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Amir honors police cadets

Officers trained to face advancements in science and tech • Amir to visit Qatar



KUWAIT: HH the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah attends the graduation of the 31st batch of cadets at Saad Al-Abdullah Academy of Security Sciences on Feb 19, 2024. — KUNA photos (See Page 3)

NEWS IN BRIEF

Kuwait wins UNESCO bureau seat

KUWAIT: Kuwait, namely the ministry of education, has been granted a seat in the permanent bureau of the UNESCO framework conference for education, culture and arts. The mandate to occupy the seat lasts for four years and it is among the memberships granted to Arab states. The conference, held in Abu Dhabi on Feb 13-15, grouped ministers of education, teaching and culture from several states. The focal topic of the gathering was the adoption of a framework for the UNESCO to teach culture and arts. — KUNA

Suez Canal revenue cut by 40-50%

CAIRO: Egyptian President Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi said Monday that revenues from the Suez Canal had "decreased by 40 to 50 percent" so far this year due to attacks on shipping by Yemen's Houthi rebels. "See what is happening at our borders... with Gaza, you see the Suez Canal, which used to bring Egypt nearly \$10 billion per year, (these revenues) have decreased by 40 to 50 percent and Egypt must continue to pay companies and partners," Sisi said during a conference with oil companies. — AFP

Qatar energy minister urges ceasefire

RAS LAFFAN, Qatar: Qatar's Energy Minister Saad Al-Kaabi on Monday called for a ceasefire in Gaza to end insecurity in the Red Sea which has disrupted hydrocarbon deliveries in the vital shipping route. The minister, who is also the chief executive of state-owned hydrocarbon giant QatarEnergy, said the "root of the problem" in the Red Sea, where Iran-backed Houthi rebels have targeted commercial vessels, "is the (Zionist) invasion of Gaza". — AFP

KUWAIT: HH the Amir, the Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces, Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, patronized and attended on Monday the graduation of the 31st batch of cadets at Saad Al-Abdullah Academy of Security Sciences. HH the Amir, upon arrival at the celebration's venue, was greeted by Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Defense and Acting Minister of Interior Sheikh Fahad Yousef Al-Sabah, Acting Interior Ministry Undersecretary Lt Gen Sheikh Salem Al-Nawaf Al-Ahmad

Al-Sabah and the ministry's top officials. The ceremony was attended by HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Dr Mohammad Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah, senior state officials and the graduates' families and citizens. The ceremony started with the national anthem and Quranic verses, then the academy's acting commander Brig Gen Mohammad Al-Roumi addressed the crowd. He stated the academy's capabilities aim to qualify cadet officers to keep pace with the rapid development in scientific, training and

technical progress and modernization. Roumi extended his deepest appreciation to HH the Amir and Kuwait's leadership, congratulating the graduates' families on this honorable ceremony. Then the ceremony of handing over the academy flag began from the 31st batch to the 47th batch of officer cadets, followed by the final results for the graduates delivered by the assistant commander of the academy, Brig Gen Ali Al-Wuhaib. Names of the graduates were an-

nounced and HH the Amir handed over the trophies to the excellent graduating officers and high-honor students at the academy. This was followed by the graduates entering the parade ground to take the oath, delivered by the Commander of the Education and Examinations Battalion Brig Gen Ahmed Al-Radhan. HH the Amir was awarded a memento on the occasion before he departed the ceremony venue. HH the Amir Sheikh Mishal will head to Qatar on Tuesday on a state visit. — KUNA

Gaza death toll tops 29,000 as Zionists to fight during Ramadan

GAZA: Deadly fighting raged on in Gaza Monday after the Zionist entity warned that, unless Hamas frees all captives, it will push on with its offensive during the holy month of Ramadan, including in the far-southern Rafah area. Global concern has mounted over the fate of 1.4 million Palestinians who have been forced into Rafah near the Egyptian border, enduring bombardment and dire food shortages in crowded makeshift shelters and tents.

Overnight strikes and battles in Gaza killed more than 100 Palestinians, mostly women and children, pushing the death toll past 29,000, said the health ministry in the territory, with fighting heaviest in Khan Yunis, just north of Rafah. War cabinet member Benny Gantz warned Sunday that the Zionist army

Continued on Page 6



GAZA: Relatives mourn by shrouded bodies after a Zionist air strike hit the Baraka family home in Deir al-Balah in the central Gaza Strip on Feb 18, 2024. — AFP

Zionist apartheid slammed; Kuwait to give evidence

THE HAGUE: Palestinians are suffering "colonialism and apartheid" under the Zionists, foreign minister Riyad Al-Maliki told the UN's top court Monday, urging judges to order an immediate and unconditional end to the Zionist entity's occupation. "The Palestinians have endured colonialism and apartheid... There are those who are enraged by these words. They should

be enraged by the reality we are suffering," Maliki told the International Court of Justice (ICJ). The ICJ is holding hearings all week on the legal implications of the Zionist entity's occupation since 1967, with an unprecedented 52 countries, including the United States and Russia, expected to give evidence. Kuwait, one of the countries participating in the hearings, is scheduled to make its argument on Feb 22. The Zionist entity will not participate in the hearings but submitted a written contribution dated July 24, 2023, in which it urged the court to dismiss the request for an opinion. Speaking in the Peace Palace in The Hague, where the ICJ sits, the minister appealed to the judges to declare the occupation illegal and order it to stop

"immediately, totally and unconditionally". "Justice delayed is justice denied and the Palestinian people have been denied justice for far too long," he said. "It is time to put an end to the double standards that have kept our people captive for far too long." Summing up, Palestinian UN envoy Riyad Mansour struggled to hold back his tears as he called for a "future where Palestinian children are treated as children, not as a demographic threat." In Dec 2022, the UN General Assembly asked the ICJ for a non-binding "advisory opinion" on the "legal consequences arising from the policies and practices of (the Zionist entity) in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem".

Continued on Page 6



Dawi and Al Seef Hospital sign deal to provide advanced health services

Kuwait's first and largest digital medical platform committed to developing healthcare solutions



KUWAIT: Chairman of Dawi's Board of Directors Saleh Al-Mansour and Vice President of Marketing and Public Relations at Al Seef Hospital Tareef Al-Awadhi sign the agreement.



(From left) Basel Al-Jarallah, Abdullah Boftain, Bader Shashtari and Saleh Al-Mansour.

KUWAIT: In a move to enhance the level of healthcare services in Kuwait, Dawi, the first and largest digital medical platform in Kuwait, announced the signing of a strategic cooperation agreement with Al Seef Hospital. This step reaffirms Al Seef Hospital's management's awareness of keeping pace with the latest technological developments and the global trend to facilitate customer service.

Saleh Al-Mansour, Chairman of Dawi's Board of Directors, emphasized the significance of the agreement and the application's vision to achieve a qualitative leap in facilitating medical services for the Kuwaiti community. He pointed out that Dawi is a Kuwaiti application seeking to provide advanced medical solutions within the framework of the digital transformation experienced by the healthcare sector.

Dawi aims to streamline the appointment booking process and provide new mechanisms for obtaining a second medical opinion, contributing to enhancing patients' experience and improving the quality of healthcare. One of Dawi's key advantages for both hospitals and individuals is ensuring easy and convenient appointment scheduling, reducing the rate of patient no-shows. The application also offers integrated solutions by providing online medical consul-



tion services, allowing users to access healthcare from anywhere and at any time.

Dawi values this partnership with Al Seef Hospital, expressing its commitment to developing healthcare services, making them more efficient and accessible to the community. Mansour concluded by confirming the growth in the market for technological solutions in the healthcare sector, reflecting societal awareness of using healthcare applications. "We are pleased at Dawi to have strong and strategic partnerships with more than 70 clinics, medical centers, and many competent doctors, whether in Kuwait or abroad. Additionally, we are in the process of announcing, in the coming months, several partnerships with other hospitals, clinics and medical centers," he said.



Saleh Al-Mansour, Tareef Al-Awadhi and Bader Shashtari. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat

In my view My vision: Inclusive education in Kuwait



By Danah Nawaf Al-Bahar

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Education in our country should include all people, including students with learning disabilities like ADHD (attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder). In the past, children with ADHD were often dismissed as "uncooperative" or incapable of learning. Today we know that this is not true. Unfortunately, students with ADHD often do not get the support they need. ADHD is a medical condition with symptoms often including hyperactivity, difficulty paying attention and impulsiveness. Because these symptoms conflict directly with the requirements of excelling in a traditional classroom environment, children with ADHD frequently have a lot of trouble in school. That's why it is so important that students with ADHD and other learning differences get help.

However, helping these students requires resources such as training for counselors to help them recognize ADHD and refer students for testing and diagnosis, training for teachers to help them work with students with ADHD, and standardized support plans and accommodations. That way, when children with ADHD need extra time on tests or for submitting work, different testing environments (such as taking tests in oral form), or additional help in understanding course material, there will be a system in place to make that happen — so they do not get forgotten or passed by, unable to achieve their full potential.

Techniques such as behavioral classroom management and organizational training have been shown to help kids with ADHD learn and thrive, but instituting these measures requires a focused solution to be implemented consistently in all schools, for the sake of all children with ADHD. That is why I urge the National Assembly, the ministry of education, school officials and educators to join hands together in taking action to make sure that a consistent approach to helping both public and private school students with ADHD, at all grade levels, is put in place and is followed. I believe, in the right school environment, all students are very eager to learn and excel in the classroom. With the appropriate support, every Kuwaiti student can do that regardless of ADHD and other learning differences.

NOTE: Danah Nawaf Al-Bahar is a Grade 11 student at Al-Bayan Bilingual School (BBS)



KUWAIT: The Public Authority of Manpower holds a meeting with 30 government agencies to explain the mechanism of Kuwaitization of government contracts.

PAM discusses Kuwaitization of govt contracts

KUWAIT: The Public Authority of Manpower (PAM) held a meeting with 30 government agencies to explain the mechanism of Kuwaitization of government contracts. The meeting came with the purpose of encouraging Kuwaiti youth and increasing the percentage of Kuwaiti nationals employed as part of government contracts signed with private companies. The Public Authority of Manpower hosted representatives of the 30 government agencies to present the details of the new regulations issued in a Cabinet decision on October 30, 2023. The decision

comes into force in May 2024.

The regulations aim to encourage young people to work in the private sector and enhance job security for government contract workers. Moreover, it will contribute to creating more job opportunities for national cadres to gain scientific experience and develop technical skills while developing work and transitioning between contracts.

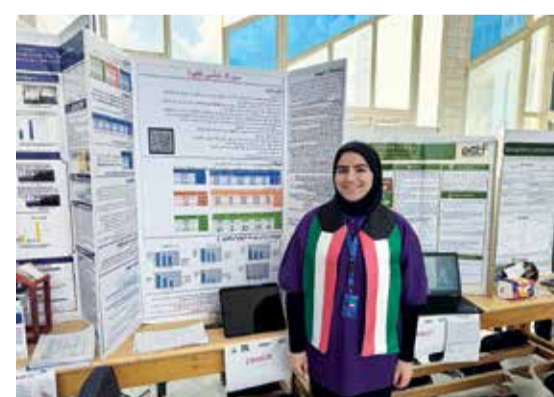
Acting Deputy Director General for National Manpower Affairs, Najat Al-Yousef, welcomed the attendees, thanking them for their cooperation. She stressed the importance of following the new regulations in order to increase the percentage of national cadres employed by these contracts. "The new regulations are considered one of the mechanisms by which the government plans to increase the percentage of national labor in the private sector as outlined in the government's work program," she added.



Kuwaiti students win silver medal in Int'l Science fair in Egypt. — KUNA photos

Kuwait Science Club wins silver medal at international fair

CAIRO: Kuwait Science Club won the silver medal Sunday at the Egypt International Science and Technology Exhibition (ESTEF 2024) in the field of environmental engineering. In a statement to KUNA, the head of the development and competitive programs sector at the Science Club and the head of the club delegation participating in the exhibition, Dr. Mohammad Al-Saffar, expressed his joy in the successive achievements made by the Kuwait Science Club in various fields and international forums.



Kuwaiti student Sawsan Abdelrasol

Al-Saffar praised the achievement made by the Kuwait Science Club delegation at the exhibition, pointing out that the Science Club won the silver medal in the field of environmental engineering for the "Helmet Plus" project by Kuwaiti student Kawthar Nasrallah.

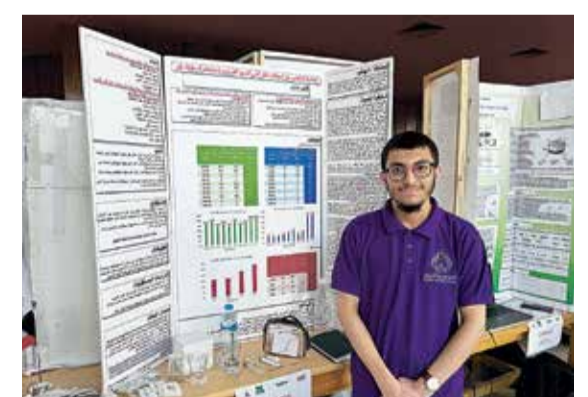
Al-Saffar confirmed that other Kuwaiti projects won special awards from the exhibition's jury, including the project on the possibility of getting rid of carbon dioxide gas using "silica gel" in the field of chemistry by the student Yosif Mishaal, and the project "Your Car Drinks Coffee" in the field of chemical energy by the student Sawsan Abdelrasol. Al-Saffar noted the projects competing for the exhibition prizes for this year's edition, which amounted to 244 projects that were filtered out of 7,732 projects submitted by 425 male and female students. — KUNA

KU striving to raise scientific, research level

KUWAIT: Acting Chairman of Kuwait University (KU), Meshari Al-Harbi, said on Monday that the university strives to raise its scientific and research level with efforts from relevant sectors in their search for everything new. KU's scientific research conference (Kuwait Vision 2035: Technology, Creativity, and Innovation) was inaugurated on Monday for two days in the cultural center of Sabah Al-Salem University city.

Al-Harbi added that according to Article 3 of the Public Universities Bylaws, the university must adhere to the values of Arab, Islamic, and human values, encourage freedom of speech and research, and support scientific research. Kuwait University had translated this by motivating researchers through annual competitions and awards. Al-Harbi affirmed that during the next stage, the university seeks to organize meetings between university staff and the country's officials to present their initiatives on solving societal problems.

The KU's Vice President of Research, Othman Al-Khuder, expressed in a speech that the number of participants in the Scientific Posters Day exceeded 322 posters, which is a record number that is approximately 20 percent more than last year's participation, thanking the research sector and all the contributors to the Scientific Research Conference of 2024. Al-Khuder mentioned that the participating posters touched on contemporary scientific, social, and national issues, which reflects the interests of the participating academics. — KUNA



Kuwaiti student Yosif Mishaal



Kuwaiti student Kawthar Nasrallah

Amir patronizes cadets' graduation



KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir, the Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces, Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, patronized and attended on Monday the graduation of the 31st batch of cadets at Saad Al-Abdullah Academy of Security Sciences. — KUNA photos

Amir's visit to Qatar bolsters decades-long partnership

KUWAIT: The upcoming visit by His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah to Qatar would add to the strength of the decades-long ties and boost the level of cooperation between the leaderships and people of both countries. After the independence of Qatar in 1971, Kuwait recognized the fellow Gulf country, extending diplomatic ties and exchanging Ambassadors.

In 1972, then Amir of Qatar Sheikh Khalifa bin Hamad Al-Thani sent a number of Qatari diplomats to train in Kuwait in addition to several military personnel who also received training under the guidance of the Kuwaiti Defense Ministry. Perhaps the embodiment of the true strength of relations came during the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990 when Qatar expressed condemnation of the act and called for the withdrawal of invading troops.

Qatar followed words of condemnation with acts of solidarity, hosting some 9,300 Kuwaiti citizens during the invasion period. The Qatari troops took part in the operations to liberate Kuwait from the invading Iraqi troops in 1991, joining in the international coalition's ground operations between January 29 and February 1, to achieve this noble goal. After the liberation, Qatar continued to provide logistic assistance to Kuwait, helping in the renovation and construction of several sectors in the country.

Relations continued to go on an upward trend and in 2002, the two countries established the joint high Kuwaiti-Qatari committee aimed at finding all means to boost ties and coordinate efforts regionally and internationally. Kuwait played a pivotal role in mending fences among GCC countries that entered an "Ambassadors' withdrawal" crisis in 2014 and also the late Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah also played a crucial role in resolving the "Gulf crisis" that followed between Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Bahrain on one side and Qatar on the other.

In a show of gratitude, Qatar launched on February 25, 2019, Sabah Al-Ahmad Corridor under the orders of Qatar's Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani, the first vast infrastructure project bearing the name of a Gulf and Arab leader. On the security and defense levels, the two countries have signed several cooperation protocols and agreements to develop their defensive and security capabilities. In line with the agreements, Kuwait



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and Qatari Amir Sheikh Tamim Bin Hamad Al-Thani. — KUNA photos

had taken part in security duties in the 2022 FIFA World Cup, which was held in Qatar.

On the economic level, in 1999, Kuwait and Qatar launched a joint financing company to provide services to Qatar consumers according to the Islamic Sharia with a capital of around KD 4 million (around \$13 million). Kuwait has around 49 percent of the capital, while Qatar owns 51 percent. In 2018, the regular maritime line between Qatar's Hamad and Kuwait's Shuwaikh seaports was established to transfer goods and passengers revitalizing private sectors ties.

On the Petroleum level, Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) and the QatarEnergy signed an agreement wherein the latter would provide natural gas to Kuwait for a period of 15 years starting from 2022 at 3 million tons to the natural gas complex in Al-Zour port, Kuwait. In 2023, the Qatari government agreed to a project to avoid double taxation and tax evasion related to capital and income. — KUNA



Late Amir Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and late Qatar Amir Sheikh Khalifa Bin Hamad Al-Thani.



Qatari Ambassador to Kuwait Ali Al-Mahmoud and Kuwaiti Ambassador to Qatar Khaled Al-Mutairi

Another 'milestone' in Kuwait-Qatar ties

KUWAIT: The Ambassador of Qatar to Kuwait, Ali Al-Mahmoud, said on Monday that the visit of the Amir His Highness Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah to Qatar strengthens historical relations between the two countries. Ambassador Al-Mahmoud stressed in a statement to KUNA the depth of Kuwaiti-Qatari relations due to a common history and a shared future between the two nations.

He added that the two wise leaders were keen on taking those relations further to explore new horizons on all levels, including political, economic, and enhancing joint cooperation, in addition to exchanging frequent visits. The ambassador stressed that, under the directives of Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani, Amir of Qatar, relations with Kuwait are a top priority for Qatar and that he feels at home in Kuwait and its people, who respect and appreciate his homeland.

He praised the cooperation and coordination between the two countries' governments on all issues of common interest for the prosperity and progress of the two countries under His Highness the Amir of Kuwait and the Amir of Qatar. On the economic side, Ambassador Al-Mahmoud said that Kuwait and Qatar signed in January 2020 a 15-year sale and purchase agreement to annually supply Kuwait with three million tons of liquefied natural gas.

He added that this agreement contributed to strengthening the bilateral relations between Kuwait and Qatar, reflected the commitment to develop partnerships and strengthen solid bonds, and that he looks forward to more cooperation opportunities and investments in all sectors. On the relations regarding culture, society, art, science, sports, and other fields, the ambassador said that Qatar was witnessing remarkable developments as it organized many local, regional, and international events, including the "International Horticultural Expo 2023 Doha" from October 2, 2023, to March 28, 2024, in which Kuwait participated with a distinguished pavilion that witnessed a big turnout of visitors.

He also pointed out the social communication between the Qataris and Kuwaitis, which confirms the deep-rooted ties between the people of the two countries. Ambassador Al-Mahmoud stressed that Qatar was awaiting the visit of His Highness the Amir, which benefited the two countries and all Gulf countries regarding regional relations and international partnerships with the aim of achieving more accomplishments through joint Gulf action.

Bilateral relations

Meanwhile, Kuwaiti Ambassador to Qatar, Khaled Al-Mutairi, said Monday that the visit of His Highness the Amir to Qatar would further strengthen the historical and fraternal ties between the two nations. Al-Mutairi told KUNA that Kuwait and Qatar share a special bond that is deeply rooted in a myriad of fields, which demonstrated the transcendent relationship the two nations and their people share. He expressed his abundant well-wishes in regards to this visit, hoping the two countries and their people would flourish under wise leadership. — KUNA



Late Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and Qatar Father Amir Sheikh Hamad Bin Khalifa Al-Thani.



Late Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and Qatari Amir Sheikh Tamim Bin Hamad Al-Thani.



KUNA launches new logo, amid stride in AI realm



Mariam Al-Zanki



Mohammad Sharaf

KUWAIT: Kuwait News Agency (KUNA) launched on Monday its new logo, depicting Kuwait's map, at a celebratory ceremony marking the national days, attended by a large number of staff and led by the Director General, Dr. Fatma Al-Salem. The designer, Mohammad Sharaf, said in a statement at the ceremony that the tag symbolized the news agency's embrace of state-of-the-art technology.

The new logo mirrors KUNA's modernity and history, while the old one shows the news agency's abbreviated name and shape of the planet, the Earth, he said, noting that the new emblem remains colored blue. Mariam Al-Zanki, the managing editor in the Arab news department and supervisor of "KUNA Smart Oasis," affirmed in her speech KUNA's keenness on staying abreast of the huge digital transformation at the global level and employing artificial intelligence, alluding to the recently inaugurated AI section. She revealed that KUNA planned the launch of an AI-dependent magazine. — KUNA

Social Affairs ministry organizes exhibition to mark national days



KUWAIT: Social Affairs ministry organizes 'Might and Pride 2' exhibition.



KUWAIT: The Public Relations Department at the Social Affairs Ministry organized the "Might and Pride 2" exhibition, which is aimed at introducing the services it provides and its participation in national celebrations. The event was in collaboration with the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Commerce, and the Ministry of Justice. The exhibition was held under the patronage of the Minister of Social Affairs, Family Affairs, and Childhood, Sheikh Feras Saud Al-Malik Al-Sabah, and in the presence of the Acting Undersecretary of the Ministry of Social Affairs, Abdulaziz Sari Al-Mutairi. In a statement on the sidelines of the event, the Acting Undersecretary of the Ministry praised the efforts of the Public Relations Department.

The Director of the Public Relations Department at the Ministry of Social Affairs, Ahmed Al-Enezi, said that for the second year in a row, the Public Relations Department is organizing this exhibition. "It aims to highlight the role of the departments of



the Ministry of Social Affairs in the best possible way," he added. Al-Enezi explained that this year's exhibition witnessed the participation of many government agencies, such as the Ministries of Justice, Finance, and Commerce, to present their services



and how to benefit from them. He thanked all the participating authorities and the employees of the Public Relations Department for their great efforts in the success of the exhibition, which witnessed a great turnout from the public.

Moroccan poets, critics remember Al-Babtain

FEZ: Moroccan poets and critics remembered Kuwaiti literary figure Abdulaziz Al-Babtain and his virtues in promoting poetry and culture in the Arab world, specifically in Morocco, as he supported literature and culture. This came in a seminar organized by the Moroccan Association for Arab Academic Studies and the Research Group on Moroccan-Kuwaiti Cultural Communication in cooperation with the Faculty of Letters and Humanities as well as Sidi Mohamed Ben Abdullah University.

Moroccan poet and critic Abdullah Al-Alawi said in a statement to KUNA that the cultural movement in Kuwait has evolved significantly, with a rich history, as the poet and critic Abdulaziz Al-Babtain was one of the prominent figures in this movement. He recalled Al-Babtain's support for training courses in language and rhetoric at Fez, Meknes, and Rabat universities during 2005-2016.

Al-Alawi also commended the Kuwaiti figure's organization of the Abi Al-Qasim Al-Shabbi course in Fez in 1994 and the Abi Tamam course in Marrakech in 2014; furthermore, his support and dissemination of publications and libraries that "had a strong impact on the Moroccan cultural move-

ment." On his part, Moroccan poet Ahmad Mafdy said that Al-Babtain was a prominent figure in intellectual and cultural work in the Arab world.

He revealed that the Kuwaiti figure helped to recognize what was obscured in the Arab nation, a step assisting in the gathering of the scattered Arab literary culture, unifying it, and making it capable of influencing the minds and souls of the writers, poets, and critics in the Arab world. Nabela Al-Hamami, a Moroccan poet, said that, on her part, Al-Babtain's impact on literature was unforgettable through his institution and would last for decades for all future generations.

Al-Babtain dedicated his money, thoughts, and efforts to serving Arab culture and cognitive development to build civilizations where culture and knowledge were the main foundations, as he established libraries, including the Al-Babtain Library for Arabic Poetry in Kuwait and the Al-Babtain Library at Al-Quds University, she added. He founded schools and universities in many countries, established the Abdulaziz Al-Babtain Scholarship since 1974, Abdulaziz Saud Al-Babtain's Poetic Creativity Award, as well as translation centers and other entities. — KUNA



Abdulaziz Al-Babtain

Gulf states score highest in ESCWA Maturity Index

BEIRUT: The UN Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) announced on Monday that, for the third consecutive year, the Gulf states scored highest in the Government Electronic and Mobile Services (GEMS) Maturity Index. In a statement, ESCWA said that Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Qatar came in the first three places and that this year's list included 17 participating countries. In its fifth edition, the index aimed to measure the maturity of government electronic and mobile services based on three criteria, namely service availability and development, service usage and user satisfaction, and government outreach efforts.

The statement noted that most Arab countries recorded progress in the index between 2022 and 2023, adding that there is an increase in the adoption of digitization in Arab countries in government services. ESCWA GEMS Regional Advisor Mohammad Nawar Al-Awa called on countries that are still in the "early stage" of digital maturity to benefit from the exchange of experiences between Arab countries to accelerate the process of digital transformation and maximize the positive impact of the use of digital technologies in government services. — AFP



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KUWAIT: Kuwait Oil Company preparing for the official launch of the company's Jurassic production facilities. — KUNA photos

KPC to launch Jurassic production facilities

KUWAIT: CEO of Kuwait Oil Company Ahmad Al-Eidan briefed Kuwait Petroleum Corporation CEO and senior officials on the ongoing preparations for the official launch of the company's Jurassic production facilities in the coming period. This came during a visit by KPC CEO Sheikh Nawaf Saud Al-Nasser Al-Sabah and several other members of the KPC board of directors to the new Jurassic production facilities (JPF-4 and JPF-5) near Al-Rawdatain and Um Niqa fields north of the country.

In a press statement, the KOC, a subsidiary of the KPC, pointed out that KPC officials expressed admiration for the project and commended the great efforts exerted to implement this strategic project, one of the largest in the Kuwaiti oil sector and "an essential part of the KPC's 2040 development strategy." The KOC indicated that the project will help materialize Kuwait's goal of increasing gas production and providing high-quality products to global markets.

The production of light oil and free gas, which the new facilities will produce, poses a tremendous challenge to all countries due to the difficulty of extracting them and the complexities of their reservoirs, it argued. The KOC affirmed that it has succeeded in completing the building and construction work on time without any incidents or change orders. It was forecast that the project would have great economic returns for the company and the Kuwaiti oil sector as a whole, and oil sector workers would gain invaluable and hard-won new experiences.

The project would allow Kuwaiti light oil to enter new markets and create many promising job oppor-



Jurassic production facilities

tunities for Kuwaiti youth, it indicated. It was unveiled that operation of the last production terminals in JPF-4 and JPF-5 in northern Kuwait has commenced. They would add 320 million cubic feet of associated gas per day and 100,000 barrels of light oil per day to Kuwait's production, the KOC stated. — KUNA



India's heritage hit by Delhi 'development' demolitions

Red Cross probing fate of 23,000 missing in Russia-Ukraine war

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BERLIN/MOSCOW: (Left) A man holds a photo of Alexei Navalny at a rally on February 18, 2024 in front of the Russian embassy in Berlin. (Right) People lay flowers for Navalny at the Solovetsky Stone, a monument to political repression that has become one of the sites of tributes for the late opposition leader on February 19, 2024. — AFP photos

Navalny widow vows to take up fight for Russia's 'freedom'

EU pledges to hold Putin accountable for Navalny's death; Kremlin denies accusations

WARSAW: Alexei Navalny's widow on Monday accused President Vladimir Putin of killing her husband and vowed to continue his life's work following his death last week in a Russian Arctic prison.

Yulia Navalnaya spoke as the Kremlin said it had no details about Navalny's death, while his mother Lyudmila was denied access to his body for a third day. "Vladimir Putin killed my husband Alexei Navalny," Navalnaya said on Navalny's YouTube channel. "Alexei died in a prison colony after three years of torment and torture," she said. Her address came shortly before she met EU foreign ministers in Brussels. "I will continue the work of Alexei Navalny. I will continue to fight for the freedom of our country," Navalnaya said. "And I call on you to stand by me." "Putin took from me the most valuable thing that I had, the closest and most loved person. But Putin also took Navalny from you," the 47-year-old said.

Kremlin slams West

Navalnaya, an economist, stood by her husband as he galvanized mass protests in Russia, flying him out of the country when he was poisoned before defiantly returning to Moscow with him in 2021, knowing he would be jailed. The announcement she will replace Navalny is a momentous and unpredictable turn for Russia's exiled and beleaguered opposition, left leaderless after Navalny's death. Russia will hold a presidential election on March 15-17 in which Putin has no real challengers.

Navalnaya said her husband's team knew "concretely" why Navalny was killed and they would work to "find out the names" of those behind his death. The Kremlin said it had no results from an investigation into the death. "At the moment, the results of the investigation have not been released, they are unknown," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said. He decried Western statements blaming the Kremlin for Navalny's end as "absolutely unacceptable." Peskov refused to say how Putin — who has not commented on the death — reacted to his opponent dying. He also refused to say when the body will be handed over.

Mother denied access

Navalny's allies said his mother Lyudmila was on Monday again denied access to a morgue in the Russian Far North. "Alexei's mother and his lawyers arrived at the morgue early in the morning. They were not allowed to go in," Navalny's spokeswoman Kira Yarmysh said on social media. "One of the lawyers was literally pushed out. When the staff was asked if Alexei's body was there, they did not answer," she added. Navalny's team have accused authorities of dragging out the process to "cover up their tracks".

Across Russia, mourners have laid flowers in memory of Navalny at monuments to victims of Soviet-era repression and hundreds of people have been detained. In Moscow, AFP reporters saw a steady stream of people bring flowers to two monuments on Monday.

the Red Sea, forcing some companies to take alternative routes including a two-week detour around the tip of southern Africa. In the latest incident, a Greek-flagged, US-owned cargo ship was attacked twice in two hours in the Gulf of Aden, which adjoins the Red Sea, maritime security firm Ambrey said. The bulk carrier reported a "missile attack" before another projectile hit the water just meters (yards) from the ship, Ambrey said.

The ship's master reported "evidence of shrapnel and damage to paintwork" in the second incident, the Royal Navy's UK Maritime Trade Operations (UKMTO) said. Earlier, the Houthis claimed an attack on a British ship in the Gulf of Aden, after Ambrey reported an attack on a UK-registered cargo ship in the Bab al-Mandeb Strait linking the Gulf of Aden and Red Sea.

The UKMTO reported an incident 35 nautical miles (65 kilometers) south of Mokha on Yemen's Red Sea coast, without naming the ship. The location would be towards the Bab al-Mandeb Strait. Citing "military authorities", UKMTO said the crew had safely "abandoned the vessel" which was left at anchor with military authorities at the site and providing assistance.

'Impact on the entire world'

As the attacks continued, Qatar's energy minister called for a ceasefire in Gaza to end the insecurity in the Red Sea, which has disrupted oil deliveries along with other trade. Saad al-Kaabi, who is also the chief executive of state-owned QatarEnergy, said the "root of the problem" in the Red Sea, where Iran-backed Houthi rebels have targeted commercial vessels, "is the (Zionist) invasion of Gaza".

"Hopefully there is a ceasefire soon that will stop that so that the economic impact on the entire world stops," he said at a ground-breaking ceremony for a new petrochemicals plant on Qatar's northeast coast.

Egypt's President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi said that revenues in the Suez Canal, which links the Red Sea with the Mediterranean, had fallen "40 to 50 percent" so far this year. The canal, which brought in \$8.6 billion in the 2022-23 fiscal year, is a vital source of foreign currency for Cairo, which is suffering from a severe financial crisis. Italian top diplomat Antonio Tajani confirmed the EU mission's launch during a meeting of foreign ministers in Brussels, calling it "an important step towards common European defense". The overall commander of the EU mission will be Greek, while the lead officer in operational control at sea will be Italian. So far France, Germany, Italy and Belgium have said they plan to contribute ships. — AFP



BRUSSELS: Alexei Navalny's widow Yulia Navalnaya takes part in a meeting of European Union Foreign Ministers.

At one known as the "Wall of Grief", a woman stood and cried, with a heavy police presence nearby. "One for all," read a note left by mourners, quoting a slogan Navalny often used at protests. Another monument close to the headquarters of Russia's security service was visited by French ambassador to Moscow Pierre Levy. Outside Russia, Russian emigres held vigils in European cities, where hundreds of thousands fled after Moscow launched its Ukraine offensive. In Kazakhstan — another country where many Russians fled — Russian rock legend Yuri Shevchuk performed a song in honor of Navalny on Sunday.

"Alexei Navalny who spoke to us, Russians, about freedom and who reminded us all that we could be free in the best sense of the word," Shevchuk told a crowd, according to Russian independent media. Shevchuk played at anti-Putin rallies in Moscow in 2011, which thrust Navalny to the forefront of the Russian opposition movement.

Putin 'accountable'

In Brussels, EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell pledged to hold Putin to account for Navalny's death after meeting Navalny's widow. "We expressed the EU's deepest condolences to Yulia Navalnaya. Vladimir Putin and his regime will be held accountable for the death of Alexei Navalny," Josep Borrell wrote on X, the former Twitter.

EU ministers considered their limited options for increasing pressure on the Kremlin over his death. The EU has already imposed heavy sanctions on Moscow, including on Putin, over the invasion of Ukraine. Officials concede it will be difficult to take significant further action. Russia's prison service said on Friday that Navalny had died "after a walk" in the IK-3 prison colony in the Arctic Yamal region — known as the "Polar Wolf." Navalny had continued even from behind bars to call on Russians to fight the government, calling on them "not to be afraid." He denounced Russia's Ukraine offensive one statement as "stupid and senseless". — AFP

EU launches Red Sea mission as US ship attacked twice

DUBAI: The European Union formally launched a naval mission on Monday to protect Red Sea shipping from Yemen's Houthi rebels as a US-owned cargo vessel came under fire twice in the region. The Iran-backed Houthis, who control much of war-torn Yemen, have been harassing the vital shipping lane since November in a campaign they say is in solidarity with Palestinians in Gaza during the Zionist assault on Gaza.



SANAA: Yemenis brandishing weapons chant slogans as they march in the Houthi-run capital Sanaa on February 16, 2024 in support of Palestine. — AFP

The EU aims to have the mission — called Aspides, Greek for "shield" — up and running in a "few weeks" with at least four vessels, an official said on Friday, ahead of Monday's official launch. "Europe will ensure freedom of navigation in the Red Sea, working alongside our international partners," European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen wrote on X, formerly Twitter. The United States is already spearheading its own naval coalition in the area and has conducted retaliatory strikes on Houthi targets in Yemen, as has Britain. The dozens of Houthi attacks have roiled shipping in

Von der Leyen seeks second EC chief term

BERLIN: Ursula von der Leyen announced Monday her bid for a second term as chief of the European Commission, vowing to defend the bloc from forces aiming to divide it. The 65-year-old German former minister's candidacy comes at a time when the European Union is facing strong headwinds from the far right, Russia's war against Ukraine is still raging, and with the specter of Donald Trump returning to the White House rattling allies.

"We must defend against divisions from within and without. I am sure that we have the strength to do so, and that is the task that I have set for myself," von der Leyen said in Berlin, as she confirmed her candidacy following a meeting with her CDU party. At the helm since 2019, von der Leyen has led the bloc's executive body as the EU traversed an extraordinary period of disruptions — from Brexit to the coronavirus pandemic to Russia's invasion of its pro-EU neighbor.

Hendrik Wuest, a key figure in von der Leyen's Christian Democratic Union (CDU) party in Germany, said five more years for her would be a much-needed constant at a time of uncertainties. "A second term would be a sign of stability, that is all the more needed at a time when our European values are being attacked from all sides," he told news site Politico.

Following Monday's nomination by the CDU, the broader alliance of conservatives across the bloc — the European People's Party group to which the CDU belongs — is expected to name her as its lead candidate for the post when it meets in Bucharest on March 6-7, EPP leader Manfred Weber has said.

Von der Leyen, a protégé of former German chancellor Angela Merkel, who served as minister in all four of her cabinets, is the first woman to lead the commission. A second von der Leyen commission would likely find itself with a changed political landscape.

Voter surveys suggest far-right, anti-immigrant parties across Europe will grab more seats in European Parliament elections on June 6-9, pushing the legislature to the right. That could slow progress towards European Union green transition that von der Leyen had made a cornerstone of her first term. It could also grow the cohort of European lawmakers sympathetic to Trump should he regain the White House.



BERLIN: European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen gestures as she addresses a press conference. — AFP

Firm on Ukraine support

Highlighting the challenges ahead for von der Leyen, Alberto Alemanno, an EU law professor at the Belgium-based College of Europe said she could face pressure from her own party to "undo her major achievements during her tenure — from delaying climate action to suspending the enlargement and reform" of the 27-nation bloc.

EU lawmaker Daniel Caspary of the CDU said he expected her priorities to shift, with more concessions to Europe's farmers, though her support for Ukraine and for sanctions against Russia were likely to remain. Underlining the crucial importance of standing firmly behind Kyiv, von der Leyen told the Munich Security Conference over the weekend that it was "much more than a question of Russia-Ukraine."

"It's a question of whether democracies globally prevail, and are we able to defend and protect our values. And the answer has to be yes," she stressed. Alluding to a possible return by Trump, who has rattled NATO allies by threatening to abandon those who fail to meet their defense spending commitments, von der Leyen also voiced the importance of building a "strong Europe". The bloc has to boost its defense resources — improving spending on defense production and ensuring that the manufacturing is done in Europe so that billions in taxpayers' funds are channeled to companies that are creating jobs on the continent, she said.

Von der Leyen also outlined plans to "install a commissioner for defense" if she won a new term. "And where he or she is coming from — this is open but of course I think it's very important for the central and eastern European countries to have good portfolios and this is a good portfolio," she said. — AFP

International

Red Cross probing fate of 23,000 missing in Russia-Ukraine war

Organization helped provide 8,000 families with information on loved ones

GENEVA: The Red Cross said Monday it was trying to find out what happened to 23,000 people who have disappeared in the chaos of Russia's war in Ukraine. The International Committee of the Red Cross said it was seeking to determine whether they had been captured, killed or had lost contact after fleeing their homes.

Shortly after Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, the ICRC created a special bureau of its Central Tracing Agency (CTA), dedicated to searching for those missing on both sides in the conflict.

"Not knowing what happened to a loved one is excruciating, and this is the tragic reality for tens of thousands of families, who live in a state of constant anguish," CTA bureau chief Dusan Vujanin said in a statement. "Families have the right to know what happened to their relatives and, when possible, to exchange news with them."

The ICRC said that over the past two years it had received more than 115,000 phone calls, online requests, letters and in-person visits from desperate family members from both Russia and Ukraine looking for missing relatives.

By the end of January, the organization and its partners had helped provide 8,000 families with information, it said. The statement quoted some of their reactions after receiving news about a loved one. "I didn't hear anything for about two months. I felt dead during this time," it quoted one person as saying after hearing their son was alive.

Vujanin stressed however that many other families "remain without news".

Call for humane treatment

The Geneva-based ICRC set up its CTA system more than 150 years ago. But the Russia-Ukraine division is the first dedicated CTA bureau set up for a specific international armed conflict in more than 30 years and is its largest operation since World War II.

It acts as a neutral intermediary between Russia and Ukraine, collecting, centralizing, safeguarding and transmitting information from one side to the other. The ICRC stressed that families have a right under international law to know the fate and whereabouts of their missing relatives. "People who are held by a party to the conflict must be treated humanely and the dead must be handled in a dignified manner," it said.

Yevheniia Filipenko, Ukraine's ambassador in Geneva, said Monday there were large numbers of civilians being held by the Russian authorities. "Russia refuses to provide access — to any humanitarian or human rights monitoring or investigative mechanisms, or humanitarian actors — to these people," she told a briefing with the UN correspondents' association.

"We in Geneva receive, on a daily basis, calls from the relatives of those who are missing. And every call is a human life. We understand that, and we are trying to do our utmost to find out the whereabouts."



KRAMATORSK: Relatives look for personal belongings of a deceased family amid the rubble of a house which was destroyed by a missile attack in the town of Kramatorsk, Donetsk region, amid the Russian invasion of Ukraine, on February 18, 2024. — AFP

She encouraged all possible international actors to help determine the whereabouts of those missing. "But the major obstacle is Russia's refusal to provide

access, to provide information," she said. "There is a need to put pressure on Russia as an occupying power, but also as a party to the Geneva Conventions, to comply

with the provisions of the Geneva Convention and to provide information about the protected persons under the Geneva Convention." — AFP

Dozens dead in Papua New Guinea tribal violence

PORT MORESBY, Papua New Guinea: Dozens of bloodied bodies have been found along a remote stretch of road in Papua New Guinea's highlands, police said Monday, a gruesome escalation of long-running violence between warring clans.

Police said as many as 64 tribal fighters had been killed in an ambush by a rival group in the early hours of Sunday, although officials later said the number was still unclear. The incident occurred near the village of Wapenamanda, about 600 kilometers (370 miles) northwest of the capital Port Moresby.

The rugged and lawless area has been the scene of tit-for-tat mass killings between rival Sikin, Ambulin, Kaekin and other tribesmen for years — with each retaliatory attack fueling a fresh round of atrocities.

Graphic police images from the scene showed doz-

ens of stripped and bloodied bodies lying by the side of the road and piled up on the back of a flatbed truck. Some men had limbs hacked and were left naked by the road with beer bottles or cans placed on their chests.

Police reported gunfights were ongoing in nearby valleys and bodies were still being recovered, leading to confusion about the number of people killed. Senior police and cabinet officials said the toll was between 49 and 64 tribesmen. "The total number of dead and injured is still being assessed as police recover further remains from dense scrubland," Police Commissioner David Manning said late Monday.

Describing the incident as a "disgraceful act of barbarity", Manning said additional security personnel had been deployed to the area to restore order. "These personnel have clear instructions that are to use any level of force required to prevent further violence and payback," he said. "This includes the use of up to deadly force when the lives of civilians or security personnel are threatened."

Mass killings

Clans have fought each other in Papua New Guinea's highlands for centuries, but an influx of

mercenaries and automatic weapons has made clashes more deadly and escalated the cycle of violence. Police said the gunmen had used a veritable armory, including SLR, AK-47, M4, AR15 and M16 rifles, as well as pump-action shotguns and home-made firearms.

The province's acting police commander Patrick Peka said many of the dead were believed to be mercenaries — men who roam the countryside offering to help tribes settle scores with their rivals. "The police and government cannot do much when leaders and educated elites supply arms, ammunition and engage the services of gunmen from other parts of the province," Peka said.

Papua New Guinea's government has for years tried suppression, mediation, gun amnesties and a range of other strategies to control the violence, with little success. The military had deployed to the area but their impact has been limited and the security services remain outnumbered and outgunned.

Police privately complain that they do not have the resources to do the job, with officers so badly paid that some of the weapons that end up in the hands of the attackers have come from the police force.

'Very disturbing'

The murders are often extremely violent, with victims hacked with machetes, burned, mutilated or tortured. Civilians, including pregnant women and children, have been targeted in the past in a cycle of retaliatory violence that has stretched over years.

Local member of parliament Miki Kaeok called for a state of emergency to be declared. "Hundreds of lives have been lost. Properties worth millions ... have been ransacked and destroyed. I don't want this to continue. It must stop now," he said.

The killings come at a difficult time for Prime Minister James Marape following deadly January riots in the capital Port Moresby and the city of Lae that prompted opponents to launch a motion of no confidence in his leadership.

Papua New Guinea's population has more than doubled since 1980, placing increasing strain on land and resources and deepening tribal rivalries. Anthony Albanese, the prime minister of neighboring Australia, described the incident as "very disturbing" and said on Monday Canberra would "provide whatever support we can." — AFP

Gaza death toll tops 29,000 as Zionists...

Continued from Page 1

is ready to push deeper into Rafah during Ramadan which, based on the lunar calendar, starts around March 10. Gantz said the Zionist entity would allow the evacuation of civilians from Rafah and "minimize the civilian casualties" — but so far it has not specified where Palestinians could flee, with vast swathes of the territory flattened after more than four months of devastating war. Egypt has stressed it does not want Gazans to flee over the border, arguing this would facilitate an effort to empty Gaza of its Palestinian population — an objective the Zionist entity denies.

Satellite images show Egypt has started erecting a walled enclosure parallel to the Gaza border, in an apparent precautionary move in case of a mass refugee flight. The Zionist entity's campaign has killed at least 29,092 people, mostly women and children, according to the latest count by the territory's health ministry.

The spiraling humanitarian crisis has forced some Palestinians to grind animal feed into flour. "My children are starving, they wake up crying from hunger," a northern Gaza woman told AFP. "Where do I get food for them?" The UN agency for Palestinian refugees, which has been bitterly at odds with the Zionist entity, said nearly three-quarters of Gazans are drinking contaminated water and warned "the speed of deterioration in Gaza is unprecedented".

UN experts urge probe of Zionist abuses of women

GENEVA: UN rights experts called Monday for an independent probe into Zionist abuses against Palestinian women and girls, including killings, rapes and sexual assault. The statement by the seven independent UN experts prompted an angry reaction from the Zionist entity. The experts voiced alarm at "credible allegations of egregious human rights violations" targeting women and girls in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank.

They cited reports of women and girls reportedly being "arbitrarily executed in Gaza, often together with family members, including their children". "We are shocked by reports of the deliberate targeting and extrajudicial killing of Palestinian women and children in places where they sought refuge, or while fleeing," they said.

Weeks of truce talks involving US, Egyptian and Qatari mediators have failed to bring a deal to pause the fighting, and the Zionist entity has rejected Hamas' demands, which include a total withdrawal of its forces. Heavy fighting has raged in and around the besieged Nasser Hospital in Khan Yunis, which the World Health Organization said is no longer operational.

The Zionist entity's army said Saturday it had detained about 100 suspects at the hospital. The Gaza health ministry said seven patients, including a child, had died in the hospital since Friday due to power cuts, and "70 staff including intensive care doctors" had been arrested. At least 20 of the 200 patients still there urgently require relocation to other facilities. WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said, adding that his organization "was not permitted to enter" the site.

International pressure has grown on the Zionist entity to halt the war in the besieged coastal territory. But Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has repeatedly insisted the army will continue until it achieves "total victory", despite also facing domestic pressure from resurgent anti-government protests and desperate relatives of hostages.

Western governments have increasingly pushed for unilateral recognition of a Palestinian state to be part of a wider peace process, something the Zionist entity has rejected. Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva on Sunday accused the Zionist entity of committing "genocide" and compared its actions to Adolf Hitler's campaign to exterminate Jews. Netanyahu labeled the comments "shameful" and Foreign Minister Israel Katz declared the Brazilian president "persona non grata in the (the Zionist entity)" unless he apologizes. Lula later recalled his ambassador to the Zionist entity for consultations. — AFP

The independent experts, who are appointed by the UN Human Rights Council but who do not represent the United Nations, also pointed to the "arbitrary detention of hundreds of Palestinian women and girls", including human rights defenders, journalists and humanitarians. They said many of those detained had reported being subjected to "inhuman and degrading treatment", including severe beatings and being denied menstrual pads, food and medicine.

They voiced particular alarm at reports of "multiple forms of sexual assault", including reports of rapes of at least two female detainees, while others were "stripped naked and searched by male Zionist army officers". The experts called for an "independent, impartial, prompt, thorough and effective investigation" into the allegations, urging the Zionist entity to cooperate.

The Zionist mission in Geneva dismissed the statement saying the experts were "motivated by their hatred for (the Zionist entity), not by the truth". It claimed Zionist authorities had received no complaints, but stood ready to investigate any "concrete claims of misconduct by its security forces when presented with credible allegations and evidence". — AFP

Zionist apartheid slammed; Kuwait...

Continued from Page 1

While any ICJ opinion would be non-binding, it comes amid mounting international legal pressure on the Zionist entity over the war in Gaza.

The hearings are separate from a high-profile case brought by South Africa saying the Zionist entity is committing genocidal acts during its current Gaza offensive. Maliki charged however that "the genocide underway in Gaza is a result of decades of impunity and inaction". "Ending (the Zionist entity's) impunity is a moral, political and legal imperative," he said. In January, the ICJ ruled in that case that the Zionist entity must do everything in its power to prevent genocide and allow humanitarian aid into Gaza, stopping short of ordering a ceasefire.

The UN General Assembly has asked the ICJ to consider two questions. Firstly, the court should examine the legal consequences of "the ongoing violation by (the Zionist entity) of the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination". This relates to the "prolonged occupation, settlement and annexation of the Palestinian territory occupied since 1967" and "measures aimed at altering the demographic composition, character and status of the Holy City of Jerusalem".

In June 1967, the Zionist entity crushed some of its Arab neighbors in a six-day war, seizing the West Bank including east Jerusalem from Jordan, the Golan Heights from Syria, and the Gaza Strip and Sinai Peninsula from Egypt. The Zionist entity then began to settle the 70,000 sq km of seized Arab territory. The UN later declared the occupation of Palestinian territory illegal. Cairo regained Sinai under its 1979 peace deal with the Zionist entity.

The ICJ has also been asked to look into the consequences of what it described as the Zionist entity's "adoption of related discriminatory legislation and measures". Secondly, the ICJ should advise on how the Zionist entity's actions "affect the legal status of the occupation" and what are the consequences for the UN and other countries.

The Zionist entity said the "prejudicial" and "tendentious" questions "represent a clear distortion of the history and present reality of the (Zionist)-Palestinian conflict". Zionist Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's office said in a statement that the conflict should be resolved through negotiations. It said the case that opened Monday was "aimed at harming (the Zionist entity's) rights to defend itself from existential threats".



THE HAGUE: Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Palestinian Authority Riyad Al-Maliki listens to a colleague during a hearing at the International Court of Justice on Feb 19, 2024. — AFP

Foreign ministry spokesman Lior Haiat in a message on X accused the Palestinian leadership of using the court as "a political tool to attack (the Zionist entity) harms both global trust in the international legal system and the chances of reaching a resolution of the conflict."

The court will rule "urgently" on the affair, probably by the end of the year. Dozens of pro-Palestinian protesters demonstrated outside the court, waving flags and brandishing banners. "I really hope justice will prevail," organizer Nadia Slimi, 27, told AFP. "I really hope all the combined efforts to pressure (the Zionist entity), to demand a more humane policy, will finally lead to some steps to liberate the Palestinian people," she added.

The ICJ rules in disputes between states and its judgements are binding although it has little means to enforce them. However, in this case, the opinion it issues will be non-binding although most advisory opinions are in fact acted upon. Human Rights Watch (HRW) said advisory opinions "can carry great moral and legal authority" and can eventually be inscribed in international law. In the court's own words: "The requesting organ, agency or organization remains free to give effect to the opinion by any means open to it, or not to do so." The ICJ has previously issued advisory opinions on the legality of Kosovo's 2008 declaration of independence from Serbia and apartheid South Africa's occupation of Namibia. It also handed down an opinion in 2004 declaring that parts of the wall erected by the Zionist entity in occupied Palestinian territories were illegal and should be torn down.

The Zionist entity reacted angrily to the 2022 UN request, with Netanyahu calling it "despicable" and "disgraceful". The week after the UN resolution, the Zionist entity announced a series of sanctions against the Palestinian Authority to make it "pay the price" for pushing for it. — AFP

International

India's heritage hit by Delhi 'development' demolitions

Islamic site dating back to 12th century latest to be razed by development authority

NEW DELHI: For nine centuries, Indians prayed at the forest shrine of Baba Haji Rozbih, a revered Sufi saint whose grave is one of the capital Delhi's oldest Islamic sites. Then, in early February, the Delhi Development Authority reduced the site to rubble, the latest victim of a "demolition program" it says has cleared "illegal religious structures" including a mosque, tombs, shrines and Hindu temples.

The destruction has sparked heartbreak from residents and worried warnings from historians at the loss of priceless heritage. "It's a blow ... to the history that made India what it is today", said historian and author Rana Safvi. The demolitions come at a sensitive time, as Hindu nationalists have been emboldened to claim ancient Islamic monuments for the country's majority faith.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi in January inaugurated a temple in the northern city of Ayodhya, built on the site of a centuries-old mosque whose destruction by Hindu zealots in 1992 sparked sectarian riots that killed 2,000 people nationwide, most of them Muslims.

General elections due this year are expected to begin in April — with Modi's Hindu-nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) widely tipped to win. The Delhi demolition campaign is officially about development, and it has targeted Hindu structures as well as Muslim ones.

But the DDA has not given details on what, if anything, will replace the razed structures, many of which were built hundreds of years before current zoning rules were put in place. "This shrine was of a Sufi saint, who was one of the earliest — if not the earliest — to come to Delhi",

said Safvi. "I have seen people of all faiths going and paying reverence to the saint."

'Maze of modern development'

Baba Haji Rozbih's shrine dated from the late 12th century, when the great Mayan city of Chichen Itza was at its height in Mexico. It was already 500 years old when India's Taj Mahal was built. Baba Haji Rozbih's shrine was less ambitious, a simple low-walled enclosure deep in the sprawling forest park of Sanjay Van — far from any roads or buildings and difficult for all but regular worshippers to find.

But for those who visited the shrine, its loss was no less bitter. "I have spent nights here praying — and everything is gone," said a man who asked not to be named for fear of backlash. "If we do not protect our history, then who will?"

The DDA is a federal agency whose mission is to ensure that Delhi's "unique historic character, its traditions and ethos" are not "lost in the maze of modern development". It said the removals were approved by a religious committee, and that the "entire demolition program (was) successfully completed without any hindrance and disturbance/protest".

Areas "reclaimed" added up to the area of a soccer pitch (5,000 square meters, 1.25 acres), the DDA added in a statement, without giving further details. The Hindustan Times newspaper reported that, along with the mosque and shrine, the DDA cleared four Hindu temples and 77 graves.

'Heritage is common'

Last month, bulldozers smashed down the Akhoni mosque in Delhi's Mehrauli forest, which its caretakers said was



NEW DELHI: In this photograph taken on February 6, 2024 a man shows the demolished shrine of Sufi saint Haji Rozbih in New Delhi. — AFP

around 600 years old. "You see the walls of a structure and realize how long it existed for," said Zakir Hussain, 40, the mosque's imam, describing how workers arrived before dawn to raze the buildings. "We have lost that. You cannot rebuild it, no matter how hard you try."

Safvi said losing the mosque was a loss for all. "Heritage is common," she said. "So you can't say that this mosque is only a blow to a

particular community or to Muslims because they prayed there."

The Archaeological Survey of India (ASI), which described Baba Haji Rozbih's shrine on its heritage list in 1922, said the cave-dwelling mystic was "revered as one of the oldest saints of Delhi". The ASI's listing said "local tradition" reported a second grave in the shrine belonged to the daughter of Delhi's

12th-century Hindu leader Rai Pithora, who "embraced Islam through him".

Rozbih's proselytizing reportedly sparked anger. "Many of the Hindus embraced Islam by his advice, and the astrologers regarded this as an ill omen" that "foreboded the advent" in the 16th century of the Muslim Mughal empire, the ASI report said. Centuries after that, demolitions began. — AFP

US man confesses in Germany tourist murder trial

KEMPTEN, Germany: An American man accused of raping and killing a fellow US tourist near Bavaria's famed Neuschwanstein castle last year made a wide-ranging confession on the first day of his trial Monday.

Troy Philipp B faces several charges including one count of murder over the death of the 21-year-old US American woman. He also stands accused of the attempted murder of the victim's friend, also a US citizen. "The accused committed the incomprehensible act," his lawyer Philip Mueller told the district court in the southern town of Kempten.

The two women, then 21 and 22 years old, were hiking in the Neuschwanstein area in June last year at the end of a European trip that had taken them to Italy and Spain. The pair got speaking to B, after the younger of the women and the accused slipped at a similar point on a mountain trail, prosecutors said.

"That's enough adventure for today," B is said to have remarked to the women, before offering to take them to a nearby viewing point on the way back to the castle, according to prosecutors. At a secluded spot, the man, then 30, allegedly pushed the 21-year-old woman to the ground and proceeded to rape and strangle her, according to investigators. Her friend intervened, leading to a scuffle in which the accused allegedly pushed the 22-year-old down a steep, 50-metre (165-foot) slope. The suspect then continued his sexual assault of the 21-year-old woman, strangling her with a belt while filming the act.

Interrupted by a pair of hikers who stumbled on the crime, he pushed the rape victim over the same ledge while she was unconscious. The 21-year-old landed at the bottom of the slope next to her friend, who called the emergency services, telling them her friend was "gasping".

When mountain rescue workers found the two women, the 22-year-old was injured but able to talk. The rape victim was seriously injured and taken by helicopter to hospital, where she died later that night from her injuries.

'Deeply ashamed'

B's lawyer said the accused had not planned the attack in advance. "He was aware that the victim could die without help, yet he still left her behind," Mueller told the court. His client was "deeply ashamed" about his actions and wished to apologize to the victim's family, the lawyer added.

B, who hails from the US state of Michigan, spoke only to confirm the accuracy of his lawyer's statement to the court. B on Monday also confessed to possession of child pornography, which investigators uncovered as part of their probe into the attack and said featured the accused's younger sister. He is not expected to make any further comments during the trial, scheduled to run until March 13.

Germany's top-selling daily Bild reported that the rescue operation and his subsequent arrest took place in front of hundreds of tourists. B faces up to life in prison if convicted. Built in the 19th century by King Ludwig II, Neuschwanstein castle is one of the most visited sites in Germany, attracting over a million visitors a year. — AFP

S Korea orders doctors back to hospitals

SEOUL: South Korea ordered trainee doctors back to work Monday after they resigned en masse to protest medical training reforms, with the government looking at using military medals to cope with shortfalls.

South Korea says it has one of the lowest doctor-to-population ratios among developed countries, and the government is pushing hard to increase the number of doctors, partly to help a fast-ageing society. But doctors have voiced fierce opposition to a new government plan to sharply raise medical school admissions, claiming it would hurt the quality of service provision. Critics say doctors are mainly concerned the reform could erode their salaries and social status.

25 killed in landslide caused by snowfall in Afghanistan

KABUL: A landslide caused by heavy snowfall has killed 25 people and injured eight others in the eastern Afghan province of Nuristan, a disaster management ministry spokesman said on Monday. Earth, snow and rubble swept through the village of Nakre in the Tatin valley of Nuristan overnight on Sunday. "As a result of the landslide, some 25 people have been killed and eight injured," spokesman Janan Sayeq said in a video clip shared with media.

Sayeq also told AFP the death toll could rise. Nuristan province, which borders Pakistan, is mostly covered by mountainous forests and hugs the southern end of the Hindu Kush mountain range. Provincial officials said snow has also hampered rescue efforts.

Wildcard candidates threaten to tip scales in US election

WASHINGTON: Americans haven't elected an independent president since George Washington, but a public turned off by two historically unpopular frontrunners appears more open than ever to the rich crop of wildcards who could tilt the election in 2024.

Voters have made clear in multiple polls that they don't want a rematch between Joe Biden and Donald Trump, and are willing to take a serious look at the growing number of politicians mulling independent or third-party campaigns. None has much of a chance of winning the White House in November but several so-called "spoilers" could sway a close election in either direction, say analysts. Democrats in particular fear a wildcard candidate harming their prospects, recalling how Green Party standard-bearer Jill Stein threw a spanner in the works for Hillary Clinton in 2016.

Stein is running again alongside several hopefuls seeking to upend the two-party system, such as racial

justice activist Cornel West and Robert F. Kennedy Jr, a candidate with a famous name who poses the biggest threat to the status quo.

Political consultant Douglas MacKinnon, a White House aide in the Reagan years, believes John F. Kennedy's nephew is shaping 2024 into a genuine three-person race, and points doubters to the multitude of pundits who gave Republican Trump no hope in 2016. "Kennedy's words and warnings are now resonating with young voters here in the US," MacKinnon wrote in an op-ed for politics newspaper The Hill. "So much so that he now leads both Biden and Trump with that demographic."

Biden more hurt

In the absence of a genuinely competitive nomination process for either of the major parties, this year's campaign is set to be one of the longest in history. Biden and Trump are already drawing battle lines, even as recent polls by the NORC Center for Public Affairs Research and the University of Massachusetts Amherst showed more than half of voters were unhappy about a re-run of 2020.

Opinions still differ on which candidate is more threatened by the scion of America's most storied Democratic dynasty, who shares conspiratorial views on vaccines and an enmity for Ukraine aid that delights Trumpists.



GWANGJU: Medical staff are seen at a university hospital in Gwangju on February 19, 2024. — AFP

suggest are tired of long wait times at hospitals, with a recent Korean Gallup poll showing over 75 percent of respondents in favor, regardless of political affiliation.

But it has drawn fierce opposition from doctors, with the Korean Medical Association saying the government's threats of legal action were akin to a "witch hunt" and claiming the plan would create a "Cuban-style

socialist medical system". Vice Minister Park said the plan was necessary in South Korea's fast-ageing society, with doctors set to be "overwhelmed with exponential demand" down the road if the current quota remained. "Hospitals are already having hard time finding doctors now, and problems of accessing medical service in time have occurred repeatedly," Park added. — AFP



DARA, Afghanistan: A general view shows snow laden terrain at Keraman village in the Dara district of Panjshir province on February 19, 2024. — AFP

ened by climate change, experts say. "When vegetation cover or the forests are cut down, or if green coverage doesn't exist in the area, soil erosion occurs," said Rohullah Amin, head of climate change for the National Environmental Protection Agency (NEPA). — AFP

Biden and Trump are virtually tied in the RealClearPolitics polling averages, but throw Kennedy into the mix and he takes 17 percent — while Trump opens a lead of five percentage points. Kyle Kondik, a political analyst at the University of Virginia, cautioned that polls often overstate support for independents, who tend to start with lofty ambitions before flaming out. But he added: "Polls that include all of the potential third-party candidates usually show Biden hurt a bit more by them than Trump."

Conservatives tend to agree. "Kennedy poses a legitimate threat to Biden because he's focusing on issues that matter to millennial voters and Gen Z voters," said Charlie Kolean, a right-leaning political operative and chief strategist at RED PAC. "We've seen focusing on issues like government transparency, fiscal responsibility and increasing economic opportunity win elections across the country."

'Incredibly arrogant'

Kennedy, Stein and West are likely to be joined by a host of other hopefuls, potentially including anti-Trump conservative Liz Cheney. Meanwhile self-styled centrist group No Labels is creating a "unity ticket" to unleash in the event that the two parties select "unreasonably divisive presidential nominees" — a move criticized by Democrats as a boost to Trump. — AFP

Business

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 20, 2024

Dubai airport could break passenger record this year

Airport hit 87 million visits in 2023, beating 2019 figure of 86.4 million

DUBAI: Dubai's air hub has "every chance" of breaking its record for passenger traffic this year after surpassing pre-pandemic levels in 2023, Dubai Airports' CEO told AFP on Monday.

Dubai International, the world's busiest airport for international passengers for nearly a decade, hit 87 million visits in 2023, beating the 2019 figure of 86.4 million despite the Gaza war, new figures showed. Chief executive Paul Griffiths cited early recovery in Dubai — the United Arab Emirates' business and financial centre — from the pandemic and a quick rebound in airport staffing levels as key factors.

"We were ready sooner. We were back to 100 percent capacity much sooner, and as a result, our traffic has rebounded far more quickly," he said, adding that Dubai's record of 89.1 million passengers, set in 2018, could be surpassed this year. "I think there's every chance of going above it. It could be a new record," Griffiths said. "I've had a peek at the January numbers and let's say it gives me some cause for optimism." Dubai Airports' official forecast for this year stands at 88.8 million passengers, just shy of the record, despite Zionist entity war on Gaza.

"We've demonstrated the absolute resilience of the network that we operate," said Griffiths, adding that Dubai's airport serves 104 countries via 102 airlines. "If there is a bit of a dip in demand from one destination or point of origin, then that tends to be compensated by the rest of the network filling the space," he added.

Cargo traffic was up 20.4 percent in the last quarter, perhaps because of attacks on shipping through the Red Sea by Yemen's Houthi rebels, Griffiths said.



DUBAI: Dubai International hit 87 million visits in 2023, beating the 2019 figure of 86.4 million despite the Gaza war.

He would not discuss security arrangements for the airport, beyond saying they were "well developed".

The Houthis fired drones and missiles at key infrastructure in the UAE in January 2022, killing three oil workers and starting a fire on the grounds of Abu Dhabi airport. Griffiths said the growth in traffic to and

from fast-developing Saudi Arabia had been "phenomenal", with Riyadh now Dubai's second busiest route behind London.

"If you look at the growth of travel and tourism across the world, we are only scratching the surface in this region," he said. "The region is waking up to

the fact that travel and tourism is a fantastic driver of growth for the economy, and also it isn't really competitive, it's collaborative, and it's complimentary."

"If you've got more cities that people want to visit, the more cities and options there are, the more people will come to the region." — AFP

Burgan Bank launches prepaid card to mark Kuwait National Day

KUWAIT: In celebration of Kuwait National Day, Burgan Bank announced the launching of its limited-edition Kuwait-themed prepaid card, which offers retail customers a crossover between Burgan's customary banking convenience and national pride. This exclusive MasterCard was developed in line with Burgan's mission to uphold its excellent customer experience and remain top-of-mind and go-to card of choice for its customers.

Commenting on the launch of the limited-edition prepaid card, Elham Al-Saleh, Deputy General Manager – Retail Banking at Burgan Bank, said: "As an engaged member of the community, we remain committed to participating in all celebrations that unite the people of Kuwait and foster a sense of national belonging. That's why this February, we launched the Kuwait-themed prepaid card, which comes adorned with



Elham Al-Saleh

colors and symbols that resemble our country and Kuwaiti identity, as well as verses from the beloved song 'Beladona Helwa' (Our country is beautiful). This limited-edition card reflects our firm belief that individuals express their unique personalities through a range of design elements, from lifestyle choices to preferences and even banking card designs."

Similar to several of Burgan Bank's existing prepaid cards, the Kuwait National Day MasterCard offers customers a range of features that guarantee seamlessness and convenience, which is delivered through the "Tap & Pay" feature that is available at all NFC-enabled points of sale (POS) in Kuwait and around the world. In addition, the reloadable card can be issued to anyone, whether they are existing Burgan customers or not. Using the card does not require a minimum age either. Furthermore, it can be used for online shopping, making it an excellent gift option for friends and



family, including children, so they can enjoy shopping with ease whether they are home or on holiday abroad.

It serves to note that Burgan Bank has a track record of banking card innovations that continue to ensure convenience and inclusivity to all users. These include sustainable card options such as biodegradable cards and virtual cards, in addition to x-change cards and co-branded prepaid cards, which offer customers a wide range of exclusive offers.

China agrees to lift ban on Spanish beef imports

CORDOBA, Spain: China has agreed to lift a ban on imports of Spanish beef, the foreign ministers of both nations said Sunday after talks.

Beijing has since 2000 imposed a ban on the European Union for exporting beef products due to the emergence of several cases of bovine spongiform encephalopathy, or "mad cow" disease, in several members of the bloc that year. "It is good news, especially for Spanish farmers," Chinese foreign minister Wang Yi told a joint news conference with his Spanish counterpart Jose Manuel Albares in Cordoba in southern Spain.

The announcement comes as farmers in Spain have for the past two weeks taken part in EU-wide protests over heavy regulation, high costs and cheaper imports which they say have left them struggling to make ends meet. "When you take into account the size of the Chinese market, the impact is going to be extraordinarily positive," Albares said. "This is a measure which we have long been asking for and which benefits the entire countryside. It is hard to find a market like the Chinese market." China's top diplomat headed to Spain after taking part in a major security conference in Munich, Germany on Saturday where he said Beijing will be a "force for stability" in the world.

Wang also reiterated on Saturday China's stance on the Zionist entity war on Gaza, calling for an immediate ceasefire and the opening of channels for humanitarian aid into Gaza. Albares said Sunday that he and Wang "agreed to support the solution of the two states: Palestinian and Zionist entity" to end the conflict.

"I have expressed my serious concern about the critical situation in Rafah, the need to achieve an immediate ceasefire, to continue supporting UNRWA more than ever and the indispensable work it does with refugees," the Spanish minister added in a reference to the UN agency for Palestinian refugees. Wang is scheduled to meet with Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez on Monday before heading to France. This is his first visit to Spain in six years. — AFP



The cuts would help the government meet its deficit target for this year of 4.4 percent of GDP, Le Maire told reporters Monday. He said, however, that the government was also keeping open the option of amending the budget in the summer "depending on economic circumstances and depending on the geopolitical situation". The government has said it still hopes to bring its deficit to below 3 percent of GDP in 2027. That deficit level requirement, agreed between European Union members as part of their Stability and Growth Pact, has been suspended since 2020 first to allow countries to deal with the COVID pandemic, and then with the economic fallout of Russia's invasion of Ukraine. EU members are currently discussing a reform of the deficit and debt rules that would allow for more flexibility. — AFP

Germany likely to fall into recession, says central bank

FRANKFURT: German output is likely to shrink slightly in the first quarter, sending Europe's top economy into recession as it battles multiple crises, the country's central bank warned Monday. The German economy has been struggling since Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine sent inflation soaring, with the crisis compounded by an industrial slowdown and weakness in key trading partners.

After contracting 0.3 percent in the final quarter of 2023, output is "likely to once again decline slightly" from January to March, the Bundesbank said in its monthly report. "This second consecutive decline in economic output would put the German economy into a technical recession."

The central bank listed a litany of problems facing the export powerhouse, from slowing foreign demand to constrained consumer spending and domestic investment. The economy may also be impacted by a wave of recent strikes, particularly those in the rail and aviation sectors, it said.

However it added there was "still no evidence of a recession in the sense of a persistent, broad-based and distinct drop in economic activity, nor is such a recession currently on the cards". A robust labor market, rising wages and slowing inflation would provide support, it said.

Following a series of interest rate hikes, German inflation slowed to 2.9 percent in January — not far off the European Central Bank's two-percent target. The German economy shrank 0.3 percent across the whole of last year. While it is expected to rebound this year, observers have recently been cautioning the recovery may be slower than previously expected. In December, the Bundesbank slashed its 2024 growth forecast to 0.4 percent, from a prediction of 1.2 percent in June.

Meanwhile, France likely overshot its budget deficit target in 2023, a finance ministry official said on Monday. President Emmanuel Macron's government

CBK bonds and related Tawarruq

KUWAIT: The Central Bank of Kuwait (CBK) announced the most recent issues of CBK bonds and related Tawarruq at a total value of KD 240 million for three months with a rate of return at 4.375 percent.

Stock markets diverge before key earnings

LONDON: Major stock markets diverged Monday as traders awaited more earnings updates this week from heavyweight companies, including HSBC bank, chip giant Nvidia and retail giant Walmart. Focus this week will be on also minutes from the most recent policy meetings of the US Federal Reserve and European Central Bank for clues on when markets can expect the pair to start cutting interest rates as inflation cools.

On Monday, mainland Chinese stocks were buoyant after Lunar New Year, leading gains in most other Asian markets, as figures showed holiday spending surged past pre-pandemic levels. Hong Kong closed down 1.1 percent, breaking a three-day rally, with analysts saying investors felt uneasy after a decision by China's central bank to leave a key policy rate unchanged, seen as an attempt to bolster the yuan. Tokyo's key Nikkei index ended flat.



TOKYO: A display showing a share price of the Tokyo Stock Exchange is opened for the live broadcasting in a brokerage studio in Tokyo. — AFP

In Europe, Paris and Frankfurt dropped in late morning deals. London steadied, managing to avoid an overall loss as shares in AstraZeneca rallied after the drugs giant had a lung cancer treatment approved in the United States. "The US markets will be closed on Monday in observance of Presidents' Day... but China is back after a week-long holiday, and we will have earnings from Nvidia in mid-week," noted Fawad Razaqada, market analyst at City Index trading group. "Investors have continually ignored the Fed's consistent pushback against expectations of an early rate cut. Instead, they have chosen to concentrate on mostly stronger earnings and the AI optimism, taking advantage of the bullish momentum to drive stocks higher." — AFP

Business



Signing the partnership agreement.



NBK reaches partnership with Almosafer to provide exclusive travel offers to customers

Partnership to enhance banking experience of NBK KWT Visa Infinite credit cardholders

KUWAIT: Seeking to enhance customer banking experience with top-notch services and offers according to the lifestyles of their different segments and ages, National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) has announced a new exclusive partnership with Almosafer, to provide NBK KWT Visa Infinite Credit Cardholders with exclusive offers that meet their expectations.



This new partnership will give NBK KWT Visa Infinite Credit Cardholders access to a world of tailored offers that meet their travel needs, including airline tickets and hotel bookings.

Under the partnership, cardholders will get 10 percent NBK KWT Points when using their KWT Card to

pay for airline tickets and hotel bookings at Almosafer stores or via its app or website. As this offer will continue going forward, cardholders will be able to avail it, as part of KWT Card product benefits. Commenting on this partnership, Hisham Al-Nusif, Deputy Head, Consumer Banking Group at National Bank of Kuwait said, "We always seek to enhance our customers' banking experience, and with the beginning of the new year, we wanted to provide exclusive offers tailored to their needs and expectations. We also work tirelessly and around the clock to keep pace with their changing needs and live up to their growing expectations."

"NBK maintains solid relationships with leading institutions across different sectors, and we are glad to partner with Almosafer, being one of the most trusted travel agents for customers. We aim to leverage this partnership to enhance customers' banking experience by delivering top-notch offers, discounts and benefits for an unmatched banking experience," he added. "Customer satisfaction and top-notch banking experience are embedded in NBK's culture. Thanks to our extensive experience gained over long decades, we are able to understand customers' needs, evaluate their goals, and even exceed their expectations," he noted.

Muzzammil Ahussain, CEO of Almosafer, added: "We are happy to partner with the National Bank of Kuwait, an industry leader in the banking sector in the Gulf region, to offer Almosafer's exclusive travel deals to the bank's esteemed customers. Kuwait is a key market for us and by extending our special offers, discounts and benefits we hope to leverage our ex-



Hisham Al-Nusif

Customer satisfaction and top-notch banking experience are embedded in NBK's culture

perience in the industry and provide tailor-made-travel solutions for NBK KWT Visa Infinite Credit Cardholders. Our digital-first, seamless experience, powered by data driven solutions, will aid Kuwait's premier national bank to provide their clients with value-added benefits. Together we hope to raise the bar on exceeding client expectations by going one step further to deliver top-notch quality services that is bound to distinguish us from the rest of the market."

A card like no other

NBK KWT Visa Infinite Credit Card is the most popular credit card in Kuwait, as it offers customers a

unique lifestyle with exceptional rewards, benefits and offers tailored to meet customers' needs and expectations, and cashback up to KD 1,000 in NBK KWT Points every month.

The card combines an exclusive package of exceptional rewards with a design inspiring national pride, making it a card like no other, and gives customers the flexibility to choose the way they want to earn rewards based on their lifestyle; either the "Spends Tier" or "Merchant Category" option.

When choosing the "Merchant Category", customers can earn NBK KWT Points on all payments made using NBK KWT Visa Infinite Credit Card at the selected categories, with 10 percent on dining and telecom, 5 percent on fitness and beauty and three percent on clothing, grocery and education.

Meanwhile, when choosing the "Spends Tier" earning option, based on their monthly spends, with up to 5 percent on digital payments, up to 5 percent on international POS and up to 3 percent on all other spends. The earned NBK KWT Points can be redeemed through NBK Online or Mobile Banking whether as cashback directly to the card, travel booking at more than 800 airlines and 150,000 hotels, e-vouchers from over 190 merchants, or points exchange with most preferred airlines.

NBK Visa Credit Cards offer the best payment method for the convenience and benefits they provide to customers, especially when using them in shopping including NBK Rewards Program as well as Purchase Protection and Extended Warranty.

NBK ECONOMIC REPORT

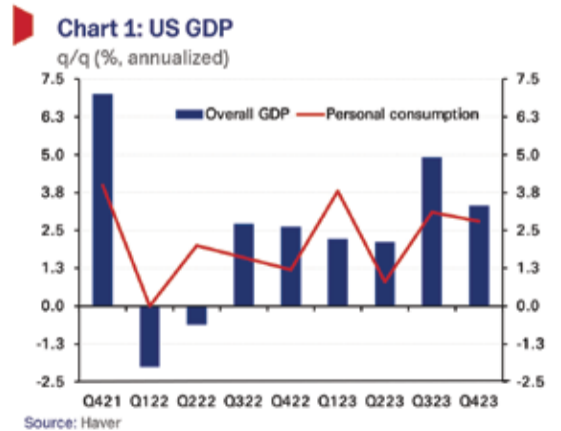
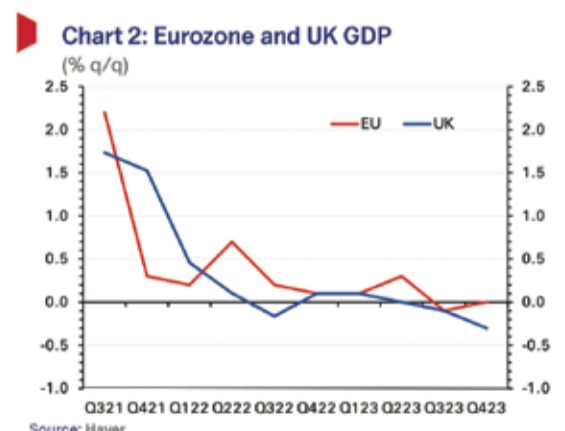
Major economies struggle for traction with US in the lead

KUWAIT: The global environment remains challenging amid high interest rates, adverse geopolitics, and subdued global trade growth. Among major economies, only the US seems poised for solid growth in 2024 as resilient household spending and a still-tight labor market support activity. The eurozone and UK are flirting with or in recession, but growth could pick up slightly from last year's weak base as inflation and the energy shock recede, and amid optimism about interest rate cuts. Despite Japan's slow growth due to anemic global demand and falling real wages, above-target inflation means that a central bank policy U-turn towards monetary tightening is possible sometime this year. China, who's post-COVID rebound disappointed in 2023, faces continued headwinds from muted domestic consumption and property sector weakness, amplifying calls for a more compelling policy response.

shocks amid deteriorating geopolitics, and renewed inflation that delays interest rate cuts. A further downside risk to growth involves the moribund commercial real estate sector, with signs of distress highlighted in some recent corporate results.

Eurozone and UK

The eurozone has been hovering close to recession, having narrowly avoided two straight quarters of negative growth (-0.1 percent q/q and 0 percent, respectively in Q3 and Q4 2023). The bloc's two largest economies, France, and Germany, continue to struggle with weak external demand (mainly on account of China) and soft domestic consumption (due to price and interest rate rises). The IMF recently cut its 2024 growth forecast for the eurozone from 1.2 percent last October to 0.9 percent, though still improving from 0.5 percent in 2023, as aftershocks from energy price rises subside and household consumption gradually recovers. Amid muted economic growth and sharply lower inflation (down to 2.8 percent as of January), the consensus view is that the ECB will reduce policy rates by 75-100 bps this year, with the ongoing resilience of the labor market providing the main reason to delay. The UK could see a similar recovery in growth to 0.6 percent, albeit from a low base of 0.1 percent in 2023, based on the IMF's projections.



US: Resilient job market
The US economy has continued to positively surprise over the last several months, which prompted the IMF to upgrade its growth forecast for 2024 to 2.1 percent (still down from 2.5 percent in 2023) from 1 percent projected six months back. GDP grew by an above-trend 3.3 percent in Q4 2023, and recent PMI and consumer surveys point to momentum being sustained over the coming months. Thus far, consumer spending has been resilient to elevated interest rates, underpinned by generally slowing inflation (3.1 percent in January), strong job gains (+350K in January, a 12-month high), and wage growth accelerating to 4.5 percent y/y. Moreover, household wealth has been boosted by rising equity and home prices.

Wage growth at 6.2 percent y/y is now running well ahead of inflation at 4.0 percent, which will provide the basis for an easing in cost-of-living pressures this year and improve the outlook for consumer spending. But at the same time, this might slow the pace of interest rate cuts by the Bank of England, with markets looking for rates to drop by around 75 bps by end-2024. The government's budget in March could unveil a package of tax cuts to boost growth ahead of a general election later in the year, but room for maneuver is limited by a fiscal deficit projected at nearly 5 percent of GDP this year. After a sizeable correction in 2022-23, the housing market looks set to be more stable. As in the US, risks surrounding the outlook for Europe include the inability of central banks to lower interest rates if inflation proves persistent, especially given the already feeble growth outlook. Uncertain energy prices, geopolitics and supply-chain issues linked to Red Sea shipping route disruption also present risks.

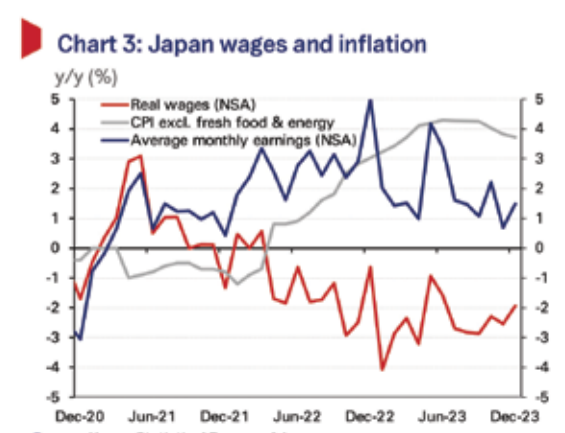
The Bank of Japan (BoJ) recently lowered its economic growth estimates for FY2023-24 (ending March 2024) to 1.8 percent due to slowing activity overseas and cooling consumer sentiment amid elevated inflation. However, the tightening labor market, rising nominal wages, and somewhat easing price pressures should support private consumption go-

ing forward, while inbound tourism should continue to recover from the pandemic. As a result, the BoJ raised its growth forecast for FY2024-25 by 0.2 percent to 1.2 percent, which although softer than this year is still above long-run trend growth. Meanwhile, the bank revised down its inflation forecast to 2.4 percent from 2.8 percent on declining energy prices, then a below-target 1.8 percent in FY2025-26. Despite currently above-target inflation, the BoJ has maintained its ultra-loose monetary policy until now, keeping short-term interest rates at -0.1 percent, worried that upward price pressures are temporary driven by cost factors.

At its latest meeting, the bank sent early signals of a shift towards policy tightening, though did not provide any indication on the timing or pace of the change. A complete withdrawal from negative interest rate policy hinges on a broad economic recovery including more robust household consumption growth and stronger overseas demand.

China: Lackluster consumption

China's economy grew 5.2 percent in 2023, but the key headwinds that dampened growth have persisted. Due to the ongoing drag from the property sector, weak domestic consumption, a declining labor force and a soft external demand outlook, output growth could remain in a prolonged slowdown. Recent indicators such as PMI surveys, CPI prints, retail sales, bank credit and trade data, have signaled uneven momentum in early 2024 and the IMF sees GDP growth decelerating to 4.6 percent in 2024. China's economic model, which relied heavily on debt-fueled infrastructure and property investment in the past, has faltered with investment as a share of GDP now trending well below pre-COVID levels. Indeed, a significant build-up in public debt, especially amongst fiscally-constrained local governments, has put the central government on the back foot. Policymakers have mulled boosting infrastructure spending, but that could stoke debt accumulation concerns, given the diminishing returns on investment. Volatile Sino-US relations and other geopolitical developments have compounded the challenges for the authorities. Nonetheless, the government has pledged fresh support to improve domestic consumption, while maintaining growth measures for exports of high-value-added green energy products. The authorities have also tried to prop up financial markets by imposing short-selling restrictions and injecting funds through state-owned enterprises, which could help stem capital outflows and support a weakening yuan. Still, recent measures to rejuvenate economic activity have yet to restore consumer and investor confidence.



MUNICH: Airplanes of German airline Lufthansa are parked at the Franz-Josef-Strauss airport in Munich, southern Germany, during a strike of the ground staff employees of Lufthansa. - AFP

Union calls Lufthansa ground staff strike at German airports

BERLIN: Union Verdi called on ground staff at Lufthansa to stage a walkout on Tuesday across Germany's biggest airports, in the latest strike to plague the country in recent weeks. The industrial action affecting seven airports including Frankfurt, Munich and Berlin will start at 4 am (0300 GMT) on Tuesday and end at 7.10 am on Wednesday, the union said in a statement.

More than 100,000 passengers are expected to be impacted by the walkout, said Lufthansa in a separate statement, adding it was drawing up an alternative flight plan.

The airline's human resource chief Michael Niggemann blasted the union's decision, saying the action would once again "put a disproportionate burden on our guests". But the union said no progress had been made in negotiations on working conditions, justifying the strike for 25,000 workers, including maintenance employees and airport counter staff across the company.

Among sticking points were what the union said were an overly low pay offer made to the staff in comparison to other employee categories such as pilots. "While the company is offering pilots with annual basic wages of up to 270,000 euros (\$298,000) raises reaching two-digit figures, ground staff are unable to break even given the inflation of the last years," said Verdi's lead negotiator Marvin Reschinsky.

"We don't want this escalation. We want a quick result for employees and passengers," said the union, which is seeking pay rises of 12.5 percent, and a minimum of 500 euros more a month. Lufthansa has offered to raise wages by four percent in December before another 5.5 percent increase in February 2025. It has also said it would pay a 3,000 euros inflation bonus to each worker.

The next round of negotiations will take place on February 21. Germany has been hit by a spate of strikes across varying sectors including transport, the civil service and supermarkets. Pinched by inflation over the last years and in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic, workers are demanding higher wages to cope with the cost of living. - AFP

Business

Gulf Bank launches environmental sustainability initiative in partnership with Mishref Co-op

Third phase of initiative will continue for a week

Fahad Al-Sharrah: We aim to reinforce environmental sustainability principles by shifting societal habits and minimizing plastic consumption.

KUWAIT: Following the specified timeline, Gulf Bank has launched the "A Step Towards Change" environmental sustainability initiative, aimed at shifting societal habits by promoting the use of reusable bags, in partnership with Mishref cooperative society. Over the course of a week, the initiative involves distributing around 20,000 reusable bags at Mishref co-op, accompanied by various informative events.

Gulf Bank had earlier revealed the timetable for executing the initiative within the participating co-ops, which include Al-Dahiya and Al-Mansouriah, Al-Shamiya and Al-Shuwaikh, Al-Rawda and Hawally, Kaifan, and Mishref. This disclosure took place in the presence of bank officials, representatives from the Environment Public Authority, and the Committee for Environmental, Food, and Water Security in the National Assembly.

On this occasion, Fahad Al-Sharrah, Assistant Manager of Corporate Communications at Gulf Bank, stated: "We are pleased at Gulf Bank to have partnered with Mishref Co-op for the third phase of our environmental sustainability initiative, 'A Step Towards Change,' following the participation of Al-Dahiya and Al-Mansouriah co-op, and Al-Shamiya and Al-Shuwaikh Co-op."

He continued, saying: "Our primary objective is to instigate a change in behavior within society, and we are working closely with Mishref Co-op to achieve this. Through the distribution of reusable bags and encouraging customers to reduce their plastic consumption, we hope to make significant progress."

Al-Sharrah conveyed optimism that this initiative would actively contribute to shaping government decisions and laws, compelling both institutions and individuals to minimize plastic usage. Ultimately, this effort is expected to contribute significantly to the protection of Kuwait's environment from the significant harm caused by plastic bags. He further emphasized that this initiative is part of Gulf Bank's annual commitment to implement various initiatives aimed at reinforcing the principles of environmental sustainability within the community. Gulf Bank believes that the journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step, and they found it fitting to initiate this program with selected major co-ops in Kuwait. Around 100,000 reusable bags will be distributed to the selected co-ops, marking the first step towards changing behavior, and becoming an integral part of their daily lives.

He added, "This initiative is rooted in Gulf Bank's 2025 strategy, with the goal of establishing principles of environmental, social, and governance sustainability. It aligns with the country's environmental strategy under the vision of 'New Kuwait 2035,' as well as legislation related to the environment, laws safeguarding the environment, resource conservation, pollution reduction, environmental safety, ecosystem rehabilitation, biodiversity protection, waste management efficiency improvement, utilization of renewable energy, and building and developing national capabilities in environmental work."

Abdullah Adel Al-Qallaf, board member of Mishref Co-op, expressed satisfaction with the partnership with Gulf Bank in the "A Step Towards Change" initiative, highlighting their commitment to driving societal progress towards decreased plastic consumption. Furthermore, he stressed the introduction of a "Fast

Track" service by the co-op for shareholders who utilize reusable bags, with the aim of promoting their ongoing use. Gulf Bank's vision is to be the leading Kuwaiti Bank of the Future. The Bank is constantly engaging and empowering its employees as part of an inclusive and diversified workplace in recognition of every employee's role in delivering customer excellence and serving the community at large. With its extensive network of branches and innovative digital services, Gulf Bank is able to give its customers the

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

Abdullah Adel Al-Qallaf: We are pleased to partner with Gulf Bank and are eager to contribute to changing societal behavior toward reducing plastic usage.



Gulf Bank's Corporate Communications team with Mishref Cooperative Society officials.

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Gulf Bank is committed to maintaining robust developments in sustainability at environmental, social and governance levels through diverse sustainability initiatives, strategically selected to benefit the Bank both internally and externally. Gulf Bank supports Kuwait Vision 2035 "New Kuwait" and works with various parties to achieve it.

Eng Al-Harbi resigns from stc Kuwait after leading it for five years

KUWAIT: Kuwait Telecommunications Company – stc, announced the resignation of Eng Maziad Al-Harbi from his position as CEO of the company, after five years of leading the executive management team at stc Kuwait. Al-Harbi submitted his resignation to the company's board of directors during the board meeting held on Feb 15, 2024, where the resignation was officially accepted by the board and disclosed on Boursa Kuwait thereafter. It has also been announced that Eng Muataz Abdullah Al-Dharrab will take on the role of CEO.

In this regard, Dr Mahmood Ahmad Abdulrahman, Chairman of the Company's board, stated: "Al-Harbi played a key role since he led the executive management team at stc Kuwait in 2019. Under his guidance, the company transitioned from offering traditional telecom services to expanding into business solutions and digital services. This strategic shift was exemplified by successful acquisitions, including QualityNet in 2019 and e-Portal Holding Company in 2022, where Al-Harbi also served as chairman. Additionally, he oversaw the rebranding of "VIVA" to "stc," aligning the company with a unified brand identity across Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and Bahrain."

stc achieved strong financial results under Al-Harbi's tenure as CEO by leveraging the company's technical and human capabilities to align with the objectives of the company's customers and shareholders. As part of this strategy, stc expanded its business model and focused on delivering integrated digital solutions to businesses in various sectors, ultimately having one of the largest contributions to stc's success. Since Al-Harbi took over, the company's revenues increased by 22 percent despite the challenges and difficulties witnessed in Kuwait's market. By end of 2023, stc achieved its highest revenues since establishment, with total revenues reaching KD 351.4 million.

The digital transformation strategy initiated and led by Al-Harbi has been an instrumental factor in stc's success and contribution to the local economy, government initiatives, and the rising demand for digital and IT solutions. stc played a significant role in fostering relationships with investors and the investment community, upholding the highest standards of transparency and best global practices in shareholder communication, which was led by Al-Harbi. The move follows the company's strategic vision to contribute to the growth and development of Kuwait, aligning with the national development plan inspired by Kuwait Vision 2035. stc has already begun drafting execution plans and coordinating with relevant authorities to build the headquarters, a step expected to significantly reduce current and future operating and administrative expenses, positively impacting the company's business and stability. Another significant achievement during this period was receiving the approval from the Communication and Information Technology Regulatory Authority (CITRA) to launch the first-of-its-kind mobile virtual network operator (MNVO) license to launch Virgin Mobile Kuwait in partnership with Virgin Mobile Middle East & Africa. The license will permit Virgin Mobile Kuwait to operate using stc's network, with stc acting as a Host Facilities Based Provider "FBP" with Virgin Mobile Kuwait, offering prepaid plans to users, and making it the first virtual telecom service in the country.

In 2024, stc was upgraded to the premier market in Boursa Kuwait, reflecting the company's strategic direction over the past years. The strategy focused towards being a market leader by enhancing the investment community's confidence in stc's strong and flexible operational business model and corporate strategy. The upgrade also reflects stc's robust financial position, ongoing compliance with the standards and regulations of Boursa Kuwait and the Capital Markets Authority, and the trust shareholders and investors have in the company's stock.

The chairman highlighted that under Al-Harbi's stewardship, stc consistently reached new milestones by applying its foundational strategy and expanding its operations over recent years. The company achieved robust financial and operational results, demonstrating its dedication to bolstering its internal strengths, broadening its business framework, and enabling its digital transformation strategy. Leveraging its state-of-the-art network, stc offered a wide array of services catering to the varied needs of both individual and institutional customers. Furthermore, the specialized contributions of its subsidiaries in providing fixed connectivity and IT services, along with offering the business sector innovative comprehensive solutions, have established stc as a pioneer in enabling digital transformation in Kuwait. These efforts have led to a series of accomplishments, including the introduction of new-to-market concepts, and strengthening its position as a leading company, all of which were recognized with numerous prestigious awards across the region, applauding its initiatives and intelligent investments.

In the beginning of 2022, stc made headlines by deciding to distribute 100 percent bonus shares from the issued and paid-up capital. During the third quarter of 2022, stc's revenue market share reached 39.8 percent leading the telecommunications sector in Kuwait for the first time since the company's inception. By end of 2022, the Municipal Council approved allocating stc a plot of land in Kuwait City to build its new headquarters. The decision came following extensive efforts from stc's board and executive

management, which was led by Al-Harbi. The move follows the company's strategic vision to contribute to the growth and development of Kuwait, aligning with the national development plan inspired by Kuwait Vision 2035. stc has already begun drafting execution plans and coordinating with relevant authorities to build the headquarters, a step expected to significantly reduce current and future operating and administrative expenses, positively impacting the company's business and stability. Another significant achievement during this period was receiving the approval from the Communication and Information Technology Regulatory Authority (CITRA) to launch the first-of-its-kind mobile virtual network operator (MNVO) license to launch Virgin Mobile Kuwait in partnership with Virgin Mobile Middle East & Africa. The license will permit Virgin Mobile Kuwait to operate using stc's network, with stc acting as a Host Facilities Based Provider "FBP" with Virgin Mobile Kuwait, offering prepaid plans to users, and making it the first virtual telecom service in the country.



Eng Maziad Al-Harbi

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Auto parts supplier Forvia to cut staff in Europe

PARIS: French-German auto parts manufacturer Forvia announced plans to cut 13 percent of its workforce in Europe over the coming years in an effort to boost competitiveness and profitability in a sluggish and shifting car market.

The company, created in 2022 from the merger of France's Faurecia and Germany's Hella, returned to profit in 2023 but unveiled the plan to achieve 500 million euros (\$540 million) in savings by 2028.

Forvia's announcement follows job cuts announced by a number of its rivals as suppliers adjust to an auto industry that has yet to fully recover from the Covid pandemic but is also in the midst of shifting to electric vehicles that will eliminate the need for certain products like mufflers. Forvia's management said up to 10,000 of its 75,500 posts in Europe could go by 2028, with a lower recourse to interim staff and the use of Artificial Intelligence to optimize research and development. In addition to France and Germany the company also has sites in the Czech Republic, Poland and Spain. "All sites will be affected but not in the same manner," Forvia's chief operating officer Olivier Durand said at a news conference. "We've had a drop in the European market and we don't see an improvement in the short or medium term," said Durand, adding that certain of Forvia's facilities are not working at full capacity. "Our industry shifts regularly and we know how to adjust our industrial capacity," he added. The plan also aims to make Forvia less dependent upon China, where it makes 27 percent of its sales but most of its profits.

The company posted a net profit of 222 million euros in 2023, with sales rising nearly 11 percent to 27.2 billion euros. Forvia, which took on debt as part of its merger with Hella, reduced its debt by nearly one billion euros last year to nearly seven billion. Investors welcomed the company's announcement with Forvia's shares rising 4.7 percent in early trading while the Paris SBF 120 index slid 0.3 percent lower. — AFP



Photos of LuLu Hypermarket's 'BBQ Bliss' promotion.

LuLu Hypermarket's 'BBQ Bliss' promotion sizzles

KUWAIT: LuLu Hypermarket's week-long 'BBQ Bliss' promotion riveted the interests of grilling gurus and grilled food lovers alike. The promotion, which ran from Feb 14–20 at all outlets of the hypermarket, was inaugurated on Feb 14 at the Al-Rai branch by renowned Arabic chef Aqeel along with LuLu's top management, in front of a gathering of shoppers and well-wishers.

The celebration of 'all things barbecue' offered amazing deals, exciting contests, and of course, the tantalizing aroma of grilled meat. During the promotion period, the entire range of BBQ products, including barbecue grilling sets, accessories and tools, as well as, succulent meats, fresh fish, flavorful BBQ sauces, and anything else you might need to make a perfect

barbecue were offered at special prices.

The heat of the promotion was turned higher on Feb 17 when the live BBQ contest at the Al-Rai outlet saw more than 100 contestants vying with each other to create that perfectly grilled wonder, and take home the coveted top prizes. With Al-Youm as the main sponsor, and Sadia, Americana, Seara, Khazan, McCain, and Al-Tayyeb as co-sponsors, the competition was a sizzling spectacle. At the end of the contest, the best grillers of the day were presented with superb prizes and gifts by top management of LuLu Hypermarket and Al-Youm. Consolation prizes were also handed to all participants in the competition.

The seven days of BBQ Bliss witnessed specially set up stalls in the hypermarket showcasing full-set barbecue equipment and accessories, while food sampling counters and food trucks allowed shoppers to relish grilled delights and other foods. A dedicated play-zone kept the little ones engaged in various activities. Adding to the sizzle of BBQ Bliss was live music, captivating performances by mascots, tallest man/flower



costumes, mirror show performances and even a cooking demonstration by chef Aqeel himself, all of which ensured there was something blissful for everyone to enjoy.

The BBQ Bliss promotion reiterates LuLu

Hypermarket's commitment to offer shoppers not only the best products from around the world at competitive prices, but also to make shopping at the hypermarket an exciting and fun-filled experience.

Business

ABK wins 'Best Corporate Governance Bank' from Global Business Outlook

Award celebrates ABK's excellence and innovation in banking sector



KUWAIT: Al-Ahli Bank of Kuwait is being honored with the title of 'Best Corporate Governance Bank'.

KUWAIT: Al-Ahli Bank of Kuwait (ABK) is proud to announce its achievement at the Global Business Outlook Awards where the Bank was honored with the title of 'Best Corporate Governance Bank'. The awards ceremony, held at Jumeirah Emirates Tower, celebrated ABK's excellence and innovation in the banking and financial sector.

Receiving this accolade is a testament to ABK's unwavering commitment to upholding the highest standards of corporate governance in the banking sector. Commenting on this achievement, Sana Al-Saqabi, Acting Chief Compliance Officer and Corporate Governance at ABK, said, "We are pleased to receive this recognition which reflects our dedication to maintaining sound corporate governance frameworks and in-

Sana Al-Saqabi: We are dedicated to maintain a robust corporate governance framework that reinforce our position as a leading and responsible financial institution

still the integrity, transparency, and responsibility values in our culture so as to reinforce the bank's position as a leading financial institution."

This award affirms ABK's continuous efforts in ensuring the highest standards of professional conduct in all its transactions. The bank seeks to adhere to the instructions of the Central Bank of Kuwait regarding the rules and regulations of corporate governance in

Kuwaiti banks and adopt them as an institutional culture, and not just as regulatory instructions. Al-Saqabi continued, "It underscores the bank's commitment to safeguarding shareholders, investors, and stakeholders' interests and fostering long-term sustainability as part of our ongoing pursuit of excellence in governance."

This award is one of many accomplishments and accolades that ABK has received this year, adding

to the Bank's impressive track record of years of achievements. In the past year alone, ABK has been recognized for its outstanding performance, innovation, and commitment to excellence in the banking industry across human resources, retail, governance, and corporate banking.

This accomplishment reinforces ABK's position as a leader in promoting good governance practices within the financial industry. Al-Saqabi concluded, "By setting an exemplary benchmark, ABK aims to inspire and influence its peers and the wider financial community to prioritize and elevate governance standards, thereby contributing to the overall health and stability of the financial sector."

NEWS IN BRIEF

Anglo American to cut jobs

JOHANNESBURG: Mining giant Anglo American Platinum said on Monday it plans to cut thousands of jobs across its operations in South Africa as it reels from low metal prices. The company said it has started a restructuring process that will impact 3,700 employees — about 17 percent of its workforce — after its 2023 profit slumped 71 percent on the previous year. Coming just months before a general election and affecting a key economic sector, the job cuts are likely to reflect poorly on the government, which is already contending with high unemployment and lackluster growth. — AFP

Nintendo shares dive

TOKYO: Shares in Japan's Nintendo tumbled as much as 8.5 percent on Monday after a report suggesting that its next-generation console will be delayed until early 2025. The successor to the popular Switch was targeted for release at the end of this year but several publishers have now been told to expect it to slip into next year, Bloomberg News reported, citing unnamed sources. That would mean that the next console would miss the key Christmas holiday shopping period in December. — AFP

GlobalFoundries to get US boost

WASHINGTON: The United States plans to award giant chipmaker GlobalFoundries \$1.5 billion in direct funding to boost domestic chip production, the Commerce Department said on Monday. The world's third-largest contract chipmaker and the Commerce Department have penned a preliminary memorandum of terms to provide the funding "to strengthen US domestic supply chain resilience, bolster US competitiveness in current-generation and mature-node (C&M) semiconductor production," said a statement from the department. The deal will also support economic and national security capabilities, it added. — AFP

Zionist entity economy shrinks

JERUSALEM: The Zionist entity's GDP shrunk by almost one-fifth in the final quarter of 2023, compared to the three months prior, according to official figures published on Monday. The 19.4-percent fall in the final quarter was attributed to the scale of the ongoing Gaza war's effect on the high-tech nation's economy. Overall, Zionist entity's GDP grew by 2.0 percent in 2023, short of the 2.3 percent projection made by the entity's central bank after the war's outbreak in October, the Central Bureau of Statistics figures showed. It was the single worst quarter for the Zionist entity economy in terms of GDP per capita since the opening quarter of the COVID pandemic in early 2020. Exports fell by 18.3 percent and imports by 42.4 percent, fueled in part by airlines terminating flights and international shipping avoiding the Red Sea after Houthi rebels began attacking ships over Zionist entity war on Gaza. — AFP

China's new year spending surges past pre-COVID levels

SHANGHAI: China's new year holiday spending last week surged past pre-pandemic levels, official figures showed, a rare bright spot for an economy struggling with sluggish consumption and deflation. Domestic spending on entertainment, dining and travel soared during this year's "Golden Week", which officially ended on Saturday, according to a statement from Beijing's Ministry of Culture and Tourism on Sunday.

Chinese travelers made 474 million trips across the country during the eight-day break, up 19 percent from 2019, the ministry said — the world's largest annual migration. And domestic spending on tourism came in at 632.7 billion yuan (\$87.9 billion), up 7.7 percent from 2019, the ministry said.

This year's new year holiday was the country's second after the abrupt scrapping in late 2022 of China's strict zero-COVID pandemic policy, which depressed consumer spending and hit business confidence through snap lockdowns and lengthy quarantines. Mainland Chinese markets rose at the open on Monday after the holiday break, with the Shanghai Composite Index up 0.28 percent and the Shenzhen Composite Index on China's second exchange adding 1.16 percent.

The latest holiday data showed that "there was substantial pent-up demand to be released," Ting Lu, chief China economist at Nomura, said in a note on Monday. But he warned against reading too much into the strong spending figures, as "we need to take into account the very low base from last year during the height of the COVID 'exit wave'", referring to a rapid

Singapore to enforce gradual use of low-carbon jet fuel

SINGAPORE: Aviation hub Singapore will require airlines departing from the city-state to use sustainable aviation fuel (SAF) from 2026 as part of industry plans to cut carbon emissions, the transport minister said Monday.

But as the environmentally friendly fuel is three to five times more expensive than conventional jet fuel, authorities will introduce a levy on tickets to help cushion costs, Chee Hong Tat told an aviation summit. Aviation is responsible for between two and three percent of global CO2 emissions but it is one of the most diffi-

Natural pesticides gain ground in 'agri-tox' capital Brazil

MONTIVIDIU, Brazil: Inspecting a thriving green field, Brazilian farmer Adriano Cruvinel is beaming: Using a fraction of the chemical products he used to, he is growing even more soy, thanks to natural pesticides. Agricultural powerhouse Brazil may be the world leader in chemical pesticide use, but Cruvinel is part of a growing trend of farmers turning to natural products known as "biopesticides."

"Our soy is doing great," says the 36-year-old agricultural engineer, giving a tour of his 1,400-hectare (nearly 3,500-acre) farm in the central-western county of Montividiu, as combine harvesters work their way across a field. "Thanks to the microorganisms we apply to the crop, it's a lot more resistant to pests and disease." Brazil, the world's biggest exporter of soy, corn and cotton, is also the top consumer of chemical pesticides: nearly 720,000 metric



BEIJING: People queue to board trains at Beijing South Railway Station in Beijing on Feb 17, 2024 on the eighth day of the Lunar New Year of the Dragon. — AFP

surge in infections across the country in December 2022 and January 2023. While total spending was up, the average spending per trip was down 9.5 percent from 2019, according to Nomura calculations.

And analysts at Goldman Sachs also pointed to the "slightly longer-than-usual" holiday period this year, which they said "contributed to the record cross-region passenger flows and encouraged more long-haul travels". The national holiday in 2019 was seven days long, compared to this year's eight.

The holiday data comes after months of struggle by officials to kickstart growth in the face of a pro-

cult industries to decarbonize.

SAFs are produced from renewable biomass and waste resources and can comprise up to 50 percent of jet fuel mixes. They are seen as the main tool for decarbonizing the aviation sector, but the technology is still in its infancy and production remains expensive. "To kickstart SAF adoption in Singapore, we will require flights departing Singapore to use SAF from 2026," Chee said in a speech.

Airliners will be required to use a jet fuel mix that is 1 percent SAF that year, gradually increasing to between 3 and 5 percent by 2030, he added.

"This will provide an important demand signal to fuel producers and give them the incentive to invest in new SAF production facilities," Chee said. To partially offset the cost, Singapore will collect a levy that varies depending on the distance travelled and the travel class.

Starting in 2026, an economy ticket on a direct flight from Singapore to London could increase by Sg\$16.0 (\$12.0), according to Chee. Passengers with

premium tickets will pay higher levies.

"We will monitor global developments and the wider availability and adoption of SAF in the next few years, before deciding on the SAF target beyond 2026," Chee said.

The International Civil Aviation Organization has set a goal for the industry to achieve net zero carbon emissions by 2050, and SAF is key to reaching that target. Chee said that it was best to take a gradual approach. An "overly ambitious" target "will hurt our air hub and our economy, and raise the cost of travel for passengers," he said at the summit, which is being held on the eve of the Singapore Airshow, Asia's biggest aviation event.

Willie Walsh, director-general of the International Air Transport Association, called for increased SAF production through government incentives to meet demand. He said that while passenger traffic surged 175 percent from 2000 to 2019, the global aviation industry's carbon footprint rose by only 54 percent, an encouraging sign. — AFP

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Agronomist Adriano Cruvinel inspects the soybean plantation at one of the plots of the Bom Jardim Lagoano farm in the municipality of Montividiu, Goias State, Brazil. — AFP

still relies heavily on chemical pesticides, known here as "agrototoxicos," or "agri-toxic" products. Natural products grew from four percent of total pesticide sales in Brazil in 2020 to nine percent in 2022. Their use has expanded four times faster in Brazil than internationally, says Amalia Borsari, of CropLife Brasil, an organization representing the agricultural chemicals industry. "There has been exponential growth," she says. — AFP



US actress Emma Stone poses with the award for Best leading actress for her role in "Poor Things", British film producer and director Christopher Nolan poses with the award for Best film and Best director for "Oppenheimer", US actress Da'Vine Joy Randolph poses with the award for Best supporting actress for her role in "The Holdovers", Swedish music composer Ludwig Goransson poses with the award for Original score for "Oppenheimer" and US actor Robert Downey Jr poses on the red carpet upon arrival. — AFP photos

'OPPENHEIMER' DOMINATES BAFTAS IN MAJOR OSCARS BOOST



Dutch Sweden photography director Hoyte van Hoytema poses with the award for Best cinematography for "Oppenheimer".



British film editor Jennifer Lame poses with the award for Best editing for "Oppenheimer".



British actress Mia McKenna-Bruce poses with the award for EE rising star award.



Britain's Prince William, Prince of Wales, president of Bafta, arrives to attend the BAFTA British Academy Film Awards.

Oppenheimer", Christopher Nolan's epic movie about the creation of the atomic bomb, swept the board at Sunday's BAFTA film awards in London, delivering a serious statement ahead of next month's Oscars. The movie earned seven awards in total, including best film, best director for Nolan, best actor for Cillian Murphy and best supporting actor for Robert Downey Jr.

In the film, Murphy plays J. Robert Oppenheimer, the US theoretical physicist often called the "father of the atomic bomb" who was haunted by the consequences of his creation. The film has grossed more than \$1 billion, already won big at the Golden Globes and Critics Choice Awards and is now the clear frontrunner for Oscars glory.

It was Murphy's first BAFTA, and he thanked Nolan for "seeing something in me I probably didn't see myself" when collecting the award at the ceremony in London's Royal Festival Hall. He later told reporters the success was "mind-blowing", adding he was "thrilled and a little shocked". Despite boasting numerous commercial successes such as "Inception" and "The Dark Knight", Nolan had never won the best director BAFTA before.

It was Downey Jr's second BAFTA, having won the best actor gong 31 years ago for playing Charlie Chaplin. On accepting the award, the US star joked that Nolan advised he attempt an understated approach to the role of Lewis Strauss, a member of the US Atomic Energy Commission, in order to restore "my dwindling credibility".

'Poor things' wins five

It was also a good night for surreal dark comedy "Poor Things", which won five awards including best actress for Emma Stone, who also won the gong in 2017 for "La La Land". In the film, Stone plays a Victorian reanimated corpse brought back to life with the spirit of a child by a mad scientist in a female "Frankenstein" story.

The US actress has already scooped Golden Globe and Critics Choice best actress awards for her no-holds-barred performance. She beat off competition from "Barbie" star Margot Robbie, with both earlier hitting the red carpet along with fellow Hollywood heavyweights Carey Mulligan and Bradley Cooper.

Britain's royal family was represented at the ceremony, hosted by Scottish actor David Tennant, by Prince William in

his capacity as BAFTA president. It was his most important engagement since returning to duties following his wife Catherine's abdominal operation, and news of his father King Charles III's cancer diagnosis.



US film director Cord Jefferson poses with the award for Best adapted screenplay for "American fiction".



Sound engineer Johnnie Burn and Sound engineer Tarn Willers pose with the award for Best sound for "The zone of interest".

William saw US actress Da'Vine Joy Randolph pick up the best supporting actress award for her role in 1970s-set prep school comedy "The Holdovers". Randolph raised a laugh when she turned to UK actor Chiwetel Ejiofor, who gave her the award, and told him: "You are so handsome. I was hoping you were going to be here and woah. Worth it."

'Barbenheimer'

In the best film category, "Oppenheimer" won out ahead of French court-

room drama "Anatomy of a Fall", "The Holdovers" and Martin Scorsese's "Killers of the Flower Moon". Both Scorsese and his historical epic's leading man Leonardo DiCaprio missed out on individual BAFTA nods but the movie

wig's film, which turned nostalgia for the beloved doll into a sharp satire about misogyny and female empowerment, has so far failed to capture the number of top prizes expected of it this awards season.



US film producer Charles Roven (right), British film producer Emma Thomas (center) and British film producer and director Christopher Nolan (left), who also won Best Director Award, pose with the award for Best film for "Oppenheimer".



Ukrainian photojournalist Mstyslav Chernov poses with the award for Best documentary for "20 days in Mariupol".

amassed nine nominations in total, including for best film.

Cooper's biopic about US conductor Leonard Bernstein was also nominated for original screenplay (shared with screenwriter Josh Singer) and best actor. However, "The Hangover" star left the ceremony empty-handed.

The BAFTA shortlist was another disappointment for "Barbie" — the other half of last summer's "Barbenheimer" box office phenomenon — which only managed five nominations. Greta Ger-

Jonathan Glazer's harrowing "The Zone of Interest", about a Nazi concentration camp commander and his family living next to Auschwitz, took home three awards including best British film, best film not in the English language and best sound. "The Boy and the Heron" by celebrated Japanese animator Hayao Miyazaki won best animated film. — AFP



Animation film director Ross Stringer, Animation film producer Bartosz Stanislawek and Animation film screenwriter Aleksandra Sykulak pose with the award for Best British short animation for "Crab day".



British film director Jonathan Glazer and Film producer James Wilson pose with the award for Outstanding British film and for Best adapted screenplay for "The zone of interest".



Britain's Prince William, Prince of Wales, president of Bafta, speaks with US-Australian actress Cate Blanchett during the BAFTA British Academy Film Awards.



Ukrainian photojournalist Mstyslav Chernov, US film and documentary producer Raney Aronson Rath and US film and documentary producer Michelle Mizner pose with the award for Best documentary for "20 days in Mariupol".



English former football player David Beckham poses with British screenwriter and film director Savannah Leaf, British producer Shirley O'Connor and British producer Medb Riordan as they pose with the award for Outstanding debut by a British writer, director or producer for "Earth Mama".

Winners of Baftas 2024

Best film Oppenheimer	Best director Christopher Nolan, Oppenheimer	Best casting The Holdovers	Best sound The Zone of Interest
Outstanding British film The Zone of Interest	Best original screenplay Anatomy of a Fall	Best cinematography Oppenheimer	Best special visual effects Poor Things
Outstanding debut by a British writer, director or producer O'Connor (producer), Medb Riordan (producer)	Best adapted screenplay American Fiction	Best editing Oppenheimer	Best British short animation Crab Day
Best film not in the English language The Zone of Interest	Best leading actress Emma Stone, Poor Things	Best costume design Poor Things	Best British short film Jellyfish and Lobster
Best documentary 20 Days in Mariupol	Best leading actor Cillian Murphy, Oppenheimer	Best makeup and hair Poor Things	EE Rising Star award (voted for by the public) Mia McKenna-Bruce
Best animated film The Boy and the Heron	Best supporting actress Da'Vine Joy Randolph, The Holdovers	Best original score Oppenheimer	
	Best supporting actor Robert Downey Jr, Oppenheimer	Best production design Poor Things	

IDCK, KRCS organize charity bazaar for Gaza children

By Faten Omar

The International Diplomatic Club Kuwait and Kuwait Red Crescent Society organized a charity bazaar for the children of Gaza on Monday titled AlJoud Bazaar at Al Baraka Hall of Crowne Plaza Hotel. The international charity bazaar launched with the participation and in the presence of the wives of ambassadors, diplomats, officials and ambassadors.

Speaking on the sidelines of the bazaar, Rima Khaldi, wife of the Palestinian Ambassador to Kuwait, Vice President of the International Diplomatic Club Kuwait and Chair of the AlJoud Bazaar Committee, emphasized the remarkable collaboration witnessed at the event, with over 60 embassies and 40 Kuwaiti and non-Kuwaiti companies joining forces, a testament to solidarity and support for the children of Gaza.

Sheikha Rima Al-Sabah, wife of the former minister of foreign affairs Sheikh Salem Al-Sabah, conceived the idea, highlighting a collective effort aimed at making a meaningful difference in the lives of children affected by the war. Khaldi extended heartfelt thanks to Kuwait Red Crescent Society for its invaluable cooperation, acknowledging its

pivotal role in making the event a success. She reserved special appreciation for Kuwait, recognizing its unwavering and enduring support for the Palestinian cause, both from its leadership and its people.

Turning attention to the Palestinian booth, she highlighted the showcasing of Palestinian artisanal products, notably Palestinian cuisine and olive oil. These products, emblematic of Palestinian identity, symbolize peace and resilience, representing the essence and strength of the Palestinian people with their deep-rooted heritage and traditions.

Dr Sahar Al-Rifai, wife of Salah Mohammed Al-Baijan, Ambassador of Kuwait to the UAE, and a representative of the wives of Kuwaiti ambassadors at the ministry of foreign affairs, commended the exceptional nature of the bazaar, emphasizing its charitable purpose in aiding the children of Palestine. As a gathering point for the wives of Arab and foreign ambassadors in Kuwait, as well as the spouses of Kuwaiti ambassadors at the ministry of foreign affairs, the International Diplomatic Club played a central role in coordinating this philanthropic endeavor.

Rifai expressed gratitude for the cooperation extended by the



Sheikha Rima Al-Sabah with the wife of Palestinian Ambassador Rima Khaldi touring the bazaar. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat

Red Crescent, which ensures the secure transfer of funds to support the children of Gaza. With over 50 pavilions from Kuwaiti companies, the level of engagement exceeded expectations, fostering hope for the continued success of such humanitarian initiatives in the years to come.

Director General of Kuwait Red Crescent Society Abdulrahman Al-Aoun highlighted the significant turnout at the bazaar, noting that over 40 Red Crescent volunteers deployed to assist embassies in managing sales

and collecting proceeds. "The cooperation witnessed was both fruitful and impactful. The primary objective of today's bazaar was to boost sales to benefit the children of Gaza, aligning with Kuwait and Kuwait Red Crescent Society's longstanding commitment to providing comprehensive aid," he said.

"Negotiations are underway to deploy a ship to transport relief aid from Kuwait to Gaza via Port Said, Egypt, in collaboration with the Egyptian Red Crescent and under Kuwait Red Crescent

volunteers' supervision. This ensures aid reaches the Palestinian territories, with ongoing follow-up by local volunteers and charitable organizations to address the evolving needs of those in Gaza. Proceeds from today's bazaar will be allocated based on the specific requirements of children in Gaza, with direct communication established with volunteers on the ground to ensure timely and targeted assistance," Aoun added.

Meanwhile, Ambassador Zubaydullo Zubaydzoda, Dean of the Diplomatic Corps and Ambassador of the Republic of Tajikistan to Kuwait, lauded the bazaar as one of the most commendable initiatives of the year, citing its crucial support for the Palestinian people amidst ongoing hardships, particularly evident in Gaza, expressing deep concern for the distressing situation unfolding in Gaza.

Zubaydzoda emphasized the importance of international cooperation in providing aid and relief to alleviate the suffering endured by Palestinians. He indicated that there was a notable diplomatic representation from Asia, Europe, Africa and the Gulf region, underscoring a unified stance in advocating for a ceasefire and an end to the violence in Gaza.



Poland's booth



Togo's booth



Egypt's booth



Canada's booth



Jordan's booth



Great turnout at the bazaar.



France's booth



Iraq's booth



Turkey's booth

Sports

No Kohli, no problem: Jaiswal leads charge of bright new India

'Really good to see these players grabbing the chances with both hands'

RAJKOT: Talented young batsmen Yashasvi Jaiswal and Sarfaraz Khan were hailed Monday as the future of Indian cricket after they led their team to a monumental Test victory over England. The left-handed Jaiswal, hit an unbeaten 214 and put on a destructive 172-run partnership with debutant Sarfaraz to set up India's 434-run win in Rajkot on Sunday.

There had been fears for India's inexperienced batting line-up with former captain Virat Kohli out for the series for undisclosed personal reasons and KL Rahul injured. Already missing destructive wicketkeeper batsman Rishabh Pant, who is still not quite ready to return after being hurt in a car crash in December 2022, it meant four of India's top five had just 33 Test caps between them.

But the new batsmen more than rose to the challenge, with the 22-year-old Jaiswal scoring a double century in Rajkot for the second match in a row and Sarfaraz, aged 26, making 62 and 68 on his first Test outing.

"Double hundred. Double fifty. This duo of Yashasvi & Sarfaraz has been double trouble for England," cricket icon Sachin Tendulkar wrote on X, formerly Twitter. Jaiswal, once a homeless boy in Mumbai who sold street food to pursue his sporting passion, scored 171 on debut in the West Indies last year and has never looked back.

He averages 71.75 in seven Tests, leads the series batting chart with 545 runs, and needs 139 in his next innings to become the fourth-quickest batsman in history to 1,000 Test runs, and the fastest in 75 years.

Sarfaraz, 26, was presented with his Test cap by spin great Anil Kumble, with his teary-eyed wife and father looking on, and he handled the England spinners with panache and was unlucky to be run out in the first innings.

"We need to see him in a few more Test matches," former chief selector MSK Prasad told Kolkata-based newspaper The Telegraph. "Jaiswal definitely has the ingredients to be the next superstar. He's proving to be an all-format player." The opportunities came knocking at their door just ahead of the transition period for Indian cricket, and it was really good to see these players grabbing the chances with both hands."

'Instant hit'

India have introduced a string of new players in the series including Rajat Patidar, 30, who made his debut in the second Test. Dhruv Jurel, the 23-year-old wicketkeeper who won his first Test cap in Rajkot alongside



RAJKOT: India's Yashasvi Jaiswal (C) celebrates after scoring a double century (200 runs) during the fourth day of the third Test cricket match between India and England at the Niranjan Shah Stadium in Rajkot. — AFP

Sarfaraz, was dubbed "an instant hit on debut" by the Indian Express newspaper.

"Yashasvi Jaiswal is a special talent, that he can play defensively 50 balls, so (has) good technique against the new ball, and unleash and get into T20 mode immediately," former batsman Sanjay Manjrekar told website cricinfo.

Sarfaraz, he added, "plays spin the best. And while watching him bat in the two innings I think India have found a brilliant middle-over batter for 50 overs cricket." England's aggressive "Bazball" brand of cricket won them the opening encounter of the five-match series but they have lost the next two, and the Times of India newspaper headlined

its report "BAZBALL TO BUST".

Jurel made 46 in the first innings and effected a sharp run out on Ben Duckett to trigger an England collapse on the fourth day. "Big victory, obviously it's a very good feeling to win a game like that, and especially with such a young team as well," said skipper Rohit Sharma. — AFP

Abdullah Hani wins French squash tourney



PARIS: Kuwaiti squash player Abdullah Hani (centre). — KUNA

PARIS: Kuwaiti Squash player Abdullah Hani won first place on Sunday in the French Junior Open Squash tournament (Under 15 years) after defeating English player George Griffith in the finals.

The match ended with Hani scoring 32 points against Griffith's 17 points, the two played a tough match consisting of five close games, 11-5, 11-7, 6-11, and 17-15.

The tournament, which started last Thursday in Lille, France, witnessed great competitions with 300 players participating from around the world. — KUNA

F1 urges speedy end to Red Bull's Horner inquiry

PARIS: Formula One on Sunday called for Red Bull to resolve their investigation into team principal Christian Horner "at the earliest opportunity". The world champions' build-up to the new season was blown off course by an accusation of inappropriate and controlling behaviour levelled at Horner by a female member of staff.

Red Bull's parent company, the Austrian drinks giant, appointed an external lawyer to take charge of the inquiry. Horner was subjected to an eight-hour quizzing by the lawyer at a secret London location last week, days before one of the most successful

team bosses of all time appeared at the 2024 car's launch on Thursday.

Formula One made its first public comments on the affair that has rocked the sport three days before pre-season testing begins in Bahrain on Wednesday. "We have noted Red Bull has instigated an independent investigation into internal allegations at Red Bull Racing. We hope that the matter will be clarified at the earliest opportunity, after a fair and thorough process," F1's statement read.

It added: "We will not comment further at this time." When news of the affair surfaced in Dutch newspaper De Telegraaf Red Bull confirmed they had launched an investigation and said they were taking it "extremely seriously". Horner, who has overseen seven drivers world championships and six constructors titles since joining the team on their arrival in F1 in 2005, categorically denies any accusation of improper behaviour.

At this week's car launch the 50-year-old Horn-



Christian Horner

er insisted it was "business as usual" whilst admitting the investigation was "a distraction". Red Bull were dominant on the track in 2023, winning 21 of 22 Grands Prix as Max Verstappen romped to a third consecutive drivers' championship. — AFP

Merlier wins stage 1 of UAE Tour

ABU DHABI: Soudal-Quick Step rider Tim Merlier burst from the middle of the bunch to storm past his rivals and win stage 1 on the UAE Tour at Liwa on Monday. The finale was marred by a high-speed fall with around 20 riders hitting the tarmac hard and three-quarters of the peloton caught behind it.

The fall was caused by a shoulder barge with some riders taken away by ambulance. Merlier had predicted a fight for the opening stage due to the quality of the field. "It's my first win of the sea-

son so I'm very happy," said the 31-year-old who has previously won stages at the Giro d'Italia and the Tour de France.

"I made the decision to ride round from the side because I was blocked. I saw (Fernando) Gaviria (Team UAE) go. I could see the finish line so I went for it," said the broadly smiling Belgian at the finish line.

Contrary to the weather forecast, there were cross winds in the finale and very little sand on the road despite the route running through sand dunes on a 141km opening run in the seven stage race. Of the field of top sprinters at the event, which includes four flat stages, two climbs and one time trial, British veteran Mark Cavendish and Dutch fast-man Dylan Groenewegen were caught behind the fall while Elia Viviani fell hard. Tuesday's stage is a 12.1km individual time trial raced on an atypical route featuring almost no turns. — AFP



ABU DHABI: The pack rides during stage 1 of the 6th UAE Tour 2024, from Al Dhafra Walk to Liwa, on February 19, 2024. — AFP

Hungary's top fencer Siklosi puts team first on road to Olympics

BUDAPEST: Training starts with playful exercises for 2019 world epee champion and Tokyo Olympic silver medallist Gergely Siklosi before he breaks sweat in fierce duels with his fellow Hungarian fencers. The 26-year-old is training hard at Aladar Gerevich National Sportshall in Budapest to get back to the top.

He suffered some setbacks in recent competitions, dropping to 11th place on the world rankings. Yet, he still has high hopes for the Paris Olympics this summer. "We have team-oriented qualifications. If the team qualifies, there is a good chance that we will get three qualification quotas for individuals. Whereas if only I would qualify individually, the country would only have one quota" Siklosi told AFP.

He is optimistic about the team's chances at the Heidenheimer Pokal in late February and at the Bue-

nos Aires Omar Vergara World Cup in March. "We are in a good position, we don't need to do a huge feat in the last two competitions, but we want to come home with medals," he added.

'Healthy rivalry'

The young fencer previously demonstrated he was ready to put the team first last July when in the semi-finals, he faced his teammate Mate Koch at the World Championships in Milan. After losing by one point in a dramatic bout on the piste, he hugged Koch, congratulating him on the win.

"I wanted to avoid repeating the events of the 2019 World Championship, where I won the individual competition, but couldn't do as well with the team." "I said to myself there that it's not a problem, I want to be the most useful as a part of the team, I can't be angry because I already have a world title and we want to get an Olympic championship together" Siklosi recalled.

According to him, he and the three other members of Hungary's national team have a close relationship. "I respect them, and we love each other very much, I feel. We work together every day... We can discuss everything, any (interpersonal) conflicts, but there is

not much. We can absolutely have a healthy rivalry, and we even tease each other about it."

Army sergeant

Siklosi also learned the value of teamwork at the Hungarian Defence Forces, which he joined in 2017. He is a sergeant of the army's Sports Company made up exclusively of elite sportsmen and women. The young fencer credits basic training and the military's hierarchical system for giving him discipline, a good stance, and a lot of other positive benefits, which he can put to good both on and outside of the piste.

As a fencer, Siklosi follows an intensive regimen around the clock, with general training sessions twice a day, long-distance running exercises over the weekend and regular visits to the psychologist. He strives to be in tip-top shape both physically and mentally for the Olympics.

Siklosi is mostly afraid of the French rivals as he believes they "will be strong in absolute terms on their home turf" at the Olympics. But he stressed the whole field is evenly matched, so "everybody has to be treated with the proper humility and attention." "It's a sport where I could easily end up being either the last or the first at the Olympics." — AFP



BUDAPEST: Hungarian epee fencer, world champion and 2021 Tokyo Olympic silver medallist Gergely Siklosi gives a thumbs up after a training session at the Aladar Gerevich National Sportshall in Budapest, Hungary. — AFP

Sports

Inzaghi pushing red-hot Inter to new heights as Atletico come to town

‘We’re now in that period where matches are all close together’

MILAN: Simone Inzaghi is on the verge of a major breakthrough at Inter Milan as the Serie A leaders push towards the first Serie A title of his coaching career and eye another deep run in the Champions League.

Inter are in red-hot form as they await the visit of Atletico Madrid on Tuesday, eight wins from eight in 2024 giving them the Italian Super Cup and a nine-point lead over Juventus in Italy's top flight—with a game in hand.

Inzaghi has long been viewed as a cup coach, one who can win the domestic knockout baubles but isn't capable of challenging for football's biggest prizes.

But last year's run to the Champions League final and their imperious current campaign in Serie A suggests that Inzaghi belongs at the top table. Inter have two points fewer than reigning champions Napoli—who charged to the Scudetto with five matches to spare—did at the same point last season. However Inter have scored a goal more and have a better goal difference than Napoli did after 24 games, on their way to finishing a triumphant season 16 points clear.

“We're now in that period where the matches are all close together so we're going to have to good enough to react to problems,” said Inzaghi after Friday's 4-0 thrashing of Salernitana.

Inter destroyed Serie A's bottom team to win their eighth straight match after statement victories over Juve and Roma, leaving fans wondering just how far their team can go in Europe's top club competition. “We're playing really well,” Inzaghi added. “It's difficult, you have to wait until the end of the season to make any conclusions.”

New heights

What makes Inter's season even more remarkable is that it comes after yet another pre-season in which big players left and serious financial problems hampered their summer transfer activity.

Inter weren't even sure who their first-choice goalkeeper was going to be until a fortnight before the start of the season after Andre Onana was sold to Manchester United in a 57 million-euro deal.

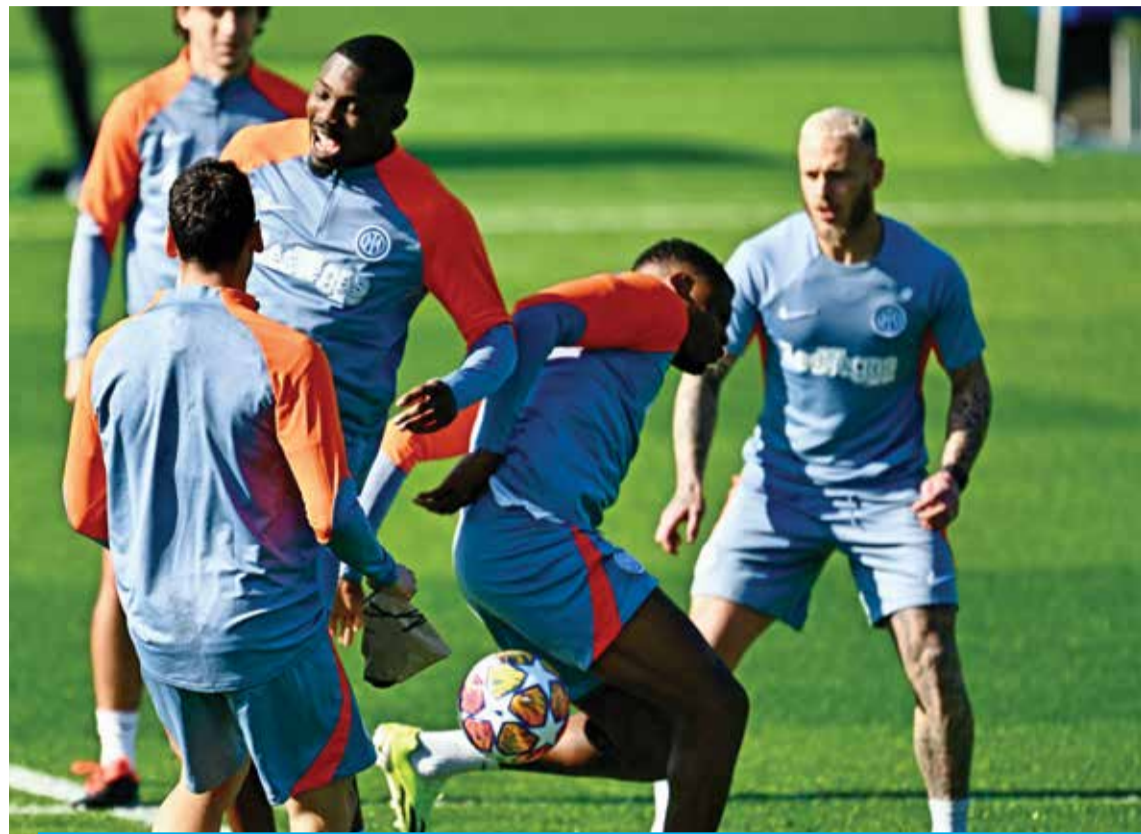
Yann Sommer, Bayern Munich's reserve keeper, was brought in for a relative pittance, while Benjamin Pavard didn't arrive until transfer deadline day but has since slotted perfectly into Inter's three-man defence.

Meanwhile free transfer Marcus Thuram immediately struck up a devastating partnership with Lautaro Martinez, making the loss of Edin Dzeko and Romelu Lukaku almost entirely pain free.

Inzaghi's ability to adapt to and get the best out of a changing cast of players has been a hallmark of his reign in Milan and it has created a special looking team.

Just how good Inzaghi's latest Inter team are compared to previous years will be revealed over two clashes with Atletico, a tough team with an even tougher manager in Diego Simeone.

“They're physical, they know what they're doing, they have lots of great players coached by a really good manager who was also a great teammate,” said Inzaghi of Atletico. Tuesday will be the second straight match Inzaghi faces a former Lazio teammate in the opposing dugout after swatting aside Fabio Liverani's Salernitana. A similar performance on Tuesday would give Inter and Inzaghi a great chance of continuing their push for European glory.—AFP



APPIANO GENTILE: Inter Milan's French forward #09 Marcus Thuram attends a training session with teammates on the eve of the UEFA Champions League last 16 first leg football match Inter Milan vs Atletico Madrid at the training center in Appiano Gentile near Milan on February 19, 2024. — AFP

Monza stun Milan in Serie A rollercoaster

MILAN: AC Milan squandered the opportunity to dislodge Juventus from second place in Serie A on Sunday when they lost 4-2 in a rollercoaster clash at Monza. The result left Milan in third place with 52 points, two behind Juve and 11 back from league leaders and bitter rivals Inter.

Matteo Pessina, with a penalty on the stroke of half-time after a rash tackle by Malick Thiaw, and a Dany Mota strike gave mid-table Monza a 2-0 lead at the interval. Monza appeared to be cruising to victory when Milan were reduced to 10 men in the 54th minute after Luka Jovic was red-carded for hitting an opponent.

Milan coach Stefano Pioli was forced to summon heavyweights Rafael Leao, Christian Pulisic and Olivier Giroud from the bench and the changes reaped an immediate dividend. Giroud was set-up by Pulisic to score his 12th goal of the season just after the hour with Pulisic himself making it 2-2 in the 88th minute.

However, young French star Warren Bondo gave Monza the advantage again with a superb 20-metre

drive in the 90th minute before Lorenzo Colombo added a fourth goal from another penalty in injury time. “It's a defeat that really hurts, the night could not have gone any worse,” said Pioli. Lazio followed their victory over Bayern Munich in the Champions League by throwing away an early lead to lose 2-1 at home to Bologna. Lazio seemed to be building on their momentum when Gustav Isaksen gave them an 18th minute lead.

Bologna fought back with Morocco international Oussama El Azzouzi, making his first start since returning from the Africa Cup of Nations, levelling in the 39th minute. Dutchman Joshua Zirkzee earned the visitors victory with his eighth goal of the season in the 78th minute. Bologna stay fifth but their fourth consecutive victory lifted them level on points with Atalanta who have a game in hand. “It was an important test for us and we responded by producing our football for 90 minutes, but it's still too early to think about qualifying for the Champions League,” said Bologna coach Thiago Motta.

Roma occupy sixth place on 41 points, five behind Bologna after a 3-0 win at Frosinone. Since taking over from Jose Mourinho as coach, Daniele De Rossi has reinvigorated Roma with a haul of 12 points over Nice and two points behind Brest. Paris Saint-Germain, who beat Nantes 2-0 on Saturday, Juventus could only draw 2-2 at relegation-threatened Verona and slipped nine points behind leaders Inter who beat Salernitana 4-0 on Friday.—AFP



MONZA: AC Milan's Portuguese forward #10 Rafael Leao (R) slides during the Italian Serie A football match between AC Monza and AC Milan at the Brianteo stadium in Monza. — AFP

dered another golden opportunity from close range after being set up by Thilo Kehrer.

Toulouse made Monaco pay in the 70th minute when a corner fell for defender Logan Costa to fire in. “We've had too many ups and downs this season,” said Monaco coach Adi Hutter whose team have taken just one point from their last four home matches. “You can

analyse things and talk about tactics but we're simply not competitive enough.”

Monaco are now fifth on 38 points, level with Lille, who beat Le Havre 3-0 on Saturday, one point behind Nice and two points behind Brest. Paris Saint-Germain, who beat Nantes 2-0 on Saturday, are clear leaders on 53 points, 13 ahead of Brest.—AFP



BREST: Brest's French forward #22 Jeremy Le Douaron (R) is tackled by Marseille's Cameroonian midfielder #17 Jean Onana (L) and Brest's French defender #19 Jordan Amavi (C) during the French L1 football match between Stade Brestois 29 (Brest) and Olympique de Marseille (OM) at the Francis-Le Ble stadium in Brest. — AFP

FIFPRO says AFC Champions League ‘unsustainable’

HONG KONG: The current Asian Champions League is “unsustainable”, the global footballers' union FIFPRO said in a report Monday, accusing the regional governing body of failing to listen to players and clubs. The continent's top club competition is in the spotlight like never before after Saudi teams shelled out on the likes of Cristiano Ronaldo, Neymar and Karim Benzema.

The round of 16 began on Tuesday last week, three days after the final of the Asian Cup, which was won by hosts Qatar. The Asian Football Confederation (AFC) is responsible for both competitions, which span a vast area from Australia to the Middle East and Central Asia. The current Champions League is split into two zones, “West” and “East”, until a two-legged final home and away.

Starting in the next campaign, there will also be a geographical split at the start of the tournament, but the quarter-finals, semi-finals and final will be held in Saudi Arabia. FIFPRO said this remodelled version, which will see the winner take home an increased cheque of \$12 million, was also unsustainable.

Takuya Yamazaki, FIFPRO's chairman for Oceania-Asia, hopes its report will “spark meaningful discussions with governing bodies, leagues, clubs and fans” about the Champions League. “The results indicate that, as anticipated, the merits do not outweigh the drawbacks for most players and clubs, making it an unsustainable system,” he said in the report. FIFPRO accused the AFC of adopting “a top-down approach that excludes the voices of players and clubs from decision-making”. It called on the AFC to forge “a genuine partnership with players, clubs and leagues to ensure that the competition delivers for all parties”. Among its conclusions, the 49-page report said that the average quality of teams in the Champions League was inferior to the top domestic divisions in Japan, South Korea and Saudi Arabia. It said the average quality of the competition was also going down.—AFP

Brest go second in Ligue 1 as Marseille hit ‘rock bottom’

PARIS: Brest continued their remarkable season with a 1-0 win at home to “rock bottom” Marseille on Sunday sending them up to second in Ligue 1. The Breton side, who played for 30 minutes with 10 men after Steve Mounie was shown a red card for violent conduct, grabbed the points when former Norwich midfielder Pierre Lees-Melou scored the only goal of the game in the 88th minute.

Marseille have now gone six games without a win and find themselves down in ninth in the midst of yet another crisis. “I think we've hit rock bottom this evening. We're in a whirlwind, a vicious circle,” said Marseille coach Gennaro Gattuso. “There is very little to say this evening, we just have to assume our responsibilities, ask forgiveness from the supporters, ask forgiveness from this jersey because, tonight, what we produced is unacceptable.”

Victory lifts Brest above Nice, who lost to Lyon on Friday, Lille and Monaco who missed their own chance to go second when they were beaten 2-1 at home by Toulouse earlier on Sunday. Toulouse opened the scoring in the 41st minute when skipper Vincent Sierro caught Monaco goalkeeper Philipp Kohn out of position on a free-kick.

Monaco levelled just after the restart through Maghnes Aklouché but failed to capitalise on a host of other chances. Centre-forward Folarin Balogun was the main culprit. The American luffed an early one-on-one with goalkeeper Guillaume Restes and then squan-

PSV's Bosz eyes Champions League redemption

THE HAGUE: PSV Eindhoven coach Peter Bosz has added incentive for Tuesday's Champions League last-16 clash against Borussia Dortmund—he spent a miserable few months at the Bundesliga giants culminating in a humiliating sacking.

The 60-year-old Dutchman has enjoyed a remarkable season with runaway Eredivisie leaders PSV, who equalled a top-flight record by winning their first 17 league games. PSV are now gunning for their first Champions League quarter-final since the 2007-2008 season, as Eindhoven fans dare to dream of emulating Guus Hiddink's class of 1988 which lifted the cup.

But Bosz will have a personal point to prove against Dortmund, who tempted him away from Ajax in June 2017, paying a Bundesliga record five million euros (\$5.4m) in compensation. The Bosz reign started brightly enough. Six wins from the first seven games led some to speculate that Dortmund could finally dethrone perennial champions Bayern Munich.

But the rot started to set in by mid-October, when Dortmund embarked on a run of five games without a win, piling the pressure on the new coach. The domestic woes were compounded by failure in Europe, with Dortmund crashing out of the Champions League group stage without a single win. However, the low point came on November 25, in a famous game at home against bitter local derby rivals Schalke 04. Dortmund were 4-0 up within 25 minutes but somehow contrived to draw the game 4-4, leaving the home fans—and backroom bosses—furious.

At a board meeting the following day, CEO Hans-Joachim Watzke told booing club members: “I feel just as shitty as you all... I have never experienced anything like that.” Media slammed Bosz's 4-3-3 system and he failed to get the best out of star striker Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang, who eventually transferred to Arsenal after several disciplinary issues at Dortmund. The die was cast and Bosz was finally sacked on December 10, after just 167 days in charge. “Bye, Bye, Bosz,” headlined mass circulation daily Bild.

‘Poison in the group’

When the last 16 draw was made against his old employers, Bosz was diplomatic, describing Dortmund as a “big club” with one of the strongest fan-bases in Europe. “I still know a lot of people at the club and I'm looking forward to it,” he said.

But in an interview with the Algemeen Dagblad late last year, he revealed the behind-the-scenes difficulties, notably with Aubameyang and French striker Ousmane Dembele. Bosz said the trouble started when Dembele disappeared from training, only to surface in Monaco, where he was in secret contract talks with Barcelona. The day after Dembele left, Aubameyang turned up late for training. And the next day, finally, Bosz suspended him after he filmed a commercial on the pitch without permission.

“I learned from that. The situation became poison in the group,” said Bosz. After a year on the sidelines, Bosz eventually returned to the Bundesliga with Bayer Leverkusen. In his third season in charge there, the team was top at the winter break but things fell apart rapidly after that and he was sacked again, heading to Lyon. The pattern repeated itself and he was fired from the French club in October 2022 after a poor run of form, finally joining PSV in June last year. PSV come into Tuesday's game at the Philips Stadium suffering a small blip in form from their flying start.

Hampered by a long injury list, they were held 1-1 by a resurgent Ajax earlier in the month. However, they remain unbeaten with a sizeable gap over the chasing pack. They warmed up for the big European clash with a 2-0 home win against Heracles.

Meanwhile, Dortmund sit fourth in the Bundesliga but have a strong record in Europe, topping the so-called Champions League group of death ahead of Paris St-Germain, AC Milan, and Newcastle. They drew 1-1 away at Wolfsburg on Saturday.—AFP



KUWAIT: The victorious The Warriors team with their trophy. — KUNA

The Warriors win Kuwait Ice Hockey League championship

Al Bahrain team defeat Mosadz to claim third place

KUWAIT: The Warriors team won the men's title of Kuwait Ice Hockey League for the 2023-2024 season for the first time after its deserved win over the Stars 10-5, as the Stars took second place.

The final match of the league that was organized by the Winter Games Club was competitive between the two teams during the first two periods as the scores were close but the Warriors were able to decide the result in the third period. Al Bahrain team from Bahrain defeated Mosadz 10-7 to claim third place.

Vice President of Kuwait Olympic Committee Sheikh Mubarak Faisal Al-Nawaf Al-Sabah said the

committee is keen on supporting the club's activities as it oversees Winter Olympic Games and they are not less important than those of the Summer Olympics. He added that he saw Kuwaiti talents that proved their outstanding abilities in this game which calls for providing all means to improve their levels as he lauded the club's efforts to promote the games that it oversees.

Public Authority for Sport Deputy Director General for Competitive Sports sector Bashar Abdullah said the club was able to take the winter games including players, referees, coaches and administrators to new levels as evident by the large number of Ku-

waitis who play the games particularly ice hockey.

Abdullah said the authority supports all federations and successful clubs to care for Kuwaiti players to make achievements in the championships abroad.

Chairman of Winter Games Club Fuhaid Al-Ajmi said the league championship began in September, and the matches were highly competitive especially after Al Bahrain team joined, adding that the club seeks to bring in Gulf teams to form a Gulf League.

He said focus will be given to preparing Kuwait players for the International Championship to be hosted by Kuwait under the auspices of the International Federation of the game. — KUNA

Hojlund makes EPL history as Man Utd hold off Luton 2-1

LUTON: Rasmus Hojlund made Premier League (EPL) history as the Manchester United striker's double ensured his side survived a scare from lowly Luton in their 2-1 win on Sunday. Hojlund became the youngest player to score in six consecutive Premier League games after netting twice in the first seven minutes at Kenilworth Road. At 21 years 14 days old, Hojlund surpassed Newcastle midfielder Joe Willock's previous record set when he was 21 years 272 days old. Ruud van Nistelrooy scored in 10 successive United top-flight outings in 2003 before Leicester's Jamie Vardy beat his Premier league record with 11 in a row in 2015. After failing to score in his first 14 Premier League appearances following his August move from Atalanta, Hojlund has scored eight times in his last eight games in all competitions. His brace should have put United in complete control, but Luton fought back impressively as Carlton Morris quickly reduced the deficit.

Erik ten Hag's side were under siege for spells and wasted several chances to kill off fourth-bottom Luton in a tense finale. Praising Hojlund's mentality, Ten Hag said: "We recruited him on his character, I knew it was strong. "He can really perform under stress and that is something you need from a Man United striker." "He doesn't get nervous or lose confidence. He has a lot of confidence and I'm sure he will score even more." Hojlund added: "I need to say thanks to my teammates and the coach because they have showed me great confidence and kept believing in me. "I knew as well that I could score goals but of course it was annoying I didn't score in the Premier League." Sixth placed United's fourth consecutive league victory moved them within five points of fourth placed Aston Villa in the race to qualify for next season's Champions League.

For long periods during a difficult season, that target has seemed beyond United, but Hojlund's prolific form has given them renewed hope. "We are back in the race and we are building momentum. We need to build pressure. Every game is a final to get closer." Ten Hag said. With just 37 seconds gone, Hojlund intercepted Amari'i Bell's dreadful back pass, rounded keeper Thomas Kaminski and slotted into the empty



LUTON: Luton Town's English striker #09 Carlton Morris (center) heads their first goal past Manchester United's Cameroonian goalkeeper #24 Andre Onana (left) during the English Premier League football match between Luton Town and Manchester United on February 18, 2024. — AFP

net. United's fastest league goal this season was followed by Hojlund's second in the seventh minute. When Alejandro Garnacho smashed a volley towards goal from a United corner, the strike hit Hojlund's chest and deflected into the net.

United hold on

But Morris gave Luton an unexpected lifeline in the 14th minute when the burly striker headed in from close-range after Tahith Chong's shot deflected into his path. Gabriel Osho should have equalized, but the Luton defender headed wide from a corner. Morris went closer with a thunderous strike that whistled just wide from the edge of the area after Garnacho carelessly lost possession.

United left-back Luke Shaw was forced off just before the break with his latest injury in a season marred by fitness issues. Luton wasted another chance to equalize as Alfie Doughty swept wide from a good position. Ten Hag

replaced Casemiro and Harry Maguire with Jonny Evans and Scott McTominay at half-time in a bid to stem Luton's momentum. Despite the change, Luton pummeled United immediately after the break, with Cauley Woodrow and Chong both threatening an equalizer. Marcus Rashford, Garnacho and Bruno Fernandes all squandered good opportunities to restore United's two-goal advantage.

Garnacho was especially culpable when he ran clean through on goal, but allowed Kaminski to get a touch on the ball as he tried to round him. The United winger still had a chance to score but delayed too long and Bell was able to clear. Fernandes shook his head in disbelief at Garnacho's blunder and the United midfielder's frustration was on display again when Kaminski repelled his own free-kick. Luton never gave up and Ross Barkley was inches away from spoiling Hojlund's memorable day in stoppage-time when his header grazed the bar. — AFP



DOHA: Ireland's Daniel Wiffen poses with the best male swimmer of the tournament trophy next to US' Claire Curzan (right) who poses with the best female swimmer of the tournament trophy. — AFP

Sjostrom, Wiffen end swim worlds with a splash

DOHA: Swedish sprint queen Sarah Sjostrom secured her 14th world title and Ireland's Daniel Wiffen lit up the 1500m freestyle and won a bet with his coach in the process as the curtain came down on the 2024 world aquatics championships on Sunday. Elsewhere in the pool in Doha, Isaac Cooper became the first Australian to win the men's 50m backstroke title and Ruta Meilutyte claimed her third straight 50m breaststroke gold.

Sjostrom took her world title tally to 14 in the 50m freestyle, 24 hours after sealing gold in the 50m butterfly and 13 years after she set the ball rolling at the 2009 championships in Rome. The 30-year-old sent a warning shot across the bows of her younger rivals ahead of the Olympic Games in Paris in five months' time, touching the wall in a time of 23.69, knocking on the door of her own world record. American Kate Douglass came in second at 23.91 ahead of Katarzyna Wasick of Poland (23.95).

This was Sjostrom's fourth gold in the dash and her third in a row. "The girls next to me were very fast but I was still able to focus on myself," she said. "It gives me a lot of confidence coming up to Paris. "I knew this was going to be a tougher race than the fly yesterday." Another swimmer putting down a marker for Paris was Wiffen who controlled the 1500m freestyle from start to finish. He began strongly to open up a large gap and looked on target to trouble the world record of 14mins 31.02sec set by China's Sun Yang at the London 2012 Olympics.

In the end he touched the wall in 14mins 34.07sec, almost 20 meters ahead of second placed German Florian Wellbrock (14:44.61) with France's David Aubry third (14:44.85). Wiffen was doubling up after claiming the 800m freestyle title on Wednesday. "I'm so happy to come away with a personal best and two world titles," he commented. — AFP