



5 Trump due in court to face historic criminal charges



11 Praying for victory: Ukraine Muslims mark Ramadan



16 Hats off as intel operatives hound sports match fixers



RAMADAN TIMINGS	
Fajr	04:13
Shurooq	05:34
Dhuhr	11:51
Asr	15:23
Maghrib	18:08
Isha	19:27

Amir's Representative urges MoI to be vigilant, tackle traffic issues

Crown Prince calls on KFF to boost safety awareness



KUWAIT: Representative of HH the Amir, HH the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, visits the interior ministry HQ (left) and Kuwait Fire Force HQ (right). — KUNA photos

RAMADAN KAREEM

Environmental care in Islam-II

By Hassan Twaha Bwambale

The following are also among the things that we can do to improve the environment.

3. Care for the animals and the rest of Allah's creatures: Among the important components and residents of the Earth, apart from humankind, are animals. All animals in nature have important roles to play in the ecosystem. They coexist and balance out each other to reduce negative impacts on the environment and unknowingly address issues of pollution, global warming and disturbances that cause a drastic change in ecosystems.

Bearing in mind that animals fulfil their roles to help care for and save the planet, it is only right for us, as vicegerents on Earth, to play our part in caring for the environment. One of the ways that can help us achieve this objective is by caring for the animals and the creations of the Almighty Allah who says what can be translated as: "And there is not a single animal the walks or creeps on the earth, nor a bird flying with its two wings, except that they are communities like you. We have not neglected anything in the (Preserved) Tablet (of Heaven). Then they (who ask for miracles) will be assemble (in the Hereafter) before their Lord (with all people)." (Al-An'aam 6: 38)

Note that the Majestic Allah created living beings (like animals, birds, and fish – among others) just like He created humans. He provides for all and is merciful to all. They all belong to communities and have their own system of living.

Abu Huraira (RA) narrated that Allah's Messenger (PBUH) said, "While a man was walking, he felt thirsty and descended down a well and drank water from it. On exiting it, he saw a dog panting and eating mud because of excessive thirst. The man said, 'This (dog) is suffering from the same problem I suffered from.' So, he (descended down the well) again, filled his shoe with water, clenched it with his teeth, and climbed up and watered the dog.

(The Almighty) Allah appreciated him for his deed and forgave him."

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KUWAIT: Representative of HH the Amir and the 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, urged interior ministry staff to carry on evolving the work system and equipment, as well as training human resources in all sectors.

This came in a speech delivered by HH the Crown Prince on Monday evening during a visit to the Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah building at the

Assembly session fails over quorum, adjourned till Eid

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: The first session of the court-revived National Assembly failed to take place on Tuesday due to a lack of quorum and the absence of the government, leading Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem to adjourn the Assembly until after the Eid Al-Fitr holidays, which start on April 21. Only 22 lawmakers showed up for the session, which was expected to

Finland becomes NATO member as Russia rages

BRUSSELS: Finland becomes the 31st member of NATO on Tuesday in a historic shift that drew an angry warning of "countermeasures" from the Kremlin. Moscow's all-out invasion of Ukraine last year upended Europe's security landscape and prompted Finland — and its neighbor Sweden — to drop decades of military non-alignment.

"Not so many years ago we thought it was unthinkable that Finland would become a member. Now

NASA unveils crew of flight around Moon

HOUSTON: NASA unveiled the crew on Monday for its first human mission to the Moon in more than 50 years — including the first woman and black man to voyage into deep space. Christina Koch, a NASA astronaut who holds the record for the longest single spaceflight by a woman, will be

interior ministry. Accompanied by HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, HH the Crown Prince also appealed to the ministry's staff to remain constantly vigilant and ready to deal firmly with lawbreakers.

HH the Crown Prince advised MoI personnel to keep pace with the latest technology in the security field, mainly cybersecurity, while sharing expertise with peers in sisterly countries. He asked the personnel to upgrade traffic systems and find solutions

to traffic problems, and enhance security awareness of both citizens and residents.

HH the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal also urged Kuwait Fire Force (KFF) staff to enhance their awareness on basic rules of safety and means of protection during a visit to the KFF HQ. HH the Crown Prince advised the staff to be ready and continue organizing joint drills as well as raise efficiency of KFF personnel through continued training. — KUNA (See Page 2)

be canceled as Prime Minister-designate HH Sheikh Ahmad Al-Nawaf Al-Sabah has not formed the new Cabinet. The presence of at least one minister is essential for Assembly sessions to be legal, according to Kuwaiti law.

The constitutional court ruled on March 19 that the Amiri decree that dissolved the National Assembly, known as the 2020 parliament, violated the constitution. As a result, the court annulled the parliamentary polls held on Sept 29 last year and scrapped the 2022 parliament. That plunged the country into a political crisis, as opposition MPs rejected the court verdict, saying it exceeded its powers, while the revived 2020 MPs urged the prime minister to speed up the process of forming the new Cabinet. Local media and analysts have said that the

Continued on Page 6

they will be a fully-fledged member of our alliance and that is truly historic," NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg said. "We are removing the room for miscalculation in Moscow about NATO's readiness to protect Finland, and that makes Finland safer."

Finnish Defense Minister Antti Kaikkonen called it "a win-win situation" ahead of the choreographed final formalities before Finland's blue-and-white flag can be hoisted in front of NATO's headquarters. But Moscow decried the move as an "assault" on Russia's security and national interests. "This forces us to take countermeasures... in tactical and strategic terms," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said.

Joining NATO places Finland under the alliance's Article Five, the collective defense pledge that an

Continued on Page 6

a mission specialist on next year's Artemis II flight around the Moon.

NASA's Victor Glover, a naval aviator, will pilot the Orion spacecraft that circles the Moon in November 2024, becoming the first black man to take part in a lunar mission. Rounding out the crew are veteran NASA astronaut Reid Wiseman, 47, the mission commander, and Jeremy Hansen, also 47, a former fighter pilot now with the Canadian Space Agency.

The three Americans and one Canadian will become the first astronauts to venture that deep into space since the historic Apollo missions ended in 1972. The Artemis II flight is a prelude to return-



KUWAIT: MPs attend a session of the National Assembly on April 4, 2023, which was adjourned. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat



BRUSSELS: NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg (right) hands over Finland's accession to NATO documents to Finnish Foreign Affairs Minister Pekka Haavisto at the NATO headquarters on April 4, 2023. — AFP

ing humans to the Moon for the first time in a half century and an eventual mission to Mars. The three American astronauts have all spent time on the International Space Station (ISS) while Hansen, the Canadian mission specialist, will be making his first space flight.

The four astronauts, dressed in blue flight suits, were introduced by NASA administrator Bill Nelson at an event at the Johnson Space Center in Houston. "The largest, most powerful rocket in the world is going to propel them onward and upward into the heavens," Nelson said. Koch, 44, an electrical

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KUWAIT: HH the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah (center), HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah (center left) and First Deputy Prime Minister, Interior Minister and Acting Defense Minister Sheikh Talal Khaled Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah (center right) and senior officials at the Ministry of Interior pose for a photo at the ministry's headquarters on April 3, 2023. — KUNA

Crown Prince urges MoI to stay updated on cybersecurity

Ministry to spare no effort in upgrading performance: Undersecretary

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 urged the Ministry of Interior staff to carry on advancing the ministry's system and equipment, as well as training human resources at all sectors.

This came in a speech delivered by His Highness the Crown Prince Monday evening during a visit to the Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah's building at the ministry. Accompanied by His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, His Highness the Crown Prince also appealed to the ministry's staff to remain vigilant and always be ready to firmly deal with outbreaks.

His Highness the Crown Prince advised the ministry's personnel to keep pace with the latest technology in the security field, mainly cybersecurity, as they share expertise with other interior ministries in friendly countries.

Received by First Deputy Prime Minister, Interior Minister and Acting Defense Minister Sheikh Talal Khaled Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah and Undersecretary Lt Gen Anwar Al-Barjas, His Highness the Crown Prince asked the personnel to upgrade traffic systems, find solutions to traffic problems and enhance security



HH the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah (center) speaks at the meeting on April 3, 2023.

awareness of both citizens and residents.

His Highness the Crown Prince affirmed the political leadership's support for all state institutions, mainly the military and security bodies. He highlighted the ministry's approach to enhancing and developing the efficiency and capabilities of all its sectors to achieve its desired goals.

His Highness the Crown Prince expressed appreciation to the ministry and its General Directorate for Drug Control for their efforts in combating drugs. Lt Gen Barjas said that the Ministry of Interior personnel have spared no effort in upgrading performance in all sectors, with the aim of enhancing security and stability

nationwide. Since last year's visit of His Highness the Crown Prince, the ministry's sectors seized large amounts of drugs, including 7,500 tons of narcotics and others, Barjas said. He stressed the importance of decisively and constantly combating such narcotics to keep the country and its citizens safe. —KUNA



KUWAIT: HH the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah receives a souvenir from Kuwait Fire Force Director General Lt Gen Khaled Al-Mekrad at the KFF headquarters. —KUNA photos



HH the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah (center) flanked by HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah (second left) and First Deputy Prime Minister, Interior Minister and Acting Defense Minister Sheikh Talal Khaled Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah (second right) and other officials at the meeting.

Crown Prince prompts fire force to enhance cooperation with allies

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 urged the Kuwait Fire Force (KFF) staff to enhance awareness on basic rules of safety and means of protection.

This came in a speech delivered by His Highness Monday evening during a visit to the KFF headquarters, conveying greetings of His Highness the Amir to the staff on Ramadan. His Highness the Crown Prince was accompanied by His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah.

Received by First Deputy Prime Minister, Interior Minister and Acting Defense Minister Sheikh

Talal Khaled Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah and KFF Director General Lt Gen Khaled Al-Mekrad, His Highness the Crown Prince advised the staff to be always be prepared and continue organizing joint drills as well as raise efficiency of the KFF personnel through continued training.

His Highness also urged staff to continuously develop the ministry's work system and boosting cooperation with peers in friendly countries. His Highness recommended staff to set plans to avoid fire eruptions, mainly in industrial zones, due to the high temperature in the summer.

His Highness Sheikh Mishal asked staff to intensify inspection tours and ensure applying safety standards in all facilities and punish by law those who violate approved requirements, without any exception, affirming the political leadership's support in this regard.

His Highness voiced appreciation to KFF for its effort in safeguarding FIFA 2022 World Cup Championship in Qatar and in partaking in rescue operations in the areas affected by the recent earthquake in Turkey. — KUNA



HH the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah (center) flanked by HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah and First Deputy Prime Minister, Interior Minister and Acting Defense Minister Sheikh Talal Khaled Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah and other officials at the Kuwait Fire Force during a meeting held at the KFF headquarters on April 3, 2023.



Deputy FM meets Ukraine ambassador

KUWAIT: Deputy Foreign Minister Ambassador Mansour Al-Otaibi received on Tuesday Ukraine Ambassador to Kuwait Dr Oleksandr Balanutsa. The two sides discussed bilateral relations and ways to bolster them as well as the latest regional and international developments. —KUNA

Local

Gold: The 'most trusted' precious metal in Kuwait

A safe haven compared to other types of investments



KUWAIT: A jeweler displays gold bracelets and necklaces at his shop in downtown Kuwait City on March 04, 2023. —Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat

By Ghadeer Ghloom

KUWAIT: Throughout history, it has been proven that gold has a special value. To take a closer look at Kuwait's gold market in terms of investing, trustworthiness, people's preferences and challenges, Kuwait Times interviewed Abu Mahdi, owner of a gold shop in Mubarakiya, and Abu Hashem, manager of a gold store in Hawally, to learn more about gold sales post-COVID and the new hallmark.

Trust in gold

Abu Hashem said gold witnessed huge demand during and after the COVID pandemic, because people realized that gold prices had increased drastically, from KD 12 per gram to KD 17 per gram. So, there is a difference of KD 5-6 per gram, which is not a small amount. People started trusting gold and realized they must keep some gold to secure their future. As a consequence, sales rose during this period until today, although gold was cheaper before the pandemic.

Abu Mahdi said being a gold seller since 2010, he sees people in Kuwait have always trusted gold, because losses and cheating in gold is very limited, especially in Kuwait, as the ministry of commerce is taking very good care of this issue. It checks gold pieces very well and it goes through a trustworthy process.

Hallmark challenges

Regarding the new hallmark, Abu Mahdi and Abu Hashem had different reactions. Abu Hashem complained that after the new stamp appeared, it brought up many problems, because people started doubting the products

they have in their stores, worrying whether the gold pieces are fake or not. Abu Hashem said he has been selling gold stamped more than 20 years ago and has not faced any mistrust as he did after the new stamp, as people always have questions regarding the new hallmark. However, he said at the end of the day, he has his own clients who trust him on the genuineness of the gold pieces more than the new stamp, which keeps his work going regardless of obstacles.

On the other hand, Abu Mahdi said the new seal barely affected his business, because the Kuwait market is a trustworthy market and cheating is almost nonexistent due to the excessive care and responsibility by the ministry of commerce. Another thing that prevented Abu Mahdi from struggling with the new hallmark is that like Abu Hashem, Abu Mahdi's costumers trust him. He also said that in case of fraud, buyers can always go to the ministry and find a solution to their problem with the gold seller.

Abu Mahdi elaborated the new hallmark is very good and even better than the old one, because the old one used to take space from the gold piece and could ruin part of its beauty, whereas the new seal is simple and is done by laser, which can be placed on small pieces of gold without ruining their shape or design. Changing the new stamp is mainly to improve it and avoid problems that appeared due to some criminals who copied the old stamp to sell people fake gold.

What makes gold special?

Abu Hashem said what makes gold more special when it comes to investing is that it is known as a safe haven compared to other

types of investments. "Stocks might lose their value and you will be left with only a few papers that can barely do anything for your benefit. However, gold is tangible; you can hold it with your hands and keep it wherever you find suitable, which keeps it under your control. That is why businessmen make sure to keep their money in gold, because when their companies lose, they sell their businesses and buy gold instead, especially since its price increases more and more by time," he said.

Additionally, Abu Mahdi said gold is one of the most popular precious metals ever and people love it for its beauty and flexibility, as it can be used as a wearable accessory that reflects wealth. Besides, it has a stable price that is agreed upon globally and keeps increasing by time. "So it is normal that people like to boost their financial income and secure their future, so they head towards gold," he said.

What kind of gold people buy?

Both Abu Hashem and Abu Mahdi said some people buy gold for investment, while others buy it for wearing it or for giving it as gifts. Abu Mahdi advised people must save their money by buying gold and not keeping it in their bank accounts or as cash, even if the amount is not big, because money loses its value over time, while gold gains value.



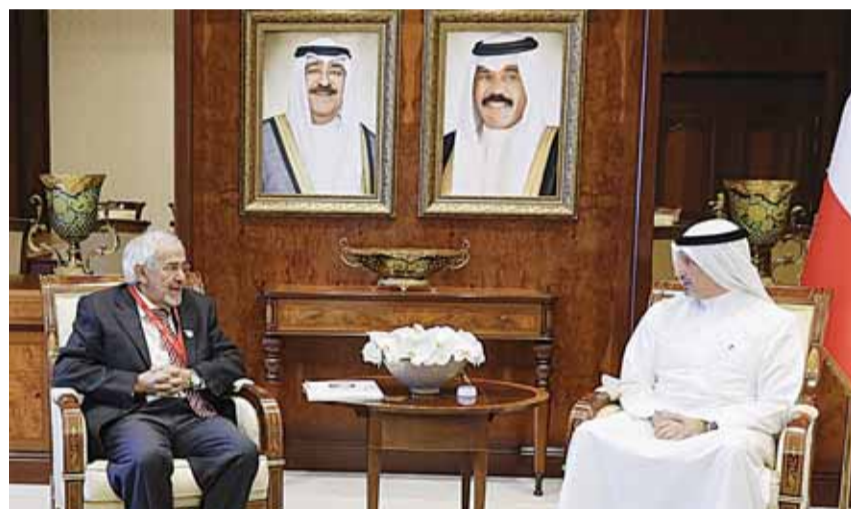
Abu Hashem



Crown Prince receives letter from UAE leader

KUWAIT: His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received on Tuesday a written letter addressed to His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah from UAE's President Sheikh Mohammad Bin Zayed Al-Nahyan. The letter highlights the strong bilateral ties and ways to develop them, and includes an invitation for Kuwait to participate in the World Climate Summit, that marks the official launch of the UAE climate conference, to be held on the 1 and 2 of December 2023, along with UAE's 52 national day celebrations.

In a meeting, Ambassador of the United Arab Emirates to Kuwait Dr Matar Hamid Al-Neyadi delivered the letter during the meeting that was attended by Minister of Amiri Diwan Affairs Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah, and Director of the Office of His Highness the Crown Prince, retired Lieutenant-General Jamal Mohammad Al-Thiyab. —KUNA



Foreign minister hails KRCS efforts

KUWAIT: Kuwait Foreign Minister Sheikh Salem Abdullah Al-Jaber Al-Sabah on Tuesday met the Chairman of Kuwait Red Crescent Society (KRCS) Dr Hilal Al-Sayer at the ministry's headquarters. During the meeting, they discussed the society's activities and projects, ways of promoting cooperation among officials of United Nations (UN) agencies, non-governmental humanitarian organizations and civil society.

Foreign Minister and the Chairman

of Kuwait Red Crescent Society also talked about supporting joint efforts for response to humanitarian emergency, including mechanisms for delivering humanitarian aid provided by Kuwait to earthquake-affected Turkish and Syrian people, along with those affected by the Russia-Ukraine war. The foreign minister hailed KRCS' great contributions, projects and activities inside and outside Kuwait only to serve noble humanitarian goals, and appreciated its fervent efforts to deliver humanitarian, medical and relief aid to affected people around the world, and to promote Kuwait's global status. —KUNA

Conference reviews latest treatments of heart diseases

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: Kuwait Heart Foundation (KHF) participated in the Clinical Cardiology Updates conference in cooperation with Gulf Heart Association to review the latest treatments of heart diseases. KHF Board Member Dr Mohammad Zubaid said one of the issues discussed was the upcoming study of KHF on scientific research about heart attacks in Kuwait, which will start next month.

He said it is a study of all heart attack cases in patients admitted to Kuwait hospitals, following the patients' treatment types and caring for them, adding that the conference includes reviewing diseases related to the heart, such as diseases pregnant women suffer from and their relation to heart diseases. Dr Zubaid said among the most important goals of KHF is to promote awareness for doctors and the public about heart diseases in Kuwait, adding that the event is very important because it includes talks about heart diseases doctors deal with daily in hospitals.

Senior interventional cardiologist Dr Fahad Al-Hajiri said the conference discussed the latest global developments and recommendations about heart disease. He hoped this conference will be the nucleus for other conferences that take place periodically, as there are many benefits for these conferences, most important of which is achieving the latest scientific developments in cardiology. Cardiologist at Mubarak Hospital Dr Abdullah Hus-



KUWAIT: Kuwait Heart Foundation (KHF) participated in the Clinical Cardiology Updates conference in cooperation with Gulf Heart Association to review the latest treatments of heart diseases.



sein Ismail said the conference is for doctors and medical staff to discuss the latest in heart diseases, in addition to sending a message to the society, as awareness of heart diseases is important.

Social Affairs Ministry teams inspect mosques during Ramadan

KUWAIT: The social affairs ministry announced that its inspection teams assigned to supervise charitable work made hundreds of visits to mosques and charitable society headquarters during the first 10 days of the holy month of Ramadan. "Our teams made 692 field visits to mosques and 40 visits to the headquarters of charitable societies, where they monitored 70 booths for collecting clothes and removed 35 of them.

We also monitored 70 restaurants inviting to collect donations for breaking fast through social media. The ministry of commerce and industry was contacted in this regard, noting that 54 charities, foundations and other entities not adhering to advertising controls were contacted to avoid future violations," the ministry said.

"Three funds collecting donations in mosques were found to be in violation of the fundraising law, where a case report was prepared by the ministry's inspectors and addressed to the Awqaf ministry. It also monitored 14 violations by people and entities fundraising through advertisements on social media, and the Public Prosecution was informed," the ministry added.

The ministry stated that three violations were also monitored of people and entities calling for fundraising through advertisements on the streets. The ministry of interior was contacted in this regard, and 21 violations were monitored on various social media sites calling for fundraising. It also said it contacted Central Agency for Information Technology, adding six teams were caught fundraising for breaking the fast.

Saad Abdullah academy holds selection exercise for officer course

KUWAIT: Saad Al-Abdullah Academy for Security Sciences on Tuesday organized a selection exercise for applicants for specialized officers, batch (31) for university degree holders. Interior ministry undersecretary for education and training affairs, Bader Al-Baloul said that personal interviews, abilities testing and medical examinations were conducted for the applicants in a transparent manner. The lottery will be conducted in two shifts, the morning for scientific disciplines and the evening for literary disciplines.

Acting director of the academy Mohammed Al-Rumi said that the draft comes upon the instructions of interior minister Sheikh Talal Al-



KUWAIT: Photos show participants during the exercise. Saad Al-Abdullah Academy for Security Sciences on Tuesday organized a selection exercise for applicants for specialized officers for university degree holders. —KUNA photos

Khaled Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah. All procedures for accepting students to become officers took place in the presence of representatives of the

Anti-Corruption Authority, Nazaha. The number of applicants for the personal interview reached 6,005 applicants. Those who qualified

to enter the lottery reached 3,728, and the required number is 300 applicants while the reserve number is 100 applicants. —KUNA



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News in Brief

Kuwait supports SIDS

PARIS: Kuwait on Monday affirmed, before the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the importance of backing the Small Island Developing States (SIDS) as they are subject to natural disasters caused by climate change. This came during a meeting held between Kuwait's permanent mission and UNESCO member states within the frame of cooperation between the two sides. Head of the mission Dr Adam Al-Mullah said in a statement that it expanded its priorities to cover efforts of backing SIDS. He said that he established in March 22, in cooperation with Armenia's permanent mission to the UNESCO, the SIDS friendship group, which attracted more than 50 countries from different continents. The group aims to show solidarity with those states and raise awareness on their needs in the face of risks facing them, mainly climate change, he said. — KUNA

Kuwait oil price up

KUWAIT: The price of Kuwaiti oil barrel rose by \$6.91 to reach \$86.23 per barrel on Monday, compared with \$79.32 pb on Friday, said Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) on Tuesday. In international markets, the price of Brent crude oil went up by \$5.04 to reach \$84.93 per barrel, while West Texas Intermediate rose by \$4.75 to reach \$80.42 pb. — KUNA

GCC chief consoles US

RIYADH: GCC Secretary-General Jassem Al-Budaiwi expressed sympathy with the United States over the victims of the tornadoes that wreaked havoc on parts of the southern and midwestern states in the recent days. In a brief statement on Monday, he offered condolences to the US government and people as well as the families of dozens of victims. Al-Budaiwi wished the wounded people a quick recovery. At least 20 people were killed when a slew of tornadoes struck in the states of Indiana, Iowa, Illinois, Arkansas, Tennessee, Mississippi, Delaware and Alabama over the weekend, according to the US Weather Channel. — KUNA

Photo of the Day



KUWAIT: This photo shows a groundsel setting seed with its fluffy, white seed heads. The flower is commonly found in Kuwait. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

KRCS distributes Ramadan food parcels to Palestinian refugees



BEIRUT: Kuwait Red Crescent Society (KRCS) distributes 2,000 Ramadan food parcels to Palestinian refugees in Lebanon. — KUNA photos

BEIRUT: Kuwait Red Crescent Society (KRCS) distributed Tuesday 2,000 Ramadan food parcels to Palestinian refugees in Lebanon, as part of initiative supporting Palestinian people wherever they were. Head of KRCS mission in Lebanon, Dr Musaed Al-Enezi told Kuwait News

Agency (KUNA) that food around 6,000 food baskets will be provided to Syrian refugees and Lebanese families in need throughout the holy month. Teams of volunteers will be arriving shortly to Lebanon to distribute 1,500 parcels of Eid clothing to Palestinian and Syrian refugees

as well as destitute Lebanese families, added Al-Enezi. Head of Palestinian Red Crescent Society Dr Khalil Mhawash, spoke to KUNA praising the Kuwaiti initiative, and extended his thanks to Kuwait's leadership and people for their humanitarian efforts. — KUNA

Gulf Society of Family Medicine gears for official launch

KUWAIT: The Gulf Society of Family Medicine, headquartered in Kuwait, is preparing for its official launch in May. "Intensive preparation is currently underway for the launch of the first international conference on family medicine in cooperation with the Gulf Society of Family Medicine in addition to the participation of a group of local and regional experts as well as all heads of the GCC societies of family medicine," said Director of the Kuwait Board of Family Medicine and chief of its

GCC counterpart, Dr Mohammed Al-Azemi.

The conference will mark the inauguration of the Gulf Society of Family Medicine. The president of the association will be elected in that position for a period of two years. Azemi assured his keenness to improve the general situation of family doctors through raising societal awareness and cooperation with local and global government agencies in order to increase communication with family doctors around the world.

"The goal is to highlight the role of family physicians at the Gulf level as an important and vital specialty which is the first line of defense for any health system. Moreover, we aim to create opportunities for training as well as exchanging experiences and information among the GCC countries in this field," Azemi said Ramadan is "an opportunity to improve our health, especially for

those who suffer from chronic diseases such as hypertension, diabetes, heart and digestive diseases. People can make peace with their illness and change their daily habits, which can reflect positively on public health".

"It is important to adhere to doctors' instructions if given the permission to fast. Health is a priority, and Ramadan is a merciful month when people should not do anything that can negatively affect their health. Therefore, taking medication at the prescribed time is important to avoid any complications," he added. He explained that family medicine is a specialty that brings together various specializations. "Primary care in Kuwait is very distinguished. Indeed, Kuwait is a pioneer in applying the concepts of family medicine, and our health centers have various specialized family medicine clinics," he said. — KUNA



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LuLu Hypermarket and Namma Charity partner to provide iftar meals

KUWAIT: LuLu Hypermarket Kuwait and Namma Charity have partnered to provide free iftar meal kits to indigent people all over Kuwait during the entire period of Ramadan. The partnership between LuLu Hypermarket and Namma Charity is a testament to their commitment to give back to the community and help those in need during the holy month of Ramadan. The initiative is expected to support a number of families in Kuwait by providing them with a source of relief during Ramadan.

Speaking on the partnership, a spokesperson for LuLu Hypermarket said, "We are proud to partner with Namma Charity to provide free iftar meal kits to those in need throughout Kuwait. Our aim is to ensure that families can break their fast with dignity and ease, and we hope that our initiative will make a significant impact on their lives."

Meanwhile, a representative from Namma Char-



ity said, "We are grateful for the support of LuLu Hypermarket, and we are committed to ensuring that the iftar meal kits reach those who are in the greatest need across Kuwait. We believe that this partnership will make a significant difference in the lives of the families that we support." The partnership between LuLu Hypermarket and Namma Charity is an excellent example of how the private sector can work with non-profit organizations to make a positive impact in the community. The initiative is expected to make a significant difference in the lives of the families that it supports, and is a testament to the commitment of both organizations to their social responsibility.





Huge fire destroys clothes market in Bangladeshi capital

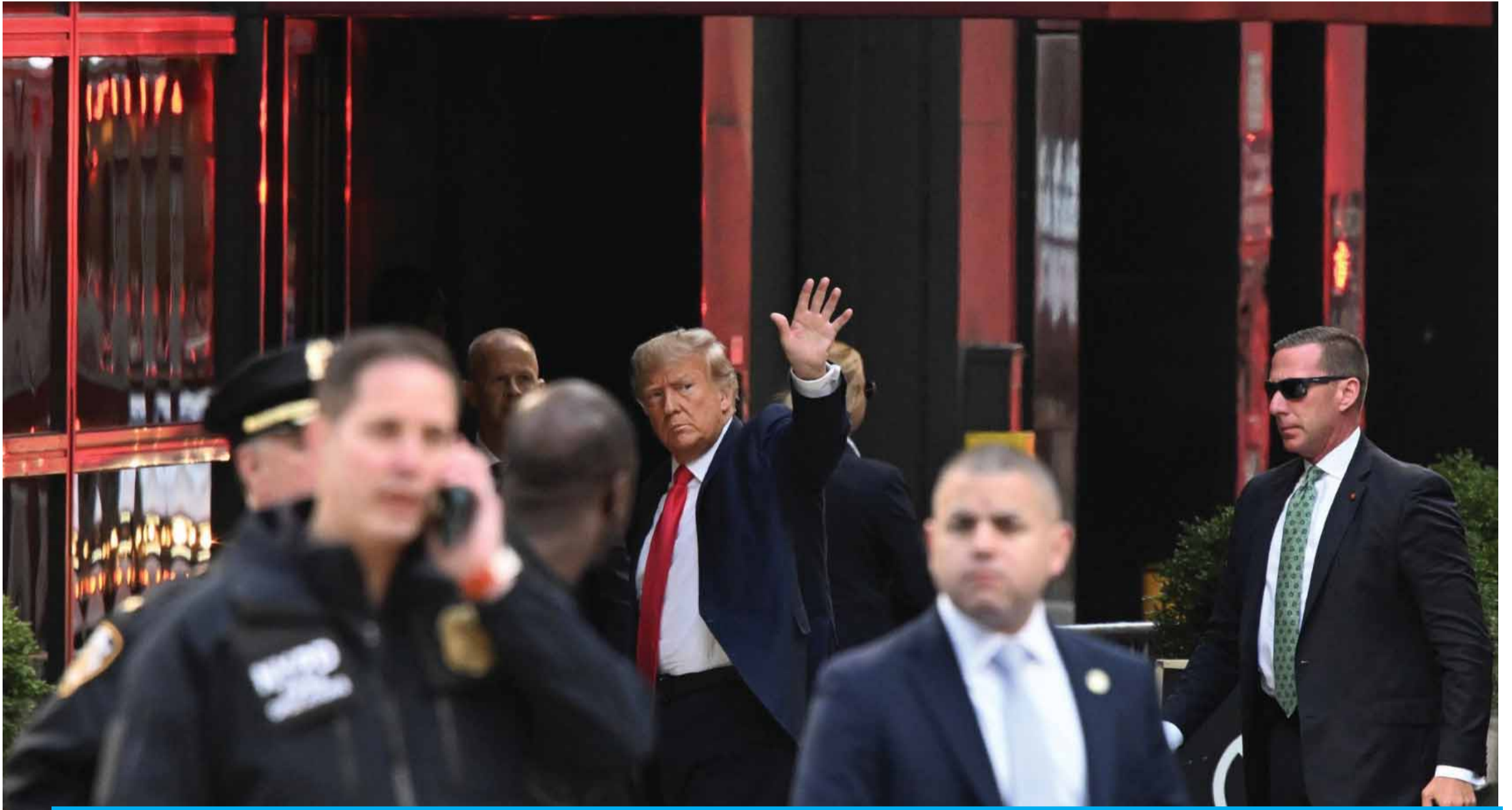
US strike in Syria kills planner of IS Europe attacks

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Trump due in court on historic charges

Trump's lawyers say their client will plead not guilty to all charges



NEW YORK: Former US President Donald Trump waves as he arrives at Trump Tower in New York on April 3, 2023. Trump arrived on April 3, 2023 in New York where he will surrender to unprecedented criminal charges, taking America into uncharted and potentially volatile territory as he seeks to regain the presidency. — AFP

NEW YORK: Donald Trump will make an unprecedented appearance before a New York judge Tuesday to answer criminal charges that threaten to throw the 2024 White House race into turmoil. Trump is the first sitting or former American president to be criminally indicted—a historic development that has propelled the United States into uncharted political waters.

Amid tight security in Manhattan—and a global media frenzy—the 76-year-old will learn at his arraignment precisely what charges he faces over hush money paid to a porn star ahead of the 2016 election that brought him to power.

The twice-impeached Republican claims he is the victim of “political persecution”—but is also using the case to energize his support base and raise millions of dollars for his bid to reclaim the White House next year. Trump is expected to leave his skyscraper on Fifth Avenue late morning to make the six-mile journey to the Manhattan court complex where he will surrender to authorities.

Thousands of police, and unknown numbers of Trump supporters and detractors, will be on the streets for the journey that will be carried live on US networks—although a judge ruled Monday night that video cameras would not be allowed inside the courtroom, US media reported.

Trump is likely to undergo the standard booking procedure of being fingerprinted—and potentially photographed, which would result in an all-time famous mug shot. But there is no precedent for a former president's surrender to court authorities and it remains to be seen whether the famously unpredictable Trump will follow procedure.

A “perp walk”—in which a defendant is escorted in handcuffs past media cameras—is unlikely for an ex-president under US Secret Service protection. What is certain is that Trump's lawyers have said their client will plead not guilty to all charges during the court hearing, scheduled to start at 2:15 pm (1815 GMT).

About 30 counts, including at least one felony, are expected to be unsealed during the arraignment,

which is only likely to last around 15 minutes. Afterward, Trump is due to return straight to Florida, where he plans to deliver an evening speech.

Porn actress

Trump was indicted last week by a grand jury in the case brought by Manhattan District Attorney Alvin Bragg, an elected Democrat. The charges revolve around the investigation of \$130,000 paid to adult film actress Stormy Daniels just days before Trump's election win.

Trump's former lawyer and aide Michael Cohen, who has since turned against his ex-boss, says he arranged the payment to Daniels in exchange for her silence about a tryst she says she had with Trump in 2006. Trump, whose third wife Melania had recently given birth at the time, denies the affair.

Legal experts have suggested that if not properly accounted for, the payment could result in charges for falsifying business records, possibly for the purpose of covering up a campaign finance violation. Late Monday, Trump on his Truth Social platform accused Bragg of “illegally” leaking details of the indictment, after Yahoo News reported that the charges included 34 counts related to falsifying business records.

Trump is facing a series of separate criminal investigations at the state and federal level that could result in further—more serious—charges between now and election day.

They include his efforts to overturn his 2020 election loss in the state of Georgia, his handling of classified documents, and his possible involvement in the storming of the US Capitol on January 6, 2021.

Republicans have largely rallied around Trump, including his rival in the party's presidential primary, Florida Governor Ron DeSantis, who called the indictment “un-American.” President Joe Biden, mindful anything he might say could fuel Trump's claim of a politically “weaponized” judicial system, is one of the few Democrats holding back over the indictment of his rival. Asked Monday whether he had faith in the legal system, Biden simply replied, “Yes.” — AFP

36, told AFP. “Then we heard people screaming. It was not good.” The dead victim was an employee of construction company BAM, the firm was quoted as saying by Dutch media. Work was being done on the railway near Voorschoten, they reported.

Nineteen people had been taken to various hospitals in the area while 11 people were treated in nearby houses, emergency services confirmed.

‘Black day’

No trains will run from Leiden to The Hague for the rest of Tuesday and services will be disrupted for several days, train operator NS said. But the international Thalys service from Amsterdam to Brussels and Paris said it was unaffected.

Dutch police and prosecutors said they had launched a criminal investigation, while rail authorities and the country's safety board are probing the cause of the crash. The head of Dutch rail network company ProRail, John Voppen, said it was a “black day for the Dutch railways”.

ProRail said maintenance work was underway when the crash happened. “Two of the four tracks were out of use because of this, while trains could run on the other two tracks,” it said. NS boss Wouter Koolmees said the “devastation is very big”. — AFP

One dead after Dutch train hits crane

VOORSCHOTEN: A Dutch passenger train slammed into a crane and derailed early on Tuesday, killing a construction worker and injuring around 30 other people in the Netherlands' worst train accident for several years.

The double-decker train carrying some 50 people from Leiden to The Hague veered off the track near the village of Voorschoten at around 3:30 am (0130 GMT), emergency and railway officials said. The force of the impact threw one double-decker carriage into a nearby field and others across the rails, AFP journalists at the scene said. A freight train also hit the crane but there were no casualties.

Dutch King Willem Alexander later visited the site of the crash, while Prime Minister Mark Rutte described it as a “terrible train accident”. Emergency services worked through the night to treat victims, while several injured people were also treated in the homes of people living nearby.

“We heard a bang first and then later a much more intense one,” local resident Chris van Engelenburg,

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International

'Worse than prison': A year on, survivors recount Yagidne horror

The youngest prisoner was six weeks old; the oldest 93

YAGIDNE: They spent nearly a month crammed in the basement of a local school, forced out of their homes by invading Russian troops and held in conditions described as "worse than prison". Soon after the invasion in February last year, the Russians forced 367 people—nearly the entire population of the village of Yagidne north of Kyiv—into a basement with no windows measuring less than 200 square metres.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky on Monday said Ukraine would never forgive Russians for setting up a "concentration camp" in Yagidne a year ago. The villagers, including elderly people and around fifty children were kept in the basement for 27 days. The youngest prisoner was six weeks old; the oldest 93.

Eleven of the villagers died during the ordeal. One of the survivors, Ivan Polgui, said the Russians did not explain anything when they arrived. "They brought us to the basement and said they would take us somewhere else later," Polgui, 63, told AFP. "We could only go to the toilet. It was worse than in prison," he added. The basement had only a few chairs and planks that served as makeshift tables. There were no beds or mattresses, leaving people to sleep on the floor or sitting up.

Polgui and others spoke to AFP as Zelensky and German Vice Chancellor Robert Habeck travelled to the village located a two-hour drive north of the capital to mark the one-year anniversary of the liberation of the settlement from Russian troops. "They came into houses with machine guns and forced everyone to the basement,"

said Valeriy Polgui, the 38-year-old son of Ivan Polgui.

"They gave us five minutes to gather everything we needed." Fellow survivor, 60-year-old Valentina, said there was "wild fear" when the Russians came. "They knocked on our door and broke it down. This fear did not leave me the whole time we were here and for a month afterwards," said Valentina, who declined to give her family name.

Speaking in Yagidne, Zelensky said he hoped that Russian President Vladimir Putin would spend the rest of his life in a dark basement with a bucket for a toilet. Addressing Ukrainians in the evening, the president called the Russian troops "animals," saying they set up a command post in the Yagidne school and used the civilians in the basement as a "human shield". Valery Polgui said some people died from lack of oxygen in the small cellar.

"At first it was cold here, but then there were more people and there was not enough oxygen," he said. He added that elderly people "lost consciousness from the lack of oxygen, lost their mind and died".

They were not allowed to immediately bury their dead. "If a person died in the morning, we could ask to take them outside in the afternoon. To put them in the boiler room," Ivan Polgui said. And if somebody died in the evening, "the corpses would lie there and children would walk around them". Their names with the date of death were inscribed on a wall and door of the basement by the others. — AFP



YAGIDNE: Ukrainian resident Ivan Polgui, 63, stands in the basement of a school where villagers were kept for almost a month by Russian troops in the village of Yagidne, north of Kyiv, a year after the liberation of the settlement, on April 3, 2023 amid the Russian invasion of Ukraine. — AFP

Zionist strike on Syria kills two civilians

DAMASCUS: A Zionist air strike early Tuesday killed two Syrian civilians, state media reported, the fourth such attack on government-held areas of the war-torn country in less than a week. During more than a decade of civil war in Syria, Zionist entity has launched hundreds of air strikes on its territory, primarily targeting Iran-backed forces and Lebanese Hezbollah fighters as well as Syrian army positions.

"At 00:15 (2115 GMT Monday) the Zionist enemy carried out an air strike... and the attack resulted in the death of two civilians," state news agency SANA said, quoting a military source. The strike came from the direction of "the occupied Syrian Golan, targeting some points in the vicinity of Damascus and the southern region", it said, adding that air defence intercepted "most of" the missiles.

SANA had earlier reported "an explosion heard in the vicinity of Damascus". While Zionist entity rarely comments on the strikes it carries out on Syria, it has repeatedly said it will not allow its arch-foe Iran to extend its footprint in the war-torn country. The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights war monitor gave the same civilian death toll, with its director Rami Abdel Rahman adding that "an unknown number of Iran-backed fighters were also killed" in the strike.

Zionist entity fired "barrages of missiles targeting military areas controlled by Iran-backed groups and regime air defence," said the Britain-based monitor, which relies on a vast network of sources inside Syria. A Zionist missile targeted a radar in the countryside

of Sweida, while another hit a glass factory in the Al-Kiswah area of the Damascus countryside, killing the two civilians, it said.

The monitor had earlier said the missiles also targeted the vicinity of Damascus International Airport and an Iranian complex near the Sayyida Zeinab area, with Syria's air defence intercepting at least two missiles.

Iran is a key ally of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad and claims only to deploy military advisers in the conflict-ravaged country. Thousands of Iranians on Tuesday attended a funeral procession in Tehran for two Revolutionary Guards killed in Zionist strikes in Syria last week. In Friday's aerial assault, Zionist missiles targeted positions near Damascus, Syrian state media had reported, a day after Zionist strikes near the capital wounded two Syrian soldiers, according to the defence ministry.

"We will avenge the blood of martyrs Milad Heidari and Meghdad Mahghani," vowed Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps spokesman Ramazan Sharif, according to Iran's Tasnim News Agency, while thousands gathered in central Tehran to mourn them, chanting "down with Zionist entity".

On Sunday, two Iran-affiliated fighters were killed in a Zionist air strike on targets in Syria, according to the Observatory, with SANA reporting five Syrian soldiers wounded in the assault near the western city of Homs. The same day, a rare car bombing rocked Damascus, with no deaths reported and no side claiming responsibility.

The Syrian war broke out in 2011 with the brutal repression of peaceful anti-government protests, and escalated into a deadly armed conflict that pulled in foreign powers and global jihadists. More than half a million people have been killed and around half of Syria's pre-war population has been forced from their homes. — AFP

US strike in Syria kills planner of IS Europe attacks

BEIRUT: The US military said Tuesday it had carried out a strike in Syria killing a senior Islamic State group official responsible for planning attacks in Europe. The strike in northwestern Syria on Monday killed senior IS leader Khalid Aydd Ahmad al-Jabouri, US Central Command said.

It said he was "responsible for planning (IS) attacks into Europe". The statement did not specify the location of the strike and added that "no civilians were killed or injured". "Though degraded", the jihadist group, which was ousted from its last territory in Syria in 2019, "remains able to conduct operations within the region with a desire to strike beyond the Middle East," said CENTCOM chief General Michael Kurilla.

Jabouri also "developed the leadership structure for IS" and his death will "temporarily disrupt the organisation's ability to plot external attacks," CENTCOM said. IS has claimed a number of deadly attacks in Europe in recent years, including a November 2015 attack in Paris and its suburbs that killed 130 people and another in the French city of Nice in July 2016 that killed 86 people. The same year, three suicide attacks in Belgium killed more than 30 people. In August 2017, attacks claimed by IS in Barcelona and elsewhere in Spain killed 16 people.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, a Britain-based monitor of the more than decade-old conflict in Syria, said Jabouri was killed in a US drone strike in the Idlib region of the northwest, an area run by jihadists. It said he was killed while

speaking on a telephone as he walked in the open near where he was staying.

The Observatory said that Jabouri, an Iraqi who was posing as a Syrian, had sought refuge in the area some 10 days ago. Damien Ferre, founder of the Jihad Analytics group, said Jabouri's real name was Khalil Abdullah al-Khulaf and that he had operated from the Deir Ezzor region of eastern Syria.

"As always, he will be replaced," Ferre told AFP, but "it's still a blow to the group." CENTCOM chief Kurilla said that despite no longer controlling any territory in either Syria or Iraq, IS "continues to represent a threat to the region and beyond".

"CENTCOM remains committed to the enduring defeat" of IS, he said. Some 900 US troops remain in Syria, most in the Kurdish-administered northeast, as part of a US-led coalition battling remnants of IS, who remain active in both Syria and neighbouring Iraq, operating out of hideouts in desert and mountain areas.

In October 2019, Washington announced it had killed IS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi in an operation in northwestern Syria. His two successors have also been killed: the first in a US operation in northwestern Syria, the second in an operation by former Syrian rebels in the country's south.

In February this year, a US helicopter raid killed IS commander Hamza al-Homs, who oversaw the jihadists' operations in northeastern Syria. Four US military personnel were wounded in the operation. "Nowhere is a 'safe zone' for IS leaders in Syria -- apart from the Badiya desert area in Homs province," Jihad Analytics's Ferre said.

Inside Syria, IS has carried out a spate of deadly attacks this year, many of them opportunistic. Impoverished Syrians foraging for desert truffles to sell have been a particular target for the jihadists while the delicacy has been in season in recent months, with dozens killed in ambushes. — AFP

Environmental care in Islam-II...

Continued from Page 1

The people asked, 'O Allah's Messenger, is there a reward for us in serving animals?' He replied, 'Yes, there is a reward for serving any animate (creature)'" (Al-Bukhari # 2, 363)

Note that the Prophet's reply in the above-quoted narration confirms to us how important it is to serve and care for the living beings on Earth - animals included. This can be justified by the clarification of the Prophet (PBUH) on the reward upon doing such noble deeds. The Earth is, in fact, a living organism and it holds a million species of animals, plants, organisms, and the human race. And in our efforts to show our care and concern for the animals and other creatures of the All-Caring Allah, we are at the same time showing care for the environment and the Earth as a whole.

4. Keep the environment clean and safe: In the pursuit of preserving the environment and fulfilling our obligations as vicegerents on Earth, keeping the environment clean and safe is part of our duty. Also known as environmental hygiene, it is an essential part of infection prevention and control, maintaining the emotional and mental stability of the inhabitants as well as our overall wellbeing, and promoting higher productivity across many levels of the ecosystems. There are in fact two aspects to keeping the environment safe and clean. On one hand, it involves removing and discarding things or objects that are dirty and harmful while on the other hand, it would be to maintain the cleanliness and oversee essential safety measures. Interestingly, Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) taught us to be part of both. Abu Huraira (RA) narrated that Allah's Messenger (PBUH) said, what can be translated as: "While a man was walking on a road or path, he saw a thorny branch (of a tree) and removed it from the way, an act that

pleased the All-Merciful Allah and forgave him for that..." (Al-Bukhari # 652 and Muslim # 1, 914)

From the above two narrations, Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) emphasizes the importance of removing whatever objects could be harmful to Allah's creatures from any path or road. Any individual may walk on a pathway and find a matter that either affects the cleanliness of the road or could potentially harm the subsequent people walking or commuting thereupon. But not everyone would actually have the will or capacity to remove the harm or, at least, avoid leaving harmful trails along the way. In light of the increase of environmental hazards, litter and debris, it is a responsibility and a necessity for all of us to create a clean and safe environment.

In conclusion, every conscious effort matters.

Even the tiniest of efforts can make an impact, can create change, and can affect the environment around us. It is our responsibility to care for the wellbeing of the planet we are living in. Abdallah bin Umar (RA) narrated that Allah's Messenger (PBUH) said what can be translated as: "Each of you is a shepherd and each of you is responsible for his flock. The imam who is over the people is a shepherd and is responsible for his flock; a man is a shepherd in charge of the inhabitants of his household and he is responsible for his flock; a woman is a shepherdess in charge of her husband's house and children and she is responsible for them; and a man's slave is a shepherd in charge of his master's property and he is responsible for it. So each of you is a shepherd and each of you is responsible for his flock." (Al-Bukhari # 2, 409 and Muslim # 1, 829)

It matters not the size of the problem at hand, but what weighs greater are the efforts that we consciously put in and take ownership upon what we are responsible for. And what greater way to facilitate that than by the ways of the Prophet (PBUH) also known as his Sunnah, which, when we practice them, we will be rewarded immensely, loved by Allah SWT greatly and would have fulfilled our duties as vicegerents on Earth responsibly. —Courtesy of the TIES

call for fresh polls, they said. Constitutional experts are still divided over the constitutional court ruling, with some calling on the government to challenge the ruling while others insist this cannot happen under Kuwaiti law.

Political analyst Abdulrazzak Al-Shayehji said on Twitter on Tuesday that the prime minister has only two options to resolve the political crisis. Either he challenges the constitutional court ruling in a bid to revive the 2022 Assembly, or after forming the new Cabinet, recommend dissolving the 2020 National Assembly and calling for fresh polls.

Finland becomes NATO member...

Continued from Page 1

attack on one member "shall be considered an attack against them all". This was the guarantee Finnish leaders decided they needed as they watched Russian President Vladimir Putin's devastating assault on Ukraine. "He wanted less NATO along his borders. He wanted to close NATO's door. No more NATO membership for any more countries in Europe. He's getting exactly the opposite," Stoltenberg said.

Invaded by its giant neighbor, the Soviet Union, in 1939, Finland — which has a 1,300-km border with Russia — stayed out of NATO throughout the Cold War. Now its membership brings a potent military into the alliance with a wartime strength of 280,000 and one of Europe's largest artillery arsenals. Its strategic location bolsters NATO's defenses on a border running from the vulnerable Baltic states to the increasingly competitive Arctic.

Senior NATO military commander Admiral Rob Bauer told AFP that Finland had so far not requested its new allies station troops on its soil. NATO officials say the war in Ukraine has sapped Moscow's forces, but the alliance is monitoring how Russia responds to gauge its future steps. Awkward allies Turkey and Hungary, for different reasons of their own, delayed Finland's bid to come under the NATO umbrella — and Stockholm's progress remains blocked.

But last week, the Turkish parliament voted to

NASA unveils crew of flight...

Continued from Page 1

engineer, spent a record 11 consecutive months in space and took part in the first all-female spacewalks while on the ISS. "Am I excited?" Koch said. "Absolutely!"

The 46-year-old Glover said Artemis II is "more than a mission to the Moon and back". "It is the next step that gets humanity to Mars," he said. Wiseman, the mission commander, said the diverse crew was made up of "exceptional operators". "We're just all professional explorers," he told AFP. "We are representing our nation," Wiseman said, but "we need the entire world to go along with us."

Francois-Philippe Champagne, Canada's minister of innovation, science and industry, attended the event and said his country "could not be more

clear Finland's final hurdle. Completing the ratification in well under a year still makes this the fastest membership process in the alliance's recent history. NATO was created as a counterweight to the Soviet Union at the onset of the Cold War era that began immediately after the Allies defeated Nazi Germany.

Finland's arrival nevertheless remains a bitter-sweet moment for the alliance as the hope had been for Sweden to come on board at the same time. Budapest and Ankara remain the holdouts after belatedly agreeing to wave through Helsinki's bid. Sweden has upset Hungary's leader Viktor Orban — one of Putin's closest allies in Europe — by expressing alarm over the rule of law in Hungary. It has also angered Turkey by refusing to extradite dozens of suspects that President Recep Tayyip Erdogan links to a failed 2016 coup attempt and a decades-long Kurdish independence struggle.

NATO diplomats hope Erdogan will become more amenable if he weathers elections next month and that Sweden will join before a NATO summit in Vilnius this July. "Sweden is ready to join the NATO Alliance," tweeted US Secretary of State Antony Blinken. Ukraine is also pushing for eventual NATO membership, but Western diplomats say that remains a still distant prospect.

"There is no better strategic solution to ensuring strategic security in the Euro Atlantic region than the membership of Ukraine in the alliance," Ukraine's Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba said. NATO members in the meantime insist they are focused on providing Ukraine with the weaponry and support it needs to win the war with Russia. — AFP

proud" to have a Canadian on the crew for the flight. As part of the Artemis program, NASA aims to send astronauts to the Moon in 2025 — more than five decades after the final Apollo mission.

Besides putting the first woman and first person of color on the Moon, the US space agency hopes to establish a lasting human presence on the lunar surface as a stepping stone for an eventual voyage to Mars. Nelson, the NASA chief, has said he expects a crewed mission to Mars by the year 2040. The 10-day Artemis II mission will test NASA's powerful Space Launch System rocket as well as the life-support systems aboard the Orion spacecraft.

The first Artemis flight wrapped up in December with an uncrewed Orion capsule returning safely to Earth after a 25-day journey around the Moon. During the trip around Earth's orbiting satellite and back, Orion logged well over a million miles (1.6 million km) and went farther from Earth than any previous habitable spacecraft. Only 12 people — all of them white men — have set foot on the Moon. — AFP

Assembly session fails over quorum...

Continued from Page 1

prime minister is not willing to deal with the revived 2020 Assembly. After forming the Cabinet, he is highly expected to recommend dissolving the Assembly and

International

China vows ahead of Tsai-McCarthy meeting to 'firmly defend sovereignty'

Tsai plans to stop over in United States on her return from Central America

BEIJING: China vowed on Tuesday to "firmly defend" its national sovereignty, ahead of a meeting between Taiwan President Tsai Ing-wen and US House Speaker Kevin McCarthy in California this week. Foreign ministry spokeswoman Mao Ning said Beijing would "closely monitor the situation and firmly defend national sovereignty and territorial integrity" after McCarthy confirmed the talks the day before.

China claims the democratic island of Taiwan as part of its territory to be re-taken one day and, under its "One-China" principle, no country may maintain official ties with both Beijing and Taipei. It has already warned McCarthy, a Republican, that he would be "playing with fire" by meeting Tsai. "China is strongly opposed to the US arranging for Tsai Ing-wen to transit through its territory, and is strongly opposed to the meeting between House Speaker Kevin McCarthy, the third-ranking US official, and Tsai Ing-wen," Mao said. "It seriously violates the One-China principle and the three China-US joint communiqués, and seriously undermines China's sovereignty and territorial integrity," she told journalists.

Central American tour

Tsai plans to stop over in the United States on her return from Central America, where she has met the leaders of Guatemala and is visiting Belize before meeting McCarthy. McCarthy's office said on Monday the "bipartisan" meeting would take place at the Ronald Reagan Presidential Library, just outside Los Angeles.

He had originally planned to follow the example of his predecessor as speaker, Democrat Nancy Pelosi, who

visited Taiwan in August. That visit prompted China to conduct its largest-ever military exercises around the self-governing island. McCarthy's decision to meet Tsai in the United States was viewed as a compromise that would underscore support for Taiwan but avoid inflaming tensions with China.

However, Xu Xueyuan, the Charge d'Affaires of China's embassy to the United States, told reporters last week Washington risked "serious confrontation" no matter whether US leaders visited Taiwan or the reverse.

"The US keeps saying that transit is not a visit and that there are precedents, but we should not use past mistakes as excuses for repeating them today," she said. Xu urged Washington "not to repeat playing with fire on the Taiwan question", alluding among other things to last year's visit to Taiwan by Pelosi.

China's consulate in Los Angeles said on Monday the meeting in California would "greatly hurt the national feelings of 1.4 billion Chinese people" and undermine "the political foundation of China-US relations".

'Peace and stability'

Tsai was greeted by flag-waving Taiwanese expatriates as she addressed a banquet after arriving in New York on Wednesday ahead of her Central America swing. "We have demonstrated a firm will and resolve to defend ourselves, that we are capable of managing risks with calm and composure and that we have the ability to maintain regional peace and stability," she told attendees. Laura Rosenberger, who heads the American Institute in Taiwan, the de facto embassy in the



BELMOPAN: Handout picture shows (L-R) Taiwan's Foreign Minister Jauhshieh Joseph Wu, Taiwan's President Tsai Ing-wen, Belize's Prime Minister John Briceño and Belize's Minister of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade, and Immigration, Eamon Courtenay pose for a picture after the signing ceremony of a Technical Cooperation Framework Agreement and the handing over of digital devices at the Foreign Ministry in Belmopan. — AFP

absence of diplomatic relations, welcomed Tsai to New York but the State Department said it did not expect officials to meet her.

The United States remains Taiwan's most important ally — and its biggest arms supplier — despite switching its diplomatic recognition to Beijing in 1979. The US stopover comes at a key time, with Beijing having ramped up military, economic and diplomatic pressure on Taiwan since Tsai

came to power in 2016. US media reported that about 20 US lawmakers planned to accompany the speaker to the meeting in California. China has increased investment in Latin America, a key diplomatic battleground between Taipei and Beijing since the two sides split in 1949 after a civil war.

Taiwan accused China on Sunday of using "coercion and intimidation" to lure away its allies after Honduras Foreign

Minister Enrique Reina and his Chinese counterpart Qin Gang officially launched relations in Beijing.

In Belize on Monday, Tsai thanked one of Taiwan's few remaining allies for its diplomatic support amid "constant threats and pressure" from China. Only tiny Belize and Guatemala remain allies of Taiwan in Central America after Honduras shifted its allegiance to Beijing. — AFP

Pakistan SC orders for Punjab polls be held in May

ISLAMABAD: Polls must be held for the assembly in Pakistan's most populous province next month, the Supreme Court declared Tuesday, voiding a bid to delay voting in Punjab and handing a political victory to opposition leader Imran Khan.

Pakistan has been in political turmoil for a year since Khan was ousted as prime minister last April through a no-confidence vote and replaced by a coalition he has harried with parliamentary manoeuvring and popular rallies calling for snap elections. In January, Khan dissolved the provincial assemblies in northwestern Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and eastern Punjab where his Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party held majorities — a move designed to pile more pressure on Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif.

Under Pakistan's constitution, elections should have been scheduled within 90 days — a deadline just days away. However the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) pushed back polling day to October, when a general election is also due, blaming a lack of funds and security threats.

Pakistan's Supreme Court — which took up the case on its own initiative — on Tuesday declared the delay "unconstitutional, without lawful authority or jurisdiction". "Neither the constitution nor the law empowers the commission to extend the date of elections beyond the 90 days," read the decision seen by AFP.

The court ordered the government to unlock funds for an election in Punjab—Pakistan's most populous province — to be held by May 14. A separate application should be made to determine the date of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's polls, the panel of three Supreme Court judges said.

Senior PTI leader Fawad Chaudhry said the decision was a "huge victory" for Imran Khan, who was shot last year in an assassination attempt he blamed on Sharif. Last month, the face-off between Khan and the government reached boiling point when police attempted to arrest him over a corruption case, leading to 48 hours of clashes with supporters in Lahore.

"I can only express sorrows and regret over the decision," law minister Azam Nazeer Tarar told reporters in Islamabad. "Due to this, the ongoing political and constitutional crisis in the country will deepen," he said.

As the political drama unfolds, Pakistan is facing a worsening security situation with increasing attacks linked to the domestic chapter of the Taliban. The economy is also in a nosedive, with inflation at a 50-year high as the nation battles to unlock a desperately needed International Monetary Fund bailout.

On Friday, 12 people died in the southern city of Karachi in a stampede as they gathered to receive charity donations. — AFP

Macron faces delicate Ukraine balancing act in China visit

PARIS: French President Emmanuel Macron will visit China from Wednesday, hoping to dissuade Beijing from supporting Russia's invasion of Ukraine but without alienating a crucial trade and geopolitical player. "China is the only country in the world capable of having an immediate and radical impact on the conflict, in one direction or the other," an official from Macron's office told reporters Friday on condition of anonymity.

Macron will look to stand firm towards President Xi Jinping on Ukraine while taking "another path" from the directly confrontational tone often heard from Washington, the official added.

The French leader's aims include preserving and rebalancing China's trade ties with Europe as well as safeguarding French interests in the Asia-Pacific region — where Paris sees itself as a player thanks to its overseas territories and military deployments.

That Macron's visit will have an impact beyond France and affect the entire 27-nation European Union is clear from that presence on the trip of European Commission chief Ursula von der Leyen. She visited Macron in Paris Monday to coordinate their preparations.

In a speech last week, von der Leyen cautioned

Huge fire destroys clothes market in Bangladeshi capital

DHAKA: Hundreds of Bangladeshi firefighters battled an inferno that raged through a popular clothing market in the capital Dhaka on Tuesday and blanketed the city's oldest neighbourhoods in black smoke.

No fatalities have been reported so far, but shop owners and fire officials told reporters that the famous Bongo Bazar and three adjacent markets had been almost completely gutted in the dawn fire. Tempers flared as the morning wore on with a group of shop owners hurling rocks at firefighters, angered by the time it was taking to bring the blaze under control.

"We dispersed them," police spokesman Faruq Ahmed said, adding that around 450 officers had been deployed to keep order and stop looting. Fire services chief Main Uddin told reporters that 600 firefighters from across the city brought the blaze under control after battling it for more than six hours, while hundreds of spectators watched from a nearby overpass.

"An enthusiastic crowd and a lack of water" along with high winds had made it difficult to combat the fire, he said. Uddin added that Bongo Bazar, built mainly from timber and tin to house hundreds of small stalls, was designated a fire risk in 2019 and had been repeatedly issued warning letters since then.

Police inspector Bacchu Mia said at least 11 people had been injured in the fire, including five firefighters, but none were in a critical condition. Owners said the four markets housed thousands of clothing shops in one of Dhaka's busiest precincts, home to the country's most prestigious university and its national police headquarters.

Built in the 1980s, Bongo Bazar is a popular destination for cut-price Western fashion brands such as Tommy Hilfiger, selling clothes that were

Beijing against direct support for the war while ruling out the 27-member European Union "de-coupling" from China. The Europeans won't hold Xi back from arming Russia by "saying nicely what he shouldn't do," said Antoine Bondaz of the Paris-based Foundation for Strategic Research (FRS). He predicted instead that the leaders would warn him off arms deliveries in public while dangling the threat of sanctions in their private talks.

China has portrayed itself as seeking a peaceful resolution to Russia's attack on its neighbour. But Xi's friendly visit to Moscow last month and announcement of a peace plan most saw as skewed towards Russia have Western countries doubtful.

Von der Leyen last week complained that "far from being put off by the atrocious and illegal invasion of Ukraine, President Xi is maintaining his 'no-limits friendship' with Putin's Russia" — recalling a phrase coined immediately before the invasion last February. "How China continues to interact with Putin's war will be a determining factor for EU-China relations going forward," she added. Within the bloc, economic heavyweights France and Germany see preserving trade with China as a priority, while nations in the EU's east — closer to Ukraine and with stark memories of Russian occupation — would prefer to up the pressure on Beijing over the invasion.

Macron will himself bring a delegation of some 60 business leaders to Beijing, including the bosses of Airbus and EDF — some hoping to sign lucrative new contracts.

"We do not want to cut economic, societal, polit-



BEIJING: File photo shows French President Emmanuel Macron (L) attending a signing ceremony with Chinese President Xi Jinping at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing. — AFP

ical and scientific ties," von der Leyen said, although Brussels like Paris hopes to "rebalance" the trading relationship "on the basis of transparency, predictability and reciprocity". Macron and the EU Commission chief will place the "accent on de-risking rather than de-coupling," Francois Godement, an Asia expert at the Institut Montaigne think-tank, wrote on Twitter.

He added that they would look for "low-key but practical responses" to frictions with Beijing that "do not insult China's future" — given Xi appears firmly in the driving seat at home.

Macron will also meet French residents in Beijing after arriving on Wednesday afternoon, before Thursday talks with Chinese leaders and a state dinner in the evening. — AFP



DHAKA: Firefighters try to extinguish a fire that broke out in a clothing market in Dhaka on April 4, 2023. Hundreds of firefighters were battling an immense blaze in the Bangladeshi capital as an inferno raged through a popular clothing market. — AFP

produced in the city's garment factories but failed to meet export standards.

Distraught shop owners told reporters the blaze had left them destitute ahead of Eid, the Muslim festival marking the end of Ramadan and the country's biggest religious celebration. "I borrowed 1.5 million taka (\$14,200) to buy Eid clothing," one business owner said. "I've lost everything."

Building fires and explosions due to leaking gas cylinders, faulty air conditioners and bad electrical wiring are frequent in Bangladesh. Last month, at least 23 people were killed in an explosion at a central Dhaka market later blamed on a bad gas line. A fire and subsequent explosions at a container depot in the port city of Chittagong last year killed more than 50 people. — AFP

Business

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 5, 2023

Credit Suisse chiefs say sorry to angry and tearful shareholders

Shareholders voice frustrations as 167-year-old bank holds its final AGM

ZURICH: Credit Suisse chairman Axel Lehmann said Tuesday he was "truly sorry" that the beleaguered bank could not be saved as he faced angry and tearful shareholders whose money has gone up in smoke. Credit Suisse's chiefs fronted up at the bank's annual general meeting, 16 days after its hastily-arranged takeover by larger Swiss rival UBS—a mega-merger in which the shareholders of both banks had no say at all. The 167-year-old bank's final AGM was the first chance Credit Suisse shareholders had to voice their frustrations, and some turned up in tears as they counted the cost of the bank's implosion.

"I can understand the bitterness, the anger and the shock of all those who are disappointed, overwhelmed and affected by the developments," Lehmann said at the Hallenstadion, Zurich's biggest indoor arena. With the bank's share price in free-fall and fearing an imminent collapse that could have triggered an international banking crisis, the Swiss government, the central bank and the financial regulators strongarmed UBS into taking over Credit Suisse on March 19.

"We wanted to put all our energy and our efforts into turning the situation around," said Lehmann, who was brought in as chairman in January 2022 to fix the bank following a string of scandals that sapped investor confidence. "It pains me that we didn't have the time to do so and in that fateful week in March our plans were thwarted—and for that I am truly sorry," he said. "I apologize that we were no longer able to stem the loss of trust that has accumulated over the years and for disappointing you."

Family's money evaporated

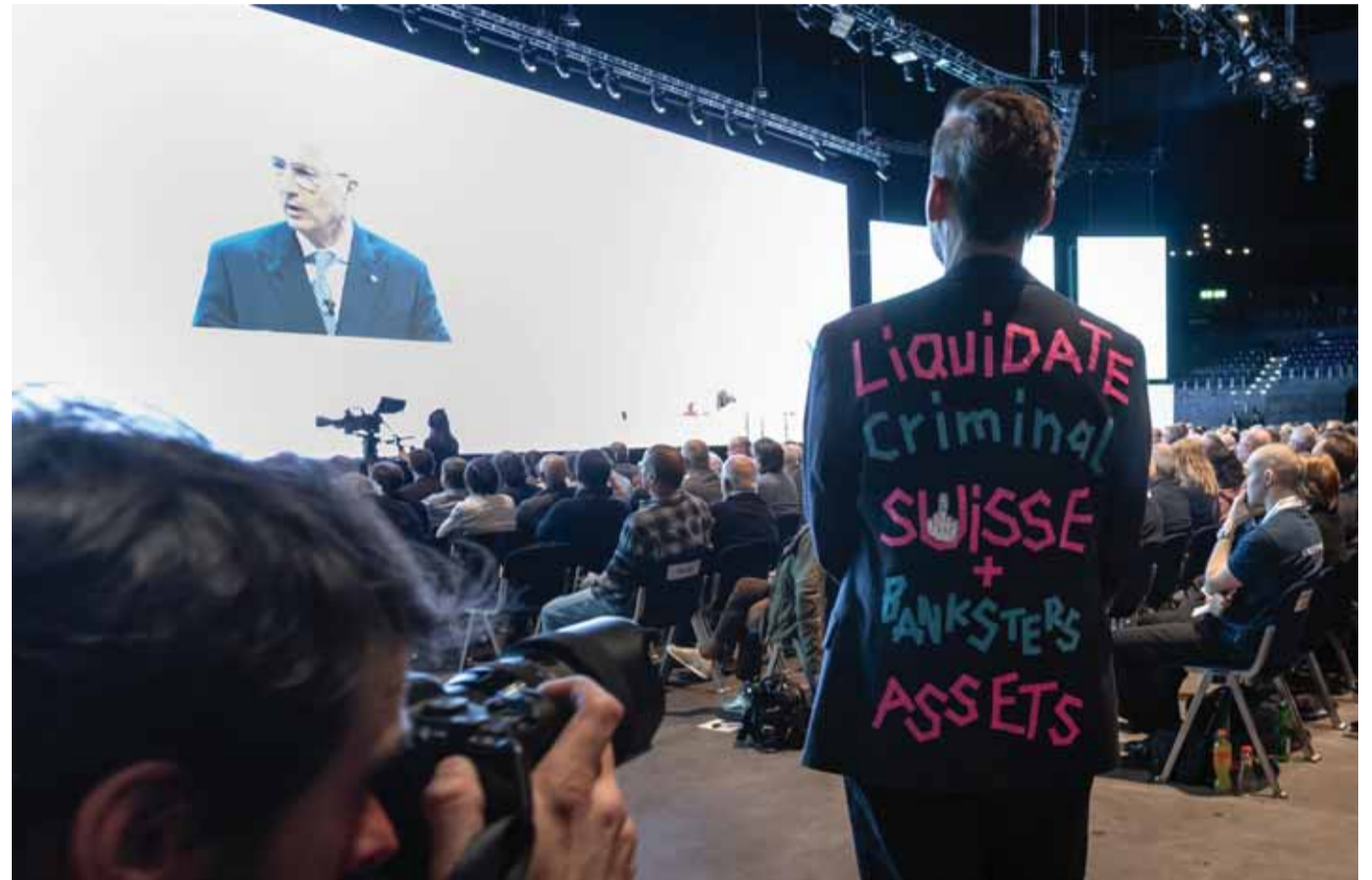
Thanks to those scandals, shareholders have seen the value of their investment plunge from 12.78 Swiss francs per share in February 2021 to the 0.76 francs they will receive in the \$3.25-billion merger. "I am angry and I lost 10,000 Swiss francs (\$11,000). It's not so much but it's not good. It's (a lot of) money for my family," Stephan Denzler told AFP, tears forming in his eyes.

"This is a historical moment and this is the reason that I want to be at this assembly," Chief executive Ulrich Koerner said it would be the bank's last ordinary general meeting. UBS—which faces its own annual general meeting in Basel on Wednesday—is the biggest bank in Switzerland, with Credit Suisse in second place. They are both among the 30 worldwide Global Systemically Important Banks—deemed of such importance to the international banking system that they are considered too big to fail. But the markets saw Credit Suisse—which suffered a net loss of \$7.9 billion in 2022 -- as a weak link in the global chain following the collapse of three US regional banks in early March.

'Deep personal regret': CEO

The bank's share price plunged by more than 30 percent on March 15 to a record low of 1.55 Swiss francs. Despite reassurances, shares recovered little ground to close the week at 1.86 francs on March 17. Fearing what might happen when the markets reopened on March 20, the Swiss government then sprung into action to patch a deal together with UBS.

Credit Suisse has been a part of Switzerland's national identity for 167 years,



ZURICH: A shareholder wearing a vest reading "Liquidate criminal Suisse and banksters assets" poses for photographers during the annual general meeting of Credit Suisse bank, in Zurich, on April 4, 2023. — AFP

but nevertheless, "the bank could not be saved", Lehmann insisted. "Ultimately there were only two options: deal or bankruptcy. The merger had to go through. The terms had to be accepted."

Koerner said he was deeply saddened at the end of Credit Suisse, but said the takeover by UBS was the only feasible solution. "This fills me with sorrow," he said. "This is a matter of deep personal

regret to me. But the bank's survival was at stake and we... no longer had a choice. "The collapse of Credit Suisse would have been disastrous, not just for Switzerland but for the global economy at large." —AFP

CBK provides banks with new banknotes on occasion of Eid

KUWAIT: The Central Bank of Kuwait announced the completion of the process of providing all local banks with new banknotes of Kuwaiti currency in various denominations in order to meet the needs of citizens and residents on the occasion of the approaching Eid Al-Fitr.

The bank stated that those wishing to obtain new banknotes of all categories of Kuwaiti currency should approach their bank branches during official working hours as it will be announced through designated branches that provide the "Ayadi" exchange service in addition to other means provided by banks to their customers to obtain new banknotes.

The Central Bank indicated that Kuwaiti banks, on the occasion of Eid Al-Fitr, allocated 359 of its branches, in addition to 171 automated teller ma-



chines (ATMs) to meet the needs of their customers for new banknotes of different denominations. The CBK will provide four central locations in the commercial complexes such as the Avenues, 360 Complex, the Capital Mall and Al-Kout Mall to provide ATMs dedicated to Ayadi service, starting from the middle of this month until the second day of Eid Al-Fitr to meet the needs of citizens and residents. The Central Bank of Kuwait congratulates all citizens and residents on the occasion of Eid Al-Fitr.

The golden license will be offered to local and foreign businesses and benefits include prioritized allocation of land, infrastructure and services, easier access to government services and support from government development funds, the statement said. Bahrain's much larger Gulf neighbors the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia have in the past few years been reforming their visa systems and making rafts of economic and legal reforms as regional competition for talent and investment heats up. Bahrain, home to the US Navy's Fifth Fleet, has been one of the most indebted states in the Gulf and was bailed out in 2018 by wealthy neighbors with an aid package of \$10 billion tied to reforms aimed at attaining fiscal balance by 2024. Bahrain has been helped by higher oil prices and real gross domestic product grew 4.9 percent in 2022, its fastest rate since 2013. Non-oil GDP growth was 6.2 percent in 2022, above the 5 percent target the recovery plan had set for the year. — Al-Arabiya

Oil had spiked more than six percent Monday and equity markets mostly rose after several top OPEC+ producers led by Saudi Arabia sprang surprise output cuts to shore up prices. The news gave a fresh headache for central bankers as they battle rampant inflation. "The move... is particularly unhelpful for central banks who, while being worried about sticky inflation, are becoming increasingly concerned about pushing rates up from their current levels," said CMC Markets analyst Michael Hewson.

"These concerns are especially pertinent given recent worries about financial stability." Investors also digested data indicating a slowing US economy that could potentially allow the Federal Reserve to ease back on its rate hikes. New York's S&P 500 and Dow advanced Monday after a closely watched gauge of US factory activity from the Institute for Supply Management (ISM) missed forecasts and showed a fifth consecutive month of contraction. —AFP

Bahrain unveils 'golden license' for companies

MANAMA: Bahrain on Monday said it was introducing a new "golden license" offering benefits to companies bringing large-scale investment projects into the Gulf state. The move is part of an economic recovery plan launched by the oil producing state in October 2021 to boost growth and job creation.

"Companies with major investment and strategic projects that will create more than 500 jobs in Bahrain, or those with investment value exceeding \$50 million, will be eligible for the license," the government's media office said.

European equities climb; oil prices firm after surge

LONDON: European equities rose further Tuesday, while oil prices held onto Monday's surge after top OPEC+ producers announced shock output cuts. London stocks nudged higher in late morning deals, while Frankfurt and Paris advanced in midday eurozone trade.

The pound hit a ten-month dollar high on recent strong UK data and expectations that the Bank of England will continue to hike interest rates. Yet equity traders remain anxious that spiking oil prices will stoke already sky-high consumer prices and spark more global monetary tightening.

National Fund discusses SMEs' success stories

By Majd Othman

KUWAIT: Under the patronage of Minister of Finance and Minister of State for Economic Affairs and Investments Abdulwahab Mohammed Al-Rushaid, the National Fund for Small and Medium Enterprise Development held on Monday "The Second Forum of National Fund Entrepreneurs". The event saw entrepreneurs narrating their journeys of success since launching their businesses years ago, which were financed and incubated by the National Fund. The Kuwaiti entrepreneurs also discussed the obstacles they faced during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Director General of the National Fund Adel Al-Hasawi told Kuwait Times the event aimed to celebrate the success stories of businesses that were only studies once. "Today, these are big projects spread across several fields, be they industries, innovations or projects for special needs," he said.

He pointed out the National Fund seeks to build solid projects that will contribute to the national gross domestic product (GDP) and help diversify in-

come sources. "Therefore, we gathered all the entrepreneurs under one roof to share their experiences and benefit from each other, especially with the hurdles they may go through," he added.

Hasawi mentioned that since the National Fund has stopped financing small and medium businesses, in accordance with the decision of the Cabinet, "we are providing moral support to 1,039 entrepreneurs who have already joined the fund. The fund has also frozen the repayment of the amount due from the entrepreneurs for the time being until we resume the funding again," he said. "We are empowering them with training courses and pricing priority in government tenders of about 10 percent if the project is approved," he pointed out.

He said the National Fund has a "national registry" project to provide entrepreneurs with advantages to support them in applying matters related to tenders. "We also provide them with incubators, courses or consultations," he added. He also revealed the National Fund is working on a major project currently in collaboration with the United Arab Emirates. The details of the project are not available yet, although he stressed it will benefit Kuwaiti entrepreneurs.

Hasawi said it is unclear when project fundings will resume, adding the decision should be based on a request from the board of directors of the National Fund, which must be submitted to the Cabinet for approval. He added there isn't an accurate number of defaulters due to the suspension of funding.

Musk changes Twitter logo to 'meme dog'

PARIS: A meme-inspired cryptocurrency's price jumped on Tuesday after Elon Musk changed the bluebird logo of Twitter to a dog associated with the digital token, despite the mogul being sued over his previous promotion of the coin. Musk bought Twitter in October last year for \$44 billion and has since slashed the workforce, introduced paid-for accounts and reinstated banned users including former president Donald Trump.

His decision to change the logo to a Shiba Inu dog, whether permanent or another short-lived joke, caused the price of dogecoin to surge by more than 20 percent, from below \$0.08 to more than \$0.10.

The Twitter chief has 133 million followers and has long used the platform for self-promotion and humor, occasionally also promoting dogecoin, a highly volatile cryptocurrency initially created as a joke.

He is being sued for \$258 billion by an investor who claims he lost massive amounts of money because of Musk's activities, though the billionaire has dismissed those claims. The Shiba Inu dog became a popular meme in 2013 when posters on forums like Reddit and 4chan began using pictures of the Japanese dog breed alongside messages written in broken English.



The cryptocurrency was launched as a joke later that year and remained largely without value for years—like thousands of other coins. However, in May 2021 its value briefly spiked to a record \$0.73 after Musk suggested his auto firm Tesla could begin to accept it as payment.

The value quickly slumped and investors have accused Musk of manipulating the value of the token to make a quick profit, known as a "pump and dump". Musk has said he is committed to crypto and that he pumps but does not dump. The logo change prompted a slew of messages featuring the meme dog—not least from Musk, who tweeted out a conversation with a follower from last year where he had promised to buy Twitter and make the Shiba Inu its logo.

However, some users were more cynical. "Why do I get the feeling the Doge icon was added so when you search 'Elon' and 'Doge' the story of his racketeering lawsuit will be buried," tweeted comedian Jesse McLaren. — AFP

Business

ADB: Developing Asia's growth to accelerate after China reopening

China GDP to grow 5% this year, India expected to expand 6.4% in 2023

MANILA: The Asian Development Bank raised its 2023 growth forecast for developing Asia on Tuesday, after China's abrupt loosening of COVID-19 restrictions and reopening of its borders brightened the region's prospects. The Philippines-based lender expects economic growth of 4.8 percent this year, up from its 4.6 percent projection in December. That compares with growth of 4.2 percent last year.

Developing Asia refers to 46 members of the ADB, stretching from Kazakhstan in Central Asia to the Cook Islands in the Pacific. China, the world's second-largest economy, accounts for about half of the region's growth. It began to emerge in December from a strict zero-COVID strategy that hampered economic activity.

"Developing Asia's economic prospects are markedly improving on the rapid reopening in the People's Republic of China," the ADB said in its flagship outlook report. "This will support growth in regional exporters of commodities, manufactured intermediates and final goods," it said.

"Regional tourism will also benefit, notably in Cambodia, Maldives, Palau and Thailand, where the PRC (People's Republic of China) was the main source of tourists up to 2019."

The ADB forecasts China's gross domestic product to grow five percent this year and 4.5 percent in 2024, compared with three percent last year. That was one of its weakest rates in 40 years owing to the pandemic and a real estate crisis. Headline inflation for developing Asia, including food and energy prices, is expected to ease to 4.2 percent this year and 3.3 percent in 2024, compared with last year's 4.4 percent.

The ADB said China was expected to experience "benign inflation" as its consumer spending takes time to recover from the lockdowns, and as global price pressures ease and developed economies slow.

Excluding China, regional inflation is forecast at 6.2 percent this year and 4.4 percent in 2024, which the ADB pointed out was higher than in advanced economies, but lower than in emerging markets outside Asia. But the ADB warned that an escalation in Russia's invasion of Ukraine could fuel inflation and lead to further interest rate hikes. South Asia is forecast to record the fastest pace of growth in the region, with India expected to expand by 6.4 percent, compared with an estimated 6.8 percent last year, on "healthy domestic demand". — AFP



Evergrande enters debt restructuring plan with creditors

BEIJING: Chinese property developer Evergrande said it has entered into a restructuring agreement with a group of international creditors, in what could be a breakthrough deal toward easing the developer's massive debt. Once China's largest real estate company, Evergrande was found in 2021 to be drowning in more than \$300 billion in liabilities, sparking a nationwide property crisis that had ramifications around the world.

In a Hong Kong exchange filing made late on Monday, the company said it had agreed to proposals with a group of ad hoc creditors who between them hold a major portion of the developer's more than \$20 billion in offshore bonds. Evergrande announced a long-awaited restructuring proposal last month, offering creditors a choice to swap their debt into new notes issued by the company and equities in two subsidiaries, Evergrande Property Services Group and Evergrande New Energy Vehicle Group.

In Monday's filing, Evergrande said the group of creditors had entered into three separate restructuring schemes that involve a combination of new notes and bonds that can be converted into shares in the two subsidiaries. The company added that trading in its shares—cut off since March 21, 2022 -- "will remain suspended until further notice".

Evergrande had earlier termed its restructuring plan



"a substantial positive milestone" which will "facilitate the company's efforts to resume operations and resolve issues onshore". China's property sector remains in turmoil, with major developers—including Evergrande—failing to complete housing projects, triggering protests and mortgage boycotts from homebuyers.

Smaller firms have defaulted on loans or had problems raising cash since the government

brought in strict lending curbs in 2020. In November, China's banking regulator and central bank unveiled new measures to promote the "stable and healthy development" of the real estate industry. They include credit support for indebted developers, financial support to ensure projects are completed and assistance for deferred-payment loans for homebuyers. — AFP

Paris garbage workers to strike again

PARIS: A union representing Paris garbage workers announced another rolling strike is set to begin next week, just as piles of uncollected rubbish were disappearing from the streets of the capital. A three-week stoppage by refuse collectors last month to protest pension reforms left the city strewn with 10,000 tons of rubbish, with some trash heaps rising to more than two meters (six feet) high. The hard-left CGT, the largest public sector union, called on its members late Monday to begin another strike from Thursday April 13. The industrial action is to demand "the withdrawal of the pension reforms", said a statement from the CGT's refuse workers branch.

It called on members to "take part actively and in large numbers in the union and sector-specific days of action". Refuse collectors can currently retire at 57, as long as they have the required number of years of social security contributions, but this would be increased to 59 under reforms being pushed through by President Emmanuel Macron. Another national day of strikes and protests—the 11th since the start of the year—has been announced for Thursday, with unions and leftist opponents of the changes hoping to regain ebbing momentum.

All eyes are on France's constitutional court which is reviewing the pension legislation set to



NANTES: In this file photo taken on March 15, 2023 protesters hold a banner reading "who sows misery reaps anger" during a demonstration on 8th day of strikes and protests across the country against the government's proposed pensions overhaul in Nantes. — AFP

raise the minimum retirement age for most people from 62 to 64, bringing France more into line with its European neighbors. The court will announce on April 14 whether the legislation is legally sound.

If it gives the go-ahead, Macron would be free to sign it into law, meaning it would enter force later this year. The public sector garbage workers' strike is set to affect half of the French capital's districts—

the other half is managed by private companies.

But blockades of the city's three incinerator plants during last month's strike also affected private collections. The CGT argues that the lower retirement age for sanitation workers—refuse collectors and sewerage workers—is justified because their life expectancy is between 12-17 years less than the average French person. — AFP

Turkish exports rise to \$23.6bn in March

ISTANBUL: Turkish Trade Minister Mehmet Mush said Tuesday that his country's exports hit a record high in March, amounting to \$23.6 billion, an increase of 4.4 percent compared to the same month of 2022. Mush said in a joint press conference with the chairman of the Turkish Exporters Council, Mustafa Gultepe, in Ankara, that Turkey's exports last March achieved the highest number ever on a monthly basis, despite the repercussions of the earthquake that struck the south of the country on February 6. According to Turkish news agency Anatolia that imports also increased last March by 4.2 percent to reach \$32.2 billion, indicating that the total energy imports reached \$6 billion, an increase of 11.4 percent. —KUNA

German exports climb as supply woes ease

BERLIN: German exports jumped higher in February, official data showed Tuesday, thanks to easing supply chains and strong demand from the United States and China. Europe's biggest economy exported goods worth 136.7 billion euros (\$149 billion), a four-percent increase on the previous month, according to adjusted figures from federal statistics agency Destatis.

The United States was the top destination for "made in Germany" goods, with exports up 9.4 percent on January. Shipments to China, Germany's biggest trading partner, climbed by 10.2 percent. Exports to fellow European Union countries increased by two percent.

Imports rose by 4.6 percent month-on-month, to 120.7 billion euros, notably due to a 6.7-percent increase in shipments from China. Carolin Herweg, foreign trade expert at the German Chamber of Commerce and Industry (DIHK), said the February rise in exports offered "a small ray of hope" in uncertain times. "Easing supply chain bottlenecks are providing positive impulses at the moment," she said, while trade with key market China was "picking up again".

The German economy has coped better than expected with the fallout from Russia's war in Ukraine and the resulting energy crisis, in part thanks to government relief measures and mild winter weather.

But the export sector, a crucial driver of Germany's economic growth, still faced headwinds, said Herweg. "Weakening global demand, high inflation and increasing protectionism continue to weigh on Germany's foreign trade," she said. The government expects the German economy to avoid a recession and grow by 0.2 percent this year. —AFP

How Russia will benefit from fresh oil production cuts

MOSCOW: The shock announcement by several OPEC+ members to voluntarily cut their oil production by more than a million barrels per day from May has sent world oil prices soaring, in a move widely seen as the tightening of the bond between Russia and Saudi Arabia.

This is what you need to know about Sunday's decision by some members of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) and their allies:

Why cut oil production further?

Independent of the broader OPEC+ output policy, eight members of the bloc led by heavyweight Saudi Arabia announced they would cut a further 1.16 million barrels per day of production until the end of the year. It came on top of a decision from Russia—also an OPEC+ member—to extend a cut of 500,000 barrels per day.

Unlike two previous cuts, several members preferred to act independently on Sunday, without going through the formal framework of the alliance that requires the agreement of the 13 countries of the OPEC cartel and its 11 partners (OPEC+). "What we are witnessing is an adaptive and agile OPEC+ group which is able and willing to act ahead of the curve," SEB analyst Bjarne Schieldrop said.

Established in 1960, Vienna-based OPEC aims to "coordinate and unify petroleum policies" of its members to ensure "fair and stable prices for producers".

To form the OPEC+ alliance, the organization in 2016 included non-OPEC oil-producing countries led by Russia. Oil prices have suffered greatly from the banking crisis in the United States and Europe, with fears of a global recession resurfacing and investors shifting away from riskier assets such as commodities.

"To the dismay of global leaders, OPEC has decided to draw a hard line at Brent \$80 per barrel for self-serving economic interests," said SPI AM analyst Stephen Innes.

How will Moscow profit from the decision?

The rise in crude oil prices particularly benefits Russia, which "needs oil-money for its expensive war in Ukraine", said Schieldrop. The cuts "will tighten up the oil market and thus help Russia to secure better prices for the crude oil it sells", he added.

Targeted by numerous Western sanctions for invading Ukraine, Russia has seen revenues from crude exports capped and the markets where it can sell limited.

According to Schieldrop, the new cuts also confirm "that Russia is still an integral and important part of the group". The consequences of Sunday's decision are all the greater because, unlike the cuts previously made by the group at the height of the pandemic or last October, "the momentum for global oil demand is up, not down" with a strong recovery of China expected, said Innes.

Prices were immediately impacted, with the two global crude references jumping about eight percent in early Monday trading. The surprise reduction further consolidates the Saudi-Russian marriage of convenience, by aligning their production levels, thus placing them on equal footing.

A slap in the face for Washington?

The White House shrugged off the output cut, saying it will have limited impact on the US economy.

"We don't think that production cuts are advisable at this moment, given market uncertainty," National Security Council spokesman John Kirby told reporters. The United States "made that clear," he said, but "we're focused on moving ahead here." Asked about the troubled relationship with Riyadh, Kirby said the kingdom "is still a strategic partner" but "we don't always see eye to eye on everything."

The latest production cuts were not sprung as a complete surprise to the US government, he added: "We were given a heads up." The cuts represent "a provocation for the oil consuming nations, which are struggling with increasing interest rates and high inflation numbers," said DNB analysts.

For Finalto analyst Neil Wilson they also signal a new era, in which "the Saudis are not afraid of the US" as OPEC "leverage" is on Riyadh's side. — AFP

Business

AI takes over: 25% of jobs vanish as productivity soars 7%: ICT experts

AI-powered solutions to have a significant impact on Bahraini labor market

MANAMA: According to industry experts in software and information technology, the adoption of artificial intelligence (AI) has the potential to displace around 25 percent of jobs, with significant impacts in areas such as customer service, law, and accounting. Nevertheless, the rise of AI is also expected to generate a wave of new job opportunities in data science, computer engineering, and machine learning. Fortunately, many occupations, such as athletics, construction, culinary arts, and painting, as well as skilled trades like carpentry and plumbing, seem to be insulated from the disruptive effects of automation for now.

At the annual Ramadan Ghabga, hosted by the Bahrain Technology Companies Society (BTECH), ICT experts noted that the Kingdom of Bahrain, owing to its advanced technological capabilities, is poised to experience the same transformative changes currently unfolding in the West, triggered by the emergence of cutting-edge artificial intelligence (AI) applications such as "ChatGPT". The experts highlighted that the widespread adoption of such AI-powered solutions will inevitably have a

significant impact on the labor market and the business sector in Bahrain.

The experts emphasized the criticality of creating national strategies that align with the economic and social shifts likely to accompany the next phase of artificial intelligence (AI) development. It is imperative to leverage the positive aspects of AI, while also mitigating any negative consequences. Notably, several reputable reports indicate that AI applications have the potential to raise the total annual value of global goods and services by up to 7 percent. As such, it is essential to invest in AI wisely and maximize its potential benefits for businesses and societies.

Bahrain Technology Companies Society (BTECH) organized the Ghabga with the topic, Technological Influence on Business Activity, at the Gulf Convention Center located in the Gulf Hotel. The occasion was graced by the presence of distinguished technology and business experts and CEOs. Tareq Fakhro, Chairman of BTECH, presided over the forum, which featured notable speakers such as Ameen Al-Tajer, CEO of Infitware for Artificial Intelli-

gence Software, Ahmed Al-Balooshi, CEO of Advantari Digital, Rashed Al-Snan, CEO of Etisalat, and Hana Al-Turaif, Founder of Daresni Bahrain, who shared their insights and experiences on the latest trends and innovations in their respective fields.

The speakers underscored the pivotal role of technology in driving the operations of commercial and industrial enterprises, and the magnitude of its impact in the future, given the rapid pace of technological development, e-commerce, and the proliferation of cutting-edge technologies. This transformation has facilitated the growth and advancement of companies that have effectively integrated these technologies into their operational framework.

They affirmed that technology has also revolutionized human resource management, created new job opportunities, and facilitated the adoption of performance measurement tools. Specifically, financial and accounting applications and programs have enabled businesses to analyze and manage their performance more effectively, leading to improved outcomes and a clearer vision for future growth.

"The Society utilizes the holy month of Ramadan as an opportunity to convene its members, enhance networking, and deliberate on topics of interest to the technology sector. The primary aim is to promote collaboration and synergy among ICT institutions and companies, by sharing expertise and experiences and strategizing on ways to effectively leverage technology to drive administrative and commercial development," said Fakhro.

Ahmed Al-Hujairy, advisor to BTECH, shared his thoughts on the event, highlighting its unique value as a platform to deliberate on diverse topics related to digital transformation. The discussions encompassed a range of issues such as innovation, competitiveness, technological infrastructure, communication, and digital media. He underscored the importance of staying informed about emerging services and advanced technologies, particularly for technology company owners, to facilitate smooth business operations. As such, events like this are essential for keeping up with the latest advancements and exploring new opportunities.

Mixed auto sales in US paint murky picture of consumers

DETROIT: Automakers reported mixed first-quarter US car sales Monday as some sedan models saw gains in a sign that vehicle affordability may be shifting consumer behavior.

General Motors, Honda, Hyundai and Nissan all reported higher US sales, while Stellantis and Toyota suffered declines. The murky picture comes as average prices for new autos linger at around \$50,000, a lofty price tag, especially in light of interest rate hikes that lifted the cost of car loans.

Citing much improved vehicle availability at dealerships, GM delivered 603,208 vehicles, up 17.6 percent from the year-ago period. The figures topped estimates for GM from Cox Automotive, which saw a strong US job market as a supportive factor in an environment clouded somewhat by higher interest rates. GM vice president Steve Carlisle described the period as a "great start" to 2023 saying the company has a "busy season" of product launches coming up.

"We gained significant market share in the first quarter, pricing was strong, inventories are in very good shape and we sold more than 20,000 EVs in a quarter for the first time," Carlisle said, referring to electric vehicles. Key GM brands with higher sales included the popular Chevrolet Silverado and GMC Sierra pickup truck brands.

But even bigger increases were seen in models such as the electric Chevy Bolt and the Chevy Malibu, a sedan that begins at around \$26,000.

"Passenger cars have made a comeback recently," said CFRA Research's Garrett Nelson. "It's likely a reflection of affordability." Meanwhile, Toyota reported quarterly sales of 469,558, down 8.8 percent.

Although Toyota's press release said the company was improving dealer inventories to "satisfy customer demand," the brand was rated the lowest in terms of daily supply of vehicles of more than 30 brands, according to a March 16 report from Cox Automotive, which said supplies were leanest for lower-priced vehicles. In general, lean vehicle inventories have supported higher prices over the last 18 months or so, with factory shutdowns due to COVID-19 followed by shortages in semiconductors that slowed manufacturing. Automakers are still dealing with supply chain problems, although the situation has improved somewhat compared with a year ago, industry sources say.

Stellantis, which reported a drop in sales of nine percent to 368,237, accounts for some of the brands with the loftiest inventories, such as Jeep and Chrysler, according to Cox.

Cox senior economist Charlie Chesbrough said Jeep sales are vulnerable to the double whammy of higher vehicle and borrowing costs. "It is a mixed bag out there and everyone is trying to figure out who is their buyer," Chesbrough told AFP. Among companies with higher sales, Honda scored a 6.8 percent jump to 284,507, with increases in car sales topping those in trucks.

At Tesla, which does not break out sales by country, deliveries rose 36 percent last quarter to 422,875, according to figures released Sunday. —AFP

Canada crypto firms to create regulated platform

MONTREAL: Three Canadian cryptocurrency companies announced Monday they are teaming up to create the largest and only fully regulated platform in the country, at a time when authorities are trying to compensate for a lack of legislation to regulate the industry.

The announcement came months after the fall of industry giant FTX, whose founder Sam Bankman-Fried faces charges including bribery and fraud in a scandal that rocked the cryptocurrency world.

When combined, the WonderFi, Coinsquare and CoinSmart companies will have over Can\$600 million (410 million euros) in assets on deposit, according to a joint press release. "This combination will create a safe, secure, scalable and regulated trading platform that can compete with the unregulated global exchanges still operating in Canada," said Coinsquare CEO Martin Pizsel.

Inflation wallops Cubans already battling shortages

HAVANA: Cuban retiree Xiomara Castellanos gets a monthly pension equivalent to \$13.80. A carton of 30 eggs in the inflation-battered country costs \$14.10 -- almost four times more than two years ago.

"It is hitting us hard, very hard," the 80-year-old told AFP of inflation that officially reached 39 percent last year, but is likely much, much higher. In 2021, the one-party communist government moved to end parallel currencies in Cuba, phasing out a convertible peso that was pegged to the dollar, leaving only the regular, weaker peso, or CUP.

Since then, the currency has fallen from 24 to an official rate of 120 to the dollar. On the black market the rate is 180. To compensate for the currency devaluation, the government two years ago raised all salaries and pensions by 450 percent. But then, "prices... exploded and salaries did not follow," Castellanos told AFP.

Reality is worse

According to official figures, inflation—which has several countries in Latin America and elsewhere in its grips—reached 70 percent in import-dependent Cuba in 2021 and 39 percent in 2022. But Pavel Vidal, a Cuban economist with the Javeriana University of Cali in Colombia, said real inflation was five to six times higher.

"Real inflation in 2022 exceeded 200 percent, one of the highest in the world," Vidal said, citing his own calculations. Before 2021, said Vidal, there was no such thing as a consumer price index in Cuba, making comparisons difficult. But from GDP figures one could infer inflation was the highest in Cuban history, he said. Like many Cubans, Castellanos depends heavily on the "libreta"—a ration book with which one can buy basics like rice, beans and bread at subsidized prices.

You buy what you get; the choice is severely

Tackling overfishing from Senegal's skies

DAKAR: Swooping over a cloud of seagulls off Senegal's sparkling shores, a French military airplane veers past a fishing trawler, the naval officers on-board keeping a watchful eye out for illegal activity.

The West African country's waters are some of the richest in the world, teeming with tuna, sardines, shrimp, lobster and octopus—and fishing is critical to the economy. But stocks are dwindling due to global warming and overexploitation. While local artisanal fishermen account for 80 percent of the country's total catch, they have for years raised the alarm about competition and harmful practices by European and Chinese companies.

To help tackle overfishing, the Falcon 50M—a French Navy aircraft—is one of several rotated year-round on loan from the Lann-Bihoue base in France.

During the airplane's patrols, five French soldiers and a Senegalese inspector scan the Atlantic for signs of bad behavior. This can range from fishing

The new platform will be able to rely on the reputation of Coinsquare, which in October became the first Canadian platform to be registered with the national regulatory body. "For years operating a registered cryptocurrency platform was a disadvantage as competitors that provided services without the burden of compliance costs were far more profitable," said WonderFi strategic investor, Kevin O'Leary, known for his prominent role in the US investment reality show "Shark Tank."

"Those days are over," he added. "Investors that see the tremendous potential of cryptocurrencies to make financial services more transparent, less costly, and more productive are seeking investment opportunities that operate in harmony with their regulators." In recent months, US regulators have cracked down on players in the cryptocurrency community. Last week, the world's largest cryptocurrency exchange, Binance, was sued by US regulators, plunging the sector into the red.

For its part, the main American exchange platform, Coinbase, revealed that the US market regulator, the Securities and Exchange Commission, said it is going to sue Coinbase for violation of securities regulations. —AFP



HAVANA, Cuba: Cubans queue to buy food, in Havana. Cuba, one of the Latin American countries facing the highest inflation, will participate in a teleconference next week with the presidents of Mexico, Colombia, Brazil, and Argentina to adopt common strategies. —AFP

limited. For the equivalent of \$1.42 in CUP, Castellanos can get 3.1 kilograms (seven pounds) of rice, a half-liter of oil, seven eggs, 1.3 kg of black beans, 2.7 kg of chicken and a packet of coffee for the month at a dedicated subsidized store.

If you want anything else, the next point of call is a state-run supermarket, where they charge much higher prices and in dollars much-needed for the public coffers. The last resort are the many small privately-owned stores that have popped up since the government in 2021 authorized small and medium businesses. At one of these in Havana, a kilogram of milk powder costs about \$14.

Cubans can withdraw dollars from the bank but in limited quantities, meaning that black market dealers can charge a premium. And while for consumers the exchange rate is 120 to 180, state enterprises which

in restricted areas, fishing without a license, or using destructive nets which sweep up species like dolphins and sea turtles or damage the sea floor.

"On the right, we have an echo at eight nautical miles," a radar operator announced during a recent visit by AFP. White and red arrows blinked on his screen, representing different vessels near the border with Mauritania, as the radio crackled with coded messages. Whenever suspicion is aroused, the plane descends and soldiers snap photos. "We have 600,000 people working directly or indirectly in the fishing industry, and millions of people depend on it, so it's important to monitor how the resource is being exploited," said Captain Ibrahima Diaw, head of Senegal's fisheries protection and surveillance department. In the event of a violation, a report is drawn up. In exceptional cases, the Senegalese Navy can send a ship to seize the offender.

Last year, the Falcons inspected nearly 600 vessels, according to the French Navy.

Reports were drawn up in 35 cases, Diaw said, describing that number as "huge". Fines can reach up to 30 million CFA francs (\$50,000). The military deal illustrates the ongoing close ties between Paris and its former colony. According to the NGO

make up 85 percent of the economy get a rate of 24 -- a measure to ease the pain of high import prices. Cuban economist Omar Everleny Perez has worked out that a couple needs \$113 per month to cover basic food requirements on top of what can be obtained with the "libreta."

But the average salary on the island of 11.1 million people is about \$33, and a large part of the population relies on remittances sent from family abroad in those most coveted of currencies: the US dollar. "What concerns me is that the world in which Cubans live is becoming more and more unequal," said Perez, who has observed an increase in poverty.

On Tuesday, President Miguel Diaz-Canel will take part in a virtual meeting with his leftist counterparts from Mexico, Colombia, Brazil and Argentina to discuss ways to deal with inflation. —AFP



DAKAR: Mamadou Samb, 30, collects fresh water heated over an open fire to clean his dive equipment shortly after going spear fishing at La Cabane des Plongeurs in Dakar. —AFP

Environmental Justice Foundation, Senegal loses more than \$270 million in revenue each year to illegal fishing. Fishing makes up 3.2 percent of the country's gross domestic product and 10.2 percent of exports, according to a 2022 US Department of Agriculture report. —AFP

business" and intended to use the process "to maximize value for its business and assets."

Last month, Virgin Orbit suspended operations for several days while it held funding negotiations and explored strategic opportunities. But at an all-hands meeting on Thursday, CEO Dan Hart told employees that operations would cease "for the foreseeable future," US media reported at the time.

"While we have taken great efforts to address our financial position and secure additional financing, we ultimately must do what is best for the business," Hart said in the company statement on Tuesday.

"We believe that the cutting-edge launch technology that this team has created will have wide appeal to buyers as we continue in the process to sell the company." Founded by Branson in 2017, the firm developed "a new and innovative method of launching satellites into orbit," while "successfully launching 33 satellites into their precise orbit," Hart added. Virgin Orbit's shares on the New York Stock Exchange were down 3 percent at 19 cents on Monday evening. —AFP

Virgin Orbit files for bankruptcy

WASHINGTON: Virgin Orbit, the satellite launch company founded by Richard Branson, has filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy and will sell the business, the firm said in a statement Tuesday. The California-based company said last week it was laying off 85 percent of its employees—around 675 people—to reduce expenses due to its inability to secure sufficient funding. Virgin Orbit suffered a major setback earlier this year when an attempt to launch the first rocket into space from British soil ended in failure.

The company had organized the mission with the UK Space Agency and Cornwall Spaceport to launch nine satellites into space. On Tuesday, the firm said "it commenced a voluntary proceeding under Chapter 11 of the US Bankruptcy Code... in order to effectuate a sale of the



This photograph taken on March 31, 2023, shows worshippers gathered for Friday prayer at a mosque near the eastern front line, amid the Russian invasion of Ukraine.



This photograph taken on March 31, 2023, shows worshippers performing the Friday prayers at a mosque near the eastern front line, amid the Russian invasion of Ukraine.



This photograph taken on March 31, 2023, shows worshippers listen to the Friday prayers sermon at a mosque near the eastern front line, amid the Russian invasion of Ukraine. — AFP photos

Praying for victory: Ukraine Muslims mark Ramadan

Muslims are observing Ramadan in war-ridden Ukraine for a second year, and most people praying at a mosque near the eastern front line this week were soldiers in camouflage fatigues. "I ask Allah to protect our mosque. I ask Allah to protect Ukraine... and to punish tyrants," Mullah Murat Suleymanov said in prayers for the holy month. "Ramadan is a month of victory," he told the small congregation of 16 people, 11 of them in uniform including one woman.

The mosque has numerous boarded-up broken windows and walls pitted by shrapnel. A rocket exploded nearby two days earlier. Among the worshippers was Said Ismagilov, formerly one of Ukraine's Muslim spiritual leaders.

When the war began, he quit and now works as an ambulance driver with volunteer paramedics, evacuating wounded soldiers from the front line. Sandy-haired and wearing glasses, 44-year-old Ismagilov is a Tatar, a Muslim ethnic group. He wore a sleeve patch from his ASAP Rescue battalion and showed his ambulance parked outside, with taped-over dents caused by shrapnel.

'Allah's protection'

He said he feels "Allah's will and protection" amid the danger. "There were times when my ambulance got riddled with shrapnel. Thank God, I wasn't injured." When the war broke out, he had been serving as mufti of Ukraine's Umma religious administration for 13 years.

But the mosque where he served emptied as many evacuated the area. "I realized I was use-

less," he said, opting to "stand up and defend my motherland". "Now I evacuate wounded people." Last year he spent Ramadan in Lysychansk, a city that saw extremely heavy shelling before Ukraine's military eventually withdrew.

One of the most important Muslim festivals, Ramadan requires believers to abstain from food and water from dawn to nightfall for a month. Despite his wartime job, Ismagilov said he can still observe the Ramadan fasting rules. "I'd got used to spending Ramadan at war, so this year was nothing new to me," Ismagilov said. "I have all I need for fasting according to all Muslim traditions."

"I'm not in the trench now. I spend most of my daytime driving or at the stabilization point," a building where paramedics take wounded for initial medical care, he said. He also tries to fit in a couple of hours praying at night.

'Hard to be Muslim'

"It's hard for those Muslims who have to stay in the trenches. They are cold and there is a lot of water in the trenches as it often rains... It's hard to be a Muslim there," he said. Ismagilov said he did not know how he would celebrate the end of Ramadan, Eid Al-Fitr, later this month. "You are lucky if you can visit a mosque now and you never know how many people will come, or if they will come," he said. "If there is heavy shelling, we will probably gather in a basement to pray there."

Ismagilov grew up in the city of Donetsk in eastern Ukraine. Intrigued by his family's Muslim heritage -- which his parents knew little about --



This photograph taken on March 29, 2023, shows ambulance driver Said Ismagilov, formerly one of Ukraine's Muslim spiritual leaders, checks equipment in his car near the eastern front line, amid the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

he went to study theology at an Islamic university in Moscow and later became an imam in Donetsk.

While he grew up in a largely Russian-speaking region, he now prefers to speak Ukrainian. "I think it's disgusting when Russian Muslims support the war," he said. Russia treats its ethnic minorities, many of them Muslims, as "people of low quality" and "uses them as cannon fodder" in the war, he said.

"It's no secret that most of the dead enemy soldiers are ethnically from Buryatia, Tuva, Dagestan, Tatarstan, Chechnya," he said, naming Russian regions with large numbers of Muslims and Buddhists. "I'm absolutely sure that many Muslim fighters taking part in combat would like to fast...

because in this case they feel even better with Allah's help," the Mufti Suleymanov told AFP.

Dressed in long robes and a white hat, he was elected mufti last November, replacing Ismagilov. A soldier standing outside the mosque said he was fasting and that most Muslim soldiers do, unless they are on combat missions. "When you are going right to the very front line, it's permitted not to fast. If it's not hot and you're not tormented with thirst, then you can fast," he said. — AFP

RAMADAN FOOD LURES CUSTOMERS IN GAZA'S MARKETS

Markets in the Gaza Strip are distinguished with display of popular food and sweets in the holy month of Ramadan creating seasonal work opportunities for unemployed youth. Vendors fill their stands with the old Arab sweet qatayef and a variety of delicious-smelling food such as a, hummus and fatteh, in addition to various kinds of beverages such as the famous drink in the Middle East 'jallab'. Many Palestinians favor the popular kinds of food namely falafel and hummus that are part of their heritage -- claimed by the Zionists as part of their tradition. — KUNA



Is it possible to have too much Picasso?

Why can't the world get enough of Pablo Picasso? On the 50th anniversary of his death, it seems the appetite for the Spanish master is inexhaustible. Picasso's ceramics, Picasso's sculptures, Picasso and feminism, Picasso's use of white, celebrity photographs of Picasso... the list of exhibitions marking the half-century since his death on April 8, 1973 runs on and on.

"Picasso gobbles everything up, and still we are hungry for more," grandson Olivier Widmaier-Picasso told AFP, adding that he was "fascinated by the number of curators, historians and researchers that continue to find new angles to explore."

Explaining his ubiquity is another matter. The genius of his talent seems largely beyond dispute, and this combined with his emergence at the start of the 20th century, just as the last obstacles to free expression were being dismantled, leaving him free to explore in every direction.

And he simply never stopped, working from his teens right up to his death on the Cote d'Azur at 91. "He remains above everyone," said Bernard Blistene, a former director of the Pompidou Centre modern art museum in Paris. "The permanent invention, the journey across all the great currents of modernity, the continuous experimentation for 80 years, the desire to please and displease... all of it is without equal," Blistene told AFP.

No more 'muses'

The MeToo movement has slightly rattled the elevated plinth on which Picasso's reputation stands, as accusations that he was an abusive misogynist towards his wives and girlfriends trigger calls for a reappraisal. "We must stop talking about the women in his life as 'muses'. Some committed suicide, others sank into madness," said Emilie Bouvard, former curator at the Picasso Museum in Paris.

The exception was Francoise Gilot, the only mistress who dumped Picasso and lived to see 50 years pass since the



Pablo Picasso

death of "the tyrannical, superstitious and egotistical being" that she denounced in a famous book in the 1960s. But the damage has been limited.

Picasso still regularly tops the list for highest-grossing artists at auction: his paintings generated \$494 million last year alone, according to Artpulse. There is a balance to be found, said Bouvard. "Picasso is someone who appropriated things, people," she said. His work often spoke of violence and sexuality -- often with brutal, even courageous honesty -- but he also turned those feelings on the women in his life.

"Dealing with this question means speaking differently but fairly about Picasso," said Bouvard. That only opens up more ways to prime the pump of the Picasso industry. An exhibition at the

Brooklyn Museum this summer, promising to reevaluate the artist "through a feminist lens", is being curated by comedian Hannah Gadsby, one of Picasso's most outspoken critics.

Meanwhile, crowds are flocking to a much lighter retrospective at the Picasso Museum in Paris curated by fashion designer Paul Smith. It suggests the sexual politics have done nothing to undermine the simple pleasure that comes from seeing Picasso's work.

"I made it very decorative because the idea is that young school children and teenagers will come and see his work in a different light," Smith told AFP. "Many of us have already seen Picasso many times around the world, so we hope to show it in a new way." — AFP

Picasso: King of the \$100 million club

Pablo Picasso, who died 50 years ago this week, remains the star of art auctions, with several of his works commanding record sums. Five works by the Spanish artist have been sold for more than \$100 million (93 million euros), 16 for more than \$50 million, and 39 for more than \$30 million, according to AFP's count.

Most expensive: \$179.4 million

"The Women of Algiers (Version O)", painted in 1955, is the most expensive work by Picasso ever sold at auction, going for \$179.4 million on May 11, 2015, fivefold what the seller had paid 18 years earlier. At the time it was the biggest art auction sale in history. It was dethroned in November 2017 by the sale of "Salvator Mundi" attributed to Leonardo da Vinci, which went under the hammer for \$450 million and holds the record to this day.



Boy with a Pipe

Previous record-holders

In the last 20 years, two other Picasso works have held the record for the biggest art auction sale: "Boy with a Pipe", from May 2004 to February 2010, and "Nude, Green Leaves and Bust" from May 2010 to May 2012, according to an AFP database.

\$4.7 billion in a decade

With sales of Picasso works adding up to \$4.7 billion over the past 10 years, according to Artpulse's annual reports, no other artist can touch his totals. Andy Warhol (\$3.4 billion) and Claude Monet (\$2.6 billion) lag well behind the King of Cubism.

3,000 pieces sold annually

Picasso was not only a painter, his oeuvre also includes sculptures, drawings, ceramics, engravings, lithographs, illustrated books and ballet costumes. These have appeared in 31,745 auctions in 10 years -- an average of more than 3,000 objects up for sale every year. — AFP

Disney chief says Florida punishing its free speech

Disney chief Robert Iger on Monday said Florida's governor's is retaliating against the entertainment giant for exercising its right to free speech in an anti-business move that "seems really wrong." Governor Ron DeSantis seized control of Walt Disney World's self-governing district in February, hailing the end of the "corporate kingdom" as he effectively punished the entertainment giant over its opposition to his political agenda.

"The governor got very angry about the position Disney took and seems like he's decided to retaliate against us... in effect to seek to punish a company for its exercise of a constitutional right," Iger said while answering questions at an annual shareholders' meeting. "That just seems really wrong to me; a company has a right to freedom of speech just like individuals do."

Disney attracted the governor's ire last year after it criticized a law banning school lessons on sexual orientation. Iger joined the streamed shareholders' meeting from the Walt Disney World theme park in Florida, showcasing new attractions as well as coming releases, including a new installment to the blockbuster "Guardians of the Galaxy" film franchise.

Disney plans to invest more than \$17 billion in Disney World in the coming decade, creating more than 10,000 new jobs while attracting even more tourist money to Florida, Iger noted. "Any action that thwarts those efforts simply to retaliate for a position the company took sounds not just anti-business, but it sounds anti-Florida."

The Disney chief likened the company's decision to speak out on political issues to times when corporations voiced opposition to injustices during the US Civil Rights Era of the 1960s or during World War II. "I'm going to continue to be guided by a sense of decency and respect," Iger said. "And trust our instincts that when we do weigh in, we weigh in because the issue is truly relevant to our business and to the people that work for us."

Iger said Disney is committed to stories that reflect the world and instill belief that "good triumphs over evil." DeSantis has positioned himself as the leading Republican alternative to Donald Trump for the 2024 presidential nomination.

A darling of the populist right, the 44-year-old DeSantis -- who has not yet entered the 2024 presidential race -- has devoted much of his time as governor to bashing Democrats for liberalism and "wokeness." DeSantis's education initiatives and other right-wing red meat, such as a proposal to allow Floridians to carry concealed weapons without a permit or training, place him firmly in the Trump lane. — AFP

Leonardo DiCaprio testifies in corruption trial against Fugees member

Leonardo DiCaprio was in Washington Monday -- not to press lawmakers on his environmental causes or to film another blockbuster hit, but rather to testify in a political corruption trial featuring a 90s hip-hop star and a disgraced Malaysian financier.

Pras Michel, a member of the US musical trio The Fugees, is facing charges for allegations of helping to secretly funnel money from Low Taek Jho -- the Malaysian businessman at the heart of the scandal -- to influence US politics.

DiCaprio captivated the courtroom Monday, telling the jury about parties thrown by Low -- extravagant affairs allegedly funded with money looted from Malaysia's sovereign wealth fund, known as 1Malaysia Development Berhad, or 1MDB.

The "Titanic" star, called to testify by the prosecution, is not accused of wrongdoing in what has become one of the biggest embezzlement cases in the world. The 48-year-old actor testified that Low threw a "multitude of lavish parties with many different people from all over the world" on boats and at nightclubs, often with celebrities in atten-



Leonardo DiCaprio

dance -- sometimes including Michel.

DiCaprio said he and Low first met around 2010 at a party in Las Vegas, though the actor, smiling, said he didn't quite remember everything from the evening. He was then regularly invited to parties by Low, including a New Year's Eve celebration in which revelers flew from Australia to the United States on a private plane -- in order to see the clocks strike midnight twice. "I understood him to be a huge businessman with many different connections in Abu Dhabi, Malaysia... a sort of prodigy in the business world, incredibly successful," said DiCaprio.

'That's a lot of money'

When Low eventually expressed interest in financing DiCaprio's 2013 film "The Wolf of Wall Street," the actor's lawyers and a private detective looked into the Malaysian financier, who is

also known as Jho Low. They ultimately gave a thumbs-up on the deal. "I was given a green light by my team as well as the studios to accept Mr. Low's funding," DiCaprio said. "That means that the background check was fine and that he was seen as a legitimate businessperson."

DiCaprio also accepted gifts from Low for his environmental foundation. But in 2015, the actor said, he cut ties with Low after suspicions surfaced around his connection to the disappearance of billions of dollars from 1MDB's accounts.

Low, who is said to have fled to China and remains at large, allegedly used the 1MDB funds to subsidize his luxurious lifestyle, invest in DiCaprio's film, rub shoulders with the rich and famous and influence politics. Low "mentioned in passing that he... was going to give a significant contribution to the Democratic Party," DiCaprio testified. "A significant sum, around 20 to 30 million dollars. I said, 'Wow, that's a lot of money.'"

The Fugees' Michel, prosecutors allege, secretly funneled that money from Low to then-president Barack Obama's 2012 re-election campaign via shell companies, hiding the donations' origins. It is illegal for foreign nationals to donate to US political campaigns.

The US government also alleges Michel agreed to participate in a clandestine lobbying effort in 2017 to help the Chinese government "secure the return" of dissident billionaire Guo Wengui, based in the United States. Guo has since been arrested himself, on allegations he defrauded investors. In addition, the government says that Michel pledged to lean on the administration of former president Donald Trump to halt a probe into Low's role in the 1MDB scandal. Michel, 50, has pleaded not guilty. — AFP

BTS s Jimin first South Korean solo artist to top US songs chart

Jimin, a member of the K-pop supergroup BTS, has made history as the first South Korean solo artist to land the number one spot on the top US songs chart, Billboard announced Monday. The single "Like Crazy" debuted at No. 1 on Billboard's Hot 100 this week, bumping Miley Cyrus's "Flowers" out of the top spot, where it had reigned for eight weeks.

Jimin is the first South Korean soloist to score a No. 1 hit on the #Hot100, thanks to "Like Crazy," Billboard tweeted. The song, off Jimin's first solo album "Face," is the 66th track to debut at the peak of the Hot 100 chart, which dates back to 1958 and combines all-genre US streaming, radio play and sales data, the

industry tracker reported.

"Face" hit Billboard's main albums chart at No. 2, making it the highest-charting album by a South Korean solo musician and beating fellow BTS member RM's "Indigo," which reached No. 3 in December, industry outlets reported.

BTS is considered South Korea's biggest-ever cultural phenomenon, selling out stadiums around the world and dominating the charts while raking in billions for the country's economy and building a global legion of fans known as ARMYs.

But the K-pop juggernaut announced a hiatus last year due to South Korea's required military service. All able-bodied men in South Korea must serve at least 18 months



Jimin

in the military and, after a years-long debate about whether BTS deserved an exemption, Jin, the oldest member of the group, enlisted last year.

Before the pause, BTS bagged six No. 1 hits on the Hot 100 and all seven members of the boyband

have reached the top songs chart with solo tracks, Billboard said. Before BTS's dominance, South Korean rapper Psy's global hit "Gangnam Style" peaked at No. 2 in 2012, according to Billboard. — AFP



In this picture taken on March 12, 2023 in Amman, Italian priest Mario Cornioli and an Iraqi woman check an outfit at the atelier of 'Rafedin', a sewing project set up by Italians to help Iraqi refugee women in Jordan. —AFP photos



Iraqi women pose with creations by "Rafedin".



Iraqi women work at the atelier of "Rafedin".

Iraqis in asylum limbo in Jordan fashion their future

In a Jordanian church, Sarah Nael sews a shirt for a project that has provided scores of women who fled violence in neighboring Iraq with skills to earn a living. Many of the women escaped the extreme violence carried out by the Islamic State group's self-declared "caliphate" that cut across swathes of Iraq and Syria, before they eventually ended up in Jordan — where they found themselves without work. "Life here is very, very difficult — if we don't work, we can't live," said Nael, a 25-year-old Christian from the northern Iraqi town of Qaraqosh, who joined the "Rafedin" sewing project two years ago. It is based at St Joseph Catholic church in the Jordanian capital Amman.

Italian priest Mario Cornioli began the project in 2016, along with Italian designers and tailors. The products, including dresses, jackets, belts and ties, are sold in Amman and Italy to raise funds. For refugees, barred from seeking regular work, the project provides them with a way to supplement handouts from the United Nations. "It's a safe place," said Nael, who has been taught to create clothes from cloth and

leather, while her brother helps in the church's kitchen. "We are Iraqis. We are forbidden to work anywhere."

Asylum limbo

Since the project started, more than 120 women have benefited. "We try to help them with dignity," said Cornioli, who runs the Habibi Valtiberina Association, an Italian charity in Jordan. "A lot are the only ones working in their families."

On the tables in rooms in the church building, colorful rolls of cloth lie ready for cutting. Cornioli hopes the "Rafedin" fashion label — meaning "two rivers", the historical term for Iraq between the Euphrates and Tigris — will become widely recognizable. For the priest, the aim is to make the project "self-sustaining" to provide more training to women in need. While the IS extremists were forced out of their Iraqi territory by a US-led alliance in late 2017, many of the refugees in Jordan are still too fearful to go back to their war-ravaged home. Many are still waiting for their painfully slow asylum applications to other countries to be processed. "This project allowed them to do something



Iraqi woman Sarah Nael inspects creations by "Rafedin".

and to survive in this period," Cornioli said. "They are just waiting to leave."

'Opportunity to learn'

Nael and her family returned home after IS was defeated in 2017, but

they left again after being subjected to anonymous threats, and eventually sought safety in Amman. Their applications for asylum in Australia have been rejected. "My father is old, and my mother has cancer," she said,

but added that going back to Iraq was out of the question. "We have nothing left there to return to." Dina Nabil, 29, worked as an accountant in Iraq before fleeing to Jordan in 2017 with her parents and aunt, in the hope of joining her sister in Australia. During her wait, she studied how to sew fabric and leather. "Some of our relatives help us financially, and sometimes the United Nations helps us a bit," Nabil said. "With my work here, we are managing."

Cornioli said the project offers "the opportunity to learn something", pointing to "success stories" of some of the women who have since left Jordan, and are now working in Australia, Canada, and the United States.

Wael Suleiman, head of the Catholic aid agency Caritas in Jordan, estimated the country hosts as many as 13,000 Christian Iraqi refugees. "They hope to obtain asylum and leave to a third country, but in light of what is going on in the world now, the doors seem to be closed to them," Suleiman said. "They are afraid of the future, and no one can blame them for that." —AFP

Scientists in Arctic race to preserve 'ice memory'

Scientists camped in the Arctic are set to start drilling to save samples of ancient ice for analysis before the frozen layers melt away due to climate change, mission organizers said on Monday. Italian, French and Norwegian researchers are in Norway's Svalbard archipelago in what they called a race against time to preserve crucial ice records for analyzing past environmental conditions -- planning to ship them all the way to the Antarctic for storage.

"Glaciers at high latitudes, such as those in the Arctic, have begun to melt at a high rate," said paleoclimatologist Carlo Barbante, vice-chairman of the Ice Memory Foundation that is running the mission. "We want to recover and preserve, for future generations of scientists, these extraordinary archives of our Planet's climate before all the information they contain is completely lost."

The eight specialists on the mission have set up camp at an altitude of 1,100 meters on the crevasse-ridden Holtedahlfonna ice field and plan to start drilling on Tuesday, Ice Memory said. They will extract ice in a series of tubes from as far as 125 meters (137 yards) below the surface, containing frozen geochemical traces dating back three centuries.

Analysis of chemicals in deep "ice cores" provides scientists with valuable data about past envi-



This file photo taken on May 4, 2022 shows a view of mountains near Longyearbyen, located on Spitsbergen island, in Svalbard Archipelago, northern Norway. —AFP

ronmental conditions. But experts warn that melt-water is leaking down and altering the geochemical records preserved in ancient ice beneath.

Ice scientists "are seeing their primary material disappear forever from the surface of the planet", Jerome Chapellaz, president of the foundation, told AFP. "It is our responsibility as

glaciologists of this generation to make sure a bit of it is preserved."

Human-caused carbon emissions have warmed the planet by 1.1 degrees Celsius since the 19th century. Studies indicate that the Arctic is warming between two and four times faster than the global average.

Antarctic 'ice sanctuary'

One set of the ice tubes extracted will be used for immediate analysis while a second set will be sent to Antarctica for storage in an "ice memory sanctuary" under the snow, where the samples will be preserved for future generations of scientists.

From their remote source, the ice cores will be transported by sea to Europe and later to the other end of the globe, for storage at a Franco-Italian Antarctic research station. There, on territory protected by the Antarctic Treaty, they will be stored under the snow at minus 50C, where no power is needed to keep them cool.

"In coming decades, researchers will have new ideas and techniques to give voice to these archives," the researchers said in a statement. "For instance, they may be able to isolate other information contained in the ice of which we are not aware today."

The team in Svalbard will work for three weeks in temperatures as low as minus 25C (-13 Fahrenheit), cutting and pulling out a series of cylinders of ice 10cm (four inches) wide. The 700,000-euro (\$760,000) mission, partly funded by the Italian research ministry, follows a series of earlier ice core extractions by the foundation, including operations in the Alps and the Andes.

Further core-drilling missions are planned in the coming years in Tajikistan and the Himalayas. A study published in the journal Science in January said that half of the Earth's 215,000 mountain glaciers are expected to disappear by the end of this century due to climate change caused by humans -- even if the target of limiting global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius is reached. —AFP

Sports

Gaikwad, Moeen lift Super Kings to first season win

Dog invasion delays start of IPL match

CHENNAI: An opening century partnership between Rituraj Gaikwad and Devon Conway helped Chennai Super Kings to a 12-run win over Lucknow Super Giants at the Indian Premier League on Monday. The match began five minutes late after a dog invasion but Gaikwad (57) and Conway (47) soon turned the spotlight to cricket with their blazing stand of 110 in Chennai.

Four-time winners Chennai, led by MS Dhoni, reached 217-7, a total their bowlers defended by restricting Lucknow to 205-7 and register their first win of this season. England's Moeen Ali took four key wickets and was ably supported by fellow spinner Mitchell Santner, who returned impressive figures of 1-21. But Gaikwad set up victory as he smashed his way to his second successive half-century this season to entertain a raucous home crowd, which witnessed its team in

action live after a long break due to COVID.

The 16th edition of the money-spinning T20 tournament has returned to its home-and-away format after a few years of pandemic forced closed-door and limited-venue seasons. Gaikwad tore into the Lucknow attack with a string of sixes including one off England's Mark Wood after the left handed Conway hit the express bowler for three boundaries in that over. Lucknow hit back to remove the openers after leg-spinner Ravi Bishnoi sent back Gaikwad and Wood had his revenge on Conway with Krunal Pandya taking a stunning low and diving catch in the deep.

Lucknow kept chipping away with wickets including Ben Stokes out for eight before Ambati Rayudu, who hit an unbeaten 27, took the total past 200. Dhoni hit two straight sixes off Wood in the final over to go past 5000 IPL runs before he departed.

In reply, Kyle Mayers smashed 53 off 22 balls to start the chase strongly but Lucknow soon lost their way to Moeen's off-spin. Moeen got Mayers, skipper KL Rahul (20) and Marcus Stoinis (21) to dent the chase and despite Nicholas Pooran's quickfire 32 Lucknow could not recover.

Dog invasion

Meanwhile, a pitch invasion by a dog delayed an Indian Premier League game between Chennai Super Kings and Lucknow Super Giants on Monday as players and umpires tried to usher it off the field. Spectators cheered as the stubborn animal led a series of groundstaff on a chase around the stadium in the southern city of Chennai. The dog, tail wagging, seemed to enjoy the spotlight before it was driven away and the match began after a five-minute delay. Batting great Sunil Gavaskar was not amused by

the turn of events and said "groundstaff should ensure that such things don't cause a delay". Chennai skipper MS Dhoni had a smile as he returned his team's fortress, this time full of fans after COVID had forced years of closed-door and away matches. The money-spinning T20 tournament has returned to the home-and-away format in its 16th edition with 10 teams travelling across India in their fight to reach the final on May 28.

Focus turned back to cricket as Chennai opener Rituraj Gaikwad faced pace bowler Kyle Mayers after Lucknow elected to field first. India has thousands of stray dogs and it is not the first time a sporting event—including an IPL match and a recent ODI between India and Australia—was interrupted by a canine. In 2011, India was forced to halt its first Formula 1 practice session when a stray dog ran onto the Buddh International Circuit.—AFP

LIV-PGA feud set aside at Masters

AUGUSTA: Saudi-backed LIV Golf's feud with the PGA Tour was set aside by players at Monday's first practice for the 87th Masters, but LIV boss Greg Norman hopes for a fiery finish on Sunday. Reigning British Open champion Cameron Smith and two-time major winner Dustin Johnson were among LIV players receiving a warm welcome from PGA rivals at Augusta National. "Lots of laughs, lots of handshakes and it was really nice," Smith said of his one-hour workout. "I wasn't sure what I was going to expect walking onto the range but it was good to see some familiar faces and lot of smiles."

Australian Smith said the reception was important for the sport. "There's too much rubbish going on... I don't think there's any kind of hatred going on between the players. We're all happy where we are and I'm just as happy for the guys winning on the PGA Tour as I am for LIV golfers." Johnson, the 2016 US Open and 2020 Masters winner who took LIV's 2022 individual crown, went around with US countrymen Kevin Kisner, Brian Harman and Gary Woodland. "It's nice to see a lot of the guys because I haven't seen them all that much," Johnson said. "For me it's the same. All my buddies are still my buddies and we play and it's still golf. So it doesn't matter where you play at."

But Norman, LIV Golf's chief executive officer, said he had "goosebumps" thinking one of 18 LIV players who qualified for the Masters would win the green jacket and be greeted by 17 colleagues at Sunday's final hole. "If one of our guys wins, no matter who it is, they are all going to be there on the 18th green and that just gives me goosebumps to think about," Norman told NewsCorp in a weekend interview. "To have those 17 other guys there, that's the spirit we want. That's what these guys talk about. They're saying no matter who wins, no matter who is in that position, we're going to be there."

Four-time major winner Brooks Koepka, who won Sunday's LIV Golf title in Orlando, agreed the rebels would show a united front on 18. "If one of the LIV players does win, it'll be definitely a huge statement for LIV," Koepka said. "If one of the guys does, I would be shocked if all of us aren't there." Smith, however, didn't get the memo. "There definitely hasn't been a conversation with me," Smith said. "I'm not sure what's going to happen."

"I'd love to see one of us guys get up to the top of the leaderboard and really give it a nice shot," Johnson said his preparation hasn't been compromised playing 54-hole LIV events. "I'm going to be ready," Johnson said. "If I'm playing how I should, I'll be right there at the end." LIV's Bryson DeChambeau, the 2020 US Open champion, called his reception "unbelievable." "The fans were awesome," he added. "They were saying the same stuff they would say if I was on the other side." American Kevin Na would enjoy a tour fight to the end. "If you have a LIV versus PGA Tour coming down the stretch, it'll be fun."

Tiger 'looks good'

Top-ranked defending champion Scottie Scheffler could become only the fourth player to win the Masters in back-to-back years, joining US compatriots Tiger Woods and Jack Nicklaus and England's Nick Faldo. Second-ranked Rory McIlroy, a four-time major winner from Northern Ireland, would complete a career Grand Slam with a victory, joining Woods, Nicklaus, Gary Player, Gene Sarazen and Ben Hogan as a champion at all four majors.

McIlroy and Spain's third-ranked Jon Rahm, who has won three PGA Tour titles this year, could each overtake Scheffler atop the rankings with a victory. Woods, the 15-time major winner still struggling with severe leg injuries suffered in a 2021 car crash, played a practice round with McIlroy, Fred Couples and South Korean Tom Kim. "I think he'll be fine," Couples said of Woods. "He's hitting it really strong and solid and he looks good. The leg, I don't know how much better it's ever going to get... But he's strong enough to hit it a mile." —AFP



Duaj Al-Otaibi hands Sheikh Salman a memento.

Kuwait Shooting Sport Club lauds, honors shooters

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: In recognition of their achievements, Kuwait Shooting Sport Club held an honoring ceremony for its shooters who made international and Olympic achievements in 2021, 2022 and 2023 Monday evening at Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Olympic

Shooting Complex under the patronage of President of Asian Shooting Confederation, Honorary President of Kuwait Shooting Sport Club Sheikh Salman Sabah Al-Salem Al-Humoud Al-Sabah.

Sheikh Salman said that the achievements made by Kuwait Shooting are the result of the care and support of the political leadership to this sport. He said the outstanding results were due to the integrated and team work by all elements at the club - coupled with the support from the Public Authority for Sport (PAS). Sheikh Salman hoped that a large number of Kuwait shooters qualify for the Paris 2024 Olympics.

Deputy Director General for Competitive Sport Affairs Bashar Abdallah lauded the club's initiative to recognize outstanding shooters which is a good

incentive. Bashar Abdallah said PAS is keen on supporting sport federation and clubs. President of Kuwait and Arab Shooting Federations Eng Duaj Khalaf Al-Otaibi said the club prepared an integrated plan for its shooters of both genders to participate in the upcoming international tournaments.

He said the shooters are being honored for their achievements in the World Cup tournaments in Italy, Egypt, UAE, Morocco, Azerbaijan and the Asian tournaments that were held in Kazakhstan, Kuwait and Indonesia. Meanwhile Shooter Abdallah Al-Rashidi said the recognition of shooters who won international championships is a boost to win more championships. He thanked those who organized the ceremony.

Belfast boxing club bids to knock out old sectarian divisions

BELFAST: As darkness falls on a Monday night in east Belfast, Protestant teenager Abbie Leebody is trading punches with Niamh Campbell, a Catholic. The pair are not having some sectarian scrap, another episode of the violence that has pitted the mostly Protestant, pro-UK communities of east Belfast against mostly Catholic ones who want reunification with Ireland.

They are sparring at the City of Belfast Boxing Academy, which trains children aged six and up from both communities. From 13, they can enter the ring to spar. After taking a quick succession of body blows, Campbell, a 28-year-old coach, returns a right jab bloodying Leebody's nose with her powder-pink glove. Her bout with 14-year-old Leebody then ends with the sound of an electronic buzzer.

Started in 2011, the academy is aimed at overcoming sectarian divisions and channelling youngsters' energies into producing some of Northern Ireland's best boxing prospects. Differences of religion or community could not have been further from Campbell's mind. "I have to give her a bloody nose every once in a while to remind her to keep her guard up," Campbell told AFP. "You don't go in thinking: 'Oh, I'm gonna hit the Protestant... you don't really think about it that way,'" she said.

But 25 years after the Good Friday Agreement

Alcaraz pulls out of Monte Carlo

MADRID: Carlos Alcaraz pulled out of the upcoming Monte Carlo Masters on Tuesday because of hand and back injury problems. The world number two seemed set to battle Novak Djokovic for the top rank in the French Open warm-up tournament which starts Saturday. "After two months abroad, I am happy to return home but sad because I finished my last match in Miami with physical discomfort," said Alcaraz on Twitter.

"I will not be able to go to Monte Carlo to start the clay court tour. I have post-traumatic arthritis in my left hand and muscular discomfort in the spine

that formally ended three decades of violence over British rule in Northern Ireland, the communities around the academy are still defined by the old divisions. The boxing club lies directly on the fault line between the Short Strand, a pro-Irish Republican enclave, and the pro-UK Loyalist communities of east Belfast that surround it. A 25-foot (7.6 metre) metal fence, a "peace wall" topped with a security camera, runs along the back of the club to delineate the line dividing the two communities.

Boxing, not bombing

There are some eight miles of peace walls in Belfast, erected throughout the conflict in Northern Ireland, beginning in the late 1960s. The borders of the Short Strand became a flashpoint for violence and pitched gun battles between Loyalist and Republican paramilitaries early in the conflict, known as "The Troubles". In the years after the Good Friday peace deal, notably in 2002 and 2011, violence involving petrol bombs and paramilitary shootouts flared between the communities.

The boxing academy, located in a former Protestant primary school, can only be accessed from the Loyalist side through a heavy gate topped with spikes. Its windows are caged and a concertina of razor wire is fixed above its main door. Abbie, who is from a Loyalist housing estate next to the club, brushes off the divisions. "If they're Catholic, or Protestant, that's the way they are," she says. "But obviously I like Catholics and Protestants at the same time."

Stephen Clarke, a club member and part-time coach better known as "Chips", is from the other side of the wall and can see his mother's house in the Short Strand from the club. The 45-year-old explains

that needs rest to prepare for everything that is to come." The 2022 US Open winner's withdrawal follows that of compatriot Rafael Nadal, who said he was not ready to compete at Monte Carlo because of a hip injury earlier Tuesday.

Nadal suffers a blow

In another development, Rafael Nadal's preparation for a tilt at a record-extending 15th French Open title suffered a blow when he announced Tuesday his withdrawal from the upcoming Monte Carlo Masters. "Hi everyone, I'm still not ready to compete at the highest level," the 36-year-old Spaniard tweeted. "I will not be able to play in one of the most important tournaments of my career, Monte Carlo."

The Monte Carlo tournament, which Nadal has won 11 times, begins on Saturday, while the French



BELFAST: Niamh Campbell 28, from a Catholic background, takes part in a boxing class at the City of Belfast boxing club, which sits on an interface in east Belfast, with young people from both communities training together. —AFP

that with children overwhelmingly placed in segregated schools and locals rarely interacting across the divide, the club "gets kids together". "There's about 10 kids in there now and I couldn't tell you where any of them are from because we don't ask that question," he explained.

"The question we ask is all about boxing. It's not about where you're from or your religion or your tribe, whatever you want to call it. "Instead of throwing petrol bombs at each other, we could be boxing with each other." Lee Costello, another coach at the club, said it allows the boxers to "be part of a community in its own right rather than something that you're told to be a part of". The 28-year-old added: "You know, whether it's a Catholic left hand coming at you, or a Protestant one, they all hurt." —AFP

Open starts May 28. Nadal said he was hoping to return soon from the hip flexor injury he sustained in the Australian Open in January, suffering a second round exit against Mackenzie McDonald. The 22-time Grand Slam champion pulled out of hard-court tournaments at Indian Wells and Miami, with his sights set on a return at the start of the clay court season.

Record Monte Carlo Masters champion Nadal won the tournament eight consecutive times between 2005 and 2012. After the tournament's director said Nadal was registered for this year's edition, the Spaniard last week denied he was set to participate. "I don't know who gets this information, but obviously if it were true, I would confirm it, but unfortunately, I cannot confirm it," said Nadal at an event. "Things are moving day by day, and I don't say things that I can't fulfill." —AFP

Sports

Zain successfully concludes its 3rd padel tournament for staff

Competition enhanced teamwork spirit and out-of-office bonding

KUWAIT: Zain, Kuwait's leading digital service provider, successfully concluded its third padel tournament for staff at PADEL IN Courts in Yarmouk Sports Club, Mishref. The competition ran for two consecutive days and enhanced the spirit of teamwork and out-of-office bonding. Zain organizes various sports competitions for staff as part of its solid internal strategy that closely focuses on promoting health and sports programs.

The company remains committed to the well-being of its staff by organizing similar programs, especially during Ramadan, to promote an active and healthy lifestyle during the month of fasting. The third season of the competition came after the huge success of the first two seasons. The tournament continued for two consecutive days at PADEL IN Courts in Yarmouk Sports Club, Mishref, where 20 two-player teams competed for the title. Team ZAIN emerged as champions, while team Heavyweight came in second place.

Zain spares no efforts to organize activities and programs that cater to its employees' talents and interests. The company is keen on encouraging employees to pursue healthier lifestyles and take part in different sports and health programs all year round. Padel is a racket sport that witnessed great popularity recently in Kuwait and around the world and features a unique playstyle that consists of a mix of tennis and squash. The sport is usually played in doubles in a closed court with walls the ball can be played off.



Waleed Al Khashti and Hamad Al Musaibeh award the champions.

Chelsea players 'sad' after Potter sacking

LONDON: Chelsea interim coach Bruno Saltor said the players would be "sad" after the Premier League club sacked manager Graham Potter as he prepared the team to face Jurgen Klopp's Liverpool. Potter was dismissed on Sunday, after a 2-0 home defeat against Aston Villa the previous day. Big-spending Chelsea, who hired the Englishman to replace Thomas Tuchel in September, have just 10 wins from 28 league games this season and are 11th in the table, 12 points outside the top four.

There have now been 13 managerial departures in the English top flight this season - a new record. Julian Nagelsmann, who was sacked as Bayern Munich boss last month, is the favourite to be the next Chelsea boss. Bruno told reporters on Monday that Potter's dismissal had been "really difficult at every single level, especially emotional".

The Spaniard, who worked under Potter at Brighton before following him to Stamford Bridge, said the players would be sad "because they know the level of human being that Graham is". Chelsea's statement announcing Potter had left Stamford Bridge also said he had "agreed to collaborate with the club to facilitate a smooth transition". When asked what that meant, Bruno said: "Probably means that I'm here right now, just trying to keep the process going and we just try to collaborate the best that we can and I think Graham did an amazing job."

"Football is a really complex business and we have to keep going," Bruno, 42, said the match against fellow strugglers Liverpool on Tuesday would be an opportunity for the Chelsea players to show their quality. "We're representing Chelsea, a club with an amazing history and it's about winning, it's about dominating," he said. "What we need to do is prepare for the game and preparation helps a lot in terms of performance and that's what the players need to focus on." — AFP

Ceferin poised for new term as UEFA president

LISBON: Aleksander Ceferin stands unopposed for a new term as president of UEFA when European football's governing body meets in Lisbon on Wednesday. The 55-year-old Slovenian lawyer, elected in 2016 following the downfall of Frenchman Michel Platini, is therefore assured of a further four years in the role despite a turbulent second term overshadowed by the breakaway European Super League project.

The UEFA Congress in the Portuguese capital comes just a few weeks after Gianni Infantino was re-elected as president of FIFA, also unopposed. Ceferin has had his differences with Infantino, with the UEFA chief notably one of the main voices against FIFA's proposals to host the World Cup every two years instead of the current four.

That idea has been abandoned by Infantino, but the European Super League is not dead and buried, with Real Madrid, Barcelona and Juventus continuing to pursue the project. A lawsuit has been launched against UEFA and FIFA at the European Court of Justice, accusing the governing bodies of abusing their power by threatening to expel clubs



UEFA President Aleksander Ceferin

and players interested in joining a breakaway league.

A final ruling is expected in the coming weeks, although the court's advocate general, whose opinions are often followed by judges, provided a first ruling favorable to UEFA in December. Assuming that decision goes UEFA's way, Ceferin will be able to focus on pursuing the planned introduction of new Financial Fair Play rules, which will see clubs forced to limit spending on player and staff wages, transfers and agents fees to 70 percent of total revenues by 2025/26.

Women's Euro bids

He will also oversee the introduction of a new format for the UEFA Champions League starting in

2024, which will see the so-called "Swiss system" model adopted for a group stage featuring 36 clubs, up from the current 32. Ceferin, who has also recently hinted at softening rules that currently prevent clubs with the same owners facing each other in European competitions, can expect to face questions on these issues when he speaks to the press following Wednesday's meeting. He may also be asked about the refereeing scandal involving Barcelona that could have serious implications for the Catalan club and for La Liga.

"The situation is extremely serious. So serious that, in my view, it is one of the most serious cases in football since I have been involved in it," Ceferin told the Slovenian daily Ekipa on Monday. Prior to Ceferin's re-election, UEFA will hold an executive committee meeting in Lisbon on Tuesday in which it will name the hosts for the 2025 Women's Euro. A joint Scandinavian bid from Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden goes up against bids from France, Poland and Switzerland.

Belarus will also be on the agenda, with the country in danger of being excluded from UEFA competitions due to its support of Russia's ongoing war in Ukraine. Russia was expelled from all club and international competitions by UEFA last year following the invasion, but Belarus is involved in the qualifiers for Euro 2024, which it began with defeats against Switzerland and Romania last month. In mid-March more than a hundred EU lawmakers called on UEFA to expel Belarus too. — AFP



Saad Al-Tamimi

Padel tournament will kick off today

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: Saad Al-Tamimi Padel tournament will kick off on Wednesday (9:00pm) and will continue until Friday at the Padel Academy courts near Kuwait Towers. The tournament will be divided into two parts - one for amateurs and the other for professionals to allow as many players as possible to participate in this Ramadan event. Winner of first place will have KD 3,000 (for the professionals), while second place will receive KD 1,500. For the amateurs, the first place will receive KD 1,500 and second place will receive KD 1,000. Tournament's sponsor Al-Tamimi said that out of his believe of the importance of sports in various fields and his care for developing the youth capabilities came this idea of having a Ramadan tournament for the Padel game.

FIFA strips under-17 World Cup from Peru

PARIS: FIFA said on Monday it had withdrawn the 2023 under-17 World Cup from Peru "given the inability of the host country to fulfill its commitments to completing the infrastructure required". The governing body of world football said the 24-team competition would still be staged on the planned dates, November 10-December 2 and it "will now designate a new host in due course".

The biennial competition was due to be held in Peru in 2021 but was cancelled because of the COVID pandemic. Brazil won as hosts in 2019. FIFA said in its statement that "despite a very

positive working relationship" with the Peruvian football federation, "it has been determined that there is now not sufficient time to secure the required investment and complete the necessary work with the Peruvian government ahead of the tournament start date".

It said "it remains open to organizing a competition in Peru in the future". Last week, FIFA withdrew the Under-20 World Cup, scheduled for May 20-June 11, from Indonesia because the governors of two of the country's provinces wanted to ban Israel, which had qualified for the first time.

Haitian boss

In another development, sport's highest court has upheld FIFA's life ban for sex abuse on a former Haitian football federation director. Rosnick Grant, the federation's vice-president in charge of referees, was kicked out of the game by the sport's governing body in July 2021 for harassment, sexual

abuse, threats and coercion against female referees. The Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS) declared the "evidence against Rosnick Grant regarding the sexual abuse charges was sufficiently convincing" to maintain the ban.

"As a basis for its decision, the Arbitral Panel considered the testimony of a victim, who had travelled to Switzerland for the hearing, to be accurate, coherent and credible," a CAS statement read. CAS's ruling comes a month after the Lausanne-based court overturned a similar life ban on Grant's boss. In November 2020 FIFA's Ethics Committee found Haitian federation president Yves Jean-Bart, 73 at the time, guilty of rape and imposed "a life ban from all football-related activities" and a one million Swiss francs (\$1.1 million) fine. Jean-Bart, the head of the Haitian football for two decades, denied that he raped young female players at a training facility outside Port-au-Prince over the course of five years. — AFP

Classifieds

Hospitals & Clinics

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

Clinics

Kaizen center	25716707
Rawda	22517733
Adaliya	22517144

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

Change of Name

I, Michael Philip Monteiro, holder of Indian passport no. L3855041 Indian permanent address 3-290 Santhosh Nagar Mangaluru Dakshina Kannada, Karnataka 575017, India, residing in Kuwait at present hereby declare that hence forth my name will be read as under (Given name) Michael and (Surname) Monteiro. 5-4-2023

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

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

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

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Kuwait SC crowned handball champions



KUWAIT: Kuwait SC claimed on Monday the title of the Handball League for the 11th time running and the 13th in its history after beating Burgan 41-31. The result of the game raised Kuwait SC's tally of points to 34, followed by Qadsia SC - 33 points.

Real Valladolid and Espanyol fire coaches

MADRID: Real Valladolid fired coach Jose 'Pacheta' Rojo on Monday while Espanyol confirmed they had axed boss Diego Martinez. Espanyol have slipped to 17th in Spain's 20-team La Liga, after losing four straight league games. They are ahead of Almeria in the first relegation place only on goal difference. Valladolid lost 6-0 at Real Madrid on Sunday and are one point and one place better off than Espanyol. Martinez held a farewell press conference at Espanyol following the club's announcement that he was leaving.

"Results lead our organization to make this decision with the sole and clear objective of staying in the top flight," said Espanyol in a statement. They named their former striker Luis Garcia, who moves from coaching Real Madrid's 'C' team, as his replacement until June, 2024. Valladolid, whose president is former Brazil great Ronaldo, echoed the sentiments in a statement posted on their website as they dismissed the coach who led them to promotion last year in his first season in charge.

"The club recognises the important career of the coach and the role he has played in the team since his arrival but, with the sole objective of achieving survival in the top flight at the end of the current campaign, we have opted to continue in another direction," said the Valladolid statement. Rojo and Martinez join a long list of La Liga clubs splitting with their managers this season, including Sevilla, who axed Jorge Sampaoli, and last-placed Elche who fired Pablo Machin, their fifth change of coach this season. Valencia sacked Gennaro Gattuso in January and then replaced the stand-in, Voro, in February.

Liga boss urged to quit

Meanwhile, Barcelona have called on La Liga president Javier Tebas to quit over "false" accusations allegedly made by him concerning their referee corruption case. The Spanish giants made the demand after a newspaper claimed Tebas had written to the Spanish public prosecutor accusing two former Barca presidents of wrongdoing. Last month the Catalan club was charged with corruption after payments of more than 7.3 million euros (\$7.8 million) to a company owned by a former refereeing chief were uncovered.

In a statement following La Vanguardia's report Barcelona claimed Tebas "presented false proof" to the public prosecutor "to incriminate our club". "FC Barcelona wants to express its deep anger, indignation and disgust," the statement read. It went on to demand that Tebas "appears in public to provide answers", adding "for the dignity and respect of the presidency of La Liga Mr Tebas should resign". Tebas in response denied "accusing anyone" in a post on social media.

Last month the club said they paid Jose Maria Enriquez Negreira, the former referee and ex-vice president of the refereeing committee of the Spanish football federation (CTA) between 1994 and 2018, for reports and advice related to refereeing. In Monday's statement a bruised Barcelona claimed they were the victims "of a media lynching for something that never happened - Barca have never bought off referees". As well as the club and Enriquez Negreira, two of the club's former presidents, Josep Maria Bartomeu and Sandro Rosell, are facing the same charge of corruption. — AFP

Everton strike late to hold Tottenham

LIVERPOOL: Michael Keane's stunning 90th minute equalizer struck dented Tottenham's challenge for a top-four finish in the Premier League as Cristian Stellini's caretaker spell in charge of Spurs started with a 1-1 draw at Everton. Harry Kane's penalty looked set to take Tottenham third in the table after Abdoulaye Doucoure had been sent off for striking the Spurs striker in the face. But the numbers were levelled up when Lucas Moura also saw red two minutes from time before Keane's thunderbolt salvaged a vital point in Everton's bid to beat the drop.

A draw is enough to take Sean Dyche's men out of the relegation zone and up to 15th. Tottenham move level on points with Newcastle and Manchester United in fourth, but have played two games more than their rivals for a place in next season's Champions League. "After the red card they were much more aggressive than us," said Stellini after Spurs failed to win away from home for the sixth consecutive game. "We have to be a team that plays at home and away with the same desire and aggressiveness." Stellini was taking charge for the first time since the sacking of his former boss Antonio Conte.

Conte's fate was sealed by a tirade towards the Tottenham squad after conceding twice late on to draw 3-3 at bottom-of-the-table Southampton. But there was little sign of a fresh start as the visitors again threw away a promising position against a side fighting relegation. Everton were lucky to escape as Kane missed two huge chances inside the first 15 minutes. The England captain should have been full of confidence after becoming his country's all-time top goalscorer during the international break.

But Kane's scuffed effort gave Keane the chance to clear off the line with his first opportunity before he headed wide when completely unmarked from Ivan Perisic's cross. No side has scored fewer goals in the Premier League than Everton this season and the home side's lack of a focal point up front without

Hats off as intel officers hound matchfixers

PARIS: A spectator removing their hat or taking off their jacket at a sporting event sounds innocuous but it can be a sign the match in question is fixed, Sportradar's Director of Intelligence and Investigations told AFP. Such apparently insignificant gestures could, for example, be signals to players in a football match to allow their team to concede goals, Tom Harding explained in an interview at the company's London base.

Harding, who spent 11 years in the Royal Navy in intelligence roles and three years in law enforcement in Britain, rumbles into action with his team of intelligence specialists and investigators once initial analysis has been done and a potentially suspicious match has been identified. They get involved if the client, or sports federation, want evidence to help them deal with the issue.

They act on information supplied by the Monitoring and Detection team of Sportradar Integrity Services, which works with over 150 sports federations and leagues with clients ranging from world football's governing body FIFA to NASCAR. Integrity Services analysts working 24/7 and operating from their main base in London to hubs in Monte-



LIVERPOOL: Everton's English defender James Tarkowski (left) fights for the ball with Tottenham Hotspur's Argentinian defender Cristian Romero during the English Premier League football match on April 3, 2023. — AFP

the injured Dominic Calvert-Lewin was again exposed. The home outfit did waste a glorious chance to take the lead when Idrissa Gueye selfishly blazed over from the edge of the box with teammates better placed to take the shot just after half-time.

A moment of madness from Doucoure appeared to have undone the endeavor of Dyche's men for the first hour. The French midfielder slapped Kane in the face after an altercation between the pair and could have no complaints at being shown a straight red card. Everton's self-destruction did not stop there as moments later Keane dived in foolishly on Cristian Romero to concede a penalty. Kane coolly sent

international teammate Jordan Pickford the wrong way for his 24th club goal of the campaign.

"The sending off changes the feel, but our mentality is growing all the time," said Dyche. "They're pushing their own standards very high, even going down 11 v 10, we took the game on," he added. Tottenham failed to make the man advantage count for much of the closing stages as they invited Everton on in search of an equalizer even before Lucas also saw red for a rash challenge on Keane. Everton's fight got its reward when centre-back Keane stroled forward before unleashing a thunderous hit into the top corner. — AFP

video, Melbourne, Singapore, Las Vegas and Minneapolis pore over screens of live sporting fixtures and betting odds.

In 2022, they identified 1,212 suspicious matches within 12 sports across 92 countries. While reflecting an increase of 34% from 2021, the data confirms 99.5% of sporting events are free from match-fixing, with no single sport having a suspicious match ratio greater than 1%. Harding has at his disposal "a significant network of reconnaissance photographers" who are sent to stadia. Other members of the intelligence unit can also be deployed on site.

"(The matchfixers) have to be in the stadium to communicate with players, and at times intimidate the players to go ahead with it," Harding said. "We are looking for those type of individuals who could be signalling to players—they are subtler these days and do not wave anymore. 'Hat on, hat off—we have seen these exchanges. 'If the person has a hat on you are to do 'X', such as concede goals. If they take it off then it means you are to do this. 'Or they put a jacket on or take it off, sometimes they change their shirt, if you see green do this, red do that.'"

Harding says that the spotters' remit is not restricted to observing what goes on on the field of play. "Sometimes we go beyond reconnaissance," the 35-year-old said. "There is surveillance. We are looking before, during and after who the players are communicating with, if there is an exchange of packages and finances. "After all, that is your crime scene ultimately."

Harding says his team also rely on the fixers on the ground over-reaching themselves and believ-

ing they are invisible. "They can be over-confident," he said. "There is a perception no-one is taking an interest, no-one is watching. "If they saw more risk of criminal pursuit they would take more measures rather than sitting in the stadium changing their shirt or hat. "You do rely on them not covering their tracks." One of the main frustrations for Harding is that sanctioning those behind the fix can be complex. "We are definitely making an impact but the frustration is a multi-jurisdictional global one," said Harding.

"You have a competition in a certain country being corrupted but the individuals organizing, facilitating or orchestrating the manipulation are in another, bettors in another and financiers in another." Harding says that while sporting sanctions have "reached a good level", it often amounts to "players and clubs being punished and their livelihoods being damaged" while those who initiated the fix get away with it. "The law enforcement world does take it seriously but there are so many hurdles legally," he said.

The legal framework in some countries does not make it clear "whether it is either a crime or considered a serious crime worth investigation", Harding added. "There are also limited resources devoted to it (in certain countries). So it is complicated. "The biggest deterrent will come when you see more criminal prosecutions." Harding, though, is bullish and believes despite some lows that matchfixers can be brought to heel. It is a battle that is "definitely winnable," he said. — AFP