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Gaza death toll nears 30,000

UN agencies warn of 'imminent' famine



KUWAIT: The 44th relief plane of Kuwait airlift heads to Al-Arish airport in Egypt with 10 tons of food and tents for the Palestinians in Gaza. (Right) This picture shows a camp for internally displaced Palestinians in Rafah, on the southern Gaza Strip on February 28, 2024. — KUNA, AFP photos

NEWS IN BRIEF

Cold wave to grip Kuwait

KUWAIT: A cold wave is expected to grip Kuwait over the weekend as the temperatures are expected to drop further, said meteorologist Essa Ramadhan. He said the current cold wave is known in the Arab peninsula as the "cold of the old" (Bard Al-Ajooz) as the high pressure leads to a drop in temperature at the end of February and the beginning of March. Such waves are called "cold of the old" as a result of the temporary return of the cold weather following warm days. It also alludes to the story of the "old lady who went out with her sheep to graze thinking winter is over but was hit with a sudden bout of cold spell."

12,000 expats deported

KUWAIT: Around 12,000 expats were deported in December, January and February as part of the efforts of the Interior Ministry to stamp out residency permit violators and lawbreakers from the country, according to sources. The sources said, 4,300 expats were deported in December and 7,685 in January and February, many for vice offences. The ministry will intensify security campaigns and deportees cannot return to the country because they violated the law. They said that around 1,500 persons are kept at detention cells of police stations, 300 at deportation center while 400 are detained at the centers of residency detectives, 200 at criminal detectives and 100 at drugs control department. They all face either legal action or deportation depending on the gravity of their crime.

Illegal residents' issues

KUWAIT: Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Defense, and Acting Minister of Interior Sheikh Fahad Al-Yousef Al-Sabah, held a meeting with head of the Central System for the Remedy of Situations of Illegal Residents, Saleh Al-Fadhalah, to bolster coordination between the Central System and concerned state bodies. This came in a statement to KUNA issued by the Central System following the meeting held at Naif Palace. During the meeting, Al-Fadhalah gave a detailed presentation with statistics regarding the Central System's efforts in resolving the issue. — KUNA

GAZA: Fighting raged Wednesday in the besieged Gaza Strip, where the reported death toll neared 30,000 as mediators insisted a truce in the Zionist-Hamas war could be just days away. The Hamas-ruled territory's health ministry reported another 91 deaths in overnight bombardment in Gaza, while UN agencies sounded the alarm on dire humanitarian conditions and food shortages. Mediators from Egypt, Qatar and the United States have been trying to find a path to a ceasefire amid the bitter fighting, seeking a six-week pause in the nearly five-month war.

After a flurry of diplomacy, mediators said a deal could finally be within reach - reportedly including the release of some hostages held in Gaza since Hamas's October 7 attack in exchange for several hundred Palestinian detainees held by Zionists. Qatar was "hopeful, not necessarily optimistic, that we can announce something" before Thursday, foreign ministry spokesman Majed Al-Ansari said Tuesday. US President Joe Biden said a day earlier that "my

hope is by next Monday we'll have a ceasefire", but "we're not done yet".

Ansari also cautioned that "the situation is still fluid on the ground". Doha has suggested the pause in fighting would come before the beginning of Ramadan, the Muslim fasting month which starts on March 10 or 11, depending on the lunar calendar. Hamas had been pushing for the complete withdrawal of Zionist forces from Gaza - a demand rejected outright by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

But a Hamas source, speaking on condition of anonymity, said that the deal might see the military leave "cities and populated areas", allowing the return of some displaced Palestinians and humanitarian relief. Zionist military campaign has killed at least 29,954 people in Gaza, mostly women and children, according to the latest health ministry figures. Since the war began, hundreds of thousands of Gazans have been displaced within the narrow coastal territory.

Nearly 1.5 million people now packed into the

far-southern city of Rafah, where Zionists have warned they plan to launch a ground offensive. Those who remain in northern Gaza have been facing an increasingly desperate situation, aid groups have warned. "If nothing changes, a famine is imminent in northern Gaza," the World Food Program's deputy executive director Carl Skau told the UN Security Council Tuesday.

His colleague from the UN humanitarian office OCHA, Ramesh Rajasingham, warned of "almost inevitable" widespread starvation. The WFP said no humanitarian group had been able to deliver aid to the north for more than a month, accusing Zionists of blocking access. "I have not eaten for two days," said Mahmud Khodr, a resident of Jabalia refugee camp in the north, where children roamed with empty pots. "There is nothing to eat or drink."

Most aid trucks have been halted, but foreign militaries have air dropped supplies over southern Gaza. What aid does enter Gaza passes through

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Information minister discusses integrated plan for elections

KUWAIT: Minister of Information and Culture Abdulrahman Al-Mutairi discussed Wednesday with officials the Ministry's comprehensive and integrated plan to cover the upcoming National Assembly

election slated for April 4. The Ministry is harnessing all its potential to cover the democratic event in a manner that shows Kuwait's status, through several TV and Radio live programs, within an integrated and comprehensive strategy, the minister told KUNA in a statement. He added that the Ministry also would facilitate the missions of media outlets, journalists and media people from inside and outside the country to report the election. The minister prayed to Almighty Allah to maintain his unlimited blessing onto Kuwait under the wise leadership of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. — KUNA

Saudi extends influence on international sports

RIYADH: Saudi Arabia's Public Investment Fund (PIF) on Wednesday announced a "multi-year strategic partnership" with the ATP, the governing body of men's tennis, extending the kingdom's influence on international sport. In a joint statement, the two bodies said that the partnership marked "a significant shared commitment to enhancing global tennis".

Since 2021, PIF has invested heavily in a number of major sports industries including setting up the LIV golf tour, a rival to the PGA, and purchasing English Premier League club Newcastle United. The statement did not give details of the amount of the investment which will see PIF become the official naming partner of the ATP rankings. PIF will also partner with ATP Tour events in Indian Wells, Miami, Madrid, Beijing and the ATP Finals, in addition to the

Next Gen ATP Finals, hosted in Jeddah until 2027.

"Our strategic partnership with PIF marks a major moment for tennis," said ATP chief executive Massimo Calvelli in the joint statement. "It's a shared commitment to propel the future of the sport. With PIF's dedication to the next generation - fostering innovation and creating opportunities for all - the stage is set for a transformative new period of progress." Last year, the kingdom hosted its first ATP Tour event - the Next Gen ATP Finals in Jeddah - along with exhibition matches pitting Novak Djokovic against Carlos Alcaraz and Aryna Sabalenka against Ons Jabeur.

In January Rafael Nadal, winner of 22 singles Grand Slams on the men's side, was named ambassador for the Saudi Tennis Federation. The latest investment with the ATP follows a Saudi bid to secure the WTA Finals in Riyadh, a move that drew criticism from former women's champions Chris Evert and Martina Navratilova while winning the support

Continued on Page 6

National celebrations reflect 'sincere love'

KUWAIT: Kuwaiti Minister of Information and Culture Abdulrahman Al-Mutairi voiced sincere thanks and gratitude to all citizens and residents and all state and private bodies for the civilized and deferential way of celebrating the country's national festivals. Speaking to KUNA, Al-Mutairi, who is also Chairman of the Permanent Committee for National Celebrations, said the committee was absolutely eager to ensure that the celebrations would be so smooth and beyond all expectations.



Minister of Information and Culture Abdulrahman Al-Mutairi

He underlined that the national festivals reflect citizens' sincere love and sentiments towards the dear nation, thanking everyone for celebrating with a highly patriotic and responsible spirit. The minister prayed to Allah Almighty to bestow joy, security and safety on the homeland under the wise leadership of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, while highly commending the directives of His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Dr. Mohammed Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah. — KUNA





KUWAIT: (Left) His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Dr Mohammad Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah received teaching staff members from Kuwait University's College of Administrative Sciences and College of Engineering and Petroleum at Bayan Palace on Wednesday. (Right) His Highness also received the chair and members of the Kuwait Economic Society. — KUNA photos

Kuwait partakes in ministerial UK-GCC meeting in Abu Dhabi

Ensuring food security, global supply chains flow is 'important'

ABU DHABI: Kuwait's Minister of Finance and Minister of State for Economic Affairs and Investment Dr. Anwar Al-Mudhaf and a delegation accompanying him took part in a joint ministerial meeting in Abu Dhabi between the GCC and the UK to discuss a free trade agreement between the two parties. Kuwait's Ministry of Finance said on Tuesday in a statement to KUNA that the meeting discussed the agreement thoroughly as well as a roadmap for fulfilling the free trade agreement's requirements between the GCC and the UK which benefits mutual interests. It added that the meeting was attended by GCC Secretary-General Jassem Al-Budaiwi and UK's Secretary of State for Business and Trade Kemi Badenoch as well as GCC ministers concerned with the free trade negotiations.

Enhancing trading systems

In another development, Kuwait's Minister of Commerce and Industry, Abdullah Al-Jouan, said that the 13th Ministerial Conference of the World Trade Organization (WTO), MC13, was an important opportunity to enhance the trading systems. Minister Al-Jouan said that the conference, hosted by the United Arab Emirates, was an important opportunity to enhance the ability of the multilateral trading system to respond to challenges and crises the world has witnessed in recent years.

He stated to KUNA after the conference, which began today and will continue until March 29, that Kuwait was committed to the multilateral trading

system and was ready to work constructively with all member states for a successful conference. Al-Jouan called on member states to enhance participation in a manner consistent with the provisions of the World Trade Organization for the sustainability of food security and the flow of global supply chains.

Al-Jouan pointed to the role of the private sector of member states in increasing inclusive and sustainable economic growth, which was as important as the role of the governments, by intensifying its efforts to achieve a more inclusive and sustainable trading system. He added that he hoped that member countries would develop key features to provide valuable exports and create an innovative business environment for sustainability, emerging companies, and entrepreneurship, which would result in more innovations and increase intraregional exports.

The conference includes 175 delegations from OIC and observer members, private sector leaders, NGOs, and civil society representatives, which would provide the international community with the opportunity to cooperate towards a more efficient, sustainable, and inclusive trading system. Representing Kuwait in Arab Commerce Ministers preparatory meeting is Undersecretary of Ministry of Commerce and Industry, Ziad Al-Najem, ahead of the 13th World Trade Organization (WTO) conference in Abu Dhabi. Al-Najem spoke on some of the topics discussed including the importance of maintaining food security and preventing restrictions on



Participants take a group photo after the ministerial UK-GCC meeting in Abu Dhabi. — KUNA

food products, according to a statement from the Ministry of Commerce and Industry.

He emphasized his gratitude to Saudi Arabia for holding the preparatory meeting and the UAE for hosting the WTO conference. The UAE is to host the conference which will take place on Monday and Tuesday, and will cover various discussions on glob-

al rules and regulations in the world of commerce, by ministers and officials from around the world. The WTO was founded in 1955 with the objective of overlooking and supervising global commercial rules and regulations, with a conference being held biennially to review and renew treaties that make up the global trading system. — KUNA

On Palestine and hope of symbols

By Yousef Abu-Ghazaleh

KUWAIT: In November 1988, the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), headed by Yasser Arafat, convened in Algiers. Something historic was on the horizon. In May 1948, the Nakba (Catastrophe) and the creation of the Zionist entity killed over 15,000 Palestinians, displaced 3/4 of a million more from their homes, and robbed the native population of 78 percent of their land. When the dust settled, all that was left of Arab Palestine were two isolated pockets of territory: The West Bank and the Gaza Strip.

Back in Algiers, the gathered members of the PLO all carried the weight of that history on their shoulders. For men like Arafat, who spent much of their lives in Palestine both before and after the Nakba, the decision they were about to make would change the course of their people's history. The West Bank and Gaza Strip were ruled by Jordan and Egypt respectively until the war of 1967, in which the Zionist entity fully occupied the territories, in addition to the Sinai and Golan Heights. This came to be known as the 'Naksa' or 'Setback'.

The Zionist entity would eventually relinquish control of the Sinai but maintain military occupation of all other territories in a seemingly endless, invincible iron



grip. In the face of hopelessness, we again go back to Algiers, where on November 16, 1988, an announcement was made to the jubilation of millions of Palestinians and activists globally. The PLO had declared independence for the State of Palestine. The front page of The Kuwait Times read in big, celebratory text the headline: The State of Palestine is Born.

The declaration was mostly symbolic, as the Zionist entity still exercised full control of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, the territories expected to make up the State of Palestine. But the power of symbolism is one that cannot be underestimated. From the watermelon to the key to the keffiyeh, Palestinians are able to exercise their most powerful form of resistance: Existence. Today, when thousands have been and continue to be martyred in Gaza and the West Bank faces unending violence, it is important to, like those men in Algiers in 1988, continue working in the spirit of hope in ultimate liberation.

ing military onslaught, which prevents aid and food from reaching the people. This came during the Security Council session on Tuesday, under "Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflicts," to search for food risks in the Gaza Strip.

The Council received briefings from OCHA Head in Geneva and Director of the Coordination Division Ramesh Rajasingham and Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) Deputy Director-General Maurizio Martina. "As grim as the picture we see today is, there is every possibility for further deterioration," Rajasingham said, referring to the military operations that led to the destruction of food production and agriculture.

He mentioned the warnings of the food security experts about a complete agricultural collapse in northern Gaza by May if conditions persist, with fields and productive assets damaged, destroyed, or inaccessible. The hostilities and shortages of essential supplies, including electricity, fuel, and water, led to food production at a virtual standstill and the risk of starvation, he added. Heavy damage to water infrastructure from fighting and the severing of power and fuel supplies significantly affected civilians, especially the malnourished, and among the thousands of injured, made them more susceptible to diseases.

He also said that the malnutrition among children and pregnant and breastfeeding women in the Gaza Strip was a particularly grave concern. He confirmed that the workers in the humanitarian field were facing obstacles just to deliver the minimum supplies in Gaza, alongside the necessary



escalation of the multispectral response to avert famine. He affirmed that the UN's efforts continued to be beset by crossing closures, serious movement restrictions, access denials, onerous vetting procedures, restrictions on communications and protective equipment, and impassable supply routes due to damaged roads and unexploded ordnance. On his side, FAO Deputy Director-General Maurizio Martina said that 2.2 million people in Gaza were experiencing catastrophic levels of food insecurity due to the war, with the risk of famine increasing day by day.

The civilian infrastructure, including essential food production, processing, and distribution facilities, was severely damaged or became difficult to access, he added. The destruction affected the commercial sector as a result of the occupation's authorities in the region, which led to the rapid depletion of imported food stocks and disrupted the food supply chain, he added.

He further elaborated that before the war, Gaza's food production enabled self-sufficiency in most fruits and vegetables; however, the war significantly hindered this capacity. He emphasized the need to cease hostilities and restore the humanitarian realm for the provision of multi-sectoral assistance, along with the restoration of critical services, which were the fundamental initial steps in averting the famine threat. He stated that an immediate ceasefire and peace are important factors for food security, and he called on all parties to respect their obligations under international humanitarian law and international human rights law to protect civilians. — KUNA

In my view

The spirit of liberation



Dr. Khalid Al-Saleh

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Kuwaitis were heartbroken over the betrayal and the barbaric invasion. Kuwaitis returned fire and fought bravely. During the 1990's, patriotic feelings were very deep. There were reforms and less corruption because Kuwait was rebuilt by energetic youths and men who wanted change. All the efforts were channeled towards responding to the enemies, punishing them for their atrocities, and building a better and stronger nation.

As the years went by, the spirit of corruption started crawling in. Special attempts were made to westernize the Kuwaiti people and move them away from their Arab and Islamic values. Reformists lost some battles and won others, but the spirit of optimism did not weaken. 15 years after the invasion, Kuwaiti society was on the verge of forgetting the invasion ordeal. During those years, corruption cases shattered the unity structure and attempted to divide society into sects.

In an attempt to westernize Kuwaiti society, some people started fighting the Arab and Muslim cultures, as well as our beautiful language. Private schools and universities were opened with catchy advertisements to attract students and high school students. Some educated ones became preoccupied with self-defense and irrelevant matters. Most citizens were busy struggling to impose western ideas on Kuwait, contrary to what the people wanted. Years later, it became clear that corruption had succeeded in dividing Kuwaiti society.

The flame of optimism began to fade. There were some people who wanted to spread hatred and division. These people encourage criminality, 'wasta', discrimination, and corruption. There were people who saw themselves as being above the law. This continued throughout the 21st century. I hope the "New Kuwait" slogan will become a reality and restore the good spirit. We need to reconstruct and develop Kuwait.

GCC demands Gaza ceasefire

GENEVA: The General Secretary of the Gulf Cooperation Council, Jassem Al-Budaiwi, urged the international community to end Palestinian suffering and to immediately and permanently implement a ceasefire in the Gaza Strip. Al-Budaiwi stressed in his speech at the 55th meeting of the United Nations Human Rights Council in Geneva the importance of the Palestinian case for the GCC and demanded the end of the occupation of Palestine.

He condemned the Zionist occupation's violations against the Palestinians and their policies of hunger and killing, stressing that aid must be delivered promptly to the Gaza Strip. Al-Budaiwi denounced the double standards practiced by some when it comes to the Palestinian case, assuring that East Jerusalem is the capital of Palestine. Al-Budaiwi noted the GCC's commitment to human rights principles and warned of rising waves of Islamophobia, stressing the necessity of respecting freedom of expression. He reiterated the council's support for UN efforts regarding human dignity and providing humanitarian support.

Starvation looms

Two UN experts warned that over 500,000 people — one quarter of the population — are facing starvation in the Gaza Strip due to the ongoing

Local

Cabinet applauds peaceful and orderly national celebrations

Ministers appreciate the efforts of Kuwait leaders, Interior Ministry



KUWAIT: The Cabinet holds its weekly meeting under the chairmanship of His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Dr Mohammad Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah. — KUNA photos

KUWAIT: The Kuwaiti Cabinet reviewed, during its weekly meeting under the chairmanship of His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Dr. Mohammad Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah, the efforts made in organizing the celebrations marking the 63rd National Day and 33rd Liberation Day of the country. Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Defense, and Acting Minister of Interior Sheikh Fahad Youssef Saud Al-Sabah apprised the preparations made by the security and traffic personnel to set the stage for the celebrations.

The Cabinet appreciated the efforts of the leaders and personnel of the Interior Ministry under Sheikh Fahad to ensure the safety and orderliness of the celebrations, said Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Sharida Al-Maousherji following the meeting. The Cabinet thanked the citizens and expatriates for their positive response to the instructions of the



Ministry of Interior, which reduced the negative behaviors and reflected the civilized aspect of the celebrations. It extolled the diligent work made by

the standing committee on national days, under its president, Minister of Information and Culture Abdulrahman Al-Mutairi, and general coordinator, Sheikh

Amthal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, to ensure exemplary organization of the celebrations. The meeting thanked the member countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council and the other sisterly Arab and friendly countries for sharing Kuwaiti festivities on the state and popular levels, which materialized the depth of Kuwait's relations with these countries.

It paid homage to the honorable martyrs who sacrificed their lives for the sake of the dear homeland, expressing hope for more prosperity and progress for Kuwait under its wise leadership. The meeting approved a draft decree inviting the voters to elect new members of the National Assembly (parliament) on April 4, 2024, and referred it to His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah for final endorsement.

During the meeting, President of the Government Performance Follow-Up Agency (GPF) Sheikh Ahmad Mishal

Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah updated the Cabinet on the following projects: first, the refurbishment of the 'Derwaza' (gate) of Alabd-Alrazzaq; second, the New Terminal of Kuwait Airport (T-2); and third, the heritage village on Abdullah Al-Ahmad St. The Cabinet spoke highly of the diligent efforts being made by GPF president Sheikh Ahmad Mishal and staffers to review the progress of government projects.

It tasked the competent state agencies to cooperate with GPF and implement the recommendations of the agency's report. The Cabinet agreed to a recommendation from the Ministry of Interior to accept a donation from Kuwait Finance House for the design, building, and equipping of one of the facilities of the Ministry. The Cabinet appreciated the donation as a kind gesture that reflects the genuine values of the sons of Kuwait and their loyalty to the homeland. — KUNA

Private sector plays crucial role, creates opportunities

By Ghadeer Ghloum

KUWAIT: Kuwait can create a producing environment for private sector growth and economic prosperity as the private sector plays a crucial role in creating opportunities for growth through enhancing employment, providing essential services, and contributing to the local economy, while being acknowledged by the government through supporting the private sector's investments and other factors that were highlighted by Kuwait Times interviewees.

Mohammed Abdullah Al-Abdullah, Member of Abdullah Al-Salem Cooperative Society and Al-Mansouriya Cooperative Society, who is also the Chairman of the Financial and Administrative Committee, told Kuwait Times that the private sector in Kuwait plays a role in creating new job opportunities and providing services and products to the society, as well as contributing to increasing investments and stimulating the local economy.

He also said that the government in Kuwait has taken several initiatives to encourage investment by the private sector, including funds for small and medium projects. These initiatives include facilitating laws and regulations, providing financial incentives, developing infrastructure, and ensuring basic services. The government also works on improving the business environment and providing support and guidance to investors.

Al-Abdullah further elaborated that private companies can take several actions to help revitalize the economy in Kuwait. They can increase investments in infrastructure and technology, provide job opportunities for citizens, enhance training and skill development, and participate in social and environmental projects. Additionally, private companies can collaborate with the government and other institutions to implement development projects, promote innovations and technological



Aisha Al-Waile



Mashael Al-Kulaib



Mohammed Al-Abdullah

advancements.

On her part, Mashael Jassim Al-Kulaib, also a Member of Abdullah Al-Salem Cooperative Society and Chairman of the Social Committee, spoke about the challenges that the private sector may be facing. "The private sector may face several challenges, including government laws and regulations, bureaucracy, financial resource constraints, and difficulty accessing financing. There may also be challenges in competitiveness with large companies and achieving sustainability in business."

To facilitate the private sector's progress, Al-Kulaib suggested: "The government may adopt policies such as providing an encouraging and simple regulatory environment and reducing bureaucracy, funding and financial support can be provided for small and medium-sized enterprises. Additionally, enhancing education and vocational training to develop workforce capabilities and provide the necessary competencies for private companies."

CEO of private sector employment company, Aisha Al-Waile, concluded with emphasizing on the importance of considering various factors when developing strategies to enhance the private sector's role in revitalizing the economy. These factors include improving the business environment, offering investment incentives, developing technology and innovation, enhancing education and workforce skills, promoting transparency and good governance, defining economic policies, fostering trade and cooperation, improving infrastructure, simplifying administrative processes, supporting innovation, and encouraging communication between the government and private sector.

She also highlighted that to enhance their role in the economy, private companies can focus on sustainable development practices, invest in technology, collaborate with educational institutions for workforce development, maintain transparency and good governance, engage in social projects, and expand their networks and relationships. These actions can improve the business environment, attract investments, and create more job opportunities.

Kuwaiti students in Bahrain mark National Days

MANAMA: Kuwaiti students in Bahrain celebrated National and Liberation Days at the financial port in Bahrain with the support of cultural attaché Mohammad Al-Dughaim. Academic consultant at the Kuwait Cultural Office in Bahrain, Manal Ibrahim, participated in the event and expressed her pleasure and pride with the Kuwaiti students in Bahrain, who represent their country at their best. At the 'Kuwait History Booth', students narrated Kuwaiti history in front of a large crowd. There was a 'Students Support Team booth', where students of both genders interacted with the public to strengthen relations.



Kuwaitis explore new opportunities amid Qatar tech summit

DOHA: A global business summit bringing together international entrepreneurs and investors in the Qatari capital on Tuesday should provide new opportunities to explore. Kuwaiti participants in the event agreed, underscoring the significance of the gathering.

Besides allowing participants to explore these opportunities, Web Summit Qatar 2024 also provides a platform for the exchange of know-how and expertise, members of the Kuwait-based Sabah Al-Ahmad Center for Giftedness and Creativity said. Among the primary objectives of taking part in such an event is to keep abreast of the latest breakthroughs seen in the world of technology, according to Abdulaziz Al-Farhan, one of the Kuwaiti participants, citing the chance of bringing back home such tech know-how.

The event also allows international entrepreneurs and investors the chance to interact with one another, which is an important step towards gaining more knowledge in the field, said Abdulrahman Al-Menefi, another participant from Kuwait. Noora Al-Askar and Bader Al-Kathmi, a pair of Kuwaiti

participants, both attached equal significance to the event, saying it would help keep afloat fledgling businesses and start-up enterprises, and thanking the Kuwait-based center for giving them the opportunity to be a part of the gathering.

Another reason for the summit's importance is that it gives tech experts the chance to discover the most cutting-edge advancements in the field, allowing those who lag behind a chance to embrace such useful tools, they underlined. Helping "connect a new generation of founders in the Middle East to investors, journalists, and customers," the event aims to develop an already fast-growing tech scene in the region," according to its official website. — KUNA



PARTICIPATION OF THE PRIVATE SECTOR

Wafa launches aid campaign

RAMALLAH: The Palestinian Micro Finance and Capacity Building Foundation (Wafa), in cooperation with Kuwait's International Mercy Society, carried out a relief aid campaign in commemoration of Kuwait's national celebrations. The campaign titled "Kuwait Mercy 3" took place in the presence of the Palestinian Prime Minister's Advisor for Arab and Islamic Funds, Nasser Qtami.

The director general of Wafa, Muhaisen Al-Atawna, said that the campaign — launched from Ramallah — contained ten trucks filled with food, blankets, and heating materials, which were being sent to Palestinian families in displacement camps in the West Bank. Al-Atawna expressed his sincerest gratitude for Kuwait and its people for their continuous support, especially during these difficult times, and congratulated them on their national celebrations.

Asian position hailed

In another development, the Arab Parliament hailed Asian positions supporting the rights of Palestinian people and rejecting those committed by occupation in the Gaza Strip. The Parliament Chief, Adel Al-Asoomi, expressed this while addressing the 14th session of the Asian Parliamentary Assembly in Baku, Azerbaijan. Al-Asoomi called for a joint meeting between the Palestinian committee at the Arab Parliament and its counterpart at the Asian Assembly and Islamic Cooperation Organization, as promptly as possible.

He demanded that more efforts be channeled into exerting international pressure to put an end to the horrific massacres. The Arab official also praised the Asian Assembly decision to establish a committee designated to support Palestinian people and their just cause. The Arab and Asian nations are not merely brought together by common interests but also by shared cultural and historic bonds and a common destiny, stated Al-Asoomi, adding that this amplifies efforts to face mutual challenges.

On achieving sustainable development objectives, he stated that it is not achieved exclusively through government action but requires a parliamentary role as well, including updating current legislative infrastructure so that it goes accordingly to sustainable development goals. Al-Asoomi also underlined enhancing economic integration to achieve the sought-after developmental goals of both Arab and Asian nations. — KUNA

Photo of the day



KUWAIT: Porgies, fish that live in shallow temperate marine waters, are displayed at a fish market for sale in Kuwait City. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

NBK celebrates achievements of Harvard Executive Development Program graduates

KUWAIT: National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) proudly celebrated the graduation of its trainees from the fifteenth edition of the Harvard Business School (HBS) Executive Development Program. This milestone marks a significant achievement as part of the Kafa'a initiative initiated by the Central Bank of Kuwait (CBK) in collaboration with Kuwaiti banks. Managed by the Institute of Banking Studies (KIBS), this initiative aims to develop and improve the skills of national talent.

The bank observed significant participation in this edition, with nine trainees from various departments' directors — a record number among participating banks. The ceremony took place under the patronage of Basel A. Al-Haroun, the Governor of the Central Bank of Kuwait and Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Institute of Banking Studies. Representatives from Kuwaiti banks, participating companies from both domestic and international spheres, CBK, KIBS, and the honorees were all in attendance. This year's Executive Development Program, held in the UAE, was themed "Navigating the Future: Leading Financial Institutions in an Era of Innovation and Transformation." The program aimed to cultivate executive leadership within the banking and financial sectors. The program centered around two primary pillars: "Financial Markets Strategy" and "Leadership." It emphasized the pivotal role of leadership and management in devising and executing financial, technical, and leadership strategies to address challenges.

Moreover, it underscored the importance of acquiring the diverse strategic and leadership skills necessary for navigating digital transformation within the financial sector, enabling participants to stay abreast of rapid developments in the field. The six-day program featured practical case studies relevant to the program's theme and the banking and financial sectors, as well as other industries for which HBS is renowned.

These case studies aimed to offer participants a comprehensive array of practical experiences, enhancing their analytical skills and equipping them with tools and methodologies to enhance performance, foster innovation, and shape institutional culture. The program alternates its location annually among the GCC countries. This approach is designed to cultivate



KUWAIT: National Bank of Kuwait celebrates the graduation of its trainees from the fifteenth edition of the Harvard Business School Executive Development Program.

executive leadership within banks and financial institutions across the region, tailored to meet the evolving needs of the banking and financial sectors amidst the dynamic changes in the business landscape. Moreover, the program sought to familiarize participants with the implications of the global surge in investments aligning with environmental, social, and governance (ESG) standards, emphasizing their significance for the organization. Additionally, it aimed to educate them on optimizing the utilization of emerging tools like AI, managing risk in a data-driven manner, and promoting successful digital transformation. Additionally, it highlighted emerging opportunities in FinTech.

The program featured interactive plenary sessions, simulations, and real-world case studies led by Harvard Business School faculty. These sessions aim to empower leaders to delve into actionable insights and acquire essential tools for effective leadership. The curriculum also emphasized global attention to environmental sustainability, emerging technologies, and strategies for leading successful digital transformations.

Furthermore, it addressed the influence of AI on team dynamics and leadership approaches, em-

phasizing improved communication, leadership in high-pressure, high-profile situations, and supporting diverse talent collaboration. Commenting on this event, Emad Al-Ablani, GM – Head of Group Human Resources at National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) said: "Our engagement in the "Kafa'a" initiative underscores NBK's commitment to investing in human capital, ensuring the development of skilled national banking leaders in alignment with the latest and highest international standards."

"Creating a flexible, dynamic, and high-performing workforce entails empowering and nurturing future leaders, equipping them with the most effective and up-to-date programs. Hence, we prioritize participation in initiatives and programs that align with the bank's long-term goals and bolster sustainability efforts in human resources," Al-Ablani added. He emphasized NBK's unwavering commitment to furnishing future leaders with the necessary training programs and capabilities. These initiatives aim to cultivate adaptability, inspire others, and deliver advanced and innovative services, thus solidifying the bank's leadership position at the local level.



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Kuwaiti embassy in Singapore celebrates Kuwait's 63rd National Day and 33rd Liberation Day. — KUNA photos



Kuwaiti embassy in Albania celebrates Kuwait's 63rd National Day and 33rd Liberation Day.



Kuwaiti embassy in Czech Republic celebrates Kuwait's 63rd National Day and 33rd Liberation Day.

Kuwait embassies in Albania, Czech, Singapore celebrate

KUWAIT: Kuwaiti embassies in Albania, the Czech Republic, and Singapore celebrated Kuwait's 63rd National Day and 33rd Liberation Day. Ambassador to Albania Faisal Al-Musaileem held the celebrations in Tirana, welcoming the President of Albania, Bajram Begaj, and other high-ranking officials, diplo-

rats, and ministers. In Prague, Ambassador Rashed Al-Hajeri held the commemorations in the presence of members of the senate, the chamber of deputies, and the deputy speaker.

In Singapore, Ambassador Ahmad Abdulrahman Al-Shuraim held the celebrations in the Singapore Edition hotel, welcoming officials like the Senior Minister of State, parliament members, and other high-ranking officials and diplomats. The three Kuwaiti ambassadors were pleased with the important and respected attendance, while the valued guests expressed their gratitude for invitations and warm welcomes during celebrations marking Kuwait's National Day and Liberation Day. — KUNA



Biden rebuked by Gaza protest vote in Michigan

Greece marks year since country's worst train crash

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BEIT LAHIA: Palestinians gather to collect aid food in Beit Lahia, in the northern Gaza Strip, on February 26, 2024. — AFP

Northern Gazans desperate for food

Palestinians resort to begging, feeding children dead horses, scraps, leaves

GAZA: At the Jabalia refugee camp in northern Gaza, Abu Gibril was so desperate for food to feed his family that he slaughtered two of his horses. "We had no other choice but to slaughter the horses to feed the children. Hunger is killing us," he told AFP.

Jabalia was the biggest camp in the Palestinian territories before the war. Abu Gibril, 60, fled there from nearby Beit Hanun when the conflict erupted. Home for him and his family is now a tent near what was a UN-run school.

Contaminated water, power cuts and overcrowding were already a problem in the densely populated camp, which was set up in 1948 and covers just 1.4 square kilometers (half a square mile).

Poverty, from high unemployment, was also an issue among its more than 100,000 people.

Now food is running out, with aid agencies unable to get into the area because of the bombing — and the frenzied looting of the few trucks that try to get through. On Friday, the health ministry in Gaza said a two-month-old baby died of malnutrition in hospital in Gaza City, seven kilometers (just over four miles) away from Jabalia. Overall, nearly 30,000 people have been killed in Gaza in the war, according to the ministry.

Scavenging and begging

In the camp, bedraggled children wait expectantly, holding plastic containers

and battered cooking pots for what little food is available. With supplies dwindling, costs are rising. A kilo of rice, for example, has shot up from seven shekels (\$1.90) to 55 shekels, complains one man. "We the grown-ups can still make it but these children who are four and five years old, what did they do wrong to sleep hungry and wake up hungry?" he said angrily.

The UN children's agency UNICEF has warned that the alarming lack of food, surging malnutrition and disease could lead to an "explosion" in child deaths in Gaza. One in six children aged under two in Gaza was acutely malnourished, it estimated on February 19.

Residents have taken to eating scav-

enged scraps of rotten corn, animal fodder unfit for human consumption and even leaves to try to stave off the growing hunger pangs. "There is no food, no wheat, no drinking water," said one woman. "We have started begging neighbors for money. We don't have one shekel at home. We knock on doors and no one is giving us money."

'Dying from hunger'

Tempers are rising in Jabalia about the lack of food and the consequences. On Friday, an impromptu protest was held involving dozens of people. One child held up a sign reading: "We didn't die from air strikes but we are dying from hunger." Another held aloft a placard warning

"Famine eats away at our flesh", while protesters chanted "No to starvation. No to genocide. No to blockade."

In Beit Hanun, Abu Gibril used his two horses to harvest a parcel of land. But the conflict destroyed that, along with his house, leaving him with nothing. Over the weeks and months, the Zionist entity's relentless bombardment has left Gaza largely a place of shattered concrete and lives.

Abu Gibril kept the radical decision to slaughter his horses to himself, boiling the meat with rice, and giving it to his unwitting family and neighbors. Despite the necessity, he said he was still wary of their reaction. "No one knows they were in fact eating a horse." — AFP

Khamenei rallies Iranians to vote in show to 'enemies'

TEHRAN: Iran's supreme leader urged voters to come out in droves on Friday and show the foes of the Islamic republic a "strong and fervent" election process for parliament and the key Assembly of Experts. "The enemies of Iran want to see if the people are present" on polling day for the 290-seat legislature and the 88-member Assembly, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei said on Wednesday.

If citizens fail to cast their ballots in large numbers, the 84-year-old supreme leader warned in an address to first-time voters, Iran's enemies "will threaten your security in one way or another". Khamenei is expected to be first to cast his ballot at 8:00 am (0430 GMT) on March 1 for the unicameral legislature and the Assembly of Experts which appoints the supreme leader, a post he has held since 1989. The vote is being as the Zionist entity is continuing its nearly five-month assault on Gaza, which it claims was triggered by an attack carried out by Hamas on October 7. The conflict has drawn in other Iran-backed armed groups, including Lebanon's Hezbollah and Yemen's Houthi rebels.

Khamenei named the United States, other Western powers and the Zionist entity as the enemies of Iran, whose economy has been hit by tough US sanctions over the country's contested nuclear program. The vote comes amid mounting economic difficulties and as Iran grapples with the aftershocks of months of mass protests triggered by the 2022 death in custody of Iranian Kurdish woman Mahsa Amini.

Conservatives vs reformists

Iran's powerful conservative and ultra-conservative forces are expected to tighten their hold on power over the weakened reformist camp, many of whose candidates were not allowed to run. Moderate former president Hassan Rouhani said he was barred from seeking re-election to the Assembly after 24 years of membership.

On Wednesday, Rouhani said the election "should be

a protest vote" for those who are opposed to "current conditions and seek transformation". Another former Iranian president, the reformist Mohammad Khatami, was quoted as saying this month by the conservative Javan daily that Iran is "very far from free and competitive elections". Their statements fell short of directly calling for a boycott, unlike those of some opposition figures and members of the diaspora.

A coalition of parties called the Reform Front has said it would not take part in "meaningless, non-competitive and ineffective elections". Hopefuls had to be vetted in order to be allowed to stand. Jurists in charge of the process approved a total of 15,200 hopefuls — less than one third of the 49,000 who registered to run for parliament, Iranian media reported. A total of 144 candidates have been approved to run for seats in the assembly, for eight-year terms. More than 61 million out of Iran's population of more than 85 million are eligible to vote. But some analysts predicted low turnout after a state TV poll found more than half of respondents were indifferent to the elections.

'Cold atmosphere'

The reformist Ham Mihan newspaper this week alluded to recent heavy snowfalls and judged in a headline that the political "atmosphere remains cold". The conservative Vatan-e-Emrouz daily by contrast hailed what it called the population's "interest in the candidates' electoral campaigns", which began on February 22.

Iran's current parliament was elected in 2020 during the Covid pandemic, with a voter turnout of 42.57 percent — the lowest since the 1979 Islamic Revolution. In Tehran, fewer than 20 percent of eligible voters cast their ballots that year.

Friday's elections will be the first since the protests triggered by the death of 22-year-old Amini in police custody. She had been arrested for allegedly flouting Iran's strict dress code for women. Many in Iran have been struggling to make ends meet as they grapple with soaring inflation and a record depreciation of the rial against the dollar. "There has been a lot of pressure on people lately as prices have risen dramatically," said 40-year-old Tehran housewife Masoumeh. "I don't think the new parliament can change the economic situation." — AFP

Hamas knows it can't be in new govt: Palestinian FM

GENEVA: Palestinian foreign minister Riyad al-Maliki said Wednesday he believes Hamas understands why it should not be part of a new government in the Palestinian territories. Maliki told a press conference that a "technocratic" government was needed, without the group. "The time now is not for a national coalition government," Maliki said. "The time now is not for a government where Hamas will be part of it, because, in this case, then it will be boycotted by a number of countries, as happened before," he told the UN correspondents' association. "We don't want to be in a situation like that. We want to be accepted and engaging fully with the international community," he explained.

Palestinian prime minister Mohammad Shtayyeh announced Monday the resignation of his government, which rules parts of the Zionist-occupied West Bank,

Deaths more than double births in Japan for 2023

TOKYO: Births in Japan dropped to a new low in 2023, with the country recording more than twice as many deaths as new babies, according to government data. The same data also showed marriages at their lowest since 1933. The numbers highlight the dramatic demographic challenges facing the world's fourth-biggest economy including worker shortages and providing healthcare for the one in 10 people now over 80 years old.

citing the need for change after the Zionist entity-Hamas war in Gaza ends. A decree from Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas said the government will stay on in an interim capacity until a new one is formed. Maliki said the priority was engaging the international community on to help provide emergency relief to Palestinians, and then looking at how Gaza could be reconstructed.

"Later, when the situation is right, then we could contemplate that option. But what comes first is how to salvage the situation. How to salvage innocent Palestinian lives. How to stop this insane war and how to be able to protect Palestinian people," he said.

"That's why I think Hamas should understand this, and I do believe that they are in support of the idea to establish, today, a technocratic government.

"A government that is based on experts, individuals who are completely committed to take up the reins and the responsibility for this period — a difficult one — and to move the whole country into a period of transition into a stable kind of situation where, at the end, we might be able to think about elections. "And after elections, the outcome of the elections will determine the type of government that will govern the state of Palestine later." Maliki is in Geneva to attend the United Nations Human Rights Council. — AFP

Births in 2023 fell for the eighth consecutive year, to 758,631, a drop of 5.1 percent, preliminary data released Tuesday showed. The number of deaths, at 1,590,503, was more than double that figure, meaning the overall population declined by 831,872.

Births peaked in the post-war baby boom period between 1947 and 1949, with more than 2.5 million people born per year, according to a health ministry official in charge of the data. During a second baby boom between 1971 and 1974, the yearly number of births stood at around two million, she told AFP.

In 2023, 489,281 marriages were registered, down 5.9 percent from the previous year and the first time they were under half a million. The number is the lowest since 1933, when 486,058 couples tied the knot. At the time, the Japanese population was roughly 70 million compared to around 124 million now. — AFP

International

Greece marks year since country's worst train crash

More than 30,000 people took to streets to protest rail system, official failings amid strike



TEMPI, Greece: This picture taken on February 28, 2024 shows a photograph of a victim at the site where 57 people, mostly students, lost their lives in a train crash one year ago. — AFP photos

TEMPI, Greece: Church bells tolled, transport came to a halt and tens of thousands of marchers gathered across Greece on Wednesday as the country marked a year since its deadliest train crash, which killed 57 people and injured dozens more. More than 30,000 people demonstrated in the capital, which was in the grip of a transport strike standstill, to commemorate the head-on collision on February 28, 2023, blamed by protesters on official failings and an unsafe rail system.

A definitive account of what happened and who may be at fault has not been delivered, with investigators in an official enquiry not due to finish questioning until March 8. At a religious ceremony held at the crash site in the valley of Tempe, some 375 kilometers (233 miles) north of Athens, hundreds of relatives gathered to leave wreaths and flowers.

"Today is a day of pain," said Antonis Psaropoulos, whose 19-year-old daughter Marthi died in the collision. "For all of us, time stopped on February 28, 2023, a cursed day ... a black hole in time."

'National trauma'

To Fotini Kokkala-Beza, the past year without her 20-year-old daughter Francesca has felt "like a century." "The cemetery has become our second home, and our home has become a cemetery. I apologize

for bringing you into this inhuman world," she said, her voice rising in anger. The bells of every church in the country tolled in the morning 57 times — once for every victim — to mark "this national trauma" and "collective failure," Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis said in a statement.

He said "human error inevitably met with persistent state failure", vowing that those responsible would be brought to justice. "We have had our fill of lies from those in power. Starting from the prime minister," countered Ilias Papangelis, who lost his 18-year-old daughter Anastasia in the collision. Greek civil servants staged a 24-hour walkout with other unions, including air traffic controllers, taxi drivers and public transport workers, who are also protesting at the high cost of living. Marches to mark the disaster were held across the country.

Trapped in wreckage

The disaster struck when a freight train and a passenger train with over 350 people aboard — mostly students — collided near a tunnel near Tempi, north of the central city of Larissa. Passengers described being trapped among smashed carriages and burning debris as the train keeled over. They broke windows to try to escape.

ing to encourage more babies, offering cash subsidies, babysitting services and support for infertility treatment. But the birth rate has continued its chronic decline.

"The number of newborns, birth rates, and crude birth rates (newborns per 1,000 people) are all at the lowest point since 1970" when data collection began, said Lim Young-il, head of the Population Census Division at Statistics Korea. Lim told reporters that South Korea's 0.72 birth rate is the lowest among OECD nations, while the average age to give birth is 33.6, the highest in the OECD.

Experts say multiple factors, from high child-rearing costs to a notoriously competitive society that makes well-paid jobs difficult to secure, are behind low birth rates. The double burden of working mothers of carrying out the brunt of household chores and childcare while also maintaining their careers is another key factor. "Having witnessed so many mothers around me give up their careers, I have decided not to follow the path to motherhood," a 37-year-old office worker, who asked to be identified by her surname Jeon, told AFP.

Jeon, who has been married for four years, said the country's rigid corporate culture was a primary reason for her decision, with greater flexibility at work "more important than government subsidies". "Raising a child is not possible without sacrificing the career of one parent in this environment," she said. — AFP

South Korea birth rate falls to all-time low

SEOUL: South Korea's birth rate fell to a record low last year, the government said Wednesday, despite having poured billions of dollars into efforts to encourage women to have more children and maintain population stability.

The country has one of the world's longest life expectancies and lowest birth rates, a combination that presents a looming demographic challenge. Neighboring Japan is grappling with the same issue, and on Tuesday the fast-ageing nation announced that the number of births there had also dropped to a new low in 2023.

South Korea's fertility rate — the number of children a woman is expected to have in her lifetime — dropped to 0.72 in 2023, down nearly eight percent from 2022, according to preliminary data from Statistics Korea. This is far below the 2.1 children needed to maintain the current population of 51 million, which at these rates will nearly halve by the year 2100, experts estimate.

The government has spent vast amounts on try-

Gaza death toll nears...

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the Rafah border crossing from Egypt, fuelling a warning from UN chief Antonio Guterres that any assault on the city would "put the final nail in the coffin" of relief operations. Zionist entity has insisted it would move civilians to safety before sending troops into Rafah but it has not released any details.

Egypt has warned that an assault on the city would have "catastrophic repercussions across the region", with Cairo concerned about an influx of refugees. Zion-

ist military spokesman Rear Admiral Daniel Hagari said Tuesday that Zionists will "listen to the Egyptians and their interests", adding that Zionists "cannot conduct an operation" with the current large population in Rafah. An AFP correspondent reported that overnight several air strikes hit the Rafah area as well as southern Gaza's main city Khan Yunis and Zeitun further north.

The army said it had "killed a number of terrorists and located weapons" in Gaza City's Zeitun neighborhood. More than 50 UK-based journalists signed an open letter to Zionist entity and Egypt calling for foreign press to be allowed free access to Gaza, plus better protection for reporters already inside the territory. UN reports indicate that at least 122 media workers have been killed in the Gaza Strip since the war began. — AFP

Reigning Masters champion Jon Rahm joined the LIV tour in December in a deal reportedly worth hundreds of millions of dollars. However, a framework deal between the PGA Tour, DP World Tour and PIF is now under discussion with a view to ending the stand-off.

PIF purchased English Premier League club Newcastle United in October and saw them qualify for this year's Champions League. It also owns four football clubs in the Saudi Pro League and has spent over \$885 million (820 million euros) on some of the biggest names in football to play for its teams. The kingdom is also set to host the 2034 football World Cup. — AFP

Saudi extends influence on international...

Continued from Page 1

of current world No 6 Jabeur. PIF has reshaped the world of golf by setting up the LIV golf tour as a rival to the PGA.

The first event took place in June 2022, causing a split within the sport that caused LIV-affiliated players to be excluded from the Ryder Cup, PGA tour events and consequently the world rankings.



Fire bombs explode near a group of riot police officers during a demonstration amid a 24-hour strike in central Athens on February 28, 2024.

The flames left many bodies charred beyond recognition and one missing woman was never found. The tragedy prompted three days of national mourning and mass protests in several cities, with demonstrators hurling rocks at the offices of the railway's Italian-owned operating company, Hellenic Train.

But nearly four months later, the conservative government was comfortably re-elected. In an interview with AFP, Marthi's mother Maria Karystianou said she had "no faith" in Greek justice and would submit her case to the European Court of Human Rights. Though 34 railway employees and officials face possible charges over the disaster, a trial is not expected to start before June.

Allegations of illegal cargo

Relatives have appointed their own experts to the case, arguing that official investigators wasted time and overlooked vital evidence. At a press conference on Monday, the relatives' committee of experts said state officials had failed to look into the causes of an intense fire that broke out just after the crash. "It is certain the freight train was carrying illegal cargo. We've found substances used to adulterate fuel," Karystianou told AFP. In a speech at the European Parliament this month, she said the government had

"tried to tamper with and cover up incriminating evidence". Potentially valuable CCTV footage was erased two weeks after the disaster without being assessed, and the site was bulldozed and paved over just days after the crash, the family's experts said.

Railway plagued by problems

The transport minister in charge at the time of the crash, Kostas Karamanlis, told a parliamentary committee of inquiry this month that on-duty staff were to blame. Safety improvements have since begun but are proceeding slowly and in sections. Campaigners say several failings that led to the disaster remain uncorrected.

Experts have warned that for decades, Greece's 2,552-kilometre (1,585-mile) rail network has been plagued by mismanagement, poor maintenance and obsolete equipment. A safety supervisor resigned the year before the crash, warning that infrastructure upgrades pending since 2016 were still unfinished and it was unsafe for trains to be travelling at speeds of up to 200 kilometers per hour. "The Tempi catastrophe was the result of state negligence and general corruption, not human error," Lysimachos Papazoglou, who lost his 22-year-old son, told reporters on Monday. — AFP

UK journalists demand open access to Gaza

LONDON: More than 50 UK-based broadcast journalists have sent an open letter to the Zionist and Egyptian embassies calling for "free and unfettered access" to Gaza for foreign media, British media reported Wednesday.

The letter, from 55 correspondents and presenters from the main broadcasting outlets based in the UK, appealed for better protection for journalists already reporting in the territory. "Almost five months into the war in Gaza, foreign reporters are still being denied access to the territory, outside of the rare and escorted trips with the Israeli military," said the letter, quoted by multiple local media outlets.

"We urge the Governments of (the Zionist entity) and Egypt to allow free and unfettered access to Gaza for all foreign media." It called on the Zionist entity to openly state its permission for international journalists to operate in Gaza and for the Egyptian authorities to allow international journalists access to the Rafah Crossing between Egypt and Gaza.

Journalists who signed the letter include Alex Crawford from Sky News, Jeremy Bowen from the BBC and Christiane Amanpour from CNN. Although some



KHAN YUNIS: A relative bids farewell during the funeral of Palestine TV journalist Mohamed Abu Hatab who was killed with 11 family members by Zionist bombardment in November 2023. — AFP

journalists have been invited to briefly "embed" with the Zionist forces for escorted tours inside Gaza, they have been prohibited from talking to any of the Palestinians there.

"There is intense global interest in the events in Gaza and for now the only reporting has come from journalists who were already based there," said the letter. "It's vital that local journalists' safety is respected and that their efforts are bolstered by the journalism of members of the international media. "The need for comprehensive on the ground reporting of the conflict is imperative." — AFP

Biden undergoes medical examination

WASHINGTON: US President Joe Biden reported to a hospital Wednesday for his last yearly medical examination before November's election as scrutiny intensifies over the 81-year-old's fitness and mental acuity for a second term. The White House said a summary of the test results from the Walter Reed military medical facility outside Washington would be released later in the day. It will be closely followed for details about the health of America's oldest ever leader.

Biden, who is on course for a rematch with 77-year-old former president Donald Trump in November's vote, took a short helicopter ride to the medical center that is often used by US presidents. "I'm going to Walter Reed to get my physical," Biden said as he left the White House and reporters shouted questions at him. Biden's routine medical exam comes as voter concerns mount over the age of a leader who would be 86 at the end of a second term in office.

The issue was thrust further into the spotlight this month when a brutal special counsel report portrayed Biden as elderly and forgetful, giving ammunition to his Republican rivals. The investigation cleared him of illegally retaining classified documents in his home and garage - but said he would come across to a jury as a "well-meaning, elderly man with a poor memory." — AFP

Apple abandons electric car plans

SAN FRANCISCO: Apple has abandoned its ambitions to produce an electric car, US media reported Tuesday, ending a struggling decade-long project. The iPhone maker had dedicated nearly 2,000 employees to its secretive car development program, Bloomberg reported, but faced an increasingly competitive electric vehicle (EV) sector. The target of "Project Titan," beginning around 2014, was to develop a fully autonomous car, according to media reports.

The decision to shut down the car project was announced internally on Tuesday, Bloomberg and The New York Times reported, citing unnamed sources. Apple had

reportedly invested billions of dollars in the project. The tech giant did not respond to AFP requests for comment. Apple has never publicly disclosed its EV plans, despite a steady drip of media leaks over the years. In 2022, the specialist site The Information published a report detailing the problems faced by the project, including the departure of multiple executives due to a lack of support from the leadership.

Several US automakers have hit the brakes on EVs in recent months as demand has slowed. Self-driving car-makers Cruise and Waymo - which is owned by Google parent Alphabet - have also struggled to expand their products beyond San Francisco. Elon Musk's Tesla, one of the EV industry's leaders, has also warned of slower growth in 2024. In a post on X, Musk responded to news of Apple shutting down its car project with emojis showing a salute and a cigarette. — AFP

Biden rebuked by Gaza protest vote in Michigan

Number of 'uncommitted' Democrat votes double that of 3 previous election cycles

DEARBORN, United States: Joe Biden scored an easy win in Michigan's presidential primary Tuesday but was dealt a stinging rebuke over the war in Gaza in an Arab American-led protest that raised concerns over his bid to win the swing state in November's election.

With almost two-thirds of polling stations still to report, the "uncommitted" share accounted for 50,000 votes, more than double the final totals in each of the last three election cycles. Biden released a statement thanking voters, touting his record on working for Michigan's middle class and acknowledging that there was "much left to do" — but made no mention of the Gaza conflict and ignored the protest vote.

"Completely betrayed" "Listen to Michigan" had set a modest goal of rallying 10,000 uncommitted voters in its aim to censure the president over US military funding for the Zionist entity, and to pressure him to call for an immediate ceasefire. "President Biden has funded the bombs falling on the family members of people who live right here in Michigan — people who voted for him, who now feel completely betrayed," the campaign said in a statement claiming victory.

The bloodshed resulting from the Zionist assault on Gaza has weakened Biden's standing among Muslims and Arab Americans, a bloc crucial to his 2020 victory in Michigan over Trump. The Midwestern state has the largest proportion of residents who identify as being of Middle Eastern or North African descent in the country, with most of the population concentrated around Detroit.

The protest never threatened Biden's easy march to the nomination, and his sole challenger, Minnesota congressman Dean Phillips, was trailing with under three percent support late Tuesday.

Alarm bells

But the significant number of "uncommitted" votes could set off alarm bells ahead of the No-



DEARBORN: Aruba Obeid (left) asks people to vote uncommitted, instead of for US President Joe Biden, outside of Maples Elementary School in Dearborn during the Michigan presidential primary election on February 27, 2024. — AFP photos

ember general election, when Biden cannot afford to see his coalition eroded in the swing state.

The US Census Bureau estimates the statewide population claiming Middle Eastern or North African descent at 310,000, although the Arab American Institute says that figure is likely a significant undercount. The organization estimates a nationwide Arab American population of 3.7 million and says the vast majority — more than 80 percent — are US citizens with the right to vote.

On the Republican side, US news networks pro-

jected Trump's victory within seconds of the polls closing, although he has to wait until the weekend for confirmation under a complex system splitting the contest over several voting days.

The former president has swept the early voting states and Michigan was never expected to interrupt his march to the nomination. His sole remaining challenger, former UN ambassador Nikki Haley, lost her home state of South Carolina to Trump over the weekend but has refused to quit, saying she doesn't believe the former president



People hug at the Listen to Michigan watch party during election night in Dearborn, Michigan on February 27, 2024.

There was little suspense over the outcome for both parties, with the president almost unopposed in the Democratic nominating contest and his predecessor Donald Trump declared the victor the Republican vote as polls were closing.

But tens of thousands of Democrats in a swing state crucial to Biden's reelection hopes ticked the "uncommitted" box as part of a push by the "Listen to Michigan" campaign to jolt the president into backing off from his support of the Zionist entity.



LONDON: Britain's Prince Harry, Duke of Sussex leaves the Royal Courts of Justice, Britain's High Court, in this file photo. — AFP

Prince Harry loses case against UK govt over security

LONDON: Prince Harry lost a court challenge against the UK government on Wednesday over a decision to change the level of his personal security when he visits the country. The youngest son of King Charles III launched legal action against the government after being told in February 2020 that he would no longer be given the "same degree" of publicly-funded protection when in Britain. "The 'bespoke' process devised for the claimant in the decision of 28 February 2020 was, and is, legally sound," High Court judge Peter Lane said in his 52-page judgment.

Harry sensationally left Britain in 2020 with his wife Meghan, eventually settling in California in the United States. The prince told a hearing at London's High Court in December that security concerns were preventing visits back to the United Kingdom.

"The UK is my home. The UK is central to the heritage of my children," he told court in a written statement read out by his lawyers. "That cannot happen if it's not possible to keep them safe. I cannot put my wife in danger like that and, given my experiences in life, I am reluctant to unnecessarily put myself in harm's way too," he added. The UK Home Office said it was "pleased" with the judgment and was "carefully considering" its next steps. "The UK Government's protective security system is rigorous and proportionate," a spokesperson for the Home Office said. "It is our long-standing policy not to provide detailed information on those arrangements, as doing so could compromise their integrity and affect individuals' security."

Harry's mother Princess Diana was killed in a high-speed car crash in Paris in 1997 as she tried to escape paparazzi photographers. Lawyers for the government rejected claims that Harry was "singled out" and treated "less favorably" or that a proper risk analysis was not carried out.

Non-working royal

James Eadie, for the interior ministry, told the court that it was decided Harry would not be provided the same level of protection as before because he had left life as a working royal and mostly lived abroad.

In May 2023, Harry lost a bid for a legal review of another government decision refusing him permission to pay for specialist UK police protection himself. The interior ministry argued then that it was "not appropriate" for wealthy people to "buy" protective security when it had decided that it was not in the public interest for such taxpayer-funded protection. London's Metropolitan Police also opposed Harry's offer on the grounds that it would be wrong to "place officers in harm's way upon payment of a fee by a private individual". It is one of many legal cases launched by Harry. Earlier this month, he settled a long-running lawsuit against Mirror Group Newspapers (MGX), whose journalists he accused of being linked to deceptive and unlawful methods but vowed to continue his legal battles with several other UK media outlets.—AFP

With 'Texit,' some want to make Texas a country, again

CYPRESS, United States: Texas, an independent country 200 years ago, now boasts a pocket of people who want that status back, advocating a separation they call Texit. Its advocates say the dramatic move — loosely inspired by Britain's Brexit from the European Union — would help resolve a roiling immigration border crisis and a fight with Washington over who controls the border with Mexico.

That fight, pitting President Joe Biden, a Democrat, and Republican Governor Greg Abbott, has laid bare a rupture in America. "We know here in Texas, the only way that Texas will ever be able to secure the border and have a sensible immigration system is to do like 200 other countries around the world and do so as a self-governing independent nation," Daniel Miller, president of the Texas Nationalist Movement, told AFP.

Miller insists his movement, created in 2005, has never been so close to achieving its goal. In the 19th century, Texas was actually part of Mexico. But after a war of independence — the so-called Texas Revolution — it achieved sovereign status in 1836. Only nine years later did it join the United States as the 28th state. Miller likens the Texit movement to the 2016 Brexit shock that ultimately saw Britain leaving the European Union. He said Texas shares history and interests with the rest of the United States but, like independence advocates in Spain's Catalan region, feels the central government does not understand their problems.

As Americans prepare to vote in November, most likely choosing between Biden and Donald Trump, the Texas independence movement wants the state legislature to pass a law allowing a referendum on breaking away. The US constitution, however, has no clause allowing states to do this — indeed, the secession of Southern states including Texas in 1861 led to the Civil War, the bloodiest war in US history.

Texan or American?

There has long been a secessionist movement in Texas, but it has been and remains a fringe movement, according to Joshua Blank, the research director at the Texas Politics Project of the University of Texas at Austin. He said the border crisis between Texas and the federal government "has created a situation that I think this group has really looked to exploit, in order to make their views seem not only more mainstream but really more plausible than they really are," said Blank.

Misty Walters, a homemaker in her 50s who attended a speech by Miller at a typical Texas barbecue restaurant, said people in the state feel they are Texans first, then Americans. "We're absolutely just being invaded," she said of the record numbers of people pouring over the border, many from Central America, in what has become a key issue in the presidential election. "And Texas needs to stand up and protect its citizens better," said Walters.

Secret dormitory highlights migrant housing crisis in NY

NEW YORK: An improvised dormitory housing more than 70 migrants in a New York furniture store was discovered by firefighters, officials said Tuesday, underlining the city's ongoing struggle to provide resources for recent arrivals from abroad.

The business owner, a 47-year-old Senegalese man named Ebou Sarr who is a longtime resident of the city, said he had welcomed around 74 people — most of them also from Senegal — to stay in the space. "Units discovered a dangerous living condition with approx-

imately 40 beds on the ground floor and in the cellar," the New York City Fire Department told reporters. Firefighters found the secret dwelling, located in the borough of Queens, late Monday after a neighbor complained about a jumble of electric bikes blocking a courtyard. Such vehicles — which have spread in the city as workers adopt them to drive delivery routes — can pose a safety hazard when poorly maintained, thanks to battery fires which have already killed several people in New York in recent months.

Sarr said he wanted to help the migrants, many of whom have nowhere else to go as the city's aid programs strain to provide for tens of thousands of new arrivals. "We have a lot of people who came to this country, to New York, too, and they needed help," Sarr told local media. "They throw them outside in this cold weather and they don't have no way to go nowhere," he added, referring to the limited amount of time the



CYPRESS: The President of the Texas Nationalist Movement, Daniel Miller, high fives a supporter at Spring Creek BBQ in Cypress, Texas, on February 20, 2024. — AFP

'Come and take it'

In the town of Eagle Pass in far southern Texas, Governor Abbott took military control of an area called Shelby Park along the Rio Grande River separating the state from Mexico. It is the site of a high-profile standoff with the federal government.

The governor, accusing the Biden administration of failing to stop huge numbers of people from entering the state, has had razor wire placed along parts of the frontier. Biden in turn has sued Texas, insisting that border control has always fallen under federal jurisdiction. Miller, the independence leader, compares the current situation to events in 1835 when Texas was still part of Mexico. Texas refused to return a cannon that Mexico had lent it and flew a flag that read "Come and take it," triggering Texas's successful war of independence.

As with the cannon, tensions around the Eagle Pass park are part of a much bigger problem, said Miller. He called it a symbol of "a broken relationship between the federal government and the states." But unlike the war with Mexico — or the Civil War for that matter — Miller's people think secession could be peacefully achieved this time. Not likely, said Blank. "Texas would not be able to secede peacefully. The US would not negotiate with them on favorable terms." — AFP

God-given vote: The bishops in UK's parliament

LONDON: One considers itself to be "the mother" of democratic parliaments, the other is an Islamic theocracy. While Britain's and Iran's legislatures are vastly different, they do share something in common: clerics. Twenty-six Church of England bishops and archbishops automatically sit in the House of Lords, the UK's unelected upper chamber, a centuries-old right that angers democracy campaigners and secularists.

Electoral reformers complain that the UK is the world's sole democratic sovereign state to reserve legislative seats for religious representatives. They note that Iran is the only other country to do so. The Anglican bishops were in the spotlight recently when they and fellow peers scrutinized Conservative Prime Minister Rishi Sunak's controversial plan to deport migrants to Rwanda, as they prepare to vote on the scheme soon.

Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby — the highest-ranking cleric in the Church of England, the leading church of global Anglicanism — warned that the proposal was leading the UK down a "damaging path". Speaking from the Lords' distinctive red benches, Welby said Sunak's contentious plan, decry by rights groups, would "outsource" the UK's "legal and moral responsibilities for refugees and asylum seekers". His intervention in the highly charged political issue highlighted the presence of the Anglican leaders in the Lords, which dates back to medieval times and comes from the Church of England's position as England's establishment church. The bishops are known as Lords Spiritual and have the same rights revising and voting on legislation as appointed life peers and hereditary peers, who together are called Lords Temporal.

Independent minded

"I think they see themselves as offering some sort of moral dimension," Daniel Gover, a politics expert at Queen Mary University of London told AFP. The number of Lords Spiritual has fallen from around 90 in the 1300s to the 26 it has been capped at since 1847. Today, they represent just three percent of the Lords' total membership of 785.

Five senior bishops and archbishops automatically receive spots, and the church selects the other 21. They take on portfolios for specific policy areas that interest them and must retire when they are 70, unlike other peers. They have no party affiliation so are not "whipped" into voting a certain way. Richard Chapman, head of parliamentary affairs for the Church of England, said the bishops take their role "extremely seriously". —AFP

city provides shelter for migrants. New York, where a longstanding housing crisis worsened in the wake of the pandemic and subsequent inflation, is also facing an influx of asylum seekers who cross the US-Mexico border and flock to the iconic metropolis.

The city has commandeered hotel rooms and constructed emergency lodging to provide space for more than 160,000 migrants since the spring of 2022, with some 68,000 of them still relying on city housing as of last month. But amid the influx, authorities have tightened regulations to limit single adults to 30 days of accommodation and families to 60 days, after which they must reapply to stay.

"What we discovered last night in some ways is also symptomatic of a larger crisis that this city is facing, that we've talked about repeatedly, in terms of the housing shortage in this city," Deputy Mayor for Housing Maria Torres-Springer told local media. — AFP

Business

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 29, 2024

Ookla Speedtest celebrates Zain Kuwait's success at MWC Barcelona

Recognition after company's 5G network won three Speedtest awards

KUWAIT: Ookla Speedtest, the global leader in network intelligence and connectivity insights, has celebrated Zain Kuwait's success at the Mobile World Congress (MWC 2024) in Barcelona, Spain. The recognition came after Zain's 5G network won three Speedtest Awards in Q2-Q3 of last year.

The special ceremony was attended by Zain Kuwait Acting Chief Technology Officer Daaj Al Oud, President and CEO of Ookla, a division of Ziff Davis, Stephen Bye, Zain Kuwait Customer Care Director Ali Akbar, Ookla Chief Strategy Officer Chip Strange, and executives from both companies.

Toward the end of last year, Zain announced that it has become the first and only operator in Kuwait to win three major awards in the same year from Ookla Speedtest, raising the bar yet again to reaffirm its leadership position in the local telecom & ICT industry and continue its ongoing efforts to serve Kuwait's largest family of subscribers.

The three prestigious accolades, 'Fastest 5G Network', 'Best 5G Video Experience', and 'Fastest Internet', came after Zain's network successfully topped the extensive analysis carried out by Ookla on hundreds of thousands of user-initiated tests made by consumers in Kuwait. The tests were carried on all of Kuwait's major networks, and Zain deservedly scored the highest results in the above three categories during the award period. Zain continues to heavily invest in its 5G infrastructure with world-class technologies, achieving the highest speeds and best operational efficiency levels. The company seeks to meet the increasing demand on data, while exploring new ecosystems only possible by this revolutionary technology, with the ultimate goal of serving all needs of consumers, businesses, and government agencies.

In yet another impressive achievement that reaf-



A group photo of Zain and Ookla executives.

firmed its leadership position in the local ICT industry, Zain recently announced that it has achieved speeds of 10 Gigabits per second after completing a 5.5G technology trial on its network, becoming the first operator to reach this significant milestone in Kuwait's telecom market. The company also succeeded in testing Ultra-Reliable Low Latency Communication (URLLC), a key 5.5G feature. Zain has invested early in upgrading and enhancing its network's infrastructure to prepare for the shift towards the 5.5G era, which brings limitless opportunities and opens up new horizons for businesses and consumers alike. In addition, the achievement serves as a testament to Zain's leadership position

and goes in line with its digitization efforts for the 'New Kuwait' vision.

Ookla is the global leader in network intelligence and connectivity insights. For almost two decades, Ookla has set the industry standard for both fixed and mobile network testing and analysis. From its world-renowned Speedtest and DownDetector platforms to an accompanying and growing suite of end-to-end enterprise solutions, Ookla's mission is to make the internet better, faster, and more accessible for everyone.

Ookla's enterprise solutions combine first-party crowdsourced data and scientifically controlled testing with tools that provide actionable insights across



Stephen Bye and Daaj Al Oud during the ceremony at MWC Barcelona.

a network's lifecycle and customer experience. Ookla's insights empower operators, businesses, government agencies, nonprofits, and more to analyze, optimize, and publicize networks around the world.

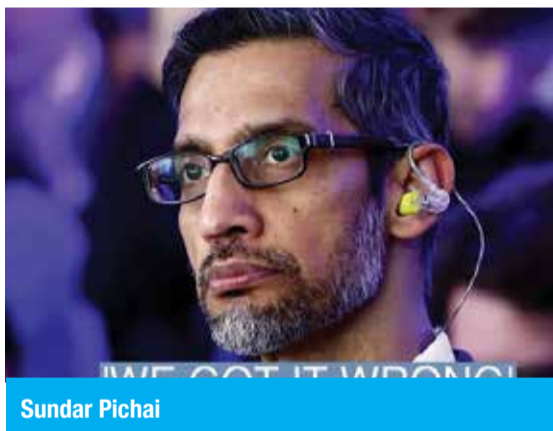
To learn more about Ookla's methodology, visit speedtest.net/awards.

Google CEO slams 'unacceptable' Gemini AI errors

SAN FRANCISCO: Google CEO Sundar Pichai on Tuesday slammed "completely unacceptable" errors by its Gemini AI app, after gaffes such as images of ethnically diverse World War II Nazi troops forced it to stop users from creating pictures of people. The controversy emerged within weeks of Google's high-profile rebranding of its ChatGPT-style AI to "Gemini", giving the app unprecedented prominence in its products as it competes with OpenAI and its backer Microsoft.

Social media users mocked and criticized Google for the historically inaccurate Gemini-generated images, such as US senators from the 1800s that were ethnically diverse and included women.

"I want to address the recent issues with problematic text and image responses in the Gemini app," Pichai wrote in a letter to staff, which was published by the news website Semafor. "I know that some of



Sundar Pichai

its responses have offended our users and shown bias—to be clear, that's completely unacceptable and we got it wrong."

A Google spokesperson confirmed to AFP that the letter was authentic. Pichai said Google's teams were working "around the clock" to fix these issues but did not say when the image-generating feature would be available again.

"No AI is perfect, especially at this emerging stage of the industry's development, but we know the

bar is high for us and we will keep at it for however long it takes," he wrote. Tech companies see generative artificial intelligence models as the next big step in computing and are racing to infuse them into everything from searching the internet and automating customer support to creating music and art.

But AI models, and not just Google's, have long been criticized for perpetuating racial and gender biases in their results. Google said last week that the problematic responses from Gemini were a result of the company's efforts to remove such biases.

Gemini was calibrated to show diverse people but did not adjust for prompts where that should not have been the case, also becoming too cautious with some otherwise harmless requests, Google's Prabhakar Raghavan wrote in a blog post. "These two things led the model to overcompensate in some cases, and be over-conservative in others, leading to images that were embarrassing and wrong," he said. Many concerns about AI have emerged since the explosive success of ChatGPT.

Experts and governments have warned that AI also carries the risk of major economic upheaval, especially job displacement, and industrial-scale disinformation that can manipulate elections and spur violence. — AFP

Bitcoin crosses \$60,000, nears all-time high

LONDON: Bitcoin passed the \$60,000 mark on Wednesday, approaching its all-time high and continuing its unbridled rise since the approval of a new type of investment indexed to the cryptocurrency. At 1325 GMT, bitcoin traded at about \$60,301, closing in on its all-time high of \$68,991 -- that was struck in November 2021 and which some analysts believe is now within reach. Since their approval on January 10 by US securities regulators, exchange-traded funds (ETFs) indexed to bitcoin have theoretically enabled a wider public to invest in the cryptocurrency without having to hold it directly. The funds themselves, however, do invest in the digital currency.

The expected approval of the new investment product had contributed in recent months to a rise in its price, which had largely fallen by the end of 2022 following the bankruptcy of several crypto giants. The US launch of ETFs or ETPs (exchange-traded products) has "injected a fresh wave of optimism, propelling trading volumes and spotlighting crypto-linked firms", notes Mikkel Mørch of specialist fund ARK36. The instruments are comparable to stocks or mutual funds as far as accessibility to everyday investors. Some investors eager to recoup their bets had initially triggered a wave of mass withdrawals from the GBTC (Grayscale Bitcoin Trust) fund, once it had been converted into an ETF. — AFP

G20 finance ministers meet on world economy hit by crises

SAO PAULO: G20 finance ministers met Wednesday in Brazil, seeking ways to shore up a global economy whose nascent recovery is threatened by a raft of conflicts and crises, including the wars in Ukraine and Gaza.

The Ukraine war could take center stage at the meeting, with G7 countries meeting on the sidelines to discuss shoring up Western support against Russia's invasion—including what US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen called an "urgent" proposal to use frozen Russian assets to increase aid for Kyiv.

Yellen, French Finance Minister Bruno Le Maire, IMF chief Kristalina Georgieva and other top economic policy-makers gathered in Sao Paulo for the two-day meeting—though there will be some notable absences, including the British, Chinese, Indian and Russian finance ministers, organizers told AFP. Brazilian Finance Minister Fernando Haddad, the host, will address the meeting by video conference, after coming down with COVID-19, organizers said.

The economic risks posed by the cost-of-living crisis, climate change and the conflict in the Middle East will also be on the agenda as finance ministers and central bank chiefs from the Group of 20 leading economies hold their first meeting of the year. Brazil, which took over the rotating G20 presidency from India in December, also wants to use the two-day meeting to pressure for progress on fighting poverty, alleviating low-income nations' crushing debt burdens, and giving developing countries more say at institutions like the International Monetary Fund and World Bank.

International taxation also features on the agenda,



SAO PAULO: Brazilian Environment Minister Marina Silva (left) and US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen (right) take part in a meeting organized by the American Chamber of Commerce (AMCHAM), in Sao Paulo, Brazil, on Feb 27, 2024. — AFP

amid global wrangling on how to deal with a so-called "race to the bottom" where some countries woo corporations and the super-rich with ultra-low tax rates. The meeting, which follows one by foreign ministers in Rio de Janeiro last week, will start laying the economic policy groundwork for the annual G20 leaders' summit, to be held in Rio in November. "There are a lot of issues on the table, and we face challenges on all of them," said the Brazilian official coordinating the G20 finance meetings, Tatiana Rosito.

"Our aim is to seek consensus and propose issues for dialogue," she told AFP. "What we're doing is setting the tone for dialogue and looking to build progress together." Finance ministers from the Group of Seven countries—Britain, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan and the United States, plus the European Union—are due to hold a separate meeting Wednesday on renewing Western support for Ukraine, which is desperate for more aid to fend off Russia. The G7 looks close to announcing plans to

jointly set up a fund for Ukraine using profits generated by an estimated \$397 billion in Russian assets frozen by the West over Moscow's invasion.

Ukraine has warned it is in dire need of more military and financial assistance, with a fresh \$60 billion US package stalled in Congress. Momentum appears to be building for Western plans to tap Russia's frozen assets: Yellen touted the idea, Canadian Deputy Prime Minister Chrystia Freeland said she agreed "100 percent," and British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak called to first seize interest from the assets, and then the assets themselves. Founded in 1999, the G20 accounts for more than 80 percent of global gross domestic product (GDP), three-quarters of world trade, and two-thirds of the world's population.

In reality, it has 21 members: 19 of the world's biggest economies—including both industrialized nations and emerging powers—plus the European Union and, participating as a member for the first time this year, the African Union. — AFP

US Q4 GDP growth revised slightly lower

WASHINGTON: US economic growth was slightly weaker than previously estimated in the fourth quarter last year, according to government data released Wednesday, due mainly to a downward revision to business investment. GDP growth in the world's biggest economy was revised to an annual rate of 3.2 percent in the final three months of 2023, from an initial estimate of 3.3 percent released last month. "The update primarily reflected a downward revision to private inventory investment," said the Department of Commerce in a report.

But it added that this was partially offset by revisions upward to government and consumer spending. Full-year growth remained at 2.5 percent, markedly above the 2022 level. While many analysts expected that consumer spending would lose steam as households drew down on savings from the pandemic period and as borrowing costs stayed elevated, consumption has been more resilient than anticipated. The US economy also defied predictions that it would enter a recession, strengthening optimism that it is achieving a soft landing -- where inflation cools from higher interest rates without triggering a downturn. — AFP

Zuckerberg discusses AI risks with Japan PM during Asia tour

Meta chief to attend pre-wedding event of Ambani's son

TOKYO: Meta chief Mark Zuckerberg met Prime Minister Fumio Kishida during a visit to Japan, discussing the risks of generative AI, a government spokesman said Wednesday. Zuckerberg is on a mini-tour of Asia that includes stops in Japan, India and South Korea, where he travelled on Tuesday night.

The 39-year-old mixed business with pleasure while in Japan, going skiing with his family and learning about sword-making from a master craftsman. Zuckerberg and Kishida met on Tuesday and "discussed a broad range of topics including the status of AI's technological advancement... (and) the risk surrounding generative AI", top Japanese government spokesman Yoshimasa Hayashi told reporters on Wednesday.

Japanese media quoted Zuckerberg as saying: "We had a good, productive conversation about AI and the future of technology." "I'm really excited for the work that is happening here in Japan," he said after the 30-minute meeting. Spearheaded by OpenAI's ChatGPT, generative artificial intelligence is a technology that can conjure up text, images and audio from simple prompts in just seconds.

Its rapid development has been heralded as potentially revolutionary for everything from video games to politics—but with negative as well as

positive consequences. Meta was one of 20 major tech firms, including OpenAI, to sign a pledge this month to crack down on AI content intended to deceive voters ahead of crucial elections around the world this year.

Tech groups had previously agreed to use a common watermarking standard that would tag images generated by AI applications such as ChatGPT, Meta's Llama, Microsoft's Copilot and Google's Gemini.

Zuckerberg arrived in Seoul on a private flight on Tuesday night for the second leg of his Asia trip and is expected to meet South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol, local media reported.

"We are coordinating with Meta to arrange a meeting," a spokesperson for Yoon's office told AFP on Wednesday. Zuckerberg met the CEO of consumer tech giant LG Electronics to discuss extended reality (XR) projects, South Korea's Yonhap news agency reported.

Meta is collaborating with LG to develop a premium headset that will compete with Apple's Vision Pro, the Korea Economic Daily reported. The Meta boss also met Lee Jae-yong, the head of Samsung Electronics—one of the world's biggest producers of smartphones and computer chips—to explore potential collaborations in AI memory chips and XR businesses, Yonhap reported.



SEOUL: Mark Zuckerberg (center), head of US tech giant Meta, arrives at the underground parking lot of LG Twin Tower during his visit to South Korea on the second leg of his Asia trip in Seoul on Feb 28, 2024. -- AFP

Samsung is among the few companies worldwide that manufacture premium high bandwidth memory (HBM) chips tailored for AI processors. Yonhap said Zuckerberg also met representatives from at least five AI and XR startups at Meta's Seoul office. The agency said he will leave for India on Thursday.

Zuckerberg will attend the lavish March 1-3 pre-wedding celebrations of the son of Mukesh Ambani, chairman of Indian oil-to-telecoms giant Reliance, reports said. Meta, Google and others have invested billions of dollars in Reliance's digital unit Jio Platforms as it seeks to take on Amazon and Walmart in India's vast e-commerce market. -- AFP

Vietnam's 'rice bowl' cracks in monster heatwave

HANOI: Southern Vietnam, including business hub Ho Chi Minh City and its "rice bowl" Mekong Delta region, suffered an unusually long heatwave in February, weather officials said Wednesday. Several areas of the delta are also suffering drought and farmers are struggling to transport their crops due to low water levels in the region's canals.

The intense period of heat began on February 9, meteorologists told AFP, with temperatures reaching up to 38 degrees Celsius (100 degrees Fahrenheit) -- an "abnormal" high for February in southern Vietnam, which usually sees hot weather peak at around 39C (102F) in April or May. In Ca Mau province, at the tip of the Mekong Delta, farmer Hong Chi Hieu told AFP that "severe drought" had made the earth "very, very dry" and caused problems using the waterways.

"Most of us grow rice here. We have quite a bumper crop this year but the dry canals are badly impacting the transportation of our harvest," he said. Le Dinh Quyet, chief forecaster at the Southern Meteorological and Hydrological Administration, said the El Nino weather phenomenon and the general impact of global climate change were contributing to the unusually long dry spell, which is still going on.

Globally, 2023 was the warmest year on record, according to the World Meteorological Organization (WMO). It warned last month that this year could be



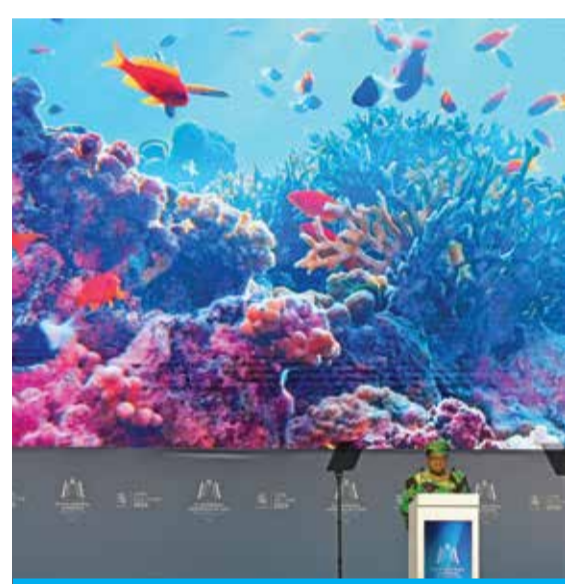
CA MAU, Vietnam: A farmer rowing a boat carrying bananas along an almost dried up canal in southern Vietnam's Ca Mau province, amid a long heatwave. -- AFP

even hotter because the naturally occurring El Nino climate pattern, which emerged in mid-2023, usually increases global temperatures for one year afterwards.

Scientists have warned extreme weather is also being intensified by global warming. More than 80 canals have dried up in the Tran Van Thoi district of Ca Mau province, state-controlled news site VNEExpress reported. According to local authorities, agricultural production is entirely reliant on rainwater and, given

its scarcity this year, farmers were forced to pump water from waterways into their fields.

That caused a large height difference between the riverside road surface and the water level below, leading to subsidence and landslides, local authorities said, according to VNEExpress. Tran Van Thoi has recorded around 340 cases of subsidence and landslides from the beginning of the year, resulting in more than 13 billion VND (\$500,000) of damage. -- AFP



ABU DHABI: Director-General of the World Trade Organization (WTO) Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala addresses delegates during a session on fisheries subsidies during the 13th WTO Ministerial Conference in Abu Dhabi. -- AFP

No new deals at WTO without US concession: India

ABU DHABI: India will only finalize new deals at a WTO ministerial meeting if the United States stops blocking an agreement on a dispute settlement mechanism, New Delhi's trade minister said Wednesday. Delegates are hoping for progress on issues such as fisheries and agriculture at the World Trade Organization's 13th ministerial meeting, under way in Abu Dhabi.

But Indian minister Piyush Goyal told AFP on the sidelines of the talks his country would not "finalize" any new agreements without progress on the dispute-settlement system.

"It's important that the first issue we should settle is that there should be an appellate body and some countries are not allowing that to happen." Washington brought a WTO dispute settlement to a grinding halt in 2019 after blocking for years the appointment of new judges to the WTO's appeals court. Goyal said "the entire working of WTO currently has come to a little bit of a standstill".

New agreements require full consensus between the WTO's 164 member states as per the body's rules. "I think it's important that the issues which relate to the past and have been under consideration for many years should be addressed first and among them is the appellate body which is of prime importance," he said. "Only after that we can look at fresh other issues in the future."

Washington had accused the appellate body of over-interpreting WTO rules, and said that judges' decisions should not go against the national security of countries. It is now pushing for a dispute settlement reform that will create a "fair" system and not replicate the flaws of the previous body, US Trade Representative Katherine Tai said this week. During the last WTO ministerial conference in 2022, member states committed to hold discussions on the dispute settlement system "with a view to having a fully operational system by 2024".

But there has been little progress, causing frustration ahead of the possible reflection of Donald Trump as US president in November. When asked if the issue should have been resolved before the Abu Dhabi conference, Goyal said: "It should have been fixed, because unless that is fixed, every other decision is only a paper decision" that cannot be implemented.

The head of the World Trade Organization on Tuesday said she was "cautiously optimistic" about prospects of striking deals on fisheries and agriculture during a ministerial meeting in Abu Dhabi. The comments by Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala came as tough negotiations kicked off on the second day of the WTO's 13th ministerial conference which is scheduled to run until Thursday but could go into overtime amid divisions. "We just got started... so we are at the very beginning," she told a press conference. "I can say that I am cautiously optimistic." With a fisheries deal largely seen as the only viable outcome of the full WTO conference (MC13), an agreement on agriculture is less likely. -- AFP

AI new obsession for venture capital investing

SAN FRANCISCO: After the earthquake of ChatGPT's phenomenal success a year ago, Silicon Valley investors have gone into overdrive with artificial intelligence, looking for the newest blockbuster idea in an ocean of hype and overpromising. OpenAI sparked a generative AI craze with ChatGPT, which can pen stories, create pictures, write computer code and more from simple text prompts.

Stung by the struggles of cryptocurrency and other faded Silicon Valley fads of recent years, venture capitalists have quickly doubled down on AI, a new promised land in the never-ending quest for big tech riches. For the big investors, "if it's not AI, it's not worth it," Denis Barrier, co-founder of venture capital firm Cathay Innovation told AFP after meetings with several investment fund handlers. "Funds are looking to make big moves," Barrier said.

"And that's pretty unlikely outside AI in the next few years." While layoffs and budget tightening became routine at tech companies last year, startups in the AI sector raised nearly \$50 billion from investors, according to market tracker Crunchbase. In that first wave of the AI gold rush, investment focused heavily on companies building the large language models that make generative AI features possible.

A record-high \$29 billion was invested in generative AI in 2023, according to PitchBook. But building foundational models from scratch costs a fortune in computing needs and most of that money can only come from the richest of backers—such as Google, Microsoft, Amazon and Nvidia—and flow to a chosen few such as OpenAI and Anthropic. This week Mistral, a buzzy French startup building its own models, secured a new investment from Microsoft after already getting financing from some of Silicon Valley's richest

investors, including Nvidia and Andreessen Horowitz, one of the sector's most aggressive firms. "We believe that any slowdown in AI will cost lives," wrote the rock star venture capitalist Marc Andreessen last year in his "Techno-Optimist Manifesto." But scared off by the cost of entry, many venture capitalists have turned their attention to more narrowly focused AI startups that could shake up banking, healthcare, energy and other sectors.

Cathay recently invested in French biotech startup Bioptimus, which is putting AI to work creating new drugs. While seeking out promising firms, Cathay looked at engineering skill, data access, cost controls, and an ambition to transform a sector, Barrier explained in his downtown office overlooking the San Francisco Bay. "You have to have a little faith," Barrier said. "An application that works can catch on like wildfire; you have to be there first!" Loora, an Israeli startup that uses generative AI to teach English, raised \$12 million last week.

Loora's mobile applications teaches English through conversation and has won more than 15,000 customers who have signed up for about the same price as a Netflix subscription. Simply embracing AI is not what is going to attract the investors, Loora co-founder Roy Mor told AFP from his headquarters in Tel Aviv. What companies need is more of the right data that will improve the app and improve user experience, he said. "I think the use cases where AI really brings value, where it solves problems, are not yet widespread," he said. For now, the most promise for returns on investment are from the business world, and many startups are focusing there. Alembic, a specialist in large-scale data analysis—the heart of AI—has just raised \$14 million. Using techniques originally designed to track health data during the coronavirus pandemic, the startup helps determine the effectiveness of marketing campaigns. Former Walt Disney Studios chairman and DreamWorks co-founder Jeffrey Katzenberg, is a founder of WndrCo, a VC that is backing Alembic. "AI is for real," the former Hollywood bigwig said. "It's not an evolution, but a revolution, a positive revolution." -- AFP



Swiss Re: Climate perils costing US 0.4% of its GDP

ZURICH: Climate perils are already causing the United States annual economic losses of \$97 billion, or 0.4 percent of its annual economic output, according to a study published Wednesday by the reinsurance giant Swiss Re. The Zurich-based group, which acts as an insurer for insurers, reaffirmed that climate change could reduce global economic output by seven to 10 percent by 2050. For now, the Philippines is the country suffering the highest annual economic losses from the impact of four major weather perils studied—floods, tropical cyclones, winter storms and severe thunderstorms—at three percent of gross domestic product. "Climate change is leading to more severe weather events, resulting in increasing impact on economies," said the Swiss Re group's chief economist Jerome Jean Haegeli.

"Therefore, it becomes even more crucial to take adaptation measures." To understand how insurers can assess risks, the study, based on 2022 data, took stock of the impact of the most frequent natural disasters on the gross domestic product (GDP) of 36 sample countries. Swiss Re economists took into account the four most frequent and most expensive weather disasters. By this yardstick, the Philippines is the hardest-hit country, followed by the United States, then Thailand with annual economic losses of 0.36 percent of GDP, Austria (0.25 percent) and China (0.22 percent). India was seventh on 0.20 percent, with Australia eighth on 0.19 percent and Japan 10th on 0.18 percent. The assessment provides a broad view of the economic implications if weather perils continue to intensify.

It does not take into account all weather risks, such as heatwaves, with Swiss Re saying it was "difficult to predict" the full impact of climate change. Globally, the four risks studied represent around \$200 billion in economic losses each year. Swiss Re economists said that while reducing greenhouse gas emissions was essential, it was also imperative to take measures to help stem economic losses. Such measures could include reviewing building regulations, creating flood defense systems and discouraging building development in areas heavily exposed to climate change. -- AFP

Business

Hong Kong scraps property taxes to revive sluggish housing market

Home prices retreat amid high interest rates, China slowdown

HONG KONG: Hong Kong has axed three major property transaction taxes in a bid to revive its depressed housing market, finance minister Paul Chan said in his annual budget speech Wednesday. The finance hub is among the world's least affordable residential markets, but home prices retreated last year amid high interest rates and China's economic slowdown.

Chan said Hong Kong immediately scrapped three types of stamp duty, reversing measures introduced more than a decade ago to rein in speculation fuelled in part by mainland Chinese buyers. "After prudent consideration of the overall current situation, we decide to cancel all demand-side management measures for residential properties with immediate effect," Chan told the legislature. The cancelled taxes include stamp duties — which were once as high as 15 percent — imposed on property buyers who are not Hong Kong permanent residents and on those purchasing a second home.

"No Special Stamp Duty, Buyer's Stamp Duty or New Residential Stamp Duty needs to be paid for any residential property transactions starting from today," Chan said. "We consider that the relevant measures are no longer necessary amidst the current economic and market conditions," he said, noting that residential market sentiment became "very cautious" since the middle of last year. Hong Kong had already reduced stamp duty last October in a bid to revive the market, but the reception had been largely muted.

Flat prices fell seven percent during 2023 and transactions slid five percent, to around 43,000. The weak housing market has also hurt public finances, with the Hong Kong government heavily

reliant on land sales for revenue but only netting HK\$19.4 billion (\$2.5 billion) last year. Hong Kong recorded a HK\$102 billion deficit in 2023-24, with fiscal reserves falling to HK\$733 billion due to "challenges posed by the epidemic and external environment", Chan added.

Bolstering appeal

Hong Kong's economy is expected to grow between 2.5 and 3.5 percent this year, the finance chief said, aided by factors such as the US Federal Reserve's expected interest rate cut. "Amid a complicated and ever-changing international environment... more strenuous efforts are required to strengthen momentum of our economic recovery," Chan said. Hong Kong hopes to reboot its reputation as a finance capital following years of strict pandemic curbs and social unrest, with critics saying that Beijing's ongoing political crackdown on the city has led to an exodus of talent and capital.

Chan on Wednesday pledged around HK\$1 billion for tourism development, including funds for "mega events" and monthly fireworks and drone shows over the city's Victoria Harbour. Hong Kong last year saw about 34 million visitor arrivals, down from record levels of 65 million in 2018.

The Hong Kong Monetary Authority also relaxed mortgage rules on Wednesday, allowing homebuyers to borrow more, and eased an income-related stress test. Louis Chan of Centaline Property Agency told AFP scrapping the property market curbs would bring "very positive impacts".

"I expect the trading volume to surge by 60 to 70 percent, with some even doubling... I expect the property price to go up by three to five per-



HONG KONG: Pedestrians walk past an empty commercial property in Hong Kong on Feb 28, 2024. Hong Kong has dropped all property market curbs in a bid to boost buyer sentiment, the city's finance chief Paul Chan said in his annual budget speech on Feb 28. — AFP

cent in the second quarter," said Chan.

Deloitte China tax partner Polly Wan said the stamp duty cancellations were "welcome moves to help stabilize the property sector and boost overall economic revival". But economist Terence Chong at the Chinese University of Hong Kong

said the impact of mortgage interest rates would outweigh that of tax cuts. "It is the most important to create a healthily rising market because no matter how cheap a flat is, young people won't put a major investment of their life in a depreciating asset," Chong said. — AFP

News in Brief

Aston Martin halves annual losses

LONDON: Aston Martin Lagonda halved losses in 2023 as average selling prices hit record highs, the British luxury auto giant announced Wednesday. Pre-tax losses totaled £240 million (\$303 million) last year, down from £495 million in 2022, the company said in a results statement. Revenue jumped 18 percent to £1.6 billion, added the carmaker whose top-end vehicles are beloved by fictional British spy James Bond. "In 2023, Aston Martin delivered... driven by continued strong demand for our ultra-luxury, high-performance products," said chairman Lawrence Stroll. — AFP

Baidu annual income jumps

BEIJING: Chinese Internet giant Baidu announced a 169 percent jump in annual net income Wednesday, in a positive sign for the country's technology sector as broader economic turbulence persists. Following years of ballooning growth, China's leading tech firms have faced unprecedented challenges more recently, as authorities pursue greater regulatory oversight. The crackdown has resulted in the loss of billions of dollars in market capitalization since 2020, dragging down the profitability of domestic Internet giants. — AFP

Tata's e-car battery plant in Bridgwater

LONDON: Indian conglomerate Tata Group announced Wednesday that its new multibillion-pound UK factory to manufacture batteries will be located in Bridgwater, south west England. The £4 billion (\$5 billion) plant in the county of Somerset, southwest England, will be Tata's first so-called gigafactory outside India. Agratas, Tata Group's global battery business, confirmed Wednesday that the 40 GWh factory would be built at Bridgwater's Gravity Smart Campus. The UK plant, which Tata, owner of Jaguar Land Rover (JLR), announced in July, will become one of Europe's largest battery-cell manufacturing sites. — AFP

Country Garden winding-up petition

HONG KONG: A petition to wind up debt-hit Country Garden has been filed in a Hong Kong court, the company said Wednesday, the latest Chinese property developer to face possible liquidation. One of China's biggest real estate firms, Country Garden has racked up more than \$190 billion in debt, becoming a symbol of an industry-wide crisis that has fuelled fears of a spillover into the wider economy. The petition, filed by a lender demanding a payoff of approximately HK\$1.6 billion (\$204 million), came weeks after Hong Kong's High Court granted a similar petition against peer Evergrande, which is more than \$300 billion in debt, kickstarting its offshore assets liquidation and management replacement. — AFP

Gulf Bank's National Day commercial hits 13 million views

KUWAIT: For the second time this year, the renowned singer Nabil Shuail has redirected his support to Gulf Bank, encouraging his fans and followers to transfer their accounts to Gulf Bank and take advantage of its cards without any limitations and enjoy all their benefits. His latest commercial for Kuwait National Day has garnered 13 million views since its release just a few days ago.

In a notable gesture, Gulf Bank has paid tribute to the importance of the song "Free Kuwait," by singer Nabil Shuail after the liberation of Kuwait, by incorporating it into a special commercial for Kuwait National Day. Presented in an engaging and uplifting manner, the commercial promotes the prepaid card, featuring with Kuwait's flag, symbolizing deep sentiments in the hearts of all citizens.

On this occasion, Najla Al-Eisa, Deputy General Manager of Consumer Banking at Gulf Bank's Marketing Department, emphasized Gulf Bank's commitment to actively engage with the community on every occasion. This reflects the bank's longstanding role as one of Kuwait's leading financial institutions supporting the national economy, and aligns with its motto "Always With You," signifies Gulf Bank's commitment to maintaining strong ties with the community.

Al-Eisa expressed joy in teaming up with singer Nabil Shuail and the commercial team, following the remarkable success of their previous campaign "Ya Shams," which garnered millions of views. She confirmed their ongoing collaboration with Nabil Shuail on future projects.

Regarding the Gulf Bank prepaid card, Al-Eisa highlighted its convenience in managing expenses and its instant benefits and discounts for customers. She emphasized its user-friendly and secure fea-

Vodafone in talks to sell Italian unit to Swisscom

LONDON: British telecoms giant Vodafone said Wednesday it was in advanced talks to sell its Italian unit to Switzerland's Swisscom after rejecting offers from French billionaire Xavier Noel's Iliad group. The full terms of the transaction have yet to be defined but the companies put a preliminary price of 8 billion euros (\$8.7 billion) on the potential deal.

Shares in Vodafone, which has been on a cost-cutting campaign that has included layoffs and the offloading of divisions abroad, rose following the announcement. The disclosure of the negotiations with Swisscom comes a month after the British mobile phone operator rejected an Iliad offer to merge their Italian units.

Vodafone said in a statement that it had "engaged extensively with several parties to explore market consolidation in Italy". The potential transaction with Swisscom "delivers the best combination of value creation, upfront cash proceeds and transaction certainty for Vodafone shareholders", it added.

The two companies, however, cautioned in separate statements that there was no certainty the transaction would ultimately be agreed. The acquisition of Vodafone Italy would be on a cash and debt-free basis, the companies said. A source close to the matter told AFP that Vodafone preferred a deal with the Swiss group because of its "significant cash element" and a higher degree of certainty that the deal could be completed, as it would have a better chance of being approved by Italian regulators.

Swisscom said it would merge Vodafone Ita-



Artist Nabil Shuail with Najla Al-Eisa, Mahdi Suleiman and Abrar Al-Yaqout from Gulf Bank pose for a group photo.

tures, suitable for both children and family members. Particularly noteworthy are the immediate discounts of up to 25 percent at over 550 restaurants and cafes in Kuwait, and up to 30 percent at over 300 commercial outlets across various sectors including travel, entertainment, health, beauty, and luxury lifestyle.

The prepaid card stands out for its convenient and rapid payment options via point-of-sale devices, available at over two million ATMs and more than 33 million stores. Customers have the flexibility to add credit of up to KD 3,000 through various channels, or by visiting one of the branches.

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

ly with its own Italian unit, Fastweb. Last month, Vodafone rejected a proposal from Iliad to merge their Italian businesses in a deal valuing Vodafone Italy at 10.45 billion euros. The British mobile phone operator had already rebuffed an 11.25-billion-euro approach by Iliad and private equity group Apax Partners in February 2022. Niel has since taken a 2.5-percent stake in Vodafone.

Vodafone reported earlier this month that its third-quarter revenues fell 2.3 percent to 11.4 billion euros on poor performances across Italy and Spain. In late 2023, Vodafone's chief executive Margherita Della Valle announced the sale of its Spanish division to investment fund Zegona for up to five billion euros. It followed her decision last year to axe 11,000 jobs, or more than 10 percent of Vodafone's global workforce, to slash costs.

Britain's competition regulator, meanwhile, is investigating Vodafone's plan to merge its British mobile phone operations with those of Three UK, owned by Hong Kong-based CK Hutchison.

Vodafone also completed the sale of its Hungarian unit last year. "The telecoms group has been stuck in the mud for a long time, trying to revive growth and reignite a spark in the business," said Russ Mould, investment director at investment platform AJ Bell. "Work to streamline the group has already involved various deals but the market is still not convinced Vodafone has found the magic solution judging by its share price performance over the past five years," he said. "The Italian deal, if successful, is a step in the right direction but only one small piece of the puzzle," he added.

Vodafone shares were up 0.7 percent in the London stock exchange in late morning deals. Susannah Streeter, head of money and markets at investment platform Hargreaves Lansdown, noted that the proposed transaction would follow "hot on the heels" of Vodafone's sale of its Spanish business. — AFP

Nissan to launch self-driving taxi service in Japan

TOKYO: Nissan is planning to launch a self-driving taxi service in Japan in the financial year starting April 2027, the auto giant said on Wednesday. The company said it will begin trials of the commercial service in the upcoming financial year from April, using minivans in an area of Yokohama, south of Tokyo. "Local communities have been facing several mobility challenges, such as driver shortages, which are a result of an ageing population," Nissan said in a statement. It plans to work with local authorities and transport operators on the venture to "provide a broad range of new services that enable free movement".

Japan is far from the only place with autonomous vehicles on the roads, but its government has set acceleration of the technology as a key priority as it faces labor shortages and an ageing population in need of transport. Since last year, road traffic laws have allowed "Level 4" self-driving vehicles to operate on public roads in certain circumstances. Vehicle autonomy is classified along a scale from 0-5, with 5 indicating essentially total autonomy.

Nissan says it has been "testing business models for self-driving mobility services in Japan and abroad since 2017". Last year, its rival Honda, US auto giant General Motors and GM's autonomous driving unit Cruise announced they will establish a joint venture which will begin a driverless ride service in Japan in early 2026. Toyota is also planning a pilot project using automated vehicles in the Odaiba area of Tokyo from July, a spokesman told AFP. From 2025 Toyota plans to launch a paid service and expand it to other districts of central Tokyo, in what will likely be Japan's first automated driving service on public roads with other vehicles, the Yomiuri daily reported this month. — AFP

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 29, 2024



West Bank museum showcases Gaza's 'artistic demonstration' against war



People visit the 'This Is Not An Exhibition' section displaying paintings by Gazan artists, including 'Flying Lesson' by Hani Zurob (right).



People visit the 'This Is Not An Exhibition' section displaying paintings by Gazan artists, such as Shadi Al-Zaqzouq's 'after the washing' (right).



People visit the 'This Is Not An Exhibition' section displaying paintings by Gazan artists, as the Palestinian Museum reopened in Birzeit town in the occupied West Bank.

At a museum in the occupied West Bank, Gazan works on display are proclaimed to be an "ongoing artistic demonstration" in solidarity with the war-ravaged Palestinian territory. "This is not an exhibition", reads the sign at the entrance to the Palestinian Museum in Birzeit, near Ramallah, showcasing art and heritage from the Gaza Strip. Alongside contemporary pieces, the works include old, traditional paintings and costumes, as well as archeological artefacts, said board member Ehab Bessaiso, a former culture minister.

He told AFP that the museum had launched the initiative to "preserve Palestinian heritage work in Gaza, which has faced destruction due to the war". Bessaiso said the museum had received "the works of hundreds of artists" from Gaza that had been held in West Bank universities and cultural centers and by individuals.

The display presents "the Gazan artistic scene in a new way" which helps "to face the challenges and difficulties which artists and culture are confronting in Gaza amid the destruction and siege", he said. In a January report, the Palestinian culture ministry said 24 cultural centers in Gaza had been destroyed "in whole or in part" since the start of the war.

They include the Arab Orthodox Cultural and Social Center, the Rashad Shawa Cultural Center—which includes a theatre, library and printing presses—and the Al-Sununu for Culture and Arts Association in Gaza City. Historical buildings such as mosques, churches, the old Phoenician port and the Al-Qarara Cultural Museum have also been destroyed.

'Whole lives stolen'

"It's a beautiful thing to see the work of artists from Gaza here in the West Bank, especially because Gaza no longer has a place to show them after all the destruction there," said Alma Abdulghani, a visitor in her 30s. The war erupted with Hamas's October 7 attack, which resulted in the deaths of about 1,160 people in the Zionist entity, mostly civilians, according to an AFP tally of official figures.

The Zionist entity's retaliatory offensive has killed at least 29,782 people, mostly women and children, according

to Gaza's health ministry. Bessaiso said the museum display is "a journey through Gazan Palestinian art, especially following the killing of dozens of artists, writers, poets and journalists". "This journey affirms the oneness of the Palestinian people, which the (Zionist) occupation is trying to destroy."

The names of 115 artists are on display at the main entrance, with black

said the project aims to be "an alternative platform for the voices" from Gaza, where repeated communications blackouts during the war have prevented them "from reaching us".

'Cut off life'

In the main exhibition hall, a pile of rubble evokes the destruction that has befallen Gaza. The scene is completed

gowns from multiple Gazan cities are on display, as well as braided necklaces and bracelets dating from the British Mandate years. A painting by Gaza-born artist Tayseer Barakat depicts military machines and vehicles, while another 16 carry written messages about the war.

"This series is a message and an expression of what I saw and heard of what our people in Gaza are living through



People visit the 'Ethnographic Collection Display: Women of Gaza Exhibition' section.



People visit the 'This Is Not An Exhibition' section displaying paintings by Gazan artists, including Layla al-Shawa's 'Tied-up Liberated'.



People visit the 'This Is Not An Exhibition' section displaying paintings by Gazan artists, such as 'Worry' by Abdel Nasser Amer (right).



Samples of the Gazan 'Thobe' or traditional dress are displayed in the 'Ethnographic Collection Display: Women of Gaza Exhibition' section.

marks around the names of those killed in the war, among them visual artist Heba Zagout and painter Mohammed Sami Qariqa. "Those who have had their homes, dreams, memories, loved ones and their whole lives stolen by the genocidal war," read the words inscribed above their names.

The museum administration described the display, which opened in mid-February, as "an alternative space to the one that once existed in Gaza before the war's fires destroyed it". It

by a constant buzzing noise, a nod to the Zionist surveillance drones that are ever-present in the skies above Gaza, and footage of ambulances transporting a never-ending stream of wounded. Mohammed Al-Huwajia, a visual artist from Rafah in southern Gaza, told AFP by video call that the "exhibition is a reminder of the solidarity between the West Bank and Gaza". It "affirms that we still exist", he added.

Near the main entrance to the exhibition, traditional dresses and bridal

in this insane war," said Barakat, who was born in Gaza's Jabalia refugee camp and has lived in the West Bank since 1984. "How do you lose more than 7,000 people? Rain bombs on them one after another, and then prevent them from being removed from the rubble," says the writing on one painting. "How do we lose a population of two and a half million people? Cut them off from communications, electricity, water and life," says another.—AFP



People visit the 'This Is Not An Exhibition' section displaying paintings by Gazan artists.



People visit the 'Ethnographic Collection Display: Women of Gaza Exhibition' section.



People visit the 'This Is Not An Exhibition' section displaying paintings by Gazan artists, including Layla al-Shawwa's 'The Scream' (left).

Christian Dior



Models present creations by Christian Dior for the Women Ready-to-wear Fall-Winter 2024/2025 collection.



DIOR AND SAINT LAURENT LOOK BACK TO 1960S

Two fashion heavyweights looked back to the 1960s at Paris Fashion Week on Tuesday, with Christian Dior paying homage to the revolutionary "Miss Dior" line and Saint Laurent building a collection around the transparent sheer outfits beloved of its founder. The see-through dress has been

Guests including Kate Moss and K-Pop megastar Jisoo were treated to waves of chiffon, lace and tulle, offering a more risqué version of the luxury nightwear of recent seasons—and impeccably timed to coincide with an exhibition entitled "Sheer" at the Yves Saint Laurent Museum. Simon Longland,

'Miss Dior' reborn
Earlier, a starry audience including Jennifer Lawrence and Natalie Portman saw a very different ode to the past at Christian Dior. Its collection was almost entirely monochrome and beige—a heady mix of nouveau riche fantasy, from gabardine to the little white dress, via

It's a story told in the current Apple TV series "The New Look", and the stars were present for Tuesday's show, including Ben Mendelsohn, who plays Christian Dior, and Maisie Williams, who plays Catherine. "I wouldn't say I've become a fashionista since doing the show, but I'm certainly more appreciative of the role that fashion plays," Mendelsohn told AFP.

"I'm still really just sort of hit with the force of the looks and the enormous variety of it, I mean there's a lot of pieces there!" The first full day of the womenswear autumn/winter collections began earlier with the typically classy stylings of Spain's Victoria and Tomas earlier in the day.

Their show, inspired by Auguste Rodin's "The Kiss", featured lots of knotted details and scarves integrated into dresses that evoked classical sculpture. The husband-and-wife team—a rarity in the fashion world—founded their brand in 2012 after Tomas Berzins and Victoria Feldman met at a Paris design school. "The Kiss" is really a balance between something very heavy and cold like marble and something warm and fast like movement," said Feldman.—AFP



This combination of pictures show models presenting creations by Christian Dior for the Women Ready-to-wear Fall-Winter 2024/2025 collection as part of the Paris Fashion Week, in Paris. — AFP photos

a celebrity fashion staple over the past year, and Saint Laurent took it to the extreme with extensive use of materials "like mist", according to the show notes. Anthony Vaccarello, who has directed the French house since 2016, revisited one of Yves Saint Laurent's obsessions: "minimizing the distance between fabric and skin".

director of buying for London department store Harrods, described it as "bursting with juxtaposition" "The silhouette, cut and styling was in large part ladylike and conservative in its femininity—think pencil skirts, pussy blow blouses and delicate hosiery -- (but) delivered in fabrications that were mostly sheer and slinky," he said.

tweed and more urban denim and leopard-print styles. It harked back to the launch of the "Miss Dior" line in 1968, when a daring new vision of femininity emerged for newly liberated women.

It was named after the founder's sister, Catherine Dior, a resistance hero who suffered a traumatic period in a Nazi concentration camp.



This combination of pictures shows models presenting creations by Christian Dior.



Lifestyle



Saint Laurent



Christian Dior



Two men convicted of murdering Run-DMC member Jam Master Jay

A US federal jury on Tuesday convicted two men of murdering the famed Run-DMC member Jam Master Jay, a case that had gone unsolved for more than two decades. Ronald Washington and Karl Jordan Jr., the alleged shooter, were found guilty on all counts, convicted of murder while engaged in narcotics trafficking and firearms-related murder. The defendants—Jordan in a forest green vest and pants and Washington in a light blue sweater—were stoic ahead of the verdict's delivery but grew audibly emotional as they learned of the jury's decision.



Run-DMC band members Joseph Simmons (left) and Darryl McDaniels (right) hold a jacket with the face of the late Jam Master Jay as they attend the VH1 Big in 2002 awards in Los Angeles.



A mural paying tribute to late Run-DMC's Jam Master Jay is pictured in the Hollis neighborhood of the Queens borough of New York. — AFP photos

"Y'all just killed two innocent people," Washington said as he and Jordan were led out of the room, while many of their family members and friends who sat through the nearly month-long trial burst into tears. The sentencing will take place at a later date. The proceedings were centered on the events of October 30, 2002, when pioneering rapper Jason "Jay" Mizell, widely known by his DJ moniker, was fatally shot in the head in his

Queens studio. He was 37 years old and a father of three.

Prosecutors presented a case of a drug deal gone wrong, saying that Washington and Jordan, who both knew Mizell, killed the famous artist as revenge for cutting them out of a cocaine deal. Federal prosecutors said Jordan—the DJ's godson—shot a 40-caliber bullet into Mizell's head, as Washington held others in the room at gunpoint.

"No matter the passage of time, be it a day, be it a week, a month, a year, or even two decades, as it was in this case, justice will be served and the harm caused by those who intentionally and senselessly end human life will be redressed," said Breon Peace, the Eastern District of New York's head attorney.

'Justice delayed'

For years, two key witnesses—Lydia High and Uriel "Tony" Rincon, the latter of whom was shot in the leg the night of the murder—had resisted cooperating with law enforcement—reticence both they and prosecutors ascribed to fear. "It's no mystery why it took years to indict and arrest the defendants," said Peace. "The witnesses in the recording studio knew the killers, and they were terrified that they would be retaliated against if they cooperated with law enforcement." "But their strength and resolve in testifying at this trial were a triumph of right over wrong and courage over fear."

A third person, Jay Bryant, will be tried at a later date. Defense teams had insisted that Bryant was in fact the killer, pointing out that his hat was discovered at the crime scene. Prosecutors allege Bryant let Mizell's murderers into the musician's studio, but accuse him of being an accomplice to the larger conspiracy, not the shooter.

"No comment," said one member of Washington's defense team when queried by AFP following the verdict. Speaking to reporters, Mizell's cousin Carlis Thompson, who sat in the gallery throughout the proceedings, called the verdict a "long time coming" but said "justice delayed is not always justice denied."

Double life

The trial revealed a lesser-known side of Mizell, who along with his band Run-DMC had railed against drug culture. But prosecutors said Mizell got involved in the narcotics trade to support his lifestyle and those close to him, as buzz around the group's music—hits include "It's Tricky" and "Walk This Way"—began to fade. He was a quiet middleman on drug deals, and a financial fount for family and friends, in the years preceding his death, they said.

Along with LL Cool J and Public Enemy, Run-DMC were trailblazers of new-school hip-hop—mixing rock elements, aggressive boasting and sociopolitical commentary—and its outgrowth, golden era hip-hop, which included eclectic sampling. The seminal group were the first rappers featured on MTV, and established a new rap aesthetic incorporating street culture—a departure from the flashy, disco-inflected attire of their predecessors. Prior to his death, Mizell was influential in New York as a cultivator of local talent, working with young rappers and co-founding a DJ academy. Jam Master Jay's slaying followed a spate of murders within the rap community in the 1990s, including the shootings of superstars The Notorious B.I.G. and Tupac Shakur. —AFP

Lagos gets Sci-Fi treatment in new Disney+ series

A new animated Disney series set in a futuristic Lagos has won over its first viewers with a Sci-Fi play on life in the Nigerian megacity. From Lagosian slang to lagoon markets and traffic jams, Disney+ six-parter "Iwaju" captures everyday urban details and catapults them into a future bristling with high-tech gadgets where some of the city's present-day problems persist. It marks Disney's first collaboration with an outside studio and part of a drive to feature more African animations, which have long been neglected by big foreign entertainment companies. Ahead of its release on Wednesday, AFP attended a preview with the series' creators at the IMAX Lekki in Lagos. "Iwaju", which means 'future' in Yoruba, was dreamt up by the pan-African entertainment company Kugali, founded in 2017 by Nigerians Olufikayo 'Ziki' Adeola and Tolu Olowofoyeku, and Hamid Ibrahim, a Ugandan.

The three suited young men made a grand entrance on the red carpet at the screening on Tuesday night, which was also attended by Nollywood stars and Nigeria's culture minister. Head set designer Ibrahim said the series had left viewers "mind-blown." The 20-minute episodes are packed with recognizable features of the city, from its island geography right down to street vendors selling Lagosian cuisine. "Futuristic elements are mixed with Lagos' identity," Ibrahim said. "It was important to us that Lagosians recognise their city and that others discover its specificities."

Kidnapping and curiosity

The series tells the story of Tola, a 10-year-old from a wealthy Lagos family,



Nigerian Minister of Art, Culture and Creative Economy, Hannatu Musawa speaks to the media during the Iwaju World Premiere.



Nigerian actress Chioma Omeruah who played "Chioma" in the Iwaju series, poses at the Iwaju World Premiere.

and her best friend Kole, a 13-year-old tech whizz and domestic worker who lives in the poorest part of the city. Their friendship is put to the test by Bode, a tech villain who runs a criminal kidnapping ring.

Kidnapping for ransom is rife in Nigeria and the "Iwaju" team drew inspiration from a real story about Adeola's friend who escaped an attempted abduction by jumping from a bridge into Lagos lagoon. Adeola said Disney had helped address the subject so "children can view it without being traumatized."

"We are talking about kidnapping, but 'Iwaju' has several other interesting themes such as family love, curiosity, inequality, questioning the status quo," he said. "It's a film that's fun to watch". The series delighted viewers at the preview. "The first thing I noticed was how relatable it was with the accents and everything... they had actual Lagos slang and it was really funny," said 25-year-old influencer Ella Gbinije.



Co-founder of Kugali Hamid Ibrahim poses at the Iwaju World Premiere.



Actress Simisola Gbadamosi arrives for the Iwaju World Premiere.



British Nigerian actor Obiesie Madduegbuna aka Lakey in the Iwaju series, poses at the Iwaju World Premiere at the Filmhouse Cinema in Lagos Nigeria.--AFP photos



Nigerian actress Bisola Aiyeola a voice actor in the Iwaju series, poses at the Iwaju World Premiere.



British Nigerian actor Obiesie Madduegbuna poses at the Iwaju World Premiere.

Sports

Top seed Zverev crashes out of Mexico Open first round

Medvedev makes winning return after Australian Open final loss

ACAPULCO: Top seed Alexander Zverev tumbled out of the Mexico Open at the first hurdle on Tuesday, eliminated by German compatriot Daniel Altmaier in three sets. Zverev, winner of the Acapulco tournament in 2021, was sent packing 6-3, 3-6, 6-3 in 2hr 28min by world number 57 Altmaier.

After sharing the first two sets, Altmaier took control of the third set with an early break to take a 2-0 lead before holding for 3-0. Zverev missed opportunities to break back in the fifth and seventh games, unable to convert any of three break points and Altmaier served out to clinch victory and set up a second round meeting with Serbia's Miomir Kecmanovic.

In other games on Tuesday, Australia's Jordan Thompson was brought back down to earth after losing his first round match just two days after winning the first ATP title of his career. Thompson, who went on a giant-killing run before defeating Casper Ruud to win the Los Cabos Open final on Sunday, was ousted in three sets by American qualifier Aleksandar Kovacevic, losing 6-3, 5-7, 6-4 in 2hr 42min.

Kovacevic will play Holger Rune in the second round after the Danish second seed cruised past Michael Mmoh 6-2, 6-3 earlier Tuesday. Greece's Stefanos Tsitsipas, the fifth seed, eased past Russian Roman Safullin 6-3, 6-4.

Tsitsipas will play Italian qualifier Flavio Cobolli in the second round. "It's one of those first rounds that you get good opponents and a very good, strong start from the beginning of the tournament," Tsitsipas said in an on-court interview after his win. "I knew that dealing with Roman, he's someone that can play good on these kinds of surfaces. He takes the ball early, pushes you back."

"That was the main thing I had to deal with today, which I did pretty well." Meanwhile, Sunday's beaten

Los Cabos finalist Ruud, the sixth seed in Acapulco, needed three sets to overpower Christopher Eubanks, eventually winning 6-4, 6-7 (5/7), 6-3.

American eighth seed Frances Tiafoe defeated Australia's Max Purcell 4-6, 6-3, 6-0, and now faces Germany's Dominik Koepfer, a 6-4, 4-6, 6-0 winner over France's Terence Atmane.

Meanwhile, Daniil Medvedev returned to action for the first time since his Australian final defeat on Tuesday with a straight sets win over Alexander Shevchenko in Dubai. Elsewhere 18-year-old Jakub Mensik beat Borna Coric 48 hours after becoming the youngest finalist at a tour event since 2021, in Doha. The man who ended the Czech teenager's dream run in Qatar on Sunday, Karen Khachanov, was also among the round of 32 winners.

World number four Medvedev got his title defence at the hardcourt ATP 500 event up and running, overcoming Shevchenko 6-3, 7-5. The Russian top seed shrugged off his month-long absence - part holiday, part injury - breaking his Kazakh opponent in three consecutive return games in the first set before reeling off four games in a row from 3-5 in the second set to complete an 88-minute triumph.

In January, Medvedev reached his second Australian Open final. He lost to Rafael Nadal in the Melbourne decider two years ago, and this time had to settle for second best in the season's opening Grand Slam to Jannik Sinner. He was forced to skip his title defence in Doha last week because he was dealing with a number of physical issues — with his foot, adductor, and shoulder. "In general, to be honest, I am happy with my level, because it is not easy to come back after an injury."

"You always try to straight away put your game back, but it's not easy and I'm happy to beat such a good opponent and am looking forward to the next



ACAPULCO: Germany's Alexander Zverev hits a return against Germany's Daniel Altmaier during the Mexico ATP Open 500 men's round of 32 tennis match at Arena GNP Seguros in Acapulco, Guerrero, Mexico. — AFP

round," said Medvedev courtside. He added: "When you take a week or two off, but it's something you planned, then it's kind of easy tennis-wise, just a couple of points or games to get back."

"I did take a week and a half off by myself and then when I came back I started feeling pain here and there, not practising 100 per cent. "It's very tricky, because when you come into a match you have to

forget about it and when you think about something other than tennis you are going to lose the match."

Medvedev will meet next Lorenzo Sonego after the Italian dispatched wild card Sumit Nagal of India 6-4, 5-7, 6-1. Mensik let slip a match point and then saved one in his 4-6, 6-3, 7-6 (9/7) victory over Coric to book a date next with Spain's world number 24 Alejandro Davidovich Fokina. — AFP

News in Brief

India upgrades contracts

NEW DELHI: Three India players had their contracts upgraded Wednesday by the national cricket board after stellar performances, as it expanded its players' list from 26 to 30. KL Rahul, Shubman Gill and Mohammed Siraj join teammates Ravichandran Ashwin, Mohammed Shami and Hardik Pandya in the A grade. But the top four players in the A+ category remain unchanged — Rohit Sharma, Virat Kohli, Jasprit Bumrah and Ravindra Jadeja — the Board of Control for Cricket in India announced. The BCCI did not stipulate pay for each category, but last year A+ contracts meant an annual salary of \$844,000, with A-grade players earning \$603,000. Opener Yashasvi Jaiswal, 22, the stand-out performer in the ongoing Test series against England, entered the list on his first BCCI central contract on grade B—a \$362,000 salary, according to last year's figures. — AFP

Shami out of IPL

CHENNAI: Pace bowler Mohammed Shami is out of this year's Indian Premier League after having surgery on his Achilles tendon. Shami, who plays for the Gujarat Titans, posted photographs on social media of himself in hospital after the operation on Tuesday. He said that recovery "will take some time" meaning he will miss the glitzy Twenty20 league that begins next month. "I will continue to work hard towards my recovery," Shami wrote, adding that the surgery had been successful and he was "looking forward to getting back on my feet." Shami took 24 wickets as India reached the final of the 2023 Cricket World Cup. The IPL, the richest Twenty20 league in the world is due to begin on March 22 but will keep fixture dates flexible because of the country's general election. — AFP

S Lanka picks suspended skipper

COLOMBO: Sri Lanka's cricket board Wednesday named a 17-man T20 squad headed by suspended skipper Wanindu Hasaranga for the upcoming tour of Bangladesh. Officials said 26-year-old would not be included for the first two games in the three-match tournament, in line with his International Cricket Council ban last week. Hasaranga, a leg-break bowler, was penalized for abusing an umpire during a T20 match Sri Lanka lost to Afghanistan. He remonstrated with on-field umpire Lyndon Hannibal after the match, for his decision not to call a no-ball on a high delivery to Kamindu Mendis in the final over, with Sri Lanka needing 11 from three balls. — AFP

O'Shea named Ireland boss

LONDON: Former Manchester United defender John O'Shea will take charge of the Republic of Ireland's March friendlies after being named interim head coach by the Football Association of Ireland (FAI) on Wednesday. O'Shea, who had a spell as assistant to former manager Stephen Kenny, will take charge of games against Belgium and Switzerland next month. The FAI said in a statement it plans to name a permanent successor to Kenny in early April. "I'm delighted to return to the senior men's coaching staff as interim head coach for the two international friendlies against Belgium and Switzerland," said O'Shea, who won 118 caps for his country as a player. "It will be an incredible honour to lead the side into the March international window." — AFP

Ohtani homers in pre-season debut

LOS ANGELES: Japanese superstar Shohei Ohtani made an impressive Los Angeles Dodgers debut on Tuesday, smashing a two-run homer in his new club's 9-6 Major League Baseball pre-season victory over the Chicago White Sox. The 29-year-old designated hitter blasted his homer in the fifth inning and went 1-for-3 at the plate before being removed at the start of the sixth inning of the exhibition game at Glendale, Arizona.

"Definitely a big first step," Ohtani said through a translator. "The biggest thing was that I was able to finish off the game without any problems." Ohtani won his second American League Most Valuable Player award in six seasons with the Los Angeles Angels last year but departed for free agency after failing to enjoy even a winning season, much less reach the MLB playoffs.

Known for his skills as a pitcher as well as swinging the bat, Ohtani will not take the mound in 2024 after undergoing right elbow surgery last September. Simply playing, however, is another key step in his recovery, which he expects will see him play in this season's MLB opening games against San Diego in Seoul on March 20-21.

Top-ranked Vu puts priority on Paris Olympics

SINGAPORE: Lilia Vu said Wednesday she was not setting herself many goals this year after storming to world number one in 2023, but qualifying for the Paris Olympics was her first priority. Vu tees off on Thursday in the HSBC Women's World Championship in Singapore at the top of the rankings having enjoyed a breakout year when she won four LPGA tournaments, including two majors.

The 26-year-old is trying to stay grounded as she chases the chance to represent team USA at the Paris Games. "Golf is not a game of perfect, and I try to keep telling myself that," Vu told AFP at Sentosa Golf Club in Singapore. "I keep saying the reason I got to this point was because I try my best to win each tournament I play," said the American, who has Vietnamese heritage. "I'm still learning to manage (pressure) as it's definitely a new thing for me." Vu wants to set realistic goals for the 2024 campaign.

"The first would be to make it to the Olympics and then win a couple more times this year," she said. "I don't want to be too specific and hold myself to super high standards. I just want them to be attainable." Vu won her maiden tour event at LPGA Thailand last year and finished in a share of seventh

Verstappen unfazed by Horner speculation before F1 opener

MANAMA: Max Verstappen on Wednesday brushed aside suggestions his bid for a fourth consecutive world title may be affected by speculation around his Red Bull boss Christian Horner. Horner's future with the outfit was thrown into doubt after he was accused of alleged controlling and improper behavior by a female Red Bull team member, a claim that initiated an independent investigation.

"It doesn't affect me," Verstappen said before this weekend's season-opening Formula One Grand Prix in Bahrain. "I'm very focused on the car and on myself and, hopefully, it is resolved very soon," he added. Horner denied all the claims and continued

"Not really any nerves because it was just a spring training game," Ohtani said. "I was more focused on getting ready for the season, doing what I've got to do." Ohtani batted second in the Dodgers' lineup between two other past MVP players, lead-off second baseman Mookie Betts and first baseman Freddie Freeman.

"No matter where I'm hitting in the lineup, I'm really not going to change my approach," Ohtani said. "I definitely think it's going to help me, not only having Freddie behind me but Mookie in front of me and a bunch of great hitters past Freddie. I'm excited to find out how it's going to feel."

Smiling as he walked to the plate in the first inning, Ohtani took the first pitch high of the strike zone then swung on the next and missed so hard his helmet came off. He wound up being retired on a called third strike. Ohtani batted again in the third and grounded into a double play that scored Jose Ramos from third base to lift the Dodgers level at 1-1. "I definitely felt good at the plate," Ohtani said. "I felt better each time I got up, so everything is trending in the right direction."

Paul DeJong's three-run homer in the fourth inning gave the White Sox a 4-1 lead, but Ohtani answered quickly. In the fifth, Ohtani blasted a two-out, two-run homer over the centerfield fence off Chicago right-hander Dominic Leone to a standing ovation from the crowd, pulling the Dodgers within 4-3.



PATTAYA: Lilia Vu of the USA tees off during the first day of the 2024 Honda LPGA Thailand golf tournament at the Siam Country Club in Pattaya. — AFP

place in her title defence last week, five shots behind winner Patty Tavatanakit.

She showed her resilience to bounce back after slumping nine shots off the pace with a first-round 73, featuring a torrid back nine containing five bogeys. Vu attributes her determination to her family's support and values. "Everything comes from my family," she said. "I'm a very big family person. They believe in me more than anybody else and everything I do is for them." Vu cites her late grandfather, who built a boat to help the family escape from war-torn Vietnam in 1982, as an inspiration. — AFP

to work as usual in the build-up to the new season while the probe was completed. It has been reported that the outcome is due to be made public on Thursday. The 26-year-old Dutchman kept his responses brief to questions from reporters at the Bahrain International Circuit where he won last year's race for the first time.

"It's a whole team effort and everyone sticks together," he said. "And we all work for success and that's why it should be resolved very soon." Seven-time champion Lewis Hamilton of Mercedes, the most successful driver at Sakhir with five wins, said the investigation into Horner's behavior was "hanging over the sport" and that the outcome was important for the future. "It's a difficult one to answer," said Hamilton, who announced earlier this month he will leave Mercedes and race for Ferrari in 2025. "I think we always have to do more to try and make the sport, and the environment that people work in, feel safe and inclusive." — AFP

Pacific rugby teams launch their own 'Six Nations'

PARIS: Canada and the United States will rejoin the Pacific Nations Cup this year in a rejigged two-stage six-team competition that will end with finals in Japan. World Rugby said in a press release that it was "creating an annual competition and rivalries like those seen in the men's Six Nations and Rugby Championship".

It said the finals in the revamped annual competition will alternate between Japan and the United States. The cup will start with two three-team groups in August with Fiji, Samoa and Tonga in one and Japan, the United States and Canada in the other.

Each will play one home game and one away game as they face the other two teams in their group once each. All six countries will then head to Japan in September for the finals, which will open with the two third-place group finishers facing off and the two semi-finals.

The following weekend the two semi-final losers will play for third and the winners will meet in the final. The three games on the first weekend will be in Tokyo. The two on the second weekend will be in Osaka.

Japan coach Eddie Jones told World Rugby that he was looking forward to the competition. "The Pacific Nations Cup is really important for Japan because it allows us to play regular tests against strong countries in tournament conditions, which is great practice for the players for the Rugby World Cup," said the former Australia and England coach.

"The Pacific Nations Cup fits in right next to the Rugby Championship and Six Nations in providing that regular competition for Pacific nations," Tonga Rugby Union Acting CEO Aisea Aholelei said. "Tonga will take this challenge with a smile and a thumping heart."

The Pacific Nations Cup has gone through numerous configurations since it was first contested in 2006. Fiji and Tonga are the only sides to have featured in every edition, Samoa having missed 2013. Canada and the USA have both taken part in four previous tournaments, most recently in 2019, while Australia A, New Zealand Maori and Junior All Blacks have also participated. Non-Pacific nation Georgia were invited once, finishing third in 2018. — AFP

Sports

Japan target Olympic gold after beating North Korea to qualify

‘We are aiming to be the best in the world and win gold’

TOKYO: Japan women’s football coach Futoshi Ikeda targeted Olympic gold after his team qualified for the Paris Games with a hard-fought 2-1 win over North Korea in Wednesday’s play-off second leg in Tokyo.

The two sides drew 0-0 in Saturday’s first leg on neutral ground in Saudi Arabia, setting up a winner-takes-all showdown for one of the two Asian berths at the Games. Hana Takahashi put 2012 London Olympics silver medallists Japan in front midway through the first half at Tokyo’s National Stadium, before Aoba Fujino doubled their lead in the second half.

Kim Hye Yong pulled one back with less than 10 minutes to go for North Korea, who were cheered on by several thousand red-clad fans who chanted and banged drums from long before kick-off until the final whistle. The hosts held on to punch their ticket to Paris and Ikeda set his sights on a first-ever gold medal.

“There are only 12 teams in the Olympic tournament and we know they will all be strong sides,” he said. “We want to get ready for the competition and we are aiming to be the best in the world and win gold. We will try to improve and get stronger.”

Japan were eliminated in the quarter-finals at the Tokyo Olympics in 2021 and also lost at the same stage at last year’s World Cup. Ikeda said he has been trying to add more depth to Japan’s squad, who are ranked eighth in the world.

“When teams put us under strong pressure, we sometimes struggle to take the initiative and

we need to get better at that,” he said. North Korea were looking to qualify for the Olympics for a third time, and the first since 2012. They returned to international football at last year’s Asian Games for the first time since before the coronavirus pandemic and lost 4-1 to Japan in the final in Hangzhou.

Choked with emotion

Coach Ri Yu Il said he was disappointed not to qualify for the Olympics but praised both teams for putting on “a great game”. He choked up with emotion when he was asked about the support of the North Korean fans. “I am so sorry that we couldn’t get the result for all the fans who came to watch us,” he said.

“We will make an effort to play better in the future.” Japan made the breakthrough in the 26th minute when Takahashi headed in the rebound after goalkeeper Pak Ju Mi had tipped Mina Tanaka’s header onto the crossbar.

The goal forced North Korea out of their shells and Japan goalkeeper Ayaka Yamashita had to claw away a goal-bound flick from Choe Kum Ok on the stroke of half-time. North Korea complained bitterly that the ball had crossed the line but no goal was given.

“Tonight’s game was a very important one,” Ri said. “VAR would have been very helpful tonight, very useful.” Fujino scored Japan’s second in the 76th minute, heading home Risa Shimizu’s pinpoint cross. North Korea replied with a goal just



TOKYO: Japan’s players celebrate their 2-1 victory after the 2024 Olympic qualifying women’s football match between Japan and North Korea at the National Stadium in Tokyo. — AFP

minutes later when substitute Kim charged into the box and chipped the ball over Yamashita. The first leg was played in Jeddah after Japan’s foot-

ball association asked Asian officials to move it from Pyongyang over a lack of operational transparency and a scarcity of flights. — AFP

Australia hammer Uzbekistan to make Paris Olympics

MELBOURNE: Veteran Michelle Heyman scored four first-half goals as Australia crushed Uzbekistan 10-0 Wednesday to emphatically seal their place at the Paris Olympics. Tony Gustavsson’s Matildas took a commanding 3-0 advantage into the home leg of their Asian playoff game after achieving their primary goal of keeping a clean sheet in Tashkent on Saturday.

The conditions in Melbourne could not have been more different, with the teams swapping snow flurries and a spartan crowd for 35 degrees Celsius (95 degrees Fahrenheit) and 54,120 screaming fans at a sold-out Docklands Stadium.

Australia were again without injured star striker Sam Kerr, who is racing against the clock to be fit for the Olympics. But they did not need her in an incredible first half that reaped eight goals against a team overawed by the occasion. “It was very special. It’s the last step of what has been a pretty long process,” said Australia skipper Steph Catley.

“I think throughout the entire qualification process we have played really good football, challenged ourselves. Everything we set out to do we did and it’s a proud moment to get to another Olympics. “We’ll definitely be dreaming big (in Paris).”

Australia finished fourth at the Tokyo Olympics, losing to the United States in the bronze-medal match. On Wednesday they grabbed the lead after barely 40 seconds, defender Dilrabo Asadova turning Kaitlyn Torpey’s cross into her own net before Heyman’s heroics.

The 35-year-old Canberra United striker has been in electric form in the women’s A-league and with Kerr out was recalled after six years, start-



MELBOURNE: Uzbekistan’s Feruza Bobokhujaeva (3rd R) kicks the ball into teammate Nafisa Nabikulova (2nd L) during the women’s football qualifying match for the 2024 Paris Olympic Games between Australia and Uzbekistan in Melbourne on February 28, 2024. — AFP

ing as a substitute in Tashkent. She repaid Gustavsson’s faith with her first goal since the 2016 Rio Olympics, and continued her fairytale with an 11-minute hat-trick in Melbourne.

The first was a simple tap-in, the second a well-guided header from a Catley cross and the third another tap-in after Manchester City’s Mary Fowler drilled a low ball in from the left. Matters got even worse for Uzbekistan when San Diego Wave defender Torpey smashed home her first international goal to put the Matildas 5-0 up after just 22 minutes.

Fowler and Arsenal’s Caitlin Foord added to the tally

before Heyman bagged her fourth with a close-range header to cap a remarkable 45 minutes during which the Matildas could easily have reached double figures.

Heyman was among four changes for the second half which started badly for the Uzbeks, with goalkeeper Maftuna Jonimqulova stretchered off in tears in the opening minute after a heavy challenge.

But it was a much tighter ship from the visitors who held on for 22 minutes before conceding the ninth, with pacey Real Madrid winger Hayley Raso finishing smartly before Amy Sayer got the 10th in the dying seconds. — AFP

Mallorca down Sociedad in Copa del Rey semis

SAN SEBASTIAN: Sergi Darder fired the decisive spot-kick as Real Mallorca beat Real Sociedad 5-4 on penalties to book their place in the Copa del Rey final on Tuesday. With the two sides deadlocked at 1-1 following extra-time in the return leg after a goalless first leg, it was Mallorca who will line-up in the final in Sevilla at La Cartuja stadium on April 6.

The Balearic islanders will face the winner of Thursday’s second semi-final - Athletic Bilbao taking a 1-0 lead into their home tie against Atletico Madrid. After a goalless 140 minutes of play over the two legs, Uruguayan defender Giovanni Gonzalez finally struck to put Mallorca in control in San Sebastian.

Gonzalez latched onto a good cross from Jaume

Costa to bury a close-range header past Sociedad’s keeper Alex Remiro. But just as Mallorca’s thoughts began to turn to a first appearance in the Cup final in two decades Sociedad were back level with skipper Mikel Oyarzabal blasting home a nifty assist from Brais Mendez inside the box with half an hour of normal time remaining.

That set up a frenetic finale, but neither side was able to break the deadlock, resulting in extra-time, and then spot-kicks. Oyarzabal was first to go only for the player who had kept Sociedad in the semi-final to miss, his shot well anticipated by Mallorca goalkeeper Dominik Greif.

Mallorca kept their nerve and with the teams level on 4-4 penalties apiece Darder stroked the ball into the bottom right corner, out of reach of Remiro’s arm, to send Mallorca to Sevilla. Mallorca, only two spots clear of the relegation zone in La Liga, now have a shot at adding to their lone Cup success back in 2003.

Sociedad, seventh in La Liga, will have to pick themselves up for next week’s Champions League last 16 return leg against Paris Saint-Germain, who are in pole after taking the first leg 2-0. Spain’s two



SAN SEBASTIAN: Mallorca’s players celebrate after winning the Spanish Copa del Rey (King’s Cup) semi final second leg football match between Real Sociedad and RCD Mallorca at the Anoeta stadium in San Sebastian. — AFP

biggest sides, Spanish champions Barcelona and cup holders Real Madrid, were both eliminated in the last round. — AFP

Liverpool need ‘miracle’ after injury woes: Klopp

LONDON: Jurgen Klopp claimed Liverpool need “miracles” to get his walking wounded back in time to boost their quadruple bid. Klopp’s side defied a host of injuries to win the League Cup 1-0 against Chelsea in Sunday’s final at Wembley.

But Liverpool midfielder Ryan Gravenberch added to the club’s mounting fitness crisis when he was stretchered off in the first half. Gravenberch will miss at least two matches, starting with Wednesday’s FA Cup fifth round tie against Southampton at Anfield.

Wataru Endo is also a doubt for the visit of the Championship promotion chasers Southampton after he left Wembley on crutches and wearing a protective boot. That leaves Klopp without 13 first team players, including Mohamed Salah, Darwin Nunez and Dominik Szoboszlai, as the Reds try to add the Premier League, FA Cup and Europa League to last weekend’s silverware.

“We need miracles with a few players. I don’t want to rule them out for too long,” Klopp told reporters on Tuesday. “But it is tough and go with a lot of players who were not available for the final: Darwin, Mo, Dom - we have to see what they can do (on Tuesday).”

“In an ideal world you’d think about these kind of things but we obviously don’t live in an ideal world so we will see when the players arrive and they get checked.” Klopp is likely to have to rely on a number of the younger players who made such an impression at Wembley, with 19-year-olds Bobby Clark and James McConnell likely to start against Saints.

Although the pair have made just one start apiece in cup competitions this season, Klopp has faith in their ability to step up. “First and foremost, they don’t have to show anything. Our boys played in youth teams and under-21s and only came up recently and trained with us: absolutely nil experience but a lot of talent and they showed that,” he said.

“What these boys have to do is to really enjoy what they are doing. They have to defend like men, otherwise they cannot play. “I saw them doing that on Sunday and it obviously helped and it gave confidence and there are so many things you cannot buy.”

Liverpool have made tentative moves to organize an end-of-season parade regardless of whether they win any more trophies. The Reds want to mark the end of Klopp’s nine-year reign after the German’s recent bombshell announcement that he will step down at the end of the season.

“That is the one part which is not so cool that it could be seen as that” (a farewell to him), he said. “I don’t think that makes sense. But besides that, I am a big supporter of trophy parades and if there is a parade I will be on the bus, no doubt about that.” — AFP

Classifieds

Clinics

Clinics

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

Change of Name

I, MOHAMED SHAFIQUE, Holder of Indian Passport No. Z5425958 Having Permanent Address Khajamiya Chl Bandra Plot Nr Mahfile Mohamadi Jogeshwari, Mumbai, Pin: 400060, Maharashtra, India, India Residing In Kuwait At Present, Hereby Declare That Henceforth My Name Will Be Read As Under: Given Name MOHAMMED SHAFIQUE And Surname SHAIKH. (#5169 28/02/2024)

I, ANTONIO JOSE D CUNHA, holder of passport No. M6716579 do hereby change my name to ANTONIO JOSE (as given name) DA CUNHA (as surname) for all purposes. I will henceforth be known in the name ANTONIO JOSE DA CUNHA and I also undertake to carry out this name change in all my documents. (#5167 28/02/2024)

I, RAHUL, holder of Passport No. R5199093 do hereby change my name to Rahul Krishan (as given name) Krishan (as surname) for all purposes I will henceforth be known in the name Rahul Krishan and I also undertake to carry out this name change in all my documents. My address H. No. 106 Amar Garden bypass Jalandhar, Pin-144004, Punjab, India (#5168 28/02/2024)

I, CHRISTOPHER ALBERT D CUNHA, holder of Passport No. M4635571 do hereby change my name to CHRISTOPHER ALBERT (as given name) DA CUNHA (as surname) for all purposes. I will henceforth be known in the name CHRISTOPHER ALBERT DA CUNHA. And I also undertake to carry out this name change in all my documents. (#5166 28/02/2024)

Five-goal Haaland crushes Luton as Man City make FA Cup quarter-finals

'It was the second time Haaland had hit five goals in a single game for City'



LUTON: Luton Town's Dutch goalkeeper #23 Tim Krull (L) stops the ball shot by Manchester City's Norwegian striker #09 Erling Haaland (C) during the English FA Cup fifth round football match between Luton Town and Manchester City in Luton. — AFP

LONDON: Manchester City's Erling Haaland scored five times as the FA Cup holders ran riot in a 6-2 rout of Luton in the fifth round on Tuesday. Aided by Kevin De Bruyne's trio of assists, Haaland completed his treble inside the first 40 minutes at Kenilworth Road.

Jordan Clark struck twice to briefly reduce Luton's deficit to just 3-2. But any Luton hopes of an incredible comeback were ruthlessly erased by Haaland as the Norway striker scored twice more after the interval to send City into the quarter-finals.

Mateo Kovacic netted to cap City's second six-goal haul this season after their 6-1 thrashing of Bournemouth in the Premier League in November. Haaland now has 27 goals in all competitions this season, making a mockery of the critics who took a swipe at him after a misfiring display in a recent draw against Chelsea. It was the second time Haaland had hit five goals in a single game for City after his heroics in the Champions League last 16 second leg win against RB Leipzig in March 2023. Saluting De Bruyne's role in his demolition of Luton, Haaland said: "Kevin is massive. It's a pleasure playing with him. We know what we both want from each other."

On his own form since returning from a foot injury that sidelined him for two months, Haaland added: "I'm getting back to my best. Finally I'm feeling good. It's an amazing feeling. It's coming, we're coming. Exciting times ahead. We are ready to attack."

Guardiola added: "What can I say? Erling is on fire, and Kevin. The connection was perfect. Kevin needs players like Erling and Erling needs players like Kevin." City have won 14 of their last 15 games in all competitions as they try to emulate last season's Premier League, Champions League and FA Cup treble.

Haaland and De Bruyne are rounding into form in time for Sunday's crucial Premier League showdown against Manchester United at the Etihad Stadium.

Predatory Haaland

City needed just three minutes to take the lead this time as Haaland finished off a flowing move. Matheus Nunes clipped a clever pass to De Bruyne and he picked out Haaland inside the Luton area, where the City striker fired past Tim Krul with ease.

De Bruyne was the provider again in the 18th minute when Haaland bagged his second goal. Taking Haaland's lay-off on the halfway line, De Bruyne unfurled a sumptuous pass that sent the Norway star

clean through on goal for a typically predatory finish. Haaland completed his treble in the 40th minute, accelerating onto yet another sublime De Bruyne assist before dinking a deft finish over Krul from 12 yards. It was Haaland's eighth hat-trick for City and his first away from the Etihad since signing from Borussia Dortmund in 2022.

Clark reduced the deficit five minutes later with a superb long-range curler and scored again in the 52nd minute. But De Bruyne and Haaland proved impossible for Luton to stop. Kyle Walker's eye-catching pass with the outside of his foot set De Bruyne free in the area and he unselfishly teed up Haaland for a 55th minute tap in. Haaland got his fifth three minutes later, taking Bernardo Silva's pass and shooting low under Krul's weak attempted save. Kovacic smashed a 20-yard drive past Krul in the 72nd minute to put a bow on City's evening to remember.

Abdul Fatawu's stunning strike gave Championship leaders Leicester a surprise 1-0 win at Premier League side Bournemouth. Leicester struck in the 105th minute when Fatawu collected Kelechi Iheanacho's pass on the edge of the area and curled into the top corner. — AFP

Hermoso looks forward to another final

SEVILLE: Jenni Hermoso gave a pre-international press conference on Tuesday for the first time since she was kissed by former Spanish football chief Luis Rubiales after winning the World Cup and said "football continues to give me life". The world champions face France in Seville on Wednesday in the first Women's Nations League final.

"I'm lucky to be back in another final after six very long months and today I'm enjoying football, competing with Spain to win another tournament," said Hermoso. It was her first Spain press conference since she spoke on the eve of the semi-final against Sweden in Auckland, New Zealand in August. "A lot has happened since then," she said. The midfielder was the centre of an international furore after Rubiales kissed her on the lips against her will after Spain beat England in Sydney in August. Rubiales and team coach Jorge Vidal were dismissed.

"It has been a hard process, of understanding many things", said Hermoso, who has played in Mexico since 2022 where she moved to Tigres in January. "I'm still playing football and the only thing I want is to continue enjoying myself wearing this shirt". "For me it's very important to play in another final, to continue here, I feel good, football continues to give me the life I need. I want to continue enjoying games with my national team and with my Tigres team, and I continue to enjoy this sport."

"If we win tomorrow, Spain will have made history again." By reaching the Nations League final, Spain also qualified for the Paris Olympics. "From lifting the World Cup to the Games, we are making a lot of history in a short time, and what better than a team feeling like champions in every sense," she said. "Tomorrow we have another chance to show that Spain is here to stay and do very good things." she said. — AFP



Jennifer Hermoso

Strus nets monster buzzer-beater as Cavs sink Mavs

LOS ANGELES: Max Strus drained an astonishing 58-foot buzzer-beater as the Cleveland Cavaliers conjured a stunning late fightback to sink the Dallas Mavericks 121-119 on Tuesday. In a remarkable finale in Cleveland, Strus unleashed a mammoth heave from inside his own half to snatch victory from Dallas, who had grabbed a 119-118 lead with just over two seconds remaining in the game.

Strus' miraculous effort was the final act of a thrilling fourth quarter rally by Cleveland, who trailed by 10 with under four minutes left after a superb 45-point performance from Mavs ace Luka Doncic. Strus was the catalyst for the Cavs turnaround, reeling off four straight three-pointers to allow Cleveland to get within one at 113-112 with 2min 35sec remaining.

Back-to-back threes from Donovan Mitchell put Cleveland 118-115 up but Dallas hit back to regain a one-point lead after a Kyrie Irving jump shot and a P.J. Washington layup. That set the stage for Strus to unfurl his game-winning three-quarter-court effort to spark pandemonium amongst the home crowd in Cleveland. "That was awesome," Strus said afterwards. "Great win, we needed it. We've been struggling so it's good to get one like that. We fought, and fought, and fought... we want to win every game and we want to keep winning."

Cleveland coach J.B. Bickerstaff praised Strus's role in sparking the late rally when it looked as if the game had slipped away. "The way that he plays the game with a determination, a never-give-in mentality and attitude — that inspires his team-mates every single day," Bickerstaff said. — AFP



Kuwait national team wins bronze medal in Aquatic finals

KUWAIT: Diver Bader Al-Subaie representing Kuwait national team, achieved the first bronze medal in the 11th Asian Age Group Aquatics Championships on Wednesday in New Clark city in the Philippines. Board Member of Kuwait Aquatics Faisal Abu-Alhassan told KUNA during a phone call that this is a

special achievement in the biggest competition in the continent where Al-Subaie won 3rd place in the one-meter dive category among the 16-18 age group.

Abu-Alhassan mentioned that this achievement is new to Kuwait in the presence of elite athletes from all around the world, noting that the Kuwaiti athletes are determined to achieve more in the coming days of the tournament. He added that this tournament includes all aquatics competition but Kuwait is only participating in the diving and swimming competitions, pointing out that Kuwait already participated in the second Arab Aquatics Championship held in the Qatari capital Doha where the Kuwaiti national team won 11 medals in various games. — KUNA