



4 Kuwaitis' innate generosity manifested during Ramadan



5 Russia blames Ukraine, opposition for death of blogger, makes arrest



15 Milan slam brakes on Napoli title charge with thumping



RAMADAN TIMINGS	
Fajr	04:14
Shurooq	05:35
Dhuhr	11:51
Asr	15:23
Maghrib	18:08
Isha	19:26

Amir's Representative calls to maintain military preparedness

Crown Prince urges National Guard to boost expertise, skills



KUWAIT: Representative of HH the Amir and the Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces, HH the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, visits the defense ministry's HQ (left) and the National Guard HQ (right). — KUNA

RAMADAN KAREEM

Environmental care in Islam-I

By Hassan Twaha Bwambale

Islam advocates the protection of the environment, though not in name, for the word 'environment' [bi'ah], along with its connotations, evolved in recent times. That Islam has high regard for the environment is something that can be found in the Holy Quran and the sunnah as we shall discuss later in this paper.

God says what can be translated as: "Then to the (people of) Thamud Allah sent their brother Salih (as a messenger). He said, 'O my people, worship Allah (alone); you do not have any other God apart from Him. He created you from the earth and settled you therein (to cultivate it). So, seek His forgiveness, then repent to Him. Indeed, my Lord is near (and) answers prayers.'" (Houd 11: 62) That means "It is your responsibility to develop it, in terms of erecting buildings, populating it, flourishing on it and filling it with life."

It also means that the All-Caring, Allah, made you live on earth for a long time so that you could excel in doing good, and after you die as righteous people, you will leave a good legacy, with people continuing to praise you. God (Allah) says what can be translated as: "And (as to) the earth, it is He (alone) who laid it down for all creatures. Therein are (abundant) fruits and date-palms endowed with (plenteous) sheaths, and grains of the husk, and sweet-scented basil." (Ar-Rahman 55: 10 – 12)

Prophet Muhammad's (PBUH) actions and response to the environment demonstrate that it is our responsibility to care for the planet Earth on which we live, and improve its condition. As narrated in a hadith, Abu Sa'id Al-Khudrei (RA) reported that the Messenger of Allah (PBUH) said what can be translated as: "Indeed, the world is sweet and green (attractive), and verily Allah is going to install you as vicegerent in it in order to see how you act. So, fear (the trial) of women. Verily, the first trial for the people of Isra'il was related to women." (Muslim # 2, 742)

Continued on Page 6

KUWAIT: Representative of HH the Amir and Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, HH the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, has instructed military personnel to be vigilant and execute drills to upgrade their preparedness. This came in a speech delivered by HH the Crown Prince during his visit to the defense ministry's HQ on Sunday evening, where he was accompanied by HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Al-Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah.

Upon arrival, HH the Crown Prince was re-

Mol supermarkets denying entry to expat shoppers

By Faten Omar

KUWAIT: After receiving several complaints about cooperative societies banning expatriates from entering to shop and buy products during the holy month of Ramadan, Kuwait Times found expats are allowed to

ceived by First Deputy Prime Minister, Interior Minister and Acting Defense Minister Sheikh Talal Al-Khaled Al-Sabah. Expressing his greetings to army men on the holy month of Ramadan, HH the Crown Prince advised them to develop the country's military system and provide radar systems with the latest technologies. HH Sheikh Mishal asked them to intensify operational drills with the armed forces of sisterly and friendly countries and pay attention to equipment maintenance to be fully ready to achieve their planned role.

enter co-ops in many areas, but several Police Co-operative Societies are denying people entry unless they are Kuwaitis or working for the interior ministry.

Security guards are stationed at all entrances of Police Co-ops to check people's civil IDs. Kuwait Times tried to speak with the co-op's administration, but they refused to talk. One of the employees, who preferred to remain anonymous, told Kuwait Times the rule has been implemented since the beginning of Ramadan.

Head of the Consumer Protection Association Meshaal Al-Mane told Kuwait Times this is an illegal decision, even if it is only applied at the interior ministry's cooperative societies, affirming that banning expatriates from entering and limiting products to

HH Sheikh Mishal also asked the National Guard to develop human resources and enhance their expertise and skills during his visit to the National Guard HQ on Sunday evening, accompanied by HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad. HH the Crown Prince also advised the Guard's staff to support rehabilitation and training programs, as well as attract outstanding human elements to enlist. He expressed pleasure over meeting the Guard staff in the holy month of Ramadan, conveying greetings of HH the Amir. — KUNA (See Page 2)

citizens only is against the law.

Mane explained cooperative societies are businesses with a commercial license from the commerce ministry, and they are also subject to the same market laws as other businesses. "The law must be implemented. As a representative of consumers in Kuwait, whether expats or citizens, we are obligated to protect their rights to enter any facility in the country and have the privilege to buy and shop," he said.

"Let us assume the opposite had happened, and a Kuwaiti was denied from entering a supermarket abroad. Is not that considered against the law?" Mane pointed out.

Continued on Page 6

Kuwait says output cuts support stability as oil market surges

KUWAIT/LONDON: Kuwait's Deputy Prime Minister and Oil Minister Bader Al-Mulla said that the voluntary reduction of production from countries participating in the OPEC+ agreement is a proactive move to bolster the stability of oil markets amid developments in global economic conditions and their

accelerating effects. This was in Mulla's statement, which was conveyed through a statement by the ministry of oil, after he headed Kuwait's delegation participating in the 48th meeting of the Joint Ministerial Monitoring Committee (JMMC), which was held Monday via videoconference.

World oil prices soared Monday after several top producers led by Saudi Arabia sprang surprise output cuts. Crude futures surged almost eight percent at one stage, a day after multiple members of the OPEC+ exporters'

alliance unexpectedly slashed production by a total of more than one million barrels per day.

The shock reduction will start in May and last until the end of the year, with OPEC+ saying Monday it involves Algeria, Gabon, Iraq, Kazakhstan, Kuwait, Oman, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. It came on top of a decision from Russia, also an OPEC+ member, to extend a cut of 500,000 barrels per day. The oil cartel had already angered Washington

Continued on Page 6



Bader Al-Mulla

Daily rainfall in 2023 broke all records

KUWAIT: The volume of the latest heavy rainfall exceeded 106 mm per day, Al-Ojairi Scientific Center said on Monday. Director General Yousef Al-Ojairi said in a statement the volume of torrential rain throughout Kuwait exceeded the amount of rain that fell in a day during the notorious "Al-Haddama" rainfall in 1934, as well as the unprecedented tor-

rential rainfall in 1997, 2013 and 2018. Ojairi said rainfall in some areas of Kuwait reached 61 mm daily, higher than the record in 2018 of 58 mm, with a total of 126.8 mm throughout the season. The 1934 Al-Haddama rain swamped Kuwait and inflicted heavy damage, affecting 18,000 people.

Kuwait is experiencing its relatively short spring season, in which weather is known for being moderate, with some weather fluctuations occurring, and rain may fall accompanied by thunderclouds. During this time of the year, Kuwait is affected by the so-called "Sarayat" season, which is characterized by radical and sudden changes in weather. — KUNA



KUWAIT: National Guard teams support efforts to clear a flooded road after heavy rain hit Kuwait on March 27, 2023. — KUNA



Local

Crown Prince urges military to stay prepared, upgrade system

Visit cements political leadership's support for Armed Forces



KUWAIT: HH the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah (center) flanked by His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah (third left) and First Deputy Prime Minister, Interior Minister and Acting Defense Minister Sheikh Talal Khaled Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah (third right) and other senior officials at the Defense Ministry headquarters on April 3, 2023. —KUNA photos



Senior officials attend the reception during HH the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah's visit to the the Defense Ministry headquarters.

KUWAIT: Representative of His Highness the Amir and the Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah has instructed the military personnel to keep vigilant and execute drills to upgrade their preparedness.

This came in a speech delivered by His Highness the Crown Prince during his visit to the Defense Ministry's headquarters on Sunday evening where he was accompanied by His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah.

Upon arrival, His Highness the Crown Prince was received by First Deputy Prime Minister, Interior Minister and Acting Defense Minister Sheikh Talal Khaled Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah. Expressing his greetings to army men on the holy month of Ramadan, His Highness the Crown Prince advised them to develop the country's military system and provide radar systems with the latest technologies. His Highness Sheikh Mishal asked them to intensify operational drills with the armed forces of sisterly and friendly countries and pay attention to equipment maintenance to ensure it's ready to achieve its planned purpose.

His Highness the Crown Prince praised relentless efforts made by the Ministry of Defense under the leadership of the First Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Interior and Acting Minister of Defense. In his speech, His Highness the Crown Prince expressed his pleasure about meeting with the ministry's staff, conveying greetings of His Highness the Amir, the Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces, on the holy month of Ramadan.

His Highness Sheikh Mishal said that his visit to the Ministry of Defense as His Highness the Amir's

representative comes to cement the political leadership's support for the Armed Forces' personnel who have proven, through their sacrifices and sincerity, that they are the fortified fortress of the homeland and its strong and solid shield.

Addressing the ministry's staff, His Highness the Crown Prince said: "We are following your sincere missions and tasks made to the homeland and its leadership to protect and defend the country and its sanctities and maintain its security and stability".

In this regard, His Highness the Crown Prince highly appreciated the Minister of Defense's directives to keep the registration process of non-commissioned officers and private courses open throughout the year and immediately accept applicants that meet admission requirements and pass medical tests.

His Highness Sheikh Mishal also praised cooperation and coordination between Kuwait's Naval Force and the General Directorate of the Coast Guard to preserve the security and safety of the country's territorial waters, referring to remarkable efforts by the Ministry of Defense on signing some agreements with its peers in some countries to keep pace with all new developments in the field of armament.

His Highness Sheikh Mishal further commended the keenness of the Kuwaiti army's units on executing joint drills to upscale their level of readiness. He then expressed appreciation to the Ministry of Defense's cooperation with Kuwait Red Crescent Society (KRCS) to dispatch humanitarian relief aid to internally displaced persons (IDPs) inside Ukraine, and to those affected by the earthquake that hit Turkey and Syria, in implementation of His Highness the Amir's directives.

Finally, His Highness Sheikh Mishal prayed to Allah the Almighty to maintain the dear homeland

safe, secure, and stable, under the leadership of His Highness the Amir.

Acting Chief of the General Staff of the Army Major General Staff Ghazi Hassan Al-Shammari delivered a speech on this occasion, thanking His Highness the Crown Prince for this visit. He said the visit embodies direct keenness of the Crown Prince on sharing this occasion with the army's personnel, expressing Ramadan greetings of the Ministry's staff to Sheikh Mishal.

Addressing His Highness the Crown Prince, Shammari said: "Your military sons are absolutely sure of the keenness of your Highness to achieve the goals of the homeland and citizens. They (sons) are aware of the responsibilities they bear to achieve these goals, and of great acceleration in regional and international events and challenges and their

consequent repercussions on all levels".

He confirmed to His Highness Sheikh Mishal that the Kuwaiti army units are moving forward to enhance armament and training capabilities of their members to get the highest levels of preparedness and combat readiness through unilateral and joint exercises in cooperation with the brotherly and friendly armed forces, with the grace of Allah Almighty and support and guidance of the Crown Prince.

He expressed sincere thanks and great gratitude to His Highness Sheikh Mishal for his continuous support to military personnel, referring to the approval of recent promotions, which included a large number of members of the armed forces. Accompanied by a number of senior state officials, His Highness the Crown Prince was given a souvenir on this occasion during the visit. — KUNA

Main takeaways from HH the Crown Prince's speech:

- HH the Crown Prince urged the Ministry of Defense to develop the country's military system and upgrade existing radars to match the latest cutting-edge technology.
- He said the military should intensify joint operational drills with armed forces of friendly countries.
- He praised efforts by the Ministry of Defense in signing bilateral arms deals with peers in other countries.
- He said he appreciated the Ministry of De-

fense's cooperation with Kuwait Red Crescent Society to dispatch humanitarian relief aid to internally displaced persons inside Ukraine, and to those affected by the earthquake that hit Turkey and Syria.

- HH the Crown Prince said he appreciated the Minister of Defense's directives to keep the registration process for non-commissioned officer courses open throughout the year and immediately accept applicants that meet admission requirements and pass medical tests.

Crown Prince calls on National Guard to recruit talent

KUWAIT: Representative of His Highness the Amir and the Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah has called on the National Guard to develop their human resources and enhance their expertise and skills. This came in a speech delivered by His Highness the Crown Prince during his visit to the National Guard headquarters Sunday evening, where he was accompanied by His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah.

His Highness the Crown Prince also advised Guard personnel to support rehabilitation and training programs and recruit outstanding talent. His Highness also expressed pleasure over meeting Guard staff in the holy month of Ramadan, conveying greetings of His Highness the Amir.

"We are following closely great efforts made by the National Guard members for our beloved Kuwait and its citizens," said His Highness the Crown Prince. He commended participation of the National Guard in a comprehensive awareness campaign to combat drugs and protect youth from this devastating curse.

"We are also proud of electing a Kuwaiti National Guard officer as one of best cybersecurity leaders in the Middle East and of the National Guard's plans to host the conference of The International Association of Gendarmeries and Police Forces with Military Status in November 2023," His Highness the Crown Prince said.

He prayed to Allah the Almighty to bestow prosperity and excellence on all institutions of Kuwait and preserve the dear homeland under the wise leadership of His Highness the Amir and the Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

Meanwhile, National Guard Undersecretary Staff Lt Gen Hashim Al-Refaie expressed pride and pleasure about His Highness the Crown Prince's visit. On behalf of the National Guard President His Highness Sheikh Salem Al-Ali Al-Sabah, Vice President Sheikh Faisal Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah and all staff, Lt Gen Refaie conveyed greetings to His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad, His Highness the Crown Prince and Kuwaiti people on Ramadan.

He said the wise approach of Kuwait's leadership to visit military institutions, including the National Guard, cements military personnel's authentic values and principles and boosts the staff's determination and perseverance to preserve security of the homeland and its citizens.

"We all observe, as Kuwaiti people, the serious steps taken by the political leadership towards reform, development and construction," he added. Refaie referred to achievements made over the past



KUWAIT: HH the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah (center), His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah (second left) and Kuwait National Guard Vice President Sheikh Faisal Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah (second right) with other senior officials pictured at the National Guard headquarters on April 3, 2023. —KUNA

periods, including fulfilling cooperation strategy with the sisterly and friendly countries to host the aforementioned conference. Accompanied by First Deputy Prime Minister, Interior Minister and Act-

ing Defense Minister Sheikh Talal Khaled Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah and a number of senior state officials, His Highness the Crown Prince was presented a souvenir on this occasion during the visit. —KUNA

Local

Zain Girgeaan celebration brings joy at the Social Care Centers

Company organized event for foster care children, special needs and the elderly



Dr Bibi Al Amiri and Aamer Al Enzi recognize Hamad Al Musaiibeh for Zain's efforts in making the event a success.



Al Amiri and Zain's team with special needs residents.

KUWAIT: Zain, Kuwait's leading digital service provider, announces the successful conclusion of the special event it organized to celebrate the Kuwaiti tradition of Girgeaan (candy distribution) at the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor's Social Care Centers. The event came in partnership with the Public Authority for Disability Affairs to share the joys and blessings of the Holy Month with foster care children, people with special needs, and the elderly.

The event was attended by General Manager of the Public Authority for Disability Affairs Dr Bibi Al Amiri, Deputy GM for Medical, Psychological, and Social Services and Disabled Care Centers Aamer Al Enzi, Zain Kuwait's Chief Corporate Affairs and Relations Officer Waleed Al Khashti, and representatives of ministries and embassies.

Every year, Zain is proud to partner with the Social Care Centers and the Public Authority for Disability Affairs to make this event a success as part of its annual Ramadan campaign. Through this collaboration, the company shares the joys of Girgeaan with foster care children, people with special needs, and the elderly who reside at the care centers. The event also witnessed special theatrical and traditional segments presented by the residents of the centers.

During the event, Zain's team joined in distributing Girgeaan (candy), gifts, and toys in an atmosphere that was full of joy and happiness. The company believes the Holy Month of Ramadan is a special time of the year, and it is always keen on sharing the blessings of this time with all segments, most importantly this cherished segment of the community. Zain believes in the importance of embracing the beautiful values of the Islamic religion as well as the noble traditions of the Kuwaiti heritage, all year round and especially in the Holy Month of Ramadan.

Societal norms hinder women empowerment

By Ghadeer Ghloom

KUWAIT: Battling for women's empowerment is an issue that occupied humanity for ages and continues to do so. The continuous efforts to support women show that it is still being resisted and even rejected by people. Women in Kuwait are no different — they have also fought to gain empowerment and receive equal rights. While some say that empowering women and giving them equal rights is a necessary human right, others claim that it is against religion and societal norms.

Asma Al-Habib, who lives in Kuwait, shared her thoughts regarding social phobia from women's empowerment with Kuwait Times. Habib attributes society's treatment of women to several factors: the hierarchy and economic system in Kuwait and other GCC countries, some religious beliefs and people's upbringing.

Segregation reinforces social phobia

Habib said that individuals' upbringing and ideol-

ogy is mostly a result of their home and workplace environments and spending time on media platforms, which present the female gender in a certain manner that limits their capabilities and opportunities in life. This teaches both genders that females' roles are limited to a certain extent. Hence, men and women in society grow with a mindset which doesn't value women empowerment. There are other factors that contribute to creating a social phobia against empowering women, such as the norms and traditions that push towards dividing men and women from each other since a very young age.

At school, they receive their education and start their lives in an environment that does not prepare both genders to work together. This makes it difficult for them to accept seeing women given similar opportunities and rights as men because they are not used to seeing each other treated equally. Separating men and women from each other not only happens at schools, but also at many people's homes as boys grow up playing around the neighborhood or going to the Diwaniya with their father away from girls, whereas girls grow up indoors learning how to do chores with their mother, also away from boys.

Habib said that empowering women threatens social hierarchies because, nowadays, any girl is capable of studying almost any major she prefers and can make her own living. This fills in the financial gap that distinguishes different social classes, making differences in socioeconomic



status not as prominent as they used to be.

Religion and women

Many people claim that women empowerment shouldn't be supported due to religious reasons. However, Habib objected and told Kuwait Times that religion — Islam, for instance — cannot be claimed as an excuse to justify limiting women's lives and not giving them their equal rights. Like many other religions, Islam has different sects and these sects have different categories and several religious figures with different views and opinions. Therefore, making a generalization that Islam or any other religion is an obstacle for women empowerment is not reasonable.

The struggle between good and evil

By Khalid Al-Saleh



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I have been in journalism for 30 years, and from when I hand delivered the column until it started to be sent by fax, then email, I am attempting to monitor the reaction of my friends and colleagues to what I write, particularly with regards to the domestic situation. In recent years, WhatsApp became my quick way to send the column to colleagues and friends and receive quick answers, and as I like statistics, I used it in comments of my colleagues and friends, and I reached certain results.

In the '90s, following the invasion calamity, the Kuwaiti citizen was full of regret due to the betrayal that accompanied the invasion of his country. The glow of reform was moving faster than corruption, and due to that Kuwait was rebuilt with young arms that wanted change. All our columns during that era revolved around answering our enemies and confronting them, and encouraging the strong building spirit. The people's answers were in agreement with us, and harmony was the sign of what we wrote and heard.

In the 2000s — in its first five years — it was clear that corruption was still breathing under the soil of the homeland. The old groups began to repair their nets and the struggle began to start slowly. Corruption had more than one head, and each head had a programmed brain, and the seeds of discord began to bloom. Then we as writers became preoccupied with repelling these attempts and warning people against a column that sought to employ all the country's resources in its favor.

Reformists won some battles and lost others, yet the spirit of optimism never weakened. During the following five years, ie, 15 years after the invasion, Kuwaiti society was at the door of forgetting the invasion ordeal and solidarity during it. During those years, corruption chose its way in beating the structure of unity, with attempts to divide the society on sectarian and social bases. The struggle between the society's components began, so we were writing with caution in general and for no benefit, as social and sectarian strife is the harshest for any society.

Few writers then were busy with general advice and many resorted to self-defense. Most comments of friends and colleagues were busy with the strife too. There was a stronger will dictated to Kuwaitis, and corruption succeeded in developing its mechanisms and was able to rise above the differences that it stirred up, jumping towards sources of income to win them.

As soon as the first 10 years of the 21st Century ended, it was clear that corruption succeeded in instilling differences in Kuwait society and the flame of optimism began to fade, so most of our writings were for restoring the spirit of optimism, but the comments of our friends were divided between encouraging and despairing towards reform.

Despite many writers continuing to encourage values and spreading the spirit of love, comments of the public in the second 10 years of the current century were full of bitterness and frustration. The spirit of optimism is no longer with us, as if there was someone who suffocated it and sorted the people of the country into groups fighting among each other.

Although I am still optimistic, yet I feel that there is a power that wants to spread frustration, encourage lawbreaking, spread waste, burn the middle class with high prices, discriminate among the people with privileges and salaries, encourage the corrupt, distance the clean, naturalize those who do not deserve at the expense of those who do, limit tenders to certain groups and consider government work as either unemployment or pressing interests.

The thing that hurts a nation most is for its people to lose the spirit of reform and the spread of frustration. We are today in need to return to the people; we need to hear their opinion in running the country and maintaining the democratic path and strengthening it. Countries are not built with songs and words of appeasement — countries are built with the hands of their children that are full of hope.



Ramadan crescent, decorations creating whimsical atmosphere

KUWAIT: The arrival of the holy month of Ramadan creates a whimsical atmosphere in the streets of Kuwait as houses light up in celebration with the signature shapes of the moon and stars. The joyful adornments, a newly acquired habit, are suitably and adeptly placed in home fronts and entryways as a delightful sight welcoming visitors. The LED lights used are considered safe and energy saving as one can also control the brightness and color. The lights are not a burden to the household's power grid should necessary safety precautions be taken. —KUNA



KUWAIT: The lighted chain of crescents and stars adorn houses. — KUNA photos



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News in Brief

Transit hub for Umrah

KUWAIT: Ministry of Interior and Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs are discussing a project that will transform Kuwait into a transit hub for Umrah and Hajj for nationals of many countries. There will be a meeting after Ramadan to discuss the main points of the project which is aimed at receiving one million Umrah pilgrims per year - who will be heading to Saudi Arabia through Kuwait. Official sources said several nationals from countries like Iraq, Iran, Bosnia and Chechen will be allowed to enter Saudi Arabia from Kuwait when the project is approved - adding that it will have a high important economic return.

Dollar trades at KD 0.306

KUWAIT: Exchange rate of the US dollar against the Kuwaiti Dinar on Monday steadied at KD 0.306 and Euro at KD 0.332, maintaining the rates unchanged for the second consecutive day. The CBK added in its daily bulletin that the British Sterling Pound rose by 0.13 percent, trading at KD 0.378 and the Swiss Franc by 0.33 percent to settle at KD 0.335. Meanwhile, the Japanese Yen remained stable at KD 0.002. The currency exchange rates as declared by the CBK reflect average rates, not actual trade.- KUNA

Council approves requests

KUWAIT: The Municipal Council, chaired by Abdullah Al-Mahri has approved the request of the general authority for communications and information technology to allocate land for the use of data centers. The Council discussed several topics, including changing the commercial activity in one of the commercial complexes from a unified activity to a free one, as well as a proposal on the road numbers on the signboards. The Council approved the request of the general authority for roads and land transport to allocate a 1,950-meter-long road and path temporarily in Sabah Al-Ahmad residential area, and also approved amending the decision of the Municipal Council for the educational, cultural and entertainment center project on Abdullah Al-Ahmad street. It also approved the request of the Ministry of Electricity, Water and Renewable Energy to allocate a site for a secondary conversion plant in Adiliya area, Plot (3). —KUNA

Kuwaitis' innate generosity manifested during Ramadan



KUWAIT: Public departments and companies offer aid for the needy during the fasting month of Ramadan. —KUNA



KUWAIT: Many Kuwaiti citizens, public departments and companies and NGOs jostle to offer aid for the needy during the fasting month of Ramadan. The institutions and individuals offer iftar (fast breaking) meals for the needy and the poor throughout the month. The food is placed at tents, in houses and mosques - manifesting the Kuwaitis innate trait of doing good. —KUNA

LuLu Hypermarket marks Autism Day

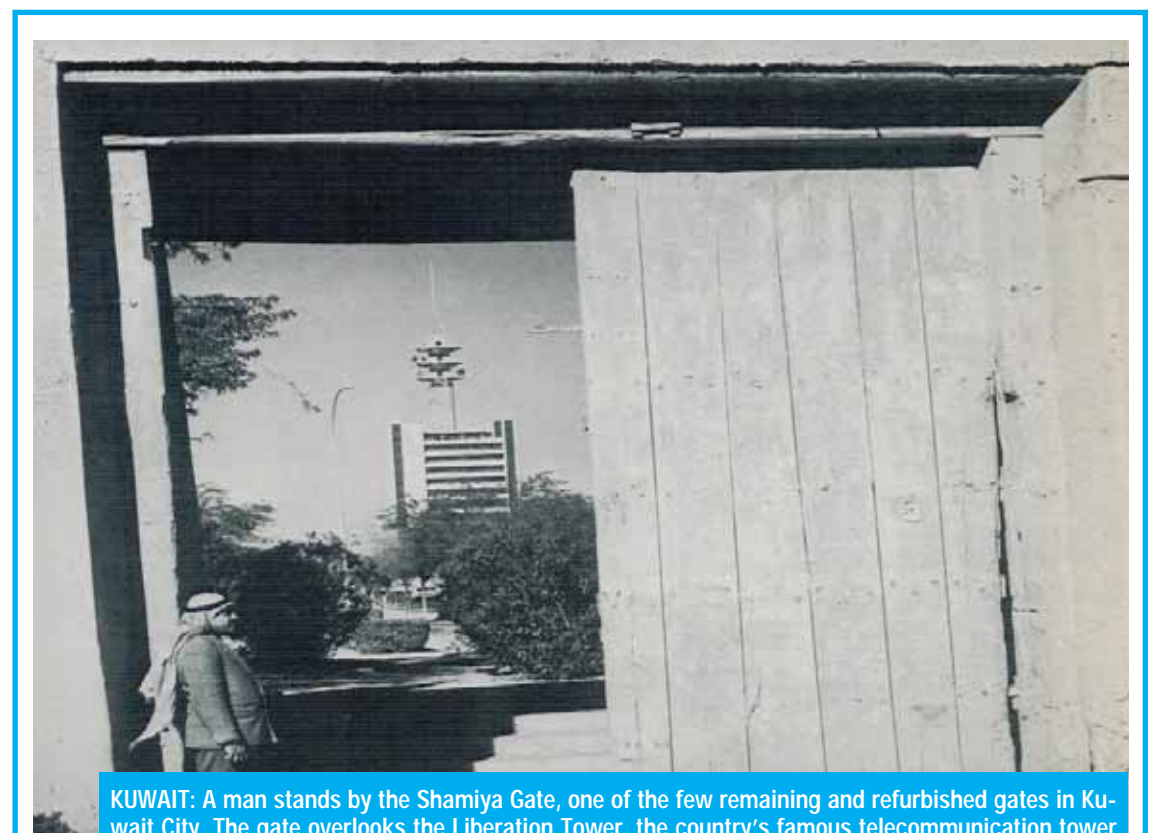
KUWAIT: LuLu Hypermarket Kuwait hosted an event to mark World Autism Awareness Day on 2 April at the hypermarket's Al-Qurain outlet, to raise awareness about autism and lend support to autistic individuals and their families. The event featured a

range of activities, including kids games and interactive workshops designed specifically for children with autism. In addition, several products and services were showcased that cater to the unique needs of individuals with autism.

In a statement on the occasion, LuLu Hypermarket Kuwait said it is committed to social responsibility and community engagement, and recognizes the importance of creating a society that is supportive and inclusive of individuals with autism. By hosting

the Autism Awareness Day, LuLu Hypermarket aims to promote greater understanding of autism, and to encourage the public to support those with autism.

The event was well-received by the community, with many attendees expressing their gratitude to the hypermarket for the opportunity to learn more about autism and to connect with others in the autistic community. LuLu Hypermarket Kuwait also said it plans to continue its efforts to support individuals with autism and their families in the future.



KUWAIT: A man stands by the Shamiya Gate, one of the few remaining and refurbished gates in Kuwait City. The gate overlooks the Liberation Tower, the country's famous telecommunication tower and a sign of its renaissance. (Source: 'Kuwait' by Ralph Shaw, London, 1976. Prepared by: Mahmoud Zakaria Abu Al-Ella, researcher in heritage at the Ministry of Information.)



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Headmistress guilty of sexual abuse at Australian school

Trial over fatal Paris synagogue attack opens after 43 years



SAINT PETERSBURG: Municipal workers clean the debris in the aftermath of the April 2 bomb blast in a cafe in Saint Petersburg on April 3, 2023. Sunday's explosion in a Saint Petersburg cafe wounded dozens and killed Russia's top military blogger Vladlen Tatarsky. — AFP

Russia makes arrest in blogger killing

Moscow blames Ukraine, opposition for death of top military blogger

MOSCOW: Russia alleged on Monday the “terrorist attack” that killed a top military blogger the day before was orchestrated by Ukraine with the help of supporters of jailed Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny. Russian investigators detained 26-year-old Darya Trepova, who was said to have links to Navalny, and posted a video in which she said is heard saying she brought to the cafe a statuette rigged with an explosive device.

Ukraine has blamed Russia's domestic infighting for the blast in a Saint Petersburg cafe that wounded dozens and killed Vladlen Tatarsky, an active promoter of the Ukraine offensive. “The terrorist attack was planned by Ukrainian security services with the help of agents working with the so-called Anti-Corruption Foundation,” Russia's anti-terror committee said, referring to Navalny's banned organisation.

A spokeswoman for Navalny's foundation rejected the accusation. “Alexei will soon be on trial for extremism. He is facing 35 years. The Kremlin thought: ‘It's great to be able to add the terrorism charge’,” Kira Yarmysh said.

Russian state-run news agency RIA Novosti reported Trepova had been arrested for 10 days for

taking part in a protest on February 25, 2022, a day after the launch of the offensive in Ukraine. The Russian interior ministry published a video of Trepova admitting to bringing a statuette that exploded. Asked on camera who gave it to her, she said she would answer “later”.

Blood and glass

Tatarsky was reportedly killed after receiving a gift statuette rigged with an explosive device during a talk at “Street Food Bar No. 1”, located along the Neva river not far from the historic city centre. “They put (the figurine) somewhere in the back without a second thought... and all of a sudden there was an explosion,” Alisa Smotrova, who was at the cafe, told AFP. “There was blood and pieces of glass,” she added.

The police were called at around 6:13 pm (1513 GMT) on Sunday and cordoned off the street outside the building. Around 20 police cars, six ambulances and several fire engines were at the scene, according to an AFP journalist there.

The venue used to be owned by the head of Wagner paramilitary group Yevgeny Prigozhin. Prigo-

zhin said on Telegram he “gave the cafe to patriotic movement Cyber Front Z and they organised various seminars there”. Cyber Front Z, which refers to itself on social media as “Russia's information troops”, said it had hired out the cafe for the evening. A local media outlet, Fontanka, said there were at least 100 people at the event.

Prigozhin however said he believed the responsibility for the attack did not lie with Kyiv but with “a group of radicals that is hardly related to the (Ukrainian) government”. The Kremlin condemned the “terrorist attack” and said “there is evidence... that the Ukrainian special services may be related to its organisation”.

‘Kill everyone’

On Sunday evening Ukrainian presidential aide Mykhaylo Podolyak said the attack happened as a result of Russian infighting. “(The) question of when domestic terrorism would become an instrument of internal political fight was a matter of time,” he said on Twitter. Prigozhin said he hoisted the Russian flag with an inscription honouring the deceased blogger

over the city administration of Bakhmut, which he claimed to have seized. The Russian foreign ministry on Sunday paid homage to the blogger and his “service to the Fatherland, which aroused Kyiv's hatred”.

Tatarsky, whose real name is Maxim Fomin, made his name early in the Ukraine offensive by publishing videos analysing the situation on the ground and offering advice for mobilised troops, according to TASS news agency.

The 40-year-old came from the Donetsk region in eastern Ukraine, which Russia claims to have annexed and which is currently mostly held by Russian troops. After spending time in prison for robbing a bank, he escaped and went to take part in armed combat in the Donetsk region in 2014, Russian newspaper Kommersant reported.

Kommersant said he retired from military service in 2019 and founded his popular Telegram channel, which had more than 500,000 followers at the time of his death. Last September, he told the media at a ceremony in the Kremlin: “We will defeat everyone. We will kill everyone. We will rob everyone as necessary. Just as we like it.” — AFP

Kosovo ex-president denies guilt as war crimes trial starts

THE HAGUE: Former Kosovo president Hashim Thaci led a violent campaign of murder and torture against opponents during the 1998-1999 independence war with Serbia, prosecutors told the start of his war crimes trial on Monday. Thaci and three other leaders of the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) rebel group all pleaded not guilty to crimes against humanity and war crimes as the trial got underway at a special tribunal in The Hague.

Protesters rallied in The Hague to support Thaci, who resigned in 2020 and has been detained by the court ever since, while thousands of demonstrators took to the streets in Pristina on the eve of the trial. Thaci is widely seen as a guerilla hero in Kosovo, but prosecutors said he openly oversaw a brutal reign of violence as the ethnic Albanian KLA tried to tighten their grip on the during and after the war.

“Why did they do it? The evidence will show that it was to gain power,” prosecutor Alex Whiting told the EU-funded Kosovo Specialist Chambers Court. “We intend to prove hundreds of detentions across Kosovo, usually under terrible conditions of abuse, and over 100 murders.”

The Kosovo war, the last of the 1990s conflicts that

tore apart the former Yugoslavia, claimed some 13,000 lives. It ended after a NATO bombing campaign forced Serb forces to withdraw.

Thaci, wearing a blue tie and charcoal grey suit and listening through headphones, confirmed the plea he entered when he first appeared before the court in 2020. “I'm fully not guilty,” the 54-year-old Thaci told the tribunal. His fellow defendants, former KLA spokesman Jakup Krasniqi, Thaci's closest political ally Kadri Veseli and key KLA figure Rexhep Selimi, also denied the charges. Dubbed the “George Washington of Kosovo” by then-US vice president Joe Biden, Thaci was the young nation's first prime minister and president after it declared independence from Serbia in 2008.

But he has long been dogged by allegations of crimes during and after the war, along with accusations of corruption in a country where KLA commanders retain a key role in public life. “These four men were without any doubt the principal leaders of the KLA and they have been celebrated and honoured for it,” Whiting told the court. “But there was a darker side to their leadership.” The KLA leaders had in fact for years had a “clear and explicit policy to target collaborators and perceived traitors, including political opponents.”

Most of the victims were fellow Kosovo Albanians, while Serbs and ethnic Roma were also killed. “In their zeal to target and eliminate those persons they deemed to be opponents the accused... also victimised their own,” said Whiting. The KLA's methods were “not a secret at all” but were publicly endorsed by the group in a “drumbeat that said political opponents posed an existential threat.” — AFP



PRISTINA: Kosovo Albanians wave Albanian flags as they take part in a march in Pristina on April 2, 2023. Thousands of Kosovo Albanians marched on April 2, 2023 protesting against announced opening of the war and crimes against humanity trial of former guerrilla leader and president Hashim Thaci and his three close associates on April 3, 2023 in The Hague. — AFP

Three killed in night of Marseille drug gang violence

MARSEILLE: At least three people were shot dead and another eight were wounded during an overnight flare up in drug gang violence in the crime-plagued French port of Marseille, police said Monday. Three separate shooting incidents have increased fears that tit-for-tat violence between rival gangs is spiralling after a series of fatal shootings over the last month.

Regional police chief Frederique Camilleri told AFP on Monday that a turf war was underway

rooted in the notorious Paternelle housing estate in northern Marseille. “This estate is linked to almost all the killings in Marseille over the last months, with two sides that are fighting over the dealing spots and which have probably entered into a cycle of vendettas,” she said.

Most of the victims were “extremely low” in the networks which control the narcotics trade, she said, with the city serving as an important gateway for drugs such as cocaine and marijuana into Europe. Two young men in their early 20s suffered fatal gunshot wounds overnight, two of them in the Castellans neighbourhood in northern Marseille where around 50 bullet casings were found by police, the local prosecutor's office said.

A 16-year-old boy died just north of the historic centre of the city in the gritty La Joliette district, while another with him is fighting for his life in intensive care, local police said. A 14-year-old was also wounded at the scene.

‘Easy money’

Last year, 32 people were shot dead in gang violence in Marseille, the highest level since 2016, according to the local prosecutor's office. In just three months, 13 have died so far this year, including the latest victims, according to a toll from AFP.

While the southern port city is renowned for its spectacular Mediterranean setting, its northern districts are some of the most deprived urban areas in France. The Paternelle housing estate is composed of a series run-down low-rise buildings where drugs are openly sold and the police are unwelcome.

“The conflict began last summer and accelerated at the end of 2022 for unknown reasons,” Camilleri added. “Each gang has interests in other estates --

Micocouliers, Font Vert, Kalliste -- where there have been other shootings these last few months.” French President Emmanuel Macron unveiled a 1.5-billion-euro (\$1.6-billion) plan to help Marseille tackle crime and deprivation in September 2021, calling such efforts a “duty of the nation”. During a three-day visit to the city, Macron called drug networks “parasites” and said traffickers would now be “harassed” by the authorities.

Rudy Manna, a spokesman for the Alliance police union, said extra officers had been put on the ground in Marseille but local associations and the justice system were needed to solve the underlying problems. “If you put 10,000 police officers, you'll still have drug-dealing,” he told the BFM channel on Monday. “Unfortunately there's easy money raining down on Marseille estates and it's attracting far too many young people.” — AFP

International

Trial over fatal Paris synagogue attack opens after 43 years

Bombing was the first deadly attack against a Jewish target on French soil

PARIS: The trial of a 69-year-old Lebanese-Canadian charged over a fatal 1980 bomb attack outside a Paris synagogue opened on Monday after more than four decades of legal wrangling. Canada-based Hassan Diab, who denies any involvement in the attack which killed four and wounded dozens, told the court during preliminary hearings that he would not show up for the trial, after accusations against him had been dropped in an earlier investigation.

In the early evening of October 3, 1980, explosives placed on a motorcycle detonated close to a synagogue in Rue Copernic in Paris's chic 16th district, killing four people—a student passing by on a motorbike, a driver, an Zionist journalist and a caretaker. Forty-six people were injured in the blast.

The bombing was the first deadly attack against a Jewish target on French soil since World War II. No organisation ever claimed responsibility but police suspected a splinter group of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine. French intelligence in 1999 accused Diab, a sociology professor, of having made the 10-kilogramme (22-pound) bomb.

They pointed to Diab's likeness with police sketches drawn at the time and handwriting analyses that they said confirmed him as a suspect. They also produced a key item of evidence against him—a passport in his name, seized in Rome in 1981, with entry and exit stamps from Spain, where the attack plan was believed to have originated.

In 2014, Canada extradited Diab at the request of the French authorities. However, investigating judges were unable to prove his guilt conclusively during the investigation and Diab was released, leaving France for Canada a free man in 2018.

Three years later, a French court overturned the earlier decision and ordered Diab to stand trial after all, on charges of murder, attempted murder and destruction of property in connection with a terrorist enterprise. French authorities stopped short of issuing a new international arrest warrant for Diab, effectively leaving it up to him to attend his trial or not. He could be sentenced to life in prison in absentia if found guilty.

"This trial has to happen now," said Benjamin Chambré, one of the prosecutors, accusing Diab of "cowardice" for not showing up. But the suspect's celebrity lawyer, William Bourdon, said his client's decision to stay away was "humanly understandable". The French judiciary "falsely gave the impression" that Diab was guilty because the plaintiffs "were demanding a guilty person at any price".

"The case should have been closed when the investigation was dropped," Bourdon said. Diab won some backing from NGOs, including Amnesty International, who said his assertion that he was in Lebanon at the time of the attack was credible. Bernard Cahen, a lawyer for around 100 plaintiffs in the case, said the start of the trial marked "the end of a long ordeal" for his clients. The verdict is expected on April 21. — AFP



PARIS: French lawyer for the French Association of Victims of Terrorism (AFVT) David Pere (L), Corinne Adler (C), a victim who was 13 at the time, and French lawyer for the French Association of Victims of Terrorism (AFVT) Antoine Casubolo Ferro attend the opening of the trial in absentia of the accused of the 1980 bombing of the Copernic street synagogue. — AFP

Three dead as powerful quake strikes PNG

SYDNEY: At least three people were killed after a 7.0-magnitude earthquake shook a remote region of northwestern Papua New Guinea before dawn Monday. The country's National Disaster Centre said dozens of homes were also affected as emergency crews continued to assess the damage across difficult terrain.

The quake struck at a depth of 62 kilometres (38 miles) near the Chambri Lake system in the sparsely populated region of East Sepik Province, the US Geological Survey said. "Chambri lake is boiling and the continuous quake is still happening right now," a member of parliament in the area, Johnson Wapunai, said in a message on social media several hours after the quake struck.

The lawmaker urged people to watch out for falling objects or trees, and to be on alert for further seismic activity. No tsunami warning was issued. Colles Pinga, who lives not far from the epicentre, told Australia's national broadcaster that three homes in his village were destroyed and people have been injured.

"There's landslides along the riverbanks... it's quite frightening," Pinga told the Australian Broadcasting Corporation. The quake also left cracks on the interior floors of a new regional hospital that was nearing completion about 60 kilometres away, and also unlodged the building's paving stones, according to photographs taken by a doctor at the scene.

Loosening of soft ground in the quake zone can cause substantial subsidence and horizontal sliding of the ground and result in major damage, the USGS said. The earthquake shook an area about 100 kilometres east of the border with Indonesia on the island of New Guinea. The remote New Britain region, part of an archipelago in eastern Papua New Guinea, was struck by a magnitude 6.2 earthquake in late February. — AFP

Malaysia ready to negotiate on South China Sea

KUALA LUMPUR: Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim said Monday that Malaysia was prepared to negotiate the South China Sea dispute with Beijing to safeguard the country's energy exploration efforts. China claims sovereignty over almost the entire South China Sea—a strategic waterway through which trillions of dollars in trade pass annually—

UN experts name S Sudan officials for rights abuses

NAIROBI: A panel of UN rights experts on Monday named several high-ranking South Sudanese officials they say warrant criminal investigation and prosecution for their part in grave atrocities against civilians.

Top government and military leaders were identified in a new report by the UN Commission on Human Rights in South Sudan that details state responsibility for widespread murder, rape and sexual slavery. The commission, which conducted a year-long investigation across six states in South Sudan, and released a partial summary of its findings in March, said none of those named in the final report had faced any accountability for their crimes.

"Over several years, our findings have consis-

despite an international court ruling that Beijing's assertion has no legal basis.

The Philippines, Vietnam, Malaysia and Brunei all have overlapping claims in the sea, while the United States sends naval vessels through it to assert freedom of navigation in international waters. Anwar—who was on a visit to Beijing recently—said the "sensitive" issue was raised at a meeting with Chinese President Xi Jinping as Malaysia's state energy firm Petronas has its largest oil platform in the disputed area, as well as several exploration projects.

"I said, as a small country we need the resources, (like) oil and gas, we have to continue (exploration projects)," Anwar said during a monthly speech to staff at the Prime Minister's Office. "But if the con-

dition is that there must be negotiations, then we are ready to negotiate."

The premier did not provide further details on the conversation with Xi. While asserting their claims in the South China Sea, Chinese authorities in recent years have ramped up its development of artificial islands, including outfitting some with military facilities and runways.

Regional nations have also accused Chinese vessels of harassing their fishing boats. In 2021, Malaysia summoned Beijing's envoy to the Southeast Asian country in protest after Chinese vessels entered its maritime economic zone in the disputed sea.

Earlier that year, it scrambled fighter jets to intercept 16 Chinese military aircraft that appeared off Borneo over the South China Sea. — AFP

tently shown that impunity for serious crimes is a central driver of violence and misery faced by civilians in South Sudan," commission chair Yasmin Sooka said. "So we have taken the step of naming more of the individuals who warrant criminal investigation and prosecution for their role in gross human rights violations."

The report identifies Joseph Monytil, governor of Unity State, and Lieutenant General Thoi Chany Reat of the South Sudan People's Defence Forces, in relation to state-sanctioned killings in Mayom County in August 2022.

Four captured rebel officers were summarily executed by government troops in killings that were captured on video and shared widely. Three were killed by firing squad and a fourth was burned alive in a hut.

The report also names Gordon Koang, the county commissioner of Koch, who was accused of leading horrific attacks on civilians in neighbouring Leer County between February and April 2022. Other top-ranking officials in Warrap, Upper

providing shades for humans and animals alike.

Planting trees is a beneficial act, one that benefits many levels of the ecosystem and helps to preserve and care for the environment. The Prophet (PBUH) encouraged the cultivation of trees. Anas bin Malik (RA) narrated that Allah's Messenger (PBUH) said what can be translated as: "There is none among the Muslims who plants a tree or sows seeds, and then a bird, or a person or an animal eats from them, except that he will be rewarded for it as charity." (Al-Bukhari # 2, 320 and Muslim # 1, 553)

Through the above quoted hadeeth (prophetic narration), it is clear that every good work and beneficial deed done sincerely by any individual will result in abundant rewards from Allah (swt). Such are examples of impactful activities. It may only be seen by the naked eye as one act of planting a tree or a flower, but in return, it brings benefits to many creatures in the long run.

The act of planting trees as mentioned by the Prophet (PBUH) is regarded as a charity. Anas bin Malik (RA) narrated that Allah's Messenger (PBUH) said what can be translated as: "Even if the Day of Judgement comes upon one of you while he has in his hand a seedling, then let him (go ahead and) plant it." (Al-Albani said that its chain of narrators is saheeh (authentic) based on the conditions of Imam Muslim in rating as authentic prophetic narrations; see As-Silsila As-Saheeha # 9 and Al-Adab Al-Mufrad # 371)

In another narration, Sa'd bin Abi Waqqas (RA) related that Allah's Messenger (PBUH) said what can be translated as: "I have declared sacred the territory between the two lava plains (areas full of black or burnt rocks) of Medina, so its thorny trees and shrubs should not be cut down, or its game killed." And he also said, "Medina is best for them if they knew. No one leaves it through dislike of it without Allah putting in it someone better than him in place of him; and no one will stay there in spite of its hardships and distress without me being an intercessor or witness on behalf of him on the Day of Resurrection." (Muslim # 1, 361) —Courtesy of the TIES Center

Nile, Jonglei and the Equatoria states were identified as warranting further scrutiny or investigation for their role in various abuses.

"The Commission found that while the Government of South Sudan has announced special investigation committees into several situations, not one has led to any form of accountability," the panel said in a statement.

"Government and military personnel implicated in these serious crimes remain in office." The government has accused the commission of interfering in its national affairs and rejected past findings from the three-member panel.

South Sudan achieved independence from Sudan in 2011 but collapsed into a civil war two years later that devastated the world's newest country. Close to 400,000 people died before a peace deal was signed in 2018 but core tenets of the agreement remain unfulfilled, and the country is riven by armed violence. A promised tribunal led by the African Union to prosecute offenders and deliver justice for victims of war crimes has never eventuated. — AFP

MoI supermarkets denying entry to...

Continued from Page 1

"This decision is against the laws of consumer protection and the ministry of commerce and industry and human rights. Let's assume that their claims that the co-ops are crowded is true. This is an administrative matter and must be organized administratively and not by random decisions, especially by preventing a consumer from buying their needs in the month of Ramadan," he said. Mane revealed he has informed the undersecretary of the ministry of commerce about the incidents faced by expats and

informed him about Consumer Protection Association's objection to such behavior.

Citizen Ali Wahabi expressed his anger at the decision that prevents expatriates from entering cooperative societies, pointing out it violates the constitution and is discriminatory. "Kuwait is a humanitarian country. It has sufficient stocks, so there is no reason to prevent expatriates from entering. This decision must be canceled immediately, because it has negative repercussions at the local and global levels," he said.

Nada Maged, an expat who used to buy from the Police Co-Op in Zahra, said: "This started three days before Ramadan, when the Police Co-op denied entry to expats. They checked the IDs and prevented anyone from entering except Kuwaitis and interior ministry personnel."

prices back to pre-banking-crisis levels." The news sparked bumper gains for European energy companies and lifted London and Paris stock markets, although Frankfurt dipped. Shares in Britain's BP and France's TotalEnergies were up more than five percent in afternoon deals, while Shell rose 4.7 percent. Oil giants enjoyed record profits last year as crude prices soared. However, the weekend development also fanned concerns over a fresh spike in consumer prices that could put pressure on central banks to push interest rates even higher — and dent the global economy.

Central banks have been hiking rates in efforts to tame high inflation. "There's real concern that the surprise decision... will prompt central banks to maintain interest rates higher for longer, due to the inflationary impact, which will hinder economic growth," said Nigel Green, head of financial consultancy deVere Group. Global equities had been buoyed Friday after data highlighted easing inflation in the eurozone and the United States.

Green said the oil price rises "can be expected to increase the cost of production and transportation, reduce consumers' purchasing power, disrupt supply chains, and lead to higher inflation expectations." Crude prices have come down over the past year as concerns about a possible recession caused by higher borrowing costs have offset supply worries sparked by sanctions on Russia over its war on Ukraine. — AFP

Environmental care in Islam-I...

Continued from Page 1

Based on the above hadeeth, one of the many lessons we can extract is that Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) showed much care and concern towards the environment and aimed at caring and protecting it wholeheartedly. Following are four things – among others – that Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) taught us about the environment.

1. Practice sustainable consumption whenever possible: Surely most of us have heard of the 3Rs: Reduce, Reuse, Recycle. Through this framework, we are reminded to use only what we need, re-use things for the same or new purpose and convert waste into useful products. Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) himself practiced these sustainable approaches during his lifetime. There are several narrations that the Prophet (PBUH) was seen to repair his shoes instead of discarding them. Aisha (RA) narrated, "Allah's Messenger (PBUH) used to mend his sandals, stitch his garments, and he would do what one of you would do in his house." (Al-Albani rated it as Saheeh (authentic) in Hida'yat Ar-Ruwat # 5, 759)

As seen from the above prophetic narration, it proves that even the noblest person on earth was mindful in his affairs and those around him. The daily items used were fixed and mended regularly. This does not necessarily mean that we have to use the same things until they wear out, but ought to work towards sustainability. We have to be conscious of the things we use, buy, sell, create, and consume. It is important for us to look at ways to get durable products and inventions, ones that prevent wear and tear for over a period.

2. Plant trees as a means of good deeds: Trees and plants, in general, are seen and appreciated in many areas of a country and also across many parts of the world. Trees are known to improve the quality of air and water by absorbing pollutants, releasing oxygen, and reducing ozone levels. They also help in reducing the atmospheric temperature by transpiring and

International

Philippine lawmaker accused of organising governor's murder

Police have arrested 11 people over the audacious attack

MANILA: A Philippine lawmaker has been accused of organising the murder of a provincial governor last month, officials said Monday, after an investigation into one of the country's deadliest political attacks in years. Gunmen wearing military-style uniforms shot and killed Roel Degamo, governor of the central province of Negros Oriental, and eight others in Degamo's home.

Police have arrested 11 people over the audacious attack in the sugarcane-growing heartland of the Philippines. A twelfth suspect was killed in a shoot-out. Arnolfo Teves, who represents a Negros Oriental district in the national Congress, was alleged to be the mastermind of the shooting, Justice Secretary Crispin Remulla told reporters.

Teves, who is overseas, has denied involvement in Degamo's murder. The congressman's brother, Henry Teves, was unseated as governor of Negros Oriental after the election commission declared in September that Degamo was the rightful winner of the 2022 election following a vote count.

The Supreme Court upheld the decision in February. Arnolfo Teves' longtime bodyguard Marvin Miranda allegedly recruited the shooters, Remulla said, likening the crime to a movie. "Marvin was the director, producer of the props and casting director. He recruited the men," he said. "Congressman Teves was the producer or executive producer of the whole production."

Arnolfo Teves could face charges for murder and illegal possession of firearms once a preliminary investigation wrapped up, Remulla said. He has been suspended from the House of Representatives for 60 days after failing to return home and report for work after his authority to travel abroad expired.

His lawyer, Ferdinand Topacio, accused the justice department and the police of subjecting suspects in the case to "improper pressure and influence" to make them testify against his client. "These acts evince not just the weakness of the government's case, but an illegal scheme to manipulate the evidence to unfoundedly incriminate a person," Topacio said in a message sent to AFP. Degamo campaigned for President Ferdinand Marcos when he ran for the nation's top job last year. Marcos has condemned the "dastardly and heinous" assassination of his political ally and has sent his top officials, including police and military chiefs, to investigate.

The Philippines has a long history of attacks on politicians. In the bloodiest politically motivated ambush on record, the leaders of a powerful southern clan and about two dozen followers were sentenced to life in prison for a 2009 attack on supporters of a gubernatorial election rival in Maguindanao province. Fifty-eight people were killed in the attack, including the politician's wife and relatives, along with 32 journalists and media workers who were covering the race. — AFP



SIATON: File photo shows supporters attending the funeral procession of Roel Degamo, governor of Negros Oriental province, in Siaton, Negros Oriental. Three people have been arrested over the murder of a Philippine provincial governor and eight others. — AFP

Headmistress guilty of sexual abuse at Australian school

MELBOURNE: A former headmistress was found guilty on Monday of sexually assaulting two sisters at an ultra-orthodox Jewish school in Australia, 15 years after she escaped arrest by fleeing to Zionist entity. Malka Leifer was guilty on 18 charges, the jury said, including raping a student during a sleep-over and sexually assaulting another teenage pupil during a school camp.

She was cleared of a further nine charges. Leifer was the principal of the Adass Zionist School in Melbourne when she was first accused of sexual assault in 2008. A dual Zionist-Australian citizen, Leifer fled to Zionist entity before she could be arrested, sparking a drawn-out court battle spanning more than 70 extradition hearings.

The fugitive mother-of-eight was fi-

nally flown back to Australia in 2021 and was put on trial in February this year. Prosecutors alleged during the trial that Leifer sexually assaulted three sisters who were studying at the Adass Zionist School, which is part of a reclusive Jewish sect on the city's outskirts.

After a seven-week trial, and seven days of deliberations, the jury convicted Leifer of sexually assaulting two of the sisters. Leifer, who has maintained her innocence throughout, sat with her hands folded and stared straight ahead as the verdicts were read.

Abuse of power

Leifer's abuse "held us hostage for many years", said one of the sisters, Dassi Erlich. "Today we can start to take that power back that she stole from us as children," she told reporters outside the court. Another sister, Elly Sapper, said justice had been served. "She abused the three of us for so many years and while today's verdict may not properly reflect that, today Malka Leifer was finally found accountable," Elly Sapper said.

The court heard how Leifer had abused her high standing within the Adass community to prey on the sisters. According to an

indictment, Leifer raped one student in 2006 after inviting her home to "sleep over for kallah lessons"—a kind of pre-wedding etiquette class that includes sexual education.

On other occasions Leifer told the students she was preparing them to be wives, prosecutor Justin Lewis told the court in his opening statement. "This will help you for your wedding night," Leifer said after one sexual assault, according to Lewis. "This is what is good for you," she allegedly said during another incident. Leifer fled Australia in 2008 after one of the students confided in her therapist about the sexual assaults. She eventually settled in the ultra-orthodox Emmanuel settlement in the occupied West Bank.

Secretly filmed

Australian police filed charges against Leifer in 2012 and requested her extradition from Zionist entity two years later, sparking a lengthy legal saga. Leifer claimed that crippling depression had left her catatonic and that she was mentally incapable of standing trial. The extradition process was suspended—until a private investigator secretly filmed Leifer going about her daily chores,



MELBOURNE: Sisters Elly Sapper (L), Nicole Meyer (C) and Dassi Erlich (R) speak to the media outside the County Court in Melbourne on April 3, 2023 after the trial of former school principal Malka Leifer. — AFP

apparently unaffected by the mental illnesses she had claimed.

She was eventually extradited to Melbourne in 2021. Defence lawyer Ian Hill previously said Leifer denied "all of

the criminal conduct alleged by each of the complainants" and that her interactions with the students were "professional and proper". "We deny that they are telling the truth," he said.—AFP

Malaysia MPs vote to axe mandatory death penalty

KUALA LUMPUR: Malaysia's parliament passed a bill Monday to remove mandatory death sentences, with rights groups welcoming the vote as an "important step" that could have a knock-on effect elsewhere in Southeast Asia.

Convictions for several offences, including murder and drug trafficking, previously came with automatic death penalties, giving judges no leeway. The bill does not scrap death sentences, but grants judges the option to instead impose lengthy prison sentences of between 30 to 40 years under certain conditions. Speaking before the lower house of Malaysia's parliament, Deputy Law Minister Ramkarpal Singh said: "We cannot arbitrarily ignore the existence of the inherent right to life of every individual." Malaysia has had a moratorium on executions since 2018, but courts have continued to send inmates to death row.

The reform will still have to clear the senate, but is widely expected to pass without major opposition. Human Rights Watch deputy Asia director Phil Robertson called Monday's vote an "important step forward for Malaysia", and hopes it will add pressure for other Southeast Asian nations to follow suit.

"This is an important breakthrough that will cause some serious conversations in the halls of upcoming ASEAN meetings," he told AFP, referring to the 10-member Southeast Asian bloc. "Malaysia should show regional leadership by encouraging other governments in ASEAN to re-think their continued use of the death penalty, starting with Singapore which has recently gone on a post-COVID execution spree." — AFP

Taiwan president makes tour stop in Belize

BELIZE CITY: Taiwanese President Tsai Ing-wen arrived in Belize on Sunday for the last stop of a Central America tour to shore up relations a week after Honduras became the latest country to switch ties to Beijing. Tsai was greeted with military honors and a red carpet welcome as she arrived in Belize City from neighboring Guatemala, which she said Taiwan would "continue assisting." Guatemala vowed in turn to maintain "recognition of the sovereignty" of Taiwan.

Tsai was to meet in the evening with people of Taiwanese origin before conferring on Monday with Prime Minister John Briceno, state television reported. The two are expected to reaffirm bilateral ties in the wake of Honduras cutting off diplomatic relations with Taiwan in late March to recognize China instead.

That reduced the number of countries maintaining diplomatic ties with Taipei to 13, including Guatemala and Belize. China considers self-ruled, democratic Taiwan part of its territory to be retaken one day, and does not allow other countries to recognize both

Beijing and Taipei. Taiwan said that before Honduras decided to cut ties, it had asked for money, but Taipei would "not engage in a meaningless cash diplomacy contest with China."

On Sunday in Guatemala, Tsai said her country would "continue assisting the substantial and prolonged development of its diplomatic allies," as she visited a hospital built with a donation of \$22 million from Taipei.

"We will not stop working with the world's democratic partners," she said. Tsai was accompanied by her Guatemalan counterpart Alejandro Giammattei, who vowed his country would maintain "recognition of the sovereignty of the Republic of China, Taiwan."

He also spoke out against "tensions generated by mainland China in the Taiwan Strait, which sow anxiety and snatch happiness and peace from the citizens of the Republic of China, Taiwan." Tensions in the Taiwan Strait soared to their highest level in years in August 2022 after then-US House speaker Nancy Pelosi visited Taipei, with Beijing staging days of air and sea exercises around the island. "May God bless the Republic of Taiwan and its yearning for peace, longing for freedom and the right to the full exercise of sovereignty. Long live the Republic of China!" the Guatemalan president exclaimed.



BELIZE CITY: Handout picture shows shows Governor-General of Belize Dame Froyla Tzalam (R) chatting with Taiwan's President Tsai Ing-wen (L) during her arrival to the Philip S.W. Goldson International Airport in Belize City. — AFP

Tsai stopped in New York on her way to Guatemala, and has announced plans to meet current US House Speaker Kevin McCarthy in California on her way home, angering Beijing. Washington has said there is no reason for China to "overreact" to the "normal, uneventful" trip, but Beijing warned the United States was "playing with fire."

The United States has no formal diplomatic ties with Taiwan, but maintains "a robust unofficial relationship," according to the State Department. It is Taiwan's most significant ally and

largest weapons supplier. Latin America has been a key diplomatic battleground since Taiwan and China separated in 1949, following a civil war in which the communists seized power on the mainland while the nationalists retreated to Taiwan.

Nicaragua shifted its allegiance to Beijing in 2021, as did El Salvador in 2018, Panama in 2017 and Costa Rica in 2007. Other than Guatemala and Belize, Taiwan retains diplomatic ties with Paraguay, Haiti, the Holy See, Eswatini and seven small Caribbean and Pacific nations. — AFP

Philippines announces four military bases US troops can use

MANILA: The Philippines announced Monday the location of four additional military bases to be used by US troops, with one site near the hotly disputed South China Sea and another not far from Taiwan. The longtime treaty allies agreed in February to expand cooperation in "strategic areas" of the Philippines as they seek to counter China's growing assertiveness over self-governed Taiwan and the building of Chinese bases in the South China Sea.

The 2014 Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement, known as EDCA, gave US forces access to five Philippine bases. It was expanded to nine, but the locations of the four additional bases were withheld until Monday while the government consulted with local officials.

The four sites had been assessed by the

Philippine military and deemed "suitable and mutually beneficial", the Presidential Communications Office said in a statement. It said the bases would also be used for humanitarian and relief operations during disasters.

A US official confirmed that the locations announced by the palace were the new EDCA sites. Three of the sites are in the northern Philippines, including a naval base and airport in Cagayan province and an army camp in the neighbouring province of Isabela, the Philippine statement said.

The naval base at Cagayan's Santa Ana is about 400 kilometres (250 miles) from Taiwan. Another site will be an air base on Palau Island, off the southern tip of Palawan Island, near the South China Sea.

Cagayan Governor Manuel Mamba has publicly opposed having EDCA sites in his province for fear of jeopardising Chinese investment and becoming a target in a conflict over Taiwan. But Philippine acting defence chief Carlito Galvez told reporters recently the government had already decided on the sites and that Mamba had agreed to "abide with the decision". The agreement allows US troops to rotate

through the bases and also store defence equipment and supplies at them.

The pact stalled under former president Rodrigo Duterte, who favoured China over the Philippines' former colonial master. But President Ferdinand Marcos, who succeeded Duterte in June, has adopted a more US-friendly foreign policy and has sought to accelerate the implementation of the EDCA. Marcos has insisted he will not let Beijing trample on Manila's maritime rights. While the Philippine military is one of the weakest in Asia, the country's proximity to Taiwan and its surrounding waters would make it a key partner for the United States in the event of a conflict with China.

Beijing has been critical of the agreement, which its embassy in the Philippines said recently was part of "US efforts to encircle and contain China through its military alliance with this country". The Chinese embassy did not respond immediately to a request for comment.

The United States has a long and complex history with the Philippines. They share a decades-old mutual defence treaty, but the presence of US troops in the



FORT MAGSAYSAY, Philippines: This photo taken on March 31, 2023 shows US army soldiers demonstrating to their Philippine counterparts the operation of a high mobility rocket system (HIMARS) prior to a live fire exercise. — AFP

Southeast Asian country remains a sensitive issue. The United States had two major military bases in the Philippines but they were closed in the early 1990s after grow-

ing nationalist sentiment. US troops return to the Philippines every year for joint military exercises, including Balikatan, which kicks off next week. — AFP

Business

TUESDAY, APRIL 4, 2023

Revival of 'NOPEC' bill poses new risks to oil market, says OAPEC

Bill an attempt to put pressure on OPEC+ to roll back output decision

KUWAIT: The Organization of Arab Petroleum Exporting Countries (OAPEC) said the revival of 'NOPEC' anti-OPEC bill is an attempt to pressure OPEC+ to make it change its decision to reduce its total production. Some members of the US Senate on March 8, 2023 put forward the 'NOPEC' bill, the long-standing legislation that would allow the US to take the dramatic step of suing OPEC nations.

In a statement OAPEC said on Monday that the supporters of the bill claim that OPEC seeks to set global oil prices, which leads to higher prices for consumers around the world.

The supporters of the draft law did not notice that, if approved, it would lead to a significant inability of supplies to meet future demand in the global oil market, especially in light of the presence of a number of factors, the first of which is the limited surplus production capacity resulting from the lack of investment in the oil sector, which in turn has been exacerbated because of attempts to dispense with fossil fuels.

The second is the decline in strategic stocks to critically low levels due to their use by IEA member states over the past year as a tool to influence oil market balances in the aftermath of the Russian-Ukrainian crisis, which has proven ineffective over time, the statement added.

The last of which is the repercussions of the Russian-Ukrainian crisis on crude oil production in Russia, which recently decided to reduce its production by 500,000 b/d during March 2023 in response to the embargo imposed on its oil exports.

OAPEC quoted Abdulaziz bin Salman, Minister of Energy of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, who said in a press interview with Energy Intelligence that "these policies add new risks and greater ambiguity to the oil market, at a time when there is a great need for clarity and stability, as it will inevitably lead to an exacerbation of market instability and fluctuations,



OAPEC
Organization of
Arab Petroleum
Exporting Countries

and this will negatively affect the petroleum industry. He reaffirmed that "the OPEC + group has done its best and succeeded in achieving stability and high transparency in the oil market, especially compared to all other commodity markets."

It is worth noting that this is not the first time that the use of the "NOPEC" law has been hinted at, and previous versions of the bill have failed, the latest of which was its approval by the Judiciary Committee in the US Senate on May 5, 2022, but it was not approved by both houses. Senators and representatives, and it did not reach the stage of being endorsed by the American President.

The bill faces significant opposition from players in the global oil industry, including the American Petroleum Institute, which indicated that this law would lead to more production than market needs, which could lower prices to the point that American energy companies find it difficult to promote production, and threatens US energy security.

In the context of responding to the attempt to revive the "NOPEC" bill and the G7 countries to put a ceiling on the price of Russian oil, Prince He also explained that "the NOPEC draft law does not take into account the importance of possessing a reserve of productive capacity and the consequences of not owning this reserve on the oil market.

"We would like to emphasize here that the OPEC countries have not set oil prices at all since the be-



ginning of the eighties of the last century, and all that they mainly aim at is to ensure the stability and balance of the global oil market, through cooperation and coordination with some of the major oil-producing countries from outside within the "OPEC + group," the statement said.

This is what it has already succeeded in achieving over the past years, during which the global oil market was subjected to severe shocks, the latest of which was the coronavirus pandemic and the Russian-Ukrainian crisis. We also stress that the "OPEC + group, which includes six of the OAPEC member states, has shown its willingness and ability to act in a proactive manner to support the fundamentals of the

global oil market when facing any developments and uncertain challenges that the oil market may face.

The most recent of which was the step taken by a number of member states of the OPEC + group in a coordinated manner, represented in voluntary reduction of oil production by about 1.649 million b/d in addition to the agreed reduction by 2 million b/d according to the decision taken in October 2022, which is a precautionary measure. In order to ensure the stability and balance of the oil market, the decision to voluntarily cut OPEC + countries had a major role in the rise in crude oil prices in the futures markets by about 8 percent, which is the largest rise in one day in more than a year.



KUWAIT: Kuwait Capital Markets Authority unveils the strategic plan for 2023 to 2027.

CMA seeks to qualify as developed market on FTSE Russell index

KUWAIT: Kuwait's Capital Markets Authority (CMA) implemented a new automated system for reports of electronic trading accounts through its electronic portal to improve supervisory work and facilitate daily reports. Over the next four years, the authority plans to build the capital market system to qualify as a developed emerging market on the Financial Times Stock Exchange Russell index, said Ahmed Al-Mulhim, chief commissioner of Kuwait CMA during a meeting.

The new system further aims to gather data from electronic trading service providers and report it to the authority through electronic trading accounts and daily income recording reports. Also during the meeting, CMA unveiled its strategic plan (2023-2026/2024-2027) in response to the requirements of the next phase of development, keeping pace with local and international changes. This was in accordance with the state's directives of Kuwait Vision 2035.

On March 30, 2022, the Authority began work on

preparing its third strategy by holding a workshop in the presence of the Executive Director and forming a specialized team to implement many of the main tasks and outputs within the scope of the work on preparing the Authority's third strategy.

In August 2022, Kuwait's CMA became a member of the Global Financial Innovation Network (GFIN), an international network that seeks to support financial innovation for the benefit of consumers, acts as a regulatory tool, and focuses on emerging technology. The Network acts as a monitoring tool and focuses on emerging technology. It also aims to support financial innovation and establish a framework for cooperation between regulatory agencies and relevant institutions that support innovation to exchange experiences and innovation methodologies.

The new system also aims to gather data from electronic trading service providers and report it to the authority through electronic trading accounts and daily income recording reports. In December last year, the stock exchanges in both Kuwait and Saudi Arabia signed a deal that will see both entities extending their cooperation in areas of mutual interest in a move to bolster the growth of capital markets. The deal between Boursa Kuwait and Tadawul Group, the owner of the Kingdom's main stock, was for developing financial technology and products as well as environmental, social, and governance reporting and implementation. — Agencies

and will remain closed from December 1 to March 31 due to extreme weather conditions and high altitude. The closure of the border for three years caused financial issues for the local business community and left many workers jobless. Prime Minister of Pakistan Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif has expressed his pleasure over the reopening of the Khunjerab Pass, saying it would help increase bilateral trade between Pakistan and China.

In a statement, Shehbaz said that the reopening of the pass removes a hurdle that would further expedite the pace of work on the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). He termed the occasion a welcome one for boosting trade with China and expressed his resolve to move ahead on CPEC with dual speed. The premier also appreciated the relevant authorities of the two countries and team members over the restoration of trade and travel facilities. — KUNA

Pakistan, China reopen trade route after 3-year gap

ISLAMABAD: The major trade route between China and Pakistan, Khunjerab Pass, was reopened on Monday after three years as the COVID-19 restrictions came to ease. The Khunjerab Pass connects Pakistan's northern Gilgit Baltistan region to China's Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous region and is being used for trade purposes between the two countries.

The high altitude trade route between the two neighboring countries was closed in 2020 following the COVID-19 pandemic. The trade route will be open from April 1 to November 30 every year,

Turkey's inflation slows to 50% ahead of election

ISTANBUL: Turkey's annual inflation rate slowed to 50 percent in March, official data showed on Monday, delivering another boost for President Recep Tayyip Erdogan ahead May elections. The inflation rate slowed for a fifth consecutive month from a high of more than 85 percent, according to the state statistics agency.

The official rate stood at 50.5 last month, down from 55.2 percent in February. The slowdown was led by a drop in the cost Turkey's energy imports, the figures showed. But analysts warn that consumer price increase may start speeding up again unless Turkey radically alters its economic policies.

New York Times loses Twitter verification on main account

WASHINGTON: Twitter has removed the gold "verified" marker from the New York Times' main account, as CEO Elon Musk bashed the news organization as "propaganda" on Sunday and the platform transitioned to a paid verification scheme. Musk took over the microblogging platform last year and made a priority of opening the "blue checkmark," indicating an authentic account, to paying subscribers. The site announced it would start winding down "legacy" blue checkmarks from April 1.

The New York Times was among news media companies, firms and charities that had already lost their blue tick and were tagged as verified business accounts with a gold tick under Musk's new system.

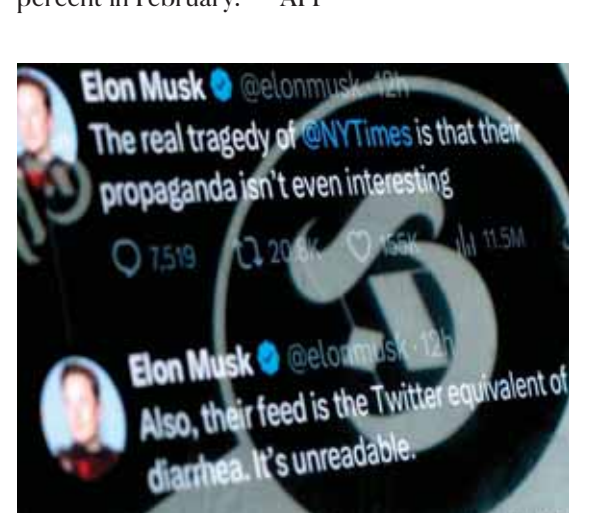
To retain the gold tick after the rollout of the subscription service dubbed Twitter Blue, these groups would have to pay a monthly fee of \$1,000 in the United States, and \$50 for each additional affiliated account. The New York Times said it would not pay for a verified business account and would subscribe for a blue tick only for journalists finding it essential for their reporting needs.

As of Sunday, the organization's main account, with nearly 55 million followers, had lost its gold checkmark, though affiliate accounts, such as for its travel and opinion sections, retained the ticks. Many media groups and personalities who also announced they would not pay for Twitter Blue, including basketball star LeBron James, have retained blue or gold checkmarks on their accounts.

In the early hours of Sunday, Musk targeted the New York Times in several tweets, saying, "The real tragedy of @NYTimes is that their propaganda isn't even interesting" and calling its main feed the "equivalent of diarrhea" and "unreadable." According to Travis Brown, a Ber-

lin-based software developer who tracks social-media platforms, only a few dozen accounts have so far been unverified, suspended or had profile elements removed since Saturday.

He said there had been a recent jump in the number of accounts that had made the switch from legacy to the new system—some 60,000 in the past week—but that they were "mostly small accounts, and very few had legacy verification." Since its creation in 2009, the blue tick became a signature element that helped the platform become a trusted forum for newsmakers and campaigners.



WASHINGTON: In this photo illustration created on April 2, 2023, the profile image of The New York Times Twitter account is reflected in tweets by Twitter CEO Elon Musk, in Washington, DC. — AFP

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But Musk and his fans said the decision of who got the coveted checkmark was made by fiat in a secretive procedure, and they called it a symbol of an unfair class system. The changes under Musk put pressure on companies, journalists and celebrities who used Twitter as their main channel of communication and relied on the blue and gold ticks for credibility. They also raise the specter of imposters and jokesters paying for an officially verified, but totally fake account. — AFP

Business

Russia: Oil production cuts ‘in interests’ of energy markets

OPEC+ cartel cuts to top one million bpd

MOSCOW: The Kremlin said Monday oil output cuts by Russia, Saudi Arabia and other major producers that have caused prices to soar are “in the interests” of global markets. The surprise move on Sunday came as oil prices have cooled in recent months after soaring last year following the start of the conflict in Ukraine.

“It is in the interests of global energy markets for world oil prices to remain at a good level,” Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters. “Whether other countries are happy with this or not is their business,” he added. The decision could anger the United States, which had already criticized the OPEC+ oil cartel, led by Saudi Arabia and Russia, over a previous cut in production last year. Cuts by Saudi Arabia, Iraq, the UAE, Kuwait, Algeria and Oman from May to the end of the year will top one million barrels per day—the biggest reduction since the OPEC+ cartel slashed two million barrels per day in October.

Russia said it would extend until the end of the year its own voluntary pro-

duction cut of 500,000 barrels per day, a measure seen by experts as a way of making prices go up and counteracting the effect of international sanctions.

Russia’s deputy prime minister in charge of energy, Alexander Novak, said the measure was justified by the “high volatility” and “uncertainty” on the oil market. “The predictability of the global oil market is a key element to ensure energy security,” he said in a statement.

The reductions, on top of a Russian decision to extend a cut of 500,000 barrels per day, and despite US calls to increase production, risk stoking inflation and pressure to raise interest rates. Russia, a leading member of the OPEC+ cartel, said it was also extending an existing cut of 500,000 bpd to the end of this year, describing it as “a responsible and preventive action”.

Oil prices soared almost six percent in Asian trade on Monday morning with West Texas Intermediate jumping by 5.74 percent to \$80.01 a barrel and Brent climbing 5.67 percent to \$84.42.

A Saudi energy ministry official “em-

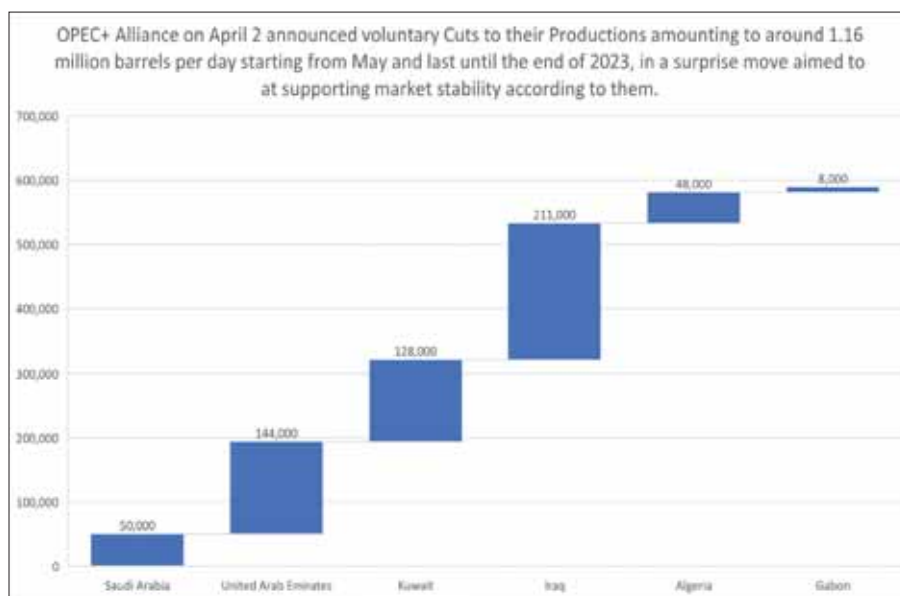
phasized that this is a precautionary measure aimed at supporting the stability of the oil market”, the official Saudi Press Agency said. The cuts follow a drop in oil prices triggered by jitters over the banking sector, following the collapse of US lender SVB and UBS’s hurried buy-out of troubled rival Credit Suisse, UAE-based oil expert Ibrahim Al-Ghitani told AFP.

Brent crude oil prices, trading just below \$80 a barrel late last week, should bounce to above \$80 as a result of the reductions, he said, calling prices below \$80 “unacceptable” for OPEC+.

“The producing countries adhere to a balancing level that supports their large financial budget this year, and their next economic plans,” Al-Ghitani said.

The reductions follow a controversial decision in October by OPEC and its allies including Russia—collectively known as OPEC+ -- to slash production by two million barrels per day.

That cut, the biggest since the height of the COVID pandemic in 2020, also came despite concerns it would fuel further inflation and push central banks to



hike interest rates. OPEC raised its 2023 world oil demand forecast in February, saying it expected demand to grow by 2.3 million barrels per day to an average of 101.87 million barrels per day this year.

But “initial expectations of higher demand in the second half are now challenged by the prospects of continued high inflation and recessionary pressures”, said Gulf analyst Yesar Al-Maleki. —AFP

Gulf Bank alleviates debt distress during the holy month

KUWAIT: As part of its continuous efforts to consolidate the principles of social sustainability, and as part of its various charitable initiatives during the holy month of Ramadan, Gulf Bank announced its participation in the “Charity Begins at Home” campaign for the second consecutive year, organized by the local organization, Altakaful. The campaign aims to alleviate debt distress from debtors who are defaulted on their debts due to their economic circumstances.

On this occasion, the Assistant Manager of Corporate Communications at Gulf Bank, Fahad Al-Sharrah said, “We are keen to consolidate Gulf Bank’s leadership in social sustainability, as we strive

to achieve sustainability across all levels – socially, environmentally and economically – through a variety of programs that reflect the Bank’s strategy and align with Kuwait’s humanitarian goals.”

Al-Sharrah mentioned that helping debtors reduces the distress of many families, especially those without breadwinners or children. The campaign is particularly noteworthy during Ramadan, as it is a month that exemplifies spiritual and human values. Gulf Bank was keen to support and relieve the distress of these families, and to help reunify debtors with their families and society, in addition to preserving the cohesion of the family unit.

Al-Sharrah added that this initiative is part of the various charitable initiatives launched by Gulf Bank during Ramadan to support the needy and their families, who face difficult circumstances. Other initiatives include distributing Ramadan food baskets “Majlat Ramadan” to needy families, in addition to other ongoing charitable initiatives throughout the month.

He indicated that for more than 60 years, Gulf

Bank has been an integral part of Kuwait’s economic and social history. Gulf Bank has always been keen to participate in community events, seizing every opportunity to support the needy in society, knowing full well the impact that these efforts have on local families. Al-Sharrah also stated that Gulf Bank continues its strong commitment to sustainability programs – at community, economic and environmental levels – through many initiatives that are strategically selected to benefit the Bank and society. This falls in line with the Bank’s 2025 strategy, and with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals and Kuwait Vision 2035.

Gulf Bank’s vision is to be the leading Kuwaiti Bank of the Future. The Bank is constantly engaging and empowering its employees as part of an inclusive and diversified workplace in recognition of every employee’s role in delivering customer excellence and serving the community at large. With its extensive network of branches and innovative digital services, Gulf Bank is able to give its customers the choice of how and where to conduct their banking



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



شركة الصفاء للاستثمار
AL SAFAT INVESTMENT COMPANY

KUWAIT BOURSA WEEKLY REPORT

WEEK ENDED ON 30 MARCH 2023

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Market	M. Cap (KD ml)	Last Close	WTD %	MTD %	YTD %	Quantity Traded	Value Traded	No. of Trades	P/E	P/B	% of Total M. Cap
Premier Market	33,686	7,821.74	0.1%	-3.1%	-1.6%	355,237,487	152,094,403	28,323	16.6	1.1	78.7%
Main Market	9,136	5,500.78	-0.5%	-0.9%	-1.2%	116,547,561	15,607,327	7,533	12.8	0.7	21.3%
All Share	42,821	7,050.76	0.0%	-2.7%	-1.6%	471,785,048	167,701,731	35,856	13.5	0.8	100%

Sector	M. Cap (KD ml)	Last Close	WTD %	MTD %	YTD %	Quantity Traded	Value Traded	No. of Trades	P/E	P/B	% of Total M. Cap
Banking	26,196	1,752.85	0.1%	-3.2%	-0.5%	169,174,724	101,163,063	14,030	22.8	1.3	61.18%
Basic Materials	484	857.16	2.7%	1.5%	0.1%	2,513,251	1,667,708	719	7.9	1.3	1.13%
Consumer Discretionary	980	1,461.98	-0.2%	0.4%	2.8%	17,634,889	4,311,243	1,786	13.4	0.9	2.29%
Consumer Staples	136	445.28	-3.4%	-7.0%	-5.5%	5,019,981	1,833,659	328	NM	0.9	0.32%
Energy	209	997.89	0.3%	-2.0%	-15.3%	703,708	44,381	82	10.8	0.6	0.49%
Financial Services	4,341	1,195.97	0.2%	-3.2%	-3.3%	161,886,418	18,943,949	7,137	12.0	0.7	10.14%
Health Care	226	455.49	0.0%	-1.0%	-1.4%	211	99	2	11.8	2.5	0.53%
Industrials	3,468	986.94	0.6%	-0.4%	-5.7%	33,049,637	20,766,890	5,201	14.3	0.8	8.10%
Insurance	784	1,909.97	0.9%	17.4%	23.0%	767,578	333,675	204	10.4	0.8	1.83%
Real Estate	2,322	1,080.19	-0.9%	-5.4%	-9.2%	61,595,717	8,696,846	3,422	13.9	0.5	5.42%
Technology	9	635.83	-5.0%	-6.1%	-13.5%	61,740	5,399	3	NM	0.8	0.02%
Telecommunications	3,473	1,132.26	-1.5%	-3.3%	-3.1%	17,708,134	9,643,909	2,727	12.8	1.9	8.11%
Utilities	195	465.79	0.6%	-2.7%	-3.8%	1,669,060	290,911	215	13.5	1.7	0.45%

Top Gainers

Stock	last Close	Change %	Volume	Value	Trades
MRC	71	16.58%	418,234	28,514	40
MARAKEZ	58	10.58%	9,990	560	18
JIYAD	16	9.66%	10,717,572	161,535	364
ARABREC	32	8.03%	9,491,408	294,998	270
MANAZEL	19	7.78%	3,076,380	57,812	177

Top Losers

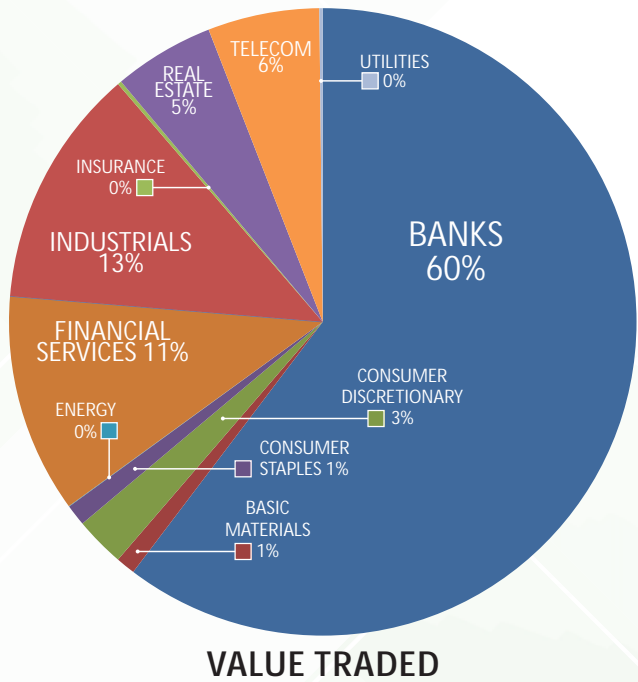
Stock	last Close	Change %	Volume	Value	Trades
TAHSSILAT	16.6	-22.79%	371,446	6,225	62
AMAR	50	-21.35%	164,312	9,312	7
ALMANAR	50	-16.61%	38,152	1,964	15
OOREDOO	1,010	-9.58%	68,812	72,309	90
UPAC	181	-9.50%	8,951	1,650	14

Top Volume

Stock	Last	Change %	Volume	Value	Trades
BOUBYAN	643	-1.23%	59,139,466	37,572,366	5,017
KPROJ	123	2.50%	50,724,834	6,211,182	1,146
KFH	826	0.24%	39,254,586	32,399,724	3,775
GFH	77	3.23%	25,488,112	1,924,454	710
NBK	1,006	-0.38%	18,248,432	18,316,419	2,869

Top Value

Stock	Last	Change %	Volume	Value	Trades
BOUBYAN	643	-1.23%	59,139,466	37,572,366	5,017
KFH	826	0.24%	39,254,586	32,399,724	3,775
NBK	1,006	-0.38%	18,248,432	18,316,419	2,869
AGLTY	621	1.31%	17,426,642	10,731,492	1,953
ZAIN	540	0.00%	14,645,792	7,895,142	2,081



Market Summary:

- Premier market volume and value dropped 19% and 13%, while Main Market volume and value dropped 21% and 20%, respectively.

- Premier and Main indexes both are facing resistance that only can be overcome by high trading volume.

- Technically, the All Share index closed at 7050, with support levels at 7041, 7000, and 6981, while resistance at 7105. The Premier index closed at 7821, with support levels at 7784, and 7701, while resistance at 7828. The Main index closed at 5500, with support levels at 5495, 5467, and 5424, while resistance at 5526.

Business

In rural America, mega solar projects get a frosty welcome

Transition to low-carbon electricity in US faces grassroots-level resistance

FULTON, US: From her century-old home, Susan Burns has watched the sun set over her cousin's field every day for 75 years. Now her cousin has agreed to have solar panels installed on the field, and an unhappy Burns finds herself in a fight. Huge solar farms are being planned in this corner of Missouri, and as in other rural areas of the United States, residents sometimes are yanking the welcome mat.

Foreseeing vast expanses of solar farms replacing cropland, Burns began raising the issue with other community members at the Baptist church across the road. She fears much may be at stake: "(I) lose my view. I lose my health. I lose my safety."

A group has formed around Fulton to fight the solar installations, as has happened in rural areas across the country. And this emerging grassroots movement is slowing the transition to low-carbon electricity in the world's largest economy.

Land registry

"I want to live and take care of my farmland. And the idea that my cousin, who lives across the road, would be turning his farmland into an industrial area was very disturbing to me," Burns told AFP from her country home. With a dozen other volunteers, Burns organized

a public meeting to sound an alarm. As people walked in, a petition awaited their signatures, and activists invited the curious to study a land registry map with three areas highlighted showing proposed solar farms.

"If we unite, we can stop this," said Joe Burns, Susan Burns's son, before a crowd of about 100 in Fulton, the county seat.

Threat to identity

The US electricity grid generates 60 percent of its power from fossil fuels. The administration of President Joe Biden is trying to turn the tide toward renewable energy. But grassroots protests against solar projects "will significantly delay America's commitment toward getting to net zero," said Jungwoo Chun, a lecturer on climate and sustainability at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

Like other academics interviewed by AFP, Chun insisted that it would be an oversimplification to see the opposition as a simple matter of the NIMBY—or "not in my backyard"—dynamic.

"Farmers have a particular identity," said Doug Bessette, an assistant professor at Michigan State University and co-author of several studies on the matter. "It's hard work, it's dirt under your

fingernails. And now if that land is... just basically laying fallow with solar panels on it for 20 years, that's a disruption to identity." Differing visions have pitted farmer against farmer, and even divided families. In the southern part of Callaway County, two neighbors nearly came to blows, said one, whose house may end up surrounded by solar panels.

Do the math

Leaning on his tractor, cattle farmer Mike Webb pointed to one of his parcels. "That piece of ground just across the road here," he said, "I may make 250 to 300 bucks an acre on a good year."

"And then when someone comes around and asks me, 'Hey, we're willing to give you \$1,000 an acre (per year) for solar panels, and give you a 2 percent increase per year for a 40-year contract,' it gets your interest," Webb said. So he signed on. "It should be my right to do what I want to do with my place," he said.

At a crossroads, with grain silos looming in the distance, a sign calls for a fight against solar projects. "It drives me crazy," Webb blurted out as he walked past, denouncing the resistance of a "minority" of the population. Here in northern Callaway County, word is that the first shov-



HEREFORD, US: Susan Burns and her husband John Burns pose for a photo in the front yard of their home, which has been in the family since 1890, across from land that has been leased for solar energy production in Hereford, Missouri. — AFP

els for one of the three solar farms could come as early as this summer, although that is not confirmed by the Ranger Power renewable energy company.

The developer of the 250-megawatt project (enough to power nearly 43,000 homes) told AFP that its \$300 million investment would, among other things,

allow local homeowners "to sustain existing family farms." "It's free money," said Webb, who is thinking about his retirement and about the day when some of his four children will take over the farm.

"Whether they like it or not, it's going to be an income for them. And you know, that's what matters to them." — AFP

Brand Finance: Boubyan fastest growing brand in Kuwait at 33% growth rate

KUWAIT: Boubyan Bank made a new achievement that adds to its successes over the past years, as the bank was ranked on the list of the top 10 most valuable and strongest Kuwaiti brands in terms of valuation for 2023, in addition to being ranked the fastest growing at a growth rate of 33 percent as per Brand Finance, the international brand-valuation consultancy.

Adel Al-Majed, Vice-Chairman & Group Chief Executive Officer of Boubyan Bank Group, stated: "With this type of remarkable recognitions, we are reaping the fruit of our success and steady steps built on well-studied strategies that enabled us to make great leaps and growth across all our financial indicators, especially our market shares across various sectors."

He elaborated: "Climbing to the 7th place and improving our ranking to AA- is based on our strong financial performance and expectations for future growth against specific standards such as our profit margin and revenues, and this valuation reflects as well the trust of our customers and shareholders in Boubyan Bank." He added:

"Confirming that we are the fastest growing brand by Brand Finance, following studies and market researches, is a recognition that we highly value, especially since it comes from a consultancy that is renowned for its fairness and professionalism."

"Reaching to where we were in 2022 was not easy; however, we can attribute our success to setting up a clear strategy, assembling an experienced executive team, returning to basics of banking business, focusing on customer service, investing in digital banking services, investing in our human resources, and focusing on national cadres", Al-Majed highlighted.

Headquartered in London, Brand Finance is a consultancy that specializes in brand valuation and offers finance and marketing consultations with offices in over 20 countries worldwide.

Improving digital banking services

Al-Majed pointed out: "Boubyan Bank always seeks to improve the level of digital banking services towards a more creative and flourishing future, where customer's convenience is our



Adel Al-Majed

priority worldwide. This strategic investment that meets the various and changing demands of corporate and SMEs' customers will confirm the position of Boubyan Bank as a leading Islamic digital bank, locally, regionally, and internationally."

He elaborated: "Over the past years, Boubyan succeeded in completing the acquisition of the Bank of London and the Middle East, where Boubyan's current holding stands at 70 percent approximately, and then Boubyan Bank announced the full launch of the new unique brand "Nomo Bank" in Kuwait and the UK as the first Islamic digital bank from London which can offer its services to Boubyan Bank's customers and non-customers."

The bank aspires to become the Islamic bank of choice for GCC customers in the United Kingdom as



we have incorporated a set of main principles for the bank as a part of its transformation strategy following the acquisition, including having a sustainable customer-focused brand aligned with Boubyan Bank's Group. Boubyan Bank concluded 2022 with KD 57.8 million in net profits at a growth rate of 19 percent, with an earnings per share of 14.2 fils along with a recommendation to distribute 6 fils in cash and 6 percent in bonus shares. Moreover, the bank continued its prudential approach by allocating KD 43.6 million in provisions.

All of the bank's key indicators witnessed a remarkable growth in 2022, where the total combined assets of Boubyan Bank Group increased to KD 7.9 billion at a growth rate of 7 percent. Moreover, the total of customers' deposits grew by 6 percent to reach KD 6 billion, while the financing portfolio grew by 7 percent to reach KD 5.9 billion, and operating income grew by 7 percent to reach KD 201 million.



Bao Fan

Investment bank China Renaissance halts share trading

BEIJING: Investment bank China Renaissance suspended trading in its Hong Kong-listed shares on Monday, saying the disappearance of its chairman meant it was unable to publish its annual results. Bao Fan, the group's billionaire chairman and executive director, went missing in February and was later revealed to be "co-operating" in an official investigation—sparking fears of a renewed crackdown on China's finance sector. The bank, which specializes in the Chinese tech industry, announced Sunday that Bao's absence made it impossible to publish its audited 2022 results.

"At the request of the Company, trading in the shares of the Company on the Stock Exchange will be suspended with effect from 9:00 a.m. on Monday, 3 April 2023, pending the publication of the 2022 Annual Results," the bank said in a stock exchange filing.

Chinese authorities have not given any details on Bao's detention or the reasons for the investigation. According to financial news outlet Caixin, China Renaissance president Cong Lin was taken into custody last September as authorities launched a probe into his work at the financial leasing unit of state-owned bank ICBC. No further details have been shared about his case.

China Renaissance has become a global financial institution since its founding in 2005, with more than 700 employees and offices in Beijing, Shanghai, Hong Kong, Singapore and New York. The group has supervised the IPOs of several domestic tech giants, including e-commerce firm JD.com. In 2015, Bao appeared on the Bloomberg Markets 50 Most Influential list, described as a "fast-talking" banker who had the ability to "arrange practically anything in China's vibrant tech scene".

Bao is not the first high-profile Chinese financier to fall foul of the authorities in recent years, with President Xi Jinping leading an aggressive crackdown on alleged corruption. In 2017, Chinese-Canadian businessman Xiao Jianhua was arrested by mainland authorities, receiving a 13-year jail sentence for corruption last August. Known to have close ties to top Chinese Communist Party leaders, the billionaire was reportedly abducted from his Hong Kong hotel room by plainclothes police officers from Beijing. — AFP

Business confidence falls among Japan's big manufacturers

TOKYO: Japan's largest manufacturers feel less optimistic about business conditions with confidence falling to its lowest level in more than two years, a key survey showed Monday. The Bank of Japan's closely watched quarterly Tankan survey is considered the broadest indicator of how Japanese businesses are faring.

It reports the difference between the percentage of firms that are upbeat and those that see conditions as unfavorable. Among major manufacturers, business confidence fell to plus one from plus seven three months earlier. The reading was the lowest since December 2020, marking the fifth quarterly drop in sentiment, and was below market expectations of plus four.

Optimism grew slightly among non-manufacturers, however, from 19 to 20. A positive figure means more businesses feel optimistic than pessimistic.

During the fraught first months of the COVID-19 pandemic, in June 2020, the Tankan score for Japan's big manufacturers plunged to minus 34. Tsuyoshi Ueno, a senior economist at NLI Research Institute, had predicted a drop in the manufacturing reading ahead of the survey's release on Monday.

"Business confidence among large manufacturers is expected to worsen markedly, given high raw material and fuel prices, as overseas demand falls and the global semiconductor market continues to deteriorate," he said. Central banks around the world



YOKOHAMA, Japan: This photo taken on March 30, 2023 shows a general view of the gallery of cars at the global headquarters of Japanese automaker Nissan Motor in Yokohama, Kanagawa prefecture. — AFP

have hiked interest rates to tackle soaring inflation linked to the war in Ukraine and other factors, but the Bank of Japan has stuck to its longstanding monetary easing policies.

The BoJ's new governor Kazuo Ueda is due to

take the helm this month when Haruhiko Kuroda steps down after a decade in the job. In February, Ueda said the continuation of monetary easing was "appropriate", warning of uncertainty in financial markets and the global economy. — AFP

China launches probe into US chipmaker Micron

BEIJING: Chinese authorities have begun an investigation into leading US memory chipmaker Micron Technology, a decision Beijing's foreign ministry said Monday was intended to "safeguard

national security". The probe escalates an already fierce battle between Beijing and Washington for supremacy in the field of semiconductors as broader bilateral relations continue to deteriorate.

The decision was announced late Friday by China's top cybersecurity regulator, which said in an online notice it would review products sold by Micron over "national security concerns".

Foreign ministry spokesperson Mao Ning told a regular news briefing on Monday the investigation was a normal measure taken to "conduct network security reviews of internet products

that affect or may affect national security". "Both Chinese companies and foreign companies operating in China must abide by Chinese laws and regulations and must not endanger China's national security," she said.

The Boise, Idaho-based Micron said in a statement it was "cooperating fully" with Chinese authorities, Bloomberg reported. US authorities have in recent years sought to prevent the country's advanced chip technology from being exported to China, imposing targeted controls on the ability of domestic industry leaders

to sell their products overseas.

They have also sought to persuade key allies to follow suit. The Netherlands and Japan—both leading manufacturers of specialized semiconductor technology equipment—have recently announced new restrictions on exporting certain products to China. Beijing has slammed the decisions as "US bullying tactics", vowing that such controls will only strengthen its resolve to achieve self-reliance in the sector—a longstanding goal of Beijing, which has been investing vast sums in domestic chip technology firms. — AFP

Lifestyle

Super Mario: Nintendo’s decades of star power



Japanese producer and video game designer Shigeru Miyamoto attends Universal’s “The Super Mario Bros Movie special screening at the Regal LA Live in Los Angeles.



US actor Jack Black attends Universal’s “The Super Mario Bros. Movie” special screening. —AFP photos



US actress Anya Taylor-Joy attends Universal’s “The Super Mario Bros Movie” special screening.



US actor Charlie Day attends Universal’s “The Super Mario Bros Movie” special screening at the Regal LA Live in Los Angeles.



US actor Chris Pratt attends Universal’s “The Super Mario Bros. Movie” special screening.



Canadian-US actor Seth Rogen attends Universal’s “The Super Mario Bros. Movie” special screening.

Hollywood is having its second bash at sprinkling some movie magic on the “Super Mario Bros” video game franchise, three decades after the last attempt. The pint-sized plumber from Japanese game maker Nintendo has enjoyed 40 years of extraordinary popularity that has transformed the character into a truly global icon.

Nintendo owes a lot to its moustachioed hero, created by a young game designer called Shigeru Miyamoto initially as the protagonist in the “Donkey Kong” arcade game 1981. The firm had been struggling to crack the North American market and, according to some accounts, was on the verge of financial ruin.

With Kong, the Japanese studio finally succeeded in the United States — and invented the platform video game along the way. The hero was known as “Jumpman” until 1983 when he was given the name “Mario”. Miyamoto then let him loose in his own “Super Mario Bros” game in 1985, where he was finally renamed “Super Mario”.

Gaming icon

The main Super Mario games have since shifted more than 400 million units. And that does not account for wildly popular spinoffs like “Mario Kart” and “Mario Odyssey” or “Mario Golf” and “Mario Tennis”. Mario’s stratospheric success helped propel Nintendo to the pinnacle of the gaming world. Game designers have built a Mario universe with characters including his green-clad brother Luigi, turtle-demon nemesis Bowser, and friendly dragon-like sidekick Yoshi. The franchise has thrived through transitions from 2D to 3D and from consoles to smartphones with “Super Mario Run” and “Mario Kart Tour”.

And retro-gamers are still willing to pay big



(From left) Michael Jelenic, Aaron Horvath, Jack Black, Chris Meledandri, CEO of Illumination, Seth Rogen, Shigeru Miyamoto attend a Special Screening of Universal Pictures’ “The Super Mario Bros Movie.”

bucks for a slice of its history. A sealed Nintendo 64 cartridge of “Super Mario” sold for \$1.56 million in 2021, a record for a video game, according to Heritage Auctions in the US. “He is a pop culture icon known to everyone, young and

old,” Morihiro Shigihara, a writer and former arcade manager, told AFP.

“The only other video game character with a claim to be more famous is Pikachu,” he said, referencing the hero from the Pokemon franchise.

Global statesman

Japan’s late former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe was not known for his comic flair. So he surprised the world by rocking up to the 2016 Olympics in Rio — the official handover ceremony for Tokyo 2020 — dressed as Mario. “I wanted to show Japan’s soft power to the world with the help of Japanese characters,” he told reporters afterwards. “I wasn’t sure how the audience would react. But I received so many cheers.” Mario was given perhaps an even stranger tribute by the authorities in the Spanish city of Zaragoza in 2010 when they named a new street Super Mario Bros Avenue. Though it is just around the corner from streets named after Space Invaders and Tetris.

Real-world empire

Nowadays, movie adaptations of video games are everywhere. Some, like “Resident Evil” and “Tomb Raider”, have become bankable franchises. But Super Mario was there first with the 1993 movie “Super Mario Bros” starring Bob Hoskins and Dennis Hopper. But it bombed. Critics and audiences hated it.

Nevertheless, the wider Mario universe has expanded undeterred with the genial working-class hero getting toy tie-ins with Lego, watches made by Tag Heuer, and a backpack range from Eastpak. “Mario” theme parks are also popping up — first in Osaka in 2021, then Los Angeles last year, and a planned third “Super Mario World” in Florida. One of the attractions being considered is the ultimate tie-in, where the real world and Mario world finally meet — an augmented reality “Mario Kart” race around Bowser’s castle. — AFP

‘Dungeons & Dragons’ finds North America moviegoers are game

Dungeons & Dragons: Honor Among Thieves scorched the competition in North American theaters this weekend with an opening take estimated at \$38.5 million, industry watcher Exhibitor Relations said Sunday.

The Paramount and eOne film, based on the popular role-playing game, also took in some \$33 million abroad, a key audience given its cost of \$150 million, said David A. Gross of Franchise Entertainment Research.

“Foreign is where ‘Dungeons & Dragons’ has to excel to be profitable and become a series,” he said, adding that the film — a fantasy heist yarn starring Chris Pine, Michelle Rodriguez and Hugh Grant — “has the potential to generate sequels.”

While toy- and game-based movies often struggle, next weekend’s opening of “Super Mario Bros.” is expected to be one of the year’s biggest. And don’t forget “Barbie,” coming in July.

In second place this weekend was previous leader “John Wick: Chapter 4,” at \$28.2 million. The Lionsgate action thriller, with Keanu Reeves in the title role, has drawn praise for elaborate stunts and choreography that have been called “spectacular” and “mind-boggling.”

Horror flick “Scream VI” from Paramount and Spyglass Media placed third at \$5.3 million for the Friday-through-Sun-



day period. Its total domestic take of \$98.2 million has surpassed last year’s “Scream,” which earned \$81 million, Variety.com reported.

“His Only Son,” a faith-based drama from Angel Studios, also opened at \$5.3 million — not bad for a movie made on a shoestring budget of \$250,000. It tells the Biblical story of God’s directive to Abraham to sacrifice his son, Isaac.

And in fifth place was United Artists’



boxing drama “Creed III,” at \$5 million. Michael B. Jordan directs and plays the title character.

Rounding out the top 10 were: “Shazam! Fury of the Gods” (\$4.7 million) “A Thousand and One” (\$1.8 million) “65” (\$1.6 million) “Ant-Man and the Wasp: Quantumania” (\$1.2 million) “Jesus Revolution” (\$1 million). — AFP

Safety coordinator on Baldwin film given suspended sentence

The safety coordinator on the Alec Baldwin film “Rust” was convicted Friday of unsafe handling of a firearm and sentenced to six months’ probation for his part in the fatal on-set shooting of its cinematographer.

The verdict was the result of a plea deal and means Dave Halls, who was also assistant director of the low-budget Western, becomes the first conviction over the accident, for which Baldwin faces manslaughter charges. Halls handed Baldwin the loaded gun in October 2021 which ultimately discharged, killing cinematographer Halyna Hutchins and wounding the film’s director, Joel Souza.

Under the plea agreement, 63-year-old Halls will serve no jail time, but must complete six months of unsupervised probation. Halls had told Baldwin the gun was “cold” — industry speak for safe.

According to court filings, the film’s armorer Hannah Gutierrez-Reed loaded the gun and handed it to Halls, who then checked the firearm to ensure that the bullets were “dummy” rounds — meaning they held no gunpowder.

Prosecutor Kari Morrissey, during the hearing Friday, described Halls as the “last line of defense” on the set, saying he failed to “check every round that was in the gun to confirm that it was a dummy round.”

Both Baldwin — a co-producer and the lead actor — and Gutierrez-Reed, who was responsible for the weapons on set, face two alternative counts of voluntary man-



Alec Baldwin

slaughter. If found guilty, they face up to 18 months in jail and a \$5,000 fine. Baldwin, 64, has repeatedly said he was told by the crew that the gun was not loaded.

In accepting the deal on Friday, Halls agreed to testify in any future proceedings related to the matter. A weeks-long preliminary hearing is set to begin in early May for Baldwin and Gutierrez-Reed. The accident sent shockwaves through Hollywood and led to calls for a total ban of real guns on set. Industry experts have said there are already stringent safety rules in place, but that they were ignored. — AFP

Lifestyle

Basquiat-Warhol: A rare artistic duo, reunited in Paris



A visitor looks at "Ailing Ali in Fight of Life", an acrylic painting.



A visitor walks past a black and white photograph made in 1985 by US Michael Halsband, depicting portraits of US Neo-expressionism artist Jean-Michel Basquiat (right) (1960-1988) and US artist, film director and producer Andy Warhol (left) (1928-1987), during a preview of the exhibition "Basquiat X Warhol".



A visitor looks at "African Masks", an acrylic painting. —AFP photos



A visitor looks at "Taxi, 45th/Broadway", an acrylic and oilstick, synthetic polymer and silkscreen ink painting.



A visitor looks at black and white photographs made in 1985 by US Michael Halsband, depicting portraits of US artist Jean-Michel Basquiat and US artist, Andy Warhol.



A visitor takes a photograph of "General Electric with Waiter", an acrylic painting.



A visitor looks at "Untitled (50 Dentures)", an acrylic and silkscreen ink painting.

There are vanishingly few great collaborations in the annals of fine art. For a brief moment in the 1980s, Andy Warhol and Jean-Michel Basquiat showed the world how it was done. It started with a bang. Warhol, 54, met Basquiat, 22, for lunch in October 1982 and took a polaroid of them together.

Basquiat took it to his studio and returned just two hours later with a portrait. Warhol was stunned by its brilliance. Soon they were working together on portraits that combined their favoured tropes: Basquiat's masks, skulls, graffiti and obscure symbols; Warhol's pop-art imagery, logos and newspaper headlines. The brief, intense collaboration lasted from 1983 to 1985 and produced some 160 works.

An unprecedented number of them — 70 — have been brought together for a show at the Louis Vuitton Foundation in Paris that opens Wednesday, mostly plucked from private collections. "It's definitely the most successful collaboration in the history of art between two great artists. It's never been matched at this level or in this short space of time," said Dieter Buchhart, the show's lead curator and a Basquiat expert.

In room after room, two different aesthetics, generations and temperaments collide — and find an unexpected synergy. "It is neither Warhol, nor Basquiat, but a third artist that emerges," said Suzanne Page, the museum's artistic director.



A visitor looks at "Chair", an acrylic painting.

"There was a great generosity between the two. They played with and provoked each other," she told AFP. "Warhol allowed himself to be completely subverted by Basquiat's interventions." At their best, it is hard to tell where one artist begins and the other ends, as in the monumental, 10-metre-long (33 feet) "African Masks". Others are unexpected: "Ten Punching Bags", never shown in their lifetimes, has the bags suspended in a line and decorated with the face of Jesus Christ inspired by Leonardo da Vinci's "The Last Supper", drawn by Warhol with the word "judge" and a crown of thorns added by Basquiat.

Cartoonist Keith Haring, a close friend of both — and who makes a cameo in the exhibition —



A visitor looks at "Olympic Rings", an acrylic painting.

praised their collaboration at the time as a "conversation in painting". But there were doubters as well. Many felt portraits should be the singular vision of an individual artist. Their supporters saw the two artists more like great jazz musicians, riffing off each other. Basquiat was inspired by the master, Warhol was reinvigorated by his young friend. "It released an incredible energy," said Page, and on a more straightforward level, they shared an intuitive genius for composition and combining colours.

If Basquiat was the more serious, the more socially engaged — "carried by anger" at the invisibility of black people — Warhol was not as detached as he sometimes came across. "He accepted the social engagement side of Basquiat, and shared it," Page



A visitor stands next to "Mind Energy" (Left), as she looks at "Pontiac No. 5", two paintings made in 1985 by artist Jean-Michel Basquiat and US artist, Andy Warhol (1928-1987), during a preview of the exhibition "Basquiat X Warhol".

said. "Warhol was engaged too, in his own way. He was a very complex creature." What might have been seen as insolence in Basquiat's approach — scrawling over works that Warhol had left around his Factory studio, for example — was totally accepted by the elder artist. Their collaboration ended happily. But within two years both were dead — Warhol following routine surgery and Basquiat from a heroin overdose. Already global superstars, their fame would only continue to grow. —AFP



French pianist Colette Maze, born in June 1914, poses during a photo session in Paris. —AFP photos



French pianist Colette Maze, born in June 1914, poses during a photo session in Paris.

The pianist who's been playing for more than 100 years

Colette Maze has been playing piano for more than a century, and is still drawing thousands of fans on social media. Born in June 1914, before the outbreak of World War I and when one of her favourite composers, Claude Debussy, was still alive, the French pianist practices four hours a day and is about to release her seventh album, "108 Years of Piano". From her apartment overlooking the Seine river in Paris, Maze moves cautiously between the three pianos in her living room, but retains a youthful enthusiasm.

"Me? I'm young," she says with a smile. "Age is not something I'm interested in. There are people who are forever young, amazed by everything, and then there are people who don't care about anything and never loved anything, even their man — can you imagine?" she adds.

'Piano is my life'

Maze was a piano teacher for much of her life, and it was only after turning 100 that she started building a significant fanbase — through her Facebook page. Many are inspired by her continuing good health and refusal to give up the traditional French pleasures of wine, cheese and chocolate. "She gives people strength — that's why she has such crazy success," said her son, journalist Fabrice Maze, adding with pride that she is one of the few people over 100 releasing albums.

She still remembers the sound of "Big Bertha", the huge cannon used by the German army during World War I, but most of

her memories revolve around her instrument. "When I was little, I suffered from asthma and my mother would play violin with my piano teacher — it would calm me," she says. "Piano is my life, my friend. I need to feel it and hear it," she adds, before offering a rendition of Debussy's "Reflections in the Water".

Maze began playing at five, and despite reluctance from her parents, she won a place at

the Ecole Normale de Musique de Paris with teachers including the renowned Alfred Cortot. Cortot was known for a method of relaxing all the muscles of the body — which Maze credits with sparing her from arthritis. The other secret to her youth? "I did a lot of dancing," she says. "I need to feel my muscles, my abdominals, my thighs, my arms. All that must be alive." —AFP

Video game BAFTAs spotlight UK's thriving independent scene

Britain's 2023 BAFTA Games Awards this week showcased independent video games studios, celebrating the powerful role of lesser-known creators in an industry where blockbuster titles enjoy vast budgets. Video game gongs were announced Thursday, one month after the British Academy of Film and Television Arts (BAFTA) annual cinema awards.

"Vampire Survivors", conceived by a single London-based Italian, clinched game of the year with its polished minimalist retro graphics and addictive overhead gameplay. The shoot-em-up, which does not contain vampires, beat big-budget quest titles "Elden Ring" and "God of War: Ragnarok", both of which took legions of people years to create.

'Don't need AAA'

"We don't need to be AAA," Sam McGarry, one of the developers behind "Vampire Survivors", told AFP at the annual London Games Festival where fans meet the industry's movers and shakers. AAA refers to big-budget, high-profile games that are usually produced by large publishers. The Briton decided one year ago to quit his job as a web developer to join the small team writing the hit game.

Some blockbuster video games can enjoy budgets running into the hundreds of millions of dollars. Yet technological advances and freely available software tools means minor players can give them a run for their money. "The introduction of new tools has allowed people to develop games for free — now, anybody can do it," said publishing director Simon Byron at Bristol-based Yogscast, which publishes independent games and also produces related video content.

'We have to innovate'

Jay Armstrong, British design director of BAFTA-nominated quest game "Cult of the Lamb", stressed that innovation was key when faced with big-spending titans of the sector. "We can't compete on graphics or budget (so) we have to innovate a little," Armstrong told AFP on the sidelines of the London Games Festival that runs to April 8.

As he spoke, fascinated gaming fans were captivated by a big screen depicting a basic animation of a lamb presiding over the sacrifice of another small animal as satanic symbols float by. "You play as a possessed lamb that runs around the world

indoctrinating cute little creatures into their cult so they can sacrifice them," explained Armstrong, whose studio Massive Monster has ten staff and is mainly UK based.

London hub

London is among cities that boast the most video game developing talent with "over 700 studios" due to its vibrant indie scene, according to festival director Michael French. Scotland's capital Edinburgh is home to Rockstar North, the division of US group Take-Two behind the top-selling "Grand Theft Auto" series — whose fifth instalment has sold more than 175 million copies worldwide and generated billions of dollars. The UK competes with Germany for the title of top video games marketplace in Europe, but globally it still trails the United States and Japan.

Britain's video games market grew strongly last year to contribute a total of £5.26 billion (\$6.5 billion) to the economy, according to trade body Ukie. Some studios had feared that Brexit would discourage European workers from flocking to Britain and hurt the industry. French conceded Britain's exit from the European Union at the start of 2021 did pose an "obstacle" — but added that "people always want to join studios" to make video games.

'Babysitting in space'

The BAFTA for best British video game meanwhile showcased UK titles including role-playing adventure "Citizen Sleeper", designed by Gareth Damian Martin. Big gaming productions "cost so much money", according to Martin. "But players want new experiences — which is not really about technological power any more, it's not really about manpower. It's really about the stories we're telling," they added. The game has relatively static graphics and lots of text because this is "the most powerful low-cost material you can use in a game".

The game features a main character who struggles to escape a corporate existence on a space station in a dystopian future — a concept that would be difficult to sell to video game giants and thrives instead in the independent scene.

"It would be extremely hard to go to Ubisoft and pitch them this game and say: ok, I want a 1,000 developers, I want \$200 million to make a story about babysitting your friends' kid in space, or about working in a bar. I don't think it would happen," said Martin. —AFP

Lifestyle



In this photo Ghost Radio station host Jack Watcharaphon's decorations and ghost-themed toys are displayed in his studio in Bangkok. —AFP photos



In this photo guests listen to the live show of Ghost Radio station host Jack Watcharaphon at his Ghost House cafe in Bangkok.



In this photo a man smokes a cigarette outside the Ghost House cafe, owned by Ghost Radio station host Jack Watcharaphon, in Bangkok.

Ghosts in their machines: Thai livestream spooks a new generation

It is almost midnight, and above a semi-abandoned Bangkok shopping centre, Ghost Radio is on air.

Rapid-fire comments ping across the studio's screens as thousands tune in online to hear callers describe their encounters with Thailand's supernatural.

Belief in spirits runs deep in the kingdom, which has a celebrated canon of ghosts from individuals like Mae Nak, a woman who haunted her village after dying in childbirth, to more sinister creatures like krasue -- bodyless women who float through the night looking to devour flesh.

Now these ancient tales are being reinvigorated through online platforms like YouTube, TikTok, WhatsApp and even delivery app Grab.

"She met a man in a white suit who told her that her time was up, and that she had to go with him," the first caller recounts, her voice quivering.

"But when she turned back, she could see her body lying in bed."

In the studio, host Watcharapol Fukjaidee listens patiently, gently prying out details.

The charismatic 46-year-old, also known by his nickname Jack, films two live episodes a week from 11 pm to dawn, fielding calls from spooked Thais as millions tune in and thousands comment online. "When there is more technology, the chance to see ghosts increases," he tells AFP.

"Ghosts come with apps, chat lines, phone calls. Technology becomes the channel where they can contact people." Watcharapol recounted a caller who was contacted by a distant friend, asking him to meet at a temple, but when he got there he made a chilling discovery.

"It turns out that his friend had died and his phone was put into the coffin," he says, raising his eyebrows, a mischievous chuckle lurking.

Ghostly meet-ups

The host got his break 20 years ago under Thailand's "godfather of ghosts" Kapol Thongplub, whose late-night call-in show was a favourite with the capital's taxi drivers.

It is now food delivery riders rather than cabbies who frequently encounter the supernatural as they endlessly crisscross Bangkok at all hours, Watcharapol says.



In this photo Ghost Radio station host Jack Watcharaphon broadcasts live from his studio in Bangkok.

And unlike Kapol's show, which was dominated by the host's larger-than-life reactions, Watcharapol is more low-key and a little tongue-in-cheek.

"Now with the influence of Twitter and TikTok, more young people call," says Ghost Radio worker Khemjira Jongkolsapaporn.

There has been a shift, with audiences now wanting to not only be scared, and then soothed -- but also entertained.

"This isn't a matter of 'still believing' or not," cultural anthropologist Andrew Alan Johnson, whose book "Ghosts of the New City" examines how recent events have reshaped Thai beliefs, told AFP.

"Ghosts become a way to tell stories that are



In this photo decorations of decapitated heads and bloody limbs are displayed at the Ghost House cafe.



In this photo Ghost Radio station production assistants check comments from listeners at the studio in Bangkok.

denied elsewhere," he said.

This is especially true in rapidly changing Bangkok, Johnson said, where ghost tales help preserve local memory -- explaining unlucky locations, or feelings of alienation.

"Folk belief is incredibly adaptable, in that it seeks to speak to people's everyday experiences," he said. The Ghost Radio YouTube channel has almost three million subscribers and is sponsored by various local firms as well as pulling income from the themed cafe on the ground floor.

Watched over by an eclectic collection of ghost-themed toys, Khemjira sifts through scores of submissions, weeding out political stories or



In this photo Chaiwut Thung-ood, a 25-year-old police officer and regular caller to the Ghost Radio poses for a picture at the Ghost House cafe in Bangkok.



In this photo a family visit the Ghost House cafe, owned by Ghost Radio station host Jack Watcharaphon, in Bangkok.

anything that might touch the kingdom's tough laws against insulting the monarchy.

Not every tale makes it on air, but Khemjira is confident the people telling them believe them to be true. "I think people meet ghosts a lot. We hardly ever hear the same story," she says.

'Scared to death'

As Watcharapol listens upstairs, downstairs his cafe is raucous with young fans and families.

Munching on a tombstone-shaped brownie, 25-year-old policeman and regular caller Chalwat Thungood explained how he shares his colleagues' tales.

His own spooky experience came on a call out to a house. As he arrived he glimpsed the shadow of an overweight man walk into a bathroom.

He struggled to open the door -- until suddenly it gave way. "I found a big man who had been dead for at least five hours. It proved to me that I saw a spirit of the big man walking into the bathroom," he said. "I 100 percent believe that ghosts exist."

Watcharapol refuses to be drawn on whether he actually believes, stating he has to maintain an open mind before admitting he is "scared to death" of hospital ghosts. People tune in to his show, he says, to find a like-minded community "because sometimes they can't speak to their family about their ghostly experiences". —AFP

Pioneering composer and eco-warrior Ryuichi Sakamoto dies aged 71

Pioneering composer and green activist Ryuichi Sakamoto, whose score for "The Last Emperor" scooped an Oscar and a Grammy, has died aged 71 after his second cancer diagnosis.

Having shot to fame in the 1970s with the influential Japanese group Yellow Magic Orchestra, Sakamoto's electronic innovations helped lay the foundations for synth-pop, house music and hip-hop. But he was perhaps best known for his film soundtracks, including for the World War II drama "Merry Christmas, Mr Lawrence", in which he also acted opposite his friend David Bowie as a prisoner-of-war camp commandant.

The hauntingly catchy track "Forbidden Colours" from the 1983 film, with vocals by David Sylvian, became a global hit for Sakamoto, who also collaborated with Thomas Dolby and punk legend Iggy Pop in the 80s.

Sakamoto went on to win an Academy Award with his score for the 1987 period epic "The Last Emperor", directed by Bernardo Bertolucci, which



This file photo taken on October 4, 2018 shows Japanese musician Ryuichi Sakamoto walking on the red carpet during the opening ceremony of the 23rd Busan International Film Festival (BIFF) in Busan. —AFP photos

tells the story of China's last emperor Puyi.

He lived in New York for decades, but his prolific career made him a huge star in his home country, where he was renowned for his strident anti-nuclear campaigning.

Despite his recent ill health -- he survived throat cancer in 2014 -- Sakamoto continued to win acclaim for his work, including the score for Alejandro Gonzalez Inarritu's 2015 film "The Revenant".

In early 2021, the musician said he was undergoing treatment for rectal cancer.

His management team announced Sunday that he died on March 28th, and a funeral was

held for close family only, at his request.

"We would like to share one of Sakamoto's favourite quotes: 'Ars longa, vita brevis. Art is long, life is short,' the team said in a statement.

'The Professor'

Born in Tokyo in 1952, Sakamoto grew up immersed in the arts, as his father was a literary editor for some of Japan's greatest novelists, including Nobel laureate Kenzaburo Oe.

He discovered the piano at a young age, and has said Bach, Haydn and Debussy fascinated him as a teenager as much as the Beatles and Rolling Stones. He studied composition and ethnomusicology at university -- earning him the affectionate nickname "The Professor" in Japan -- and began performing in Tokyo's burgeoning 1970s electronic scene.

"I was working with the computer at university and playing jazz in the daytime, buying West Coast psychedelic and early Kraftwerk records in the afternoon, and playing folk at night," he told The Guardian in 2018.

"I was quite busy!" In 1978, he co-founded Yellow Magic Orchestra (YMO) with Haruomi Hosono and Yukihiro Takahashi, who died in January.

Their high-energy techno-pop had an enormous influence on electronic music worldwide, and inspired the synthesised melodies of early Japanese video games. Groundbreaking US hip-hop artist Afrika Bambaataa sampled YMO in the 80s, and some of the Japanese group's songs became international hits -- including "Behind the Mask", which inspired cover versions by Michael Jackson and Eric Clapton.

After YMO disbanded in 1983, Sakamoto dedicated himself to solo projects, exploring multiple musical styles from prog rock and ambient to rap, bossa nova and contemporary classical.

He racked up collaborations with avant-garde artists, but also with stars from around the world like Cape Verde singer Cesaria Evora, Brazil's Caetano Veloso, and Senegalese sensation Youssou N'Dour.

"I want to be a citizen of the world," Sakamoto, who moved to New York in the 1990s, once said. "It sounds very hippie but I like that."

Numerous musicians paid tribute Sunday including indie pop outfit Japanese Breakfast, American musician and producer Questlove, and former Smiths guitarist Johnny Marr, who on Twitter hailed Sakamoto as "an elegant and timeless artist." —AFP



Martin Scorsese and Leonardo DiCaprio

Scorsese, DiCaprio to premiere new film at Cannes

Martin Scorsese's new film starring Leonardo DiCaprio, "Killers of the Flower Moon", will get its world premiere at the Cannes Film Festival on May 20, organisers confirmed on Friday.

It will be the first time the veteran filmmaker presents a new film at the festival since he won best director there in 1986 for "After Hours".

Scorsese won the top Palme d'Or prize in 1976 for "Taxi Driver" and also presided over the jury in 1998.

"The Cannes Festival is overjoyed to welcome Martin Scorsese this May on the Croisette, to climb the steps of the Palais des Festivals," the organisers said in a statement.

The film, also starring Robert De Niro, was produced by Apple, which has agreed to release it in cinemas in October prior to streaming on its platform.

Cannes only allows films to compete for the Palme d'Or if they get a theatrical release, which has notably prevented Netflix from entering its films.

"Killers of the Flower Moon" tracks the true story of serial murders of a Native American tribe in an oil-rich part of the United States in the 1920s. —AFP



This file photo taken on June 7, 1996 shows Japanese composer, singer, songwriter, and record producer Ryuichi Sakamoto posing during a portrait session in Paris.

Sports

Medvedev claims 4th ATP title of the year

Djokovic takes No 1 spot back from Alcaraz

MIAMI GARDENS: Russian Daniil Medvedev claimed his fourth ATP title of the year with an emphatic victory over Italy's Jannik Sinner in the final of the Miami Open on Sunday. Sinner had upset world number one and defending champion Carlos Alcaraz in Friday's semi-final, but the 21-year-old struggled in the heat against the fourth seed Medvedev, who triumphed 7-5, 6-3. The win was Medvedev's 19th career ATP title and his fifth in a Masters 1000 event and confirmed his dominance on hard courts in 2023.

Sinner, also beaten in the Miami final two years ago and now with a 0-6 record against the Russian, said he had not been at 100%. "We woke up this morning not at my best, I felt a little bit sick....unfortunately today I couldn't play at my best," said the Italian who, however said there had been no question of him pulling out of the contest. "No, it was not that bad. But, you know, with the heat, when you run a lot, it gets a little bit worse and worse. Obviously the first half an hour we played in the sun also," he said.

Medvedev, who had already won three titles in three weeks at Rotterdam, Doha and Dubai before losing to Alcaraz in the Indian Wells final, started confidently, holding serve to love while Sinner's first service game was a real battle. Sinner had to save a break point and fought through a 26-shot rally before coming through at the end of a 10-minute game.

In contrast, Medvedev again served to love but Sinner was showing signs of settling as he held his serve and then the Italian broke Medvedev to go 3-2 up, with a deft touch volley. Medvedev immediately broke back, however, with Sinner's effort clipping the net and going out and after the Russian held again, the Italian had attention from the ATP trainer.

Sinner, looking uncomfortable in the bright sunshine, took a pill along with a powder in his water in the 87 F (30.5 C) heat. Medvedev, looking composed and confident, grabbed the first set when Sinner was serving at 6-5 down and the Italian's poor shot into the net handed the Russian the crucial break. Medvedev quickly got ahead in the second set when Sinner sent a forehand long but just as quickly handed the break back to Sinner.

But Sinner was making too many errors and when Medvedev broke again to go 3-1 up, the Italian was unable to turn things around and the world number five completed his first ever win in Miami. "I'm really happy. Today was a tough match. It was probably the hottest day and the most humid during the day," Medvedev said. "It was not easy conditions. I don't know if Jannik had a small injury or cramp. I was also struggling, tried not to show it," he added.

At home on hard courts

Medvedev's 19 ATP Tour wins have come at 19 different events, but he had not won a Masters 1000 event since Toronto in 2021. "I haven't won't such a big title in probably a year and a half. At the end I was quite shaky," he said. "Not even tight, because I'm not scared to win. But still the hands get a little shaky so the serve is a little bit tougher... I managed to get myself together and close the match."

The 27-year-old has now won five of the six hard-court ATP Masters 1000s and has also reached the final at both hard-court Grand Slams, winning the 2021 US Open. Now he must turn his attention to the clay courts where he has had much less success. "I love hard courts, If it would be my choice there would be only hard courts," he joked.



MIAMI GARDENS: Daniil Medvedev of Russia holds the Butch Buchholz Trophy after defeating Jannik Sinner of Italy during the Mens Finals of the Miami Open on April 02, 2023. —AFP

Number one spot

In another development, Novak Djokovic returned to number one spot in ATP rankings published Monday despite missing US tournaments last month because of his lack of a Covid vaccination. Carlos Alcaraz had taken the top ranking from Djokovic af-

ter victory in Indian Wells, but the Spaniard bowed out of the semi-finals of the Miami Open on Friday to allow the Serb back for a record 380th week as No 1. Djokovic has a 380-point lead over Alcaraz, with Greece's Stefanos Tsitsipas in third, more than 1,000pts behind the leading duo. —AFP

Exeter qualify for Champions Cup quarter-finals

PARIS: Exeter qualified for the Champions Cup quarter-finals on tries scored when Sunday's last 16 thriller with Montpellier ended 33-33 after extra time. French champions Montpellier, reduced to 14 men after No 8 Zach Mercer was sent off, pushed their English hosts all the way, with the sides locked at 26-26 after normal time. The visitors looked to be heading for the last eight when Louis Carbonel broke the deadlock in the second period of extra time.

But Jack Yeandle crashed over with Joe Simmonds converting in the last minute to draw Exeter level at the end of 100 minutes of breathless rugby. Yeandle's try was Exeter's fifth to Montpellier's four, sending the 2020 European champions through to a quarter-final with the Stormers after the South African side beat Harlequins 32-28 in Cape Town on Saturday.

"We've had a few rollercoasters over the years. I am really pleased for the players. We've challenged them a bit this season around some of the highs and lows of performances," said Exeter boss Rob Baxter. At Exeter's Sandy Park home an Englishman opened the scoring, but not one of the hosts, rather Montpellier's Curtis Langdon, who powered over the line seconds after coming on for Brandon Paenga-Amosa.

Paolo Garbisi converted and then a try from Vincent Rattiez put Montpellier 12-0 up with only seven minutes on the clock. Exeter regrouped and cut into that deficit when Scott Sio touched down with Joe Simmonds adding the conversion. Simmond's older brother Sam had Exeter back level after the hour mark, with Joe converting to make it 14-12. A deliberate knock-on by Henry Slade earned the Exeter centre 10 minutes in the sin bin with Garbisi kicking the resulting penalty to put Montpellier back in front by a point at half-time.

'Impossible to handle'

Montpellier had to play the final 30 minutes of regulation time down a man after Mercer's red card for a tackle to the head of Christ Tshiunza. Garbisi extended their lead with a 53rd minute penalty but that was cancelled out seconds later when Sam Simmonds found Tom Wyatt who went on to score an eye catching try.

Josh Iosefa-Scott then crossed over and after a successful conversion Exeter found themselves eight points clear. With four minutes of normal time left on the clock Lenni Nouchi's touchdown lifted Montpellier to within three points of Exeter, Garbisi's injury time penalty leaving the teams inseparable at 26-26. With the winner eventually determined by tries count-back Montpellier will rue the two touchdowns they had disallowed in the second half.

Baxter hailed Sam Simmonds, the Exeter No. 8 who will join Montpellier after the World Cup later this year. "He looked almost impossible to handle sometimes," said Baxter. Five-time European champions Toulouse downed the Bulls 33-9 to set-up a last-eight clash with the Sharks, another South African side, next weekend. Lock forward Emmanuel Meafou, winger Matthis Lebel and flanker Thibaud Flament were the try-scorers for the French side Thomas Ramos was perfect with the boot, succeeding with all of his seven kicks at goal.

Three-time winners Saracens will next face defending champions La Rochelle after seeing off Ospreys of Wales 35-20. Saracens pounced on a late blunder by the Ospreys which proved to be pivotal in the game. With a tight round-of-16 tie locked at 20-20 approaching the final 10 minutes, Rhys Webb took a quick line-out around his 22 only for the ball to fall straight into the arms of Duncan Taylor. It was Taylor's first touch of the afternoon having just arrived as replacement for Alex Lozowski and the former Scotland centre strolled over before being mobbed by his team-mates. —AFP

Kohli, Du Plessis lead Bangalore to IPL victory

BENGALURU: Virat Kohli and skipper Faf du Plessis led Royal Challengers Bangalore to a thumping eight-wicket drubbing of Mumbai Indians as the tournament's big guns ruled on an action-packed Sunday at the Indian Premier League. England's Jos Buttler smashed a blazing fifty to help Rajasthan Royals hammer Sunrisers Hyderabad by 72 runs in the first match of the day. Kohli (82 not out) and Du Plessis (73) capped off a run-filled day with an opening stand of 148 as Bangalore achieved their victory target of 172 with 22 balls to spare in front of a raucous home crowd.

The pair bossed the chase from the start with some assured strokemaking and regular boundaries to open their IPL campaign in style. "I thought it was a phenomenal win, a homecoming after four years. Couldn't have asked for a better game," an elated Kohli said as he reflected on a tournament which has reverted to a home-and-away format following a number of years impacted by the Covid pandemic.

Man-of-the-match Du Plessis, a 38-year-old South African veteran, said "My first time playing here (at M.Chinnaswamy Stadium) as a home player, especially batting with Virat Kohli. Energy bounces off him." Five-time winners Mumbai looked clueless despite the presence of Jason Behrendorff, who came in as the "impact player" when they fielded, and the returning England fast bowler Jofra

Archer. Du Plessis smashed six sixes in his 43-ball knock before departing in the 15th over. New man Dinesh Karthik soon fell for a duck off Mumbai's big-buy Cameron Green.

Glenn Maxwell then struck two sixes and Kohli smacked the winning hit over the fence as Bangalore started their hunt for a maiden IPL title in season 16 of the cash-rich T20 tournament. Mohammed Siraj led an inspired bowling attack with figures of 1-21 to keep down five-time winners Mumbai to 171-7 despite an unbeaten 84 by Indian talent Tilak Varma. Varma, a 20-year-old uncapped India batsman, took charge after an early collapse when Mumbai lost their top three including Green (5) and skipper Rohit Sharma (1) inside six overs after being invited to bat first.

Varma 'courage'

Australia's Green, who was the second-most expensive buy after Mumbai forked out \$2.11 million in the auction, was bowled by England left-arm quick Reece Topley. Rohit lasted 10 balls before Akash Deep got the star batsman caught behind for one as Mumbai slipped to 20-3, but the all-format India captain praised Varma's fightback. "Some of the shots he played today, he showed a lot of courage," said Rohit. "We wanted to be courageous enough, and hats off to Tilak for getting us to the total. We did not bat to our potential."

Bangalore suffered a blow when Topley awkwardly landed on his right shoulder while fielding and left the ground with the physio. Topley was believed to have suffered a dislocated shoulder, which was put back in place but the 2.01 metre tall (6 feet and 5 inches) player was ruled out of the rest of the match. Buttler's 22-ball 54 led Rajasthan's batting onslaught as they posted 203-5, and then their bowlers restricted hosts Hyder-

by 4.085sec. "Normally I'm not very good when it rains, but today the sensations were incredible," said the Italian who now has a nine-point lead in the championship. South African KTM rider Brad Binder, who won the sprint race on Saturday after starting from 15th place on the grid, was 17th and last on Sunday after a fall on the opening lap.

Former MotoGP world champion Joan Mir missed Sunday's race due to injuries suffered in the sprint, his Honda team announced. "After a morning medical check, Joan Mir was declared unfit for the Argentina GP by MotoGP and circuit medical staff due to cranial and cervical trauma," Honda said. The Spaniard, who won the MotoGP title in 2020, crashed in the opening lap of Saturday's sprint. During the medical tests he experienced feelings of nausea and dizziness, and will now return to Europe and prepare for the Grand Prix of the Americas at Austin.

Honda were already missing six-time world champion Marc Marquez, injured in the season-opener in Portugal. Mir's absence reduced the usual 22-rider grid on Sunday to 17 with Marquez, Enea Bastianini, Spanish veteran Pol Espargaro and

out a bogey in her four-under 67, nabbing her second straight runner-up finish after falling in a playoff to Celine Boutier in Arizona last week.

Another pair of major champions, Patty Tavatanakit and Kim Hyo-joo, shared third on 272. Thailand's Patty charged up the leaderboard with a six-under par 65 while Kim, playing in the final group, carded an even-par 71. Spain's Carlotta Ciganda and American Nelly Korda shared fifth on 273. Yin, who turned pro in 2020 and won her first three China LPGA starts, took a two-shot lead into the final round and birdied the second hole.

Then came three straight bogeys before she righted the ship—she had just one par through the first 10 holes. "Like I said yesterday, I can make birdie at this course for sure, and I just told myself got to be patient," she said. After bogeys at the 10th and 14th, Yin fought back again with a birdie at the 14th—where her second shot took a lucky bounce off a tree. Hall, who had three birdies on the front nine, could find just one coming in, at the 16th.

Yin became just the second player from China to win on the LPGA tour, after 10-time winner Feng Shanshan. "That means a lot, not just for me, also for China," Yin said. "And Shanshan is always my goal here—I think she got 10 tour wins here and it's just my first one. "She's definitely the person I look up to," added Yin, who is the fifth different winner in five



BENGALURU: Royal Challengers Bangalore's Faf du Plessis plays a shot during the Indian Premier League (IPL) Twenty20 cricket match between Royal Challengers Bangalore and Mumbai Indians on April 2, 2023. —AFP

abad to 131-8. Leg-spinner Yuzvendra Chahal returned figures of 4-17 after pace spearhead Trent Boult struck twice in his first over.

Buttler and his opening partner Yashasvi Jaiswal - who also made 54 - had provided an explosive start to last year's runners-up and the inaugural IPL champions. Skipper Sanju Samson also joined in the charge with his powerful 55 before he departed in the 19th over and Shimron Hetmyer finished off the innings with his unbeaten 22. "It is a fantastic start for us. We had a really good season last season but it counts for nothing this year," said player of the match Buttler. —AFP



TERMAS DE RIO HONDO: Ducati Italian rider Marco Bezzecchi (right) celebrates his first win with second-placed Ducati French rider Johann Zarco in Santiago del Estero, Argentina. —AFP

Miguel Oliveira all nursing injuries from Portimao. Sunday's Moto2 race in Argentina was won by Tony Arbolino with Alonso Lopez and Jake Dixon filling out the podium. Moto 3 honors went to Japan's Tatsuki Suzuki with Diogo Moreira fending off Andrea Migno at the line for second place. —AFP



CALIFORNIA: Yin Ruoning of China poses with the winner's trophy after winning the DIO Implant LA Open at Palos Verdes Golf Club on April 02, 2023. —AFP

events so far this year. The LPGA will now take a week off before the Lotte Championship in Hawaii, with the first major of the year, the Chevron Championship, coming up April 20-23 at its new venue, the Club at Carlton Woods near Houston. —AFP

Sports

Milan slam brakes on Napoli title charge with four-goal thumping

AC Milan hammer runaway Serie A leaders 4-0

MILAN: AC Milan hammered runaway Serie A leaders Napoli 4-0 on Sunday in an incredible performance which slammed the brakes on their opponents' charge to a first league title in over three decades. Rafael Leao outshone Khvicha Kvaratskhelia in the battle of the wing wizards with a brilliant brace while Brahim Diaz and Alexis Saelemaekers netted the other goals for the rampant defending champions who move up to third.

The biggest win of the Serie A season for Stefano Pioli's side was also a third league defeat for Napoli, whose huge lead at the top of the table has been cut to 16 points after second-placed Lazio beat Monza 2-0 earlier on Sunday. A difficult 2023 has left Milan 20 points off the pace but they have struck first blood in a trio of matches against Napoli which will conclude this month with the Champions League quarter-final between the two Italian teams.

"It's an incredible feeling, but even if I hadn't scored today, we still played very well," said Leao after his first goals since mid-January. Napoli were without injured star striker Victor Osimhen but an otherwise first choice line-up was humbled by Milan who have boosted their chances of qualifying for next year's edition of Europe's top club competition.

Milan are however only a point above local rivals Inter Milan and Roma, who sit fifth on goal difference following their 3-0 win over Sampdoria. "It's only the first step... we have another 10 matches left in the league in which we need to have the same attitude," Pioli told DAZN. "We threw away chances in the past and that can't happen any more. I'm happy with the win but it's only one game."

"For this to be a good season we need to be playing in the Champions League next season," Diaz

was at the heart of Milan's fast start and it was his delightful pass which slipped through Leao and allowed the Portugal winger to dink the away side ahead in the 17th minute. And the home fans were stunned into near silence eight minutes later after more brilliant play from Diaz, who collected Ismael Bennacer's cross before cutting inside Mario Rui and then lashing in from close range.

Napoli struggled to get anything out of a well-drilled Milan and Leao struck again just before the hour mark, showing why he is so important to his team by bursting past Amir Rrahmani and smashing a powerful finish into the top corner. With Napoli reeling, Saelemaekers took advantage of more sloppy defending, dribbling through weak tackles and nutmegging goalkeeper Alex Meret to cap a perfect night for the seven-time European champions.

Lazio consolidate second

Pedro's low finish in the 13th minute and a sensational free-kick from Sergej Milinkovic-Savic 10 minutes after half-time gave Lazio their fifth win in six league matches at Monza. Milinkovic-Savic's goal was his first since scoring against Milan in January and his 65th for Lazio, making him the club's highest ever foreign goalscorer.

"It's been a few months that I've not played as well as I could have, it's been a hard period for me, but I give all I can to improve and today finally I scored a goal," Milinkovic-Savic said. Roma overcame 10-man Sampdoria in Rome thanks to Georginio Wijnaldum's header six minutes into the second half and two late goals from Paulo Dybala and Stephan El Shaarawy.

Netherlands midfielder Wijnaldum struck five minutes after Jeison Murillo was sent off for two



NAPLES: Napoli's Italian forward Matteo Politano (right) reacts after colliding with AC Milan's Portuguese forward Rafael Leao during the Italian Serie A football match between on April 2, 2023. — AFP

bookable offences and then won the penalty from which Dybala scored his 10th league goal of the season with a minute remaining. El Shaarawy swept home a fine stoppage-time finish to hand Samp their 19th defeat of the season and leave them 10

points behind Spezia, who sit just above the relegation zone and drew 1-1 with fellow strugglers Salernitana. Earlier, eighth-placed Bologna increased their hopes of European football next season with a 3-0 win over Udinese. — AFP

Potter pays the price as Chelsea remain ruthless

LONDON: Chelsea's new owners have been quick to try and put their stamp on the club, but the Blues hot seat remains one of the most precarious in football as Graham Potter was sacked as manager on Sunday. Potter lasted just seven months in the job as the Englishman paid the price for slipping to 11th in the Premier League table. That was not the return the club's American ownership group was expecting after investing over £500 million (\$616 million) in new players in their first season in charge, on top of the £2.5 billion they paid for the club.

The consortium headed by LA Dodgers co-owner Todd Boehly and Behdad Eghbali of private equity firm Clearlake Capital have now dismissed two managers in their debut campaign. Thomas Tuchel was jettisoned in September despite his achievements on the field, in winning the Champions League in 2021, and off it as he deftly handled the difficulties of last season when sanctions were imposed on the club due to the ownership of Roman Abramovich.

A hire-and-fire culture at Stamford Bridge is

nothing new after Abramovich's 19-year reign between 2003 and 2022. The Russian showed no mercy to even illustrious managers such as Jose Mourinho, Carlo Ancelotti and Antonio Conte, who won Premier League titles during their time at Chelsea. Despite the disruption in the dugout, Chelsea fans were still spoiled by success during the Abramovich era with 19 major trophies. That has so far not been the case under the new regime.

Scattergun transfer strategy

Potter won just 12 of his 31 matches in charge as Chelsea crashed out of both the League and FA Cup in the early rounds to Manchester City and find themselves rooted in the bottom half of the Premier League. Only Champions League success can salvage the season, but they face a difficult route to the final.

The Blues take on holders Real Madrid in the quarter-finals later this month with the winners progressing to a last four clash against City or Bayern Munich. Potter had been sold the dream when he was plucked from Brighton with Chelsea paying over £20 million in compensation for his services. "There's a completely different ownership," he said earlier in the season when speculation first arose over his future. "This is hard for people to get their head around as Chelsea for 20 years has been one thing and now all of a sudden it's different."

That has proven not to be the case as Boehly and



LONDON: Chelsea's English head coach Graham Potter gestures during the English Premier League football match between Chelsea and Aston Villa at Stamford Bridge in London on April 1, 2023. — AFP

Eghbali's patience was exhausted by a 2-0 home defeat to Aston Villa on Saturday that was met by boos from the home support. Potter was ultimately the fall guy for a scattergun approach to the transfer market that exposed a lack of experience among the new owners. Boehly installed himself as the club's sporting director last summer and oversaw a £250 million outlay on Raheem Sterling, Kalidou Koulibaly, Wesley Fofana, Marc Cucurella and Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang, all of whom have struggled to make a meaningful impact. — AFP

Antetokounmpo lifts Bucks; Dallas on the brink

LOS ANGELES: Giannis Antetokounmpo scored 33 points as the Milwaukee Bucks returned to form with a statement 117-104 victory over the Philadelphia 76ers on Sunday. Eastern Conference top seed favourites Milwaukee - routed 140-99 by Boston in their last outing on Thursday - bounced back in style to score an emphatic win over the third-placed Sixers. Antetokounmpo led a balanced Milwaukee offensive display that saw five players finish in double figures in a wire-to-wire victory at Fiserv Forum.

Antetokounmpo finished with 14 rebounds and six assists in addition to his 33-point haul, while Brook

Lopez (21 points), Khris Middleton (19) and Jrue Holiday (18) all contributed. Tyrese Maxey led the Sixers scoring with 29 points while Joel Embiid added 28. The win edged Milwaukee closer to sealing top spot in the Eastern Conference. With four games remaining in the regular season, the Bucks lead the East on 58-22, with Boston second on 54-24.

Philadelphia remain third on 51-27 following Sunday's loss. Bucks coach Mike Budenholzer meanwhile said Antetokounmpo's performance confirmed his belief that the Greek star should be the front-runner for the regular season MVP award. "We certainly feel like Giannis is the MVP," Budenholzer said. "What he does at both ends of the court - he does everything," Budenholzer said. "We feel like he's in the conversation and he should be the guy."

In other games on Sunday, Western Conference leaders Denver - still missing Nikola Jokic - held on for a tense 112-110 win over the Golden State Warriors. Michael Porter Jr and Jamal Murray combined

for 55 points as the Nuggets withstood a late Warriors rally to hold on. Warriors star Klay Thompson missed a last-gasp three-point attempt before a desperate block from Murray thwarted another effort as time ran out.

In Los Angeles, LeBron James bagged the 107th triple-double of his career as the Lakers continued their late season resurgence with a 134-109 romp over the Houston Rockets. James finished with 18 points, 11 assists and 10 rebounds, while Anthony Davis led the Lakers scoring with 40 points. The Lakers third consecutive victory leaves them seventh in the Western Conference, just one spot outside the automatic postseason places. In Oklahoma City meanwhile, Kevin Durant scored 35 points against his old club as the Phoenix Suns romped to a 128-118 win over the Thunder. Shai Gilgeous-Alexander scored a game-high 39 points for Oklahoma City, who are 10th in the Western Conference, just one win ahead of the Dallas Mavericks. —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
Khalidiya	24848075
Kaifan	24849807
Shamiya	24848913
Shuwaikh	24814507
Abdullah Salem	22549134



NOTICE
March 13, 2023

Mr. Jesley Xavier Miranda, son of Mr. Jesus Nazareno Miranda, resident of H No 184/1 Figueum Bhatt, Goa Velha, North Goa - 403108, Goa and Ms. Acacia Pinto, daughter of Mr. John Joe Pinto, resident of Khalai Village, Kirol Road, Vidyavihar, Mumbai 86, Maharashtra both Indian nationals presently residing in Kuwait, have given notice of intended marriage between them under the Foreign Marriage Act, 1969. If anyone has any objection to the proposed marriage, he/she may file the same with the undersigned according to the procedure laid down under the Act/Rule within thirty days from the date of publication of this notice. Communications in this regard can be made by Email (cw2.kuwait@mea.gov.in) /letters/telephonic calls (00965 - 22550171, 00965 - 22533125).

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TIMINGS: 10:00AM to 02:00PM - 08:00PM to 10:30PM

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Change of Name

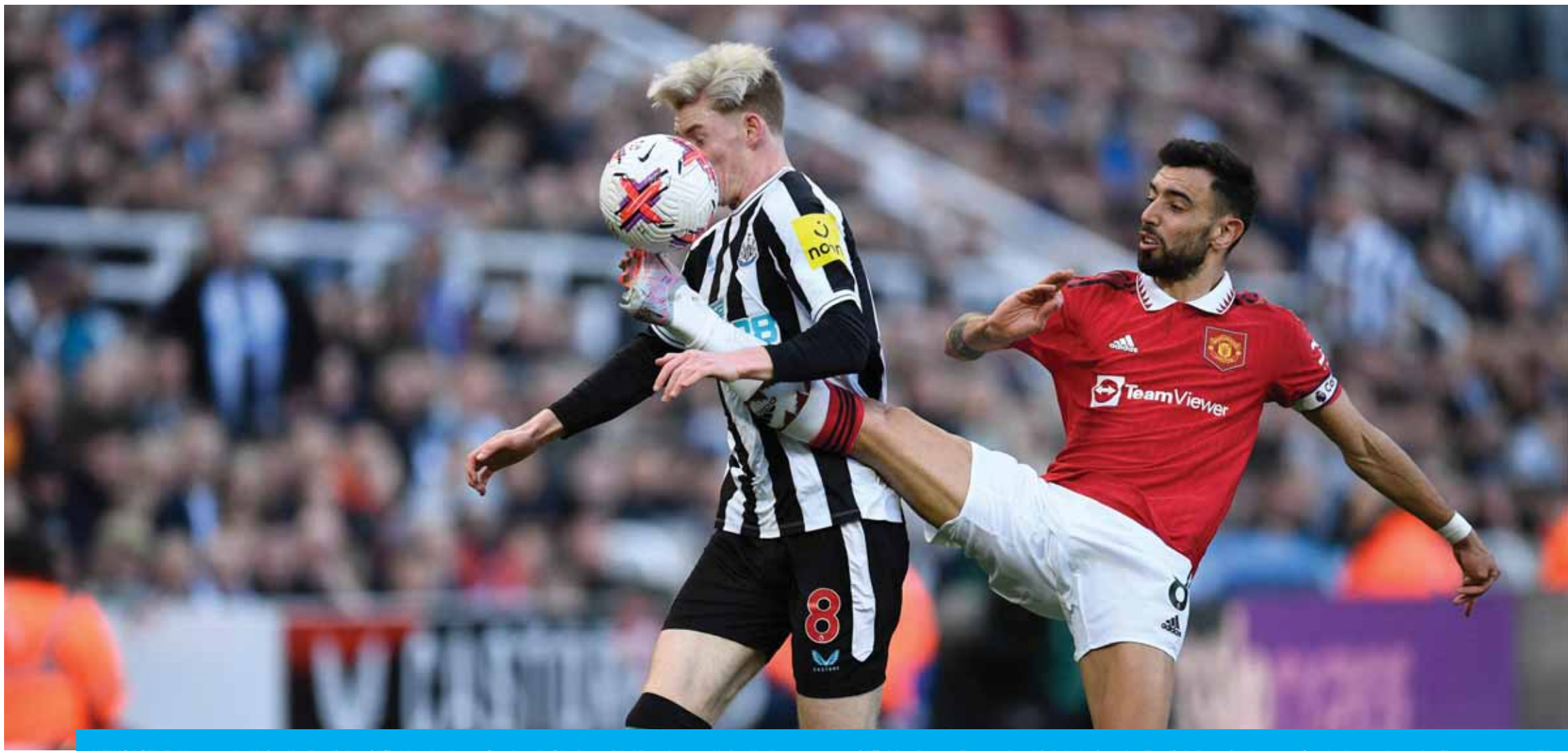
I, NAGARAJAN RAMANICKAM, born on 06.11.1981 (Native District: Thanjavur) residing at No. 92/1, Udaiyar Street, Mela Perambur, Tharangampadi Taluk - 609402, Nagapattinam District, Tamil Nadu, shall henceforth be known as **SUJAI RAJAMANICKAM. (C 3195)**

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**

Newcastle go 3rd, down United

West Ham scramble out of relegation zone



NEWCASTLE: Newcastle United's English midfielder Anthony Gordon (left) vies with Manchester United's Portuguese midfielder Bruno Fernandes (right) during the English Premier League football match on April 2, 2023. — AFP

LONDON: Newcastle avenged their League Cup final loss against Manchester United as Joe Willock and Callum Wilson clinched a 2-0 win that lifted the Magpies into third place in the Premier League on Sunday. Eddie Howe's side were beaten 2-0 by United at Wembley five weeks ago in their first major final for 24 years. But Newcastle might swap silverware for a lucrative Champions League berth and second half goals from Willock and Wilson at a raucous St James' Park moved them closer to that ambition.

Newcastle's third successive league win - and their first against United since 2019 - took them above their fourth placed opponents on goal difference. They sit one point ahead of fifth placed Tottenham, who visit Everton on Monday, as the race heats up to qualify for next season's Champions League via a top four finish. It is 46 years since Newcastle last finished above United, but the Magpies, fuelled by Howe's astute management and the financial backing of their Saudi owners, now have a rare

chance to emulate that feat.

"We were frustrated not to lead at half-time, but I felt if we performed the same way it would come. Thankfully it did," Howe said. "If you're playing well that's the most important thing. That gives us a great chance of achieving a special season. If we can maintain our position I'll be very happy." United are without a win in their last three league games, thrashed 7-0 at Liverpool and then held to a goalless draw by lowly Southampton before this setback on Tyneside.

United's first major trophy in six years was supposed to be the start of a new golden era, but instead they have failed to score in three successive league matches for the first time since February 2020. It was a dispiriting start to a busy run of nine fixtures in April as Erik ten Hag's men look to nail down a top four finish, while aiming to advance to the Europa League semi-finals and FA Cup final. "I hate to say it but they were better today, especially their determination, passion and desire. They wanted to win more

so they won," Ten Hag said. "It wasn't good enough. We allowed them too many chances. You have to be hungry and give everything every game. "We have to deal with the setback and learn a lesson. I believe we'll bounce back." Newcastle's pressure was finally rewarded in the 65th minute when Bruno Guimaraes clipped a cross to the far post and Allan Saint-Maximin headed back towards Willock, who nodded home from virtually on the goalline. Wilson put the result beyond doubt after 88 minutes with a clinical close-range header from Kieran Trippier's free-kick.

West Ham boost

In Sunday's other game, West Ham scrambled out of the relegation zone as Nayef Aguerd's first goal for the club sealed a crucial 1-0 victory against fellow strugglers Southampton. David Moyes' side kicked off at the London Stadium languishing second bottom of the table, with Southampton in last place.

But Morocco defender Aguerd's maiden goal since signing from French club Rennes last year lifted the Hammers up to 14th. West Ham are just one point above the relegation zone, but they have a little breathing space thanks to their first win in three league games. On the day Leicester sacked Brendan Rodgers after their slump into the bottom three, Hammers boss Moyes must have breathed a sigh of relief when the final whistle blew on a result that may have saved his job.

Southampton remain bottom of the table and sit three points from safety after their winless run reached four games. Aguerd eased West Ham's mounting anxiety in the 25th minute as the Moroccan defender rose to power a header past Gavin Bazunu from Thilo Kehrer's free-kick. "We have played better than that and not won this season, but today was all about the result," Moyes said. "I have to get results. There's no protection to stop me losing my job." — AFP

Messi jeered as PSG suffer home defeat

PARIS: Paris Saint-Germain suffered a second home defeat in a row Sunday, falling 1-0 to Lyon as their World Cup winning superstar Lionel Messi was jeered by a section of supporters. After losing 2-0 at home to Rennes two weeks ago, it was Lyon's Bradley Barcola who inflicted the latest loss for PSG at the Parc des Princes. The goal by Barcola—who had come on as replacement for injured Amin Sarr—made up for a missed penalty by Alexandre Lacazette in the first half.

It is the Parisians' fifth Ligue 1 loss this season, all of them in 2023, and leaves Christophe Galtier's side just six points ahead of both second-placed Lens and Marseille in third. The night started in controversial circumstances. As the team line-ups were announced over the loudspeaker, whistling greeted Messi's name in one part of the stadium. Fans in another area, however, shouted in response "Messi". Messi, 35, is nearing the end of his two-year contract with the Paris club. Talks have begun on a possible renewal but he has also been linked with a return to Barcelona.

In two seasons, the veteran has played 67 matches with PSG including Sunday's game against ninth-placed Lyon and scored 29 goals. "The whistles, I find that hard," said Galtier. "Leo is a player who gives a lot and who has given a lot since the start of the season." He added: "With a stroke of genius, Leo is able to deliver the right ball, to provide an assist, to score a goal. I never once thought about taking him off." PSG midfielder Danilo acknowledged the team had hit "a difficult phase" which they had to find a way out of, given their rivals were closing in.

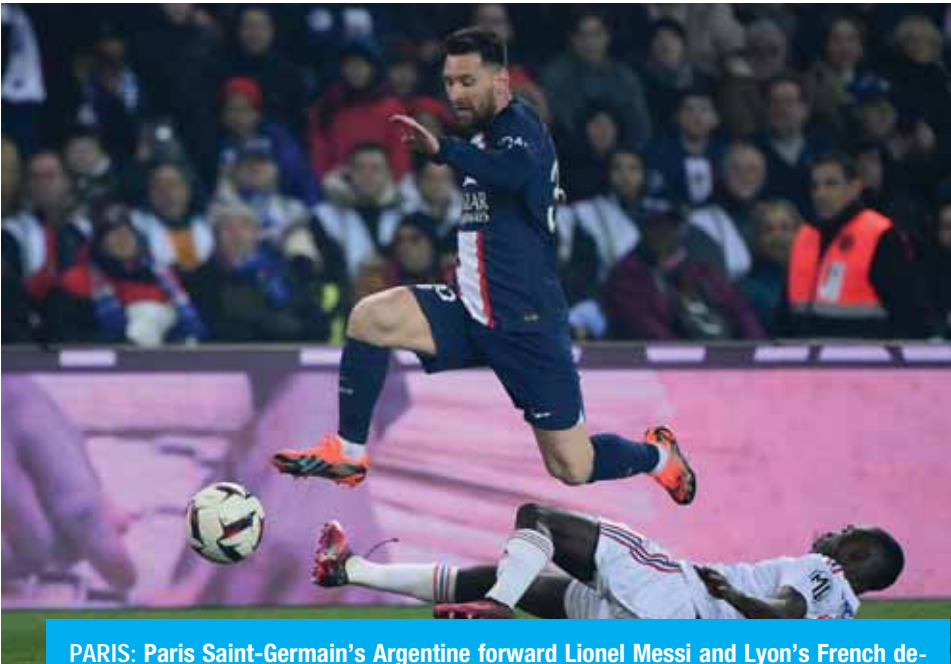
"We have to wake up. The title is not guaranteed at all, there are still a lot of matches," he said on Prime Video. "There are lot of things to change, not just the

mindset, but it's not up to me to say what." PSG have been severely hampered by injuries, with Neymar recovering from ankle surgery and their defence decimated. On Sunday, PSG called up 17-year-old central defender El Chadaille Bitshiabu but he was overawed, giving away the ball too often. Kylian Mbappe failed to pull off a repeat of his late scoring heroics as he had done in recent games against Strasbourg and Brest.

"We can't expect everything from Leo and Kylian," said Galtier. "It's our eighth defeat in 2023, it's far too many." Next up for PSG is a trip to Nice who are undefeated since January 2 before a crucial home clash with second-placed Lens. Lens will be hopeful of delivering a further blow to their Qatar-owned rivals whose season is threatening to implode after a Champions League exit at the hands of Bayern Munich and a French Cup loss to bitter rivals Marseille. Monaco kept up their push for a Champions League spot with a roller-

coaster 4-3 home win over lowly Strasbourg. Monaco trailed 2-1 at the interval despite taking an 18th-minute lead through Vanderson. Lebo Mothiba and an own-goal by Chilean defender Guillermo Marinpan gave Strasbourg the edge. Eliesse Ben Seghir and Edan Diop, both just 18 years old, and Youssouf Fofana then hit three goals inside an 11-minute spell in the second half to give Monaco a 4-2 lead.

Habib Diallo's stoppage-time strike was only a consolation for Strasbourg. Monaco have 57 points, just three behind third-placed Marseille who were held to a 1-1 draw by Montpellier on Friday. "As I told the players, we saw two faces of Monaco tonight," said Monaco coach Philippe Clement. "We started well and for 25 minutes, we were good. But then the aggressiveness fell away and Strasbourg came back and scored twice. At half-time, I was very angry. I didn't recognize my team." —AFP



PARIS: Paris Saint-Germain's Argentine forward Lionel Messi and Lyon's French defender Castello Lukeba (R) fight for the ball during the French L1 football match between Paris Saint-Germain (PSG) and Olympique Lyonnais (OL) . — AFP



MADRID: Real Madrid's Belgian forward Eden Hazard (left) falls down next to Real Valladolid's Moroccan defender Jawad El Yamiq (center) and Real Madrid's Brazilian forward Rodrygo (right) during the Spanish league football match on April 2, 2023. — AFP

Madrid thrash Valladolid 6-0

MADRID: Karim Benzema scored a stunning hat-trick in a seven-minute salvo as Real Madrid thumped Real Valladolid 6-0 on Sunday in La Liga. The champions, second, sit 12 points behind leaders Barcelona after the Catalans beat Elche on Saturday, with 11 games remaining each. Carlo Ancelotti's side warmed up for their Copa del Rey semi-final clash on Wednesday with their arch-rivals in style by dismantling the helpless visitors, 16th and a point above the drop zone.

Rodrygo Goes opened the scoring early on, before Benzema's hat-trick, including a spectacular acrobatic effort, with Marco Asensio netting the fifth in the second half and Lucas Vazquez adding another late on. Rodrygo had another goal ruled out for handball by Vinicius Junior, who set up two of Benzema's strikes,

as Madrid ran riot in the spring sunshine at the Santiago Bernabeu.

"The team went out with a lot of conviction, a lot of desire to win the game and to play well in front of our fans," Vazquez told DAZN. "Karim is a spectacular player, a world-class star, he's been here 14 years and year after year he scores goals. "Year after year he's been Madrid's number nine, there's not much left to say about him, I'm very happy for him and enjoying (playing with) him in each game."

Starting in a central attacking midfield role, Rodrygo slotted home the opener after 22 minutes after being teed up by Asensio to open the floodgates. Vinicius's cross allowed Benzema to net the second after 29 minutes, and four minutes later, the Brazilian fed his French strike partner again and the forward curled home from the edge of the box. Benzema completed his hat-trick after 36 minutes when Rodrygo crossed and he pulled off an impressive overhead effort from inside the six-yard box for his 14th goal of the season in La Liga. — AFP