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AMIR DISSOLVES ASSEMBLY

Decree accuses parliament of constitutional violations, including using offensive language



HH the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: HH the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah on Thursday issued an Amiri decree dissolving the National Assembly over disrespectful remarks by lawmakers regarding the ruler, an official statement said. An official statement cited by the KUNA news agency said the parliament has been dissolved "due to the National Assembly breaching constitutional principles as it failed to show due respect to the political leadership (HH the Amir) and for deliberately using uncontrolled and offensive language".

The decree said the dissolution was based on article 107 of the constitution, which gives HH the Amir the authority to dissolve the National Assembly but by stating the reasons. The article also states that fresh elections must be held within two months of the date of the dissolution. The dissolved Assembly was elected barely nine months ago in early June last year after the dissolution of the previous Assembly over disputes with the government.

The dissolution came after the government headed by HH Sheikh Dr Mohammad Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah, formed about a month ago, approved an Amiri decree calling to dissolve the National Assembly over the offensive remarks. The government's decision came during an extraordinary meeting held late Thursday. HH Sheikh Mishal took the oath in the Assembly to assume his powers as the new ruler of Kuwait on Dec 20, a few days after the demise of former Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah.

The decree did not make any specific reference to the remarks, but the government had boycotted Wednesday's Assembly session after the Assembly voted overwhelmingly to support the remarks. The remarks were made by lawmaker Abdulkarim Al-Kandari last week. It is the third time the National Assembly has been dissolved during the past 18 months and the ninth time since 2006 amid non-stop political crises between the elected parliament and the government.

PM honors Kuwaiti athletes



KUWAIT: HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Dr Mohammad Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah attended a ceremony on Feb 15, 2024 to honor Kuwaiti athletes who won medals at the 19th Asian Games, as well as athletes who have qualified for the 2024 Paris Olympics and members of the national handball team who have qualified for the 2025 World Men's Handball Championship. — KUNA (See Page 16)

Visa 'ban' remains on 8 countries as family visas queried

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: The interior ministry has refused to change a previous decision that prohibits the entry of citizens from eight countries into Kuwait without high-level security approvals, suspending all related transactions. These countries are Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq, Lebanon, Pakistan, Syria, Yemen and Sudan. Informed security sources have indicated that the decision is periodically reviewed, but no new developments have occurred that warrant a change. Despite official requests from these countries to allow their citizens to enter Kuwait like others, the decision remains unchanged.

Sources revealed that embassies of these eight countries have submitted requests from their governments, urging Kuwait to lift restrictions on their citizens' entry into Kuwait. However, Kuwait rejected negotiations on this matter, presenting reasons for the decision and addressing any issues that could contribute to lifting the restrictions. Some of these countries offered to sign labor and security memoranda with Kuwait to facilitate the entry of their citizens.

The sources emphasized that Kuwait responded by stating that the decision is not a principled refusal to allow the entry of citizens from these countries. Instead, it is based on pure security considerations due to the internal conditions in these countries. Kuwait expressed appreciation for its relationships with these nations and indicated that restrictions on their citizens would be lifted once the conditions in these countries improve.

The sources further explained that similar measures have been taken with most countries experiencing internal disturbances. The objective is to prevent communities facing

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Zionists assault besieged Nasser Hospital in Gaza

GAZA: The Zionist entity sent troops into a hospital in war-torn Gaza on Thursday where it claimed captives may have been held, as medics warned the key medical facility was operating in "near impossible" conditions. The raid came after days of intense fighting between troops and Hamas fighters around the Nasser Hospital in Khan Yunis — one of the largest medical sites in southern Gaza, and one of the few hospitals that are still operational in the territory.

The health ministry in Hamas-ruled Gaza reported that thousands of people who had sought refuge at the hospital, including patients, have been

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GAZA: A boy flashes the victory sign as Palestinians flee from Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip to what they believe are safer areas in central Gaza on Feb 15, 2024. — AFP

Modi commits to 'expanding' ties with Qatar

DOHA: Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday committed to strengthening ties with Qatar during his first visit to the gas-rich Gulf emirate since 2016. During a meeting with Qatar's Amir, Modi gave a "commitment to further expanding and deepening bilateral cooperation with Qatar", a statement from India's foreign ministry said. The premier also thanked Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani for hosting the 800,000-strong Indian community in the Gulf state.

The visit follows the release earlier

this month of eight Indian ex-navy personnel arrested by Qatar and sentenced to death, according to India's foreign ministry. New Delhi never gave details of the eight Indian nationals or their alleged crimes, and Qatar has not made the charges public. But Indian media reported the men — among them former high-ranking and decorated officers, including captains who once commanded warships — were arrested in Doha in Aug 2022 for spying for the Zionist entity.

In a rare public statement on the case as it was under examination in October, Qatar said it had full confidence in the independence and integrity of its judiciary. The freeing of the former sailors has been presented as a significant diplomatic victory for Modi in the Indian press.

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DOHA: Qatari Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani welcomes Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi during an official ceremony on Feb 15, 2024. — AFP

Private US lander bound for the Moon

WASHINGTON: A private US spaceship was bound for the Moon on Thursday, where it will attempt to land near the south pole and carry out experiments that pave the way

for the return of American astronauts later this decade. Intuitive Machines, the Houston-based company leading mission "IM-1," hopes to become the first non-government entity to achieve a soft touchdown on our celestial companion, and to land the first US robot on the surface since the Apollo missions more than five decades ago.

A previous attempt by another US company last month ended in failure, raising the stakes to get it right this time and demonstrate the strength of

American industry. Intuitive Machines' hexagonal-shaped Nova-C lander named "Odysseus" blasted off from the Kennedy Space Center in Florida on top of a SpaceX Falcon 9 rocket at 1:05 am local time (0605 GMT). "We are keenly aware of the immense challenges that lie ahead," CEO Steve Altemus said in a news release, confirming Odysseus had successfully established contact with ground control and all systems were working normally.

The spaceship, which carries a pow-

erful new type of engine based on supercooled liquid methane and oxygen should reach its landing site, Malapert A, on Feb 22, an impact crater 300 km from the south pole. NASA hopes to eventually build a long-term presence and harvest ice there for both drinking water and rocket fuel under Artemis, its flagship Moon-to-Mars program.

The agency paid Intuitive Machines \$118 million to ship science hardware to better understand and mitigate

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Local

Kuwait condemns Zionist aggression

Arab League calls for action plan to aid Palestine

KUWAIT: Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Jarrah Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah renewed Kuwait's condemnation and rejection of the Zionist occupation's continued aggression on the Gaza Strip, reiterating the call for the international community and UN Security Council to fulfill their obligations in this matter. This came during Sheikh Jarrah Al-Sabah's speech Thursday on behalf of Minister of Foreign Affairs Abdullah Al-Yahya, sponsor of the regional conference "Arab Women, Peace, and Security," organized by the Kuwaiti Federation of Women's Associations in cooperation with the Arab Women's Organization affiliated with the Arab League.

The deputy minister called upon the international community to allow humanitarian aid to enter Gaza without obstacles and provide protection for defenseless Palestinians, as well as hold Zionists accountable for violating international law and put a stop to it. He explained that women were and still are the first victims of wars, conflicts, security, social, economic, and political unrest, but they have proven their ability to withstand and face difficulties, stressing the importance of governmental and nongovernmental organizations' support for women's issues.

Women empowerment policies in various fields have a direct impact on stability and security in the Arab world, he added, which prompts the need for concerted efforts to strengthen state policies in empowerment, especially at economic and social levels, and boost their rights in the decision-making process. He pointed out that despite the challenges facing women in the Arab world, they were able to earn many of their civil, political, and economic

rights, stressing confidence that this conference will achieve more goals and objectives aimed at promoting women's rights.

He stressed Kuwait's keenness, since the establishment of the legislative foundations of the state, to preserve women's rights and support them, pointing out that the Constitution guaranteed the rights of Kuwaiti women in Article 29, which emphasized equality between men and women. He noted that Kuwait has contributed over the past years to supporting the empowerment of women, and Kuwaiti women's representation in leadership positions has reached 28 percent in various sectors, in addition to occupying 64 percent of the total national workforce in the public sector and 48 percent in the private sector.

Sheikh Jarrah Al-Sabah said that the UN Security Council issued Resolution No. 1325 entitled "Women, Peace, and Security" in 2000, which came to emphasize the role of women in preventing and resolving conflicts, maintaining peace, reconciliation, and mediation endeavors. In this regard, Kuwait recently established a National Committee to implement UNSC Resolution No. 1325, chaired by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and including relevant national authorities. As it is important to strengthen joint international action aimed at preventing the outbreak of international conflicts and protecting women, Sheikh Jarrah offered greetings and respect to Kuwaiti women, remembering with pride how they faced occupation with courage and bravery and had a major role in the ranks of the resistance.

Meanwhile, Arab League Secretary General Ahmad Abu al-Gheit called for an urgent plan to re-



KUWAIT: Kuwaiti Deputy Foreign Minister Ambassador Sheikh Jarrah Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah chaired a meeting with a border demarcation committee on Thursday at the Ministry Headquarters. — KUNA

spond to humanitarian aid requests by Palestine on Thursday. This came in a statement by Abu al-Gheit in the inaugural speech of the 113th Arab Economic and Social Council meeting chaired by Jordan. He mentioned the document included humanitarian, economic, and social relief for various Palestinian lands, hoping to reduce Palestinians' daily suffering.

Abu al-Gheit added that the meeting is convening at a very dangerous time both regionally and internationally, especially with the ongoing genocide taking place in the Gaza Strip since October 7 by occupation forces. The Zionist occupation is no longer hiding their vicious, inhumane plans regarding Palestinians, specifically the recent bombardment of

Rafah City, which is inhabited by 1.4 million Palestinian refugees, he added.

"A humanitarian crisis is coming into effect, with tensions rising in the region," he stressed. He said that all parties must acknowledge the genocide being committed, branding "grotesque" the global political double standards regarding the matter. He pointed out the economic damages the war has produced. With increasing threats of security in the Red Sea, there has been a decline in tourism in the region, affecting investments. He concluded by saying that Arab countries, due to the current situation in Gaza, are now focusing on damage control instead of looking into a better future for the region. — KUNA

Kuwait takes part in Arab Economic, Social Council meeting

CAIRO: Kuwait is taking part in the meeting of senior officials of the Arab Economic and Social Council (ESC), which commenced on Wednesday and was chaired by Jordan. Arab League Assistant Secretary General and Head of the Social Affairs Sector, Dr. Haifa Abu Ghazaleh, called during the meeting for a plan to respond to the negative economic and social repercussions of Zionist aggression on the Gaza Strip. She underscored the efforts of Arab ministers of health and social affairs to provide urgent humanitarian aid to Gazans in collaboration with the Egyptian Red Crescent.

Pointing to the escalating number of casualties, including indiscriminate harm to children, women, the elderly, and people with disabilities, Abu Ghazaleh described the Gaza crisis as an unprecedented tragedy in history. She also underlined Somalia's struggles with floods, which worsen already challenging humanitarian, economic, and developmental conditions. A proposal will be presented to the ESC to aid Somalia in overcoming these difficulties.

She emphasized the significance of this session as it prepares the economic and social development agenda for the upcoming Arab Summit in Bahrain, involving vital initiatives by member states, ministerial councils, and Arab organizations targeting the improvement of Arab citizens' lives and advancing Arab efforts towards implementing the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals. Kuwait is participating in the 113th meeting with a delegation from the ministries of finance, foreign affairs, and commerce, headed by Acting Assistant Undersecretary for Economic Affairs at the Ministry of Finance, Talal Al-Namesh.

The Arab Economic and Social Council's 113th meeting kicked off at the Arab League headquarters in Cairo. The meeting's agenda discussed various topics, including the report of the Arab League's secretary-general and the follow-up to the 112th meeting's decisions between the 112-113 sessions. The meeting will also address the economic and social cases at the Arab League's summit in its 33rd regular session, scheduled in Bahrain for May 2024, in addition to Arab and international cooperation in social and development fields.

The council will also discuss reports and decisions of ministerial councils and committees, including the Arab Youth and Sports Ministerial Council's extraordinary session, held in September 2023, as well as the Arab Social Affairs Ministerial Council's 8th extraordinary session, held in Tunis in October 2023. It will also look into the Arab Ministers of Health extraordinary session in November, the Arab Population and Development Council's 5th regular session in November, and the 43rd regular session of the Arab Ministers of Social Affairs Council in December. — AFP

Qurain Cultural Festival launches art exhibition

KUWAIT: The Qurain plastic art exhibition, one of the main activities of the 29th Qurain Cultural Festival, kicked off Wednesday with the participation of 62 Kuwaiti artists. Musa'ed Al-Zamel, assistant secretary general for the arts sector at the National Council for Culture, Arts, and Literature (NCCAL), said it is the most important activity of the Qurain festival, referring to declaring the winners of the creative Isa Al-Sager award given to 10 participants in this exhibition. He pointed out that the one-week show features artists, professors, and talented younger people.

For his part, Duaij Al-Ghoinem, an NCCAL official, said the event includes varied creative visions and experiences from 62 Kuwaiti male and female artists in different plastic arts fields. Speaking to KUNA, Waleed Al-Nashi, a plastic artist, underlined the importance of partaking in this gallery to share expertise, adding that he is taking part in the event with two portraits. At the end of the opening ceremony, the winners announced are Khazal Al-Qafas, Abbas Malik, Mohammad Al-Shaibani, Nawaf Al-Armali, Jaber Ahmad, Abdullatif Ashkenani, Israa Kalendar, Nasser Al-Rafaie, Abdullah Al-Jairan, and Abdulredha Baker. — KUNA



Minister of Health, Dr. Ahmad Al-Awadhi, inaugurates the Al-Zour Sea Port Health Center on Thursday.

Health minister inaugurates port health center

KUWAIT: The Minister of Health, Dr. Ahmad Al-Awadhi, inaugurated the Al-Zour Sea Port Health Center on Thursday in the presence of the Executive Vice President for Administrative and Commercial Affairs of Kuwait Integrated Petroleum Industries Company and a number of officials from the Ministry of Health.

The center will provide preventive and curative services to the visitors of the seaport, which comes within the government's work program for the first 100 days and within the framework of

the Ministry of Health's plan to develop health services provided at all land, sea, and air border crossings. He explained that the border maritime health centers supervised by the Public Health Sector at the Ministry of Health include the health centers of Mina Al-Ahmadi, Mina Al-Zour, Shuwaikh Port, Shuaiba Port, and Doha Port.

"They have an important and essential role, as they deal with emergency health cases for travelers, sailors, and maritime workers," he said, indicating that they provide first aid and urgent care for emergency cases and conduct the necessary medical examinations for them before entering the country. Minister Al-Awadhi pointed out that these centers also play the role of health surveillance at sea, as they issue health permits for ships, such as the traffic form, the ship sanitation form, and the ship exemption form from health surveillance in accordance with international requirements.



The International Women's Group marks Kuwait National and Liberation Days on Sunday, 11 February 2024, at the Crowne Plaza.

IWG marks National and Liberation Days

KUWAIT: The International Women's Group (IWG) celebrated Kuwait National and Liberation Days on Sunday, 11 February 2024, at the Crowne Plaza. To mark this special occasion, guests and members arrived in Kuwaiti attire where they were greeted with rose water and bokour. A Kuwaiti-corner especially constructed as a replica of the sitting-room of a traditional Kuwaiti house and shop was greeted with delight by all attendees who enjoyed a first-hand view of a traditional Kuwaiti lifestyle represented by its authentic furnishings and handicrafts.

The event commenced with the national anthem of Kuwait. Antonia Dimitrova, President of IWG and wife of the Ambassador of the Republic of Bulgaria, welcomed the distinguished attendees and in her opening speech congratulated HH the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and the people of Kuwait on the occasion of National and Liberation Days and extended the very best wishes of the IWG Executive Board and members for the continued prosperity, peace and progress of Kuwait.

Layla Boulos, IWG Public Relations Coordinator, served as master of ceremonies and introduced the enchanting and culturally rich program commencing with a talk by Maysa Al-Mutawa who spoke about the history of Kuwaiti woman's clothing. She opened

her very informative talk by saying, "the dresses that you are going to see today represent Kuwait's tradition and story over the ages. Despite globalization, Kuwaiti women continue to wear these dresses on many occasions, sometimes tweaked for the times, but always preserving the allure of our mothers and grandmothers".

The wonderful presentation on Kuwaiti traditional clothing for women included various Abayaas, young girls with Bokhnag and a re-enactment of a traditional Kuwaiti wedding with the bride adorned in traditional jewelry and wearing a Kuwaiti Thob embroidered in gold thread. Ameena Al-Mutawa, who served as the bride, also gave an enlightening presentation on the different pieces of bridal jewelry that she wore.

Primary students and their teacher Heba-allah Gomaa, from the British School of Kuwait performed several traditional dances in the various segments of the program including the Kuwait National Day celebrations and in the traditional wedding re-enactment. The beautiful choreography was meticulously done by Anwar Alhasan and the costumes by Dalal Alshatty. The event continued with two very interesting and important presentations, the first by Mrs Dana Al-Jouder who spoke about the physical aspects of the old city of Kuwait. She showed some rare images of the city, the old gate and city wall and spoke of the various changes that have taken place over the years with modernization.

Eng Maha Al-Baghli, former Municipal Council Member and Founder of Safira CSR Co spoke

eloquently of corporate and social responsibility and women's empowerment. She stressed the importance of the promotion of entrepreneurship and sound business practices amongst Kuwaiti women and youth. In closing, shields of appreciation were presented to the esteemed speakers and certificates of thanks to the participants and performers. An outstanding Kuwaiti buffet prepared by the chefs of Crowne Plaza was enjoyed by the attendees who enjoyed and appreciated the event immensely.

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Local

Kuwait, Japan hail strong ties

Japan Embassy marks Emperor's Birthday • Over 5,000 Kuwaiti tourists visited Japan in 2023

By Passant Hisham

KUWAIT: The Embassy of Japan held a reception on Wednesday on the occasion of the birthday of the Emperor of Japan at Regency Hotel. Kuwaiti Deputy Foreign Minister Sheikh Jarrah Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah as the guest of honor. Speaking to Kuwait Times, Japanese Ambassador to Kuwait Morino Yasunari stressed on bilateral trade between the countries. "Kuwait is the third largest supplier of oil to Japan. We would like to expand these relations beyond oil and build more cooperations in the areas of health, food and environment, as both countries have common interests in these areas," he said. He also noted that unfortunately, Kuwait culture is not very well known in Japan, so he invited more Kuwaitis to visit Japan and raise more awareness about their culture there.

In his opening speech, he specifically addressed his desire to work closely with the ministry of foreign affairs and other government bodies in Kuwait, as well as various organizations and individuals for the sake of achieving peace, prosperity and a better world.

Morino emphasized the already existing diplomatic relations that have strengthened the ties between the two countries, which have been reflected in various instances last year. Firstly, more than 5,000 Kuwaiti tourists visited Japan in 2023, aligning with its aim to attract foreign investment from all countries around the world.

"We are proud of our high-quality human capital and competitive R&D. Japan is aiming to reach 100



Japanese Ambassador to Kuwait Morino Yasunari and Kuwait Deputy Foreign Minister, Sheikh Jarrah Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah cut the cake during the event. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat

trillion yen (about \$670 billion) in trade balance in 2030," he added, explaining Japan upholds a free and open economic order under the well-established rule of law, which provides a stable, secure and predictable business environment.

Secondly, he referred to the rise in the exchange of students and the increasing business delegations, where government institutes and organizations from the two countries cooperated in holding various symposiums. Morino also highlighted Kuwait's success to attract Japanese voice actors and musicians in anime-related events held in Kuwait.

Lastly, he added the significant interest by



Guests attending the event.

both Japanese and Kuwaiti peoples to learn each other's language has encouraged Kuwait University to accept Japanese students to a year-long Arabic language course, in addition to providing a Japanese language course for Kuwaitis. He expected these kinds of interactions to continue this year, further deepening and extending relations. "Cultural exchanges are not only important for friendship and mutual understanding, but can also inspire further development of the respective cultures," Morino said.

The ambassador announced the approach of Expo 2025 in 14 months in Osaka and Kansai. "I hope that the 2025 Expo will be an epoch-making

occasion to reaffirm the importance of mutual understanding, harmony and cooperation for peace and further development of mankind," he said.

Finally, Morino conveyed his gratitude for the encouraging messages he received from government leaders, Kuwaiti citizens and diplomatic representatives following the earthquake that struck Japan's northern region on Jan 1. Furthermore, he recalled the words of the Japanese emperor in his annual remarks in January this year, expressing his grief about the loss of lives due to the wars and conflicts that are happening around the world, especially in Gaza and Ukraine.

Moreover, according to Al-Bahar, Kuwait takes part in discussions for agricultural development and coordinates with GCC and Arab bloc partners to set common priorities. He underlined the importance of the periodic replenishment process in financing projects, adding that for the period between 2025 and 2027, replenishment is estimated at \$2.240 billion. Kuwait's contribution until the 12th replenishment reached \$250 million, stated Al-Bahar, adding that it had also urged member states to contribute to the 13th cycle to facilitate the sought-after results.

He said that the work of the fund touches the lives of some 100 million people in rural areas through increased production and improved infrastructure, especially as commodity prices and inflation increase globally. He further indicated that Kuwait pays special attention to nations lacking food and water security, according to its commitment to the 2030 sustainable development agenda of resolving widespread famine and extinguishing food security, which affects some 700 million people.

The 47th session of the IFAD's governing council adopted innovative mechanisms to make rural development more sustainable, flexible, inclusive, and fair. These mechanisms aim to address the challenges of a world growing more complex with issues of climate change, conflicts, and poverty, where orthodox methods can no longer be relied on. — KUNA



Kuwait Embassy in Tunisia celebrates National Days

TUNIS: Kuwait's Embassy in Tunis celebrated National and Liberation Days on Wednesday. The event saw the presence of Tunisian Minister of Finance Sihem Boughdiri and Minister of Family, Women, Children, and Senior Affairs Amel Moussa. In a press release, Boughdiri expressed happiness at witnessing Kuwait's celebrations, praising the strong and historical ties between the two countries and their bilateral relations in various fields.

In a similar statement, Moussa wished Kuwait further progress, praising Kuwaiti-Tunisian relations and cooperation in various fields since the 1970s. Kuwait's Ambassador to Tunisia, Mansour Al-Omar, and the embassy's diplomats celebrated Kuwait's



63rd National Day and 33rd Liberation Day, as Al-Omar congratulated His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Dr. Mohammad Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah, and the Kuwaiti people on the happy occasions. — KUNA

Kuwait supports IFAD's rural development effort

ROME: Kuwait's representative at the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) reiterated Thursday his country's commitment to the agency's role and its contributions to financing ambitious programs addressing poverty in rural areas. Waleed Al-Bahar, who doubles as Acting Director General of the Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development (KFAED), made the remark in an interview with Kuwait News Agency (KUNA) on the sidelines of the 47th meeting of the IFAD's governing council in Rome from February 14-15.

Al-Bahar, mentioning that Kuwait is a co-founder of IFAD, spoke of its deeply rooted belief in the active role of the agency in alleviating poverty in rural areas within developing countries. Since its establishment in 1978, Kuwait has been continuously supporting the fund through contributions and active participation in the periodic replenishment process, which takes place every three years to evaluate available resources and assure continuity.

KU registers patents in 14th IIFME edition

KUWAIT: Kuwait University said on Thursday that its patent and intellectual property office won international medals during its participation in the 14th International Invention Fair in the Middle East (IIFME). The university said in a press release that the exhibition included a group of Kuwait University researchers who registered their inventions with the US Patent Office of the Department of Commerce. Prof. Bader Al-Enzi from the Department of Environmental Technology at the College of Life Sciences received the gold medal with honors and the Panda Medal from the Chinese Invention Society for an air pollution control invention.

Dr. Fawaz Al-Zaabi from the dentistry depart-

ment received the gold medal for his invention of a technique to replicate soft tissue anatomy using a multi-purpose 3-dimensional resin-printed prototype for implant-supported fixed prostheses. Dr. Osama Mohammad, Dr. Ammar Bahman, and Dr. Sarah Barghash from the Mechanical Engineering Department at the College of Engineering and Petroleum received a medal for their patent for "Air Conditioning System with Solar-Powered Subcooling System."

Dr. Nawaf AlJuwaihel from the Mechanical Engineering Department at the College of Engineering and Petroleum received the gold medal with honors as a research assistant from the Kuwait Institute for Scientific Research in cooperation with Dr. Nasser Al-Sayegh and Dr. Hussain Bahzad. Kuwait University's patent and intellectual property office ensured that all researchers registered their patents for their inventions and protected their intellectual rights. It was pointed out in a press release that researchers' achievements were the culmination of efforts, support, and creativity and encouragement. — KUNA

Environmental warriors promote sustainability

KUWAIT: The director general of the scientific center, engineer Musaid Al-Yasin, said on Thursday that the environmental warrior competition organized by the center aims to consolidate the concepts of sustainability and environmental preservation. This was stated in a press release issued by the center affiliated with the Kuwait Foundation for the Advancement of Sciences on the occasion of celebrating and honoring the winners of the environmental warrior competition.

The event aims to establish a new generation of environmental leaders, spread environmental awareness, and encourage young people to actively participate in environmental protection. Al-Yasin stressed the commitment to raising a conscious generation with knowledge and passion to protect our environment, praising the valuable cooperation and great support from the Ministry of Education and the Kuwait Finance House, which contributed to achieving the goals of the program and inspiring students to become real ambassadors.

For his part, the official spokesman of the center, Mohammed Al-Sanusi, stressed in a speech the importance of cooperation between the scientific center and its partners in expanding the scope of the initiative to include high school students across Kuwait. Al-Sanusi expressed his thanks to all the participants, especially the outstanding students and teachers who expressed their commitment to protecting the environment through their inspiring photographic works.

He explained that the ceremony was an opportunity to highlight the winning photographic works and honor the students who were able to highlight



KUWAIT: Scientific center organizes environmental warrior competition. The program is aimed at consolidating the concepts of sustainability and environmental preservation.

the importance of preserving the environment, stressing the commitment of the center to support environmental awareness and encouraging young people to participate in efforts to maintain a healthy and sustainable environment for future generations.

For her part, Mona Al-Ansari, Director General of Science at the Ministry of Education, said in a similar speech that the environmental warrior program is a distinctive initiative aimed at enhancing awareness of environmental issues and developing environmental leadership among youth and society in general, as this program provides an opportunity for participants to discover the science behind climate change and its impact on the environment and human life.

Al-Ansari pointed out that the objectives of the program included drawing attention to global and local environmental challenges and promoting a deep understanding of the environmental, economic, and social impacts of climate change, as the program seeks to promote dialogue and positive interaction between youth and society and encourage them to take effective measures to protect the environment and achieve sustainable development. — KUNA



Municipality organizes cleaning campaigns

KUWAIT: The Municipality organized hygiene campaigns in all governorates in conjunction with the celebrations of national holidays in order to enhance community participation, raise the level of cleanliness, and highlight the civilized appearance of the country. The hygiene supervisor at the Capital Governorate, Salah Al-Farhan, told the Kuwait News Agency (KUNA) that the municipality is working according to a comprehensive and clear field plan on the occasion of the celebrations of the 63rd National Day and the 33rd anniversary of Liberation Day.

Al-Farhan pointed out that the municipality will provide cleaning mechanisms in the places and streets that will witness the celebrations of national holidays, stressing that the field tours will continue until the end of February. He stressed the municipality's keenness to remove any activity carried out on state properties without a license. He stressed that



the municipality is serious about issuing violations and taking legal measures to ensure the cleanliness of facilities and public squares to reduce the negative phenomena accompanying the celebrations. He pointed out that the Department of Public Hygiene and Road Works in the municipality carried out a cleaning campaign. — KUNA

Local

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Website: www.kuwaittimes.comKUNA chief, foreign
ambassadors discuss
media cooperation

KUWAIT: Director General of Kuwait News Agency (KUNA), Dr. Fatma Al-Salem, held separate meetings with foreign ambassadors, discussing ways to boost media cooperation. During her meetings with South Korean Ambassador to Kuwait Chung Byung-ha and Canadian Ambassador Aliya Mawani at KUNA's headquarters, Dr. Al-Salem affirmed the agency's interest in boosting cooperation with media entities in both respective countries. The cooperation would build bridges of mutual understanding and bring people in the world together, she affirmed. On his part, the South Korean Ambassador commended the deep-rooted relations with the State of Kuwait, pointing out that this year coincided with the 60th anniversary of the first shipment of oil from Kuwait to Korea. He affirmed that his country was keen on boosting relations with Kuwait, especially within the cultural, media, and technological domains. — KUNA

NBK concludes 5th edition of
'Tamakan' training program

KUWAIT: National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) has concluded the Fifth Edition of "Tamakan" training program for Kuwaiti fresh graduates, organized by "Creative Confidence" with the bank's strategic sponsorship. The closing ceremony was attended by Isam Al-Sager, Vice-Chairman and Group CEO of National Bank of Kuwait, Shaikha Al-Bahar, Deputy Group CEO of NBK, Sulaiman Al-Marzouq, Deputy CEO of NBK - Kuwait, Faisal Al-Hamad Chief Executive Officer - Global Wealth Management, Mohammed Al-Othman, CEO - Consumer and Digital Banking, Mohammed Al-Kharafi, COO - Head of Group Operations and Information Technology, Zaid Isam Al-Sager, GM - Deputy Head of International Banking Group, Emad Al-Ablani, GM - Group Human Resources.

The ceremony held at NBK's HQ, included a discussion session where the bank's executive management listened to trainees' presentations of their outstanding graduation projects, showcasing creative ideas and visions from the ambitious Kuwaiti youth. Over the course of the program spanning 10 weeks, NBK hosted 34 trainees at different departments where it provided them with courses aimed to upskill, qualify and prepare them to start a successful career.

Tamakan offers an innovative training experience for Kuwaiti fresh graduates who need support to overcome the challenges ahead as they seek to start their career or set up their own business, thanks to developing the required skills, as well as expertise to stand on solid grounds as they navigate their way into the highly challenging labor market. "Tamakan" aims to develop the personal skills needed to become compelling candidates, in addition to motivating Kuwaiti youth to explore their potentials and energies. It also unleashes the creativity of young talent through workshops about creativity and innovation, design thinking, business model design, career exploration and innovative de-risking solutions.

On their part, the trainees expressed their pleasure with participation in this program and extended thanks to NBK for supporting them and providing its long-standing expertise to develop their skills and qualify them for the labor market in a professional manner, thanks to the bank's highly professional organizational approach.

The trainees also thanked NBK's executive management, who participated in open discussions with them where they conveyed their long experience in the banking industry, in addition to providing

them with valuable advice to build a successful career. They referred to the significant development achieved and knowledge acquired during the program, which adds value to their upcoming career. They also highlighted they benefited from upskilling on various sides, and regarded "Tamakan" as their gateway from the academic world to career exploration and working life.

NBK strongly believes in the importance of nurturing the Kuwaiti youth by attracting and developing talents and providing all means of support to help them navigate their way into the labor market. It also supports different social initiatives that align to Kuwait National Development Plan (KNDP), and serve the country's strategic agenda to drive growth, and create job opportunities for the Kuwaiti youth in the private sector, being the country's most valuable resource and the cornerstone for national development.

It is worth mentioning that "Tamakan" received "The Social Work Pioneer Project Award" from the GCC Council of Ministers of Social Affairs and Labor, recognizing it as an innovative training experience for Kuwaiti fresh graduates to achieve professional self-development in pursuit of emerging as active and efficient workforce.



KUWAIT: The International Diplomatic Club Kuwait, in partnership with the Kuwait Red Crescent Society, is honored to invite people to attend AlJoud Bazaar, an international charity bazaar to benefit the children of Gaza. The bazaar will see the participation of a significant number of Arab and foreign embassies accredited to the State of Kuwait, in addition to a selection of leading Kuwaiti companies. Al-Joud Bazaar will be held on Monday, February 19, 2024, at The Crowne Plaza Hotel - AlBaraka Ballroom from 10 am to 8 pm.



KUWAIT: Kuwait University held an event to celebrate the 63rd anniversary of the National Day and the 33rd Liberation Day at the University City of Sabah Al-Salem. — KUNA photos

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KU celebrates
National Days
in style

KUWAIT: Kuwait University held an event to celebrate the 63rd anniversary of the National Day and the 33rd Liberation Day at the University City of Sabah Al-Salem in Shadadia district. The Acting Rector of the University, Dr. Mishary Al-Harbi, said in his speech that the event stems from its national role as part of the national entity, adding that the university has worked through its long academic career to consolidate the values of citizenship, patriotism, and belonging.

Al-Harbi explained that the university's outputs over the past years have effectively contributed to pushing Kuwait forward at a steady and balanced pace, offering his sincere congratulations to His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah and all the Kuwaiti people on the anniversary of the national holidays. He stated that "this cherished occasion, which has been present in the consciousness of Kuwaiti society over the years, embodies the cohesion of the Kuwaiti people and their sacrifices, and the national holidays are an opportunity to review what we have given to the homeland and what we have to give of which we are proud."

He pointed to the directives of His Highness the Amir as he emphasized the importance of realizing the scale of national responsibility and instilling a spirit of hope and optimism. For his part, the acting secretary general of the university and its official spokesman, Dr. Fayez Al-Dhufairi, said in a similar speech that the celebration represents a great pause for generations to realize all the sacrifices made by the martyrs for the liberation of the homeland and the restoration of a free Kuwait, as well as the painstaking efforts that accompanied the construction of this great country.



Al-Dhufairi added that the most important thing to talk about on this occasion is the innate love of this land, and this is not limited to the sons of this homeland but a delightful love in the hearts of everyone who grew up here. He stated that Kuwait is a land of giving, known for its humanitarian initiatives since before its independence. Artist Saad Al-Faraj said in his speech that the national holidays are an occasion to recall the history of the homeland and what the women and men of Kuwait have given to this country in various circumstances, calling on university students to arm themselves with science and knowledge and return the favor to their country at all levels and represent it in international forums. —KUNA





Google boosts Paris' ambition to become Europe's AI epicenter

Philippines arrests IS terror funding 'facilitator'

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Doctors operate robot on ISS

Earth-bound surgeons conduct first-ever surgery in orbit

WASHINGTON: Earth-bound surgeons remotely controlled a small robot aboard the International Space Station over the weekend, conducting the first-ever such surgery in orbit - albeit on rubber bands. The experiment, deemed a "huge success" by the participants, represents a new step in the development of space surgery, which could become necessary to treat medical emergencies during multi-year manned voyages, such as to Mars. The technology could also be used to develop remote-control surgery techniques on Earth, to serve isolated areas.

The robot, developed by Virtual Incision (VIC) and the University of Nebraska, is called space-MIRA. It took off for the International Space Station at the end of January, aboard a payload carried by a SpaceX rocket. Stored inside a compact box the size of a microwave oven, the robot was installed last Thursday by NASA astronaut Loral O'Hara, who has been in space since last September. The experiment then took place on Saturday, conducted from Virtual Incision's headquarters in Lincoln, Nebraska.

It lasted around two hours, with six surgeons

taking a go at operating the robot, which is equipped with a camera and two arms. "The experiment tested standard surgical techniques like grasping, manipulating and cutting tissue. The simulated tissue is made up of rubber bands," Virtual Incision said in a statement. In a video shared by the company, one arm equipped with pincers can be seen gripping the band and stretching it, while the other arm equipped with scissors makes a cut - mimicking a dissection.

A key difficulty is the time lag - about 0.85 seconds - between the operation center on Earth and the ISS. For a control experiment, the same process will take place with the same equipment, but on Earth. "The experiment was deemed a huge success by all surgeons and researchers, and there were little to no hiccups," Virtual Incision said in a statement, claiming it will "change the future of surgery." NASA, which provided some financial support for the project, said that with longer space missions, "the potential need for emergency care increases, including surgical procedures from simple stitching of lacerations to more complex activities." — AFP



NEBRASKA: In this image courtesy of Visual Incision's (left to right) Sean Crimmins, senior in engineering; Erika Smith, University of Nebraska Lincoln (UNL) student; and Rachael Wagner, a UNL graduate student, adjust the robotic arm on a stand in a chamber for Electromagnetic Compatibility (EMC) and Electromagnetic Interference (EMI) testing at Lincoln's NCEE labs in Lincoln. — AFP

US rebukes Zionists for demolishing activist's home in Jerusalem

WASHINGTON: The United States has rebuked Zionists for demolishing the home of a Palestinian activist in east Jerusalem, saying its ally was damaging its own standing. The unusually forceful US condemnation of Zionist actions came hours after Fakhri Abu Diab, a campaigner against demolitions, said that dozens of Zionist personnel tore down his home of 38 years near the Old City.

"Ten of us were living here—my wife, my three children and five members of the extended family. Now we're literally on the street, asking neighbors and passers-by to help us," Abu Diab told AFP in Jerusalem. "We have become homeless," he said. In Washington, State Department spokesman Matthew Miller said the United States condemned the demolition and would encourage Zionists not to target other homes. "He has been an outspoken community leader including against demolition and now his family has been displaced," Miller said of Abu Diab.

"These acts obstruct efforts to advance a durable and lasting peace and security that would benefit not just Palestinians, but Zionists," he told reporters. "They damage Zionist entity's standing in the world, and they make it ultimately more difficult for us to accomplish all of the things we are trying to accomplish that would ultimately be in the interests of the Zionists," he said. He noted that part of the building dates before 1967, when Zionists captured east Jerusalem—home of sites holy to Jews, Muslims and Christians—in the Six-Day War. Zionists later annexed east Jerusalem, a move not recognized by most of the international community.

Abu Diab responded to the US condemnation: "I



JERUSALEM: Palestinian activist Fakhri Abu Diab stands amid the rubble of his home that was demolished by Jerusalem municipality workers amid the mostly Arab east Jerusalem neighborhood of Silwan on February 14, 2024. — AFP

thank them, but they should have put pressure beforehand on the Zionists to prevent the demolition of my house." "They demolished the memory, the past and the future. They did not demolish just the ceiling or the house," he said, standing near the rubble of his former home. "It was an act of revenge, part of the campaign against the Palestinians of Jerusalem that has only grown since October 7," he said.

On October 7, Hamas militants infiltrated Zionist entity from the besieged Gaza Strip and attacked several communities in the south that resulted in the deaths of around 1,160 people, mostly civilians, according to an AFP tally based on Zionist figures. Militants also took around 250 people hostage, in the

deadliest-ever attack in the country. Around 130 of the hostages are believed to remain in Gaza, including 29 who are believed to be dead.

Zionist entity has responded with a relentless military campaign in the Gaza Strip that has killed more than 28,500 people, mostly women, children and adolescents, according to the health ministry in the Hamas-ruled territory. The United States, while backing Zionist entity's right to respond, has voiced alarm over civilian casualties in Gaza Strip and criticized settlers' violence against Palestinians in the West Bank. Campaigners charge that Zionists turn to demolishing homes as collective punishment or to enforce legal rulings favoring Zionists. — AFP

Ukraine reinforces 'extremely critical' frontline town

KYIV: Ukraine has rushed soldiers to the embattled eastern town of Avdiivka, surrounded on three sides by Russian forces, where the military said the situation was "extremely critical". The announcement of reinforcements came as a Ukrainian rocket strike on the Russian border city of Belgorod killed at least five people, Russian officials said. Both sides are escalating aerial attacks as the war nears the end of its second year. Ukraine's position around Avdiivka in the eastern Donetsk region has grown increasingly precarious.

"The Third Separate Assault Brigade confirms that it was urgently redeployed to strengthen Ukrainian troops in the Avdiivka area," the brigade said in a Telegram post. It described the situation as "extremely critical," "threatening" and "unstable", adding that Russia was "throwing new forces and resources into the town". Russian troops, who have managed to almost encircle the town through a series of bloody attacks launched last year, have made fresh progress in recent days.

Bringing in supplies and evacuating the few hundred civilians who have remained was "complicated," a Ukrainian army spokesman said Thursday. Russian President Vladimir Putin said in late January that Russia troops had reached the city's outskirts. They have also cut a key access road, according to reports from both Ukrainian and Russian military bloggers. Ukraine's new army chief Oleksandr Syrsky acknowledged that his troops were outnumbered on the battlefield and facing "extremely difficult" conditions after a visit Wednesday to troops around Avdiivka.

The battle for the industrial hub, less than 10 kilometers north of the city of Donetsk, has been one of the bloodiest of the two-year war. It has drawn comparisons with last year's grinding fight for Bakhmut, in which tens of thousands of soldiers were killed. Should Russian forces punch through



BELGOROD: This handout photograph published on the official Telegram account of Belgorod region governor Vyacheslav Gladkov, on February 15, 2024, shows rescuers working at a damaged shopping centre following an air attack on Belgorod. — AFP

Ukraine's stretched defenses, it would be the most significant territorial gain for Moscow since it seized Bakhmut last May.

Belgorod strike

Both sides have escalated aerial attacks in a bid to hit targets away from the entrenched frontlines. A Ukrainian rocket strike killed at least five people in the Russian city of Belgorod on Thursday, the region's governor said. Images of the aftermath showed a blown-out shopping centre and scattered debris. One showed a body covered with a blanket nearby.

"According to preliminary data, five people were killed in Belgorod, including one child, and another 18 people were injured, five of them children," governor Vyacheslav Gladkov said. Belgorod city lies about 30 kilometers from the border with Ukraine and has been repeatedly struck by what Moscow says is indiscriminate shelling by Kyiv's forces. On the diplomatic front, concern is growing in Kyiv and Western capitals over Ukraine's ability to hold out against intensifying Russian attacks without more Western military support.

NATO chief Jens Stoltenberg said Thursday the delay in passing new US aid for Ukraine was already hurting Kyiv's forces on the battlefield. Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky will travel to Berlin and Paris on Friday for meetings with Olaf Scholz and Emmanuel Macron, his office announced. Kyiv has been pressing Europe to deliver more much-needed artillery shells, amid frontline shortages. Zelensky will then meet US Vice President Kamala Harris at the Munich Security Conference on Saturday, Kyiv said.

Both sides also launched a wave of overnight aerial attacks. Russia fired 26 missiles, killing at least one person and destroying multiple homes, Ukraine said. Russia blamed a Ukrainian drone attack overnight for a blaze at an oil depot in the western Kursk region, close to the border with Ukraine. Kyiv has struck multiple Russian energy facilities over the winter in what it has called "fair" retribution for Moscow's own attempts to cripple Ukraine's power grid. Russian attacks on Ukraine killed a 66-year-old woman in the northeastern city of Chuguyiv when projectiles hit a residential area, the prosecutor's office said. — AFP

New York judge rejects Trump's attempts to dismiss charges

NEW YORK: A New York judge on Thursday rejected Donald Trump's attempts to dismiss charges he covered up hush money payments to a porn star, setting the stage for the first criminal trial ever of a former US president to begin on March 25. At the same time, Trump's representatives attended a separate hearing in Atlanta, pushing to have the lead prosecutor bringing charges of election fraud and racketeering against Trump disqualified from the case.

They are just two of four criminal cases facing the Republican frontrunner as he campaigns to retake the White House, with his legal teams seeking to push the actual trials until after the November 5 vote. Trump, who has seized on the media attention of his legal woes to fire up his supporters and denounce Democratic opponent Joe Biden, reiterated his claim that the charges were "just a way of hurting me in the election." "How can you run for election if you are sitting in a courthouse in Manhattan all day long," he said as he arrived. Once the hearing got underway, Judge Juan Merchan rejected Trump's request for dismissal or delay, ruling that jury selection would begin as scheduled in late March.

The ex-president's legal team argued he would not receive a fair trial in New York because another Manhattan jury had awarded \$83 million to E. Jean Carroll, a writer whom Trump was found to have sexually assaulted and defamed. The judge rejected that, as well as arguments by Trump's lawyers that there was too much media coverage for a jury to be unbiased. "Given all the information I have before me, we are moving ahead to jury selection on March 25," Merchan said.

Trump, who wore a trademark red tie and dark suit, fidgeted in his seat as his lawyer argued with the judge and prosecutors. The former president faces 34 counts of accounting fraud linked to payments to porn star Stormy Daniels. Prosecutors say that Trump illegally covered up remittances to his longtime lawyer and aide, Michael Cohen, to reimburse him for payments to bury stories about Trump's alleged extramarital sexual relations with Daniels and a Playboy model.

Trump's lawyers were also representing him in Atlanta, Georgia, where he is accused of conspiracy to overturn the 2020 election, which he lost to Biden. That hearing seeks to have District Attorney Fani Willis dismissed from the case over an alleged relationship with another prosecutor. Trump's legal rollercoaster could continue on Friday if, as US media have reported, a ruling is issued in his civil fraud trial, in which he is accused of grossly inflating his property's values.

In that case he risks having to pay up to \$370 million and faces a ban from conducting business in New York state. And he also faces another possible trial alleging conspiracy to overturn the 2020 election in Washington. Trump has used the numerous legal cases to fuel his claims of being victimized as he campaigns for a return to the White House. The hush money case dates to the closing days of the 2016 election when Trump was on the cusp of his shock win as a political outsider against Democratic candidate Hillary Clinton. A New York grand jury indicted Trump in March 2023 over the payments made to Daniels, whose real name is Stephanie Clifford. Prosecutors say the money was paid to silence Daniels over claims she had a tryst with Trump in 2006 - a year after he married Melania Trump. — AFP



Former US President Donald Trump attends a hearing at Manhattan Criminal Court in New York City on February 15, 2024. — AFP

International

Lebanon family 'invited to dinner' finds death in Zionist strike

Bloodiest civilian toll from a single strike on Lebanon

NABATIEH: Hussein Barjawi had invited his daughter, her husband and their two young sons to dinner in south Lebanon, but a Zionist strike nearly wiped them all out, an official said Thursday. At least five family members—Hussein Barjawi, his daughters Amani and Zeinab, his sister Fatima and Zeinab's son Mahmud Amer—were killed in the strike on the city of Nabatieh, Lebanon's official National News Agency reported.

It was the bloodiest civilian toll from a single strike on Lebanon since cross-border hostilities erupted in October between Zionist entity and Lebanon's powerful Hezbollah movement. And the death toll could go even higher, with NNA reporting that Barjawi's wife and niece were still unaccounted for, while Hussein Amer, a small boy, was pulled alive from the rubble.

Amin Shomar, a local official in south Lebanon, said Ali Amer, his wife and their two sons, aged three and four, had been "invited over to his father-in-law's house in Nabatieh for dinner". Amer was "badly wounded" in the strike and was taken to hospital. Shomar told AFP, while his wife and son were killed and his other son was pulled out from the rubble alive.

Video circulating on social media purportedly showed the rescue of the boy, his face bloody and wearing a blue tracksuit, a mattress among the debris beside him. An AFP photographer said the ground and first floors of the three-storey residential building were hit, with pieces of furniture strewn among the rubble.

Authorities had cordoned off the area as the search continued, he added. Schools, universities and local administrative offices in Nabatieh were closed on Thursday following the attack. The Zionist military and the Iran-backed Hezbollah group have been trading near daily cross-border fire since the Zionist-Hamas war broke out in October.

The Lebanese group saying it is acting in support of Palestinian ally Hamas with its attacks on Zionist entity. Many including two Hezbollah fighters were killed in Zionist strikes in south Lebanon on Wednesday, the NNA and the group said, while a Zionist soldier was killed by unclaimed rocket fire from Lebanon.

A woman, her child, aged two, and stepchild, 13, in the village of Sawwaneh were among those killed in the Zionist strikes Wednesday, according to the NNA. Tarek Mrroueh, 35, who works in a pharmaceutical company, expressed shock at the sudden violence that rocked his neighbourhood in Nabatieh.

He said he initially thought a Hezbollah member's house might have been targeted. "But then we learnt that it was Hussein Barjawi's building. He's a civilian, not affiliated with any political party," Mrroueh said.

Mohammed Bdeir, a mechanic whose workshop is nearby, said that "civilians were targeted and everybody knows it". "There is no military objective here," the 67-year-old add-



AI QANTARA: Mourners attend in the southern Lebanese village of al-Qantara on February 15, 2024 the funeral of a woman and two children killed yesterday during a Zionist air strike in the village of Al-Sawwaneh.— AFP

ed. Nabatieh had been relatively spared the cross-border violence until last week.

A Zionist drone strike on a car seriously wounded a Hezbollah commander in the city on February 8, sources on

both side of the frontier said, with the group firing a salvo of rockets at northern Zionist entity in response.

The cross-border hostilities have killed at least 254 people on the Lebanese side,

most of them Hezbollah fighters but also including 38 civilians, according to an AFP tally. On the Zionist side, 10 soldiers and six civilians have been killed, according to the Zionist army.— AFP

Google boosts Paris' ambition to become Europe's AI epicenter

PARIS: US tech giant Google opened Thursday an AI research hub in Paris, part of a trend for big tech firms to base teams working on cutting-edge products in European centers. Google already employs thousands of people at its engineering facility in Zurich, a city that also houses AI-focused teams from Meta, Apple and Microsoft. Amazon, another major player in AI research, has teams based in several locations in Germany and Britain.

AI covers a broad range of technologies based on algorithms and big data processing, which help to power everything from online advertising to smartphone cameras. Google's Parisian hub will host at least 300 researchers in the French capital, the US firm said in a statement. The aim was to train at least 100,000 AI professionals by the end of 2025. Google CEO Sundar Pichai praised Paris during the opening event, calling it a "global centre of innovation". "It's a magnet for tech talent, including more than 40 nationalities within our local engineering teams," he said.

The Google boss earlier met French President Emmanuel Macron, who has long pushed the French

capital as a cutting-edge hub. Paris has had notable successes, with Meta establishing an AI research team there in 2015 led by its AI chief Yann LeCun, one of the world's pre-eminent academics in the field. At the Google event, officials talked of creating a European Silicon Valley in the Paris region - a long-held dream. But the French city is playing catch-up with European centres like Berlin, Zurich and London and southern England.

Google DeepMind started life as a British startup before the US giant bought it, and its main offices are in London. Zurich hosts one of Google's largest engineering facilities outside the United States - employees there even have a nickname, "Zooglers". Microsoft also operates a centre dedicated to AI and Mixed Reality in Zurich and its director, Marc Pollefeys, told AFP the city has everything needed for an AI hub - including aspects that Paris will struggle to replicate. "You need a number of elements in place to really anchor the ecosystem," he said.

These elements include a top-level institution like ETH Zurich, a leading university the field where Pollefeys also works as a professor. Google said in a statement that its AI hub in Paris would build relationships with several top institutions around France, adding that the country had more than 500,000 scientific researchers. Pollefeys pointed out that the education facilities in Zurich combine with a lively entrepreneurial scene - both Meta and Apple grew their presence in the Swiss city from acquiring local startups.— AFP

AU summit seeks to raise Africa's voice on global stage

ADDIS ABABA: The African Union's annual summit will open on Saturday against the backdrop of coups in Gabon and Niger and a political crisis in Senegal, posing challenges for the bloc as it seeks to amplify its international presence. Set up more than two decades ago, the 55-member bloc has long been criticised for being ineffectual and for taking little decisive action in the face of numerous power grabs.

Gabon and Niger will be absent from the meeting in Ethiopia's capital, Addis Ababa, following their suspension over coups last year. They will join Mali, Guinea, Sudan and Burkina Faso, which are also barred from the summit.

The coups and the crisis in Senegal, which has been in turmoil since President Macky Sall pushed back this month's elections at the last minute, will likely dominate the agenda, said analyst Nina Wilen. "I doubt that there will be any strong decisions," said Wilen, director of the Africa programme at the Egmort Royal Institute for International Relations think tank in Brussels.

The organization has so far had "very little influence



ADDIS ABABA: A man takes notes at a table in front of the flags of the member states of the African Union at the AU headquarters in Addis Ababa on February 15, 2024.— AFP

on countries that have suffered recent coups", she said, adding that member states did not want to set precedents that could clash with their own interests. Some 19 presidential or general elections are scheduled on the continent in 2024, portending more challenges for the AU.

The bloc has managed to avoid a crisis by defusing tensions ahead of the summit over the one-year rotating AU chairmanship, currently held by Comoros President Azali Assoumani. The succession had long been blocked by the dispute between Morocco and Algeria, heavyweights of the North African region to whom the post falls this year.

After months of intense negotiations, Mauritanian President Mohamed Ould Ghazouani is expected to take over the chairmanship.— AFP

Visa 'ban' remains on 8 countries as...

Continued from Page 1

internal unrest and protests from intensively bringing their residents to Kuwait through visits, family reunification and residency on company sponsorships. This is to prevent the potential infiltration of wanted individuals or security-threatening elements, a scenario not acceptable to Kuwaiti security authorities for the sake of maintaining internal security.

The same sources affirmed that residents from these countries who already have visas in Kuwait are not affected by the decision, and they have the right to return to the country and renew their visas.

Meanwhile, former lawmaker Abdulkarim Al-Kandari questioned the government on Thursday about the benefits and costs it expects from a decision it issued recently to allow expats to sponsor their wives and children. The lawmaker asked Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Defense and acting Interior Minister Sheikh Fahad Yousef Al-Sabah if the ministry has conducted studies about the impacts of reopening dependent visas for expats on the national economy. He asked the minister about the number of dependent expats expected to enter the country as a result of the decision.

The interior ministry resumed issuing dependent

visas for expats last month after suspending the procedure for close to two years, but required stricter conditions from expats to benefit from the decision. It said those who can bring their wives and children to live with them in the country must draw a monthly salary of at least KD 800, must hold a university degree and their job should be in line with their study field. It however exempted several categories from the salary condition.

Kandari also asked about the costs the government expects to bear because the new expats will benefit from public subsidies of certain services, especially medical care. He also asked about the expected financial return to public coffers from the entry of expat families. The lawmaker also inquired if the decision will negatively impact government measures underway to correct the imbalance in the demographic structure, which is heavily tilted in favor of expats, who form around 70 percent of the country's population of 4.5 million.

Kandari also asked about the basis on which the ministry set conditions for the family visas and if the ministry has a mechanism to ensure that the university degrees presented are authentic. The ministry has also reopened visit visas for expat relatives, allowing those who draw a salary of KD 400 and higher to bring their wives, children and parents on a visit visa and those who draw a salary of KD 800 to bring their siblings.

the lack of solar power rendering Odysseus inoperable.

IM-1 is the second mission under a NASA initiative called Commercial Lunar Payload Services (CLPS), which the space agency created to delegate cargo services to the private sector to achieve savings and to stimulate a wider lunar economy. Four more CLPS launches are expected this year. The first, by Pittsburgh-based Astrobotics, launched in January, but its Peregrine spacecraft experienced an engine anomaly that caused a fuel leak and it was eventually brought back to burn up in Earth's atmosphere.

Soft-landing a robot on the Moon is challenging because it has to navigate treacherous terrain with communications subject to a lag of several seconds, and use its thrusters for a controlled descent in the absence of an atmosphere that would support parachutes. Apart from Astrobotics' failed attempt, two other private initiatives got close. The Soviet Union was the first country to touch down, then the United States, which is still the only country to also put people on the surface.— AFP

Zionists assault besieged Nasser...

Continued from Page 1

made to leave in recent days. It has called the situation at Nasser "catastrophic", with staff unable to move bodies to the morgue because of the risks involved. Nurse Mohammed Al-Astal told AFP this week that the facility had been "besieged" for a month and was facing deadly sniper fire, sewage in the emergency room and a lack of drinking water.

Footage on social media, which AFP could not independently verify, shows rescuers trying to move patients from the hospital's orthopedic ward, after it was struck, to safer rooms. Using mobile flashlights, rescuers were seen dragging a patient on a bed, while some others carried another sick person in a blanket amid fallen debris. Doctors Without Borders has said its staff there are working in "near impossible conditions".

The World Health Organization has described Nasser hospital as a critical facility "for all of Gaza", where only a minority of hospitals are even partly operational. At least 28,663 people, mostly women and children, have been killed in the Zionist entity's brutal assault on the Palestinian territory, according to the health ministry. The Zionist entity launched more deadly strikes on southern Gaza on Thursday, after Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu insisted it would push ahead with a "powerful" operation in the overcrowded city of Rafah for "complete victory".

Hundreds of thousands of people have been driven into Rafah, seeking shelter in a sprawling makeshift encampment near the Egyptian border. "We were dis-

placed from Gaza City to the south," said Ahlam Abu Assi. "(Then) they told us to go to Rafah, so we went to Rafah. We can't keep going and coming," she added. "There is no safe place for us."

Australia, Canada and New Zealand were the latest to warn the Zionist entity not to launch a ground offensive in the city, issuing a joint statement saying it would be "devastating" for 1.5 million trapped civilians. "There is simply nowhere else for civilians to go," they said.

In Cairo, efforts to secure a ceasefire entered a third day, with negotiators from the United States, Qatar and Egypt trying to broker a deal to suspend the fighting and see the release of the remaining captives in exchange for Palestinian prisoners held by the Zionist entity. CIA director William Burns joined the head of the Zionist entity's Mossad intelligence service for talks with mediators on Tuesday, while a Hamas delegation was in Cairo Wednesday. But there was no sign of immediate progress.

Netanyahu's office said it did not receive "any new proposal" from Hamas about releasing captives, and Zionist media reported that the country's delegation would not return to negotiations until Hamas softens its stance. While he did not comment directly on the reports, Netanyahu said: "I insist that Hamas drop their delusional demands and, when they drop these demands, we can move forward."

Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, who heads the West Bank-based Palestinian Authority, has urged Hamas to "rapidly" agree to a truce and stave off further tragedy. With regional tensions high, the Zionist army said rocket fire from Lebanon Wednesday killed a Zionist soldier, while Lebanese sources said Zionist strikes had killed 15 people, 10 of them civilians. The Zionist military said it had killed Hezbollah commander Ali Al-Debs, his deputy and another fighter.— AFP

Private US lander bound...

Continued from Page 1

environmental risks for astronauts, the first of whom are scheduled to land no sooner than 2026. Instruments include cameras to investigate how the lunar surface changes as a result of engine plume kicking up dust and a device to analyze the charged dust haze that appears during lunar twilight as a result of solar radiation.

Odysseus also carries an advanced landing system that uses laser pulses to detect hazards like small boulders and craters. There is more colorful cargo aboard as well, including a digital archive of human knowledge and 125 mini-sculptures of the Moon by the artist Jeff Koons. After touchdown, the payloads are expected to run for roughly seven days before lunar night sets in on the south pole, with

Modi commits to 'expanding'...

Continued from Page 1

The announcement came on the heels of a major liquefied natural gas deal between India and Qatar's state-owned hydrocarbon giants Petronet and QatarEnergy.

Under the agreement, the Gulf state will supply energy-hungry India with 7.5 million tons of LNG per year for the next 20 years. The Indian foreign

ministry said during Modi's meeting with the emir the pair discussed "economic cooperation, investments, energy partnership", as well as cultural bonds.

Political expert Michael Kugelman told AFP the visit by Modi solidified at reset in relations between India and Qatar. "I would certainly view Modi's visit to Doha as a reflection of a new phase of a relationship that New Delhi would like strengthen," he said. "I think that it would not have been possible to enter that new phase until this issue of the ex-sailors had been resolved. I think that created an opening for Modi to initiate this new phase," the South Asia director for the US-based Wilson Center added.— AFP

International

Indonesia's Prabowo set for sweeping presidential win

Election rivals have yet to concede but 'it's all over for Anies and Ganjar'

JAKARTA: Indonesian Defence Minister Prabowo Subianto on Thursday looked set to become the new president of the world's third-largest democracy, likely avoiding a runoff vote against election rivals who have yet to concede.

The ex-general declared victory Wednesday evening after preliminary counts from government-approved pollsters—previously shown to be reliable—indicated he would win high office with a majority in his third attempt. The slower, official count by the archipelago's election commission also showed the 72-year-old on course for the presidency at 57 percent with 43.82 percent of votes counted, more than double his nearest rival.

"This victory should be a victory for all Indonesians," Prabowo told a rapturous crowd in the capital Jakarta on Wednesday evening. President Joko Widodo told reporters Thursday he had met with Prabowo the previous evening to offer his "congratulations".

In reaction to Prabowo's victory, markets in Southeast Asia's biggest economy jumped by nearly two percent, energised by Prabowo's vows of continuity. Prabowo lost the previous two presidential polls to popular outgoing leader Jokowi, as he is popularly known.

But he now appears on the cusp of succeeding his former rival, who observers say has unfairly backed his defence chief's campaign. Analysts have said a Prabowo win is almost assured. "It's all over for Anies and Ganjar," said Adrian Vickers, a professor at the University of Sydney.

Fellow candidate Anies Baswedan, who had been the favourite to battle Prabowo in the event of a runoff, said he would respect the result when it was finalised. A spokesperson for Ganjar Pranowo, polling third, told reporters his team had discovered "structured, systematic and massive" electoral fraud, without providing evidence.

The country's election commission head Hasyim Asy'ari did not mention the claims at a press conference Thursday. In legislative polls, Prabowo's Gerindra party was only projected to win 13 percent of parliamentary seats, meaning he would have to join forces with other parties to pass laws.

'Cuddly grandpa'

Much was made internationally about Prabowo's human rights record in the run-up to the vote. NGOs and former bosses accuse Prabowo of ordering the abduction of democracy activists towards the end of the three-decade Suharto dictatorship in the late 1990s.

Some of those activists have never been found, and witnesses accuse his military unit of committing atrocities in East Timor. He was discharged from the military over the abductions but denied the allegations and was never charged.

But voters appear to have overlooked that history as he rehabilitated his image from a feared military figure to a "cuddly grandpa" who dances on social media. "The 'gemoy' (cute) narrative has made him popular," said 24-year-old voter Adellia Natasha.

Another key factor in his popularity was picking Jokowi's eldest son, 36-year-old Gibran Rakabuming Raka, as his running mate, a move that raised eyebrows. Indonesia's then-chief justice, who is Jokowi's brother-in-law, in October changed the rules that had barred candidates below the age of 40 from running for high office. Some observers have also accused Jokowi of improperly using government funds to support Prabowo, who has rejected accusations of impropriety.

Looking forward

Some of Indonesia's allies have so far avoided congratulating the fiery populist on his apparent victory, with the official announcement still weeks



JAKARTA: Presidential candidate and Indonesia's Defence Minister Prabowo Subianto (R) dances on the stage with vice presidential candidate Gibran Rakabuming Raka (L), Indonesian President Joko Widodo's son and current Surakarta City mayor, during their gathering with supporters after polls closed in the country's presidential and legislative elections in Jakarta. — AFP

away. Australian Foreign Minister Penny Wong told a Senate hearing on Thursday that Canberra looked "forward to working closely with the next president" when they are inaugurated in October.

The United States congratulated Indonesians for their "robust turnout" in a statement that did not mention Prabowo. But Singaporean Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong called Prabowo to congratulate him "on his strong performance in the election",

with the pair discussing bilateral ties and areas of cooperation, Lee's press secretary said in a statement Thursday.

Rights groups, meanwhile, have pointed to concerns about Prabowo, saying he needs to be transparent about his history. "That goes for both current rights issues as well as accountability and justice for what happened in the past," said Phil Robertson, Asia deputy director of Human Rights Watch.

Prabowo's sweeping win was also criti-

cised on local and social media. The hashtag #RIPDemokrasi trended on X, formerly Twitter, overnight with tens of thousands of posts after Prabowo declared victory.

Local newspaper Jakarta Post led with the headline "Prabowo wins" and an editorial that said "the result should not surprise anyone" because of the reports of government resources used to help Prabowo. "In the end, it wasn't even close," the paper wrote. — AFP

India's top court strikes down on election funding

NEW DELHI: India's top court on Thursday struck down a scheme that allowed anonymous political donations in the form of electoral bonds, a critical ruling that comes ahead of national elections expected in April.

Electoral bonds have become a key method of political funding, allowing donors to give anonymously through certificates purchased from a bank, but transparency rights activists say the practice reduces accountability in the world's biggest democracy.

Critics condemned the campaign financing method as an opaque way to funnel "black money" to parties, but supporters say it provides better regulation than cash donations, which are still legal. "The electoral bond scheme infringes upon the right of information of the voter," the ruling said, read out by Chief Justice D.Y. Chandrachud. "The information about the funding of political parties is essential for the effective exercise of the choice of voting", it added. Under the scheme, individuals or companies could buy electoral bonds at the government-owned State Bank of India (SBI).

The anonymous and tax-exempt bonds would then be handed to political parties and exchanged for cash. Denominations range from 1,000 rupees (\$12) to 10 million rupees (\$120,000). In addition to the concerns about the scheme allowing huge anonymous donations to parties, critics also feared it gave the government the power to access donor details through the state-owned SBI.

The judgement also ruled the SBI must submit details of each bond—including who purchased it—since April 2019 to the Electoral Commission, who must publish those details on its website by March 13. "The details shall include the date of purchase of each electoral bond, the name of the purchaser of the bond, and the denomination of the electoral bond purchased," the ruling read.

"The Supreme Court has struck down the Electoral Bond scheme and all the provisions that were made to bring it into effect," said Prashant Bhushan, a lawyer representing the Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR) watchdog, one of the petitioners.

"They have held that this violates the fundamental right to information of citizens to know about who is contributing money to political parties," he told reporters outside the Supreme Court in New Delhi. "They have also struck down the unlimited contribution being made by companies to political parties."

Opposition Congress party leader Rahul Gandhi welcomed the judgement, accusing Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) of using the bond system as a "medium for taking bribes and commission".

ADR co-founder Jagdeep Chhokar said the ruling would help end political "mischief". "My initial reaction is of big relief—and some hope," he said, adding that the bond system "had added an extra layer of opacity". — AFP

White House to brief lawmakers after Russia nuke reports

WASHINGTON: US President Joe Biden's national security chief will brief top lawmakers Thursday after they warned of a "serious" threat reportedly involving a Russian bid to build a space-based nuclear capability. White House National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan will hold a closed-doors meeting with congressional leaders, as US media said Russia was developing a weapon that could knock out Western satellites.

Moscow denied the "malicious" and "unfounded" reports, describing them as a White House ploy to try to pass a multi-billion-dollar Ukrainian war aid package that is stalled in Congress. Mystery and concern has gripped Washington since US House Intelligence Committee chairman Michael Turner abruptly issued a cryptic statement on Wednesday referring to a "serious national security threat."

The Republican asked Biden to declassify all information about the unidentified threat so the United States and its allies could "openly discuss the actions necessary to respond." American media outlets then reported that it involved Russia advancing plans to deploy a nuclear weapon based in space that could target satellites.

US officials said the threat described did not involve an active capability or one that could target humans, but added that it was significant. They also pointed to comments by Republican House speaker Mike Johnson saying that there was "no need for public alarm."

But the sudden announcement irked the White House's Sullivan, who signaled frustration that Turner had gone public ahead of a briefing already planned for Thursday. Sullivan said he would be meeting with the four House members in the "Gang of Eight" group of party leaders and top intelligence committee members.

He refused to confirm he would discuss the security threat, but pointed to the significance by saying it was



WASHINGTON: US National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan takes questions during the daily press briefing in the Brady Briefing Room of the White House in Washington, DC, February 14, 2024. Ukrainian troops are starting to run out of ammunition as a huge package of US war aid requested by President Joe Biden remains blocked by Republicans in Congress, Sullivan told reporters. — AFP

"highly unusual, in fact," for the national security advisor to "personally" reach out to House members as he had.

'Tricks'

Democrat Biden and the Republican-led House are at an impasse over a White House request for \$60 billion in military aid to help Ukraine's defense against the Russian invasion entering its third year. Johnson—who has repeatedly warned he will not address allies' security until America's immigration system is shored up—is refusing to bring the Senate-passed bill to the floor for a vote.

Moscow dismissed the threat warning as a US attempt to denigrate Russia and push through the Ukraine funding. Kremlin Spokesman Dmitry Peskov said the

White House was "trying to get Congress to vote on the appropriations bill any way it can", the state-run TASS news agency reported. "It's obvious. Let's see what tricks, so to speak, the White House is going to pull," he was quoted as saying. Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov, who is involved in Russia's nuclear policy, said the United States was "fantasizing" and should provide evidence of its claims.

"If they make any kind of claim, they should accompany it with evidence," he added, TASS cited Ryabkov as saying Thursday. The West has accused Russia of reckless nuclear rhetoric after President Vladimir Putin said he was prepared to use a nuclear weapon if he felt an existential threat. — AFP

Bangkok: Work from home as pollution blankets city

BANGKOK: Bangkok city employees have been told to work from home to avoid harmful air pollution, as a layer of noxious haze blanketed the Thai capital on Thursday. City authorities asked for cooperation from employers to help workers in the city of about 11 million people avoid the pollution, which is expected to last into Friday.

The air monitoring website IQAir ranked Bangkok among the 10 most polluted cities in the world on Thursday morning. Levels of the most dangerous PM2.5 particles—so tiny they can enter the bloodstream—were more than 15 times the World Health Organization's annual guideline, according to IQAir.

Bangkok governor Chadchart Sittipunt said late Wednesday that all city employees would work from home on Thursday and Friday. "I would like to ask for cooperation from the BMA network of about 151 companies and organisations, both government offices and the private sector," he said in a statement, adding that more than 60,000 people were affected.

BMA is an abbreviation for the Bangkok Metropolitan Administration. Chadchart said at least 20 of Bangkok's 50 districts were expected to have unhealthy levels of



BANGKOK: Commuter boats cross the Chao Praya River amid high air pollution levels in Bangkok on February 15, 2024. — AFP

PM2.5 particles, and the problem would linger because of calm weather.

Air quality in Thailand regularly plummets in the early months of the year as smoke from farmers burning stubble in the fields adds to industrial emissions and vehicle exhaust fumes. Bangkok and the northern city of Chiang Mai ranked among the most polluted cities in the world on a number of days last year.

For many Bangkok residents, working from home is not an option. Jarukit Singkomron, 57, a motorcycle taxi driver on one of the capital's busiest streets, was working despite his allergic reaction to the pollution. "If I stay home, then I will starve," he told AFP. "People like me have to go out to make ends meet." — AFP

Philippines arrests IS terror funding 'facilitator'

MANILA: The Philippine government said it arrested a woman on Thursday tagged by the United States as a facilitator for "terror" who gave money and other aid to the Islamic State group. Myrna Mabanza was arrested near the town of Indanan in the southern Sulu island group, a stronghold of an IS-linked armed militant group called Abu Sayyaf, according to a statement from Manila's Anti-Terrorism Council.

The US treasury department in 2018 listed Philippines-based Mabanza as a "facilitator for terror", saying she supported the Philippine branch of ISIS, an alternate name for IS. It accused her of "assisting in, sponsoring, or providing financial, material, or technological support for, or financial or other services to or in support of" ISIS-Philippines.

The US and Philippine governments both alleged the 32-year-old was involved in two 2016 fund transfers—one of up to \$107,000 -- to the then leader of the Abu Sayyaf militant group and ISIS-Philippines, Isnilon Hapilon. — AFP

Business

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 16, 2024

Germany overtakes Japan as third-biggest economy

India projected to leapfrog both later this decade

TOKYO: Once forecast to become the world's biggest economy, Japan slipped below Germany last year to fourth place, official data showed Thursday, although India is projected to leapfrog both later this decade. Despite growing 1.9 percent, Japan's nominal 2023 gross domestic product in dollar terms was \$4.2 trillion, government data showed, compared with \$4.5 trillion for Germany, according to figures released there last month.

The change in positions primarily reflects the sharp fall in the yen against the dollar, rather than the German economy - which contracted 0.3 percent in 2023 - outperforming Japan, economists said. The Japanese currency slumped by almost a fifth in 2022 and 2023 against the US currency, including around seven percent last year. This was in part because in an effort to boost prices the Bank of Japan has maintained negative interest rates, unlike other major central banks which have raised borrowing costs to fight soaring inflation.

"The overtaking... in size in dollar terms owes a lot to the recent collapse in the yen. Japan's real GDP has actually outperformed Germany's since 2019," said Fitch Ratings economist Brian Coulton. Germany's heavily export-dependent manufacturers have been hit particularly hard by soaring energy prices in the wake of Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Europe's biggest economy has also been hampered by the European Central Bank raising interest rates in the euro-zone as well as uncertainty over its budget and chronic shortages of skilled labor.

Falling population

Japan is also heavily reliant on exports, in particular cars, although the weak yen - making exports cheaper - has helped big firms like Toyota offset weakness in key markets such as China. But it is suffering more than Germany in terms of worker shortages as its population falls and birth rates remain low, and economists expect the gap between the two economies to widen. Thursday's data showed that Japan's economy shrank an adjusted 0.1 percent quarter-on-quarter in the last three months of 2023, missing market expectations of 0.2 percent growth.

Japanese humble 'onigiri' rice balls get image upgrade

TOKYO: Wrapped in seaweed and stuffed with delicious fillings, "onigiri" rice balls are shaking off their reputation as a cheap and uninspiring snack in Japan - and enticing hungry converts abroad. Mouth-watering pictures on social media, rising demand for affordable lunches, and a surge in tourism to Japan are all drawing people to the humble onigiri. Just ask any of the 50-odd customers lined up in a quiet corner of Tokyo for the restaurant Onigiri Bongo to open.

In the past, "no one came between lunch and dinner, but now customers queue non-stop", said 71-year-old Yumiko Ukon, who runs the more than half-century-old shop. Some wait for eight hours, said Ukon, whose team makes some 60 different types of onigiri, bulging with traditional fillings like pickled plum, or more unusual offerings such as bacon with soy sauce. Onigiri Bongo only has nine counter seats, but sells around 1,200 rice balls each day.

"When I was young, onigiri was something you would make at home," Ukon told AFP. "Now people buy onigiri, or go out to have onigiri." Long popular as on-the-go fuel in Japan, onigiri have been eaten for over a millennium in the country, where they were once taken onto the battlefield by samurai. The quick bites can be found in convenience stores on practically every corner, ubiquitous enough to be banal.

But with more visitors than ever flocking to Japan, and the country's pop culture booming in popularity, onigiri are now also becoming a lunch option overseas. Japanese rice ball chain Omusubi



TOKYO: People commuting to work in the morning cross a pedestrian crossing in Tokyo on February 15, 2024. — AFP

Growth for the third quarter was also revised downward to negative 0.8 percent, meaning that Japan was in technical recession in the second half of 2023. "Like Japan, Germany's population has been declining, but it has nevertheless achieved steady economic growth," said Toshihiro Nagahama, economist at Dai-ichi Life Research Institute. "This is because, especially since the 2000s, the government authorities in Germany have been actively implementing policies to create an environment that makes it easier for companies to operate in the country," he said.

Soul-searching

During its boom years of the 1970s and '80s some

projected that Japan would become the world's biggest economy. But the catastrophic bursting of Japan's asset bubble in the early 1990s led to several "lost decades" of economic stagnation and deflation. When in 2010 Japan was overtaken as number two by Asian rival China - whose economy is now around four times larger - it prompted major soul-searching.

While largely a product of the yen's slide, falling behind Germany will still be a blow to Japan's self-esteem and add to the pressure on unpopular Prime Minister Fumio Kishida. More humiliation is to come with booming India projected to overtake Japan in 2026 and Germany in 2027 in terms of output - although not in GDP per capita - according to

the International Monetary Fund.

Germany and Japan "are shrinking in terms of contribution to global growth in favor of faster-growing ones... because their productivity is already very high and it is very hard to increase it," said Natixis economist Alicia Garcia-Herrero. "Of course, both Germany and Japan could take measures to mitigate this. The most obvious one is allowing for more immigration or increasing the fertility rate," she told AFP. Japan "has not made progress in raising its own growth potential," Japanese financial daily the Nikkei said in a recent editorial. "This situation should be taken as a wake-up call to accelerate neglected economic reforms." — AFP



TOKYO: Photo shows a staff member making rice balls, known as 'onigiri', at the restaurant Onigiri Bongo in the Otsuka area of Tokyo. — AFP photos

Goonbe has opened outlets in Paris and near Grand Central Station in New York. "It's light, healthy and easy to eat," said 53-year-old customer Sean King, who first tried onigiri in Japan and was "very happy" to find them in the Big Apple. "You don't have any regrets after eating one."

Affordable lunch

The oldest rice ball restaurant in Tokyo, Onigiri Asakusa Yadoroku, was included in the 2019 Michelin Guide, elevating the status of the snack. "From that moment, people who saw onigiri as an everyday bite to eat began to see it as a quality dish," said Yusuke Nakamura, president of Japan's Onigiri Society. Spending on onigiri and other pre-prepared rice products has grown by 66 percent over the past two decades in Japan, figures from the internal affairs ministry show.

In 2022, onigiri were the second-most-fre-

quently purchased ready-to-eat food in Japan after bento lunchboxes, according to the Japan Ready-made Meal Association. And the number of specialized onigiri shops is rising quickly, Nakamura said. The trend has been driven by demand for takeaway meals during the pandemic, but also inflation, with people choosing onigiri over a restaurant meal to save money.

While imported grains like wheat have become more expensive because of the war in Ukraine, "the price of rice, grown domestically, is relatively stable", Nakamura explained. Japanese people have deep cultural links to rice, said Miki Yamada, who runs "Warai Musubi", a catering service specializing in "omusubi" - another name for onigiri. In the Shinto religion, "rice is an offering made to deities", and the traditional triangular shape of onigiri may be a reference to mountains, where many Shinto gods dwell, the 48-year-old said. — AFP

general election, voters take part in two by-elections on Thursday, with the Conservatives fearful of losing one-time strongholds in Wellingborough, central England, and Kingswood in the southwest.

'Mild recession'

"The news that the UK slipped into technical recession in 2023, will be a blow for the prime minister on a day when he faces the prospect of losing two by-elections," said Capital Economics analyst Ruth Gregory. "But this recession is as mild as they come and timely indicators suggest it is already nearing an end." In a broad-based decline, all main sectors shrank in the fourth quarter - with manufacturing and construction among the biggest drags. The economy was broadly flat last year with 0.1-percent expansion, down sharply from growth of 4.6-percent growth in 2022, the ONS added.

The news came on the same day it emerged that Japan has also entered recession. "All told, it was a disappointing set of (British) GDP figures, but there's no reason to panic just yet," said Henry Cook, senior economist at MUFG Bank. "For a start, the la-

bor market remains firm with the unemployment rate stands... close to its historical low. "Consumer confidence has also gradually improved over the last 18 months. That doesn't scream 'crisis' to our minds." Finance minister Jeremy Hunt insisted the economy was on the mend, even if inflation stands at 4.0 percent, double the Bank of England's target rate.

"High inflation is the single biggest barrier to growth," Hunt said following the GDP data. "Although times are still tough for many families, we must stick to the plan - cutting taxes on work and business to build a stronger economy," Hunt said in a statement. Chancellor of the Exchequer Hunt is widely expected to cut taxes in his budget next month, in a move seen as a way of closing the gap on Labor. But with the Bank of England's main interest rate sitting at a 16-year high of 5.25, millions of voters are suffering from soaring mortgage repayments.

Sunak pledge 'in tatters'

Reacting to Thursday's data, Labor slammed the government's stewardship of the economy. "This is Rishi Sunak's recession and the news will be deeply

S Korean scientists develop sustainable 'meaty rice'

SEOUL: Scientists in South Korea have developed a new type of sustainable hybrid food—a "meaty" rice that they say could help solve food crises and climate change. The new grain was grown in a lab by researchers at Seoul's Yonsei University and is packed with beef muscle and fat cells. The result is a pink rice that the team says could offer a cheaper and more environmentally sustainable meat alternative and leave a smaller carbon footprint.

"Imagine obtaining all the nutrients we need from cell-cultured protein rice," said Park So-hyeon, who co-authored the study. "Rice already has a high nutrient level, but adding cells from livestock can further boost it," she said in a press release on Wednesday, when the study was published in the Matter journal. The grain was coated in fish gelatine to help beef cells latch onto the rice and then left to culture in a petri dish for up to 11 days.

The final product contained 8 percent more protein and 7 percent more fat than regular rice, the team said, and was more firm and brittle than natural grains. The latest creation left a significantly smaller carbon footprint since the production method eliminates the need to raise and farm animals which consume "a lot of resources and water and releases a lot of greenhouse gas," Park said. For every 100g (3.5 ounces) of protein produced, hybrid rice is estimated to release under 6.27 kilograms of carbon dioxide, while beef production releases eight times more, according to the press release. — AFP

Britain slides into recession, a blow to embattled PM

LONDON: Britain is in recession, official data showed Thursday, dealing another blow to embattled Prime Minister Rishi Sunak, whose Conservative party is forecast to lose a general election expected this year. Gross domestic product shrank 0.3 percent in the fourth quarter of 2023 after contracting 0.1 percent in the prior three months, the Office for National Statistics (ONS) said in a statement. That places the economy in recession, which is defined as two quarters of falling GDP in a row.

While economists predicted that the recession could be short-lived, the data is a big setback for Sunak, who has placed economic growth as a key priority. It comes as the Conservatives badly trail the main opposition Labor party in polls. Ahead of the



LONDON: A worker puts away chairs in London. Britain is in recession, official data showed Thursday, dealing another blow to embattled Prime Minister Rishi Sunak. — AFP

worrying for families and business across Britain," said Labor's finance spokeswoman Rachel Reeves, adding that his vow to deliver growth was in "tatters". While UK inflation has tumbled since striking a 41-year peak of 11.1 percent in October 2022, energy and food prices remain elevated. — AFP

Indian farmers set up camp

'We are here for the long haul'

SHAMBHU, India: Protesting Indian farmers relaxed inside their tractors Thursday as they awaited orders from leaders to advance on the capital, vowing they'd last longer than the police currently blocking their route. "We are here for the long haul," said Mela Singh, a 70-year-old from Punjab state's Mansa district, one of the thousands of farmers setting up camp on the highway after their column was stalled by roadblocks about 200 kilometers north of New Delhi. "A month, six months, a year, it does not matter, we will only retreat when we win this battle."

Community kitchens and makeshift medical clinics have been established, while other farmers snooze beneath tarpaulins stretched over their tractor trailers. Thousands of farmers this week launched what they have dubbed "Delhi Chalo", or "March to Delhi", to demand a law to fix a minimum price for their crops, in addition to other concessions including the waiving of loans. The demonstrations come ahead of national elections likely to start in April.

They echo ones in January 2021, when farmers used their tractors to smash through barriers and rolled into New Delhi on Republic Day during their then year-long protest. This time around, their hundreds of tractors have been halted by fearsome police barricades of concrete blocks, rolls of razor wire and barrages of tear gas when the farmers come too close. But the tense initial energy of the protest — marked by sloganeering and farmers using kites to ward off police drones dropping tear gas from the air — has given way to a more languid wait.

'Everyone's fight'

The protesting farmers are in no hurry to head back home. Kamaljit Singh, 35, insisted everyone had a cup of the super-sweet milk tea he had on offer. "We have 100 liters (22 gallons) of milk," said Kamaljit, a farmer from Punjab's Patiala district, saying his village had gifted the milk to support the protest. "Another 200 liters are on their way. We have enough for everyone." The milk is a symbol that all are behind the protest, he said. "Every person from the village has contributed," said Kamaljit. "This is everyone's fight."

Two-thirds of India's 1.4 billion people draw their livelihood from agriculture, accounting for nearly a fifth of the country's GDP, according to government figures. Nearby villages are making sure the protesters are well fed, drawing from the Sikh tradition of "langar", or community kitchen, and coordinated from village gurdwaras, Sikh places of worship. "In every village in the vicinity, gurdwaras have set up community kitchens where food is prepared round the clock for the farmers," said Sukhpal Singh, 63, also from Patiala.

Makhan Singh, a 60-year-old wheat farmer, used a roti to scoop up his breakfast of curry and pickled chilies — food donated by a village close to the camp. The scent of fresh curry wafts towards the thick lines of baton-wielding riot police, who watch the camp from barricades across the highway. "The women in our village woke up at 3:00 am to prepare the food," said Mukhiya Singh, 32, who offered a curry of spiced tomatoes and potatoes. Earlier this week, police alternated between raking the crowds with water cannon and dropping tear gas. — AFP



AMBALA: Farmers shout slogans as they march towards New Delhi during a protest demanding minimum crop prices on February 14, 2024. — AFP

Airbus posts 11% drop in net profit

TOULOUSE: European aircraft manufacturer Airbus on Thursday posted an 11 percent drop in net profit to 3.8 billion euros (\$4.1 billion) in 2023, with past charges related to its space business cutting into earnings. The group, which delivered 735 aircraft last year despite problems in its supply chain, said it plans to deliver "around 800" in 2024. And despite the space problems, the profit figure was the third biggest announced by Airbus after its 4.2 billion-euro bumper year in 2022.

"In 2023 we recorded strong order intake across all our businesses and we delivered on our commitments. This was a significant achievement given the complexity of the operating environment," said Airbus chief executive Guillaume Faury. The group said it had received orders for 2,094 aircraft in 2023, beating a previous record dating back to 2013. Its A320 and long-haul A350 jets led the order list. Group revenues increased by 11 percent to 65.4 billion euros, with commercial aircraft revenues increasing 15 percent.

Airbus Helicopters' deliveries were stable at 346 units, against 344 in 2022, with revenues rising four percent. Revenues at Airbus Defense and Space increased



BLAGNAC: CEO of Airbus Guillaume Faury (left) and chief sustainability and communication of Airbus Julie Kitcher attend a press conference to present Airbus 2023 results at the Airbus Leadership University event centre in Blagnac, south-western France, on February 15, 2024. — AFP

two percent. But profits at the space division fell 40 percent to 229 million euros because of a one-off 600 million charge. Facing stiff competition from US-rival SpaceX, Airbus has been hit by development delays and high costs for its geostationary satellites, according to a source following developments. Space division head Jean-Marc Nasr is to be replaced from March 1. — AFP

Asian markets rise, tracking Wall Street and Europe gains

HONG KONG: Most Asian markets rose Thursday, tracking a rebound in Europe and New York and following positive remarks from a senior Federal Reserve official that US inflation was headed in the right direction. Figures on Tuesday showing the US consumer price index slowed less than expected in January dealt a body blow to hopes of an early interest rate cut and sent Asia indices mostly lower.

But investors returned to buying on expectations borrowing costs will be reduced this year, while traders also cheered strong earnings releases that soothed any worries about companies' bottom lines. "Over time we think it will become clear that January was more one-off vs a new CPI trend," 22V Research strategists led by Dennis DeBusschere said.

Traders will be closely following the release of the producer price index, which is due at the end

of the week. Stephen Innes, of SPI Asset Management, added that the US stock market's rebound "offers some respite following the bolt from the blue delivered by inflation figures" on Tuesday. "Notwithstanding inflation, which is still too high versus arbitrarily defined targets, the US macro picture continues evolving consistently with a soft landing," he added.

The Fed's vice chair for supervision, Michael Barr, said the central bank should be "careful" about the timing of interest rate cuts but added that he was "confident" inflation was heading back to the target of two percent. "We need to see continued good data before we can begin the process of reducing the federal funds rate," Barr said. In Tokyo, official data released Thursday showed Germany overtook Japan last year as the world's third-biggest economy, primarily because of a sharp fall in the yen.

Japan's economy grew 1.9 percent last year, though it contracted for a second straight quarter in October-December, pushing it into a technical recession. Japan's nominal 2023 gross domestic product in dollar terms was \$4.2 trillion, government data showed, compared with \$4.5 trillion for Germany, according to figures revealed last month. — AFP

No.	Ticker	Sector	Price Movement & Performance										Valuation Multiples *				
			Open Price	Close Price	Week High	Week Low	Range	Volume	WTD Change	WTD %	YTD %	Support Level	Resistance Level	P/E	P/B	Yield	Beta
101	National Bank of Kuwait	Banking	974	977	981	973	8	14,968,669	5	0.51%	9.28%	974	984	14.4	1.79	3.5%	1.03
102	Gulf Bank	Banking	293	288	299	287	12	29,736,316	-6	-2.04%	2.49%	285	294	14.0	1.33	3.3%	1.29
104	Al Ahli Bank of Kuwait	Banking	265	281	288	262	26	11,741,394	48	20.60%	20.60%	260	292	18.0	1.12	2.6%	0.98
106	Kuwait International Bank	Banking	159	159	161	158	3	20,917,461	1	0.63%	6.00%	156	160	16.6	0.60	2.3%	1.11
107	Burgan Bank	Banking	189	199	209	186	23	25,636,873	10	5.29%	15.70%	197	202	21.1	0.76	3.8%	1.37
108	Kuwait Finance House	Banking	782	786	802	782	20	136,216,217	8	1.03%	8.26%	785	799	20.5	1.97	2.1%	1.17
109	Boubyan Bank	Banking	623	620	629	617	12	7,098,357	-4	-0.64%	3.33%	616	644	33.0	2.44	0.9%	1.17
201	Kuwait Investment	Financial Services	208	195	214	190	24	56,409,305	-11	-5.34%	53.54%	178	200	11.4	0.91	2.6%	2.00
204	National Investments	Financial Services	297	290	297	280	17	24,996,387	-6	-2.03%	21.34%	289	296	95.1	1.36	9.5%	2.03
205	Kuwait Projects	Financial Services	107	110	112	106	6	38,200,262	3	2.80%	4.76%	107	110	27.1	0.62	0.0%	1.00
212	Arzan Financial Group	Financial Services	226	227	229	218	11	79,483,304	3	1.34%	8.10%	208	228	32.7	1.53	1.8%	1.17
222	Aayan Leasing and Investment	Financial Services	176	174	178	171	7	20,533,748	-1	-0.57%	0.00%	171	180	8.9	1.20	4.3%	1.58
252	Al Imtiaz Investment	Financial Services	55	56.1	56.8	54.6	2.2	6,700,801	0.7	1.26%	-0.71%	55.5	57.1	NM	0.38	0.0%	1.32
401	Kuwait Real Estate	Real Estate	243	239	247	233	14	45,130,021	-3	-1.24%	16.59%	237	245	19.3	1.61	1.2%	1.13
404	Salhia Real Estate	Real Estate	449	450	454	444	10	5,987,707	21	4.90%	4.90%	444	460	15.2	1.35	3.2%	0.51
413	Mabaneer	Real Estate	788	834	837	788	49	12,679,824	50	6.38%	-1.07%	825	838	16.7	1.75	1.6%	0.96
418	The Commercial Real Estate	Real Estate	106	106	107	105	2	13,758,331	-1	-0.93%	3.92%	105	108	21.0	0.64	2.8%	0.62
501	National Industries	Financial Services	227	233	236	226	10	29,738,857	6	2.64%	14.22%	232	239	21.3	1.10	2.0%	1.65
505	Gulf Cable	Industrials	1,500	1,514	1,520	1,480	40	1,652,505	16	1.07%	15.57%	1,513	1,575	15.8	1.39	4.0%	1.03
506	HEISCO	Industrials	843	841	852	832	20	2,326,772	-3	-0.36%	2.56%	832	846	23.5	2.14	2.4%	0.90
514	Boubyan Petrochemical	Basic Materials	584	592	604	581	23	4,945,049	12	2.07%	1.20%	580	604	12.9	1.25	10.0%	0.93
603	Agility	Industrials	608	607	623	599	24	18,152,237	4	0.66%	19.25%	598	618	18.4	0.87	0.0%	1.55
605	Zain	Telecommunications	515	514	527	511	16	20,149,740	-1	-0.19%	1.38%	512	528	10.3	1.78	6.8%	0.63
623	Human Soft Holding	Industrials	3,330	3,365	3,475	3,327	148	723,614	45	1.36%	-1.00%	3,350	3,400	10.3	3.40	11.3%	0.65
642	ALAFCO	Industrials	213	206	215	203	12	4,126,645	-7	-3.29%	14.44%	206	213	NM	0.89	0.0%	1.21
654	JAZEERA	Consumer Discretionary	1,022	1,185	1,188	1,022	166	3,749,510	164	16.06%	-14.69%	1,100	1,204	20.3	7.63	2.4%	1.32
813	GFH Financial Group	Financial Services	80.9	80.5	81.5	80	1.5	20,166,232	0.5	0.63%	5.50%	79.7	81.1	8.7	0.92	6.3%	1.37
821	Warba Bank	Banking	190	189	192	187	5	23,826,548	-1	-0.53%	1.61%	188	196	23.6	1.00	1.5%	1.11
822	Kuwait Telecommunications	Telecommunications	590	591	599	587	12	3,261,163	28	4.97%	4.97%	577	595	17.8	2.51	5.9%	0.70
823	Mezzan Holding	Consumer Staples	601	612	614	598	16	3,467,150	-2	-0.33%	6.43%	605	618	14.7	1.73	2.0%	0.50
824	Integrated Holding	Industrials	548	521	550	507	43	3,363,347	-10	-1.88%	2.16%	520	546	36.6	2.12	2.9%	0.71
827	Boursa Kuwait	Financial Services	2,005	1,996	2,023	1,994	29	1,168,088	-4	-0.20%	15.78%	1,971	2,035	25.8	6.57	4.3%	1.40
830	AL GHANIM	Consumer Discretionary	1,085	1,117	1,131	1,080	51	2,352,643	32	2.95%	5.78%	1,069	1,123	11.5	3.96	6.3%	0.73

* As of end of week closing

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What's behind US economy's surprising strength, growth?

US GDP growth blows past predictions

WASHINGTON: The US has seen GDP growth blow past predictions, hiring numbers surge unexpectedly and consumers still spending even as interest rates climbed - deftly averting a dreaded recession in 2023. While interest rates have hit the highest level in more than two decades, a situation ordinarily accompanied by higher unemployment and a consumption pullback, it has not been the case this time. What accounts for the surprise?

'Value of talent'

Low unemployment, wage growth and hiring have underpinned consumers' willingness to spend. The situation stems from turmoil businesses experienced during Covid-19 when executives struggled to hire, train and retain talent. This has made them think twice before resorting to job cuts, even when faced with a possible economic slowdown, said EY chief economist Gregory Daco. Instead, they favored reducing hiring. "As a result, we've seen more resilience in the labor market," Daco told AFP. "A unique facet of this business cycle is that the value of talent has shifted," he added. Meanwhile, even as private sector hiring cooled, "non-cyclical government, healthcare and education propelled much of employment growth," said Nationwide chief economist Kathy Bostjancic.

Purchasing power

Americans are snagging jobs and wage increases, while annual real wage growth has been positive since May 2023, said ZipRecruiter chief economist Julia Pollak. "Declining inflation and rising purchasing power are fueling strong consumer spending," she told AFP. Although online job posting numbers have fallen steadily from a peak in November 2021, Pollak said the level remains historically high. But she noted that the labor market is slackening, with applications per

job posting rising 30 percent on-year in January based on ZipRecruiter data.

Government spending

Another factor is a series of measures including the \$2.2 trillion CARES Act in 2020 and \$1.9 trillion American Rescue Plan a year later, through which the government approved economic aid for recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. The payments were certainly "effective in providing inflationary pressures," said Dan North, senior economist at Allianz Trade North America. Shortly after, President Joe Biden signed the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law in 2021, allowing \$1.2 trillion in transportation and infrastructure spending, and rolled out his landmark climate action plan, the Inflation Reduction Act in 2022.

While the Federal Reserve has fought to slow the economy and quell inflation with rate hikes, North said "fiscal policy has been doing exactly the opposite." "Government subsidies for electric vehicle, microchip, and infrastructure investments are boosting business investment at a time when high interest rates might otherwise have caused it to plummet," Pollak added. About 30 percent of GDP growth last year came from the government sector, which represents some 14 percent of the economy, said Daco.

Locked-in rates

The economy also fared well despite aggressive rate hikes due to the stretch of much lower rates in prior years. In 2020, the Fed brought the benchmark lending rate down to virtually zero before starting to raise it again in March 2022. This "allowed corporations to issue debt at very low interest rates," North said, adding that many companies did just that. "Now in aggregate, corporations are paying the lowest interest payments on record," he added. In a similar vein, consumers locked low mortgage



CALIFORNIA: A credit card decal is displayed on the window of a business in San Rafael, California. According to a report by the Federal Reserve Bank of New York, credit card debt in the United States has reached \$1.13 trillion. — AFP

rates, softening the blow from Fed rate increases.

Lagged effects

Economists say it takes time for the impact of rate hikes to flow through the economy as well. The last hike was announced in July, and North expects it can take six quarters - 1.5 years - for the full effect to

bear out in the form of a slowdown. But the outlook this year remains positive with interest rate cuts on the horizon as inflation has fallen - a development that generally spurs business activity. A National Association for Business Economics survey released this month showed that only a quarter of respondents believe a recession will occur in 2024. — AFP

Burgan Bank urges customers to adopt safe banking practices

KUWAIT: In light of the alarming rise in financial fraud and scam attempts in Kuwait and the Ministry of Interior (MoI)'s success in processing 334 reports of fraud, which amounted to a total of KD 592,556 since the inception of the Virtual Fraud Room, Burgan Bank reiterated the urgency for all customers to follow precautionary measures and secure banking practices to avoid falling victim to the ever-evolving schemes of financial fraud.



Faissal Al Roumi

It serves to note that Burgan Bank continues to offer its unwavering support to the MoI's virtual fraud room (Aman) - which was recently set up and activated by the Kuwait Banking Association (KBA) under the guidance of the Central Bank of Kuwait (CBK), in cooperation with the MoI and the Public Prosecution and with the participation of specialized representatives from all domestic banks - to handle reports of electronic financial fraud around the clock.

In this regard, Faissal Al Roumi, Executive Manager - Operational Risk at Burgan Bank, said: "Protecting our customers from electronic financial fraud schemes is among our top priorities, which is why we continue to regularly upgrade our systems and fortify our products and services with the latest security standards. In parallel, we continue to spread fraud awareness messages on the different ways to deter any financial fraud attempts across the Bank's various channels of communication as well as its nationwide branches."

Al Roumi offered Burgan's customers numerous secure banking tips to help them stay vigilant of any scams or fraud attempts, which includes refraining from clicking any suspicious hyperlinks that may be attached to an email or SMS. He noted that the Bank does not collect or update any customer information via email, SMS, or phone calls. Payment Gateways should also be checked prior to filling out card details to ensure it is secure by starting with "HTTPS". In addition, he urged the customers to avoid answering calls or responding to messages requesting personal or bank account information, noting that scammers collect these data and use them to rob customers of their hard-earned wealth or personal information.

Other security measures that Al Roumi highlighted include safekeeping the bankcard PIN and not writing it on the card itself, as well as not sharing the one-time password (OTP) with anyone or saving important information - such as debit or credit card numbers, as well as secure key - on the mobile phone. Burgan Bank has also taken a step in mentioning the reason for each OTP sent within the message and clients should read the reason before submitting.

He also stressed the importance of logging out of the Bank's application or online platform as soon as the transaction or service is fulfilled. Other precautions include constantly updating anti-virus programs that are installed on all devices used for online banking, as well as regularly updating the devices' operating systems, applications, and firewalls. In the case of suspecting any unauthorized transactions, Al Roumi urged all customers to immediately contact customer support and report the suspected breach.

It is worth noting that Burgan Bank spares no effort to support the banking awareness campaign, "Let's Be Aware" (Diraya), by spreading the word about its importance and goals on a daily basis with customers visiting the branches. The Bank also utilizes its social media and digital channels to spread vital financial literacy and fraud awareness information, ensuring that fraud awareness becomes second nature to as many individuals as possible across society and guaranteeing higher levels of security for their bank accounts.

Argentina inflation soars above 250%

BUENOS AIRES: Argentina's monthly inflation slowed slightly in January, but the prices of key goods and services rose 254 percent year-on-year, the statistics agency said Wednesday. President Javier Milei had warned that the country's battle with inflation was far from over when he took office in December, riding a wave of fury over decades of economic mismanagement, and stood by his policies Wednesday.

"If one takes the number alone, isolated, it is horrifying. And indeed it is, but you have to look at where we were and what the trend was," Milei told television station La Nacion Mas. Monthly inflation stood at 20.6 percent in January, the INDEC statistics agency said, down from the 25.5 percent figure for December. Annual inflation in December was 211 percent. Latin America's third-largest economy continues to face an unrelenting crisis, with Milei warning that the situation

will get worse before it improves as he applies what he termed "shock" treatment.

He began his term by devaluing the peso by more than 50 percent, slashing transport and fuel subsidies, and getting rid of price controls. The cost of transport went up 26.3 percent in January, while goods and services soared 44.4 percent. The president Wednesday said that "economic activity would have fallen much more" had he not implemented the new policies. "We are focusing on taking care of the most vulnerable class," Milei said, while detailing increases in social allowances.

Milei has estimated that inflation would come under control within two years. The 53-year-old libertarian and self-described "anarcho-capitalist" is however struggling to get his reforms through Congress, where his fledgling party does not have a majority. After marathon debates, his hefty flagship reform package - which touches on many areas of public and private life, from privatizations to cultural issues and the penal code, divorce and the status of football clubs - was recently sent back to committee for a rewrite.

But in a symbol of support for Milei's reforms, the IMF in late January issued a fresh disbursement of \$4.7 billion in funds, as part of a previously agreed



BUENOS AIRES: A man counts one thousand Argentine peso banknotes in Buenos Aires. — AFP

\$44 billion aid program. International Monetary Fund chief Kristalina Georgieva at the time praised Milei government's "bold actions to restore macroeconomic stability and... address long-standing impediments to growth." The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) said last week it expects Argentina's economy to shrink by 2.3 percent this year. — AFP

EU cuts euro-zone inflation, growth forecasts for 2024

BRUSSELS: The European Commission on Thursday cut both its growth and inflation forecasts for the euro-zone in 2024, as it warned geopolitical tensions spelled rising uncertainty for the single-currency area's economy. The forecasts by the EU's executive arm demonstrate the impact of the European Central Bank's interest rate-hiking campaign last year: a welcome fall in inflation, predicted to drop to 2.7 percent, but also worryingly sluggish growth, expected to reach just 0.8 percent.

Although the Frankfurt-based ECB has held rates steady so far in 2024, it is widely expected to begin cutting rates later this year in the face of slowing consumer prices and a weakening euro-zone economy. Inflation soared in the aftermath of Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022, sending energy prices sky-high as Europe scrambled to find alternative power sources.

Reflecting lower energy prices, the commission revised its inflation forecast sharply down from 3.2 percent - although it still remains above the ECB's two-percent target. "Lower energy commodity prices and weaker economic momentum set inflation on a steeper downward path than anticipated in

the Autumn Forecast," it said in a statement. The commission's 2024 growth forecast for the euro-zone, at 0.8 percent, also marks a sharp downward revision from the previous forecast of 1.2 percent.

"After narrowly avoiding a technical recession in the second half of last year, prospects for the EU economy in the first quarter of 2024 remain weak," it said. Brussels expects growth to reach 1.5 percent next year. But commission executive vice president Valdis Dombrovskis warned "the global landscape remains highly uncertain" amid fears that conflict in the Middle East could broaden beyond the Zionist entity and Gaza. "We are closely tracking geopolitical tensions, which could have a negative impact on growth and inflation," he said.

The commission was also optimistic that despite the expiry of energy support measures and trade disruptions in the Red Sea, those issues would not derail falling inflation in the longer term. "The European economy has left behind it an extremely challenging year, in which a confluence of factors severely tested our resilience," the EU's economy commissioner, Paolo Gentiloni, said. "The rebound expected in



FRANKFURT: A sculpture of the Euro currency stands in the city centre of Frankfurt am Main, western Germany. — AFP

2024 is set to be more modest than projected three months ago, but to gradually pick up pace on the back of slower price rises, growing real wages and a remarkably strong labor market," he added.

Weaker German economy

The euro-zone has been weighed down by the area's largest economy, Germany. The commission significantly downgraded its forecast for Germany, expecting growth of only 0.3 percent in 2024, down from its autumn prediction of 0.8 percent. "Investment growth is projected to remain low relative to pre-pandemic values, weighed

down by downbeat investor sentiment entering the year. Labor shortages continue to be a bottleneck to activity," it said about Germany in a report.

But the commission still expects the German economy to grow by 1.2 percent in 2025. France, the EU's second-biggest economy, is doing better than Germany but the commission also cut its growth forecast for France to 0.9 percent from 1.2 percent. And it slightly downgraded its prediction for the French economy in 2025, expecting growth of 1.3 percent, down from 1.4 percent in the autumn forecast. — AFP

Microsoft to invest 3.2 billion euros in AI in Germany

BERLIN: Microsoft said Thursday it would invest 3.2 billion euros (\$3.4 billion) in Germany through 2025, with the bulk going to expand the tech giant's efforts in artificial intelligence. The investment will go towards doubling the capacity of Microsoft's "AI and data centre infrastructure", vice

chair Brad Smith said in Berlin at an event with Chancellor Olaf Scholz. Germany is "constantly at the forefront" of technological change, Smith said, with the country second in Europe in terms of the number of AI-based applications being created.

But Germany suffers from a relative shortage of AI skills, according to Smith, a problem seen across different sectors. Microsoft wants to "help build out infrastructure to help the Germany economy continue its use of AI and build out the skill base to fill the jobs required", Smith said. Microsoft is among the large tech companies to have moved fastest and furthest into the sector, investing in ChatGPT-maker

OpenAI and pushing AI across products.

The bet on AI has driven a surge in revenues at the US group and pushed it past Apple as the world's biggest company by market capitalization. Other tech groups have also moved to expand their AI work in Europe, with Google also announcing Thursday that it would open a research hub in Paris. Homegrown AI firms to rival the US tech companies have however been slow to get off the ground in Germany. The head of Aleph Alpha, Germany's hope to challenge OpenAI, said at the end of last year the startup would struggle to compete with the financial backing received by US rivals. — AFP



FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 16, 2024

Weekender



Abdulrahman Al-Farsi

By Shakir Reshamwala

Whales, sharks, stingrays, octopi, crabs and an assortment of fish sway in the wide blue expanse...but wait a minute — they are joined by dragons, horses, falcons and even Tweety! This is not a scene from the deep oceans, but giant kites bobbing in the skies of Kuwait above Bneidar, where the Al-Farsi Kite Team has been holding a weekly display for years during the cooler months.

Record-breaking Al-Farsi Kite Team wows visitors with giant flying creatures

On a recent crisp winter afternoon, Kuwait Times caught up with Abdulrahman Al-Farsi, the doyen of the Al-Farsi Kite Team. Farsi was fascinated by kites when he was a child, but as he grew older, he got busy with the responsibilities of the family business. He rekindled his hobby when he had children of his own, introducing them to kiting. As the years went by, they grew up too and had children of their own.

Farsi however was hooked, and formed the Al-Farsi Kite Team, comprised entirely of volunteers united by a passion for kiting. The team — whose numbers can reach up to 70 — has participated in kite festivals around the

world. A meeting with kite specialist Peter Lynn of New Zealand led Farsi to invest in larger and more varied kites, culminating in setting a world record for the largest kite flown (in the shape of the Kuwaiti flag), an accolade Al-Farsi Kite Team holds to this day.

The kite display is held every Friday from 11 am to 5 pm. The Al-Farsi Kite Team usually organizes a festival during the national holidays in February in a carnival-like atmosphere with activities for children and food trucks galore. This year, the festivities began late and were toned down due to the demise of the late Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and the continuing war in Gaza.

On the day Kuwait Times visited, the open area was surrounded by cars and picnicking families. Dozens of gi-



gantic kites were aloft, while children played in a train kite tethered (thankfully) to the ground. Most of the kites are custom-made and painted by Peter Lynn Kites. They are only powered by wind, expertly lifted and taken down by the team members.

Despite his children taking over the running of the family business, Farsi, a spry 69, is still actively involved, with weekends and travels devoted to his childhood hobby. "Not anytime soon," he said when asked if he has plans to retire. Nearby, as the team prepared to fly a comparatively smaller replica of the world-record Kuwait flag kite, but the largest kite that day in the sky nevertheless, Farsi was at hand, his excitement palpable as he relived his boyhood dream.



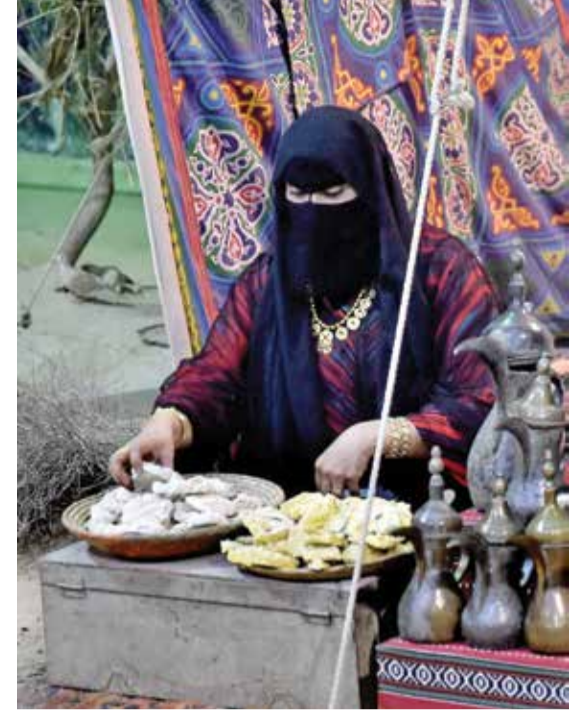
Visitors are dwarfed by giant kites displayed by the Al-Farsi Kite Team in Bneidar. - Photos by Shakir Reshamwala



A woman carrying a bundle on her head is seen with a girl wearing traditional Kuwaiti dress.



A woman holds a basket of Girgian, a mix of candies and sweets.



A woman serves jameed, traditional Kuwaiti food.



EL-TAYBEEN

Heritage troupe reviving Kuwait's golden days

By Passant Hisham

Tracing back in time to the good old days when life was much slower, simpler, and perhaps more meaningful, the “El-Taybeen” troupe revives nostalgic scenes from the past by embodying traditional customs, inherited rituals and cultural art of their beloved homeland. “We are a group of family members and friends who have invested our energy into a non-profit initiative that aims to strengthen social cohesion and national identity and promote our cultural heritage,” said Eman El-Sharrah, head of the troupe.

According to Sharrah, the troupe’s name is inspired by a popular Arabic saying, “Kind people are gone,” where it is widely believed that kindness only belonged to our grandpar-

connected with their roots and strongly hold onto their inherited societal values, customs and traditions that reflect their distinctive nomadic Arabic origins. “We consider ourselves a reflection of the Kuwaiti family, society and the entire nation that is keen to spread the values embedded in our roots and adopt them for leading a better future for our country,” Sharrah noted.

Since its beginnings in 2018, the troupe has been spreading cultural and heritage awareness through active participation in many national events inside Kuwait, collaborating with various ministries and entities, including universities such as Kuwait University, heritage museums such as Beit Othman, and historical districts such as Souq Mubarakkiya. On a global level, the troupe has represented Kuwait in national celebrations undertaken in Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates. Additionally,



A man practicing the traditional craft of breaking and selling ice.

ents and ancestors. So, through the cherished memory of these old people, Sharrah started this troupe in the hope of restoring the lost kindness in the present world again.

She highlights the main goals of the troupe are to leave a real impact on future generations by helping them stay more



A boy playing with al kavood, a toy made from palm trunk.



A board displays the name of the El-Taybeen troupe.

the troupe has been featured in popular TV and radio shows, particularly during special seasons such as Ramadan.

El-Taybeen’s efforts have even extended to socially responsible initiatives by taking part in charitable events, holding shows in old age homes and other organizations for the disabled, reflecting a holistic ap-

proach to community engagement. “Our purpose is to give back to our homeland, as we believe it’s time for every individual to realize that they should have an active role in fostering growth in all aspects of society,” Sharrah noted.

Whoever observes the steps taken by the troupe and notices their concern in capturing the

essence of the country in all the little details of their shows will know that this group of people isn’t just working to keep themselves busy, but is genuinely aiming to leave an unforgettable message for the world, promoting the values of unconditional love and loyalty towards Kuwait.



A man holds an old gas lantern. — All photos from the troupe’s shows



Derbaha, an old toy wheel that children used to play with in the past.



Representation of an old store in Kuwait.

Weekender

By Ghanimah Al-Fuhaid

Change is a universal phenomenon that cannot be prevented and does not discriminate; it impacts all people and all things, both material and immaterial. Few, however, have known change for as long and as deeply as language has. It is a perpetual occurrence as living beings continue to interact with one another day by day.

For the past few decades, Kuwait has been witnessing its own linguistic shift, particularly in its dialect. To delve into this change, how it came about, and what it might signify for the Kuwaiti identity, Kuwait Times interviewed several citizens from current and previous generations to gather their opinions on the matter.

How has it changed?

When speaking with young adults, all unanimously agreed that the Kuwaiti dialect has evolved since their parents' and grandparents' times. They noted differences, especially in informal settings with friends, where English has heavily influenced their speech.

Apart from incorporating English words, the younger generation has also started translating and creating words directly from English. For instance, Fouz, 28, shared, "Our generation has been taking words from English and turning them into Arabic. A lot of us love to use the term 'sar feeni', which is a direct translation of 'I was like' in English."

Similarly, 33-year-old Ahmed mentioned frequently using terms like "imperwin" (to get paranoid) and "impeswit" (to pass out) in his social circles. These words are crafted by using English terms as a base and adjusting letters to better suit the Arabic language. Such expressions have only recently become part of the dialect.



Despite this generational shift, some, like Fouz and Ahmed, expressed a desire to learn classic Kuwaiti words used by their older relatives, indicating a recognition of the importance of preserving linguistic heritage.

"Sometimes, my grandmother would say something, and I'd just go 'What are you saying?'. I have slowly built up my vocabulary, though. Just by sitting more with the elderly during family gatherings, I've picked up many words. It's really that simple," said 18-year-old Mariam, who actively seeks to prevent the potential erasure of traditional Kuwaiti words.



The ongoing transformation of the Kuwaiti dialect

Causes and concerns

While the younger generation expressed some level of concern about the current state of the Kuwaiti dialect, parents and grandparents interviewed by Kuwait Times appeared more alarmed about the direction it seems to be heading.

Taiba, 56, and a mother of three, believes the rapid change is due to the influence of social media, especially "influencers". "People are constantly watching others on Snapchat and Instagram, then proceed to copy the way that they speak. There's no sense of individuality anymore. My daughters and their friends all sound the same. It isn't bad, of course, but I just wish younger people expressed themselves in their own way," she said.

"Kuwaiti dramas are very popular with the current generation, but they're filled with grammatical and syntactical mistakes, despite representing our society. It only contributes to the change and faults in our dialect nowadays, and they don't even realize it because they assume it's the correct way of speaking," she added.

Another woman, in her 70s and wishing to remain anonymous, admitted, "Our dialect is gone, and with it our identity as Kuwaitis." When asked about preventing this endangerment, she emphasized the importance of tradition, community engagement and cultural activities. "Preservation starts with tradition. Get together with your family and elders and engage in cultural activities. Talk to your neighbors and invite

them over, be in touch with your community, and make sure to do it all with love."

Language as a cultural heritage

The beauty of language lies in its ever-changing nature, but many

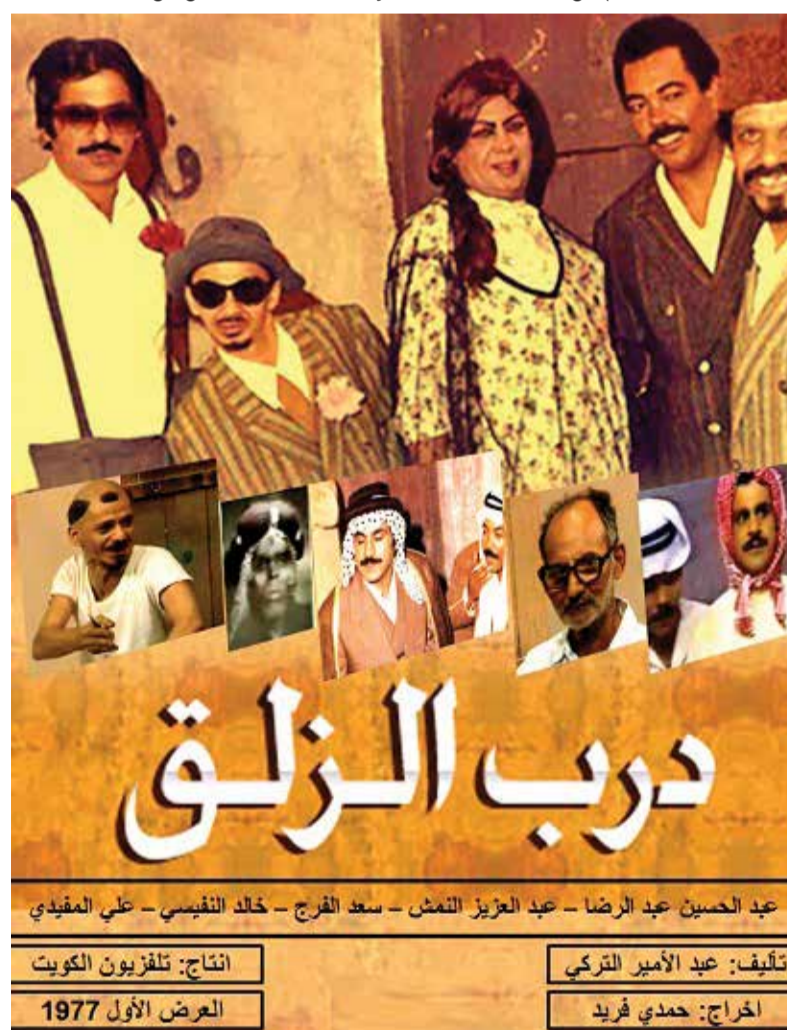
believe that preservation efforts are necessary for the Kuwaiti dialect, considering it as a core part of the country's rich and longstanding culture.

"If you want an example of how real Kuwaiti is spoken, just put on 'Darb Al Zalag' (A Kuwaiti come-

dy from 1977). It's a great way to learn, and there are many other shows and theatrical plays just like it," recommended 41-year-old Fatemah, reflecting on a bygone era of Kuwaiti art and television.

"We should also advocate for the construction of cultural institutes dedicated to researching and keeping records of old Kuwaiti words and expressions, especially because it's all oral. Our dialect is as important as any other aspect of our culture and must be preserved for generations to come, especially if it disappears. There should be something written that we can always go back to, like a dictionary, for example."

Meanwhile, 22-year-old Nouriyah believes that not all hope is lost. "We can and should hold on to the classic dialect; it's Kuwaiti heritage after all. I think if we made it more appealing by creating fun programs on TV or TikTok, people would be more aware of what's going on and show more interest. Private schools should make more of an effort, too, and organize cultural activities that could educate their Kuwaiti students."



Poster of the "Darb Al Zalag" definitely Kuwait's and arguably the Arab world's most popular television series for nearly half a century.

WHAT'S ON IN KUWAIT

• **Event: Al-Khairan Marina Market**
Place: Al-Khairan Mall
Date: February 16, 2024

• **Event: Porsche Club**
Place: Kuwait Motor Town
Date: February 16-17, 2024

• **Event: Kuwait Ports Festival**
Place: Port of Shuwaikh 14-15
Date: February 16-17, 2024

• **Event: SADI 2024**
Place: Sadu House
Date: February 17, 2024
Time: 9 am to 1 pm

• **Event: Bloom Market**
Place: Dhahi Complex
Date: February 17, 2024
Time: 9 am to 5 pm

• **Event: Ramadan Market**
Place: 360 Mall
Date: February 17, 2024
Time: 10 am to 10 pm

• **Event: Science in the Garden**
Place: Scientific Center
Date: February 17, 2024
Time: 9 am to 1 pm

• **Event: Autoland Car Expo**
Place: International fairground
Date: February 7-18, 2024

• **Event: AlJoud Bazaar: International Bazaar for the Children of Gaza**
Place: Crowne Plaza - AlBaraka Ballroom
Date: February 19, 2024
Time: 10 am to 8 pm

• **Event: Ford Desert Challenge**
Place: Mutlaa
Date: February 18, 2024

Sports

Rohit, Jadeja tons help India to 326-5 in England Test

Sarfaraz Khan smashes 62 on debut

RAJKOT: Centuries from skipper Rohit Sharma and Ravindra Jadeja helped India recover and then dominate Thursday after early blows on day one of the third Test against England. India reached 326-5 at stumps after Sarfaraz Khan smashed 62 on his debut to turn the opposition attack on its head in Rajkot. The left-handed Jadeja, on 110, and Kuldeep Yadav, on one, were batting at close of play after Sarfaraz was run out.

England pace bowler Mark Wood took three wickets including two early strikes as India slipped to 33-3 before Rohit, who hit 131, and Jadeja put together 204 runs. The marathon stand is India's first century partnership and the best so far by either team in the five-match series, level at 1-1. Rohit fell in the final session off Wood but Sarfaraz stepped into the spotlight as he took on the bowlers with regular boundaries including a straight six off Tom Hartley.

"I was padded up for almost four hours and was thinking, 'I have been so patient in my life, (just) a little more patience now,'" Sarfaraz told reporters. "I went inside and was initially nervous for a few balls but with such a good practice and hard work it all went well." With his father and wife in attendance, the 26-year-old Sarfaraz, who has averaged over 69 in 45 first-class matches, reached his 50 in 48 balls.

Sarfaraz put on 77 runs with Jadeja, who was promoted in the batting ahead of Sarfaraz, but was run out after a mix-up between the two batsmen and Wood hit the stumps directly at the bowler's end. Jadeja, who missed the second

match with a hamstring injury, raised his ton with a single and celebrated by swinging the bat in his trademark sword dance.

'Threw everything'

Earlier Rohit stood calm to guide India to 93-3 at lunch and kept up the charge, prompting England skipper Ben Stokes to rotate his bowlers in his landmark 100th Test. Rohit reached his 11th Test ton soon after the tea break. He hit 14 fours and three sixes before a bouncer from Wood got him to top edge the ball caught by Stokes at mid-wicket. Wood came in as the only change for England and had the left-handed Yashasvi Jaiswal caught at slip by Joe Root for 10 in the fourth over of the day.

In the next over, Wood induced another nick from Shubman Gill, who was snapped up by wicketkeeper Ben Foakes without scoring. "Was a great start," England assistant coach Paul Collingwood told reporters. "We threw everything up in terms of plans and field positions, we fought hard all the way through the day and right till the end," he said.

"It was a hard-fought day and we will see tomorrow. Hopefully take some wickets in the morning." Spin was introduced after eight overs and Hartley struck with his left-arm spin to send back Rajat Patidar for five. Rohit survived a hit on the helmet early on in the innings and Root dropped the opener at slips on 27. He was also given out lbw to James Anderson, who needs five more dismissals to reach 700 Test wickets, but successfully reviewed, with replays showing a faint edge. — AFP



RAJKOT: India's Ravindra Jadeja (right) plays a shot during the first day of the third Test cricket match between India and England at Niranjan Shah stadium in Rajkot on February 15, 2024. — AFP

Pathways back to PGA for LIV golfers discussed 'daily'

LOS ANGELES: The contentious issue of how players who embraced the LIV Golf League might return to the US PGA Tour as the global game evolves remains under "daily" discussion, superstar Tiger Woods said Wednesday. "We're looking into all the different models for pathways back," Woods said at a press conference on the eve of the Genesis Invitational at The Riviera Country Club, where he's set to play his first official PGA Tour event since the Masters last April.

"What that looks like, what the impact is for the players who have stayed and who have not left and how we make our product better going forward, there is no answer to that right now." Four-time major champion Rory McIlroy, long a scathing critic of LIV Golf, said in January that he believed golf needs to reunite top players, even it delays sorting out any penalties for those who abandoned the established PGA Tour and DP World Tour for the big money offered by the upstart league backed by Saudi Arabia's Public Investment Fund (PIF).

However, at the Phoenix Open last week, Scottie Scheffler and Justin Thomas joined the list of players insisting that LIV golfers — including two-time major winner Dustin Johnson and reigning Masters champion Jon Rahm — should face some consequences for their defections. "I want the best product and the best players," Thomas said. "I would say that there's a handful of players on LIV that would make the tour a better place, but I'm definitely not in the agreement that they should just be able to come back that easily."

Scheffler, meanwhile, said he thought it would be an unpopular decision to let LIV golfers come back "like nothing ever happened." Woods, one of six player-directors on the US PGA Tour's policy board, indicated the topic was a hot one. "We're looking at very different, varying degrees of ideas and what that looks like in the short term, we don't know," he said of a potential plan for reintegrating LIV players. "We don't even know in the longer term what that looks like. "Trust me, there's daily, weekly emails and talks about this and what this looks like for our tour going forward."

The discussion continues as the PGA Tour forges ahead with its new partnership with Strategic Sports Group (SSG) — a consortium of billionaire sports team owners that agreed a \$3 billion deal with the tour to create a for-profit commercial entity that will allow nearly 200 PGA Tour players the chance to become equity holders. Woods said Wednesday that SSG brings the know-how to improve the PGA Tour "entertainment product" while honoring the history and traditions of the tour.

While the deal with SSG is done, Woods said the hope was to complete negotiations to make the PIF "part of our tour and a part of our product." The PGA Tour has been negotiating with PIF since June, when the details of a framework merger agreement were announced to the astonishment of PGA Tour players, who had no idea such a plan was in the works. "Ultimately we would like to have PIF be a part of our tour and a part of our product," Woods said. — AFP

Centurion Bedingham 'confident' Proteas can level NZ series

HAMILTON: South Africa's David Bedingham scored a maiden century on Thursday and then said he was "very confident" they could dismiss New Zealand short of the 267 needed to win the second and final Test in Hamilton. New Zealand, inspired by debut seamer Will O'Rourke's five-wicket haul, were 40-1 in their second innings at stumps on day three, needing a 227 more to complete a record run chase and a 2-0 series win.

Tom Latham was not out on 21 while Devon Conway was trapped leg before wicket by Dane Piedt for 17 in the day's final over. The highest successful fourth-innings chase by any team at Seddon Park was 212, achieved by Australia against New Zealand 24 years ago. Bedingham's career-high 110 was comfortably the standout knock in South Africa's second innings of 235, supported by 43 from Keegan Petersen and 34 from captain Neil Brand.

It handed the understrength tourists an opportunity to square the series and deny New Zealand their first-ever series win over the Proteas. "Our goal was to bat through the day so we were a bit short of that but I think taking Conway's wicket right at the end is a massive bonus," Bedingham said. "Inside the changing room we have 11 guys who are very confident we can win it. I just hope my 110 is in a winning cause."

Big spin threat

With his team 31 runs ahead on first innings, Bedingham batted aggressively in difficult conditions. The 29-year-old scored 12 fours and two sixes in a 141-ball stay that followed his 87 in the first Test in Mount Maunganui, which South

Fierce competition expected for Int'l horse show jumping

KUWAIT: Saturday will mark the final round of the International Show Jumping Championship which is expected to witness fierce competition for the first grand prize at the height of 145cm.

The Championship is being held at the Arabian Gulf Beach, as there will also be heats at the heights of 110, 125, and 135 cms. The judges' committee is chaired by Kuwait's Nadhar Al-Mustafa and includes Lama Abdulal, Ibtisam Al-Arouri, rider Raghad Al-Dabbous, and International judge from Lebanon Kareem Badarou representing the International Equestrian Federation.

Mohammad Dadallah from Bahrain heads the field of referees that includes Kuwait's Sharon Al-Quoud, Oman's Mohammad Al-Kalbani, Dr Yahya Al-Hadban and Jordan's Ahmad Nassar. Nadar Al-Mustafa said Kuwait Equestrianism is in its best as Kuwait had skilled riders in all age stages and there are large numbers who are turning to this sport.



HAMILTON: South Africa's David Bedingham (left) runs as New Zealand's Kane Williamson (center) misses the ball as wicket keeper Tom Blundell looks on during day three of the second cricket test match between New Zealand and South Africa at Seddon Park in Hamilton on February 15, 2024. — AFP

Africa lost by 281 runs.

Bedingham and Petersen combined for a crucial fifth-wicket stand of 98 before Petersen's dismissal sparked a collapse, with the last six wickets falling for 33. O'Rourke had too much pace and bounce for the tailenders, finishing with 5-34, giving him nine wickets in the match in an eye-catching Test debut. Earlier, he removed Raynard van Tonder for one and then Brand in quick succession to have South Africa in trouble at 39-3. Glenn Phillips, who claimed two wickets with his part-time off-spin, pulled off three catches in the gully, two of them spectacular.

Bedingham was able to capitalize on New Zealand's failure to include a specialist spinner on a pitch that is favoring slow bowlers, scoring freely off Phillips and Rachin Ravindra. O'Rourke believed New Zealand's run chase could hinge on how their batsmen handle off-spinner Piedt, who took five wickets in the first innings. "I think we're pretty confident," he said. "The off-spinner bowled very well in the first innings and he's going to be a big threat again in the next one but each batsman will have their own plans on how they're going to counteract that." — AFP



The judging committee.

Palestine Mini Goal tourney

KUWAIT: With 16 adult teams and 8 for children the "Palestinian Children Mini Goal Football Championship" started yesterday at the late Sameer Saeed playground. The tournament is organized by the Mini Goal Committee of Kuwait Olympic Committee in cooperation with Coordination Committee of the popular Conference for Palestinians Abroad.

The first day of the championship witnessed strong competition under enthusiastic atmosphere. Qualifications has 4 adults groups with 4 teams each as the first and second place of each group qualify for the quarter finals. Meanwhile

children will go through the knock out system. Results of the first day were as follows: The children teams that qualified are: Khan Younis, Bait Lahya, Jabalia, and Shajaeya as Khan Younis defeated Rafah 1-0, BAIT Lahya defeated Bait Hanoun 2-1, Shajaeya defeated Nusairat 4-1 and Jabalia defeated Dair Al-Balah 3-0.

In the adults category: Qalqeelya drew with Jericho 2-2, Jafa defeated Safad 3-0, Hebron defeated Bethlehem 1-0, Gaza defeated Jerusalem 4-1, Hebron defeated Jericho 5-4, Qalqeelya defeated Bethlehem 4-1, Gaza defeated Safad 2-0, Qalqeelya defeated Hebron 4-0, Jafa defeated Gaza 3-1, Jafa defeated Jerusalem 3-0, Jericho defeated Bethlehem 3-0, Jerusalem defeated Safad 3-0, Shajaeyah defeated Nusairat 4-1, Khan Younis defeated Rafah 1-0, Jabalia defeated Dair Al-Balah 3-0, and Bait Lahya defeated Bait Hanoun 2-1.



Sports

Immobile hands Lazio Champions League advantage over Bayern

'We wanted to give our supporters a good night and we've done that'

ROME: Ciro Immobile fired Lazio towards a first Champions League quarter-final in nearly a quarter of a century in Wednesday's 1-0 win over Bayern Munich which plunged their troubled opponents even deeper into crisis. Italy forward Immobile slotted home the last 16, first leg's decisive goal from the penalty spot in the 69th minute in Rome to pile pressure on Bundesliga champions Bayern, who risk having a disastrous season by their own exalted standards.

The spot-kick was won by Gustav Isaksen who was cluttered by Dayot Upamecano with a rash tackle which earned the France defender a red card and left Bayern a man down for the final 20 minutes. Immobile's strike came days after he netted his 200th Serie A goal and allowed a raucous Lazio home crowd to dream of a first quarter-final in Europe's top competition in 24 years. "We prepared for this match so that we could give Bayern a game. Even if we'd only had a 10 percent chance the team would have given everything on the pitch," said Ciro Immobile to Amazon Prime Video. "We wanted to give our supporters a good night and I think we've done that."

Lazio won the Italian title the last time they reached the quarter-finals in 2000, when they fell to Valencia in the last eight. And in order to emulate that star-studded team which featured the likes of Juan Sebastian Veron, Marcelo Salas and Sinisa Mihajlovic, Maurizio Sarri's side still need to hold out in Bavaria next month.

However Bayern are a club in a slump and a toothless display in the Italian capital in which they didn't have a single shot on target will do nothing to help embattled coach Thomas Tuchel. Tuchel, who described his side's performance as "a little bit

slapstick", denied that he is concerned for his future even though Wednesday's defeat came after a 3-0 thumping at Bayer Leverkusen on Saturday which left Bayern five points off the pace in the German title race. The Champions League looked like Bayern's last chance at a trophy this season but Immobile put those hopes in serious doubt.

Bayern's 'tough week'

"We had a good first half, we were the better team, we were completely dominant, we had the chances and we lost our rhythm and belief in the second half. I don't know why," said Tuchel. "With this performance we did everything to lose this game which was completely in our hands." Star striker Harry Kane admitted Bayern were suffering a "really tough week". "We're in a difficult spell. We have to fight. We have to turn it round. We have big games and big things to fight for," Kane told TNT Sports. "We're not out of it, we will never give up. We just need to turn it around. One game or spark can turn it round."

Bayern were on the front foot for most of the opening period, which was light on clearcut chances and featured only one shot on target. That effort was a weak Alessio Romagnoli header for the hosts, who were lucky to go into the break level as Jamal Musiala shot just over the bar after a slick passing move on the edge of the Lazio area. Kane lashed over from close range early on while in the 32nd minute Leroy Sane watched his powerful shot fly just wide after a neat free-kick routine.

But right after the break Bayern had Manuel Neuer to thank after he rushed out to stop Gustav Isaksen for giving Lazio the lead after being bril-



ROME: Lazio's Italian defender #13 Alessio Romagnoli (top left) and Bayern Munich's South Korean defender #03 Kim Min-Jae jump for the ball during the UEFA Champions League last 16 first leg between Lazio and Bayern Munich on February 14, 2024. — AFP

liantly put through by Luis Alberto. And after a long spell of ineffective Bayern possession, Immobile punished the away side with his 20th goal of the season, won by Isaksen when he was upended by

Upamecano. Bayern were left a goal and man down and from that point had an even harder time threatening the well-organized home defense, allowing Lazio to hold out for a famous win. — AFP

Mbappe scores as PSG stun Real Sociedad 2-0

PARIS: Kylian Mbappe scored the opener as Paris Saint-Germain took a big step towards reaching the Champions League quarter-finals with a 2-0 win over Real Sociedad in the first leg of their last-16 tie on Wednesday. The mediocrity of PSG's first-half performance at the Parc des Princes may have had their supporters fearing another in a long line of disappointing results down the years in the Champions League knockout stages. But Mbappe, who is expected to leave the club at the end of the season when his contract expires, broke the deadlock from close range just before the hour mark.

Bradley Barcola's well-taken goal in the 70th minute then made it 2-0 to give the French champions a comfortable cushion to take to Spain for the return early next month. "We managed to score at key moments. We are happy with this first step. There is still a lot of work to do but it is good to be going there with the advantage," Mbappe told broadcaster Canal Plus. Captain Marquinhos added: "We were in great difficulty in the first half but we knew that would be the case. The coach gave us an earbashing at half-time and I think that helped because the attitude was much better in the second half."

"We know how important it is to win at home but it is not finished. We need to keep the same mindset between now and then, keep playing well in the league and then go there and play well to secure our qualification." There was big pressure on PSG coming into this tie after they had gone out in the last 16 of the Champions League in five of the last seven seasons. Another early exit this season would be a monumental setback for the Qatar-owned club, especially as Real Sociedad were appearing in their first Champions League knockout tie in two decades.

They also made the trip to Paris having failed to score a goal while failing to win any of their last four games in all competitions. In addition to that, they were missing captain and top scorer Mikel Oyarz-



PARIS: Paris Saint-Germain's French forward #07 Kylian Mbappe (center left) fights for the ball with Real Sociedad's Spanish midfielder #22 Benat Turrientes (center right) during the UEFA Champions League round of 16 first leg football match between Paris Saint-Germain (PSG) and Real Sociedad on February 14, 2024. — AFP

abal as he recovers from injury. PSG, who gave a Champions League bow at left-back to 20-year-old Brazilian January signing Lucas Beraldo, were aiming to extend a run of 16 games unbeaten in all competitions stretching back to early November.

Away side threaten

However, an early shot by Mbappe that was beaten away by visiting goalkeeper Alex Remiro was really the only time they threatened in a poor first-half showing. Instead it was the away side, winners of their group ahead of Inter Milan, who looked more comfortable and who came closest to scoring prior to the break. In the final minute of the half, captain Mikel Merino controlled the ball before crashing a piledriver from 25 metres off the top of the bar and over.

PSG eventually broke the deadlock on 58 minutes as Ousmane Dembele's corner from the right was helped on by Marquinhos towards the back post where Mbappe turned it in. It was a 31st goal

of the campaign in all competitions, and a fourth in the Champions League, for the France captain who is widely tipped to move to Real Madrid after this season. That relaxed the hosts and Mbappe almost scored again in the 63rd minute as he won the ball back high up the pitch and hit a powerful shot from outside the box which was tipped onto the bar and over by Remiro.

Luis Enrique's side did find the net again 20 minutes from the end when Barcola collected a ball on the left, skipped away from Hamari Traore on his way into box and then slotted the ball past Remiro for his first ever Champions League goal. La Real could not find a way back into the game as their run without a goal stretched to five matches. They now have something of a mountain to climb when they entertain PSG in San Sebastian on March 5, although supporters of the French side will remain wary given the way they have collapsed at this stage of the competition in recent years against Barcelona and Madrid, among others. — AFP

S Korea's Klinsmann under fire after Asian Cup semi-final exit

SEOUL: Jurgen Klinsmann looks set to be fired as coach after top South Korean football officials said Thursday that "a change of leadership is necessary" following their Asian Cup exit and in-fighting among star players. The Korea Football Association's national team committee met a week on from the 2-0 defeat to Jordan in the semi-finals and with Klinsmann under huge pressure. The committee is not a decision-making body but will make its recommendation to the KFA's executive board, which will make a final ruling on the 59-year-old German's fate.

A smattering of protesters gathered outside KFA headquarters in Seoul, demanding Klinsmann's removal after just less than a year in the post. "We've reached a consensus that Klinsmann cannot exercise his leadership as national team head coach for various reasons and that a change of leadership is necessary," Hwangbo Kwan of the committee said. After a three-hour meeting, Hwangbo said the committee had decided Klinsmann's "tactical preparation fell short" during the team's disappointing Asian Cup campaign in Qatar.

He added: "Klinsmann said there was discord among squad members and it affected their performance (in the Jordan match)." Klinsmann attended the meeting on a video conference from his home in the United States. Yonhap news agency reported. "There were opinions that Klinsmann failed to show his resolve to find new talent and that he failed to grasp internal conflict or mood among squad mem-

bers in management," said Hwangbo.

"There were also reviews that he is appearing to ignore the Korean public for his short stays in South Korea and that he had lost trust from them," he added. Yonhap previously reported, citing unnamed sources, that the KFA would consider a temporary appointment for next month's World Cup qualifiers against Thailand if Klinsmann were to be sacked. Klinsmann, who has never won over South Korean fans or media, had promised to deliver the country's first Asian title in 64 years. He has refused to resign despite fierce pressure and said he will remain living in the United States, despite demands from South Korean fans and media for him to move there.

Bust-up

The South Korean team have been in the eye of a storm. On Wednesday came revelations about a bust-up between players that left Son Heung-min with an injured finger on the eve of the Jordan game in Qatar. Paris Saint-Germain's Lee Kang-in on Wednesday issued an apology after Yonhap said the 22-year-old had tried to punch skipper and Tottenham star Son. Lee's representatives have denied there was a punch.

The fracas was reportedly triggered by younger players - including Lee - rushing through their dinner so they could leave early and play table tennis. This angered some of the older players, including Son, who wanted to honor longstanding tradition that the pre-game dinner be a team bonding experience, triggering the brawl. Lee and Son both played in the Jordan defeat, the latter with two of his fingers strapped together. He had the same dressing on his fingers when he came on at the weekend in Tottenham's 2-1 win over Brighton. The incident has fuelled calls for Klinsmann to be sacked, with some saying it was more evidence of his weak management. — AFP

Nadal puts return on ice, admits 'not ready to compete'

MADRID: Rafael Nadal on Wednesday was forced to shelve his plans to return to action at next week's Qatar Open, admitting he is "not ready to compete". The 37-year-old missed most of last year with a hip injury sustained at the Australian Open before making his comeback at last month's Brisbane International. However, a small muscle tear then forced the 37-year-old to pull out of this season's first Grand Slam in Melbourne. The 22-time Grand Slam title winner now hopes to return to the tour at the Indian Wells Masters in California from March 6-17.

"I would have loved to play in Doha, where the tournament team, as well as the amazing Qatar fans have always supported me greatly," Nadal said in a statement on X. "Unfortunately I am not ready to compete and I won't be able to come to Doha where I really wanted to be and play again. I will focus on keep working to be ready for the amazing Indian Wells tournament." Nadal was named on the entry list last month for the Qatar Open, to be held February 19-24, and where he was champion in 2014.

Earlier Wednesday, the former world number one, whose ranking has plummeted to 646, admitted he had been suffering "some discomfort these past few weeks and I'm a bit on the limit". "At this point every blow I take, every injury, is a setback not only in tennis and physically, but also mentally," he told La Sexta television. He added: "I am 100% confident of being in Indian Wells, it's a very special tournament for me. I don't know if it's going to be the last time I play in it, so I would like to be in Indian Wells, for sure."

Nadal reiterated that his "main goal is to try to get to the clay season as healthy as possible, to at least give me the chance to enjoy this part of the season", which the Spaniard has dominated in his career. He has won a record 14 French Open titles and holds an astonishing 112-3 win-loss record at Roland Garros. Nadal won two matches in Brisbane in January after a year on the sidelines but felt pain in his upper left thigh during a quarter-final loss to Jordan Thompson.

Meanwhile, Nadal defended his decision to work as an ambassador for the Saudi Tennis Federation, claiming the Gulf kingdom is "a country with great potential". "I don't think Saudi Arabia needs me to wash any image; it's a country that has opened up to the world and is a country with great potential," said Nadal in response to claims that the Saudis use massive investment in sport to soften its controversial human rights record, a practice known as "sports washing".

"When I signed the contract I knew what would happen and that there could be some controversy. What I am going to do in Saudi Arabia is in line with what I have done all my life. I am a firm believer that education and sports can change lives and complicated situations into opportunities." "I'm not going to go to work in a way that I don't feel comfortable with," added Nadal who said his contract contains exit clauses. — AFP



Spain's Rafael Nadal



SEOUL: Hwangbo Kwan (center) of the Korea Football Association's national team committee holds a press briefing at the Korea Football Association (KFA) in Seoul on February 15, 2024. — AFP

Kuwait PM proud of achievements in West Asian Handball event

'You are good seeds sown by forefathers'



KUWAIT: (From left) President of Kuwait Olympic Committee Sheikh Fahad Naser Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, State Minister for National Assembly Affairs, State Minister for Youth Affairs Dawood Maarafi, HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Mohammad Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah and Director General of Public Authority for Sports Yousuf Al-Baidan. - KUNA

KUWAIT: His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Dr Mohammad Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah said on Thursday he is proud of Kuwaiti athletes' achievements during the West Asian Handball Championship and qualification for the World Handball Championship and addressing a ceremony organized by the Public Authority for Sport to honor the Kuwaiti athletes. His Highness the Prime Minister said this achievement reflected strong belief, high self-confidence, and solid will to attain the goals.

Commending His Highness the Amir

Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah's patronage of national renaissance and his support to Kuwaiti sports, he addressed the players by saying: "His Highness the Amir believes that you are good seeds sown by forefathers." His Highness the Prime Minister urged the Kuwaiti athletes to keep making sports accomplishments for the sake of their nation, affirming that the Minister of State for National Assembly Affairs, Minister of State for Youth Affairs and Minister of State for Communications, Public Authority for Sport and

Kuwait Olympic Committee would spare no effort to support them in order to raise the name of Kuwait higher in all domains.

Abdullah Al-Khamis, the captain of the Kuwaiti national handball team, and Kuwaiti shooting champion Eman Al-Shamma, delivered speeches during the event. Afterwards, His Highness the Prime Minister, accompanied by Minister Maarafi, PAS Director General Yousuf Al-Baidan and KPC Chairman Sheikh Fahad Naser Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, honored the Kuwaiti sports champions. — KUNA



Shooter Eman Al-Shamma



Handball captain Abdullah Al-Khamis



DOHA: Poland's Iga Swiatek in action during her round of 16 match against Russia's Ekaterina Alexandrova during their Women's Singles tennis match at the Qatar WTA Open at Khalifa International Tennis and Squash Complex in Doha on February 14, 2024. — AFP

Swiatek eases into Qatar Open last 8 as Osaka gets walkover

DOHA: World number one Iga Swiatek reached the Qatar Open quarter-finals for a third successive year on Wednesday as fellow four-time Grand Slam champion Naomi Osaka also made the last eight without hitting a ball. Swiatek, the two-time defending champion at the Gulf event, defeated 14th seed Ekaterina Alexandrova 6-1, 6-4. The Russian battled bravely, saving four match points in the 10th game of the second set before Swiatek came through.

The 22-year-old Pole will face another two-time Doha champion, Victoria Azarenka, in Thursday's quarter-finals. Former world number one Azarenka beat eighth-seeded Jelena Ostapenko 6-0, 6-3 for her third win over the Latvian this year. Swiatek now has a 11-1 record in Doha, with her lone loss at the tournament coming to Svetlana Kuznetsova in the 2020 second round.

Osaka advanced earlier Wednesday after Ukraine's Lesia Tsurenko, who beat fourth seed Ons Jabeur in round two, pulled out with an elbow injury. Osaka will meet another former world number one, Karolina Pliskova, for a place in the last four as the Japanese star continues her

comeback following maternity leave. The 26-year-old is through to her first WTA quarter-final since reaching the Miami Open final almost two years ago. Pliskova, who won her first title in four years in Romania last week, fought back from the brink of defeat to overcome Czech teenager Linda Noskova 3-6, 7-5, 6-1.

Noskova served for the match up 5-4 in the second set before the wheels came off against two-time Grand Slam finalist Pliskova. Leylah Fernandez knocked out Australian Open runner-up Zheng Qinwen 7-5, 6-3. Chinese fifth seed Zheng let slip a strong position in the opening set where she led 5-3, as Fernandez broke twice in a row and reeled off the final four games. Fernandez then punished a loose service game from Zheng in the sixth game of the second set before closing out an impressive victory.

"I'm extremely pumped up, I'm super happy with my level. There's still a lot of work to do, but so far so good, so we're just going to keep going," said Fernandez. World number 38 Fernandez, a former US Open finalist, goes on to meet third seed Elena Rybakina for a spot in the semi-finals. Rybakina withstood a spirited fightback from 16th-seeded American Emma Navarro, winning 6-1, 6-7 (6/8), 6-4. The Kazakh had a match point in the second set tie-break but the in-form Navarro, this year's Hobart champion, forced a deciding set.

Rybakina broke for a 3-2 lead and saved two break points in the final game to seal the win. "It was such a difficult match," said Rybakina. "I had some opportunities in the second set but she played really well and for me physically it was a little bit more difficult. — AFP

Celtics crush Nets for 6th win in a row; Curry makes history in loss

SAN FRANCISCO: The NBA-best Boston Celtics imposed one of their most lopsided romps over Brooklyn on Wednesday, while Golden State three-point sharpshooter Stephen Curry made history in defeat. Curry's nine three-pointers made him the first player in NBA history to sink at least seven shots from behind the arc in four consecutive games, but the Warriors squandered a 15-point lead at home and lost to the Los Angeles Clippers. Boston's Derrick White scored 27 points and Jayson Tatum added 20 to propel the Celtics over the Nets 136-86, the fifth-largest victory in club history dating to 1946.

It was the Celtics' sixth consecutive win, with Kristaps Porzingis scoring all 15 of his points in the first half. "This game said a lot about us," Porzingis said. Boston, which had beaten Indiana 155-104 in November, became only the third club in NBA history with two or more 50-point or better wins in a season, joining Milwaukee in 1978-79 and Sacramento in 1992-93. "It's a good treat going into All-Star break, winning this big," Boston forward Sam Hauser said. "It has been a good season so far. Get some time to rest up, get our minds and bodies right. Definitely still some areas to get better at."

It was also coach Joe Mazzulla's 100th career triumph over two seasons guiding the Celtics, who improved to 43-12. "It's something to be proud of, to be grateful for, just a testament to the people you have around you," Mazzulla said. Also stretching their win streak to six games were the Dallas Mavericks, who ripped visiting San Antonio 116-93. Kyrie Irving had 34 points, nine rebounds and seven assists while NBA scoring leader Luka Doncic added 27 points, nine rebounds and eight assists for the Mavs. Victor Wembanyama had 26 points and nine rebounds for the Spurs.

At San Francisco, NBA all-time three-pointers leader Curry scored 41 points, shooting nine-of-19 from three-point range, but a fourth-quarter fightback brought the Clippers a 130-125 triumph. James

Harden hit for 26 points, Paul George added 24 and Norman Powell had 21, hitting five out of seven three-pointers for the Clippers. Four-time NBA champion Curry, 35, also made 11 three-pointers in a win over Indiana last Thursday, nine in a triumph over Phoenix on Saturday and seven more last Monday in a victory over Utah.

The Cleveland Cavaliers, powered by Donovan Mitchell's 30 points, won for the 17th time in 19 games, rallying from 17 points down to edge visiting Chicago 108-105 despite Coby White's 32 points for the Bulls. "That's a playoff-type basketball game. We physically gutted it out," Mitchell said. "For us to lock in in the second half, especially in the fourth quarter, it was big time." The Cavs, who first led 80 seconds into the fourth quarter, stayed six games behind Boston in the Eastern Conference. "We're a tough group," Mitchell said. "At the end of the day we've got to go out there and prove it."

Hachimura's career high

Japan's Rui Hachimura scored a career-high 33 points with LeBron James out due to an ankle injury as the Los Angeles Lakers cruised to a 138-122 victory at Utah. Anthony Davis had game-highs of 37 points and 15 rebounds for the Lakers. Former Toronto star Pascal Siakam made a triumphant Canadian return with Indiana, scoring 23 points, while Tyrese Haliburton added 21 to power the Pacers over the Raptors 127-125. At Philadelphia, Bam Adebayo and Tyler Herro each scored 23 points for Miami in a 109-104 victory. Tyrese Maxey led the 76ers with 30 points. Domantas Sabonis scored 20 points and grabbed 12 rebounds to fire the Sacramento Kings to a 102-98 victory at reigning NBA champion Denver.

Orlando's Paolo Banchero had 36 points to ignite the Magic's 118-100 home rout of the New York Knicks, who got 33 points from Jalen Brunson. Brandon Miller scored 26 points to spark the Charlotte Hornets over visiting Atlanta 122-99, while Kevin Durant had a game-high 25 points to lead Phoenix over visiting Detroit 116-100. Zion Williamson scored 36 points to lead New Orleans over visiting Washington 133-126. Deni Avdija had 43 points in defeat. The Memphis Grizzlies snapped a nine-game losing streak with a 121-113 home victory over Houston. — AFP