



2 Dates a popular and integral component of Ramadan feast



7 One dead as sectarian riots rock parts of India



16 Verstappen beats Hamilton to win chaotic Aussie Grand Prix



RAMADAN TIMINGS	
Fajr	04:16
Shurooq	05:36
Dhuhr	11:51
Asr	15:23
Maghrib	18:07
Isha	19:25

Ghanem calls for first session of Assembly after court ruling

Ministers to take oath during session • Crown Prince meets PM

RAMADAN KAREEM

Fasting in Ramadan: An exercise in patience

Dr Shariffa Carlo

Allah says what can be translated as: "So endure patiently (O Muhammad), with a beautiful patience." (Al-Maarij 70:5) What is a beautiful patience? It is a patience born, not of resigning to an inevitability, but the understanding and acceptance of the reality that whatever befalls us is from Allah (SWT), and it is good. It is a deep satisfaction within the soul when tragedy hits. It is the knowledge that life, death, disease, health, war, peace, heart-break, love, wealth, poverty... everything is a test from Allah and it is all good.

Ramadan is a month of fasting and worshipping and this, beyond doubt, requires patience. Even the linguistic meaning for fasting highlights the necessity of patience. Sawm and siyam are the Arabic words for fasting. They literally mean "to keep away from something."

The verb is 'saama', which means to abstain or to restrain from something. The word sawm is derived from the word saim, which is a horse that is kept hungry by his master and raced to build his stamina for battles. By commanding Muslims to give up on their desires for some part of the day, Almighty Allah intends to build stamina against Satan, whose purpose in life is to make us slip and do actions that displease Allah.

In further analysis of the word, we find that "sawm" also means to keep silence and to restrain. The Noble Quran also defines "sawm" as "patience", "self-control, perseverance and determination". Therefore, according to Islam, sawm stands for protecting oneself against

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Barcode turns 50 but its days might be numbered

PARIS: The patch of irregular vertical lines that revolutionized checking out at the supermarket and facilitated the globalization of retail is turning 50. But as the barcode celebrates its birthday on Monday, its days might be numbered as it faces competition from the younger QR code, the information-filled squares used in smartphones. The trademark beep as a product is scanned is heard about six billion times per day across the world as around 70,000 items are sold each second.

It has become so integrated in the shopping experience that it is easy to forget how much the technology revolutionized retail by speeding up the checkout process and giving retailers the ability to trace products and better manage inventory. The barcode not only identifies a product, but "gives professionals

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By B Izzak

KUWAIT: National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem has sent out invitations to MPs and the government to attend a regular session of the Assembly, the first since the constitutional court reinstated the house in a landmark ruling two weeks ago. According to the invitation, the first item on the agenda of Tuesday's meeting is reading an Amiri decree forming the new Cabinet and allowing unelected ministers to take the oath to become members of the Assembly, as per the Kuwaiti constitution.

The new Cabinet has not been formed yet, but on Sunday HH the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received Prime

Workers at risk due to new absconding report system: Lawyer

By Faten Omar

KUWAIT: New legal procedures regarding complaints against domestic workers absconding from sponsors' houses are harmful to both workers and sponsors, lawyer Mohammad Al-Jasem told Kuwait Times. As sponsors are increasingly complaining about their domestic workers escaping due to the increased workload during Ramadan, Jasem called on people to know their rights, while also consider-

ing the worker's situation. "A person who is absent from their place of residence or work is reported as absconding. According to the article 20 visa, the person must live in the sponsor's house, so if the domestic worker is absent, the sponsor has to report it," said Jasem. "In the past, we had the best way of reporting such cases, where the sponsor used to go to the police station and report the worker's absence. Currently, absconding reports are filed at service centers. But the new system does not take into account the dangers of human trafficking," he said.

Jasem explained domestic workers have recently been victims of human trafficking. "For example, before the process was amended, it was discovered one worker had not absconded. She arrived in Kuwait after her vacation but was kidnapped on

Meanwhile, the Assembly's legal and legisla-

tive panel was due to vote late Sunday on a draft law calling to establish a high election commission to oversee the election process and ensure free and fair elections. Some members of the reinstated 2020 Assembly have alleged that there was wide-ranging fraud in the election of the 2022 Assembly that had been scrapped by the constitutional court.

Meanwhile, authorities are monitoring those who insulted the judiciary in order to summon and question them and refer them to court. Sources said following the constitutional court ruling to annul the 2022 Assembly, some people insulted the judiciary on Twitter and other social media platforms. Sources said some of the suspects committed state security crimes through their tweets.



KUWAIT: A housemaid waits at an office for domestic workers at a commercial complex in this 2016 file photo. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat



LITTLE ROCK, Arkansas: This handout satellite image captured and released on April 1, 2023 shows a view of Little Rock after the passing of a tornado on March 31, 2023. — AFP

Deadly storms and tornadoes sweep across US

WASHINGTON: The death toll from a major storm system that has lashed the south-central and eastern United States with devastating winds and destructive tornadoes rose to at least 26 by Sunday, officials said. Tennessee, one of the hardest-hit states since the storms began Friday, initially had seven weather-related fatalities, but the toll there later rose to nine, according to Memphis-based news channel WREG.

Scenes of devastation were left in the path of the Tennessee tornado, which twisted trees, flattened homes into piles of wooden boards and ripped walls

from still-standing structures. "The whole house, you can feel it shaking," said Janice Pieterick, whose house doors and glass windows blew out when the tornado swept through Lewis County. "We just all hunkered down."

The toll in Tennessee came on top of the 17 deaths reported in Arkansas, Mississippi and Alabama in the south, Indiana and Illinois in the Midwest, and Delaware in the mid-Atlantic. The storm system left dozens injured. It sent multiple tornadoes — some of exceptional size and rare power — sweeping through Arkansas, where they killed at least five people, the state's governor said.

Daylight revealed extensive damage, with several homes torn apart, cars overturned, power lines toppled and trees ripped out of the ground. Governor Sarah Huckabee Sanders declared a state of emergency and activated the national guard to help with recovery efforts. She said she had spoken

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Kuwait and major oil producers announce surprise output cuts

KUWAIT: Gulf oil producers Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates led a coordinated cut in production by Middle East countries on Sunday, calling it a "precautionary measure" aimed at market stability. Surprise cuts by Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and the UAE totaling 772,000 barrels per day (bpd) will take effect from May and last for the rest of the year, they said in statements released by official media. Iraq followed suit while Algeria also announced a "voluntary" cut of 48,000 bpd over the same timeframe. Oman announced a cut of 40,000 bpd, while Kazakhstan will also cut output by 78,000 bpd.

Kuwait will implement a voluntary cut of 128,000 barrels per day from May till the end of 2023 in coordination with some OPEC and non-OPEC participating countries in the Declaration of Cooperation, Deputy Prime Minister and Oil Minister Bader Al-Mulla said in a press release Sunday. This voluntary cut is a precautionary measure in addition to the reduction in production agreed at the 33rd OPEC and non-OPEC Ministerial Meeting on Oct 5, 2022, the minister added.

Russia's Deputy Prime Minister Alexander Novak also said on Sunday that Moscow would extend a voluntary cut of 500,000 bpd until the end of 2023. Moscow announced those cuts unilaterally in February following the introduction of Western price caps. After Russia's unilateral reductions, US officials said its alliance with other OPEC members was weakening, but Sunday's move shows the cooperation is still strong.

A Saudi energy ministry official "emphasized that this is a precautionary measure aimed at supporting the stability of the oil market", the official Saudi Press Agency said. The cuts are on top of oil cartel OPEC's controversial decision in October to slash production by two million barrels per day, the report said. That reduction, the biggest since the height of the COVID pandemic in 2020, came despite concerns it could fuel further inflation and push central banks to hike interest rates even more. — Agencies

Local

Dates the most popular fruit and an integral part of Ramadan feast

High in sugar and vitamins, dates are beneficial during fasting



Ayman Pasha



A box of dates stuffed with nuts and other ingredients is displayed at a shop in Kuwait City on April 1, 2023. —Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat



A vendor shows a box of dates stuffed with nuts and other ingredients at a shop in Kuwait City on April 1, 2023.



A vendor arranges dates stuffed with nuts and other ingredients at a shop in Kuwait City on April 1, 2023.



Boxes of dates stuffed with nuts and other ingredients are displayed at a shop in Kuwait City on April 1, 2023.

By Ghadeer Ghloom

KUWAIT: Dates are the most common fruit to be found with almost every iftar meal. It is one of the most loved fruits among Muslims for several reasons. To break one's fasting with dates is recommended by Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), which makes dates special among Muslims and very popular especially during the holy month of Ramadan. Besides, it has scientifically proven benefits for the human body.

After being requested and preferred by many people, stores have started selling dates of different types by adding a touch of creativity through stuffing and/or coating them to enhance their flavor, which has transformed it from a basic fruit into a one that comes in different shapes, flavors and prices.

Kuwait Times asked Ayman Pasha, sales manager at a local dates store in Shuwaikh, about the most popular types of dates and their prices. "There are so many types of dates that differ in taste, texture quality and price, such as ikhlas Al-Hasa, ikhlas Al-Kharj and ikhlas Al-Qassem, which is the most sought after type for its quality and color, in addition to dry dates. There are also stuffed dates, like siqea with almonds, majdool with walnuts, majdool with halva, ikhlas with

cashew, khudri with cashew and many other stuffings, which vary in their prices," Pasha said.

"The average price is between KD 3,500 to KD 5 per kilogram depending on the kind of stuffing. The prices of the dates differ based on their type, as the quality differs, but are affordable for everyone," he added.

Abu Abdullah, a middle-aged man, said dates revitalize energy of people who are fasting, after being on an empty stomach all day. Dates compensate the sugar they lose while fasting. So, eating dates balances the vitamins and minerals that their body needs to stay healthy and strong. Another thing that makes dates special to Muslims is that Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) taught Muslims to break their fast with dates, as he used to do. This makes Muslims consider eating dates as obeying their Prophet's (PBUH) advice.

Kuwait Times asked Abu Abdullah about his thoughts about the new types of dates. "Dates are no longer a simple fruit that can be bought for very cheap price. Today, buying dates can exceed KD 10," he said. According to him, adding extra fillings and/or coatings to the dates have changed their simplicity and increased prices.



A vendor shows dates at a shop in Kuwait City on April 1, 2023.

KU receives Bulgarian ambassador

KUWAIT: Acting Director of Kuwait University Dr Fahad Al-Rashidi received Bulgarian Ambassador to Kuwait Dimitar Dimitrov on Sunday at Sabah Al-Salem College City and discussed means of enhancing cultural and academic cooperation between the two countries.

Welcoming the ambassador Dimitrov, Dr Al-Rashidi said, "The University is keen on exchanging experiences and cultures between universities and educational institutions in the world in addition to have cultural discussions with them. The Kuwait University is ready to provide all needed services in addition to cooperating with the Bulgarian embassy by receiving all proposals and working on them to harness all efforts in enriching the educational process," he added.

"The Language Center at Kuwait University provides seats for Bulgarian students to study the Arabic language, which can be increased in the near future. Moreover, we are discussing ways to expand the field of scientific and academic cooperation between Kuwait University and the Republic of Bulgaria.

Ambassador Dimitrov expressed his happiness at



KUWAIT: Ambassador of the Republic of Bulgaria Dimitar Dimitrov presents a memento to Director of Kuwait University Dr Fahad Al-Rashidi.

visiting Sabah Al-Salem University City, stating the importance of increasing academic cooperation between countries. Dimitrov praised the joint academic relations, especially with regard to Kuwait University receiving some students from the Republic of Bulgaria to learn the Arabic language at the Language Center, pointing out the depth of the relations between the two countries which date back to sixty years.

At the end of the meeting, the Ambassador of the Republic of Bulgaria presented a memento of appreciation to the Director of Kuwait University on the occasion of the 60th anniversary of the Kuwaiti-Bulgarian relations.

beginning of the case and it transferred her to the prosecution subsequently. The prosecution released her on a KD 1,000 bail after investigations during which she denied the CSC's accusation.

It is noteworthy that the CSC objected to Dr Zaman's statement regarding a non-Kuwaiti company managing the information and data of citizens in addition to residents through servers located outside the country, explaining that its statement is incorrect and harms the country's security.

Dr Zaman confirmed during investigations that she made her statement based on the competence of being a specialized university professor who heads a public benefit association concerned with information and its security. Moreover, she said that she made her statement out of concern for the interest of her country and its security as well as the security of its citizens.

Cassation court acquits Dr Zaman

KUWAIT: The cassation court has acquitted Dr Sa-faa Zaman from homeland security charges relating to spreading false information about the accessibility of Egyptian companies to employees data in Kuwait.

The Civil Service Commission (CSC) has issued a complaint after Dr Zaman has publicly commented about data and private information of citizens and residents in Kuwait. The accusation report included three charges including spreading false information that undermines the state security, spreading panic in society, as well as exposing the country to dangers of cutting ties with a friendly country.

The state security has summoned Dr Zaman at the

Deputy FM meets Benin's envoy



KUWAIT: Deputy Foreign Minister Ambassador Mansour Al-Otaibi receives Ambassador Mudjaidou Somano Issou on Sunday. —KUNA

KUWAIT: Deputy Foreign Minister Ambassador Mansour Al-Otaibi met on Sunday the Ambassador of the friendly Republic of Benin Kuwait Mudjaidou Somano Issou. During the meeting, they discussed bilateral relations between the two friendly countries and ways of further bolstering them. —KUNA

Teachers Society rejects strategic alternative for wages

KUWAIT: The Kuwait Teachers Society has summarily rejected that change in the present structure of teacher's allowances which was approved in 2011 and amended in 2017, stressing that the strategic alternative for salaries will infringe upon the rights of Kuwaiti teachers.

"Our allowances are not to be messed with and we completely reject the draft strategic alternative. It will cancel all legitimate benefits, bonuses, allowances and acquisitions of Kuwaiti teachers. It contradicts all Kuwaiti policies regarding Kuwaitization and making teaching a desirable profession that encourages local teachers to join. Furthermore, the policies should help consolidate the principles of justice, equality and fairness for the bearers of the torches of knowledge and the builders of genera-

tions as well as in raising their material and moral standing," the society stated in a statement.

The society stated that the strategic alternative project will have wider negative consequences on the reality of the educational process.

"The goals of the strategic alternative with regard to achieving justice for similar professions do not apply to teachers, because there is no difference in their salaries as they all have their job title at the Civil Service Commission under the title "teacher" upon which they are granted the right to enjoy the benefits of allowances and grades, according to their job level," the society said.

"The implementation of the strategic alternative project would be a factor opposite to the encouragement of Kuwaitis to join the profession due to the lack of financial benefits that would encourage them," the society added. The society concluded its statement by noting that it will continue its approach to be an impenetrable force against anyone who tries to undermine teaching and compromise its high status. It will work to stand firmly against any projects, plans and policies that are prejudicial to the methodology of the teaching cadre.

Local

Marburg, the new virus threat: Risks for Kuwait remain low

Virus transmitted from fruit bats and spreads among humans through direct contact

By Nebal Snan and Agencies

KUWAIT: Kuwait's Foreign Ministry has warned Kuwaitis against traveling to Tanzania and Equatorial Guinea following reports of new Marburg virus outbreaks in the two countries.

The two countries are facing their first-known outbreaks of the highly virulent disease, which causes fever with uncontrollable bleeding. The virus is a close cousin to the Ebola virus and has a fatality rate of up to 88 percent, depending on the strain of the virus and the quality of care provided. Here is some of what we know about the disease so far.

How is Marburg virus transmitted?

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), the virus is transmitted to people from fruit bats and spreads among humans through direct contact with the bodily fluids of infected people, surfaces and materials.

What are the symptoms for Marburg virus disease?

The early symptoms of infection include severe headache, high fever, weakness and muscle pain, said Kuwait's Health Ministry Spokesperson Dr Abdullah Al-Sanad in a press statement. Illness caused by Marburg virus begins abruptly and could be ac-

companied by headaches, says WHO. Many patients develop severe hemorrhagic symptoms within seven days. Late onset symptoms include: nausea, vomiting, severe abdominal pain, severe diarrhea and blood in the vomit or stool, said Sanad.

Are there any known cases in Kuwait?

There are no known cases in Kuwait, in Gulf Cooperation Council countries or the Middle East, according to Sanad. In Equatorial Guinea, there have been at least nine laboratory-confirmed cases, seven of which resulted in death, and 20 probable cases of dead individuals in the outbreak, which was first identified last February. Tanzania confirmed its first-ever case on March 21. Health officials are investigating a total of eight cases, five of whom have died, and they have identified a total of 161 contacts who are being monitored.

Can we get a vaccine against Marburg virus?

No, there are no vaccines or antiviral treatments approved to treat the virus. But WHO says supportive care – rehydration with oral or intravenous fluids – and treatment of specific symptoms, improves survival. A range of potential treatments, including blood products, immune therapies and drug therapies, as well as candidate vaccines with phase 1 data are being evaluated.



What's the risk of spread?

WHO said it considers the risk of spread to be "very high" in Tanzania and Equatorial Guinea but described the risk of global spread as "low." The agency said the

risk of international spread "cannot be ruled out". Sanad said risk levels are low in Kuwait due to the "scarcity of travel and the absence of direct flights" from and to the countries struggling with the outbreak.

Stress a catalyst for bodily health issues?

By Alexis De Leon

In an effort to raise general awareness of the causes and treatments for the stress epidemic, April has been designated as 'Stress Awareness Month' since 1992. Today's public health is plagued by a serious issue with stress and bad mental health. Kuwait Times interviewed senior high school students to share their experiences with stress and tension. Kuwait Times spoke with Yaraa Ali, a High Honors Achiever in Grade 11 GAS strand, to learn more about stress and she mentioned that from past topics in class, stress is the body's way to reacting to change that requires adjustment or response. She said "Stress is a normal part of life. It can be positive and negative, but it's basically just a reaction of your body and mind to any challenge or demand."

Althea Dimapilis, a High Honors Achiever in Grade 11 STEM strand, shared "My burnout was so tiring, it's a constant cycle of wanting to do something but not having the motivation to do it, and being more disappointed in myself for not giving my all. I lost all motivation to go to school, studying for quizzes and exams, and even talking to friends sometimes." Hanayen Al-Faraj, an aspiring 17-year-old artist, was asked if she felt like she was under an unhealthy amount of pressure, said, "I was considered a genius when I was a kid and as I grew up, I lost that 'intelligence'. It feels like a lot of pressure since people expect me to still be how I was when I was younger." Continuing with the interview, the students dis-



Hanayen Al-Faraj



Yaraa Ali



Gracia Prameswari

cussed their ways for unwinding and reducing tension. Ali pointed out "I just sleep to relieve stress, but also, I play games. I play calming games, I don't play Valorant or anything like that when I'm too stressed because I get really overwhelmed. Games like Unpacking or Genshin Impact, specifically for the farming because I don't like fighting as well as making PowerPoints!" Al-Faraj said "To relieve stress, I try to get my mind off things that are stressing me out by distracting myself with hobbies like listening to music or taking a rest before I can go back to that situation and deal with it." Gracia Prameswari, an aspiring 16-year-old dancer, shared as well. "I guess maybe just think about something else, I listen to music that would make me feel better and I typically just sleep. It's like fast-forwarding time and skipping a small chunk of the day, I also gain energy from it so I think it's a good way to relieve stress."

WebMD states that stress frequently serves as a

catalyst for bodily health issues like high blood pressure and heart problems as well as mental health problems like anxiety and depression. We still don't pay it the attention it deserves even though it has a big impact on us. Burnout, which is characterized by mental, emotional, and physical fatigue, can result from persistent and excessive stress. If we keep undermining the effects of stress and what harm it can do to our bodies, it can only make things worse for our entire well-being. In light of this, we ought to pay attention to our physical and mental wellbeing. The "Thirty Day Challenge," promoted during Stress Awareness Month, urges participants to take one action that will improve their physical, mental, and emotional health each day of April. Openly discussing your difficulties with loved ones, peers, and coworkers will help eliminate the stigma associated with mental illness. It is important to take care of others, but it is just as important to take care of yourself.

Kuwait hands out food baskets to needy in Malaysia

KUALA LUMPUR: Kuwait Embassy continued on Saturday handing out food baskets to needy people in Kuala Lumpur during the holy month of Ramadan.

Speaking to KUNA in a statement, Modhi Al-Fadhli, Charge d'Affaires, said the embassy distributed the baskets to Rohingya's refugee families and Somalia's community in Malaysia. Al-Fadhli said that families' members came to the embassy in Kuala Lumpur and were given baskets as part of aid provided in Ramadan. The embassy hands out, and supervises distribution of, annually Ramadan baskets to help needy families in Malaysia. The food baskets distributed to a number of varied segments of the community and refugees in Malaysia. — KUNA



Ethical questions must be considered before using artificial womb

KUWAIT: Several guidelines must be taken into account when considering the use of artificial wombs in assisting couples who wish to have a child, says President of the Islamic Organization for Medical Sciences (ISMS) Dr. Mohammad Al-Jarallah.

The womb, which allows for extracorporeal pregnancy by growing a fetus outside the body of the mother, is an inevitable revolutionary step in the medical field, said Jarallah. The artificial womb is similar to a vital plastic bag that contains the amniotic fluid which surrounds the fetus in the mother's womb. The fetus gets the nutrients and oxygen it needs through a machine connected to the umbilical cord, which functions in a similar manner to blood pumps and kidney dialysis machines. The artificial womb provides the same conditions available in the mother's womb, allowing it to grow up to the required stage to pass the danger stage.

But using this ground breaking technology requires determining any potential religious, ethical and legal implications.

"Legal personality" is the first concept that needs to be studied, said Jarallah. "Legal Personality" is when the fetus becomes a person with legal and ethical rights. Jarallah said the concept is highly complicated and controversial but has been discussed over

'Sabeeli' Islamic studies platform for non-Arabic speakers

KUWAIT: The Electronic Daawa Committee of the Najat Charity Society has launched on Saturday the academic website "Sabeeli" to facilitate Islamic studies for non-Arabic speakers in sponsorship of the general secretariat of the Awqaf ministry.

Chief of the committee, Abdullah Al-Ajeel said: "The electronic project targets new converts to Islam who do not speak Arabic, and presents the teachings of the Islamic religion in five different languages."

"The launch of the platform is considered the first phase of the project as the society aims to cover

decades. Some people believe that legal personality begins with pregnancy, while others believe it is after birth, or in a time between them, bearing in mind that this question has important effects on the ethical and legal situation of fetuses that grow in artificial wombs.

Jarallah also warned that authorizing the use of artificial wombs could lead to "birth trade", or the use of surrogate mothers or other forms of exploitation to carry children. He said it is important to deal with those fears to guarantee the use of technology responsibly and ethically.

Other considerations include genetic engineering, whereby the artificial womb technology may be used in manipulating the genes to improve some features or to remove some illnesses. Although genetic engineering has the ability to present many benefits, it brings up important ethical questions that must be dealt with.

Informed consent is another restriction. It involves making sure that the individuals who opt to use the technology understand the risks and benefits related to it. Another issue to keep in mind is justice, which is related to making sure that the technology is available for all those who may benefit from it.

Privacy of the parents and child should also be protected by maintaining the secrecy of sensitive medical information and protecting the technology from possible safety break-ins.

A potential change in gender roles due to use of the technology is concerning, said Jarallah. The artificial womb technology may allow men to carry children and give birth and this will affect the family dynamics and social standards. That is apart from the effects on family structure as couples or individuals who cannot bear children naturally will be able to get children.

the largest number of languages gradually. It is expected that four more languages will be launched in three months and is targeted to reach 12 languages in total. The curriculum and the lessons presented on the platform are numbered around 1,498 that go with the needs of new converts in accordance with their language in addition to Quran translations, interpretations and Dhikrs," Al-Ajeel added.

He added: "After the success of the electronic Dawaa with its project (Direct Dialogue) in previous years, which resulted in 23,980 converts from 124 countries, the society took the initiative to create an academic platform (Sabeeli) to complement the journey of Islamic education with the advanced methods targeting the largest segment of beneficiaries to serve Islam."

He concluded by saying that the academy is open for free registration for every science student who speaks any of the five languages through the website. — KUNA

In my view

The problem of legislative vacuum and its solution



Lawyer Mohammed Al-Muthaffar

Local@kuwaittimes.com

The latest ruling of the constitutional court on March 19, 2023 invalidated the entire process of the last National Assembly elections which took place on Sept 29, 2022. The ruling invalidated the membership of those declared victorious in all five constituencies due to the invalidity of the decree dissolving the National Assembly and the invalidity of calling on voters to cast their votes in the elections. Most notably, the dissolved parliament regains its constitutional authority by the power of the constitution from the date of issuance of the ruling, as if the dissolution was not done. After this ruling, we are in a stage of what is called a legislative vacuum.

This ruling came as an affirmation of the victory of the constitution and the rule of law in the country, as the ruling applied the rules and foundations of the constitution as well as upholding considerations of justice without equivocation, favoritism or bias towards a political opinion. The reasons for the dissolution included that there was a deep disagreement between the government and the parliament without a solution, and that there was no way out of that crisis except by dissolving the parliament and resorting to the people to choose new members.

However, the government that issued the dissolution decision had been formed following the resignation of the government that preceded it, which submitted its resignation as a result of the deepening dispute between it and the parliament. The new government that participated in issuing the dissolution decree did not clash with the parliament, not even for a short while. Therefore, no disputes arose between the government that issued the decree and the Assembly in the first place, which means that the dissolution decree was issued without a reason.

Therefore, the current concern is as follows:
First: The problem of the presence of a defect in the laws issued by the Assembly, which was declared invalid.

Second: The existence of a legislative vacuum that necessitates a preference between calling for new elections or the continuation of the Assembly whose return was issued to exercise its duties and complete its legal term.

Third: What is the fate of the laws issued during the era of the dissolved Assembly?

The solution to the first problem is to issue Amiri decrees until the Assembly returns. The second problem is that we see that out of respect for the court's ruling and the constitution, the dissolved parliament should return to complete its term, after which new elections will be called after the end of its legal term, so that we abide by the constitution and respect its provisions, and there is more legislative stability.

The third problem is that these laws remain in force until they are invalidated or abolished, and thus we have overcome this dilemma, especially since this ruling is not the first of its kind. The 2012 Assembly was considered null and the 2009 Assembly was reinstated, while keeping the laws issued during that period. The constitutional court relied in its ruling on the fact that the request for the dissolution of the 2009 Assembly came from a ministry that had lost its capacity by accepting its resignation in full, and the new prime minister also met with ministers who had lost their capacity due to accepting the resignation of the previous government. Only thus would it be a violation of article 107 of the Kuwaiti constitution. The ruling of the constitutional court to restore a dissolved council was the first of its kind in Kuwaiti parliamentary life at that time, and our current ruling has become the second.

News in Brief

2,000 army servicemen
to be promoted

KUWAIT: Acting Defense Minister, Interior Minister and First Deputy Prime Minister, Sheikh Talal Al-Khaled has ordered the promotion of 2,000 servicemen in the Kuwait Army of different military ranks. The defense ministry announced on Saturday that the minister's instructions come in support of servicemen in the army, and to lift their morale and encourage them to expend more effort for their country. The promotion is aimed at ensuring that the best servicemen are being supported and that their rights are preserved according to the legal procedures in place. —KUNA

Municipality shuts
down 7 violating stores

KUWAIT: A campaign run by the Kuwait Municipality has resulted in the closure of seven violating stores. Deputy Director of the Farwaniya and Mubarak Al-Kabeer governorates at the Municipality Nawaf Al-Kandari said the Administration of Public Hygiene and Road Works in Jebel Al-Shuyoukh area, in cooperation with the Interior Ministry, has caught seven stores not adhering to rules and regulations put in place by the Kuwait municipality. He indicated that inspectors at the governorate are continuing their monitoring of those violating the municipality's rules and regulations, as legal procedures are going to be taken against them.

CSC begins nullifying
March 26, 27 absences

KUWAIT: The Civil Service Commission has announced on Sunday that it will implement not counting absences or delays for March 26 and March 27 electronically for employees of 25 government authorities under the integrated civil service systems. "Work is underway to follow up implementation for the rest of the agencies and ministries during the coming days through the employment affairs supervisors affiliated with the Civil Service Commission in each authority." The Civil Service Commission had announced on March 27 that the absence or delay in the attendance of employees to their workplaces during Sunday and Monday March 26 and 27 will not be counted due to the bad weather in the country. —KUNA

Photo of the day



KUWAIT: An aerial view of Kuwait City taken from a drone. The country will continue to experience clear and warm weather conditions this week. —Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

Kuwaiti charities offer aid, iftar meals to many in Jordan

Volunteers distribute food boxes, iftar meals and Eid clothes



KUWAIT: Al-Tarahom Voluntary Team poses with the Kuwaiti Charge d'Affaires Dr Mubarak Al-Hajri.



Al-Rahma International offers food to Palestinian refugees in Jordan. —KUNA photos

AMMAN: Since the onset of Ramadan, Jordan has witnessed noticeable activities by Kuwaiti charities providing aid and food to thousands of Palestinians and Syrian refugees in particular.

The Kuwaiti embassy has sponsored charitable programs, organized by Kuwaiti societies in various parts of the Kingdom of Jordan. Dr Mubarak Al-Hajri, the Kuwaiti Charge d'Affaires, said in an interview with KUNA after participating in a program by "the Tarahom Voluntary Team" of the International Islamic Charity Organization that philanthropic work has become synonymous to Kuwait's history.

The Kuwaiti Embassy spares no efforts in supporting the Kuwaiti charitable societies as part of the Ku-

waiti Foreign Ministry's campaign, "Kuwait on your side," and in implementation of guidelines by the political leadership. Hajri lauded efforts of Kuwaiti charities and the Kuwaiti Red Crescent Society, noting that the volunteers "have been pursuing the march of designating Kuwait as center for humanitarian action".

"The Tarahom Voluntary Team" has given aid worth \$65,000 for Syrian refugees, Palestinians and low-income Jordanian families. The team has also distributed 1,000 food parcels to some 5,000 individuals, funded four surgeries, treated 240 patients and provided iftar meals to 1,500 people.

Meanwhile, Al-Rahma International Society distributed food worth \$5,000 to Palestinian refugees.

Up to 630 food baskets were handed over to some 3,000 Palestinians at the refugee camps. Kuwait Red Crescent Society, in coordination with the Jordanian Red Crescent, carried out a campaign to distribute Eid Al-Fitr clothes and iftar meals to the Syrian refugees living in small towns. Up to 25,000 iftar meals were distributed and 1,000 coupons to buy Eid clothes were given to 20,000 persons.

Al-Najat Charity's team, as part of "the One Million Iftar Initiative," carried out in 25 countries, distributed 1,600 food parcels to Syrian refugees, orphans and the poor in the Jordan valley camps. The number of beneficiaries reached 1,600 families or 8,000 people in need. —KUNA



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Al-Najat Charity's team distributed 1,600 food parcels to Syrian refugees, orphans and the poor in the Jordan refugee camps.



Kuwait Red Crescent Society carried out a campaign to distribute Eid Al-Fitr clothes and iftar meals to the Syrian refugees living in small towns.

Reflections of an architect

By Dr Yousef Al-Haroun

The first day in architecture school we were told that water is the enemy of all buildings. Water may infiltrate the structure, flood, cause mold, and bring all sorts of havoc. In fact, we were taught to design and protect buildings from not only water but also other elements such as sun, wind, and fire. It really all depends on where you live. In the tropics elevating the structure protected against flooding, while in Arabia courtyard houses provided the perfect sanctuary against the harsh summer sun and brutal sandstorms.

In North America and Europe, people would gather around the hearth for warmth and have gable roofs to help melt away the snow. Porches in Australia are designed to provide air circulation to relieve the effects of humidity while allowing people to be more aware of their surroundings in the outback. So, if in the vernacular people lived with nature and respected the environment, why do we today view it as an enemy? As practicing architects, we come to realize that new enemies of architecture start to emerge. It may be something very devious yet hidden in plain sight.

The pigeons people see in plazas and around parks are truly a nuisance for architecture. They use any ledge or opening to nest and litter almost everywhere. Watching their buildings disrespected like that makes architects infuriated! So, have we come down to blaming birds for living in buildings rather than trees because we invaded their natural habitats? For other architects, the enemy is red tape and building regulations that significantly reshape, hamper or even stop construction of architectural ambitions and landmarks.

This may also take shape in the form of budget cuts, which may completely transform facades and the qual-

ity of spaces. It may also be through bureaucracy and corruption that slows down development and impacts creativity and ingenious production. In some countries, wars have a devastating effect on our built environments and usually with careless destruction of sacred sites and entire cities.

This has been evident in Hiroshima and Nagasaki during the Second World War and more recently in the Middle East, the devastation of Aleppo and Mosul. Why do we build something only to destroy it? Eventually as our experience grows and we get a record track in designing and building, we come to the realization of who the true enemy of architecture is. It is unfortunately without a question of a doubt people. It is ironic especially that people construct buildings, so how can they be their enemies?

What's even more perplexing is that by being the enemies of architecture people are in fact negatively affecting their health and overall well-being. Today, most buildings have high-energy costs during construction, use unsustainable materials and building techniques. Studies show construction and building wastes account to more than half of all environmental pollution. When did people start to lose their architectural humanity and allow the slow environmental demise of our houses, buildings, cities, and urban fabric? Although, architecture is a human production, it is also very much alive carrying with it rich history, culture, and all that comes in between.

People's experiences of spaces and their perceptions are created everyday by the places where they live, work, and play. Yet, with all that architecture gives them, they don't give back. Instead, taken from architecture is its connection with nature. Sometimes people need to be reminded in how the built and natural environments can co-exist. Architecture's true beauty lies within its simplicity inspired by nature. Once we start appreciating this concept, a new vernacular may arise inspired by the essence of the past, and to address the needs of the present, to aspire for a more sustainable future. Only then may we once again live in harmony and peace with our architecture.

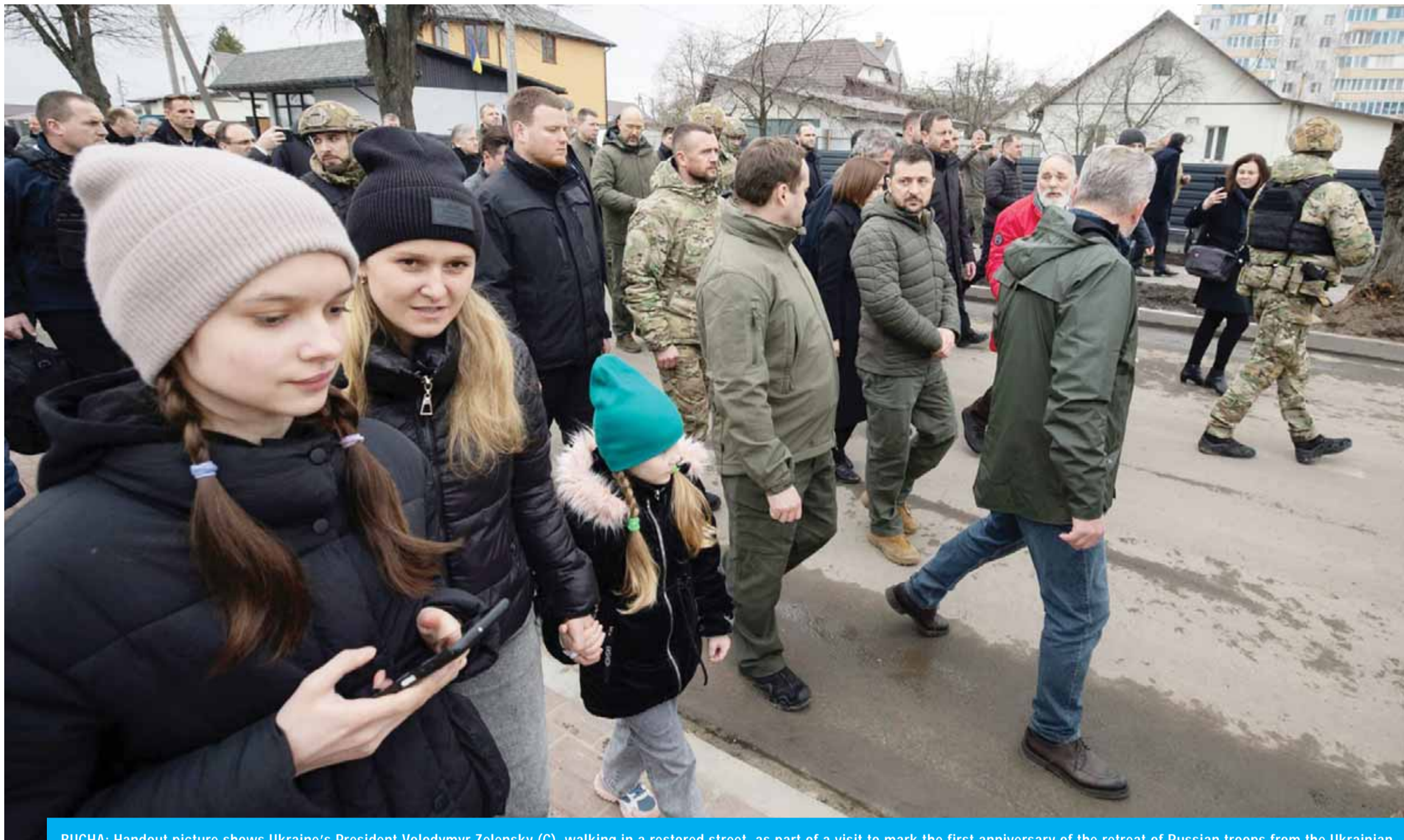


Leaders of Taiwan, Guatemala reaffirm ties

Spain begins centuries-old colourful Holy Week celebrations

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BUCHA: Handout picture shows Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky (C), walking in a restored street, as part of a visit to mark the first anniversary of the retreat of Russian troops from the Ukrainian town of Bucha, in Bucha, near Kyiv. — AFP

Zelensky hails Ukraine resistance

'We want every Russian murderer, executioner to be held responsible for every crime'

KYIV: President Volodymyr Zelensky on Sunday hailed Ukraine for fighting off "the biggest force against humanity of our time", one year after the first bodies were found in the streets of Bucha. The quiet Kyiv suburb was occupied by Russian troops for more than a month last year and its name has become synonymous with the alleged war crimes carried out by Moscow during the invasion. Russia has accused Ukraine and its allies of staging atrocities. The anniversary comes a day after Russia took over the rotating presidency of the UN Security Council despite outrage from Kyiv and Western nations that have imposed sanctions on Moscow.

"People of Ukraine! You have stopped the biggest force against humanity of our time," Zelensky said in a post on Telegram, accompanied by photos of areas liberated a year ago when Russian troops

retreated from around the Ukrainian capital. "You have stopped a force that despises everything and wants to destroy everything that gives people meaning," Zelensky said.

"We will liberate all our lands," he said. Russia currently occupies around 18 percent of Ukraine's territory. Also marking the anniversary of the liberation of the Kyiv region, Ukraine's armed forces chief Valery Zaluzhny wrote: "We will continue to fight for the independence of our nation." On April 2, 2022, AFP journalists visited Bucha and saw the bodies of 20 men in civilian clothing, including one with his hands tied behind his back, in a heavily destroyed town. The scenes sent shockwaves around the world, with Kyiv and its Western allies condemning executions of civilians. Prosecutors in Kyiv say that Russian forces killed some 1,400 civilians around Bucha,

including 637 in the town itself, and that they have identified dozens of Russian soldiers responsible.

When he visited Bucha shortly after the discovery of the bodies, Zelensky appeared visibly moved and said Russia had carried out "war crimes" that "will be recognized by the world as genocide". Since then almost every foreign leader who has visited Ukraine has also travelled to Bucha to pay their respects. On Friday — the first anniversary of Russia's retreat from the Kyiv region — Zelensky said he hoped that Bucha would become a "symbol of justice". "We want every Russian murderer, executioner, terrorist to be held responsible for every crime," he said.

'Massive bombardment'

After Russian troops retreated from the Kyiv region, they also drew back from parts of the northeast and

south of the country. But the front line has remained almost static in recent months, with Russian troops claiming only marginal gains — mainly around the battleground city of Bakhmut in the east.

The gains have come with steep casualties and Ukraine's defences have held, with help from supplies of Western arms. The Russian army, supported by the Wagner paramilitary group, has pressed hard to surround Bakhmut — hoping to claim a battlefield victory after the string of humiliating reversals.

On the ground, the intensity of the fighting has decreased from the start of the year despite intense clashes around Bakhmut. Andriy Yermak, head of Zelensky's office, on Sunday said Russian forces carried out "a massive bombardment" on the village of Kostyantynivka near Bakhmut, killing six people and injuring eight. — AFP

Pope thanks well-wishers after illness

VATICAN CITY: Pope Francis thanked those who prayed for him during his illness Sunday, after presiding over mass in St Peter's Square, just a day after leaving hospital following a bout of bronchitis. "I thank you for your participation and also for your prayers, which intensified during these past days. Thank you!", he said.

The 86-year-old's admittance to hospital on Wednesday with breathing difficulties sparked concerns he may not be well enough to attend a series of rites in the most important week in the Chris-

tian calendar. But Francis had promised to be present, and he waved briefly to some 30,000 people as he rode in his popemobile through the square, which was adorned with over 35,000 plants and flowers.

He looked serious as he followed the procession through St Peter's Square of religious figures, including red-robed cardinals, carrying large palm leaves and olive branches. He blessed the palms, then walked a short way with the aid of a walking stick to the altar, where he sat while the ceremony was conducted by a cardinal.

The Vatican said this was an arrangement adopted prior to the pope's latest illness, as the Argentine is no longer able to stand for long periods. Francis, who had appeared pale at times, stood to say the Angelus at midday, and the crowds applauded as he thanked them for their prayers.

He then did a final round in the pope-

mobile, waving and smiling. Palm Sunday marks the arrival of Jesus in Jerusalem before his crucifixion. Easter Sunday, which this year is on April 9, celebrates his resurrection from the dead.

As a smiling Francis had left Rome's Gemelli hospital Saturday after a three-night stay, he quipped to well-wishers who asked how he was "I am still alive!" The head of the world's 1.3 billion Catholics has suffered from increasing health issues over the past few years, including knee problems which have forced him to use a wheelchair and a walking stick.

Francis felt unwell Wednesday following a general audience in St Peter's Square, but his condition improved after he was given antibiotics. The hospitalization was his second since 2021, when he underwent colon surgery, also at Gemelli. — AFP



VATICAN CITY: Pope Francis delivers the Angelus prayer at the end of the Palm Sunday mass on April 2, 2023 at St. Peter's square in the Vatican. — AFP

Finns vote as far right aims to unseat PM Sanna Marin

HELSINKI: Finns began voting on Sunday in legislative elections that could see the country take a dramatic turn to the right, as centre-right and anti-immigration parties vie to unseat Social Democratic Prime Minister Sanna Marin.

After the breakthrough by nationalists in neighbouring Sweden and the far right's victory in Italy last year, Finland could become the latest country to join the nationalist wave in Europe. First results are expected around 8:00 pm (1700 GMT).

The vote comes just days ahead of Finland's formal accession to the NATO defence alliance, made possible after Turkey ratified the country's membership bid on Thursday. "The polls show that the more

right-wing political trend in Finland is gaining strength," Juho Rahkonen from the E2 research institute told AFP.

Traditionally, the biggest of the eight main parties in parliament gets the first chance to build a government, and since the 1990s that party has always claimed the prime minister's office. "We are aiming to win this election and continue our work for a more sustainable future," Marin told reporters at her final campaign event in Helsinki on Saturday.

The latest survey published on Thursday by public broadcaster Yle showed the centre-right National Coalition holding a thin lead at 19.8 percent, with the nationalist eurosceptic Finns Party in second place at 19.5 percent. The Social Democratic Party (SDP) led by Marin, who took office in 2019 as the world's youngest prime minister at age 34, was in third place with 18.7 percent. "We have had a great campaign. We have the best candidates all over Finland and we are first in the polls, so I'm optimistic," National Coalition leader Petteri Orpo told AFP at a campaign rally on Saturday.

While Marin ranks as Finland's most popular prime minister this century in polls, she is struggling to convert her popularity into SDP seats in parliament. "Although she is exceptionally popular, she also arouses opposition. The political divide has been reinforced," Rahkonen said.

While some view her as a strong leader who deftly navigated the Covid-19 pandemic and the NATO membership process, others see the rising public debt on her watch and backlash over video clips of her partying as signs of her inexperience.

"I liked Marin ... but I don't personally believe that her ideas about economic policy are something she and her government can actually achieve," 29-year-old voter Kasper Kylmala told AFP after casting his ballot.

Finland's debt-to-GDP ratio has risen from 64 percent in 2019 to 73 percent, which Orpo's National Coalition wants to address by cutting spending by six billion euros (\$6.5 billion). Marin has accused the National Coalition of wanting to "take from the poor to give to the rich". — AFP



KIRKKONUMMI: The Finns Party chair Riikka Purra arrives to cast her vote at a polling center in Kirkkonummi, west of Helsinki, on April 2, 2023 during the parliamentary elections in Finland. — AFP

International

Spain begins centuries-old colourful Holy Week celebrations

Floats are carried on the shoulders of members of the brotherhoods

MADRID: Spain's colourful Holy Week celebrations begin on Sunday, featuring centuries-old processions of the faithful carrying flower-covered floats topped with statues of Christ or the Virgin Mary that draw huge crowds. Organized by various religious brotherhoods, or "cofrades", the parades are held across the country in the week leading up to Easter Sunday, which this year in the Christian Church falls on April 9. Depicting scenes from the story of the Passion of Christ, the floats are carried on the shoulders of members of the brotherhoods called "costaleros", often accompanied by solemn music from a brass band.

Other members of the brotherhoods accompany the floats wearing long robes with tall, pointed hoods that leave only two small holes for the eyes. The processions first appeared in the 15th and 16th centuries in Spain, which already had a tradition of biblical theatre depicting the Passion.

"Originally people went out on the streets with a cross," University of Navarra professor of church history Fermin Labarga told AFP. They were accompanied by other members of religious brotherhoods who "performed acts of penitence" such as whipping their bare backs, he added.

These self-flagellations disappeared in the 18th century due to growing criticism that they "were not done out of devotion but for ostentation", Labarga said.

But the tradition of staging Easter processions continued. The goal of the parades was to "remember the Passion (of Christ)" — the week of the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus — and "strengthen belief", said Labarga. While Spain, like most European nations, has

grown increasingly secular in recent decades, the parades continue to draw huge crowds of all levels of devotion and all walks of life. Many of the more famous processions are broadcast live on TV.

Labarga called them a "complete performance". Spaniards love the processions "because they are aesthetically beautiful and they incorporate festive elements which make them very attractive, with music, images and movement", he added. The most elaborate and extravagant parades are held in the southwestern region of Andalucía, particularly in its capital, Seville, and in the northern city of Valladolid. The Passion Procession held in Valladolid on Good Friday has over 1,000 participants and dozens of floats.

Typically, the most dramatic and fervent processions take place on Maundy Thursday and Good Friday, when mourners dressed in black lace often join in to mark Christ's death. On Easter Sunday, when Christ's miraculous resurrection is celebrated, the parades become more jubilant, with more lively music.

During the 16th and 17th centuries, Spain exported its Easter parade tradition to its overseas possessions, mainly in Latin America. Processions are especially popular in Guatemala, Mexico, Peru and Venezuela.

Guatemala's Holy Week — a vibrant celebration that mixes Mayan rituals with Catholic religious fervour — was last year given UNESCO heritage status. Spain also introduced these processions to the parts of southern Italy which it ruled until the 18th century. The legacy can also be found in the Philippines, which Spain ruled until 1898. — AFP



SEVILLE: Penitents walk down a street during the Holy Week's Palm Sunday celebration in Seville on April 2, 2023. Spain's colourful Holy Week celebrations begin today, featuring centuries-old processions of the faithful carrying flower-covered floats topped with statues of Christ or the Virgin Mary that draw huge crowds. — AFP

Zionist strikes wound five Syrian soldiers

DAMASCUS: Five Syrian soldiers were wounded in the latest Zionist air strike on Syria, state news agency SANA reported Sunday, with Iran saying two Revolutionary Guards officers died in earlier attacks.

During more than a decade of civil war in Syria, Zionist entity has launched hundreds of air strikes on Syrian territory, primarily targeting Iran-backed forces and Lebanese Hezbollah fighters, as well as Syrian army positions.

The strike early Sunday near the western Syrian city of Homs was Zionist entity's third in recent days after the capital Damascus was targeted on the nights of March 30 and 31, according to the agency.

"The Zionist enemy carried out an air assault... targeting positions in the city of Homs and its province," SANA reported, citing a military source.

Syria's air defence intercepted several missiles, but five soldiers were wounded and some material damage was reported, SANA said. The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, a Britain-based war monitor, said the strikes targeted several military positions of Syrian government forces and pro-Iran groups.

The monitor said explosions rocked the city and a fire broke out in a research centre, with ambulances heading to the scene of the attack.

Observatory head Rami Abdel Rahman told AFP that in addition to the five wounded Syrian soldiers, several Iran-affiliated fighters in the research cen-

tre had been killed in the strikes. "An arms depot belonging to Lebanese Hezbollah forces in the military airport of Dabaa, in the southwestern sector of Homs, was destroyed," he added.

In the strikes on Friday, Zionist entity launched "several missiles from the occupied Golan Heights" against positions near Damascus, Syrian state media said. The Observatory said those strikes had targeted a weapons and ammunition depot of the Syrian military and pro-Iran groups.

Sepahnews, the website of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, said Friday that officer Milad Heidari had been killed. On Sunday, the website reported that Mehghad Mahghani, a military adviser wounded in the same strike, had "attained the high rank of martyrdom".

It added that "the crimes of the fake and criminal Zionist regime will not go unanswered, and it will pay". Iranian foreign ministry spokesman Nasser Kanani condemned that attack, saying on Sunday that the "blood of these high-ranking martyrs will not go to waste" and that Tehran "reserves its right to respond... at the appropriate time and place".

Zionist entity conducted several air strikes on Syria in March, according to the Observatory, which has an extensive network of sources in the country. While Zionist entity rarely comments on the strikes it carries out on Syria, it has repeatedly said it will not allow its arch-enemy Iran to extend its footprint in the war-torn country.

Zionist Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, speaking after the strike on Sunday, said: "We are exacting a high price from the regimes that support terrorism, beyond Zionist's borders. I suggest that our enemies not err."

Zionist entity has seen weeks of protests against a controversial judicial overhaul now frozen by the government, but Netanyahu said that domestic politics would not stop its military. — AFP

Montenegrins vote to elect their next president

PODGORICA: Montenegrins headed to the polls on Sunday to elect their next president in a vote that could see a young upstart unseat incumbent Milo Djukanovic, who has dominated the country's political scene for decades. The outcome of the contest is likely to determine the balance of power in the Balkan nation ahead of snap parliamentary elections due in June, following months of gridlock after the government collapsed in August.

Montenegro's president, elected for a five-year term, has a mostly ceremonial position and most of the political power resides with the prime minister. Polls opened at 7:00 am (0500 GMT) local time and close at 8:00 pm. Unofficial results are expected late on Sunday.

The runoff comes two weeks after the first round, where Djukanovic beat back a range of opponents hoping to shake up the political scene. He garnered 35 percent of the vote compared to 29 percent for his main challenger, Jakov Milatovic.

However, analysts have largely favoured Milatovic to become the new president. They argue the pro-European economist is likely to appeal to a large number of voters desperate for change after decades of rule by Djukanovic and his Democratic Party of Socialists (DPS).

"I'm absolutely convinced that I will become the new president of the country, that today the citizens of Montenegro will send the current president into the political past," said Milatovic on Sunday before casting his vote.



PODGORICA: Montenegro's presidential candidate Jakov Milatovic speaks to the press at the polling station after voting in the second round of the presidential election in Podgorica, on April 2, 2023. — AFP

The DPS has witnessed repeated setbacks since the party suffered its first major defeat in the 2020 parliamentary elections.

Since then, Montenegro has stumbled from crisis to crisis that has seen the collapse of two governments. Djukanovic, backed by autocratic former Serbian leader Slobodan Milosevic, arrived at the helm of the former Yugoslav republic in 1991, when he was just 29.

But as Serbia increasingly became an international pariah, Djukanovic pivoted West, broke ties with Belgrade and helped usher in Montenegro's independence in 2006. Under the leadership of Djukanovic and his party, Montenegro joined NATO, kick-started the negotiating process for European Union membership and moved away from Russia's influence. After voting on Sunday, Djukanovic promised to keep pursuing a European future for Montenegro. — AFP

Fasting in Ramadan: An exercise in patience...

Continued from Page 1

selfishness, sensual and bodily desires and protecting one's instinctive self-control and perseverance. It encompasses regulating and keeping oneself away from some basic human needs, conscious self-restraint from sexual intercourse, food and drink from dawn to dusk for a certain period with the sole intention of worship. It is the essence of Ramadan.

The great Islamic scholar, Imam Ahmad, noted that patience is mentioned in more than 90 places in the Noble Quran. It is a concept of extreme importance for Muslims. In Ramadan, the acts of fasting and praying late into the night, coupled with the increased drive to center our lives around the worship of our Creator, require extra measures of patience.

Muslims must always try to control our desires and our emotions. A man came to the Prophet (PBUH), and he said, "Tell me of a word I can live by, but not so much that I forget." the Prophet (PBUH)

said, "Avoid being angry." The man repeated his question and the Prophet (PBUH) again said, "Avoid being angry." (Musnad Ah?mad # 23, 468 and it sahih (authentic) according to Al-Albani)

In general, Muslims have been commanded to remain calm, to be patient. While we are hungry and thirsty from fasting, we may be more prone to succumb to the pitfalls of becoming 'hangry'. We may be extra tired from staying up late praying. We may be stressed with all the extra duties we have taken upon ourselves from increasing our charity to spending time reading the Noble Quran, to the extra socializing we tend to do in this month. The Prophet (PBUH) knew this and gave us advice. He told us "Do not insult anyone while you are fasting. If anyone insults you, then say, 'Indeed, I am fasting.' If you are standing, then sit down." (Sahih Ibn Khuzaymah # 1994, and is hasan (fair), according to Al-Albani)

Ramadan is a time for Muslims to work on patience and perfect our character. It is our training ground. It is a perfect opportunity to make a change in our perceptions, behaviors, and beliefs and to elevate our practices and habits for the years to come. — Courtesy of the TIES Center

to nearly \$5,000 per year.

But the humble barcode will soon give way to another standard developed by the organization, said Renaud de Barbuat and Didier Veloso, the respective heads of GSI Global and GSI France. The new standard, based on QR, or Quick Response code, will be introduced around 2027. If barcodes have been compared to prison bars by critics of the over-commercialization of society, the Chinese game Go with its white and black pieces on a square board was the inspiration for the QR code's Japanese creator, Masahiro Hara.

Developed in 1994, QR codes can hold much more information as they are read both horizontally, like barcodes, and vertically. Instead of having to search a database for information to go along with a product, the QR code can integrate information directly, such as the composition of the product and recycling instructions. GSI believes moving to the QR code format allows the sharing of far more information about products as well as content, enabling new uses that will be accessible to consumers as well as retailers.

As smartphones can read QR codes, they are an easy way to send people to websites to get additional information, leading to their widespread adoption by companies, artists and even museums. They are even used by payment systems. But barcodes are likely to remain in place for years to come as the world gradually transitions to QR codes. — AFP

Deadly storms and tornadoes...

Continued from Page 1

to President Joe Biden, who promised to expedite federal aid.

The city of Wynne, in northeastern Arkansas, was "cut in half by damage from east to west," Mayor Jennifer Hobbs told CNN. The National Weather Service had issued tornado warnings for several other states, from as far north as Iowa to the southern state of Mississippi, where a twister last week killed 25 people and caused extensive property damage.

Calamity struck in the Illinois town of Belvidere, outside of Chicago, on Friday when severe weather caused the roof and part of the facade of the Apollo Theater to collapse while a heavy metal band played inside. TV footage showed emergency personnel carrying out injured concert-goers on stretchers, while video posted on social media showed waist-high rubble on the floor of the venue and a gaping hole in the roof.

Belvidere Fire Chief Shawn Schadle reported one death and 28 injuries, including five people hospitalized with serious injuries. In Crawford County, in southern Illinois, three people died when a house collapsed, likely from a tornado hit, said Kevin Sur, spokesman for the Illinois Emergency Management Agency. In the neighboring state of Indiana, three people were killed by a storm in Sullivan County, on

the border with Illinois, several US media outlets reported, citing local authorities.

The state's department of natural resources said two campers were found dead after storms hit a state park in Owen County, causing "severe damage" to the campground, according to a Saturday statement. Overnight tornadoes also claimed one life in Pontotoc County, Mississippi, and one in Madison County, Alabama, emergency officials reported Saturday. More than 610,000 homes were without power Saturday, according to the poweroutage.us website. The situation was improving by Sunday morning, but tens of thousands were still without electricity.

As the storm tracked northeastward, the highest number of outages from Saturday afternoon into Sunday were in the states of Ohio and Pennsylvania. The mid-Atlantic state of Delaware suffered one fatality from a "collapsed structure" in Sussex County on Saturday evening, according to the county's emergency operations center, while several other states in the area remained under high wind warnings.

"Maximum wind gusts could approach 60 miles (100 kilometers) per hour throughout much of the Appalachians, upper Ohio Valley and Mid-Atlantic today," the National Weather System warned. Tornadoes are common in the United States, especially in the center and south of the country. Biden on Friday visited the Mississippi city Rolling Fork, one of the worst-hit areas in last week's tornado. In December 2021, tornadoes killed about 80 people in Kentucky. — AFP

Workers at risk due to new absconding...

Continued from Page 1

her way home by a taxi driver and taken to a brothel in Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh and imprisoned for a year and a half," he noted.

Jasem explained that in the previous report system, the criminal investigation department was instructed to investigate the reason for the worker's absence and were obligated to start searching for her and her phone until they found her. "The old procedure used to help police officers find the person, but now the procedure only involves placing her name as a wanted person at Kuwait's borders. People must consider that domestic workers may be subject to human trafficking," he reiterated, calling on the government to restore the old system because it safeguarded people's lives and deterred crime.

Regarding domestic labor recruitment offices,

Jasem said their existence is a crime within the legal framework. "The presence of such offices is nothing but a crime. Most offices take money from sponsors and workers through recruitment offices in their home countries," he charged. He said domestic workers entering Kuwait pay a large amount of money, although it is just like a regular job in any company.

"We demand an end to this behavior, which is suspected human trafficking within a legal framework. It violates rights and freedoms of workers and it is almost a fraud, as some domestic workers have agreed to certain jobs and certain salaries, but when they arrive in Kuwait, they face a different reality," he pointed out.

Jasem recommended that Kuwait should regulate this process by classifying domestic work as a "regular job" to protect the rights of sponsors, who sometimes pay more than KD 1,200 to the recruiting office. "The process must be regulated directly between the domestic workers and the sponsors through correspondence or recruiting websites, in the same way that any company recruits its workers. The contract must guarantee full legal rights of both parties," he stressed.

Barcode turns 50 but its days might...

Continued from Page 1

in stores access to other functionalities", said Laurence Vallana, head of France de SES-Imagotag, a company that specializes in electronic tagging.

Barcodes were initially patented by Norman Joseph Woodland and Bernard Silver in the United States in 1952. But it wasn't until nearly two decades later, in 1971, that US engineer George Laurer perfected the technology and moves towards its commercialization began. On April 3, 1973 the standard to identify products was agreed by a number of large retailers and food companies. It later became known as EAN-13, which stands for European Article Number and the number of digits in the barcode.

The following year, on June 26 in the US state of Ohio, the first product was scanned: a pack of chewing gum that is now in the National Museum of American History in Washington. Today, the non-governmental organization Global Standard 1 manages the barcode system and counts about two million firms as members. It provides companies with a unique "global trade item number" for each product, which is then translated into the barcode. Each firm must pay an annual fee based on their sales, up

International

At Mayan ruins, leaders of Taiwan, Guatemala reaffirm ties

Honduran President Xiomara Castro expected to visit China soon

GUATEMALA CITY: Taiwanese President Tsai Ing-wen and her Guatemalan counterpart, Alejandro Giammattei, on Saturday took in the jungle ruins of a Mayan civilization citadel where they observed an ancient ritual before a massive stone pyramid known as El Gran Jaguar.

The two shook hands there and vowed to maintain strong ties in the face of a diplomatic offensive by China, which sees Taiwan as part of its territory awaiting reunification. The assembled dignitaries "witness today the strengthening of the friendship between our nations," Guatemalan deputy culture minister Jenny Barrios said.

Tsai's visit, which will also take her to Belize, comes days after neighboring Honduras broke diplomatic relations with Taipei to link up with Beijing, which does not allow coun-

tries to recognize both China and Taiwan. Honduran President Xiomara Castro is expected to visit China soon.

The two presidents walked to a nearby esplanade and shook hands for a symbolic official photo while a bonfire lit during a Mayan dance ceremony burned. They also witnessed a traditional ball game played in Mayan times.

In a meeting with Giammattei on Friday night, Tsai thanked him for his support last year when China conducted military maneuvers near the island. She also highlighted cooperation with Guatemala, one of only 13 diplomatic allies the self-governing island has in the world, mostly small nations in the Caribbean, the Pacific and Latin America. Speaking to the media with Tsai at his side, Giammattei called Taiwan "the one and only true China." Some Gua-

temalans believe their nation is losing economic opportunities by choosing Taiwan over mainland China.

"China is a market of more than one billion people, and it would be in the interest of some Guatemalan sectors to export and import products from China," sociologist and political analyst Miguel Angel Sandoval told AFP.

On Sunday, Tsai will visit a new hospital in the city of Chimaltenango, in western Guatemala, built with a \$22 million donation from Taipei. Tsai will then leave for Belize, where she is to meet with Prime Minister John Briceno on Monday and depart on Tuesday. On her way home, Tsai will stop in California to meet with US House Speaker Kevin McCarthy, a meeting that prompted China to warn Washington that it is "playing with fire." — AFP



TIKAL: This handout picture shows Taiwan's President Tsai Ing-wen (L) and Guatemala's President Alejandro Giammattei (R) shaking hands at the Tikal archaeological site in Peten, Guatemala. — AFP

Sectarian clashes rock parts of India

NEW DELHI: Authorities deployed hundreds of riot police and cut mobile internet services in parts of eastern India on Sunday after violent clashes erupted in at least eight states during a Hindu religious festival. Police said one person was shot dead in the Nalanda district of Bihar state on Saturday after majority Hindus and minority Muslims clashed in the town of Biharsharif.

This came a day after mobs fought running battles and set fire to homes and shops during at times frenzied public celebrations of Ram Navami. Hindu festivals regularly feature hundreds of people — sometimes brandishing swords, guns and tridents — provocatively marching through Muslim neighbourhoods with religious music pulsating through powerful sound systems. Biharsharif police chief Shibli Noman said nearly 100 people have been detained over violence that erupted on Thursday when thousands of Hindus rallied on the streets and paraded through Muslim-dominated areas. "The situation is under control. We are patrolling the area and ensuring no gatherings are allowed," he told AFP, adding that the unrest was being investigated.

Similar communal flare-ups were reported in two other cities in Bihar, where authorities shut mobile in-

ternet services in some areas and clamped down on public movement. In Rohtas, another district hit by violence where police arrested dozens, six people were injured in an explosion inside a house where two men were allegedly making a bomb.

Bihar police tweeted that at first glance it did not appear that the blast was related to the recent unrest. Homemade explosives are sometimes used in mining in the area. Sectarian violence also hit seven other states in recent days following the Hindu festival on Thursday, with dozens injured and hundreds arrested in at least 13 towns and cities.

This included Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Karnataka and the Howrah region of the eastern state of West Bengal where mobs rampaged and torched vehicles and shops on Thursday. West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee accused Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Hindu-nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party of orchestrating the violence. The BJP accused her of targeting Hindus.

Similar violence was reported in Modi's home state of Gujarat on Thursday in western India where clashes were reported in Vadodra along with Aurangabad in the western region of Maharashtra. Critics say that hardline Hindu groups have been emboldened since Modi, who was Gujarat state chief minister during huge riots there in 2002, was elected prime minister in 2014. Last year, similar clashes were reported across several cities on Ram Navami, including in New Delhi and in Jharkhand in eastern India where one person was killed. — AFP



SASARAM: In this photograph taken on April 1, 2023, a policeman (R) walks through a street after a violent clash at Sasaram in India's Bihar state. Authorities deployed hundreds of riot police and cut mobile internet services in parts of eastern India on Sunday after violent clashes erupted in at least eight states during a Hindu religious festival. — AFP

Three British men held in Afghanistan

LONDON: Britain's interior minister Suella Braverman on Sunday said the UK government was "in negotiations" after three British men were detained by the Taliban in Afghanistan. Media reports have identified the men as charity medic Kevin Cornwell, 53, the unnamed manager of a hotel for aid workers and YouTube star Miles Routledge. "The government is in negotiations and working hard to ensure people's safety is upheld," Braverman told Sky News. The non-profit group the Presidium Network said on Twitter on Saturday it had been "working closely with two of the families".

"We are working hard to secure consular contact with British nationals detained in Afghanistan and we are supporting families," the UK's foreign ministry added in a statement. Scott Richards of the Presidium Network told Sky News: "We believe they are in good health and being well treated."

"We have no reason to believe they've been subject to any negative treatment such as torture and we're told that they are as good as can be expected in such circumstances." He added, however, that there had been "no meaningful contact" between authorities and the two men Presidium was assisting.

These two men are believed to have been held by the Taliban since January. It is not known how long the third man has been held for.

'Misunderstanding'

Presidium on Twitter urged the Taliban to be "considerate of what we believe is a misunderstanding and release these men". Last year the Taliban freed a veteran television cameraman and four other British nationals it had held for six months. Peter Jouvenal was one of a "number" of Britons that the government in London said had been held by the hardline Islamists. Britain's foreign ministry said the five "had no role in the UK government's work in Afghanistan and travelled to Afghanistan against the UK government's travel advice."

"This was a mistake," it added. At the time, Afghanistan government spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid accused the Britons of "carrying out activities against the country's laws and traditions of the people of Afghanistan".

"After consecutive meetings between the IEA (Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan) and Britain the said persons were released... and handed over to their home country," he said. "They promised to abide by the laws of Afghanistan, its traditions and culture of the people and not to violate them again," he added. The Taliban returned to power in August 2021 and has since sparked global outrage with its policies in particular towards women and girls. — AFP

Bulgaria votes for fifth time in two years

SOFIA: Bulgarians were voting on Sunday in their fifth general election in two years, amid visible frustration and deep divisions over the war in Ukraine. Russia's invasion of its neighbour has deepened the political crisis that has engulfed the poor Balkan country since 2020, a turmoil unseen since the fall of Communism.

Massive anti-corruption protests three years ago led to long-time prime minister Boyko Borisov losing power in 2021. But this set off a record series of elections in the country of 6.5 million, which is a member of the European Union and NATO but is historically and culturally close to Russia.

The country's political parties have struggled since 2021 to form stable coalitions, leading to a deeply fragmented parliament and a string of interim governments. "No-one inspires confidence any more," Krasimir Naydenov, 57, told AFP outside a polling station in Sofia. He said he had voted nonetheless, hoping for "the government to start functioning again". The main players in Sunday's ballot are the same as in recent elections. The latest polls put Borisov's Conservative GERB party neck-and-neck with the reformist We Continue

the Change (PP) led by Kiril Petkov, who was briefly premier in 2022. Both have around 25 percent support.

'Worrying spiral'

Turnout, which sunk to a record low of under 40 percent during the last general election in October, is expected to be low again. "We must find a solution to the crisis," Borisov told reporters after casting his ballot.

"With this terrible war in Ukraine—we must very clearly stay with the democratic world," Petkov has so far ruled out working with GERB—the target of corruption protests he himself took part in.

This time, his PP has joined forces with the small right-wing Democratic Bulgaria coalition. "I voted for a normal European life. I voted for us to have a normal European government, normal European roads, normal European healthcare, normal European education," Harvard-educated Petkov said.

Unless Borisov withdraws, there is no end in sight to this "worrying spiral of elections", predicted Lukas Macek, associate researcher at the Jacques Delors Institute for Central and Eastern Europe. "We find the same pattern as in other central European countries—a former leader who clings on and the other parties who refuse to ally with him, without having much else in common," he told AFP.

"I fear the influence of pro-Russian parties in the next parliament," Ognian Peychev, a 60-year-old engi-



SOFIA: A man casts his ballot at a polling station during the country's parliamentary elections in Sofia. — AFP

neer, told AFP at a recent protest against the war in Ukraine. The ultra-nationalist Vazrazhdane party, which defends the Kremlin's war, stands to gain some 13 percent of the vote on Sunday, according to opinion polls, up from the 10 percent it won in the October ballot.

Pro-Russian influence

The Socialist BSP, the successor of Bulgaria's Communist Party, has also sided with Moscow and objects to sending weapons to Ukrainian forces. Many in Bulgaria still revere Russia as the country that ended five centuries of Ottoman rule in 1878.

"Both Petkov and Borisov are too aggressively critical of Russia," said Mariana Valkova, a 62-year-old entrepreneur who worked in the Soviet Union. "I'd rather there wasn't a government and (President Rumen) Radev remained in charge."

Pro-Russian Radev, who has appointed interim cabinets between the inconclusive elections, has denounced Petkov and his allies as "war mongers". He also opposes sending arms to Ukraine. At the same time, Bulgaria's munitions factories have been running at full capacity making ammunition to be exported to Kyiv via third countries. — AFP

Burkina Faso expels reporters from France

OUAGADOUGOU: Burkina Faso has expelled correspondents from France's Le Monde and Liberation dailies, the newspapers said on Sunday, the latest move by the junta ruling the west African country against French media.

The move is the latest deterioration in relations with former colonial power France since current military junta leader Ibrahim Traore seized power in September. Le Monde said it "condemns in the strongest terms" the "arbitrary decision" to expel its correspondent, Sophie Douce, and her colleague from Liberation, Agnes Faivre.

Burkina Faso, which witnessed two coups last year, is battling a jihadist insurgency that spilled over in 2015 from neighbouring Mali, which is also run by the military. Both have vowed to recover land seized by the jihadists but have emphasised national "sovereignty" over the strategy.

In both countries, tensions with France at government level have been accompanied by anti-French demonstrations and a growing alliance with Russia. In March, the Burkina junta scrapped a 1961 accord with France on military assistance, only weeks after it told the French ambassador and troops supporting its anti-jihadist campaign to leave the country.

It has also ordered France 24 news channel and Radio France Internationale (RFI) off air. Le Monde said journalists Douce and Faivre were summoned by authorities on Friday evening and given 24 hours to leave the country. They landed in Paris on Sunday morning, it said. Liberation said the deportations were "absolutely unjustified expulsions" and suggested they were linked to an investigation into abuse by the military it published on Monday.

'Security crisis'

It said its probe "into the circumstances in which a video was filmed showing children and adolescents being executed in a military barracks by at least one soldier" had "evidently strongly displeased the junta". Burkina government spokesman Jean-Emanuel Ouedraogo had criticised the article as "manipulations disguised as journalism to tarnish the image of the country".

On Monday, the junta suspended broadcasts by France 24 after the channel interviewed the head of Al-Qaeda in North Africa, saying it was "legitimising the terrorist message". France 24 retorted that Burkina's "security crisis ... must not be a pretext for muzzling the media".

In December, the junta suspended RFI, accusing the radio station of airing a "message of intimidation" attributed to a "terrorist chief". Both RFI and France 24, which cover African affairs closely and are popular in African francophone nations, have also been suspended in Mali.

Soldiers in Burkina Faso, one of the world's poorest nations, staged two coups in 2022 over the government failure to tackle the threat from jihadist groups. More than 10,000 civilians, troops and police have been killed, according to one NGO estimate, and at least two million people have been displaced.

Official figures say jihadists effectively control about 40 percent of the country. Junta leader Traore vowed to recover lost territory after he took power. But attacks have escalated since the start of the year, with dozens of soldiers and civilians killed every week. Media rights organisation Reporters Without Borders alleged the junta was targeting the media to "camouflage its abuses". — AFP

Business

MONDAY, APRIL 3, 2023

European aviation sector fears CO2 rules could clip its wings

Saudi plans to make Riyadh a gigantic aviation hub • Qatar has 'open skies' deal with EU

PARIS: European airlines fear losing out to rivals based outside the EU that can ignore the bloc's emissions-reduction rules to become carbon neutral by 2050. The "Fit for 55" package sets out an initial goal of reducing emissions by 55 percent in 2030 compared with the 1990 level. This involves bloc-level obligations to scale up the use of sustainable aviation fuels (SAFs) to be blended with fossil fuels in all flights departing from European airports.

SAFs come from sources such as municipal solid waste, leftovers from the agricultural and forestry industry, used cooking oil, crops and plants, and hydrogen. These technologies are still developing and the end product is more expensive, thereby placing additional costs on airlines obliged to use them while passengers will have to pay more for flights. The aviation sector is growing in Asia and the Middle East and companies based there could benefit greatly as they are not subject to these constraints, industry experts say. "The European airline industry has to live with the fact that it's cheaper to bypass environmental reduction ideas if you hop outside of Europe," Carsten Spohr, CEO of German carrier Lufthansa, said at the Airlines for Europe (A4E) aviation summit in Brussels on Wednesday.

Spohr said an airline flying from Brussels to Singapore via Paris, for example, must pay through a carbon emissions trading scheme for the European leg of the trip. "If you want to go via Doha, you don't need to pay emission trading, you also don't need to be part of blending (SAF and traditional fuels)," Spohr said.

'Stop being naive'

Carbon dioxide emissions from aviation have been included in the EU emissions trading system

since 2012. Under this system, all airlines operating in Europe—both European and non-European—have to monitor, report and verify their emissions, and to surrender allowances against those emissions.

Qatar has obtained a controversial "open skies" agreement with the European Union to increase flights between the country and the 27-nation bloc. Saudi Arabia plans to make Riyadh a gigantic regional aviation hub like Dubai while Istanbul airport, the main hub of Turkish Airlines, has already surpassed London's Heathrow and Paris's Charles de Gaulle by handling 64.3 million passengers last year.

"Istanbul is ideally placed for going to Asia, Africa and eastern Europe. We have to stop being naive," said Alain Battisti, the former president of France's National Aviation Federation.

'Centre of gravity shifting'

Istanbul plans to triple its flow of passengers. "Climate change and the legal regulations that go with it are inevitable. Important measures are going to be taken on the EU side, and as a result, the centre of gravity of air transport is likely to shift to the East," Kadri Samsunlu, the CEO of Istanbul airport, told AFP. A detailed study in March last year by the Dutch research group SEO said that non-European aviation hubs would gain passengers as a result of the EU measures.

It said intra-European passengers could decline by 14 percent. Augustin de Romanet, head of France's ADP airports group, said a major shift east "would make the European companies bankrupt", though he added: "I think that Europe will eventually avoid this distorted competition". A4E interim chief Laurent Donceel said Fit for 55 will increase costs for air carriers by 577 billion euros (\$629 billion) by 2050.

'Steady increase'

There has been a "steady increase" in eviction filings over the last year, and nationwide numbers are now close to where they were before the pandemic, said Hepburn of Eviction Lab. In the 10 states and 34 cities that the group tracks, the number of such cases filed rose from around 6,600 in April 2020 during the pandemic to over 96,800 in January.

Carolyn had worked out a payment plan with her landlord but it became increasingly hard to work as her health worsened: "I just couldn't make enough money." "I managed to make \$800 before I really got too sick to work. I had to choose between paying that towards rent or having food and some medicine," she said. "There is anger, there is frustration, there is guilt and even some shame that I probably shouldn't be taking on because... I really am actually sick, and it's something I gotta finish accepting," she added. Over a third of the US population rent their homes.

Greater squeeze

"We haven't even seen a flattening out yet" after a dramatic rise in eviction filings, said Mary Horner, senior staff attorney at Legal Services of Northern Virginia (LSNV). Some households were approved for rental assistance that never arrived as funding dried up, resulting in arrears of over \$10,000.

But there are also many "who owe lower amounts, who simply cannot keep up with the increase in rents," Horner said. "Rents are a lot higher than they were. Inflation has made food more expensive... The money that families had before is just being stretched much more thinly," she added.

In Richmond, Virginia, the situation is also grim with record-low vacancies and high rent increases, said Martin Wegbreit, litigation director at Central



LISBON, Portugal: Passengers are pictured at Humberto Delgado airport in Lisbon on April 1, 2023. European airlines fear losing out to rivals based outside the EU that can ignore the bloc's emissions-reduction rules to become carbon neutral by 2050. — AFP

The "Europeans for fair competition" group, which includes airlines and unions, is seeking a carbon border tax, like those for industry. It is a duty on imports based on the amount of carbon emissions resulting from the production of the product in question. As a price on carbon, it discourages emissions and as a trade-related measure it affects production and exports.

Roman Mauroschat, an aviation policy officer at

Transport and Environment, a think tank based in Brussels, said a carbon border tax only made sense for sectors where production risked being shifted to third countries exporting goods to Europe. "Air companies have been warning for years that climate measures will hit their competitiveness. However, projections forecast a strong growth in the sector despite the new measures." — AFP

Squeezed by high costs, US tenants grapple with eviction

ALEXANDRIA, US: For nearly eight years, driving for a ride-hailing platform and making deliveries helped Laine Carolyn pay her bills—but a sudden deterioration in health forced her to stop work and fall behind on rent. Carolyn, 32, is among an increased number of US tenants confronting eviction risks in the face of high inflation, elevated rents and with the end of pandemic-era aid.

The country sees 3.6 million eviction cases filed in a typical year, said Peter Hepburn, associate director of Eviction Lab at Princeton University. But that number slowed to a trickle during the pandemic.

Now, with COVID-era legal protections and assistance lifted, it is surging again, Eviction Lab's figures show. At courthouses in Virginia, tenants living paycheck-to-paycheck told AFP how an unexpected accident or medical bill was enough to land them before a judge with an eviction filing.

Carolyn said she owes over \$10,000 in rent and other fees. But she could not return to employment after being diagnosed with Graves' disease and hospitalized last November. "It was giving me double vision and it wasn't safe for me to drive," she said. "There is brain fog, and it makes it almost impossible to think," the Alexandria resident added. Carolyn said that she cannot afford to appeal her eviction case, which requires her to repay her rent—so she is out of options. Now she is waiting for the axe to fall.



ALEXANDRIA, US: Laine Carolyn, age 32, pauses during an interview at her home in Alexandria, Virginia. — AFP

Virginia Legal Aid Society. Richmond ranked second among large cities for eviction rates in 2016. "It's a perfect recipe for tenants being squeezed even more now than they were before the pandemic," he added.

Yolanda Wilson, 45, said she had to get a new vehicle—which she needed for work—with money meant for rent after her car caught on fire. The situation landed her with an eviction filing and some \$2,900 to repay. "Even if I have a plan (for repayment)... I feel anxious," she said.

Growth in rental prices has cooled but shelter costs still accounted for over 70 percent of the increase in consumer prices in February. For many, the eviction process is traumatizing, said Horner of LSNV. "Nearly all tenants are unrepresented... They don't necessarily know what their rights are," she said. To appear in court, many have to take time off work, often bringing their children along as they lack childcare. — AFP

Dutch refinery to feed airlines' thirst for clean fuel

ROTTERDAM: Scaffolding and green pipes envelop a refinery in the port of Rotterdam where Finnish giant Neste is preparing to significantly boost production of sustainable aviation fuel. Switching to non-fossil aviation fuels that produce less net greenhouse gas emissions is key to plans to decarbonize air transport, a significant contributor to global warming. Neste, the largest global producer of SAF, uses cooking oil and animal fat at this Dutch refinery.

Sustainable aviation fuels are being made from different sources such as municipal waste, leftovers from the agricultural and forestry industry, crops and plants, and even hydrogen.

These technologies are still developing and the end product is more expensive. But these fuels will help airlines reduce CO2 emissions by up to 80 percent, according to the International Air Transport Association. Global output of SAF was 250,000 tons last year, less than 0.1 percent of the more than 300 million tons of aviation fuel used during that period.

"It's a drop in the ocean but a significant drop," said Matti Lehmus, CEO of Neste. "We'll be growing drastically our production from 100,000 tonnes to 1.5 million tonnes next year," he added. There clearly is demand.

The European Union plans to impose the use of a minimum amount of sustainable aviation fuel by airlines, rising from two percent in 2025 to six percent in 2030 and at least 63 percent in 2050. Neste has another site for SAF in Singapore which will start production in April. "With the production facilities of Neste in Rotterdam and Singapore, we can meet the mandate for EU in 2025," said Jonathan Wood, the company's vice president for renewable aviation. Vincent Etchebehere, director for sustainable development at Air France, said that "between now and 2030, there will be more demand than supply of SAF".

'Need to mature technologies'

Air France-KLM has reached a deal with Neste for the supply of one million tons of sustainable aviation fuel between 2023 and 2030. It has also lined up 10 year-agreements with US firm DG Fuels for 600,000 tons and with TotalEnergies for 800,000 tons. At the Rotterdam site, two giant storage tanks of 15,000 cubic meters are yet to be painted. They lie near a quay where the fuel will be transported by boat to feed Amsterdam's Schiphol airport and airports in Paris.

The Franco-Dutch group has already taken steps to cut its carbon footprint, using 15 percent of the global SAF output last year—or 0.6 percent of its fuel needs. Neste's Lehmus said there was a great need to "mature the technologies" to make sustainable aviation fuel from diverse sources such as algae, nitrocellulose and synthetic fuels. Air France CEO Anne Rigail said the prices of sustainable aviation fuel were as important as their production.

Sustainable fuel costs 3,500 euros (\$3,800) a ton globally but only \$2,000 in the United States thanks to government subsidies. In France, it costs 5,000 euros a ton. "We need backing and we really think the EU can do more," said Rigail. — AFP

Up to 30% of jobs may go in merger of UBS-Credit Suisse

ZURICH: The merger between banks Credit Suisse and UBS could see up to 36,000 jobs being cut across the world, the SonntagsZeitung weekly reported on Sunday.

The takeover by UBS of Credit Suisse was hastily arranged by the Swiss government on March 19 to prevent a global financial meltdown, following fears of contagion from the collapse of banks in the United States. UBS announced on Wednesday it would bring back former chief executive Sergio Ermotti to handle the huge risks involved in the Swiss banking giant's controversial absorption of its troubled rival Credit Suisse.

On Sunday, citing internal anonymous sources, SonntagsZeitung said management was mulling cutting between 20 percent and 30 percent of the workforce, meaning between 25,000 and 36,000 jobs. Up to 11,000 jobs could be cut in Switzerland alone, according to the weekly, which did not provide details of which posts could be targeted. Before the merger, UBS and Credit Suisse had employed slightly more than 72,000 and 50,000 people, respectively.



ZURICH: Newly-appointed UBS CEO Sergio Ermotti (right) arrives next to UBS Chairman Colm Kelleher (center) and outgoing CEO Ralph Hamers during a press conference in Zurich. — AFP

UBS and Credit Suisse, the second-biggest bank in Switzerland, were both among the select banks around the world considered to be globally systemically important financial institutions (G-SIFIs) and therefore deemed too big to fail. UBS chairman Colm Kelleher said this week: "There's a huge amount of risk in integrating these businesses."

Credit Suisse was embroiled in a series of scandals in the years leading up to a March 15 share

price collapse, when investor confidence plunged following two bank failures in the United States.

Among these was the bankruptcy of the British financial company Greensill and the implosion of the US hedge fund Archegos. It was also caught up in a bribery scandal in Mozambique involving loans to state-owned companies and was fined \$2 million in a money laundering case linked to a Bulgarian cocaine network. — AFP

US consumer confidence holds up, Europe's energy prices cool

China emerges out of COVID-induced slowdown

KUWAIT: Consumer confidence in the US rose in March despite the turmoil in the banking sector during the survey period. The Conference Board Consumer Confidence Index rose to 104.2 in March from 103.4 in February. The present situation component declined slightly while the expectations component improved. Optimism was underpinned by strong labor market conditions and lower fuel costs, but respondents did indicate they would spend less on highly discretionary items like entertainment and dining out. That supports a narrative of near-term spending strength, but higher borrowing costs and reduced access to credit are major headwinds.

The most recent survey from the Federal Reserve Bank of Richmond that tracks business conditions in manufacturing firms in the area reported modest improvements in March. The composite index for Fifth District manufacturing firms rose from -16 in February to -5 in March as firms continued to report easing of supply chain constraints. Meanwhile, the average growth rate of prices paid decreased moderately while average growth rate of prices received changed little in March and firms expect both to moderate over the next 12 months.

In the housing market, pending home sales unexpectedly rose to the highest since August last month, adding to signs that the housing market may be stabilizing after a turbulent year. Sales rose 0.8 percent month-on-month versus a 2.1 percent expected decline. In a year-on-year basis, pending home sales fell 21.1 percent in February. Mortgage rates have trended lower after the collapse of two US regional banks sparked fears of contagion in the banking sector, pushing down US Treasury yields.

The Fed's favored gauge for inflation, the Core PCE Price Index rose just 0.3 percent month-on-month (4.6 percent year-on-year) in February, below the 0.4 percent forecast and the previous month's 0.5 percent (4.7 percent year-on-year) gain. It marks a slight slowdown from the month before as price pressures show signs of gradually easing. Although moderating, it is still high.

Minneapolis Fed President Neel Kashkari and voter on monetary policy this year said recent bank turmoil has increased the risk of a US recession. Before this month's bank collapses and market turmoil, Kashkari said the Fed should lift rates to about 5.4 percent and the hold them there until inflation has cooled. The US dollar Index held steady this week, keeping in the 102 range. It closed the week at 102.594.

Dampening energy prices

Like their neighbor across the Atlantic, business and consumer confidence in Germany continued their upward trend in March. Germany's most prominent leading indicator, the Ifo Business Climate index, rose for the sixth month in a row, coming in at 93.3 in March from 91.1 in February, mainly attributed to lower wholesale gas prices and the reopening of the Chinese economy. Both the current assessment and expectations component increased significantly. Despite the recent turmoil in the banking sector, the latest economic sentiment indicators illustrate that those effects on sentiment appear to be ring-fenced and have not yet affected the real economy. On the consumer side, however, the picture is mixed in March. The GfK Consumer Climate index rose to -29.5 from -30.6 in February. Although improving, it marked a slower pace from the previous months' improvements. The rise is attributed to improved income expectations thanks to a noticeable drop in energy prices, however, the propensity to buy showed little change.

Cooling energy prices rubbed off on inflationary pressures that also showed signs of cooling in the region. However, food prices continue to be the main

component pushing inflation higher. In Europe's largest economy, Germany, consumer prices rose 0.8 percent month-on-month and 7.4 percent year-on-year, tumbling down from 8.7 percent year-on-year in January and February this year. Food prices still showed above-average growth (up 22.3 percent year-on-year) but energy prices slowed considerably (up 3.5 percent year-on-year). Apart from these elements, the German government's relief package has also contributed to the inflation slowdown. The situation is similar in Spain, where inflation rose 0.4 percent month-on-month and 3.3 percent year-on-year in March, down considerably from 6.0 percent year-on-year in February. In France, consumer prices rose 0.8 percent month-on-month and 5.6 percent year-on-year in March, down from 6.3 percent year-on-year in February. In the Eurozone as a whole, annual inflation fell from 8.5 percent in February to 6.9 percent in March, but core inflation ticked higher from 5.6 percent to 5.7 percent in March.

The single currency started the week in the 1.0700 region and pushed higher to close the week at 1.0843.

No relief for shoppers

Shop price inflation continued its run in the United Kingdom. The British Retail Consortium (BRC) Shop Price Index accelerated from 8.4 percent year-on-year in February to a fresh high of 8.9 percent year-on-year in March. "Shop price inflation has yet to peak. As Easter approaches, the rising cost of sugar coupled with high manufacturing costs left some customers with a sour taste, as price rises for chocolate, sweets and fizzy drinks increased in March," said Helen Dickinson, CEO of the BRC. Fruit and vegetable prices also rose as poor harvests in Europe and North Africa worsened availability, and imports became more expensive due to the weakening pound. Food inflation skyrocketed in March to the highest rate on record, rising to 15 percent from 14.5 percent in February.

Governor of the Bank of England (BoE), Andrew Bailey, spoke last week reiterating that the top priority of the central bank remains tackling inflation. Despite global worries surrounding the banking sector, Bailey said that UK banks were "resilient, with robust capital and liquidity positions, and well placed to support the economy." Furthermore, Bailey signaled that the central bank will not be swayed by uncertainties in the global financial system. He stated that the Monetary Policy Committee will "focus on its own important job of returning inflation to target." Bailey acknowledged that cost and price pressures remain elevated and that the path of in-

flation will not be entirely smooth. The latest data has pointed to more resilient economy even after 11 consecutive rate hikes, and additional tightening is required as inflation continues.

The cable started the week off in the 1.2200 region and got a boost from hawkish comments of BoE Governor Bailey, closing the week at 1.2337.

China recovery

The world's second-largest economy showed signs of recovery from the COVID pivot disruption. China's economic recovery gathered pace in March as gauges for manufacturing, services and construction activity held strong, boosting the outlook for growth this year. Although easing from February's level, the official manufacturing PMI was at 51.9, above economists' forecasts. Spending on services and government investment in infrastructure drove the economy's recovery further. China's official non-manufacturing PMI jumped from 56.3 in February to 58.2 in March. The PMI figures are the first official indicators of economic activity for the month, showing the recovery is strengthening after stringent pandemic restrictions were dropped and COVID infection waves eased.

Japan juggles mixed inflation figures

Signs of cooling inflation in Japan have been mixed, highlighting broadening price pressures in the world's third largest economy. The Bank of Japan (BoJ) Core CPI, the preferred inflation gauge of the central bank, dropped to 2.7 percent year-on-year in February from 3.1 percent year-on-year in January. Core consumer inflation in Tokyo also slowed, rising 3.2 percent year-on-year in March. The pace of increase slowed from a 3.3 percent year-on-year gain in February and a nearly 42-year high of 4.3 percent year-on-year hit in January due largely to the effect of government subsidies to curb utility bills. However, a measure that strips fresh food and energy prices in Tokyo, which is closely watched by the BoJ as a gauge of demand-side price pressures, hit 3.4 percent year-on-year in March, its highest pace in over three decades and higher than the 3.1 percent year-on-year rise in February. Prices of services also pushed higher in February. The Service Producer Price Index measured by the BoJ climbed from 1.6 percent year-on-year in January to 1.8 percent year-on-year in February.

In a positive sign for Japan's economic recovery, industrial production improved 4.5 percent month-on-month in February, partially reversing the 5.3 percent month-on-month slump in January caused

by the Lunar New Year holiday. Retail sales rose the most in over two years, rising 1.4 percent month-on-month and 6.6 percent year-on-year in February. The recent pickup in economic recovery has been supported by solid consumer spending despite high inflation. On the other hand, however, separate data showed labor market conditions worsened slightly in February. The unemployment rate increased from 2.4 percent to 2.6 percent and the jobs to applicant ratio edged down to 1.34, meaning there are 134 jobs offered for every 100 applicants. That could dampen the outlook for workers' wages, considered a key factor for the BoJ's decision on when to begin normalizing its massive easing policy. The yen started the week off strong at 130.53, but closed the week weaker at 132.79.

Australian retail sales slowed in February as shoppers reined in spending in the face of higher costs and rising interest rates. Retail sales eked out a meager 0.2 percent rise month-on-month in February compared to the 1.8 percent month-on-month rise the previous month. Adding to evidence that the worst of the price increases has passed, annual inflation rose at the slowest pace since June last year. The consumer price index slumped to 6.8 percent year-on-year in February compared to 7.4 percent year-on-year in January. Inflation had been dragged down by a 14.6 percent month-on-month drop in costs for holidays and travel, as well as slowing annual increases for housing, which rose 9.9 percent from a year earlier. Food and non-alcoholic beverages rose 8 percent, while rents rose by 4.8 percent. Prices excluding volatile fruit, vegetables and fuel rose 6.9 percent year-on-year in February, down from 7.5 percent in January.

The latest data bolstered the case for a pause in interest rate hikes at the Reserve Bank of Australia's (RBA) meeting next week. RBA Governor Philip Lowe flagged the importance of last week's CPI print, saying the board will look more pieces of data before deciding on whether or not to stop tightening. Lowe has said the central bank was closer to pausing its rate increases because monetary policy was now in restrictive territory, and suggested a halt could come as soon as April depending on the data. The Aussie started the week off in the 0.6600 region but couldn't hold itself above 0.6700 after the release of the inflation numbers brought about bets of an RBA policy pivot. It closed the week at 0.6687.

Kuwait

Kuwaiti dinar

USD/KWD closed last week at 0.30655.

Rates - 02nd April, 2023

Currencies	Previous Week Levels				This Week's Expected Range		3-Month Forward
	Open	Low	High	Close	Minimum	Maximum	
EUR	1.0908	1.0838	1.0928	1.0843	1.0710	1.1060	1.0895
GBP	1.2387	1.2326	1.2426	1.2337	1.2140	1.2510	1.2355
JPY	132.65	132.57	133.59	132.79	129.65	132.72	131.00
CHF	0.9134	0.9114	0.9177	0.9148	0.9075	0.9280	0.9057

Chinese FM: Japanese chip curbs to drive Beijing's self-reliance

BEIJING: Chinese Foreign Minister Qin Gang told his Japanese counterpart on Sunday that Tokyo's new export controls on semiconductor equipment will only further drive Beijing's quest "to become self-reliant". Yoshimasa Hayashi's visit to China is the first by a Japanese foreign minister since December 2019, ending a gap of over three years during which bilateral ties have sharply deteriorated.

The ministers' Beijing meeting comes just days after Japan unveiled planned export controls on 23 items used to make semiconductors, following US pressure for countries to restrict China's access to the technology.

"The United States used bullying tactics to brutally suppress the Japanese semiconductor industry, and now it is repeating its old tricks against China," Qin told his counterpart, according to a readout of the meeting.

He also accused Japan of being Washington's "minion". "The blockade will only further stimulate China's determination to become self-reliant," he said. Japan's controls were preceded by similar restrictions imposed last month by the Netherlands, where authorities cited "international and national security".

In comments to reporters, Hayashi defended the new restrictions on Sunday as "consistent with international rules", adding that they were "not aimed at a specific country". Semiconductors have become a major flashpoint in the souring ties between China



TOKYO: This file photo taken on February 22, 2023 shows China's Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs Sun Weidong (left) attending a meeting with Japan's Foreign Minister Yoshimasa Hayashi (right) at the Foreign Ministry in Tokyo. — AFP

and Japan — the world's second and third-largest economies. The foreign ministers also discussed China's recent detention of a Japanese national working in Beijing for Tokyo-based pharmaceutical company Astellas under allegations of espionage.

Hayashi told reporters after the meeting that Japan had "protested" the detention, and called for "the immediate release of that individual".

Qin said Sunday that "China would deal with him according to the law", without offering further details on the case. The two sides

also discussed a disputed group of islands that Japan calls the Senkaku and Beijing the Diaoyus. "We reiterated my serious concerns about the East China Sea, including the situation surrounding the Senkaku Islands, as well as China's increased military activities in and around our country, including cooperation with Russia," said Hayashi. Beijing's growing regional assertiveness will likely be among the key topics discussed at this year's G7 meeting, which Japan is scheduled to host. — AFP



THE WORLD BANK
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The World Bank is seeking a dynamic **External Affairs Officer for the GCC Countries**, Middle East, and North Africa Region. S/he expected to lead and/or contribute to a range of communication activities for the GCC countries and the MENA region. The candidate will not only particularly focus on communication and engagement in Kuwait, but also focus maintaining cross cutting responsibilities for communication initiatives across the GCC. Other duties mentioned in the job ad online.

Selection Criteria:

The position requires master's degree and at least of 5 -8 years of experience, in Communication, International Relations/Public Affairs, Marketing, Political Science or Journalism, or equivalent combination of education and experience. The successful candidate will be recruited for a four-year term appointment.

Details (vacancy # 21778) are available in the World Bank Careers website: <https://www.worldbank.org/en/about/careers>. All applications must be submitted through this website.

Closing date is April 14, 2023

Business

NBK recognized with 'Excellence in Product Design Award' by Visa

Visa delegation visits NBK headquarters

Mohammed Al-Othman:

- The award is a testament to the hard work and dedication of our employees to offer our customers unique products and services
- Our extensive experience enables us to understand customers' needs, and exceed their expectations

KUWAIT: National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) was recognized by Visa with "Excellence in Product Design" award for NBK KWT Visa Infinite Credit Card. Salah Al-Fulaij, CEO of National Bank of Kuwait – Kuwait received a delegation from Visa at NBK HQ headed by Dr Saeeda Jaffar, SVP and Group Country Manager for GCC, Visa who presented the award to Mohammed Al-Othman, GM - Consumer Banking Group at NBK, in the presence of officials from the bank and Visa.

Commenting on this, Mohammed Al-Othman, GM - Consumer Banking Group at NBK said: "The award represents a recognition of NBK's efforts in creating customer-centric products which are tailored to meet their evolving needs, as well as a testament to the hard work and dedication of our employees to offer our customers unique products and services."

"The award also demonstrates our solid partnership with Visa, through which we always seek to provide exclusive added-value products and offers to our customers," he added. Al-Othman emphasized that excellence and provision of best customer experience are key pillars of NBK's culture, noting that the extensive experience gained over long decades has enabled NBK to understand customers' needs, evaluate their goals, and even exceed their expectations.

"NBK continues to launch many customer-centric initiatives, with the aim of enhancing customers' positive experience at all stages, taking into account

the rapidly evolving consumer behavior to ensure providing a top-notch banking experience," he noted. On her part, Dr Saeeda Jaffar, SVP and Group Country Manager for GCC, Visa commented: "We are pleased to present this prestigious award to NBK for their commitment to innovation in digital payments and providing the best payment experience to consumers in Kuwait."

"Visa will continue to pursue endeavors with our local partners to drive innovation and excellence in digital payments. We look forward to building on our successful partnership with NBK with more best-in-class payment experiences for our Visa cardholders in Kuwait," she added.

NBK KWT Visa Infinite credit card

NBK KWT Visa Infinite Credit Card gives its holders a unique lifestyle thanks to the benefits and offers it provides which are tailored to fit their needs and expectations, with up to 10 percent NBK KWT Points of rewards.

The card combines an exclusive package of exceptional rewards with a design inspiring national pride, making it a card like no other. The card gives customers the flexibility to choose the way they want to earn rewards based on their lifestyle; either the "Spends Tier" or "Merchant Category" option. When choosing the "Merchant Category", customers can earn NBK KWT Points on all payments made using NBK KWT Visa Infinite Credit Card at

Dr Saeeda Jaffar:

- Visa will continue to pursue endeavors with our local partners to drive innovation and excellence in digital payments
- NBK is always from the early adopters of cutting-edge payment solutions and providers of high-quality customer service



KUWAIT: Salah Al-Fulaij, Dr Saeeda Jaafar, Mohammad Al-Othman, Hisham Al-Nisf and Ankush Devadason receiving the award.

the selected categories, with 10 percent on dining and telecom, 5 percent on fitness and beauty and 3 percent on clothing, grocery and education. The earned NBK KWT Points can be redeemed through NBK Online or Mobile Banking whether as cashback directly to the card, travel booking at more than 800

airlines and 150,000 hotels, e-vouchers from over 190 merchants, or points exchange with most preferred airlines. Customers can redeem NBK KWT Points up to KD 1,000 per month. In addition, NBK KWT Visa Infinite Credit Cardholders can earn NBK Rewards Points at over 900 participating outlets.

UK recession risks linger despite brighter data

LONDON: The UK economy performed slightly better than thought in the final quarter of last year, revised data showed Friday, but analysts warned of recession risks as inflation remains sky high. The Office for National Statistics (ONS) said the economy grew 0.1 percent in the October-December period after an initial estimate showing flat output. Either way, the UK narrowly avoided falling into recession at the end of 2022 despite a cost-of-living crisis.

"The economy performed a little more strongly... than previously estimated, with later data showing telecommunications, construction and manufacturing all faring better than initially thought," noted ONS director of economic statistics, Darren Morgan.

He added that households saved more in the last quarter, with finances boosted by government support to pay sky-high energy bills. "Meanwhile, the UK's balance of payments deficit with the rest of the world narrowed, driven by increased foreign earnings by UK companies, particularly in the energy sector," he added. Oil and gas prices soared last year as supplies tightened following the invasion of Ukraine by key energy producer Russia.

That largely contributed to inflation soaring worldwide in 2022, with UK consumer prices reaching a four-decade high above 11 percent. After dipping at the end of last year and start of 2023, British inflation rose back to 10.4 percent in February.

Recession in 2023?

"The final quarter GDP data suggested the economy was even more resilient in 2022 than we previously thought, as the government absorbed some of the hit to households from high inflation," Ruth Gregory, deputy chief UK economist at Capital Economics, said following Friday's data. "But we still think that about two-thirds of the drag of higher interest rates has yet to be felt and that the economy will slip into a recession involving a peak to trough



LONDON: A shopkeeper (left) passes a customer their change in GBP pound sterling ten and twenty pound notes, at a shop in east London. — AFP

fall of about 1.0 percent this year."

Other economists believe the UK will avoid recession in 2023, matching a prediction from the government. The Bank of England, which has aggressively raised its interest rate several times over more than a year in a bid to cool inflation, has expressed hope the UK will swerve recession, which refers to at least two quarters of contraction in a row.

Separate data Friday from major mortgage provider Nationwide showed UK house prices slid 3.1 percent year-on-year in March, as BoE interest-rate hikes took their toll. That was the biggest decline since 2009 when the global financial crisis was still in full flow. Retail lenders tend to match the central bank's increases to borrowing costs, resulting in higher repayments on home loans.

Pay rises

With inflation still elevated, Britain on Friday said its minimum wage would jump by a record 9.7 percent from Saturday. April also sees the country's state pension leap by a record amount, at more than 10 percent. It comes as Britain continues to face mass strike action by thousands of public and private sector workers battling for pay rises that match the surge in inflation. The latest walkout Friday saw the start of a 10-day strike by about 1,400 security guards at Heathrow airport, forcing the cancellation of several flights to and from London's main hub. — AFP

Some have raised concerns that noise from the turbines might disturb the about 600 elephants living in the park, who communicate via low frequency infrasounds. "Wind turbines produce a lot of noise," said Anglea Stoeger-Horwath, an animal behaviour specialist at the University of Vienna told AFP.

"There's a real risk that it might impact their way of communication... (and) might stress them". Nature guide and wildlife photographer, Jeni Smithies, said in turn the animals might get "frustrated" and "aggressive", adding tourists coming to the area will also have their view spoiled.

In rejecting the appeal last year, the ministry wrote that the visual impact of the project would be limited, given there already are other turbines nearby. Campaigners opposing the project said this week they were considering further legal action. French firm EDF, which is among the companies involved in the project, already runs a 60 megawatt wind farm some 11 kilometers from Addo park, which lies just one hour drive from Gqeberha, formerly Port Elizabeth. "(The farm) has been operational since 2015 and no complaints, issues or grievances have been communicated by members of the public," EDF told AFP, adding it continued to monitor biodiversity on the site.

The company dismissed additional concerns that turbulence created by the turbines may interfere with small anti-poaching patrol aircrafts, saying the national parks department "has not given any indication" that this might be an issue. Other developers did not respond to AFP requests for comment. — AFP

Wind project near S African elephant park riles activists

CAPE TOWN: Plans to build wind farms next to a South African national park have riled wildlife activists who worry the turbines will ruin the landscape and impact elephants. More than 200 turbines are slated to be erected in the vicinity of the Addo Elephant National Park, in the country's south, after the Environment Ministry dismissed a legal bid to block the project last year.

The decision has upset tour operators and environmental campaigners, including William Fowlds, a wildlife vet who runs a lodge in the area and complains the farms risk degrading "the wild experience of going on a safari". "It's catastrophic," he told AFP. "No one is saying we are against wind farms, but if you place them in an area of high environmental value and high eco-tourism value, you are actually damaging the local environment and the people that live there." With solar, wind is seen as key to efforts by Africa's most industrialized economy to wean itself off coal—which is currently burnt to generate about 80 percent of the country's electricity.

The environment ministry said authorization to build the wind farms was given upon the completion of an environmental impact assessment. But critics of the plan are not convinced.

China manufacturing slows in March

BEIJING: China's manufacturing activity slowed in March, official figures showed Friday, while growth in the services and construction sectors surged to a 12-year high. The world's second-largest economy is slowly rebounding after posting some of its weakest growth in decades in 2022.

The official manufacturing purchasing managers' index (PMI) — a key gauge of Chinese factory output—beat expectations but fell to 51.9 in March, from 52.6 in February, data from the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) showed. Analysts polled by Bloomberg News had expected March factory activity to come at 51.6 percent, after February recorded the highest reading in more than a decade as facto-

ries returned to normal following a surge in COVID cases. The official non-manufacturing PMI, which measures growth in the services and construction sectors, rose to 58.2 in March—the highest since May 2011 — and up from 56.3 in February. "The PMI indicates China's economic recovery is on track," said Zhang Zhiwei, chief economist at Pinpoint Asset Management. "The expansion of service sector activities is particularly strong... The strong momentum will likely continue in the coming months."

The country has seen a surge in demand for travel, entertainment and other leisure services that were curbed for nearly three years during the pandemic.

China's new premier Li Qiang said Thursday the economy was showing "strong momentum" despite a challenging global environment, pledging increased support for business. Beijing has set an economic growth target of around five percent for this year, one of its lowest in decades—a goal Li has warned will not be "easy". — AFP



PARIS: Voters register to vote during a municipal public "citizen vote" voting session on free-floating electric scooters at the city hall of the 17th district in Paris on April 2, 2023. — AFP

Paris votes on ban for rental e-scooters

PARIS: Residents of Paris voted Sunday on whether to banish for-hire electric scooters from the streets of the French capital, which was a pioneer in adopting the divisive new form of urban transport.

City authorities once welcomed operators of app-based rental scooters with open arms, seeing them as an emissions-free alternative to cars and motorbikes. But after a chaotic introduction in 2018, city hall has progressively tightened regulations, creating designated parking zones, limiting the top speed and restricting the number of operators. Their presence remains controversial, with pedestrians complaining about reckless driving while a spate of fatal accidents has highlighted the dangers of vehicles that can currently be hired by children as young as 12.

"They're dangerous, both for those who use them and for pedestrians," Francoise Granier, a 68-year-old doctor who voted in the 9th district of the capital, told AFP on Sunday. "And the police never intervene." Like her, IT worker Michael Dahan, 50, deplored the state of the capital's streets, saying: "If it was better regulated, I wouldn't be against... but you see people behaving in a crazy way."

Such views are expected to dominate in the 21 voting booths set up around the French capital, with the exercise billed as a "public consultation" rather than a referendum by mayor Anne Hidalgo.

The pro-cycling Socialist leader favors a ban and announced the vote in January to settle the issue of whether they should be allowed. "I'm committed to respecting the choice of voters, purely and simply," she told reporters as she voted.

"It's very expensive—five euros for 10 minutes—it's not very sustainable, and above all, it's the cause of a lot of accidents," she added. The consultation will not affect privately owned electric scooters, of which 700,000 were sold nationwide last year, according to transport ministry figures. Around 100,000 journeys are completed each day in France on rented e-scooters in around 200 towns and cities.

Watched abroad

Transport Minister Clement Beaugne expects the poll to result in a ban, while some operators also privately fear a negative result unless their mostly young users turn out to vote. "It's an important consultation that will be watched by a lot of other towns in France and overseas," Beaugne told Europe 1 radio on Wednesday. He argues that e-scooters are a valuable new transport solution that have replaced up to one in five journeys in Paris that would have previously involved an emissions-producing vehicle.

A total of 1.6 million people are eligible to vote, with turnout expected to be low. Results are scheduled to be released at around 10 pm (2000 GMT). A ban would be a setback for operators such as California-based Lime, Amsterdam-based Dott or Germany's Tier and could encourage other cities to follow suit. Montreal banned all electric scooters for rental or private use in 2020, while Copenhagen banned rental versions in 2020 before bringing them back a year later with stricter conditions. — AFP

Hat tip: Italy's Borsalino fedoras are back putting on the style



Borsalino's head of style Jacopo Politi poses at the Borsalino hat company's factory in Alessandria on March 28, 2023. —AFP photos



An employee works at the Borsalino hat company's factory in Alessandria on March 28, 2023.



Borsalino hats are on display on March 28, 2023, in the historical first shop opened in Alessandria by the legendary brand.



Employees work at the Borsalino hat company's factory in Alessandria on March 28, 2023.



Humphrey Bogart, Michael Jackson and Al Capone had one thing in common. All were fans of the Borsalino fedora hat, which is now enjoying a comeback. Italy's legendary brand—long synonymous with dapper, rugged masculinity—has dusted itself down since it was driven into bankruptcy in 2017 by an unscrupulous boss. Franco-Italian financier Philippe Camperio has put it back on its feet and revived sales while staying true to its age-old traditional techniques.

Time appears to stand still in its Piedmonte factory near Alessandria, southwest of Milan. Wooden machines dating from 1888 are used to make the felt from piles of rabbit fur, with only the softest strands selected. They are then sent in a cloud of steam onto a rotating cone, gradually taking the form of a fedora, before being sprayed with hot water and singed with flames. The process is unchanged since the brand was founded more than a century and a half ago.

It takes seven weeks to make a felt hat, with about 50 steps in the process. And most of those steps are done by hand. "When our factory opened in 1888, the machinery was ahead of its time. Today, we are one of the last craftsmen in the world to make hats by hand," said Borsalino's purchasing manager Alessandro Mortarino. Rabbit hair is used because it is "softer, more consistent and more malleable than wool," he said.

A new lease on life

Daniele Fascia, a craftsman who has worked at Borsalino for 15 years, is busy shaping a future fedora. He flattened its wide edges and delicately molded the crown, using quick gestures with surgical precision. "The machines help us, but the main part is done by hand. We respect tradition," he said.

The classic Borsalino fedora costs 300 euros (\$327) on average. But the luxurious Panama

Montecristi, which takes six months to make, can set you back up to 1,650 euros. A poster from Jacques Deray's 1974 film "Borsalino" starring French actor Alain Delon—wearing a fedora, of course—hangs over the company's brightly lit showroom, lined by tall cases containing hats of all shapes and colors.

The appointment last year of Jacopo Politi as head of styling, formerly with the Chanel-owned Paris milliner Maison Michel, has breathed new life into the hatmaker. Besides the classic felt hats or summery straw Panamas, Borsalino now offers more playful baseball caps, bucket hats and especially berets, which Politi, 44, said were a hit with young people. Borsalino has benefited from a renewed enthusiasm for hats since the early 2000s, the designer said. "The hat was considered old-fashioned and locked away in a wardrobe, but now it's back in fashion," Politi said.

Women clients

The brand is also looking to attract more women customers, who now account for half of revenue, up 30 percent since the ownership change. "Our goal is to increase their share to 60 or 65 percent," owner Camperio told AFP. After sales plunged by half in 2020 due to the coronavirus pandemic, they began to recover in 2021 and increased by 25 percent to 20 million euros (\$21.8 million) last year. "For 2023, we are once again aiming for a 20 to 25 percent revenue growth," said Camperio, executive chairman of the private equity company Haeres Equita.

Borsalino's former boss, Marco Marengo, was sentenced to five years in prison in 2016 for fraudulent bankruptcy, leaving the company with debts of 34 million euros. But now the page has turned. A new Borsalino Museum will be inaugurated in Alessandria on April 4, where more than 2,000 hats that have marked the history of the storied brand will go on display. —AFP

Children's Cancer Center of Lebanon holds 10th fundraising dinner in Kuwait



CCCL team and board members with Carole Samaha, Ghinwa Nemnom, Nabila Awad, and the cancer survivor.



CCCL Chairman Joseph Asseily with Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Salem Abdullah Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and CCCL Board Member Faisal Al-Mutawa.

The Children's Cancer Center of Lebanon (CCCL) held its tenth fundraising gala dinner in Kuwait at the St Regis Hotel, under the patronage of the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Kuwait, Sheikh Salem Abdullah Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

The ceremony was attended by former Minister Walid Jumblatt, MP Paula Yacoubian, previous Kuwaiti Ambassador in Lebanon Abdel Aal Al-Qenaei, Chargé d'affaires at the Lebanese Embassy Ahmed Arafat, the Consul of Lebanon in Kuwait Basil Oweidat, the British Ambassador Belinda Lewis and the French one Claire Le Flecher, Chargé d'affaires of the US Embassy to the State of Kuwait James Holtzside, Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Kuwaiti Red Crescent Society and former Minister of Health Dr. Hilal Al-Sayer, Chairman of the Board of Trustees of the Children's Cancer Center, Joseph Asseily, and members of the Board of Trustees Faisal Al-Mutawa, Nora Joumblatt, Mona Sidawi, Paul Edde, Zaid Midani, the General Manager of CCCL, Hana Chaar Choueib, and around 450 Kuwaiti and Lebanese attendees.

Minister Sheikh Salem Abdullah Al-Jaber Al-Sabah stated that "this ceremony comes in light of the exceptional circumstances that the Lebanese Republic is going through, as Lebanon is suffering from an economic crisis that affected all aspects of the life of the Lebanese people and its residents, and affected all sectors and institutions in the country, especially the health private sector." And he stressed that this "necessitates concerted efforts and work to alleviate the impact of this crisis on children affected by this malignant disease."

He believed that "the humanitarian role played by the Children's Cancer Center of Lebanon is an important and vital one, as it has been able, since its establishment in 2002, to treat more than 5,000 children, and to provide counseling to more than 6,000 other children, which constitutes almost half of the number of children with cancer in Lebanon". He pointed out that "the humanitarian role of the

center was not limited to the Lebanese children only, but also included refugee children in Lebanon, which reflects the great humanitarian role of this center."

He stressed that "it is a matter of pride that the State of Kuwait has assisted the Children's Cancer Center of Lebanon with grants amounting to six million dollars through the Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development."

He concluded by thanking "all the donors, contributors, and institutions that support the Children's Cancer Center of Lebanon" and confirming "the continued support of the State of Kuwait to enable this center to continue its noble humanitarian mission."

As for the CCCL board member, Faisal Al-Mutawa, he thanked Sheikh Salem Abdullah Al-Jaber Al-Sabah for his patronage and support for this charity ceremony, which "was not possible to hold without him," considering that "his official, moral and material support has a great impact." He also praised the efforts of Deputy Foreign Minister Abdul Mohsen Al-Zaid, "who worked with us tirelessly and supported us in completing all procedures and official licenses."

Al-Mutawa stated: "In recent years, we used to hold such charitable events, to contribute in a simple and modest way, to support this noble humanitarian work. It is true that we stopped for some time, for known reasons such as the COVID epidemic which was beyond our control, but here we are resuming our efforts to hold this ceremony." He added, "I stand before you as someone who is trying to do good, even if it is modest, to have a positive impact in treating poor children with cancer who are unable to secure their treatment."

He requested everyone "to do whatever they can to make such a positive difference in the lives of these children, regardless of the amount of contribution they can make, whether it is by donating some money or volunteering for some time, or even simply spreading the word in support of this work."

Asseily thanked Sheikh Salem Al-Abdullah for holding the ceremony under his patronage, praising the "tireless work and great sacrifices made" by Faisal Al-Mutawa, the CCCL board member, noting that he "sees humanity through the prism of sacrifice and giving, and this is representative of the people of Kuwait, government, and people."

He said, "when tragedy befell on August 4, 2020, with the semi-nuclear explosion that destroyed the port and half of the capital Beirut, and displaced tens of thousands, not to mention the victims and those afflicted with a permanent disability, the Kuwaiti Red Crescent Society and people rushed to extend a helping hand to Lebanon and its institutions, as they always do in every devastating disaster, be it natural or not." In this context, he praised the Kuwaiti Red Crescent's initiative to provide material support to treat the severe damage to the Children's Cancer Center, as the rehabilitation was completed quickly and practically. He saluted the President of the Red Crescent, Dr. Hilal Al-Sayer, "and everyone who took the initiative to extend a helping hand to the Children's Cancer Center of Lebanon, affiliated with St Jude Hospital and in cooperation with the American University of Beirut Medical Center, as his sole message is to serve the child who is in dire need of support from those who give and help."

He explained that "the cost of treating a child exceeds 55,000 dollars a year," recalling that the center treats "between 350 and 500 cases annually with a budget that exceeds 15M dollars," adding that CCCL has treated "since 2002 more than five thousand children at a cost of more than 200M dollars." It was secured thanks to the chivalry of philanthropists from the Arab region, the State of Kuwait in particular, and Lebanon without a doubt."

And he stressed that "the revenues of donations decreased significantly at a time when the cost of treatment increased with the inability to find medicines" in light of "the economic situation in Lebanon, which has caused the

national currency to lose its purchasing value, and with the worsening conditions in all parts of the world."

He concluded, stating that "yes, we came to tell you that we urgently need your sympathy, and with your support, we will be able to continue providing free treatment to children with this disease without any discrimination, in line with Danny Thomas' saying: No child should die in the dawn of life."

The ceremony included a live testimony by survivor Yara Abi Al-Mona about her experience with the Children's Cancer Center, where she reported how, at the age of 16, tests and doctors' diagnoses showed that she had a tumor. She said, "there are many achievements and victories that we make in our lives, we rejoice and celebrate them, but there is no victory equivalent to the joy of defeating cancer." She added: "today, we are here not as victors over the disease, but our goal is to be ambassadors of the Children's Cancer Center's mission."

The event was sponsored by our platinum sponsors: Ali Abdulwahab Al Mutawa Commercial, Cura Health Co, Advanced Technology Company, Al Sayer Group, M2R - Media, our gold sponsors: MARKAZ, NBK, Zain Group, and by our Bronze Sponsors: Bella Clinic and HEISKO.

The ceremony included a public auction, which was performed by Auctioneer Mohammad Al-Kiti. The auction included carved steel handmade to resemble a dervish offered by the Lebanese artist May Rishani, a painting titled "Bright" by the artist Hindi Shivani Dagger, an Islamic woven rug from silk in the year 1887, a handmade silky rug from 1960-1970, a ring Chevalier designed by Randa Khalil Raad, luggage product partnership between Globe Trotter and Casablanca, and a box made from pearls from Jerusalem Old.

The ceremony was presented by Nabila Awad, and the audience enjoyed a sophisticated artistic show by the one and only Carole Samaha preceded by a soft musical intervention by the talented Ghinwa Nemnom.



Aisha Palace, stunning architectural landmark, cultural center in Cairo



Located in the cultural Zamalek ward in Cairo overlooking the Nile, Aisha Fahmy Palace is a stunning architectural landmark and an important cultural center. The palace was built over an area of 2,700 square meter in 1907 and designed in classic European style by Italian architect Antonio Lasciac. It was built for Egyptian aristocrat Ali Fahmy, the brother of Aisha Fahmy. After the passing of her brother and father, Aisha bought her siblings shares and owned the palace where she lived there with her then husband, actor Yousef Wahbi, until she died in 1962. The two-storey palace was repossessed by the government and in 1975 became an art center. The rooms contain rare paintings of silk and linen, European motifs, and exquisite murals that render the aesthetics of the palace. The 1,000 square meter basement was turned into an exhibition hall for artists. —KUNA



Mustansiriya Madrasah, an Abbasid cultural landmark



Mustansiriya Madrasah (school) is a spacious old complex of ornamented structures maintaining construction features of the Abbasid caliphate. It was established in 1227 by the Abbasid Caliph Al-Mustansir and was one of the oldest universities in the world. Situated on a 4,836 sq m plot of land on the Tigris River's bank, it is marked with a 1,710 sq m central plaza, corridors, teaching halls, a mosque, a library and dormitories. Al-Mustansir had dedicated special attention to the school, contributing with some 80,000 books. —KUNA

Lifestyle



Members of DC Men Knit attend a gathering in Alexandria, Virginia, on March 5, 2023. —AFP photos



Sam Barsky, whose professional knitting led to him becoming a social media influencer, poses at the Oregon Ridge Park which is depicted on his sweater March 8, 2023, in Cockeysville, Maryland.



Michael Manning, a retired federal government worker, attends a gathering of DC Men Knit in Alexandria, Virginia, on March 5, 2023.



Gene Throwe, coordinator of DC Men Knit (2nd left), and other members attend a gathering in Alexandria, Virginia, on March 5, 2023.



Sam Barsky, whose professional knitting led to him becoming a social media influencer, poses with a penguin sweater at the Oregon Ridge Park March 8, 2023, in Cockeysville, Maryland.



Sam Barsky, whose professional knitting led to him becoming a social media influencer, lays out some of his works at the Oregon Ridge Park March 8, 2023, in Cockeysville, Maryland.

In US, men unravel stereotypes – by knitting

Knitting has surged in popularity once again in the United States in this age of pandemics and self-care. But on a sunny March afternoon just outside the nation's capital, one club of enthusiasts sets itself apart: the 10 or so people clicking their needles are men.

DC Men Knit meets twice a month in the Washington area to knit or crochet scarves, hats and blankets. The goal? Relaxation, friendship and reclaiming a pastime historically enjoyed by men and women. The group's coordinator Gene Throwe says he hopes to "provide a safe space for men to knit together and trade our skills with one another, to help each other out, because knitting has for quite a while been viewed as a female vocation."

The 51-year-old Throwe, an office manager for a national association of nursing schools, puts some finishing touches on a brown sweater with a subtle golden pattern that he's been making on and off for years. Like many of his fellow knitters, Throwe grew up watching his grandmother work magic with her needles. That feeling of nostalgia turned to regret as he watched the hobby fall by the wayside, in favor of more modern pursuits.

One day, he realized he could do something to re-

vive it. "Why do I have to expect the women to do it -- I can do it too!" he recalled. The members of DC Men Knit tend to spark a degree of fascination when they meet in public places -- but no hostility or discrimination. "It's always some grandmotherly type person that... stares at us, like we just landed from Mars," Throwe says with a laugh. "And then they'll just start asking us questions about what we're working on."

'Not just for grandmas'

Historically, men have always been knitters, from those who ran lucrative medieval knitting guilds to the schoolboys in World War II Britain who made blankets for the troops. For those who are passionate about the craft, the latest craze is nothing out of the ordinary.

In his shorts in near-freezing temperatures, and a fanny pack around his waist, Sam Barsky doesn't fit the mold of the usual social media influencer. But he has nearly 500,000 followers on Instagram and TikTok combined.

Barsky -- a self-styled "knitting artist" -- has won over fans with his freehand knitting and his unique sweater designs, which are inspired by landscapes and nature,

monuments or works of art. Niagara Falls, Stonehenge, the New York City skyline, penguins, robots, the Wizard of Oz: Barsky takes it all on and has sweaters not just for Christmas but for every occasion -- birthdays, Valentine's Day, Hanukkah, you name it.

He even has a sweater dedicated to... his sweaters, with about 30 of his creations knitted in miniature form. His work has been displayed at the American Visionary Art Museum in Baltimore. "Knitting is not just for grandmas. Knitting is for anyone of any age or gender who wants to do it, who enjoys doing it," he told AFP in an interview at Oregon Ridge Nature Center in Cockeysville, Maryland, north of Baltimore. It was in the park that he kept knitting when the coronavirus pandemic brought travel to a screeching halt. The park's trees, some of which were painted in 2017 by people who overcame drug and alcohol addiction, have been immortalized on one of Barsky's sweaters against a golden background.

Pandemic side effects

While Barsky is keen to travel once again, he says the pandemic was not all bad for him personally: his TikTok

account, which he opened in September 2020, quickly attracted a bigger following than the Instagram account he'd been using for years.

Once people were free to meet up in person again, his knitting circles "got much, much larger crowds because lots of other people picked up knitting in that period of time," he said. Like breadmaking or pottery, knitting and other sewing arts were revitalized during the first months of the pandemic as a way for penned-in Americans to combat their boredom and anxiety -- a scenario repeated around the world.

Even former first lady Michelle Obama has taken up the hobby, showing off the sweaters she made for president husband Barack in promotional appearances for her latest book. In the DC Men Knit group, each member found a purpose. For Throwe, knitting is reclaiming an art form that "can be modern and useful." Devlin Breckenridge, a 48-year-old video game aficionado, says he wanted to "do something a little more creative... instead of digitally killing something," and knitting fit the bill. And for Michael Manning, a 58-year-old retired government worker, the soothing repetitiveness of knitting is "just very relaxing." —AFP

Dominican border wall threatens environment, mangroves

The anti-migrant wall being built in the northwest of the Dominican Republic crisscrosses a thick mangrove forest and threatens the ecosystem by depriving it of water, environmental groups warn. The Dominican government wants to build a 160 kilometer (100 mile) concrete fence along the 380 kilometer border with Haiti to prevent illegal migrants from entering, and to "protect" the country from Haitian gangs with growing influence.

Each year, between 100,000 and 200,000 Haitian immigrants are deported (171,000 in 2022) in an atmosphere of xenophobia and high tension between the two neighbors that share the mountainous Caribbean island of Hispaniola.

But the Dominican Academy of Sciences believes that the damage to the wetlands in Monte Cristi National Park in the northwest of the country is simply "irreparable." The Ministry of Defense, which is carrying out the work, asserts that "only 6 square kilometers (2.3 square miles) have been affected", or 0.04 percent of the wetlands.

Yet from the top of a hill, Roque Taveras, an official of the Ministry of the Environment, pointed to a section of wall 250 meters (820 feet) long which crosses the wetlands. The watercourse of "the gorge which feeds the mangrove has been interrupted," he pointed out to AFP.

Work has been temporarily halted on this section by order of environmental authorities, who are demanding the construction of 16 culverts that would allow water to flow. On both sides of the trench in the middle of the mangrove, which can reach more than 20 meters (65 feet) high, lie the trunks of felled trees.

Rich ecosystem

"This mangrove, the red mangrove, was

hundreds of years old. How long does it take for a new mangrove to reach this size?" asked Taveras, referring to promises of reforestation. The national park's ecosystem is rich with four types of mangroves that grow in the Dominican Republic, he explained. "The red (Rhizophora mangle), the white (Laguncularia racemosa), the black (Avicennia germinans) and the buttonwood (Conocarpus erectus)."

The mangroves are home to the blue crab (Cardisoma guanhumi), nicknamed "Paloma de Cueva" (cave pigeon) by the Dominicans. This crustacean, whose claws can reach 15 centimeters (six inches) in length, is one of the species classified as "vulnerable" by the authorities due to the reduction of its habitat but also to excessive trapping for human consumption.

There are also small fiddler crabs (Leptuca pugilator), gray pigeons (Patagioenas inornata), several species of herons and some rare caimans. In addition to ecosystems, the wall also has "a very negative impact" on local tourism, Hicir Blanco, 49, president of Manzanillo EcoAventura, an agency which organizes visits and promotes the preservation of the region. "It has already started to affect us because it was an area where we came to show the mangroves to tourists," he says.

When the border fence is complete, "we won't have easy access," he points out, because much of the mangrove forest is on the Haitian side. He also voiced disappointment that an ecological watchtower project from the University of Pennsylvania was ignored by the authorities.

Local fishermen who "feed their families through responsible fishing" will also have "problems," said the conservationist, who sports a sailfish tattoo on his forearm. He said the upheaval created by the wall will upset the sensitive balance of fish species. —AFP



UNESCO Assistant Director General Ernesto Ottone (left), Tanzanian filmmaker Walt Mzengi (3rd left), South African filmmaker Gcobisa Yako (5th left), Nigerian filmmaker Korede Azeze (7th left), Kenyan filmmaker Voline Ogutu (8th left), and Ugandan filmmaker Loukman Ali (11th left), Netflix Director of Local language Films Africa Tendeka Matatu (right) and guests pose for a photocall at a film premiere where five winning filmmakers are showcased in a competition entitled 'African Folktales, Reimagined' to find some of Sub-Saharan Africa's up and coming filmmakers, in the Kenyan capital, Nairobi, on March 29, 2023. — AFP

Netflix, UNESCO seek breakthrough for African cinema

It's a revenge thriller where a mother turns into a ruthless vigilante, tracking down and drowning a soldier who has killed her baby, in an explosion of violence and jubilation. What might sound like the plot of the latest flick by Quentin Tarantino or another Hollywood auteur is actually the fruit of a partnership between streaming giant Netflix and the UN cultural agency UNESCO to give a platform to new voices in African cinema. "Katera of the Punishment Island", directed by Ugandan Loukman Ali, is among six short films co-financed on the continent by the American platform and the UN agency. "It's the revenge of a young girl, left to her own devices and yet who is going to smash up everything," said French producer Pape Boye, who served as a "mentor" to the director and praises the "jubilant violence" of the film.

Loukman Ali, he said, is a worthy representative of a new generation of African filmmakers, who grew up on a diet of mainstream cinema and "want to be seen by as many people as possible," scorning so-called genre films. The director, 32, said he embraced cinema as a form of escapism and a way to forget the poverty surrounding him as he was growing up.

"Each time there was a film that reminded us of how poor we were or how bad situation the situation was, it was kind of like a no-no," he told AFP in a telephone interview. "I am more about entertainment. That's the model I follow."

'Stories I wanted to tell'

Loukman Ali was chosen by the scheme last year, among 2,000 pitches received by UNESCO and Netflix, to direct his short film, with funding of some \$75,000 dollars. "Katera of the Punishment Island" has been available since Wednesday on the platform. Five other young African filmmakers have also en-

joyed this privilege, including the Kenyan Voline Ogutu, whose "Anyango and the Ogre" is set in a futuristic world where women are divided into two categories, single or married -- with the latter group exposed to domestic violence. "I always wanted to tell stories of horror and sci-fi. But the market I was in was not very accommodating," she said.

"This is a very good opportunity for me to actually now tell the stories I wanted to tell." Decision makers can be bolder elsewhere, such as in South Africa, from where several daring series have recently emerged, and especially in Nigeria's so-called Nollywood, where 2,500 films are released each year, often at low cost.

But Steven Markovitz, the executive producer of the joint Netflix and UNESCO project, said dozens of young emerging African directors were challenging ideas of a "traditional" African film. He said that in the 1970s and 80s, slower-paced African films on sober subjects were dominant. "But if you look at a lot of filmmakers today, they're much more playful and provocative, they're more open to trying new forms, they try to build bigger audiences, wider audiences for their work." He said that this change had been notable for some time but was now accelerating at pace partly due to new technology but also due to the fact today's Africans may be the third or fourth generation since the colonial era. "They are more about asserting their identity in the present and the future. There's a philosophical shift amongst this generation, and that's why they're a lot more free in their thinking in the telling."

'Leap of faith'

Tendeka Matatu, of Netflix Africa, said that there was now even a "golden age" of African filmmaking. "The Africa of the 1970s is very different from the Africa of the 2020s," he said. "The filmmakers want to tell



Netflix Director of Local language Films for Africa, Tendeka Matatu.

stories that reflect the society of this year."

Streaming platforms are playing a crucial role, investing heavily in a chronically underfunded and underequipped film industry on a continent where, according to UNESCO, around 40 percent of the countries do not have a single cinema. Within eight years, the size of the African streaming market, today estimated at 3 million subscribers, will increase by sixfold, according to UNESCO's deputy director general Ernesto Ottone. But this remains a modest figure compared to the 1.7 billion Africans, because hundreds of millions still have neither a sufficiently good internet connection nor the means to subscribe to a platform.

But filmmaker Leila Djansi of Ghana, the mentor for "Anyango and the Ogre" said the main problem is that African cinema is above all lacking acceptance. "I agree it's a business. You are putting in millions. But give people a chance. Take a leap of faith. "Poverty, HIV, war ... there's more to Africa than that, but until African filmmakers are given the opportunity to tell these stories, the perception is always going to be negative," she said. —AFP



General view of the mangrove forest cut in two by the wall that the Dominican Republic is building on the border with Haiti, converted, according to environmentalists, into an impassable barrier to the watercourse that feeds the wetland and its plant and animal species in Pepillo Salcedo, Province of Montecristi, Dominican Republic on March 21, 2023. —AFP

Sports

Allez? Russia's Olympic fencing hopefuls in limbo

KAZAN, Russia: For Russia's fencing champions, a ruling to allow them to return to international competition has meant little change for now as different European countries have cancelled their fixtures in protest. Last month's decision by the International Fencing Federation (FIE) made fencing the first Olympic sport to re-open its events to athletes from Russia and ally Belarus.

It generated outrage in Ukraine, a hard-hitting petition to uphold the ban and a raft of competition cancellations in countries opposed to hosting Russian or Belarusian fencers. "There has to be a limit to these absurdities," Ilgar Mamedov, the head of Russia's Fencing Federation, told AFP on the sidelines of a fencing competition this weekend in the Russian city of Kazan on the Volga River.

Excluded from other events, some of Russia's Olympic hopefuls were taking part in the competition — entitled the "Friendship Cup" alongside athletes from Armenia, Serbia and Vietnam. "Athletes need to understand where they stand — if they can take part or not" in qualifying events for the Olympic Games in Paris next year, Mamedov said, as he watched an epee bout.

Athletes from Russia and Belarus have

faced differing sanctions from a multitude of sports since Russia launched its assault on Ukraine in February last year. Following the FIE ruling, more than 300 active and former fencers have written to ask IOC president Thomas Bach — who won Olympic fencing team gold in 1976 — to continue the exclusion.

All eyes are now on Poland which is due to hold a women's foil competition in Poznan later this month, the first qualifying event for next year's Olympics. At the event in Kazan, Russia's fencers expressed their hopes of re-joining international competitions. "I would love to go to the Games," said Russia's current epee champion Aizanat Murtazaeva, 21.

Fourth-placed at the Tokyo Olympics in 2021, she said that this time she would like to "come back with a medal" from Paris. Anastasiia Rustamova, who won the European junior championships aged 16 in February 2022, said she was also keen. "We are moving forward, we are getting stronger. We are going to win the Olympics!" she said.

'Best athletes'

The International Olympic Committee on March 28 recommended the return to

competition of Russian and Belarusian athletes as individual neutrals but refused to give a timeline on their potential participation at the Paris Olympics. The IOC said athletes "who actively support the war" would be banned, as well as "athletes who are contracted to the Russian or Belarusian military or national security agencies". Russian Olympic chiefs branded the conditions "discriminatory".

Russian sporting clubs CSKA and Dynamo — both linked to the Russian army — have been training grounds for some of the country's best athletes for decades in a variety of disciplines. "Our best athletes have come either from CSKA or Dynamo," Mamedov said. This is the case, for example, for double Olympic champion in sabre Sofya Velikaya, or Pavel Sukhov and Sergey Bida, who won silver in team men's epee in Tokyo in 2021.

While Russian fencers still do not really know if they have been reintegrated or not, several European countries have been cancelling events in protest. France became the latest to do so on Friday when it cancelled this year's Challenge Monal. The French Fencing Federation said it was "not able to honour the requests" of the FIE on Russian and Belarusian fencers.



Russia's Anastasia Balyagina and Russia's Galina Krymova (R) compete in the international fencing event "Friendship Cup" in the Russian city of Kazan on the Volga River on March 31, 2023. —AFP

Competitions have also been called off in Denmark and Germany. The Danish fencing federation said the situation was a "mess". "We also predict chaos at the international competition since fencers will probably refuse to fence with Russian

and Belarusian fencers," said Jan Sylvest Jensen, the head of the Danish fencing federation. But for Russian fencing chief Mamedov, the key question is: "How can the exclusion of Russian athletes help Ukraine?" —AFP



MIAMI GARDENS, Florida: Petra Kvitova of Czech Republic poses with the Butch Buchholz Trophy after defeating Elena Rybakina of Kazakhstan at the Miami Open at Hard Rock Stadium on April 1, 2023. —AFP

Veteran Kvitova defeats Rybakina for 30th WTA title

MIAMI: Petra Kvitova drew on all her experience to claim her 30th WTA singles title with a straight sets Miami Open victory over Elena Rybakina on Saturday. Czech Kvitova, appearing in her first Miami final at the age of 33, triumphed 7-6 (16/14) 6-2 at Hard Rock Stadium, a victory which will return the two-time Wimbledon champion to the top 10 in the world rankings.

Rybakina came into the final on a career-best 13-match winning streak after winning the title at Indian Wells and was looking for the rare "Sunshine Double" of both WTA 1000 events. It was a tight, serve-dominated battle until Kvitova broke to go 5-4 up but Rybakina, who represents Kazakhstan, immediately broke back.

That set up a tie-break and having a 7-0 perfect record in those contests this season, reigning Wimbledon champion Rybakina would have been confident of her chances but Kvitova's serve was strong and her determination stronger still. The tie-break was a thrilling 22-minute, 28-second, 30-point shoot-out in which Kvitova saved five set points to emerge triumphant when Rybakina hit a return into the net.

Kvitova, a left-handed player, took that momentum into the second set, breaking early to go 2-0 up and from then on she never looked like letting her opponent. It's years her junior, back into the contest. Rybakina couldn't convert a break point in the next game and then she herself was broken again when serving to stay in the match at 5-2 down.

Kvitova, who has now won 30 of 41 career finals, said the tie-break, which saw each player have five set points, had turned the contest in her direction. "That was deciding the whole match for sure. I think it was the longest one I ever played in my life. Nothing is easy hanging out with Elena," she said. "(She hit) so many aces at the beginning of the tie-break. I was like oh my God, I couldn't even play, so it was a little difficult," added Kvitova, who now has nine WTA 1000 titles.

Rybakina is part of a talented new generation on the WTA Tour, along with world number one Iga Swiatek of Poland and Belarusian Aryna Sabalenka, but Kvitova said she had been able to draw on her greater experience. "I think it has played a good role in my mind. I have played so many finals. I know I can play well in a final, no matter who I am facing. So mentally that was important for me to know that," she said.

"Of course this means a lot, that at my age I can still win big tournaments, the young ones are coming up all the time, it's tough to face them all the time, it's very tiring," added the Czech. Kvitova won 78 percent of her service points (52 of 67) and finished with 29 winners to 14 unforced errors. Rybakina fired 12 aces in the match and became the first player since Serena Williams at 2016 Wimbledon to hit 10 or more aces in six consecutive matches in a single tournament. —AFP

Loulat Louseel win Saad Al-Tamimi Ramadan tourney

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: Loulat Louseel team were crowned champion of Saad Al-Tamimi Ramadan Football Tournament after defeating Lemon Line 3-1 in the final on Saturday at Messila fields in Sabah Al-Salem. Bu-Saud Team ended in third place after defeating Al-Omar 2-0.

Veteran football commentator Khalid Al-Harban and Saad Al-Tamimi handed the medals and prizes to the winners. Loulat Louseel received gold medals and KD 5,000, Lemon Line silver medals and KD 3,000 and Bu-Saud KD 1,000 and the bronze medals.

Loulat Louseel's Salem Al-Osaimi won the best goalkeeper prize. Best player was Saleh Haider and top goal scorer was Yahya Al-Agha with 8 goals, both from Loulat Louseel.

The final match was followed by a match between Kuwait veteran players including Mohammad Karam, Hussein Al-Mkaimi, Wael Suleiman, Bader Haji, Faisal Burquba, Waleed Nassar, Abdelaziz Al-Hajiri, Shihab Kankouni, Nawaf Al-Khalidi, Waleed Ali, Hani Al-Saqer, Fahad Dabes, Jamal Mubarak, Mohammad Al-Adwani and Abdelrahman Al-Mousa, which ended in a 3-3 draw.

Tamimi thanked Advisor at the Amiri Diwan



Sheikh Faisal Al-Malek Al-Sabah for attending the opening day. He also thanked the Kuwait national team's former stars. "We used all capabilities in order to spend a beneficial and entertaining sporting time between friends, Kuwaitis and residents," he said.

He said we enjoyed the three days of the tournament with the presence of the guests and players and we will be keen on having the tournament every year. He said that there will be a tournament for padel professionals and amateurs from Wednesday, wishing everybody success.

Harban lauded the tournament, adding "the tournament gathered us with several sports personalities who gave a lot to their country during the best years

of their lives". Former player Karam was happy to participate in the veterans' match. "We enjoyed a few minutes with many of Kuwait stars and it was a good initiative and this tournament restored the Ramadan atmosphere that we missed lately," he said.

Hajiri hoped the tournament continues every year, adding the organization was good and the large number of participating teams indicate its importance for athletes. Best goalkeeper Osaimi said the match was very difficult, adding "our opponents deserved to be in the final match with outstanding players, including two Brazilian professionals". He said the tournament was a success in all of its aspects and hoped to see it continue every year.

South Africa's 'mega' Binder wins Argentina MotoGP sprint race

TERMAS DE RIO HONDO, Argentina: South Africa's Brad Binder rode a "mega race" on his KTM to win a frantic Argentina MotoGP sprint on Saturday ahead of Ducati duo, Marco Bezzecchi and Luca Marini of Italy. World champion Francesco Bagnaia, on a factory Ducati, was only sixth after sweeping both the sprint and the showpiece grand prix at last weekend's season-opener in Portugal.

However, the Italian retains the championship lead ahead of Sunday's main race where he will look to deliver Ducati's first victory at Termas de Rio Hondo. "Brad rode a mega race as we all saw," Binder's Australian KTM teammate Jack Miller told www.crash.net. "He showed the bike has all the capabilities. He qualified one position in front of me on the grid and he made it work, that's for certain. I could not believe it. I got a decent start but when I started the third lap and saw he was in front. What happened there?"

Alex Marquez, of Ducati-Gresini, will start Sunday's grand prix from pole after dominating a dramatic qualifying session where his bike caught fire. Marquez, the younger brother of six-time MotoGP world champion Marc Marquez, has yet to win a race in the sport's premier class. Binder was the star of the sprint having started from a lowly 15th on the grid.

The 27-year-old nipped ahead by the second lap

Sri Lanka seal dramatic win against N Zealand

AUCKLAND: Sri Lanka claimed a dramatic Super Over win in the opening match of their three-game Twenty20 series against New Zealand on Sunday to earn their first victory on tour. The match went to a tie-break decider after both teams chalked up 196 runs in a high-scoring thriller at Auckland's Eden Park. New Zealand only made 8-2 off a tight Super Over bowled by spinner Maheesh Theekshana before Charith Asalanka smashed a six off the second ball of Sri Lanka's response, then sealed victory with a four.

"That was a really nervous game and at the end, it's our day," said Asalanka. "I tried to hit boundaries because I back myself. Momentum is most important for a team like us, a young team, and we're hoping to do well," he said ahead of the second T20 game in Dunedin on Wednesday before the three-game series concludes in Queenstown



SANTIAGO DEL ESTERO, Argentina: KTM South African rider Brad Binder celebrates winning the Argentina Grand Prix MotoGP sprint race at Termas de Rio Hondo circuit on April 1, 2023. —AFP

after Franco Morbidelli on a Yamaha had been quickest off the start line. "I surprised myself a little, but what a start," said Binder after finishing 0.072sec ahead of Bezzecchi. "The plan worked from start to finish." Morbidelli slipped back to finish fourth with Marquez in fifth.

Maverick Vinales, on an Aprilia, who is second in the championship and was a winner in Argentina with Yamaha in 2017, Jorge Martin, 2021 world champion Fabio Quartararo and Jack Miller rounded out the top 10. Aleix Espargaro, who became Aprilia's first MotoGP race winner at Argentina last year, crashed out from ninth spot. "I hope everyone enjoys this format of races. I think the show is good, the quality of the show is fantastic for the TV. But I really don't like it," said the Spaniard. —AFP

next Saturday. The nail-biter in Auckland handed Sri Lanka their first win on a month-long tour of New Zealand after losing both the Test and one-day international series by the same 2-0 scoreline. Black Caps tailender Ish Sodhi had earlier set up the Super Over finish when he tied the scores by calmly hoisting the last ball of their 50 overs for six off Sri Lanka captain Dasun Shanaka.

It completed a run chase that always looked unlikely for the home side but came alive when Rachin Ravindra scored 26 off 13 balls to follow key knocks from Daryl Mitchell (66 off 44) and Mark Chapman (33 off 23). It left New Zealand needing 13 to win off the final over, a task that became harder to achieve when Adam Milne fell to the first delivery bowled by Shanaka.

"To climb our way back in our innings was outstanding and I thought for 'Ish' to hit that six was quite dramatic but it wasn't meant to be," said New Zealand captain Tom Latham. "Super Overs can go either way, but we fell on the wrong side today." Theekshana was a key performer for Sri Lanka with the ball, conceding 1-22 off four miserly overs, while fellow spinner Wanindu Hasaranga took 2-30 as New Zealand struggled for enough momentum through the early overs.

Left-hander Asalanka top-scored in Sri Lanka's 196-5, striking six sixes in a rapid 67 off 41 balls. He

Kuwait to host first annual chess tourney

KUWAIT: The first annual chess tournament will be held on April 6 and 7 under the patronage of Sheikh Mubarak Abdullah Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah. Sheikh Abdullah Al-Mubarak spoke about the importance of mind sports that develop the youth, as chess is the king of mental games and Kuwait is keen on human development.

He said chess is a mind game that does not require translation and expressed pleasure at the spread of the game in Kuwait. "We see an outstanding presence of families and their keenness on following tournaments and participating in them," he said. He said the tournament will see outstanding participation by players of both genders as registration exceeded all expectations, adding he is keen to be present and support all players.

International chess arbiter Khalaf Al-Azmi said the tournament is of nine rounds, five of which will be held on Thursday from 9:00 pm and four rounds on Friday. He said the time of play is 10 minutes, with 3 seconds for each move. He said the tournament is open to all nationalities and sanctioned by the International Chess Federation. It will be held at Sheikh Abdullah Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah Hall in Khaldiya.



AUCKLAND: Sri Lanka's Charith Asalanka and Kusal Mendis celebrate winning the super over and the match against New Zealand at Eden Park on April 2, 2023. —AFP

put on 103 for the fourth wicket with Kusal Perera, who returned from a long-term shoulder injury in style. The experienced Perera scored a controlled 53 not out off 45 balls in what was his first match for Sri Lanka in any format since the 2021 T20 World Cup, having spent nearly 18 months out. —AFP

Sports

Jesus keeps Arsenal 8 pts clear

MANCHESTER: Manchester City thrashed Liverpool 4-1 on Saturday but remain eight points adrift of Arsenal at the top of the Premier League after Gabriel Jesus scored twice in the Gunners 4-1 win over Leeds. Arsenal did not feel the pressure of City briefly cutting the gap before kick-off at the Emirates as Jesus marked his first league start since November with a double.

Bukayo Saka was handed a rare rest by Mikel Arteta and Jesus took responsibility from the penalty spot in his absence to open the scoring 10 minutes before half-time. Jesus was sidelined for three months after picking up a knee injury at the World Cup but the former City forward's return for the run-in could deny his old club a fifth title in six years.

The Brazilian fired home his second goal of the game after Ben White doubled Arsenal's lead early in the second half. "He's been working so hard the last four or five months with a lot of support obviously from the team and the staff," said Arteta on Jesus' impact. "Today he deserved the chance to start and he grabbed the opportunity with a lot of conviction and scoring two very important goals." Rasmus Kristensen pulled a goal back for Leeds, but Granit Xhaka rounded off the scoring as Arsenal made it seven consecutive league wins for the first time under Arteta.

In the clash between the two sides that have dominated English football over the past five years, City were a class apart despite the absence of Erling Haaland due to injury. Liverpool went in front through Mohamed Salah's 23rd goal of the season but were blown away in the second half after Julian Alvarez brought City level before the break. Pep Guardiola's men needed less than a minute in the second period

to go in front as Kevin De Bruyne tapped home Riyad Mahrez's cross.

Ilkay Gundogan slammed home the third before Jack Grealish rounded off his best performance in a City shirt with a fine finish for the fourth. "Now it's the Jack we thought (we were buying). Aston Villa fans know this Jack," said Guardiola of Grealish, who joined for a Premier League record £100 million (\$124 million) in 2021 from the Birmingham club.

City still have a game in hand on Arsenal and the two meet in a potential title decider at the Etihad later this month. A sobering defeat is another blow to Liverpool's hopes of a top-four finish as the Reds slip to eighth in the table.

Brighton and Brentford shared the points after a thrilling 3-3 draw at the Amex. Three times Brentford led through Pontus Jansson, Ivan Toney and Ethan Pinnock. But the Seagulls grabbed a deserved point thanks to Alexis Mac Allister's late penalty after Kaoru Mitoma and Danny Welbeck also equalized in the first half.

A point apiece sees both sides edge above Liverpool and within six points of the top four. Aston Villa are also making a late push for Europe as their superb form under Unai Emery continued with a 2-0 win at Chelsea. Ollie Watkins and John McGinn scored for the visitors at Stamford Bridge, who moved above Chelsea into ninth.

Hodgson's 'wonderful feeling'

Roy Hodgson's return at Crystal Palace delivered the Eagles' first victory of 2023 as Jean Philippe-Mateta's 94th minute goal beat Leicester 2-1 at Selhurst Park. The Foxes looked on course for a much-needed win when Ricardo Pereira fired

The 'keeper, who returned after a five-week injury layoff, charged out of his box to try and clear Dayot Upamecano's long pass, but could only make the faintest of contacts with the ball before watching helplessly as it rolled into the net. Mueller scored from a corner just five minutes later and pounced when Kobel spilled Leroy Sane's shot five minutes after that. "Sometimes there are crap days and today was one of them," Kobel told Germany's Sky, blaming himself for the defeat.

But Dortmund coach Edin Terzic backed his 'keeper, saying: "We can't forget that this man is the reason we were on top of the table." Unlike earlier in the season when Dortmund came from 2-0 down to draw 2-2 at home with Bayern, there would be no miracle comeback this time around, with Coman sliding the ball under Kobel early in the second half.

Emre Can converted a consolation penalty after Serge Gnabry fouled Jude Bellingham in the box, while Dutch forward Donyell Malen added a second for Dortmund in the last minute of normal time. Munich have won their last nine home league matches against Dortmund, scoring 37 goals and conceding just eight in the process. Dortmund will need to regroup after the defeat, their first league loss in 2023, ahead of their German Cup quarter final at RB Leipzig on Wednesday. Bayern face Freiburg twice in the space of a week, once at home in the Cup on Tuesday and then away in the league on Saturday.

"We'll see what Madrid do tomorrow, (but) if we win our games, we will be champions," Eric Garcia told Movistar. "The coach told us all at the start of the season, everyone is important. We have an important game on Wednesday and he was able to rest some players."

Barca coach Xavi took the chance to experiment by deploying Garcia in Sergio Busquets' usual pivot role, and made several other changes to his usual side. Torres and Fati started on the flanks, the latter having made headlines this week after his father complained about the Barca number 10's lack of minutes. "(Goals) always give confidence to the forwards, today it went perfectly," Xavi told Movistar.

"Two goals for Robert, one for Ferran, one for Ansu, and Ansu's work — he ended up exhausted, that's the truth. Aside from the goal, that is very positive for him and his confidence, how he worked for the team, it's really important for me, and the goal is a consequence of his work and his talent. I'm especially happy for Ferran, Ansu, the players that maybe deserved goals, today they scored."

Lewandowski broke the deadlock after 20 minutes with his first goal in four league matches, scuffing a finish into the ground, with the ball looping over a defender and into the net. The Polish international and the top goalscorer in the league grabbed his 16th and 17th strikes of the campaign — he has 27 across



LONDON: Arsenal's Brazilian striker Gabriel Jesus vies with Leeds United's Dutch defender Pascal Struijk at the Emirates Stadium on April 1, 2023. — AFP

home on 56 minutes. But Eberechi Eze's free-kick hit the woodwork and deflected in off Leicester goalkeeper Daniel Iversen to quickly get Palace level before Mateta coolly slotted home at the death.

"It's a wonderful feeling," said Hodgson, who is back in the dugout at 75. "It's such a relief, really, because I thought over the course of the 90 minutes we deserved to win the game." Defeat sees Leicester

slip into the relegation zone after Bournemouth came from behind to beat Fulham 2-1 thanks to goals from Marcus Tavernier and Dominic Solanke.

Nottingham Forest and Wolves remain outside the bottom three after a 1-1 draw at the City Ground. Daniel Podence struck seven minutes from time to snatch a draw for the visitors after Brennan Johnson opened the scoring for Forest. — AFP

Bayern put four past Dortmund on Tuchel debut

MUNICH: Bayern Munich went back to the top of the Bundesliga on Saturday, defeating Borussia Dortmund 4-2 at home to give Thomas Tuchel a winning start as coach of the Bavarian giants. A shocking own goal from Dortmund goalkeeper Gregor Kobel, as well as two trademark poacher's finishes from Thomas Mueller had Bayern 3-0 up by the 25th minute.

Kingsley Coman added a fourth shortly after half-time to send Bayern two points clear of the visitors despite two late consolation goals. "We need the desire to get better, because we have to get better," Tuchel said, although he praised his side's "desire to fight for the ball". "It was the result we absolutely wanted."

Dortmund came into the match in the unfamiliar position of first place, one point ahead of Bayern, who fired coach Julian Nagelsmann in favour of Tuchel last week. Tuchel, who won a German Cup title during a two-year stint in charge of Dortmund, only had one training session with Bayern but it was Kobel who gifted them a flying start in the 13th minute.

Lewandowski hits brace in Barca cruise

ELCHE, Spain: Robert Lewandowski struck twice as Barcelona moved 15 points clear at the top of La Liga with a comfortable 4-0 win at Elche on Saturday. Earlier Lucas Ocampos and Youssef En-Nesyri struck to earn new Sevilla coach Jose Luis Mendilibar a crucial 2-0 victory over relegation rivals Cadiz in his first game in charge. Barca's Polish forward Lewandowski has endured a small dip in form recently but was back to his lethal best to continue the Catalans' procession towards their first title since 2019.

Ansu Fati also scored for the first time since October in the league and Ferran Torres rounded out the comfortable win, as Xavi was able to start some reserve players ahead of Wednesday's Copa del Rey semi-final clash with Real Madrid. Elche, playing under new coach Sebastian Beccacece for the first time, are bottom of the table and never seemed likely to trouble the runaway league leaders. Champions Madrid, second, host Real Valladolid on Sunday.



MUNICH: Bayern Munich's Dutch defender Matthijs de Ligt and Dortmund's English midfielder Jude Bellingham vie for the ball on April 1, 2023. — AFP

Union Berlin kept up their surprise pursuit of the Bundesliga title with a 3-0 victory over rock-bottom Stuttgart. Second-half goals from Seraldo Becker, Kevin Behrens and an own goal from former Union player Genki Haraguchi took the third-placed side to just two points behind second-placed Dortmund and four from Bayern. "After half-time, we played like we should," said Union coach Urs Fischer. — AFP



ELCHE, Spain: Barcelona's Polish forward Robert Lewandowski vies with Elche's Spanish defender Pedro Bigas at the Martinez Valero stadium on April 1, 2023. — AFP

all competitions. Barcelona should have increased their lead in the first half but Lewandowski nodded over and Jules Kounde had an effort cleared off the line. Gavi pulled the strings and Garcia was solid in midfield as Barca secured a 20th clean sheet of the season in the top flight. Fati stretched Barcelona's advantage 10 minutes into the second half, driving forward from the halfway line and drilling into the bottom corner. — AFP

Classifieds

Hospitals & Clinics

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

Clinics

Kaizen center	25716707
Rawda	22517733
Adaliya	22517144

Khaldiya	24848075
Kaifan	24849807
Shamiya	24848913
Shuwaikh	24814507
Abdullah Salem	22549134
Nuzha	22526804
Industrial Shuwaikh	24814764
Qadsiya	22515088
Dasmah	22532265
Bneid Al-Gar	22531908
Shaab	22518752
Qibla	22459381
Ayoun Al-Qibla	22451082
Mirqab	22456536
Sharq	22465401
Salmiya	25746401

Change of Name

I, NAGARAJAN RAMANICKAM, born on 06.11.1981 (Native District: Thanjavur) residing at No. 92/1, Udaiyar Street, Mela Perambur, Tharangampadi Taluk – 609402, Nagapattinam District, Tamil Nadu, shall henceforth be known as **SUJAI RAJAMANICKAM**. (C 3195)

I, SALIM HASSAN ALI, holder of Indian Passport No. L4907160 having permanent address at Maharashtra, India – 416510 residing in Kuwait at present, hereby declare that henceforth my name will be read as under: **SALIM HASAN ALI SHAIKH**. (C 3194)

I, ANTONIO OLIVEIRO, holder of Passport No. P7116987 do hereby change my name to **ANTONIO** (as given name) **OLIVEIRA** (as surname) for all purposes. I will henceforth be known in the name **ANTONIO OLIVEIRA** and I also undertake to carry out this name change in all my documents. (C 3193) 03/04/2023

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Verstappen wins Australian Grand Prix



MELBOURNE: Red Bull Racing's Dutch driver Max Verstappen celebrates victory with the trophy as second-placed Mercedes' British driver Lewis Hamilton (left) and third-placed Aston Martin's Spanish driver Fernando Alonso (right) clap for him on the podium after the 2023 Formula One Australian Grand Prix at the Albert Park Circuit on April 2, 2023. — AFP

MELBOURNE: Max Verstappen held off a revived Lewis Hamilton to steer his Red Bull to a chaotic win at the Australian Grand Prix on Sunday and tighten his grip on the world championship. The world champion began from pole and despite being passed by Mercedes pair George Russell and Hamilton at the start, he kept his cool to win a race red flagged three times, with multiple crashes. Hamilton came home second ahead of Aston Martin's Fernando Alonso, who made it three podiums from three this year.

"We had a very poor start, lap one I was careful as I had a lot to lose," said Dutchman Verstappen, who won the season-opening race in Bahrain and came second in Jeddah a fortnight ago. "After that, the pace of the car was quick. With these red flags, I don't know, I don't really understand. It was a bit of a mess but we had good pace and we won, so that's important."

It was a disastrous day for Ferrari's Charles Leclerc, last year's winner, who spun out on the first lap, while Russell's car caught fire on lap 19 and his race

too was over. Victory was Verstappen's maiden win in Melbourne and Red Bull's first in Australia since Sebastian Vettel's 2011 triumph. His teammate and winner in Saudi Arabia Sergio Perez sliced through the field to come fifth after qualifying last due to brake issues, behind Lance Stroll in the other Aston Martin.

Late drama

The Red Bull triumph came despite unbelievable late drama that saw a red flag come out when Verstappen had a comfortable lead from Hamilton and Alonso with two laps left, meaning they had a bunched restart for an all-out attack to the finish. But it descended into chaos when Alonso was clipped by Ferrari's Carlos Sainz as they jostled for position and sent into a spin, which caused a flow on effect with multiple other cars coming to grief.

Sainz was given a five-second penalty, eventually finishing 12th, and the race stopped again. It resumed after a lengthy delay for single lap behind a safety

car — with no overtaking allowed — in the order of the previous start with only 12 cars left. "I didn't expect to be second so I'm super grateful for it," said seven-time world champion Hamilton. "I'm driving as best I can and working as hard as I can but still, considering we've been down on performance and in straight pace, for us to be up there fighting with Aston is amazing." On a fine day, Lando Norris in a McLaren was sixth, Niko Hulkenberg in the Haas seventh and rookie Oscar Piastri, in the other McLaren, an encouraging eighth on his home circuit.

'Rollercoaster of emotions'

Alpha Romeo's Zhou Guanyu came ninth and AlphaTauri's Yuki Tsunoda 10th. "We had a rollercoaster of emotions today, many things going on at the beginning, and the last half an hour," said Spanish veteran Alonso. "Mercedes were very fast and Lewis did an incredible job — I could not match the pace, but we'll take P3." With Red Bull's undeniable speed advan-

tage, it was crucial for Russell and Hamilton to get a strong start. And they did just that with both scorching past a tentative Verstappen on the first corner before Leclerc spun at Turn 3 and the safety car came out. They resumed with Hamilton pressing Russell before the safety car was deployed again on lap seven when Williams' Alexander Albon lost control, leaving gravel on the track, with a red flag eventually needed. They got underway again from a standing start with Hamilton initially keeping Verstappen at bay.

But it only a matter of time before the Dutchman made his move and he surged into the lead on lap 12. Once more a safety car was needed when Russell's car broke down, but Verstappen was in charge now and pulling clear. By the halfway mark, he was seven seconds ahead with the battle seemingly all about who came second between Hamilton and Alonso. But there was more drama when Kevin Magnussen lost the rear tyre of his Haas and the red flag came out again at the death. — AFP

Former India all-rounder Salim Durani dies at 88



MUMBAI: Former Indian Test cricketer Salim Durani speaks after receiving his award during the BCCI Awards 2009-2010 function in this May 31, 2011 file photo. — AFP

NEW DELHI: Tributes poured in on Sunday for former cricketer Salim Durani, a hero of India's maiden series victory over England, who died at the age of 88. An attacking left-handed batsman and a left-arm orthodox bowler, Durani played 29 Tests for India between 1960 and 1973 and scored his only century against the West Indies. Cricket icon Sachin Tendulkar said: "Deeply saddened to hear about the passing of Salim Durani ji. A really warm and loving person."

Born in Kabul, Durani played for the Indian states of Gujarat, Rajasthan and the former Saurashtra in first-class cricket and was loved by fans for his six-hitting prowess. "I have had the opportunity to interact with him and was deeply impressed by his multifaceted persona. He will surely be missed," Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi tweeted.

Durani starred in India's historic first series victory over England in 1961-62 when he took eight wickets in Calcutta (now Kolkata) and then 10 in Madras (now Chennai). He played a key role in another famous win against the West Indies in 1971 in Port of Spain when he dismissed Clive Lloyd and Gary Sobers, the latter for a duck. He was dropped for the Kanpur Test in 1973 against England, but brought back for the next match after protests from fans who held placards and raised slogans of "No Durani, no Test". — AFP

Butler inspires Heat victory as Mavs' hopes fade

MIAMI: Jimmy Butler scored 35 points as the Miami Heat snapped their three-game losing streak to inflict a damaging 129-122 defeat on the Dallas Mavericks on Saturday. Heat talisman Butler produced a typically dynamic performance to steer Miami to a precious win, leading the scoring from 12-of-16 shooting while laying on 12 assists. Cody Zeller provided offensive support with 20 points while Kevin Love and Max Strus added 18 points apiece, with Tyler Herro finishing with 15.

Miami improved to 41-37 and remain seventh in the Eastern Conference standings, one win behind the sixth-placed Brooklyn Nets as they chase an automatic playoff berth. Heat coach Erik Spoelstra was pleased his team had been able to rediscover their offensive rhythm after only managing to score 92 points in each of their previous two games. "They're a very good offensive team — we knew we were going to have to put some points on the board," Spoelstra said. "We knew we'd have to put some pressure on them offensively and during the course of the game we were able to get them on their heels, and Jimmy controlled the tenor and tempo of the game."

But while Miami celebrated, Dallas were left contemplating another painful loss that leaves them closer to the ignominy of missing the postseason one year after reaching the Western Conference finals. The Mavs remain 11th in the Western Conference with a 37-41 record and are now one game behind the 10th placed Oklahoma City Thunder, who occupy the last of the play-in berths.

Dallas coach Jason Kidd pinpointed his team's shaky defense as the reason for the loss. "It wasn't the offensive side of the ball, it was the defensive side," Kidd said. "We were trying to get stops and then when we did we'd just throw it away. We've got to do a better job of keeping the ball." Crucially, Oklahoma City own the head-to-head tie-breaker with Dallas, meaning that they will still be ahead of the Mavericks even if they draw level on wins.

Dallas, who have lost six of their last seven games, have just four regular season games left to force



MIAMI: Jimmy Butler of the Miami Heat drives against Maxi Kleber of the Dallas Mavericks during the fourth quarter of the game at Miami-Dade Arena on April 1, 2023. — AFP

their way into the playoffs. Luka Doncic led the Dallas charge in Miami on Saturday with 42 points, 10 rebounds and eight assists while Tim Hardaway Jr finished with 31 points. Kyrie Irving had 23 points but struggled to stamp his influence on the contest. "Timmy (Hardaway), Ky (Irving) and Luka kept us in the ballgame," Kidd said. "We just didn't get any production from the bench tonight."

The writing was on the wall for Dallas after the first quarter, with Miami pouring in the points to lead 44-31 heading into the second. Dallas re-

grouped in the second period but still trailed by 12 points at the break. Although Dallas threatened to sneak back into the game late in the fourth quarter, Butler's poise at key moments ensured Miami always managed to keep the Mavs at arm's length as they closed out victory. In Saturday's other NBA game, the New Orleans Pelicans maintained their playoff momentum with a 122-114 win over the Los Angeles Clippers. The Pelicans are seventh in the Western Conference on 40-38, half a game behind the sixth-placed Clippers. — AFP