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Girgian celebration



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'unprecedented uncertainty'



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Madrid humiliate Barca



RAMADAN TIMINGS

Fajr	04:10
Shurooq	05:31
Dhuhr	11:50
Asr	15:23
Maghrib	18:10
Isha	19:28

Saudi and Iran vow to bring security, stability in Mideast

Tehran names envoy to UAE after nearly 8-year absence



BEIJING: Iran's Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian (left) shakes hands with Saudi Foreign Affairs Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan and Chinese Foreign Minister Qin Gang (center) during a meeting in Beijing on April 6, 2023. — AFP

BEIJING: Top diplomats from Middle East rivals Iran and Saudi Arabia met in Beijing on Thursday, pledging to work together to bring "security and stability" to their turbulent region following a surprise China-brokered deal. In a joint statement released after talks between Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian and Saudi counterpart Prince Faisal bin Farhan, the two sides vowed to continue to work together to improve ties.

"The two sides emphasized the importance of following up on the implementation of the Beijing Agreement and its activation in a way that expands mutual trust and the fields of cooperation and helps create security, stability and prosperity in the region," said the statement. Tehran and Riyadh announced a Beijing-brokered agreement in March to restore relations that had been severed seven years ago when protesters in Iran attacked Saudi diplomatic missions.

The ministers' visit to Beijing came as French President Emmanuel Macron and EU chief Ursula von der Leyen were also in the Chinese capital, seeking to make Europe's case in a meeting with Xi Jinping for bringing an end to the conflict in Ukraine. The shock rapprochement between mainly Sunni Muslim Saudi Arabia, the world's biggest oil exporter, and Shiite-majority Iran, strongly at odds with Western governments over its nuclear activities, has the potential to reshape relations across a region characterized by turbulence for decades.

The two sides "negotiated and exchanged opinions with the emphasis on the official resumption of bilateral relations and the executive steps towards the reopening of the embassies and consulates of the two countries", Iran's foreign ministry said in a statement. Saudi state TV channel Al Ekhbariya aired footage of the pair shaking hands in front of Saudi and Iranian flags and then talking and smiling.

In a readout from state broadcaster CCTV, Beijing hailed "the first official meeting between the foreign ministers of the two countries in more than seven years" and Beijing's "active mediation" in the diplomacy. Under last month's agreement, the two countries are to reopen their embassies and missions within two months and implement security and economic cooperation deals signed more than 20 years ago.

Saudi Arabia severed relations with Iran in January 2016, after protesters attacked its embassy in Tehran and consulate in the Iranian city of Mashhad over Riyadh's execution of the Saudi opposition Shiite cleric Nimr Al-Nimr. Talks between the foreign ministers are expected to be followed by Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi's visit to Riyadh. Raisi accepted an invitation from Saudi Arabia's King Salman, Iran's First Vice President Mohammad Mokhber said on Monday.

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RAMADAN KAREEM

Journey of Ramadan: From motivations to global appreciation

By Ronny Engen

In today's health-focused society, fasting, especially intermittent fasting, has gained popularity as a wellness trend. Modern lifestyles have adapted to this ancient practice, attracted by its health benefits. However, it's essential to recognize that fasting has been part of many religious traditions. Including, and perhaps most notably, in Islam.

Let's explore the human side of Ramadan, the holy month observed by Muslims involving strict fasting and spiritual reflection. We'll examine personal accounts and emotions that shape this spiritual journey. Fasting during Ramadan is a fundamental Islamic practice, but as we will see, the transformative experiences stir a range of motivations and inspirations, filling the month with a treasured sense of fellowship and spiritual renewal.

I collected perspectives from Muslims with diverse backgrounds to get a good variety of experiences of the journey that Ramadan is. In this exploration, we'll discover thought-provoking insights and personal reflections from these conversations. I sincerely thank all respondents for their patience with me and for sharing their unique insights during this holy month of Ramadan.

To understand motivations for fasting, I specifically asked for "what inspires you to fast" aiming for the subtle personal motivations and individual stories. Participants expressed how fasting, a key part of their faith, nurtures a strong

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China deploys warships near Taiwan

TAIPEI: China deployed warships through waters around Taiwan on Thursday as it vowed a "firm and forceful" response to the island's president meeting US House Speaker Kevin McCarthy. Taiwan leader Tsai Ing-wen held talks with McCarthy in Los Angeles on Wednesday, expressing gratitude afterwards for the meeting that included other US lawmakers. "Their presence and unwavering support reassure the people of Taiwan that we are not isolated and we are not alone,"

Tsai told reporters. China had repeatedly warned both sides the meeting should not take place, and deployed an aircraft carrier through waters southeast of Taiwan hours before the talks. Three additional warships were detected in waters separating the island from mainland China, Taiwan's Ministry of National Defense said on Thursday morning. An anti-submarine helicopter had also crossed the island's air defense identification zone, according to the ministry.

And China deployed coastguard vessels for unusual patrols that sparked a protest from Taiwan. Despite Taiwan having been ruled separately for more than 70 years, China views it as part of its territory and has vowed to one day seize it, by force if necessary. China carried out its largest-ever air and sea

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HSINCHU: A French-made Mirage fighter jet taxis on the runway at an air force base in Hsinchu, northern Taiwan on April 6, 2023. — AFP

Concern, criticism after Zionists storm Jerusalem mosque

JERUSALEM: Global criticism and concern mounted after Zionist police clashed with Palestinians inside Islam's third-holiest site, sparking a military exchange of rockets and air strikes, with fears of further escalation. Two more rockets were fired late Wednesday from the Gaza Strip towards Zionist entity, the army and witnesses said, and fresh altercations broke out at Al-Aqsa mosque during

the Jewish Passover and the Muslim holy month of Ramadan.

Armed police in riot gear stormed the prayer hall of Al-Aqsa mosque, aiming to dislodge the youths they said had barricaded themselves inside. A barrage of rocks and fireworks met the officers, police video showed, and more than 350 people were arrested. United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres was "shocked and appalled" by images he saw of Zionist security forces beating people at the mosque, particularly because it came at a time holy to Jews, Christians and Muslims that should be a period of peace, his spokesman said.

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JERUSALEM: Zionist security forces are seen during the expulsion of worshippers from Al-Aqsa mosque compound in Jerusalem's Old City. — AFP

Russian frigate makes rare port call in Saudi

JEDDAH: Two Russian vessels left Jeddah on Thursday after making the first port call by the Russian navy in a Saudi port for a decade, Russian offi-

cial said. The frigate Admiral Gorskov and the tanker Kama arrived in Jeddah on Wednesday and left less than 24 hours later after a "long arranged" visit, a Russian embassy official in Riyadh told AFP on condition of anonymity.

Russia's defense ministry said on its website that the port call was the first by a Russian warship for about 10 years. The two ships took on food and drinking water in the Red Sea

port, the ministry said. A "cultural program" was also scheduled for the crew, it added. The Admiral Gorskov, which is armed with Zircon hypersonic missiles, and the Kama were part of a group of Russian Northern Fleet vessels that left in January and has taken part in two exercises, in the Indian Ocean and the Arabian Sea. One of the exercises was with China and South Africa.

Saudi Arabia has taken a conciliatory stance over Russia's invasion of Ukraine calling for a political solution. Russia has worked closely with the kingdom and other members of the Organization of Oil Exporting Countries (OPEC) in efforts to manage the oil markets. Earlier this month, OPEC and its allies cut production by more than one million barrels per day in a surprise move that sent prices soaring and drew criticism from the United States. — AFP



Most oil-producing nations cut production voluntarily

KUWAIT: Most oil-producing countries within the OPEC+ system reduced their production by about 1.7 million barrels per day in a voluntary agreement without an official meeting. This reduction applies until the end of this year. A two-million barrels per day official reduction preceded this one in November 2022. The production cut aimed to support oil prices - Brent crude - which lost about 20.6% of its value in one year from April 5th, 2022 to April 5th, 2023 despite rising its price per barrel rose by \$5.4. The sudden cut seemed to be a legitimate defense of those countries' primary source of hard currency.

On the other front, the US Federal Reserve raised the interest rate on the US dollar nine times in one year, with a range of 4.75%-5.00% to achieve one goal, namely to curb inflation even if the hike curbs economic growth. The largest commodity contributing to international trade and a significant inflation source is oil, whose low price is a primary

target for curbing American inflation policies.

This puts the world in an economic clash between two fronts and a complicated global financial circumstance. Each front tries to achieve a goal contradictory to the other. This uncomfortable situation portends severe repercussions for the international economic front, with impacts that may affect both parties, especially when the world is involved in a war on the European land. Besides, one of its parties is a significant member of the OPEC+ Group, which is living in a state of cloning the old Cold War.

This time, the first party is the US; the opposing party is China, which has recently entered the arena of competition for political influence. The state of division is closer to the post-crisis situation of 1929 when the Bolsheviks were ruling Russia and devastated Germany after World War I, experiencing the beginning of the emergence of the Third Reich - Hitler's Republic -, Mussolini in Italy, and

Japan was under military rule.

Therefore, there was no cooperation to deal with that crisis, whose impacts lasted about 17 years. This yielded a great war. The exact opposite happened after the 2008 crisis. China was the biggest supporter of the USA, and the G-20 was in regular contact to coordinate policies to reduce costs to the lowest limits. This cooperation contained charges to the minimum within one year.

The preceding concerns us in Kuwait, the most exposed to the world and the most dependent on oil. Oil prices fell by about 20.9% between the beginning of the last fiscal year and the current one. Our oil production fell by about 9.4% during the same period, while public expenditures increased for the current fiscal year by 11.7%.

Oil revenues fund 90% of these expenditures while prices and production are decreasing, while the current part of expenditures increased to

90.5%. Kuwait is currently governed by a caretaker government, that has resigned since the 26th of January 2023 and was disabled before that, and an impeached parliament with a temporary replacement. This applies to sensitive bodies with expired or temporary boards of directors, and most of the leadership positions in the public sector that directly dominates 70% of the economy, by appointment, or temporary.

The world around us is going through a troublesome affair, which will cause fundamental changes to the world. Kuwait is like a one-pillar tent that depends on oil and its savings, which dropped in both price and value, with an expected risk of further decline. Also, its general administration is temporal and is unable to take preventive actions, i.e. unable to work on increasing the number of its tent poles to protect the country from the dangers of external repercussions. — Al-Shall

Minister, Indian envoy hold talks



KUWAIT: Indian Ambassador Dr Adarsh Swaika called on Minister of Public Works and Minister of Electricity, Water and Renewable Energy Amari Bugammaz on Thursday. Discussions pertained to high potential of bilateral cooperation in the infrastructure sectors. He apprised the minister of the massive infrastructure development in India and the capability of Indian companies in delivering high quality projects abroad.

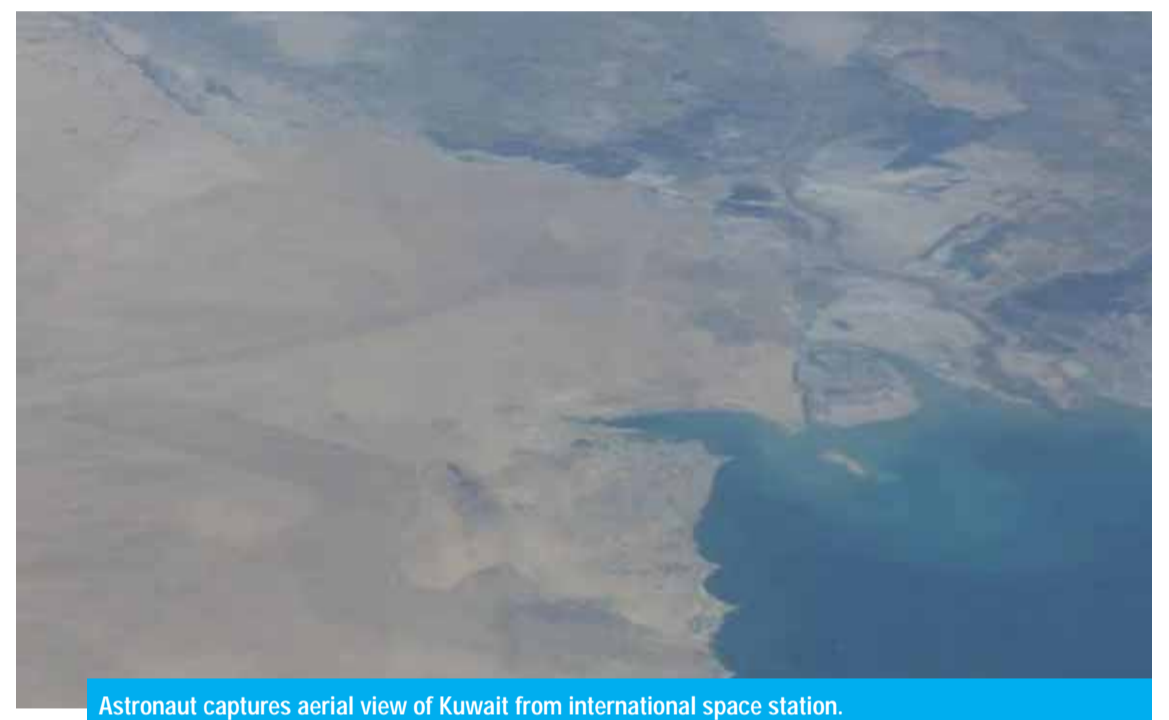
Astronaut captures top view of Kuwait

KUWAIT: Emirati Astronaut, Sultan Al-Niyadi has published a video from the international space station of an aerial view of a number of Arabian Gulf Countries including Kuwait, which he called "The land of good people". Al-Niyadi said: "We are now floating in the morning over the Arabian Peninsula and there is nothing better than our homeland."

Al-Niyadi videos include that of Riyadh, Iraq, Kuwait, Bahrain and then Qatar which he also called "The Doha of good deed". He showed an aerial view of Abu Dhabi and then that of Kuwait. "We floated around the Arabian Peninsula in a few minutes, because the station rotates at a speed of 27,000 kilometers per hour - which is a very great speed," he said. In conclusion of the video, he said "I wanted to share with you this beautiful terrain and stunning scenery." — Agencies

GCC chief, Kuwait ambassador discuss regional issues

RIYADH: GCC Secretary-General Jassem Al-Budaiwi and Kuwait ambassador to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia Sheikh Sabah Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah discussed the efforts to advance the GCC joint action. They reviewed the progress towards more integration among the GCC member



Astronaut captures aerial view of Kuwait from international space station.

states and how to realize the aspirations of their peoples in the light of the visions of the GCC leaders. The meeting also dealt with the latest developments of regional and international issues, according to a press release from the GCC Secretariat. Al-Budaiwi congratulated Sheikh Sabah on his appointment as Kuwait Ambassador to Saudi Arabia, and wished him success in his new mission.

Gulf trade

In another development, GCC Secretary-General discussed with the Omani Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion Qais Al-Yousef on how to enhance joint Gulf action un-

der the directives of the GCC leaders. The officials discussed the efforts made by the General Secretariat and Oman (the Presidency State) regarding working on completing projects for drafting commercial laws and regulations between the GCC countries according to the approved timetable, in line with the decision of the International Cooperation Committee at its 63rd meeting held in October 2022, said a statement.

The two sides also reviewed several issues of commercial, investment and industrial concern, and ways to improve integrated joint work, in a way that contributes to advancing the growth of Gulf economy, noted the statement. — KUNA

Dangerous rise in obesity rates

KUWAIT: Kuwait occupies a top place among countries of the most obese people around the world and that is due to their dietary choices and the popularity of fast food in the country. The dangerous rise in obesity rates has led to a surge in chronic diseases that come with obesity. The body mass index (BMI) of 25 or more indicates excess weight and obesity occurs at 30 and above.

Kuwait registers high rates of stomach stapling compared with other countries around the world. Doctors in Kuwait, which has a population of around four million, perform 5,000 stomach stapling operations a year. The Cancer Aware Nation (CAN) brings awareness to the dangers of obesity as it is among the most important risk factors for cancer, particularly breast, colon and rectal cancers.

CAN Board Chairman Dr Khalid Al-Saleh said continued cooperation with the health ministry, particularly the chronic diseases department resulted in several proposals aimed at tackling obesity in the country. The cooperation began with the "Reduce



Your Weight in Ramadan" program, he said. This year's turnout for the program, which is held in cooperation with HAIIDO Academy, is 45 percent higher than last year. This reflects an increase in awareness of obesity dangers among citizens and residents.

Saleh urged citizens and residents to call

97355516 on WhatsApp to benefit from the program specially that Ramadan is not over and it is a good opportunity to join the program to stay away from obesity and its dangers. He said that CAN's campaigns for next year prioritize obesity because of how important it is to fight it. — Agencies

Belgian exports to GCC up 23.9%

BRUSSELS: Belgian exports to the six-member Gulf Cooperation Countries (GCC) went up by 23.9% in 2022, from 6.73 billion euro (\$7.34 billion) in 2021 to 8.34 billion euro (\$9.09 billion) in 2022, according to official figures. Belgium's total imports from GCC increased by a whopping 92% from 6.41 billion euro (\$6.99 billion) in 2021 to 12.31 billion euro (\$13.4 billion) in 2022, showed the figures released by the Belgian

Foreign Trade Agency. Belgian exports to Kuwait went up from 305.17 million euro (\$333.01 million) in 2021 to 370.96 million euro (\$404.76 million) in 2022 up by 21.6%, it said. Belgian import, however, from Kuwait went down from 339.97 million euro (\$370.94 million) in 2021 to 243.6 million euro (\$265.13 million) in 2022, a drop of 28.3%. UAE was the top destination for Belgian exports going up from 3.66 billion euro (\$3.99 billion) in 2021 to 4.54 billion euro (\$4.95 billion) in 2022, up by 23.9%. It was followed by Saudi Arabia with 2.06 billion euro (\$2.44 billion) in 2021 increasing to 2.67 billion euro (\$2.91 billion) in 2022, up by 29.3%, it added.

Belgium's exports to Qatar in 2021 were valued at 391.21 million euro (\$426.76 million) - going up to 443.25

million euro (\$483.80 million) in 2022, an increase of 13.3%. The exports to Oman increased by 0.7% from 207.28 million euro (\$226.24 million) to 208.65 million euro (\$227.73 million) in the same period, it noted. To Bahrain, Belgian exports went up by 7.6% from 93.04 million euro (\$101.45 million) to 100.15 million euro (\$109.58 million).

On the Belgian imports from GCC, Qatar was at the top with an increase of astounding 352% from 1.37 billion (\$1.49 billion) in 2021 to 6.21 billion euro (\$6.76 billion) in 2022, according to the agency. It was followed by Saudi Arabia with an increase of 26.8% from 2.60 billion euro (\$2.83 billion) in 2021 to 3.29 billion (\$3.58 billion) in 2022. —KUNA

Disability census to help the disabled join workforce

KUWAIT: The Public Authority for Disability Affairs will prioritize determining the number of people with disabilities in Kuwait as the next step towards building a strategy to integrate them into the job market, said the authority's director. The number of people with disabilities currently registered with the authority amounts to three percent of Kuwait's total population, the Director General of the Public Authority for Disability Affairs Dr Bibi Al-Amiri told KUNA Wednesday.



Dr Bibi Al-Amiri

"The number is considered small compared to the average percentage of disabled people in other countries across the world, which exceeds 15 percent," said Amiri. Amiri stressed the importance of spreading awareness and thoughtful planning in the early stages of conducting the census. She said the certificate of proof of disability, for example, helps the authority implement a mechanism for providing people with disabilities with the best medical service available and in accordance with the needs of each case.

The authority, said Amiri, is moving towards minimizing the role that medical committees play in renewing these certificates so as to redirect resources towards locating new disability cases. It will also reexamine and standardize the medical criteria used by the committee to evaluate patients, with the aim of integrating the patient's social circumstances into the evaluation process. Amiri said the authority is planning rehabilitation and training programs to help people with disabilities join the workforce. It will also advocate for the implementation of the disabilities law, which stipulates that disabled people make up four percent of an organization's staff. — KUNA



KUWAIT: The Public Works Ministry is examining the reason behind the sinkhole on the Fourth Ring road near Andalus area. The emergency teams rushed to the site and cordoned off the area to prevent any accident. —Agencies

Local

Expats quota system eyed

Manpower Authority to review decision

KUWAIT: The government received an advisory report from private academic bodies charged with studying the population demographics in Kuwait as part of the executive authority's directives to implement its work in addressing the Kuwaiti labor market, the large increase in expatriates compared to the number of Kuwaitis, the consequences of that on the poor conditions of public services and infrastructure, as well as the extent to which citizens benefit from these services.

The report included issues that were the focus of the recommendations: a principle to fix the demographic imbalance and improve the quality of expatriate workers while reducing the number of unskilled expat workers in the country. The report also included implementing a quota for every nationality in Kuwait.

According to the report, there are proposals

that were sent to the Council of Ministers that deal with the implementation of the quota and setting a percentage for each country so that it does not exceed 25% of the number of Kuwaitis. Determining a period of time for each expatriate to reside in Kuwait can help a lot in getting rid of excess and unnecessary labor for the market.

Meanwhile, the Manpower Authority is reviewing the decision regarding the facilities granted to those who have reached the age of 60 (without university degrees), indicating that any decision issued is subject to evaluation after a period of time in order to know its repercussions on the labor market. The Manpower Authority issued a decision previously that allowed people over sixty (who do not have a college degree) to obtain a work permit by allowing them to move to the private sector.

UNHCR, Arab Fund ink MoU

KUWAIT: The UN Refugee Agency and Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development signed Thursday a memo of understanding (MoU) for helping refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) and host communities in Middle East and North Africa. The deal mainly aims at promoting cooperation between the agency and the fund by facilitating humanitarian response to aid vulnerable refugees, Representative of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) Nisreen Al-Rubaian said in a statement.

It is also meant to provide financing and technical backing for small and medium-sized private institutions that employ Arab refugees and IDPs in host countries and communities, she said. The MoU



would contribute to bolstering and cementing communication between both sides, exchanging information and expertise and organizing joint activities for supporting the issues of IDPs and highlighting their humanitarian needs, she added. — KUNA

Zain hosts drive-thru Girgian celebration

KUWAIT: Zain, Kuwait's leading digital service provider, hosted the first-of-its-kind drive-thru Girgian celebration at its main headquarters in Shuwaikh. The event came in collaboration with Wainkoum and witnessed a great turnout of children and families who were eager to celebrate with Zain. The event came under Zain's social campaign during Ramadan, through which the company aims at sharing the joys and blessings of the Holy Month with everyone, including children and young people who are the community's most vibrant segment.

The company is keen on sharing the joys of local traditions with the community, including Girgian, one of the most cherished occasions celebrated by

people across the GCC. Zain celebrated with children and their families in the most unique way, setting up a first-of-its-kind drive-thru experience to distribute candy to visitors in partnership with the creative minds at Wainkoum. The event welcomed crowds of visitors in their cars and witnessed a great turnout of children and families who were eager to celebrate with Zain.

Zain is always keen on organizing unique interactive social initiatives during Ramadan to share the blessings of the Holy Month with the various segments of the community, reflecting Islamic values and Kuwaiti principles to enrich the art of giving and strengthen bonding between community members. Zain's Corporate Sustainability and Social Responsibility campaign during the Holy Month of Ramadan includes an extensive array of programs that covers different areas, including humanitarian, voluntary, cultural, religious, sports, and recreational programs.



Arab League stresses Cyprus, Arab relations

CAIRO: Secretary-General of the Arab League Ahmad Aboul-Gheit on Thursday stressed the importance of the "rooted relations" between Cyprus and the Arab world, and cooperation and coordination for regional and international issues. This came during a visit of President of Cyprus Nikos Christodoulides to the Arab League in Cairo, a press statement stated. The statement

indicated that Cyprus is an important partner of the League in the European continent and the European Union, stressing that Cyprus plays a traditional role in support of peace, security and stability in the region.

During the meeting, both sides exchanged views on several regional and international issues, mainly the latest development in Al-Quds, Syria, Libya, the war in Ukraine, and the situation in the Middle East, the statement added. President Christodoulides expressed his appreciation to the important role played by the League in the regional scene, and the keenness of his country to strengthen its relations with the Arab World, referring to the importance of the Arab-European relations and the need to enhance them at all levels. — KUNA



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KU receives visiting profs

KUWAIT: The College of Higher Education at Kuwait University welcomed the visiting experts Prof Rashid Ansari from the University of Illinois and Prof Ashraf Ibrahim from the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA). Prof Rashid Ansari will rate the Electrical Engineering Master's Program while Prof Ashraf Ibrahim will rate the medical laboratory sciences, along with the attendance of interim assistant dean of higher education Dr Suoor Al-Otaibi and Electrical Engineering Master's Program Manager Dr Mohammed Al-Zuraibi.

During their visit, a number of important issues were discussed, most notably the extent to which the

program is compatible with the future goals and aspirations and how to offer the courses in a manner that commensurates with the research and projects. Also, in addition they talked about the need to evaluate the program on a periodic basis.

Transporting students

In other news, the university administration has agreed to provide golf cars to transport students within the Kuwait University campus. The Acting University Director, Dr Fahad Al-Dubais told students at the university: "The proposal to provide golf cars to facilitate the movement of students within the university campus has been approved. The university administration will soon take the necessary measures and arrangements towards implementing the proposal as well as setting up organizational systems and regulations."



KUWAIT: The College of Higher Education at Kuwait University welcomed the visiting experts Prof Rashid Ansari from the University of Illinois and Prof Ashraf Ibrahim from the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA).

NBK distributes dates and water to drivers before Iftar



KUWAIT: National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) distributed dates and water at different intersections and bus stops in Kuwait before iftar time. The campaign is a part of NBK's annual Ramadan Program "Do Good Deeds in Ramadan". The campaign aimed to raise awareness at reducing accidents, speeding and committing traffic violations during the holy month of Ramadan, especially during the run up to iftar at different areas including Adailiya area, Mishref, Khaldiya, Shamiya, Assidiq, Al Surra and Kaifan.

The initiative involved a large number of NBK volunteers who distributed small snacks for drivers to break their fasting around Iftar time, at strategic intersections and traffic lights, as well as bus stops. Talal Al Turki, NBK Public Relations Senior Manager, said: "NBK is proud to launch this initiative, which combines giving and sharing spirit in offering snacks to drivers to break their fasting and raising safety awareness to reduce traffic accidents, especially around Iftar time".

"NBK is committed to adopting value-added social initiatives, especially those related to the holy month of Ramadan," he added. For over 30 years, NBK has carried out "Do Good Deeds in Ramadan" program, which includes many events, contributions, social welfare activities and voluntary activities. This initiative is in line with NBK's keenness to reach out to various sectors in the society, maintaining its leading position in social responsibility.



Talal Al Turki

Hot weather predicted

KUWAIT: The Meteorological Department predicted that the weather will be hot during the day and moderate-to-cold at night with chances of scattered light rains and thunderstorms in the evening. The weather forecast controller at the Meteorological Department, Abdulaziz Al-Qarawi, told the Kuwait News Agency (KUNA) that the country is affected by a shallow air thermal that causes a rise in temperatures.

He stated that the weather will be inclined to heat with winds in fluctuating direction - turning to the southeast light to moderate speed - between 8 to 30 kilometers per hour. The forecast is between 33 and 35 degrees Celsius and the sea will have light to moderate waves between 1 and 3 feet. He added that the weather at night will be moderate-to-cold and partly cloudy. The south-east winds will turn to the north-west with light to moderate speed and active at intervals between 10 and 40 kilometers per hour.

On Saturday, the weather is expected to be hot and partly cloudy and wind from north-west, ranging between 06 and 25 kilometers per hour. The expected maximum temperatures are between 33 and 35 degrees Celsius and the sea will be light to moderate waves and a height of between 1 and 3 feet. Saturday night will be moderate to cold and the expected minimum temperature will be between 18 and 20 degrees Celsius. — KUNA



KUWAIT: Pigeons take cover under the shade of trees on the seafont of Kuwait City. The Meteorological Department predicts that the weather will be hot during the day and moderate-to-cold at night with chances of scattered light rains and thunderstorms in the evening. —Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat



Namaa Kuwait Charity foundation teams conduct nearly 100 eye operations, distributes 200 Ramadan baskets containing food items in Kenya. — KUNA photos

Namaa distributes food items, conducts operations in Kenya

KUWAIT: Namaa Kuwait Charity foundation has completed its aid and medical assistance for people in need in Kenya within its framework to continue its charitable efforts around the world. Director of communication and information technology at the foundation, Abdulaziz Al-Kanderi said that the campaign is aimed at containing the humanitarian crisis in Kenya, especially with the spread of diseases, poverty and malnutrition.

The work of the medical teams included con-

ducting the necessary medical examinations for patients, dispensing medicines, and providing them with appropriate health instructions. The teams also conducted nearly 100 eye operations, from vision correction to cataract removal." Aid campaigns included "Halal earning" which is a program of 16 different projects that aimed at sustaining income for families and the needy, by providing various sewing machines, food shops, and bicycles that facilitate their transportation.

The aid includes distributing 200 Ramadan baskets containing food items, as well as distributing gifts and toys to children. The foundation seeks to reduce the spread of poverty, unemployment and diseases in societies. Al-Kanderi expressed his thanks to the Embassy of Kuwait in Kenya for its support and facilitation of relief campaigns. — KUNA



KSSCP and CAN host diplomatic women's committee

KUWAIT: Kuwait Society for Preventing Smoking and Cancer (KSSCP), along with Cancer Aware Nation (CAN) invited the members of the diplomatic women's committee to participate in its Ramadan event as part of its activities during the holy month of Ramadan. Members of the committee, the honorary chairwoman, Sheikha Hala Bader Al-Muhammad Al-Sabah, Khaled Al-Saleh and Dr Hessa AL-Shahin graced the occasion.

Dr Al-Saleh reviewed an overview of the association's history and the great role it plays in its awareness programs in all governorates. The committee members visited the mobile clinic, and some of the members took out some tests. Sheikha Hala praised the role played by the association in raising awareness and combating the disease - through early detection. At the end of the visit, a Ramadan Ghabga was prepared that featured Kuwaiti Ramadan dishes. The committee members thanked Dr Hessa for her kind efforts.



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Macron says 'counting' on Xi to 'bring Russia to its senses'

UN demands Taliban revoke ban on women employees

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US race enters uncharted territory

Trump faces trial, Biden not sure if he is running



SMYRNA, US: Supporters of former US president Donald Trump are seen outside a stop on Florida Governor Ron DeSantis' nationwide book tour at Adventure Outdoors, the largest gun store in the country, in Smyrna, Georgia. — AFP

WASHINGTON: US voters Thursday surveyed a uniquely volatile 2024 presidential election landscape, where the leading Republican candidate, Donald Trump, now faces trial and the incumbent, Joe Biden, has not even confirmed he's running. Trump pleaded not guilty on Tuesday to 34 felony charges linked to alleged attempts to silence damaging personal information during his triumphant 2016 race for the White House.

The man who went from 1980s playboy real estate magnate, to TV reality show star in the 2000s, then right-wing populist president, made history as the first serving or former commander in chief to face a criminal trial. But while he had to go through the humiliating process of arrest in a New York courtroom, polls show Trump remains by far the strongest Republican candidate.

In fact, his numbers have only improved as his legal scandals grow, making it hard for his closest rival, Florida Governor Ron DeSantis to gain traction. Far from cowed, Trump is doubling down on extreme rhetoric, painting himself in a speech after his release

Tuesday as the victim of a "Trump-hating judge" and "massive election interference."

On Wednesday, he called on his Truth Social app for Republicans in Congress to "defund the DOJ and FBI" in response to what he claimed is the "ABUSE OF POWER" by the Department of Justice and chief federal law enforcement body. Trump attorney Todd Blanche said his client is "upset." But "I'll tell you what: he's motivated and it's not going to stop him and it's not going to slow him down."

For all the bravado, 76-year-old Trump is in serious trouble. During his decades in the public eye, he has shown astonishing ability to escape legal peril, whether during his many business disputes or even as president when Republicans acquitted him in an unprecedented two impeachment trials.

But Trump is now in the hands of the New York state court system, where Manhattan District Attorney Alvin Bragg is mounting an aggressive prosecution. He also risks the wrath of Judge Juan Merchan, who is overseeing his case in New York and cautioned against "comments that have potential to

incite violence." Even if some analysts have questioned the strength of the New York case, Trump's real problems may lie elsewhere. Reports indicate that a high-level probe into his hoarding of top secret White House documents at his private Florida Mar-a-Lago residence is gathering pace. Another criminal probe is underway in Georgia over his efforts to overturn the 2020 election, which he lost to Biden but refused to concede. Next year, the legal calendars will likely collide with the political calendar, sparking new levels of unpredictability.

The Manhattan court is set to reconvene December 4, with a trial expected sometime early in 2024. Trump, meanwhile, would in theory be campaigning hard for Republican presidential nomination — with the first contests scheduled February 5 and 13 in Iowa and New Hampshire.

'Not a focus'

At the White House, Biden appears content to sit back and watch the fall of a man he has branded a "toxic presence." Asked Wednesday about the pres-

ident's view of the spectacle, Press Secretary Karine Jean-Pierre reemphasized that Biden is "not focused on this indictment."

"Our focus is on what the president was elected to do, which is make sure we deliver... to talk about the issues that matter," she added. Biden and his party got another piece of good news overnight Tuesday with victory for the Democratic candidate in an especially fierce battle for a vacant Wisconsin Supreme Court seat. This creates a liberal majority on the court, which will play a key role refereeing electoral disputes in 2024 in one of the tightest swing states in the country.

But Biden is also injecting uncertainty into 2024. His age is a constant source of concern, even to allies. Now 80, he would be 86 by the time he left office after a second term.

And he has yet to confirm he is running, despite strongly hinting on several occasions that he will. After repeated delays to the expected announcement, Axios has reported that it may now only land in July or even later. — AFP

UK pauses expulsion of Nepalese guards rescued from Kabul

LONDON: The UK on Thursday said it had paused the expulsion of a group of Nepalese military veterans who worked at the British embassy in Kabul before being rescued when the Taliban rulers took over Afghanistan. Thirteen of the former Gurkha soldiers worked as guards at the high-security compound housing the UK and Canadian embassies in Kabul, and have been living in the UK since the 2021 regime change.

Ten of them were last week detained in handcuffs following a raid on their west London hotel, where they had been living and working as cooks for Afghan refugees staying there. Immigration officials served them with papers ordering their removal to Nepal and India, but the government said Thursday that the operation had now been halted. "Removal of this cohort has been paused, pending further review," the interior ministry told AFP in a statement.

The Gurkhas have earned a reputation for fierce fighting, loyalty and bravery since they first served as part of the Indian army in British-ruled India in 1815. Around 200,000 have fought alongside British troops in both world wars, as well as the conflicts in the Falklands, Iraq and Afghanistan.

There around 2,700 currently enlisted in Britain's armed forces. A lawyer for some of the group, Jamie Bell, told AFP he was "delighted" by the decision, but added "the men have been offered no assurances that they will be given leave to remain."

"All 10 of them remain in detention. The Home Office should have to answer for the way they have treated these men," he said. The UK has taken in 25,000 people from Afghanistan under two resettlement schemes set up in the wake of the Taliban takeover. One focuses on women, children and religious minorities -- the scheme under which the Nepalese men's asylum claims were being processed -- and the other on Afghans who worked for the British military and government. — AFP

Jihadists planned a follow-up attack in France: Defendant

BRUSSELS: Jihadists planned a follow-up attack in France during the UEFA Euro 2016 championships, months after killing 130 people in November 2015 attacks in Paris, a defendant in a Brussels trial said Thursday. But that fell apart when a member of the cell, Salah Abdeslam, was arrested in Brussels just three months before the football tournament was to begin, said Mohamed Abrini.

Abrini, 38, spoke during cross-examination in the Belgian trial of nine alleged jihadists accused of taking part in March 2016 bombings in Brussels, at the city's airport and in a metro station, that killed 32 people and wounded many more. Abdeslam, a 33-year-old Frenchman also in court, is the main suspect in the trial. He and Abrini, friends since childhood, last year were convicted and sentenced for participating in the November 2015 Paris attacks. Abrini's courtroom testimony repeated what he told investigators after his arrest in 2016 in Brussels, a month after the attacks in

Antakya's quake victims doubt Erdogan's pledge

ANTAKYA: Retired construction worker Ali Cimen looked at the pile of rubble raising dust over his former neighborhood and scoffed at the idea that Turkey's earthquake disaster zone could be rebuilt in a year. Half a dozen growling excavators were levelling what was left of the 60-year-old apartment complex in the ancient Syria-border city of Antakya.

Hundreds more swung their giant arms and raised a cacophony of noise across this mountain-ringed melting pot of ancient civilization. Antakya was known as Antioch until it became part of Turkey and inherited the mantle of one of the region's most free-spirited cities.

Its skeletal remains — precariously standing since a 7.8-magnitude quake unleashed its devastation ex-

actly two months ago — were now being turned to rubble and dust. What comes in their place — and when — is a matter of intense social and political debate. "I don't think the reconstruction can be accomplished in a year," Cimen said, while watching his home being torn down.

"Maybe somewhere else. But here, under these conditions, removing the rubble alone will take at least a year."

Antakya bore the brunt of a calamity that claimed more than 50,000 lives and tested the leadership of President Recep Tayyip Erdogan ahead of May 14 elections. Erdogan has made a bold campaign pledge to rebuild the entire disaster zone — originally home to more than 13 million people — by the start of next year. Few of those who remain in the hollowed shell of this city believe him. The stench of decomposing bodies wafts in with the wind from piles of unsuspected rubble and random street corners.

Lines of hanging laundry betray signs of life persevering in all the emptiness and ruin.

Patches of the old city centre — once a vibrant maze of romantic cafes and boutique shops — re-



BRUSSELS, Belgium: Defendant Bilal El Makhoukhi (center) arrives to attend the trial of the 2016 Brussels terror attacks, at the Justitia building in Brussels on April 5, 2023. — AFP

than that," Abrini responded. On Wednesday, Abrini had downplayed his participation in the Brussels plot, asserting that "just like in Paris, they'll convict us for what others did."

Abdeslam, briefly questioned Thursday, said that after fleeing the manhunt launched in the wake of the Paris attacks he went to Brussels but "not to participate in anything". — AFP



KAHRAMANMARAS, Turkey: Yasemin Tabak, a victim of earthquake poses in the quake-hit city of Kahramanmaraş on April 4, 2023, two months after the 7.8 magnitude devastating earthquake of February 6. — AFP

main impassable because of meters-high mounds of debris. Erdogan told the nation on Wednesday that half the rubble had already been cleared from Antakya's Hatay province. Retiree Gokhan Karaoglan treated Erdogan's pledges with a healthy dose of scorn. "It's been two months and they still haven't cleared the rubble," the 54-year-old said. — AFP

International

Macron says 'counting' on Xi to 'bring Russia to its senses'

Kremlin sees no prospect of Chinese mediation on Ukraine

BEIJING: French President Emmanuel Macron said on Thursday he was counting on his Chinese counterpart Xi Jinping to "bring Russia to its senses" over its war in Ukraine. The French president, who arrived on Wednesday for a three-day state visit, has made clear he is seeking to dissuade China from supporting Russia's invasion of its neighbor. "I know I can count on you to bring Russia to its senses and everyone to the negotiating table," the French head of state told Xi during a bilateral meeting in Beijing. And in a joint statement following those talks, the two leaders reaffirmed their call for peace talks between Kyiv and Moscow "as soon as possible". The two sides also reaffirmed their opposition to the use of nuclear weapons during the conflict.

To coincide with their meeting, Chinese state broadcaster CCTV released a report in which Xi hailed China's "positive and steady" ties with France as the world undergoes "profound historical changes".

'Major role'

Macron has said during his trip that Beijing can play a "major role" in finding a path to peace in the conflict and welcomed China's "willingness to commit to a resolution". His visit to China—his first since 2019 -- comes as Western pressure mounts on Beijing to help push for peace in Ukraine. Though Beijing is officially neutral, Xi has never condemned the Russian invasion. While he recently went to Moscow to reaffirm his alliance with Vladimir Putin—framed as an anti-Western front—Xi has not spoken on the phone with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky.

Macron, who is accompanied on his visit by European Commission chief Ursula von der Leyen, said he wants to "be a voice that unites Europe" over Ukraine, and that coming to China with her serves to "underline the consistency of this approach". In a Thursday morning meeting with Chinese Premier

Li Qiang at the Great Hall of the People, Macron stressed the importance of dialogue between China and France "in these troubled times".

"The ability to share a common analysis and build a common path is essential," he said.

And in a separate meeting with Li, von der Leyen told the premier that relations between the EU and China had grown "complex in recent years". "It is important that we discuss all aspects of this relationship together today," she said, especially in the current "volatile geopolitical environment".

Following Macron's talks with Xi, the pair will give statements to the press, followed by a meeting with von der Leyen and then a state dinner. Macron will travel to Guangzhou in southern China to meet students on Friday, taking with him a broad delegation of top politicians, business leaders and even celebrities, including composer Jean-Michel Jarre.

Taiwan tensions

The visit comes in the face of mounting Chinese pressure on Taiwan, with the island's President Tsai Ing-wen meeting with US House Speaker Kevin McCarthy in California on Wednesday. Tsai hailed the talks, saying they showed the self-ruled island was "not isolated" on the international stage.

Beijing balks at any official contact between Taipei and the rest of the world, insisting there is only "one China". Macron told journalists Wednesday he did not think his Chinese counterparts had "a desire to overreact" to the Tsai-McCarthy meeting.

Beyond talks on Ukraine, Macron's trip has an important economic component, with the French leader keen to firm up a crucial trade partnership. Macron is accompanied by more than 50 French business leaders on his visit, including top bosses of Airbus, EDF and Veolia.

Meanwhile, the Kremlin on Thursday said it saw

Ghana, Tanzania, and Zambia, Harris found herself treated to unusually positive headlines, not least in an Associated Press article, reproduced in news outlets across the United States, describing her as a "historic figure." She hopes to carry that momentum domestically Thursday, visiting a Qcells solar panel factory in Georgia as part of an administration-wide effort to tout economic achievements in the run-up to an expected Biden-Harris 2024 reelection campaign announcement. If Harris, 58, is having a strong moment, that hasn't always been the case since the day she arrived to great fanfare at the White House in 2021 -- the first woman and first Black person ever in the role. The vice presidency has long been a notoriously tricky task. John Garner said after serving in the 1930s as Franklin



BEIJING: China's President Xi Jinping (center), his French counterpart Emmanuel Macron (left) and European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen meet in Beijing on April 6, 2023. — AFP

no "prospect" for China to mediate the Ukraine conflict and said it had "no other way" than to press on with its offensive. The comments came as French President Emmanuel Macron was in Beijing to try to dissuade China from supporting Moscow's campaign. "Undoubtedly, China has a very effective and commanding potential for mediation," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said.

"But the situation with Ukraine is complex, so far there are no prospects for a political settlement" he

D. Roosevelt's veep.

Harris, however, has often come under especially harsh criticism, whether over her management style or lackluster policy achievements. And it's a negative vibe that the White House would love to see cleared up in time for the 2024 campaign, when Harris will face an even more intense spotlight as deputy to the oldest president in history—with Biden reaching 86 by the end of a second term.

The administration sprang to Harris's defense in March, after a lengthy Reuters article quoted unnamed sources saying Biden and some Democrats have been frustrated or disappointed with her performance. Biden, marking Women's History Month, fired off a tweet a few days after the Reuters arti-

cle to share effusive praise for his veep, saying he wanted to "call attention to one remarkable woman in particular: Kamala. She's shattered barrier after barrier."

The White House communications director, Ben LaBolt, also jumped on the story, dismissing the Reuters report as "silly season material." "@VP has shaped and helped pass historic legislation that is improving lives and lowering costs for working families," LaBolt tweeted. Harris may see better press as she pursues a steady schedule of reelection campaign travel. And her foreign trips—including high-profile stops in Asia—have also bolstered her credentials should she ever have to take over in an emergency. — AFP

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US reelection campaign: Harris gets a reboot

WASHINGTON: An emotional trip as the first Black US vice president to Africa, followed by a frontline role pushing President Joe Biden's economic message at home is giving Kamala Harris a chance to steady her political ship ahead of a reelection campaign set to bring fierce scrutiny.

Returning home last weekend from a tour of

Saudi and Iran vow to bring ...

Continued from Page 1

Iran and Saudi Arabia support rival sides in several conflict zones across the region, including in Yemen, where the Houthis rebels are backed by Tehran and Riyadh leads a military coalition supporting the government. The two sides also vie for influence in Syria, Lebanon and Iraq. Riyadh's traditional ally Washington welcomed the detente agreement, but said it remains to be seen whether the Iranians will "honor their side of the deal".

China's success in bringing Iran and Saudi Arabia together has challenged the United States' long standing role as the main outside power broker in the Middle East. An expert told AFP that Beijing's role would likely increase confidence that any deal would stick. "Because China is a strong backer of Iran, Saudi should have more confidence in Iran's ability to comply with the agreement, an issue that has always been in doubt," said Joel Rubin, former US Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Legislative Affairs.

Thursday's meeting "suggests that the process

hasn't gone off track since the Beijing announcement last month", said Ali Vaez, Director of the International Crisis Group's Iran Project. "But it's still early days to judge whether this is just a tactical detente or a way-station towards strategic rapprochement."

Officials from Iran and Saudi Arabia held several rounds of dialogue in Baghdad and Oman before they met in Beijing. In 2016 a number of Gulf countries followed Riyadh's action in scaling back ties with Tehran, but they have led the way in restoring diplomatic relations.

Iran welcomed an Emirati ambassador last September, after a six-year absence, and on Wednesday named its own ambassador to the UAE, following a nearly eight-year hiatus. Last year Iran said Kuwait had sent its first ambassador to Tehran since 2016. Iran has also welcomed a potential rapprochement with Bahrain, a close Saudi ally, which in the past accused Iran of backing a Shiite-led uprising in the Sunni-ruled kingdom, an accusation Tehran denies.

Meanwhile, Iran has named an ambassador to the United Arab Emirates nearly eight years after his predecessor left, as a thaw in relations with the Gulf Arab states picks up pace. "After some eight years, the foreign ministry has named Reza Ameri as the Islamic Republic of Iran's new ambassador to the United Arab Emirates," Iran's official IRNA news agency reported late Tuesday. — AFP

widely circulated on social media showed police clubbing people on the floor inside the mosque. The Palestinian Red Crescent said it had treated 37 people, including some after their release from custody.

Zionist far-right National Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir voiced "complete backing" for police and their "swift and determined" actions. Palestinian militant group Hamas, which rules Gaza, called on West Bank Palestinians "to go en masse to the Al-Aqsa mosque to defend it". The mosque in annexed east Jerusalem is built on top of what Jews call the Temple Mount, Judaism's holiest site. It has been a frequent flashpoint, and clashes there in May 2021 sparked the latest Gaza war that raged for 11 days.

On Gaza's streets, protesters burned tyres and swore "to defend and protect the Al-Aqsa mosque". Within hours of the first clashes at Al-Aqsa mosque, at least nine rockets were fired from Gaza towards Zionist entity, the army said, adding that "in response" warplanes struck two suspected Hamas weapons-manufacturing sites.

The air strikes were followed by new rocket fire from Gaza, AFP journalists reported. Later Wednesday witnesses reported two more rockets fired from northern Gaza. Zionists said "one launch failed" and fell in Gaza while the other landed "in the area of the security fence" boundary. Islamic Jihad, another Gaza-based militant group, called the rockets "a first warning message". Palestinian civil affairs minister Hussein Al-Sheikh condemned the police action inside Al-Aqsa, saying "the level of brutality requires urgent Palestinian, Arab and international action". Germany urged both sides "to do everything possible to calm the situation". — AFP

Journey of Ramadan: From motivations to...

Continued from Page 1

bond with God and supports spiritual growth. They spoke of growing God-consciousness, strong focus on kindness, reading the complete Quran during Ramadan, helping others, and sharing food with neighbors and family. Many celebrated obedience to Allah, community, and the challenge of facing their desires during this sacred month.

I then explored the physical and emotional effects of fasting during Ramadan. Many described initial challenges such as thirst and tiredness, followed by adaptation and even feelings of strength as the holy month progressed. Mentally, several expressed clarity and increased awareness through avoiding negative behavior and sinful acts. Emotionally, many described Ramadan and fasting as giving a sense of spiritual fulfillment that fostered tranquility, euphoria, and happiness.

They spoke of a heightened spiritual connection and closeness to God, feeling a recharge of their spiritual batteries. Despite occasional weakness or sluggishness, the consensus emphasized fasting's positive impact, focusing on uplifting emotions and profound spiritual growth that accompanies this sacred practice. Indeed, fasting during Ramadan stands out as a life-affirming spiritual detox that cultivates patience, self-restraint, and an unwavering connection to God and the Islamic tradition.

For a great number of people, the true highlight of fasting is the moment when they can break bread and share a meal with their loved ones. Family gatherings and community events come alive during this time, as

China deploys warships near...

Continued from Page 1

exercises around Taiwan following a visit in August last year by McCarthy's predecessor, Nancy Pelosi, to the island. China then deployed warships, missiles and fighter jets into the waters and skies around Taiwan.

Its response to the McCarthy meeting has so far been on a much lower level, but still left Taiwan on high alert. Taiwan's defense minister described the timing of the deployment of the Shandong, one of just two Chinese aircraft carriers, as "sensitive". "When an aircraft carrier comes out, there are usually take-offs and landings for aircraft but we have not found any takeoff or landing. We will keep watching," Chiu Kuo-cheng told reporters.

When asked if Shandong's deployment was a prelude to Chinese military exercises, Chiu said: "We are not ruling this out". Chinese President Xi Jinping is currently hosting French counterpart Emmanuel Macron and European Commission chief Ursula von der Leyen as the EU attempts to repair relations with Beijing.

Tsai's visit to California was technically a stop-over after a trip to Latin America to see two of Taiwan's

diminishing band of official diplomatic allies. China had repeatedly issued warnings ahead of the Tsai-McCarthy meeting and issued another strong rebuke Thursday afternoon. "China will take firm and forceful measures to firmly safeguard national sovereignty and territorial integrity," foreign ministry spokeswoman Mao Ning said at a regular briefing.

Many also spoke of their challenges during Ramadan, such as balancing daily life with Ramadan activities, controlling eating habits, resisting social eating invitations, or waiting for the sunset prayer can be difficult. Fatigue and health issues may also create hurdles, leading some to seek alternative spiritual practices such as an even deeper commitment to charity and serving the community. Despite the obstacles, the commitment to fasting demonstrates its deep sense of purpose and spiritual fulfillment for Muslims.

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McCarthy, who is second in line to the US presidency, had originally planned to go to Taiwan himself but opted instead to meet Tsai in California. The decision was viewed as a compromise that would underscore support for Taiwan but avoid inflaming tensions with China. McCarthy said after meeting Tsai that a shared belief in freedom and democracy underpinned a relationship that was "a matter of profound importance to the free world".

McCarthy vowed US arms sales to Taiwan - which infuriate Chinese leadership - would continue, in what he said was a proven strategy to dissuade aggression. "And what we know through history, the best way to do that is supply the weapons that allow people to deter war," he said. "It is a critical lesson that we learned through Ukraine, that the idea of just sanctions in the future is not going to stop somebody" who wants to wage war. An eight-member US congressional delegation also arrived in Taiwan on Thursday to hold talks on trade and security - such visits have increased in recent years. — AFP

Concern, criticism after Zionists storm...

Continued from Page 1

White House National Security Council spokesman John Kirby said the United States said he was "extremely concerned by the continuing violence and we urge all sides to avoid further escalation". Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, whose country and Zionist entity have been rebuilding ties, said: "Trampling on the Al-Aqsa mosque is our red line."

Later on, Zionist police said "dozens of law-breaking juveniles, some of them masked, threw fireworks and stones" into the mosque and tried again to barricade themselves in as worshippers gathered for evening prayers. Officers thwarted and dispersed the "violent rioters" and allowed worshippers to leave, police said. An AFP journalist saw security forces blocking access routes to the mosque.

A spokesman for Palestinian president Mahmoud Abbas said Zionists were "creating an atmosphere of escalation, instability and tension", saying police stormed the mosque and attacked worshippers. Violence in the Zionist-Palestinian conflict has intensified since the new government of veteran Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu took power in December, a coalition with extreme right and ultra-Orthodox Jewish parties.

Palestinian witness Abdel Karim Ikraiem, 74, said Zionist police armed with batons, tear gas grenades and smoke bombs burst into the mosque "by force" and "beat the women and men" worshipping there. One video

International

UN demands Taliban revoke ban on women employees

Present curbs reminiscent of Taliban's first regime between 1996 and 2001

KABUL: Top UN officials warned Wednesday that a Taliban government ban on Afghan women working for its mission in the country would violate the world body's charter, and demanded it be revoked. The United Nations also announced it had instructed all its Afghan staff, men and women, not to report to the office after the ban was confirmed.

Under their austere interpretation of Islam, Taliban authorities have imposed a slew of restrictions on Afghan women since seizing power in 2021, including banning them from higher education and many government jobs. The increasing curbs are reminiscent of the Taliban's first government between 1996 and 2001, when the UN said they were responsible for repeated human rights violations—particularly against girls and women. UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres demanded the ban be “immediately revoked”.

“This is a violation of the inalienable fundamental human rights of women,” spokesman Stephane Dujarric said in a statement on behalf of Guterres on Wednesday. The UN said on Tuesday the Taliban government had extended a ban on women working for non-governmental organizations to the world body's workforce of some 400 Afghan women.

UN humanitarian coordinator in Afghanistan Ramiz Alakbarov said “the charter of the United Nations is going to be violated” because of the ban. “It is absolutely clear that no authority can give in-

structions to the United Nations... on who should be employed,” he told AFP. “We are not going to make an exception.” While it is unclear what the effect of a charter violation would be in the long term, the UN ordered all Afghan staff “not to report to the office until further notice”. The UN Security Council planned to discuss the issue at a closed-door meeting Thursday morning.

‘Assault against women’

UN mission head in Afghanistan Roza Otunbayeva said in a separate statement that, “in the history of the United Nations, no other regime has ever tried to ban women from working for the organization just because they are women”. “This decision represents an assault against women, the fundamental principles of the UN, and on international law.”

UN Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohammed said the organization's Afghan women staff would continue to be paid. US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said he was “disturbed” by the “reprehensible” order. “This will threaten vulnerable Afghans who depend on humanitarian assistance. We urge the Taliban to put Afghans first and reverse this decision,” he tweeted on Thursday.

The world body's 400 women Afghan employees are the bulk of its 600 women staff working in Afghanistan. In total, there are about 3,300 Afghans in

the 3,900-strong UN workforce there.

The UN airlifted \$1.8 billion into Afghanistan between December 2021 and January 2023, funding an aid lifeline for the nation's 38 million citizens and shoring up the domestic economy.

Severe restrictions

The Taliban authorities ordered all NGOs in December to stop employing Afghan women after receiving “serious complaints” that women employees were not observing a proper Islamic dress code.

“These justifications have no basis considering what we know about Islam,” said Alakbarov. Several conservative countries in the region still allow women to study and work, he added. Many NGOs suspended all operations in the country in protest after the ban was announced, piling further misery on Afghanistan's citizens, half of whom face hunger, according to aid agencies.

It was agreed after days of discussion that women working in the health aid sector would be exempt from the decree, although the UN enjoyed a general exemption. Aid workers say women employees are crucial in delivering help to women in a deeply conservative and patriarchal country such as Afghanistan. The restriction will also hamper donation-raising efforts by the UN at a time when Afghanistan is enduring one of the worst humanitarian crises in the world, Alakbarov said.



KABUL: UN humanitarian coordinator in Afghanistan Ramiz Alakbarov gestures as he speaks during an interview with AFP at the UN Compound in Kabul on April 5, 2023. — AFP

In other restrictions placed on Afghan women since 2021, authorities have barred teenage girls from secondary school, while women have been pushed out of many government jobs, prevented from travelling without a male relative and ordered to cover up outside the home, ideally with a burqa. Women have also been banned from universities and are not allowed to enter parks or gardens. — AFP

News in brief

Japanese copter disappears

TOKYO: A Japanese military helicopter with 10 people on board disappeared from radar on Thursday near an island in the southern prefecture of Okinawa, according to an army spokesperson and media reports. The aircraft went missing around 4.30 pm (0730 GMT), with the Ground Self-Defense Forces scrambling to assess the situation and gather information, the official said without elaborating. The helicopter belonged to the army's branch in the southern Kumamoto region, public broadcaster NHK said. After taking off from Okinawa's Miyako island before 4 pm, it was scheduled to have returned after an hour-long flight, according to NHK. “Saving lives is our utmost priority,” Prime Minister Fumio Kishida said while briefly addressing reporters. — AFP

Montenegro's Djukanovic to quit

PODGORICA, Montenegro: Montenegro's veteran political leader Milo Djukanovic was set to resign as the leader of his party on Thursday, a party official said, just days after suffering a landslide loss in a presidential runoff. Djukanovic has been a political mainstay in Montenegro for decades, rotating through various positions—including multiple stints as both president and prime minister, and led his Democratic Party of Socialists (DPS) party since 1997. According to a senior DPS official who asked not to be named, Djukanovic has “decided to step aside from the position of party president” following the double-digit loss to the upstart economist Jakov Milatovic over the weekend. — AFP

3 Russian policemen killed

MOSCOW: Three policemen were killed in a shootout in Russia's North Caucasus republic of Ingushetia, the Russian interior ministry said Thursday. Ingushetia is a majority-Muslim republic in Russia's North Caucasus bordering Chechnya. While such clashes with authorities used to be relatively common in the early 2000s, they have become rare in recent years. “On April 5-6 overnight three employees of Russia's interior ministry were killed while performing their service and combat duties in the Malgobeksky district” of Ingushetia, the ministry said. It expressed “deep condolences” to the families of Bashir Khautev born in 1992, Maxim Alekhin born in 1984 and Maxim Rodyonov born in 1998. — AFP

Solomons disqualifies leader

SYDNEY, Australia: The pro-China Solomon Islands government has reportedly “disqualified” a former provincial leader because of his defiant refusal to recognize Beijing over Taipei. The sanction against Daniel Suidani—a local assembly member and ex-premier of the largest island Malaita—comes at a time of growing Chinese influence in the Solomons and the wider Pacific, viewed with concern by the United States and its allies in the region. Suidani—already ousted as provincial premier in a no-confidence vote in February—has consistently refused to toe the line set by Prime Minister Manasseh Sogavare, who switched the island nation's diplomatic recognition from Taiwan to China in 2019. — AFP

Australian mayor to sue over alleged ChatGPT defamation

SYDNEY: An Australian mayor may become the first person to sue the creators of ChatGPT over claims the AI-powered chatbot falsely labeled him a criminal. Brian Hood sent a legal notice to parent company OpenAI last month after its web app wrongly implicated him in a bribery and corruption scandal—a

Vietnam airport construction dust blankets homes, school

DONG NAI, Vietnam: A thick layer of dust from the construction of a huge airport in Vietnam has been blanketing nearby neighborhoods for months, staining everything from trees to homes to schoolchildren's uniforms a sickly shade of red. Located 40 kilometers from southern business hub Ho Chi Minh City, the four-runway Long Thanh airport—which will be the country's largest—is forecast to transport 100 million passengers and five million tons of cargo annually once finished.

But after heavy construction work began earlier this year, residents as far as 10 kilometers from the site have been living under billowing clouds of dust, prompting fears for their health and anger over the disruption caused to their lives. “It has been unbearable. The red dust is just everywhere in our community,” said Tran Minh Hoang, who lives in Dong Nai province's Binh Son district.

Hoang, 59, begins each day hosing down his front yard to get rid of the muck, but the dust was so severe that he resorted to wrapping a fine nylon net around the entire front section of the house. “It has helped a little,” he told AFP. His wife, Nguyen Thi Tuyet Hanh, said they had kept their one-year-old grandson almost entirely indoors for months. “We cannot force him to wear a face mask. So it's better to limit his time outdoors,” Hanh said.

A thick coating of dust could be seen in the yard of local schools, while pictures on state media showed textbooks, classrooms and children's uniforms had turned red after a school day. Nguyen Van Chanh, 70, said the chairs, bowls and dishes in his kitchen were covered, as was his laundry.

Inside the enormous construction site, scores of trucks could be seen motoring to and fro, stir-



DONG NAI, Vietnam: This photograph taken on April 5, 2023 shows dust being thrown up by trucks carrying soil at the construction site of Long Thanh airport in Dong Nai province. — AFP

ring up the red earth. Inspections by the local environment department showed dust pollution at the site reached highs of up to 18 times the permitted levels, state media reported. Local authorities have “reported the issue and demanded the environment ministry conduct an inspection over the compliance of environmental regulations at the site”, state media said.

According to the initial plan, the first phase of the project—aiming to serve 25 million passengers a year—was due to be finished by around 2025. But Airports Corporation of Vietnam (ACV) recently told the government the deadline would be pushed to 2026. The completion of the airport, which will

span 5,000 hectares and cost an estimated \$16 billion, will likely be many years after that.

After complaints from residents and local authorities, investors and contractors deployed several trucks to dampen the ground in a bid to reduce the amount of dust in the air. “The measure has not been effective as the site area is too big,” project head Do Tat Binh admitted to state media. For Hanh, the building of the airport had been something she'd looked forward to, hoping it would make the neighborhood better connected.

“We were so happy at first when we knew there would be a huge airport in this area. But now we have become sick of it.” — AFP

Drought pushes Kenya refugee mega-camp to ‘breaking point’

DADAAB, Kenya: Ugash Adan Abdulahi shook a jerry can. Inside rattled a few grains of sorghum—the only food to last his family another 10 days in Kenya's overwhelmed Dadaab refugee camp.

Every day hundreds of desperate people arrive at Dadaab seeking food and shelter, most from across the border in Somalia, where violent instability and a record-bad drought has made life impossible for many. Abdulahi, his two wives, and nine children walked some 500 kilometers (310 miles) from their dust-bowl village in southern Somalia to Dadaab, one of Africa's largest refugee camps, just over the border on Kenya's far-eastern frontier.

One of his wives, Shamsa Abdekrashid Muhamud, was pregnant during the arduous two-week journey. She gave birth on arrival, her newborn yet another addition to the 350,000 people who call Dadaab home. “We left four months ago because of the drought,” she said, sheltering from the ferocious sun in a hut of sticks and tarpaulin with her children. Inside, there are few possessions. The mattress is gone, long sold for food. “When we arrived, we didn't receive a food aid card for about three months. We had no water, shelter or food. Refugees

helped us by giving us food,” she said, before adding: “We need help.” Abdulahi said they had little choice but to beg from those better off than them. “We don't know what to do,” he said.

Between 400 and 500 people arrive at Dadaab every day, according to the UN refugee agency UNHCR, mostly driven from Somalia after five consecutive seasons of failed rains. The World Health Organization says this drought, already the worst in 40 years, could result in the deaths of 135 people in Somalia every day between January and June this year. Some in Dadaab have also fled Al-Shabaab, the Al-Qaeda affiliate that controls swathes of rural Somalia and has fought a bloody insurgency to overthrow the government for more than 15 years.

The camp opened in 1991 following the collapse of dictator Siad Barre's military regime and Somalia's slide into anarchy. For a long time Dadaab—which Kenyan authorities have repeatedly threatened to close over the years—was the largest refugee camp in the world.

It has since lost that title but Dadaab remains imposing, boasting a population that rivals all but Kenya's biggest cities. All three of the settlements making up the vast tent city—Dagahaley, Ifo and



DADAAB, Kenya: Somali refugee Faiza Abdulahi Hassan (center), 32, who will be resettled in the US after spending 5 years in the camp poses with her five girls in the Dadaab refugee camp, one of Africa's largest refugee camps in Kenya. — AFP

Hagadera—are well beyond capacity.

Abdulahi and his family, like all new arrivals, end up on the very outskirts of the camp in “extremely precarious” conditions, said Charlotte Rostorf Ridung, chief of operations for the UNHCR in Dadaab. Resources are overstretched by the sheer number of arrivals, and newcomers must make do.

At a water pump on the edge of Dadaab, Fatouma Ahmat Ali had queued up since the previous day to fill her container. “I left because there were a lot of explosions in Mogadishu, and war between the government and Al-

Shabaab,” said the 65-year-old in a polka dot headscarf as she waited her turn. “At least we don't have a war here, but we don't have anything to eat.”

In this arid and inhospitable climate, water distribution is overseen by Doctors Without Borders (MSF), a French charity which also runs a health centre for recently-arrived refugees. “We have between 80 and 100 consultations a day. We don't have enough medicine, but we are doing our best to cope with the influx,” said Abdissalam Omar Nuur, a clinical officer who arrived in Dadaab three months ago. — AFP

crime he actually blew the whistle on.

ChatGPT has thrust artificial intelligence tools into the headlines, with intrepid users exploiting its impressive power to streamline everything from answering mundane emails to cheating on school exams. But the mayor of Hepburn Shire—an area about two hours' drive northwest of Melbourne—said Thursday that ChatGPT's flaws had shocked him.

“I was horrified: I was stunned at first that it was so incorrect,” Hood told Australia's national broadcaster. He said he had been alerted to the “disturbing” results from the app by friends and colleagues.

“It's one thing to get something a little bit wrong;

it's entirely something else to be accusing someone of being a criminal and having served jail time when the truth was the exact opposite,” he said.

Before taking office, Hood had helped expose bribery and other crimes at his former employer, Note Printing Australia, leading to criminal charges against several people. But when ChatGPT was asked about the bribery scandal and Hood's role, it returned results that falsely claimed he had been jailed for corruption, his lawyers said in a statement. When AFP put a comparable question to the free version of the AI tool on Thursday, it was still giving a similar false answer about the mayor's role.

Hood said he had yet to receive a response from OpenAI after his lawyers issued a legal notice on March 21 demanding a fix to avoid court action. OpenAI has not yet responded to a request for comment, but its chatbot does carry a disclaimer warning that it “may produce inaccurate information about people, places, or facts”. James Naughton from Gordon Legal, who is representing Hood, said the information supplied by ChatGPT was defamatory and had damaged the mayor's reputation.

“This critical error is an eye-opening example of the reputational harm that can be caused by AI systems such as ChatGPT,” Naughton said. — AFP

Business

FRIDAY, APRIL 7, 2023

NIC receives Euromoney's 'Best Wealth Management Company in Kuwait' award

Recognition reflects our success in attracting a large segment of customers: Al-Maktoum

KUWAIT: The National Investments Company (NIC) recently received the 'Best Wealth Management Company in Kuwait' award for 2023, under the category of 'Best for Ultra' (high networth individuals in Kuwait), by Euromoney International. The award, one of the most important awards in the regional financial sector, was presented during the Private Banking Awards event in London and is considered another milestone that confirms the company's position, product quality, and leadership position in Kuwait and the region.

NIC received this award based on its contribution to the development of private banking services in Kuwait, providing investment services, and facilitating investment opportunities that meet customers' ambitions, thus enhancing the company's financial position, thanks to its extensive experience, inordinate knowledge, innovative solutions, and the wealth management executives.

In a statement to the press, NIC stressed that the award from Euromoney was based on surveys and comprehensive studies that evaluate several factors, such as key performance indicators, financial ratios, innovation, and new services, while consulting industry specialists and taking into consideration reports and research. These awards are granted to distinguished entities making measurable differences, adding real value in their sectors, and contributing to raising the level of service provided. Euromoney Awards for Excellence Programs extend for over 50 years, attracting thousands of entries from international financial institutions.



Al-Muthana Al-Maktoum

- Winning the award is a testimony to NIC's efforts in developing private banking services and investment opportunities that meet customers' ambitions.
- Proud to be a positive contributor to the growth of the investment sector in Kuwait and the region while providing customers with innovative banking and investment solutions for over 35 years.

Competitive services

Al-Muthana Al-Maktoum, Executive Vice President – Wealth Management Sector, said: "Proud to receive the 'Best Wealth Management Company in Kuwait' award for 2023 by Euromoney International, a new testimony on the company's capability to provide competitive and unique services, and another reflection of our success in attracting a large segment of customers and providing advanced and innovative investment products following best standards within the wealth management sector."

Al-Maktoum also highlighted that NIC is delighted to be an active contributor to the growth of the investment sector in Kuwait and the region and to providing innovative banking and investment

solutions to customers over more than 35 years, during which it succeeded in adopting feasible investment approaches in wealth management, making it one of the largest investment companies in Kuwait and the region in terms of the volume of assets under management, which reached more than KD 1.121 billion by the end of December 2022.

"The award reflects NIC's commitment to providing the best services within the wealth management sector. It confirms its customer relationships and long-term partnerships built on trust and prudence. It provides integrated investment products, solutions, and plans to help them achieve their financial goals," added Al-Maktoum. Prominent products and investment opportunities

NIC's Wealth Management Sector is keen to

meet the needs and requirements of its valued customers by providing the financial products and services they need, thanks to the company's team, who continuously processes comprehensive classifications of the clients and their needs. This factor has helped attract investors, enabling them to have multiple investment opportunities and build long-term customer partnerships based on mutual trust and sustainable relationships.

The company also focuses on providing value-added services and products and achieving performance that exceeds the prevailing rates of return at the market and industry levels by investing in sectors characterized by opportunities with latent returns and considering potential risks.

Al-Maktoum concluded: "The wealth management sector will continue to enhance customer satisfaction by providing easy yet effective services, following the trend by digitalizing those services. Also, the company's management team always seeks means to encourage customers through interactive services. It utilizes its experienced team who keeps pace with customer aspirations and provides effective services that meet requirements and align with global changes."

NIC has launched the portal system recently, allowing clients to track their investments on a real-time basis while allowing them to execute orders immediately and efficiently, with features such as comprehensive analysis of their investments from portfolios and funds through more comprehensive solutions to achieve their investment objectives.

Tunisia president Saied rejects IMF 'diktats'

TUNIS: Tunisian President Kais Saied on Thursday rejected "foreign diktats" from the International Monetary Fund (IMF), which is in stalled talks with the heavily indebted country over a bailout package. "Regarding the IMF, foreign diktats that will lead to more poverty are unacceptable," Saied told reporters in the coastal city of Monastir.

Saied's government reached an agreement in principle in mid-October for a nearly \$2 billion package from the IMF, but the deal has not been approved by the lender's board, a key step to unlocking support from other international lenders.

The IMF has pushed Tunisia to remove state subsidies on basic goods, particularly fuel.

"It's true that some people who don't need subsidies are benefiting from them, but we can find other ways to make sure they get to those who deserve them," Saied said. Tunisians have endured years of mounting economic pain, made worse by the coronavirus pandemic and the fallout from Russia's invasion of Ukraine. The IMF was originally expected to approve a bailout deal on December 19, but that was delayed pending a Tunisian budget, which has since passed, and a law to stop banks charging excessive interest. The IMF's sister lender, the World Bank, effectively suspended new lending to Tunisia last month after Saied sparked accusations of racism with incendiary comments against migrants from sub-Saharan Africa.

A World Bank official said that meant the IMF talks, partly dependent on funding from the Bank, could now be pushed further down the line and that the IMF would face pressure not to approve a bailout.

Asked what the alternatives are to a deal, Saied said Tunisians should "work on our own". "Social peace is not a game," he added. The IMF has also called for legislation to restructure more than 100 state-owned firms, which hold monopolies over many parts of the economy and in many cases are heavily indebted. Moves to cut state support for essential goods have proved disastrous in the past.

In December 1983, Tunisian authorities abolished subsidies on cereals, sending the price of bread, semolina and pasta soaring, and causing riots which left dozens dead.

Saied has seized far-reaching powers since sacking the government in July 2021, later dissolving parliament and pushing through a constitution replacing the one approved in 2014 following the country's Arab Spring revolution. Saied, 65, was elected in 2019 for a five-year term. Asked on Thursday whether he would stand for another term in elections scheduled for next year, he said it was "too early to say". "I do not feel that I am in competition with anyone, I feel that I have a responsibility to assume and I will not give it up," he said. —AFP

Global growth to fall below 3% in 2023: IMF chief

WASHINGTON: A continued slowdown in almost all the world's advanced economies is expected to drag global growth below three percent this year, the International Monetary Fund's managing director warned on Thursday. "With rising geopolitical tensions and still-high inflation, a robust recovery remains elusive," Kristalina Georgieva said in prepared remarks ahead of the IMF and World Bank's spring meetings next week.

"This harms the prospects of everyone, especially for the most vulnerable people and countries," she

UAE to release new AED 1000 banknote April 10

ABU DHABI: The Central Bank of the United Arab Emirates has introduced a new banknote of AED 1000 for trading in the markets, and it will be available in banks and exchange shops as of Monday, April 10, 2023.

The new banknote was made of polymer material, and was designed using varying and consistent shades of brown, used in banknotes of the same category currently in circulation, with the aim of facilitating identification by the public. The front side of

Japan, land of hybrid car, takes slowly to EVs

TOKYO: Atsushi Ikeda loves his car so much that he founded a club for Tesla owners, but his embrace of an electric vehicle makes him something of an outlier in Japan. As markets from China to the United States race to put more EVs on their roads, the pedal is nowhere near the metal yet in Japan, where the hybrid still reigns supreme. Last year, 59,000 new EVs were sold in Japan, a record and a three-fold annual increase, but still less than two percent of sales of all cars in the country in 2022. It's a situation that might seem counterintuitive, given Japan's auto industry—which employs eight percent of the country's workforce, and accounts for a quarter of all its exports—pioneered hybrid and electric cars. But experts say the popularity of hybrids has actually hindered uptake of EVs, with Japanese automakers in no hurry to abandon existing line-ups.

The skepticism is no secret, and the former chief of Toyota, the world's top-selling carmaker, regularly questioned the growing focus on electric. "I think Toyota didn't want the trend to tilt towards plug-in hybrids and electric vehicles because of their focus on hybrids and also their significant investment," said Kenichiro Wada, president of the Japan Electrification Research Institute, who helped develop early EVs at Mitsubishi Motors in the 2000s.

added in the speech, due to be delivered in Washington. Global growth almost halved last year to 3.4 percent as the impact of Russia's invasion of Ukraine rippled through the world economy, abruptly halting the recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic.

While Asia's emerging markets are expected to see substantial increases in economic output—with India and China predicted to account for half of all growth this year—the good news will be outweighed by the slowdown expected for 90 percent of the world's advanced economies. "Growth remains weak by historical comparison—both in the near and medium term," she said. She added that world growth will likely remain at roughly three percent for the next half-decade, the lowest medium-term forecast since the 1990s.

Low-income countries are expected to suffer a double shock from high borrowing costs and a decline in demand for their exports, which could cause poverty and hunger to increase, Georgie-

the banknote includes a picture of the late Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al-Nahyan looking at a model of a space shuttle when meeting with NASA officials in 1974. The design of the reverse side of this new banknote included a picture of the "Barakah" Nuclear Power Plant in the Emirate of Abu Dhabi.

This new banknote is characterized by advanced security features that include modern technologies, such as the technology known as (spark flow dimensions), as well as the technology of security chips known as (kinogram colors). This new banknote will be traded alongside the current banknote of the same denomination in circulation, as it is a guaranteed value banknote under the law. The Central Bank has previously coordinated directly with the concerned companies that provide cash deposit and withdrawal devices in the country to reprogram their devices and ensure the acceptance of this new banknote —Argaam.

He compared the company to a top-ranking sumo wrestler, eager to "maintain the status quo for as long as possible". When Ikeda went looking for a car that was "affordable, safe, with no pollutants", he quickly turned to Tesla. "I like high-performance cars," he told AFP, describing the few Japanese options on the market when he bought in 2016 as small and unattractive. There are now government incentives for people to go electric, but Ikeda says "charging infrastructure is too weak in Japan", blaming "heavy regulations".

Zero-emission targets

The situation in Japan is increasingly inconsistent with priorities elsewhere. EVs made up 20 percent of new cars sold in China last year, around 15 percent in western Europe and 5.3 percent in the United States, according to a PwC study. Ironically, EVs have a long history in Japan, with Mitsubishi Motors unveiling its i-MiEV in 2009, and Nissan its Leaf model a year later.

At the time though, the models were expensive because of their batteries and considered impractical given the lack of a nationwide charging network. Hybrids looked like a better bet, and have proved enduringly popular, making up more than 40 percent of sales in Japan last year. Government and industry efforts have also been sidetracked by a drive to develop hydrogen-powered vehicles—a sector that has grown much slower than electric. The European Union, Britain and several US states want all new cars sold to be zero-emission by 2035. Japan's goal however includes hybrids and hydrogen-powered fuel cell vehicles by the same year. Despite the



Kristalina Georgieva

va said. "About 15 percent of low-income countries are already in debt distress and another 45 percent face high debt vulnerabilities," she said, calling on wealthier IMF members to do more to provide support. —AFP



YOKOHAMA: This photo shows a cutaway display model of one of Nissan's electric vehicles (EV) at the global headquarters of Japanese automaker Nissan Motor in Yokohama, Kanagawa prefecture. —AFP

obstacles, there are some signs of change, spurred in part by more demanding EV targets in overseas markets. If they cannot "react quickly" to these new demands, "some Japanese carmakers could disappear", said auto analyst Koji Endo, of SBI Securities.

Japanese firms have begun rolling out more ambitious EV targets, even as foreign automakers try to establish a foothold for their EVs in the country. Last year, Nissan launched its "Sakura" model—a fully electric car in the mini-sized "kei" category that is popular in Japan. It accounted for a third of the country's EV sales in 2022. "Japanese drivers' daily travel range is shorter," compared with European or US consumers, Nobuhide Yanagi, Nissan's chief marketing manager for EVs in Japan, told AFP. —AFP

Business

Russian economic prospects 'foggy' as sanctions cut deep

An exodus of Russians, Kremlin's mobilization drive led to labor shortages

MOSCOW: The resilience of Russia's economy has over the past year surprised many observers as Moscow adjusts to unprecedented Western sanctions over its assault on Ukraine. But in a rare public admission, President Vladimir Putin late last month warned of possible economic troubles ahead and urged the government to act quickly. "The sanctions imposed against the Russian economy in the medium term could really have a negative impact," Putin said at a televised meeting. It was a major change of tone after Putin earlier said the worst was over, praising the benefits of "economic sovereignty" and insisting that the West's sanctions strategy has backfired.

What exactly is Putin's message?

"Mr Putin's observation is quite simply realistic," said Arnaud Dubien, director of the Franco-Russian Observatory think tank in Moscow. Dubien, a veteran Russia expert, said Putin is seeking to further mobilize companies and government officials as Russia is cutting ties with the West.

"The situation is better than expected but do not relax, continue to find alternatives," he said, describing the Kremlin chief's logic. Alexandra Prokopenko, a former Russian central bank official, suggested that Putin's message primarily targeted companies that have been hit hard by sanctions. "It's a message to businesses," said Prokopenko, who worked at the central bank between 2017 and 2022 and quit after the start of Moscow's assault on Ukraine. "You're only safe in Russia under my charge, there's no way back," she said, referring to his possible thinking.

'Difficult situation'

More than a year into Moscow's offensive in Ukraine, the Russian economy finds itself ever more dependent on energy exports to Asia and slipping further behind in many high-value sectors. An ex-

odus of hundreds of thousands of Russians and the Kremlin's mobilization drive have led to labor force shortages. Dubien pointed to particular problems in the car industry, which thrived when leading foreign carmakers set up shop in Russia in the early 2000s. "The sectors most affected by the sanctions such as automotive production are those that were most open to investment and international cooperation," he said. In late March, Russia's flagship carmaker AvtoVAZ said that a number of parts suppliers were halting deliveries, prompting the struggling company to bring forward an annual holiday.

Prokopenko, who now researches Russian government policymaking at the Berlin-based German Council on Foreign Relations, said that sectors linked to the military-industrial complex—such as optics, pharmaceuticals and metal production—are "where the economy is doing its best." Sergei Tsyplakov, a professor at Moscow's Higher School of Economics, warned that the Kremlin's much-vaunted pivot to China and India could not solve all the problems. "Although the Russian economy did not collapse immediately after the imposition of sanctions, the situation remains difficult," he said.

Economic backsliding

Many economists expect the economic outlook to darken in the coming months. Prokopenko pointed out that it was the windfall from sky-high energy prices that helped Russia weather the initial shock from the unprecedented sanctions. "This isn't going to happen this year," she said. "In 2023, there's no sign to expect that Russia will get this extra income."

In February, Moscow's revenue from oil exports plummeted by 42 percent compared to last year, according to the International Energy Agency. The re-orientation of Russia, once Europe's main gas supplier, towards Asian markets is expected to take



MOSCOW: People walk past a branch of Russian VTB bank in Moscow on April 5, 2023. Russia's second-largest bank, VTB, reported a huge loss amounting to \$7.7 billion in 2022 after it was hit hard by Western sanctions over Moscow's offensive in Ukraine. —AFP

time. Putin, observers say, has a vital interest in seeing high energy revenue if he wants to finance Moscow's assault on Ukraine and keep dissent at home at bay. Prokopenko said she saw "lots of problems" ahead. "In the short-term perspective the Russian economy isn't doing bad, it's still functioning," she said, stressing however that finding new partners would take time.

"The future is foggy," Dubien estimated that Pu-

tin could afford to bankroll the offensive in Ukraine for another "three to four years" but warned that the economy faces years of further backsliding. "It has already lost the equivalent of a decade of development since 2014," he said, referring to the year when the West pummeled Russia with sanctions over the annexation of Crimea from Ukraine. "It could now lose a second one as well." —AFP

India pauses rate hikes citing global 'uncertainty'

MUMBAI: India's central bank held interest rates Thursday for the first time in nearly a

year because of "unprecedented uncertainty" in global markets but said it was committed to taming persistent inflation. The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) left the benchmark repurchase rate at 6.50 percent after hikes at all six of its prior meetings since May 2022.

It defied market expectations of a 25 basis points hike and recent increases by the Federal Reserve, the European Central Bank and the Bank of England. "What we are witnessing today is un-

precedented uncertainty in geopolitics, economic activity, price pressures, and financial markets never seen before," bank governor Shaktikanta Das said in a webcast. "The decision to pause on the repo rate is for this meeting only" and the bank's Monetary Policy Committee remained "focused on withdrawal of accommodation," he added. The RBI began raising rates after prices soared on the back of the Ukraine war. Inflation remained at 6.44 percent in February, above the

RBI's upper band of six percent, but down from a peak of 7.79 percent in April 2022.

"Our job is not yet finished, and the war against inflation has to continue," Das said. "And this has to continue until we see a durable decline in inflation closer to the target." This week the World Bank cut its India growth forecast to 6.3 percent from 6.6 percent for the financial year to March 2024, citing "slower consumption growth and challenging external conditions". —AFP



شركة الصفاء للاستثمار
AL SAFAT INVESTMENT COMPANY

KUWAIT BOURSA WEEKLY REPORT

WEEK ENDED ON 6 APRIL 2023

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No.	Ticker	Sector	Price Movement & Performance										Valuation Multiples *				
			Open Price	Close Price	Week High	Week Low	Range	Volume	WTD Change	WTD %	YTD %	Support Level	Resistance Level	P/E	P/B	Yield	Beta
101	National Bank of Kuwait	Banking	1,013	975	1,028	974	54	13,954,261	-31	-3.05%	-5.03%	952	1,010	16.0	1.92	3.3%	1.03
102	Gulf Bank	Banking	297	296	303	295	8	11,431,007	-2	-0.67%	-5.73%	294	303	15.2	1.31	3.4%	1.30
106	Kuwait International Bank	Banking	188	187	189	187	2	11,664,632	0	0.00%	-4.59%	186	194	23.8	0.58	2.1%	1.16
107	Burgan Bank	Banking	220	225	227	220	7	2,910,795	4	1.81%	2.74%	222	227	17.9	0.83	3.7%	1.27
108	Kuwait Finance House	Banking	755	739	770	739	31	79,212,863	-12	-1.59%	-1.23%	715	744	25.1	1.86	1.8%	1.16
109	Boubyan Bank	Banking	645	651	658	634	24	37,912,983	8	1.24%	-18.42%	649	691	46.5	2.56	0.9%	1.17
201	Kuwait Investment	Financial Services	120	117	124	117	7	2,856,402	-3	-2.50%	-23.03%	113	119	108.8	0.57	4.2%	1.84
204	National Investments	Financial Services	240	234	246	234	12	2,776,985	-7	-2.91%	-1.27%	232	237	21.5	0.94	18.8%	1.86
205	Kuwait Projects	Financial Services	122	127	130	122	8	26,274,261	4	3.25%	13.39%	126	132	21.8	0.77	0.0%	0.93
212	Arzan Financial Group	Financial Services	106	102	107	101	6	6,980,296	-3	-2.86%	-11.30%	101	106	10.1	0.71	2.3%	1.13
222	Aayan Leasing and Investment	Financial Services	132	123	136	123	13	22,465,379	-9	-6.82%	-7.52%	123	128	9.4	0.91	5.7%	1.69
252	Al Imtiaz Investment	Financial Services	55.2	57.7	61.5	54.6	6.9	7,452,684	2	3.59%	-22.96%	57.1	59.1	-	0.34	16.0%	1.24
401	Kuwait Real Estate	Real Estate	109	110	113	108	5	16,600,450	1	0.92%	1.85%	108	111	14.0	0.79	2.7%	1.09
413	Mabaneer	Real Estate	689	721	730	689	41	1,115,842	34	4.98%	-9.88%	703	725	15.3	1.62	1.9%	1.03
418	The Commercial Real Estate	Real Estate	100	98.4	100	98.0	2	13,410,179	-1.9	-1.89%	-0.51%	96	99	13.9	0.59	3.0%	0.58
501	National Industries	Financial Services	195	195	199	194	5	2,861,099	0	0.00%	-10.14%	190	202	11.0	0.87	5.7%	1.56
505	Gulf Cable	Industrials	1,075	1,130	1,140	1,075	65	405,897	35	3.20%	-7.00%	1,090	1,149	18.4	1.04	5.5%	1.01
506	HEISCO	Industrials	580	590	605	580	25	255,779	3	0.51%	-3.75%	590	611	19.2	1.52	3.5%	0.99
514	Boubyan Petrochemical	Basic Materials	782	769	793	765	28	1,215,718	-13	-1.66%	-3.88%	769	790	7.8	1.52	7.8%	0.98
603	Agility	Industrials	590	578	592	565	27	38,319,941	-43	-6.92%	-19.72%	566	598	22.5	0.93	2.7%	1.58
605	Zain	Telecommunications	540	542	550	535	15	10,740,378	2	0.37%	-3.73%	528	546	12.0	1.91	6.5%	0.71
623	Human Soft Holding	Industrials	3,891	3,970	3,995	3,861	134	986,168	79	2.03%	12.78%	3,930	3,995	9.5	3.60	10.4%	0.62
642	ALAFCO	Industrials	188	184	192	176	16	2,831,691	-3	-1.60%	-9.36%	184	195	-	0.79	0.0%	1.20
654	JAZEERA	Consumer Discretionary	1,800	1,800	1,847	1,741	106	406,781	-10	-0.55%	-5.26%	1,780	1,820	19.5	10.71	4.4%	1.45
813	GFH Financial Group	Financial Services	77.5	74.5	78	72.2	5.8	29,650,470	-2.3	-3.00%	-1.97%	74.2	76.6	9.9	0.92	6.2%	1.32
821	Warba Bank	Banking	228	228	231	227	4	4,487,166	0	0.00%	-2.98%	221	229	31.1	1.22	1.3%	1.11
823	Mezzan Holding	Consumer Staples	361	364	380	361	19	3,793,941	-2	-0.55%	-7.38%	360	375	-	1.12	4.3%	0.47
824	Integrated Holding	Industrials	368	371	371	364	7	3,903,401	2	0.54%	0.27%	362	371	29.5	1.49	2.8%	0.71
826	Shamal Az-Zour	Utilities	176	174	176	173	3	2,493,872	-3	-1.70%	-7.45%	173	176	13.3	1.65	10.3%	0.49
827	Boursa Kuwait	Financial Services	1,790	1,813	1,920	1,760	160	679,593	18	1.00%	-11.65%	1,798	1,820	20.8	5.72	4.7%	1.01
830	AL GHANIM	Consumer Discretionary	895	876	917	867	50	834,523	-44	-4.78%	8.82%	860	887	12.0	3.29	6.3%	0.32

* As of end of week closing

Business

NBK ECONOMIC REPORT

Kuwait population, employment rise in 2022, but still below pre-COVID levels

Population rose 8% to 4.74m in 2022 • Kuwaiti employment inches up

- Kuwait's population rose 8% to 4.74 million in 2022, the first annual gain in three years, as some expatriates returned after COVID.
- Expatriate job gains were concentrated in labor-intensive sectors, including real estate, construction and manufacturing, helping to relieve labor shortages. But construction employment remained almost 20 percent below pre-COVID levels.

- The number of Kuwaiti jobs increased by 1.4 percent in the six months to December 2022 and non-Kuwaiti jobs by 9.5 percent.
- Kuwaiti employment gains continue to accrue largely to the public sector. A rebalancing towards the private sector through sustained economic growth is required to promote fiscal sustainability and economic diversification.

KUWAIT: Kuwait's population increased in 2022, reversing the decline seen in the last three years and almost reaching near its 2019-peak. The rise was predominantly driven by the return of some expatriate workers as economic activities recover from the pandemic.

Employment also recorded decent gains (+8.1 percent in the six months to December 2022), as non-Kuwaiti jobs in key labor-intensive sectors rebounded strongly, which has helped both alleviate labor shortages and the non-oil economy recover some of the ground lost since 2019. Nonetheless, expatriate employment (excluding domestic workers) remains 10 percent below its peak in 2019. Meanwhile, the public sector was the driver of new jobs among Kuwaiti nationals, with private sector employment declining in 2H22. Continued momentum in job creation through sustained economic growth remains imperative in order to absorb the new Kuwaiti entrants to the workforce.

Overall population growth picks up

According to the latest demographic data from the Public Authority for Civil Information (PACI), Kuwait's population growth trend reversed course during 2022, rising by 8 percent y/y, the fastest annual growth rate in 17 years. The population is now just 0.8 percent below its 2019-peak. The growth rate of Kuwaiti nationals further eased to 1.9 percent y/y in 2022, while the rate of non-Kuwaiti growth accelerated sharply to 11.1 percent, after two consecutive years of decline. Expatriate numbers, however, were still down 3.7 percent (-125K) from their peak in 2019. Accordingly, Indians' share in the total population rose to 20.4 percent from 19.1 percent in 2021, but the share of Egyptians slightly dropped to 13.8 percent from 13.9 percent.

Working and old-age Kuwaiti population is rising

The working-age population (15-64 years) among Kuwaiti nationals has been expanding rapidly (CAGR of 2.6 percent over the last five years), and now stands

at 63 percent of the total Kuwaiti population. This has underlined the imperative for an acceleration in job creation. Moreover, the proportion of Kuwaitis above 64 years has also been increasing (albeit still quite small at 4.8 percent of total), implying rising demand for social and pension support for retirees. However, these trends are typically in line with population trends in Western developed countries.

Overall employment increased by 8.1 percent in the six months to December 2022, largely driven by an influx of non-Kuwaiti workers (+9.5 percent). Meanwhile, jobs among Kuwaiti nationals were up 1.4 percent or +6K to 455K. The increase in Kuwaiti jobs was driven by the public sector, which added 7.6K new jobs compared to a decline of 1.5K in the private sector.

Meanwhile, the number of unemployed Kuwaitis edged up by 7 percent from June 2022 to 26K by December, with an implied unemployment rate of 5.4 percent (up from 5.2 percent in June). Despite the slight increase in the last six months, the unemployment rate is much improved compared to the 7.2 percent recorded at the end of June 2021; the number of unemployed Kuwaitis has fallen by 21 percent since then.

Female participation grows

Among Kuwaitis, the female share in employment has been increasing, with the trend continuing in 2022; females now comprise more than 51 percent of total employment from 48 percent in 2017. Moreover, the number of Kuwaiti homemakers declined by 27 percent since 2018 (-15K to 39K). In addition, there has been a robust rise in the Kuwaiti female workforce, boosted by an increase in their participation rate (the share of the female working-age population that is in the female labor force). By December 2022, the female labor participation rate had risen to 50.2 percent from 49.8 percent at the end of June 2022 (and a cumulative rise of 4.7 percent points since 2017), while the male participation rate dropped from

50.8 percent to 50.6 percent in 2H22. Since the labor force participation rate among females is now very close to that of males, scope for continued growth may be more limited. Nevertheless, the rise will have boosted females' purchasing power, and likely their consumption.

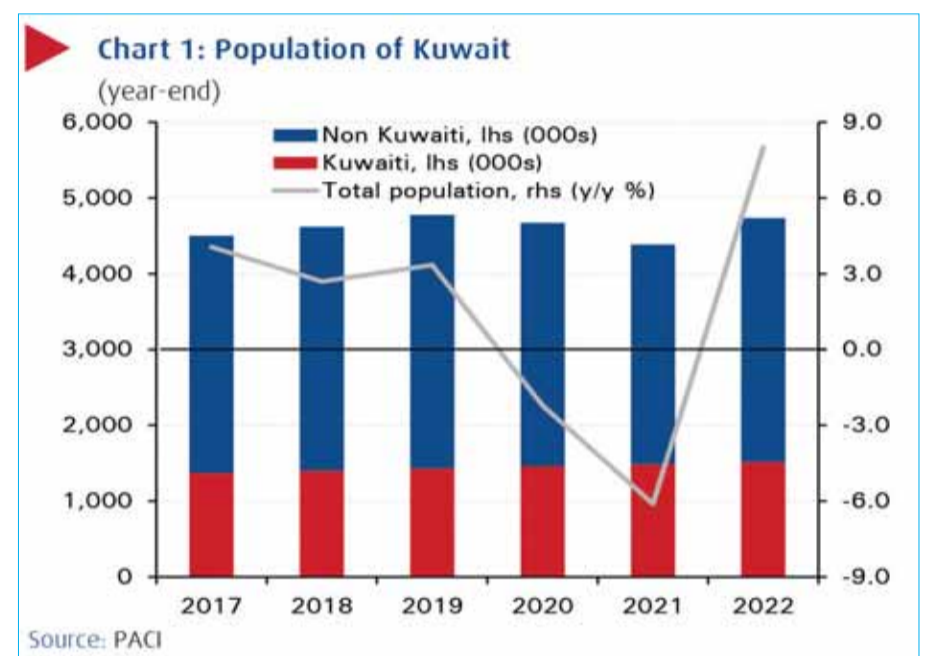
Meanwhile, 2022 was the fourth consecutive year of decline in the male participation rate (a cumulative drop of 1.9 percent points since 2018), with the rate falling to 50.6 percent. This could possibly be explained by a 23 percent increase in number of students among working-age males, relative to just 10 percent rise in female students over the same period. Also, male students as a proportion of the male working-age population rose from 27.6 percent in 2018 to 30.3 percent by December 2022. Ideally, this could mean a more educated and qualified male workforce will be available in future.

Non-Kuwaiti jobs return but still below pre-COVID era

As COVID-related restrictions were lifted and economic activities normalized, non-Kuwaiti jobs also made a strong comeback in 2022. Although the relevant data is not available for the end of 2021, in the last six months to December 2022, non-Kuwaiti employment grew 9 percent to 1.6 million (excluding domestic workers). However, this level is still a good 10 percent below the pre-COVID peak. Most new jobs were concentrated in low-end profiles, in labor-intensive sectors such as real estate & construction, manufacturing, trade, and hospitality. This rise in workers should help alleviate ongoing labor shortages caused by the pandemic and support economic activity, though in some sectors – especially construction – employment is still well below pre-pandemic levels. In contrast, the number of private household (domestic) workers increased to a record high.

Share of domestic workers in population rises further

The number of domestic workers in the expatriate population has been in-



creasing, reaching 773K at end-2022. Generally, 4,000-5,000 marriages occur annually among Kuwaiti nationals, implying the need for a similar number of new housing units. Moreover, given the usual cultural norms in Kuwaiti society, it also means the requirement to hire domestic helpers in these new households. Therefore, domestic workers' share of the Kuwait's total population stood at 16.3 percent at end-2022, up from 13.9 percent in 2016.

Looking at the trend in expatriate numbers excluding domestic workers, a better underlying guide to business activity trends in the economy and potentially the authorities' objective of rebalancing the country's demographics, shows that as of December 2022, foreigners comprised 51.7 percent of the total population, down from 55.8 percent in 2016.

During the last six months of 2022, the proportion of expatriate workers with secondary and below educational qualifications increased further (from 90.5 percent to 91.4 percent). Now only 8.6 percent of foreign workers are diploma and above qualified; by contrast, the

same category jumps to 52 percent for Kuwaiti workers. This implies that more than 91 percent of expatriates are not highly educated and possibly working at lower-end jobs. Although this potentially points to a relatively smaller contribution to the economy, replacing these workers with Kuwaiti nationals is not feasible from a qualification and aspiration point of view. Meanwhile, the effect of Kuwaitization is more visible in the public sector: the share of expatriate workers in the public sector steadily fell to 23 percent in 2022 from 30 percent in 2016.

The growth rate of the Kuwaiti population may continue to ease further over the coming years as the birth rate continues its softening trend. Yet, with an expanding working-age population, with 15-20K new entrants annually to the workforce, creating more jobs is a key challenge for authorities. We believe continued strong growth in the non-oil economy through robust capital investment and policy reforms would help create a more dynamic and developed economic environment, generating additional employment opportunities for Kuwaitis.



Vision Golfe: Main business event between France, Gulf Countries

KUWAIT: Business France, the national agency supporting the international development of the French economy, is organizing "Vision Golfe", the main business event between France and the Gulf Cooperation Council, a new platform to promote business cooperation in markets with high-growth potential. The conference is scheduled to take place in Paris on June 13-14, 2023, at the premises of French Ministry of the Economy, Finance and Industrial and Digital Sovereignty, under the high patronage of Emmanuel Macron, President of the French Republic.

The conference will cover a wider range of topics, including:

- Best practices for building sustainable partnerships between France and the GCC region, including panel discussions focusing on economic diversification and creating business models for sustainable development;
- Cooperation and investment opportunities in various sectors such as aerospace, blue energy, digital transformation, green industry, renewable energy, biotechnology, culture, consumer goods, cosmetics and fashion, food, transportation and logistics, and healthcare;

* Use cases and success stories on the latest trends and innovations shaping ongoing projects between French companies and GCC partners;

* This will also be an opportunity to identify potential investment projects and learn more about why France has become the most attractive destination in Europe for foreign direct investment.

"Vision Golfe" aims to strengthen relations between France and the GCC region. Despite persistent global challenges, the future looks bright for the Gulf countries, due to forward-looking policies and bold investments in energy transition and sustainable development. France, with its industrial excellence, historical know-how, expertise in key sectors and its strong decarbonization policy, is fully committed to take part in the gulf visions through capacity-building, leading to fruitful business collaborations.

This major business event will bring together key decision-makers from the private and public sectors, including policymakers, ministries from the GCC and France, business leaders, high-potential midcaps, SMEs and startups to explore new opportunities for collaboration and investment, while showcasing success stories of great partnerships that contribute to localization strategies and the Gulf Visions. More than 1,000 business meetings are set to happen, along with themed panel discussions and workshops.

To connect with thought leaders and decision-makers from France and the GCC, and to enjoy extensive networking sessions and tap into potential partnerships, you can register directly through this link.

France hit by new protests after pensions deadlock

PARIS: French demonstrators on Thursday kicked off another day of protests and strikes to denounce President Emmanuel Macron's pension reform, after the latest talks between the government and unions ended in deadlock. Macron, currently on a visit to China, is facing the biggest challenge of his second term over his flagship pension overhaul, which includes hiking the retirement age from 62 to 64 and demanding people work longer for a full pension.

Demonstrations got under way across the country, with striking workers waving labor union flags at the Charles de Gaulle Airport near the capital, television footage showed. Protesters in the western town of Vannes started the day dancing a conga and listening to music from a brass band, while crowds also gathered in the western city of Nantes and southern port of Marseille.

There have been signs that the two-and-a-half-month protest movement is starting to lose some momentum, and unions are hoping for a mass turnout on the 11th day of action since January.

All sides in the standoff are awaiting an April 14 verdict on the validity of the reform by France's Constitutional Council, which has the power to strike out some or even all of the legislation. While the members of the Constitutional Council—known as the "wise ones" (les sages) -- will deliver their verdict in line with a strict interpretation of the law, unions want to show that the protest movement still has momentum whatever the decision. "We're still asking for the reform to be revoked," Laurent Berger, head of the centrist CFDT union, told RTL radio on Thursday morning.

"We're in the middle of a social crisis, a democratic crisis," he said. "It's a problem... that needs to be solved by the president."

Protests descended into violent unrest after Prime Minister Elisabeth Borne invoked on March 16 a controversial executive power to ram the bill through parliament without a vote. Police are expecting 600,000 to 800,000 people to protest nationwide on Thursday.

'Democratic crisis'

Unions said a meeting with Borne on Wednesday made no progress after she refused to dis-



PARIS: French Democratic Confederation of Labour (CFDT) union's general secretary Laurent Berger (left first row) and French CGT trade union General Secretary Sophie Binet (right first row) pose prior to talks between France's Prime minister Elisabeth Borne and inter-unions representatives at the Hotel de Matignon in Paris on April 5, 2023. —AFP

cuss going back on the minimum retirement age of 64. "It's clearly a failure when the prime minister won't even allow a way into that discussion," said Cyril Chabanier, speaking for the country's eight main unions after barely an hour of talks. It was the first such gathering between the two sides since the government presented the contentious pensions bill in January.

Despite refusing to budge on the issue, Borne said she would not move forward with any other labour topics "without social partners". Berger already on Wednesday said France was experiencing "a grave democratic crisis". Macron is to remain for the rest of the week in China, where an aide denied the allegation as the pension change was in the president's manifesto during his re-election campaign last year. "You can't speak of a democratic crisis when the bill has been enacted, explained to the public and the government is taking responsibility for it," said the aide, asking not to be identified by name.

Union chiefs have urged a record protest turnout on Thursday. But numbers in the previous round of strikes and protests last Tuesday were down on the week earlier. A record number of people, more than 1.2 million, marched against the reform nationwide on March 7. The Paris metro system is for the first time on a strike day expected to be working with minimal disruption, according to operator RATP.

Across the country, three high-speed trains out of four will be running, railway operator SNCF said. Just 20 percent of schoolteachers are expected to strike on Thursday, the Snuipp-FSU union said. —AFP

Lifestyle



Kate Flavell (right) teaches Charlotte Mafi (second left) and Anne Porter (left) during a bell ringing training session at All Saints Church, in Kingston-upon-Thames, in southwest London. —AFP



A photograph shows All Saints Church, in Kingston-upon-Thames in southwest London.



Kate Flavell (right) teaches Anne Porter (left) during a bell ringing training session at All Saints Church, Kingston-upon-Thames, in southwest London.

UK bell enthusiasts clamour to 'ring for the king'

At the top of 52 steep, narrow steps at All Saints Church near London, expert bell ringers are showing the ropes to two new recruits ahead of King Charles III's coronation. Senior doctor Charlotte Mafi and office administrator Anne Porter have each answered a call for volunteers to help "ring for the king" on May 6. The day before the historic event, both women are hoping to be in the belfry tower of the 12th-century church in Kingston upon Thames, on the western edge of London, to ring a celebratory peal.

Kate Flavell, secretary of the bell-ringing society, first sets out some vital safety basics. "Don't walk around near the ropes and keep your feet firmly on the ground when sitting near them," she tells Mafi. According to Flavell, it usually takes around 10 hours to teach someone to handle a bell competently.

Eight kings

"You've got a heavy piece of metal that's swinging around on a wheel from the mouth-up position of the bell back round to the mouth-up position again, and then back the other way.

"And you're controlling it with a rope.



Tower Captain Paul Flavell (left) and Kate Flavell (right) teach Charlotte Mafi (second left) and Anne Porter (second right) during a bell ringing training session at All Saints Church, in Kingston-upon-Thames, in southwest London.

It's not easy and it does take some learning," she said. The novices are two of more than 1,000 people who responded to an appeal for new recruits by the UK's Central Council of Church Bell Ringers. "It's something I always wanted to do and then I saw this and thought 'why not now?'" said Mafi, adding that she finds the rhythm of the bells "very soothing".

All Saints is a fitting place to celebrate a coronation.

The ceremonial crowning of up to eight Saxon kings of England in the 10th century is said to have taken place in an early church that stood on the site. Porter has now completed three hours' instruction and is beginning to get the hang of it. "I have always loved the sound of bells," she said. "I am not confident enough to handle a bell on my own but soon I will be able to join in with the other ringers."



Tower Captain Paul Flavell (second right) and Kate Flavell (right) teach Charlotte Mafi and Anne Porter during a bell ringing training session at All Saints Church, in Kingston-upon-Thames, in southwest London.

Royal opportunity

Royal occasions are a prime opportunity for Kate Flavell and her husband Paul, who has been the "tower captain" overseeing the All Saints bells for the past 35 years. "Last year, when there was the queen's Platinum Jubilee, we rang a thing called a quarter peal for that, which is about 45 minutes of non-stop ringing," Kate Flavell said.

"Then, of course, not that long after that the queen died and so we rang with muffles on," she added regarding the death of Queen Elizabeth II in September. All Saints is unusual in having 12 bells, something more common in cathedrals, and its coronation peals will ring out clear and unmuffled.

But while the church has a full team of about 20 ringers, Britain's wider bell-ringing community is in sore need of more recruits. There are around 6,000 sets of bells across the UK totalling nearly 38,000 bells, but only 30,000 people trained to ring them, according to the Central Council of Church Bell Ringers.

Ringling in history

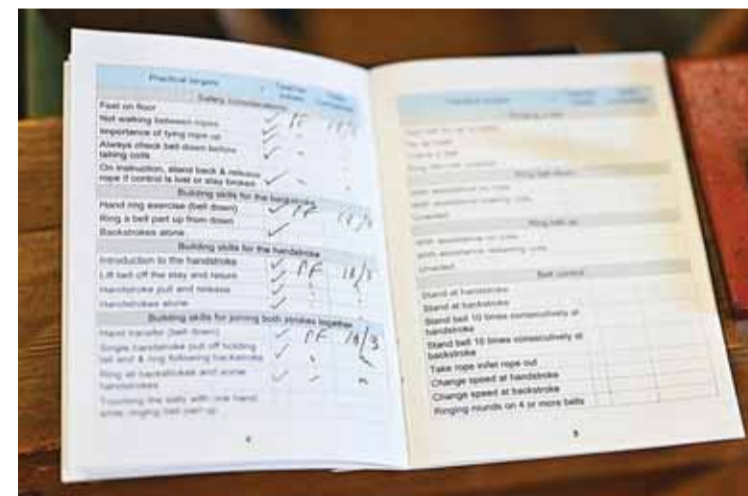
"In the cities it's quite strong but we really need to recruit elsewhere... we don't want it to die out on our watch," Flavell said. For now, however, she is just looking forward to the celebratory peals marking the coronation. Mafi and Porter, too, are excited to be playing their part next month, and say they are in it for the long haul beyond the festivities. "I just think throughout history they have rung bells for celebrations, and so to be part of that historic moment will be wonderful," Porter said. —AFP



Kate Flavell (right) teaches Anne Porter (left) during a bell ringing training session at All Saints Church, Kingston-upon-Thames, in southwest London.



A photograph shows ropes hanging on the wall during a bell ringing training session at All Saints Church, in Kingston-upon-Thames in southwest London.



A photograph shows a training book which lists practical targets during a bell ringing training session at All Saints Church, Kingston-upon-Thames in southwest London.

King Charles III's coronation: What we know with month to go

With a month until King Charles III's coronation, plans are at an advanced stage to mark Britain's first enthronement in seven decades. Charles, 74, immediately became king when Queen Elizabeth II died aged 96 last September after a record-breaking reign of 70 years. But a British monarch's coronation traditionally takes place later, after national and royal mourning along with months of intense preparation.

Three-day celebration

The early May coronation weekend will feature a star-studded concert, nationwide "big lunch" and volunteering initiatives, as well as the traditional ceremony and royal processions. The three days of events will begin with Charles's formal crowning at London's Westminster Abbey on Saturday, May 6, in a tradition dating back more than 900 years.

May 7 will see a televised music concert staged at Windsor Castle, west of London, featuring "global music icons and contemporary stars", according to Buckingham Palace. However, the lineup is still to be confirmed. Kylie Minogue and Lionel Richie are reportedly set to perform, but other big names such as Adele and Elton John have cited diary clashes.

Also on May 7, neighbours and communities will be invited to host thousands of "coronation big lunches", billed as a "nationwide act of celebration and friendship". The final part of coronation weekend, dubbed "the big help out", will be held on Monday, May 8 -- designated a UK public holiday this year. Organised



A handout photo shows Britain's King Charles III and Britain's Camilla, Queen Consort posing in the Blue Drawing Room at Buckingham Palace, in London. —AFP

Scaled-down ceremony

The coronation ceremony is expected to be much shorter and less elaborate than the one staged for Elizabeth in 1953. Then, proceedings lasted almost three hours, drew 8,251 official guests crammed into temporary tiers in Westminster Abbey, and included representatives from 129 nations and territories.

This time, the palace has confirmed it



An undated handout photo shows the invitation for the May 6, 2023 Coronation of Britain's King Charles III, which will be issued in due course to over 2,000 guests who will form the congregation in Westminster Abbey.

will be inviting a mere 2,000 guests, while the service is set to last around an hour. It released an image of the official invitation, which is set to go out in the coming days. Designed by heraldic artist Andrew Jamieson, it features the motif of "the Green Man", an ancient figure from British folklore, "symbolic of spring and rebirth, to celebrate the new reign".

Guest list

Foreign royals including Prince Albert of Monaco, and Prince Fumihito and his wife Kiko of Japan, have confirmed their attendance. Several European leaders such as French President Emmanuel Macron are also expected along with senior diplomats from China, despite ongoing tensions between the

West and Beijing. The United States will be represented by First Lady Jill Biden, the White House confirmed on Tuesday. In a phone call, President Joe Biden "congratulated the king on his upcoming coronation" and looked forward to meeting him in the future, it said. Among members of the British public invited is a teenager who has raised hundreds of thousands of pounds (dollars) for a hospice by camping in his garden every night for three years.

Harry and Meghan?

Suspense remains around whether Prince Harry and Meghan will travel from the United States. A spokesperson for Charles's younger son confirmed last month that he and his wife had been invited, but would not say if they had agreed to attend. Harry has fallen out spectacularly with his family, after giving a series of incendiary interviews criticising the institution. There was particular outrage in Britain at allegations made against Charles and elder brother William in Harry's autobiography "Spare", published earlier this year.

Queen Camilla

Charles's wife Camilla will also be formally crowned -- wearing Queen Mary's Crown. More than a century old, it was commissioned by Queen Mary for her 1911 coronation alongside King George V. Charles will wear the 17th century St Edward's Crown. His wife has been known as "queen consort" since Elizabeth II died. But invitations to the coronation call her, for the first time, as "Queen Camilla", and she is expected to retain that title after May 6. —AFP

Strategy Games

In this file photo shows the game Catan (center) by German creator Klaus Teuber on a shelf at Hamleys toy store during a photo call in London. —AFP

Creator of Catan board game dies

The inventor of the hugely popular Catan board game, Klaus Teuber, has died at the age of 70, the franchise's German publisher has said. Teuber passed away on Saturday after a "short and serious illness", publisher Kosmos said in a statement Tuesday. The Catan creator had "inspired millions of people around the world with his many award-winning games", Kosmos said. More than 40 million copies of Catan, which was originally known as Settlers of Catan, have been sold since it first appeared on the market in 1995, with the game being translated into over 40 languages.

In the game, players compete to colonise the unoccupied island of Catan. By building settlements and roads using resources that can be traded, players compete to collect points and control the island. Born in 1952, Teuber began life as a dental technician before making a career in the world of boardgames. Teuber's first game "Barbarossa" was released in 1988, before blockbuster success Catan. "I always tested the games with my family first," Teuber told German daily Sueddeutsche Zeitung in 2017 in an interview together with his son Benjamin. "I was fortunate enough to have a father that I didn't have to ask to play with me, he came into my room and asked me," Teuber's son said. —AFP

Lifestyle

Nintendo 'needed to be involved' in new Mario movie, says Miyamoto



In this file photo Japanese producer and video game designer Shigeru Miyamoto attends Universal's (The Super Mario Bros Movie) special screening at the Regal LA Live in Los Angeles.—AFP photos



In this file photo (from left to right) Michael Jelenic, Aaron Horvath, Jack Black, Chris Meledandri, CEO of Illumination, Seth Rogen, Shigeru Miyamoto attend a Special Screening of Universal Pictures' (The Super Mario Bros) at Regal LA Live on April 01, 2023 in Los Angeles, California.



In this file photo US actor Chris Pratt attends Universal's (The Super Mario Bros Movie) special screening at the Regal LA Live in Los Angeles.

When Shigeru Miyamoto first created a princess-rescuing plumber more than four decades ago, Nintendo's future mascot was just a collection of pixels who didn't have a flamboyant Italian accent -- or even a name.

This Wednesday, Mario, now the most famous character in video game history, stars in "The Super Mario Bros. Movie," a major new animated film released in theaters by Hollywood giant Universal Pictures. "I don't think anybody thought Mario would be this big, including myself," legendary game designer Miyamoto told AFP.

"It's like seeing a 2D illustration come to life as a 3D puppet, and then that coming to life, becoming a human." The movie -- released in the wake of recent, successful video game adaptations such as "The Last of Us" --- is the second attempt to bring Mario to the big screen, after an ill-fated, live-action 1993 movie.

Back then, Nintendo handed over creative freedom to Hollywood producers, who delivered a bizarre dystopian fantasy set in a dinosaur kingdom. This time the Japanese gaming giants took no such chances.

Nintendo dispatched Miyamoto himself to co-produce the movie along with Chris Meledandri, founder of Illumination -- the Paris-based studio behind "Despicable Me" and "Minions." "We wanted to develop the movie ourselves, instead of licensing it," recalled Miyamoto. "That's when we met Chris. If Chris and his team would develop this together with us, we would feel confident." But in order to successfully bring that authentic Nintendo spirit to the movie, "I was certain that we needed to be involved, otherwise it could not be done," said Miyamoto.

'Character-driven'

The result is a colorful, kaleidoscopic action

movie, frenetically paced to appeal to children, but stuffed with winks and nods to the games that generations of nostalgic Nintendo fans grew up with. It even offers its heroes an origin story.

The Mario brothers, struggling to get their fledgling New York plumbing business off the ground, try to save the city from a flooding crisis, but get sucked down a green warp pipe. Mario ends up in the Mushroom Kingdom, where he sets off to save Luigi after learning that his more timorous brother has landed in Bowser's clutches.

According to Miyamoto, the idea for a film emerged from a major strategic shift by Nintendo around a decade ago, to make its games "more character-driven." Until then, beyond the odd "Wahoo!" catchphrase, Nintendo designers would not add "anything extra or unnecessary" to characters, because "we didn't know what kind of games they would be used for" next.

But "we wanted people who are not gamers to recognize our characters," explained Miyamoto, leading to the partnership with Meledandri's Illumination studio. The "change in direction" also prompted the Nintendo theme parks that recently opened in Osaka and Los Angeles, with more to come.

'Spielberg' of video games

For Miyamoto, now 70, who is sometimes billed as the Steven Spielberg of video games, his new role as a Hollywood producer was something of an adjustment. "I enjoy films. I'm not a film expert," he told AFP. "I do watch a variety of movies. But I never thought I would want to make a movie." Instead, films like Spielberg's "Indiana Jones: Raiders of the Lost Ark" had inspired Miyamoto's video games, which include the critically adored "Legend of Zelda" series.

"When I watched it, I could tell that so many creative people were involved... and the direction of that single lead person brought it together into this one cohesive structure," he recalled. "I was looking at that from a game designer perspective, thinking 'I want to make games like that!'"

Working closely with Meledandri for six years and watching the Hollywood mogul bring the new "Mario" movie together, Miyamoto got to "witness that whole process happening in front of me."

A-list stars including Chris Pratt, Jack Black, Anya Taylor-Joy and Seth Rogen signed on to voice Nintendo's famous roster of characters.

'Possibilities'

The movie has weathered controversy, not least over Mario's accent. While in the video games, Mario has a famously over-the-top Italian twang, many fans watching the new film's trailer last year were baffled to find Pratt speaking in an American accent. An explanation for that apparent oversight is woven into the movie's plot, and should help to assuage some of viewers' skepticism. Pratt has suggested that Mario's traditional accent -- voiced in the games by Charles Martinet -- could prove distracting across a feature-length film. "We discussed early on the importance of grounding my version of Mario's voice in something that could carry a 90-minute emotional through line," he said, in the film's press notes. Miyamoto says he hopes that Mario being in a movie will make it feel to fans like he actually exists.

"I feel that we have accomplished that. I hope that we've accomplished that." With a major Mario movie completed, could there be a space for future big-screen Nintendo adaptations, such as a "Zelda" film? "There's always possibilities!" said Miyamoto.—AFP



In this file photo US producer Chris Meledandri attends Universal's (The Super Mario Bros Movie) special screening at the Regal LA Live in Los Angeles.—AFP

Video games 'blending' with film, says 'Mario' movie producer

Having created the most successful animated franchise of all time with "Despicable Me" and its spin-off "Minions" films, producer Chris Meledandri knows a thing or two about blockbuster movies.

After a six-year collaboration with Nintendo to create "The Super Mario Bros. Movie," the founder of Illumination studio has now been steeped in the even more lucrative world of video games -- and he says the barrier between it and film is disappearing. "I think there's a natural evolution to the lines being blurred," Meledandri told AFP. "You begin to see games with real-time rendering having such power that you're seeing a level of visual imagery in games that's just stunning.

"You're seeing games that integrate narrative in very effective ways. You're seeing a crossover in terms of artists working in both spaces." With the release in theaters this week of the eagerly awaited "Mario" movie, Meledandri's Illumination studio is the latest to try bridge the gap. Having made the \$4.4 billion-grossing "Despicable Me" franchise, the Paris-based studio was able to convince A-list movie stars including Chris Pratt and Jack Black to lend their voices to Nintendo's beloved cast.

Still, it could be seen as a gamble given the checkered history for computer game adaptations, which stems back to 1993's original "Super Mario Bros." movie. That live-action fantasy was a commercial and critical flop, but Meledandri said it was "just not something that we ever focused on" while planning the new film. "I can't think of any conversation about the 1993 movie. Maybe it came up three times," he said.

Since then, a small but growing number of crossover hits have included movies "Lara Croft: Tomb Raider" and "Warcraft," alongside Netflix's Emmy-winning animated series "Arcane" and HBO's recent "The Last of Us." "We're so quick to speak to trends. But trends are just a collection of individual experiences," he said. While many video game-adaptation flops have seen Hollywood wrest creative control away from franchises' original creators, basing movies on games is "perfectly viable" if film producers collaborate, said Meledandri.

"If people continue to do it in the way that they've done it in the past, I think it's gonna be harder for them to make strong films." Still, while cinematic elements are increasingly common in video games, there is little evidence that the interactivity of games can successfully translate to film or television.

"Very talented people" like Charlie Brooker have dabbled with interactivity in shows such as "Black Mirror," which had an episode titled "Bandersnatch" that let viewers make choices that influenced the story, noted Meledandri. "It's one of those notions that has captivated people for many years, but fundamentally I think it's much more difficult to achieve," said Meledandri. "I don't know anybody who has a handle on it." —AFP

Johnny Depp film to open Cannes fest

Johnny Depp's new film, a French period drama in which he plays King Louis XV, will be the opening film of the Cannes Film Festival, the organisers announced on Wednesday. "Jeanne du Barry" is directed by French director Maiwenn who also stars in the title role as the famous 18th century courtesan who works her way into the king's affections.

It is the first major role for Depp since his high-profile defamation trial with ex-wife Amber Heard over her claims that he was physically abusive. His new film will be shown on the first night of the Cote d'Azur festival on May 16, and will be released on the same day across French cinemas, as is customary for the opening night feature. The film received investment from

Saudi Arabia's Red Sea Film Foundation, it was announced in January.

The foundation, formed in 2019 in a sign of the country's loosening of social restrictions, has already funded some 170 African and Arab movies, it said, but "Jeanne du Barry" is its first foray into European cinema. This year's Cannes Film Festival, which runs May 16-28, already has some heavyweight Hollywood fare in its line-up, with "Indiana Jones and the Dial of Destiny" getting its world premiere there, along with the latest from Martin Scorsese, "Killers of the Flower Moon", starring Leonardo DiCaprio and Robert De Niro. The full line-up is due to be announced on April 13.—AFP



Johnny Depp

Montreux Jazz Fest to mix genres, generations

From music legends Bob Dylan, Lionel Richie and Iggy Pop to newer stars like Gayle and Sam Smith, the Montreux Jazz Festival unveiled Wednesday a vast and varied line-up for this summer's shows. The 57th edition of the festival, held in the idyllic Swiss town of Montreux on the shores of Lake Geneva from June 30 to July 15, will serve up acts "traversing genres and generations", organisers said.

Dylan, the 81-year-old Nobel laureate and folk-rock legend, will be in Montreux on July 1 as part of a tour to present his album "Rough and Rowdy Ways". "Part acoustic folk, part electric blues, this 2020 album is considered by his fans and critics to be one of his best of the last 30 years," organisers said, adding that at Dylan's request, the concert venue would be "fully seated to reflect the intimate atmosphere of his tour".

The next night, audiences can see Chris Isaak, the 66-year-old American singer-songwriter most famous for his 1989 hit "Wicked Game", appearing 30 years after his only previous appearance at Montreux. American smooth rocker Lionel Richie, British singer Seal and British band Simply Red will meanwhile represent "three decades of hit-makers at the crossroads of soul and pop", organisers said. Newer generations of hit-makers will also be well represented.

British star Sam Smith will be playing the prestigious Stravinsky Auditorium for the first time, eight years after appearing at the festival's Lab, which is



dedicated to exploring new and emerging music production.

Among the younger artists on the line-up is another LGBTQ icon, the American rapper, singer and songwriter Lil Nas X, who blurs the lines between hip-hop, pop and R&B and made a name for himself with the 2019 country-trap smash hit "Old Town Road". It also includes a number of popular talents on TikTok, like Canadian Stacey Ryan in the groovy pop category and Cavetown, Maisie Peters and 18-year-old US star Gayle "in more indie or emo incarnations". Several evenings of the festival will be dedicated to exploring musical genre through the artistry of two different generations, the organisers said.

That is the case with 44-year-old US songwriter and pianist Norah Jones, who will appear in Montreux 13 years after her last visit alongside Mavis Staples as she celebrates her 84th birthday.

The festival organisers also promised a "dream line-up for every punk rock fan" with Iggy Pop due to showcase his ferocious new album. He will be preceded on stage by Generation Sex -- a supergroup comprising original members of Generation X and the Sex Pistols, including singer Billy Idol and bassist Tony James.—AFP

AI bot ChatGPT faces growing scrutiny in Europe

France's data regulator said on Wednesday it had received two complaints about the AI program ChatGPT, as European authorities deepened their scrutiny of the chatbot days after Italy banned it. ChatGPT, created by US firm OpenAI, has provided a global hit by demonstrating an ability to generate essays, poems and conversations from the briefest of prompts -- as well as passing tough exams. But Italian regulators said last Friday that the firm had no legal basis to engage in massive data collection and questioned the way it was handling the information it had gathered.

European authorities including those of France, Ireland and Germany have since approached their Italian counterpart to try to establish a common position on ChatGPT. And the concerns are not limited to Europe -- on Tuesday, Canada's data regulator said it was opening an investigation into OpenAI.

France's CNIL, regarded as the most powerful European data regulator, confirmed to AFP on Wednesday it had already received two complaints, though it has not yet announced a full investigation. Zoe Vilain of Janus International, a campaign group, filed the first complaint.

"We are not anti-tech, but we want ethical technology," she told AFP. She wrote in her complaint that when



This file photo shows screens displaying the logos of OpenAI and ChatGPT.—AFP

she tried to sign up for a ChatGPT account she was not asked for consent to any general terms of use or privacy policy.

The other complaint came from David Libeau, a developer who wrote in his submission he had found personal information about himself when he asked ChatGPT about his profile.

"When I asked for more information, the algorithm started to make up stories about me, creating websites or organising online events that were totally false," he wrote.

ChatGPT and similar programs are "trained" on huge bodies of text gleaned from the internet and are known to invent answers, though OpenAI said such "hallucinations" were less common with GPT-4, the latest version of the bot. Last month, billionaire Tesla and Twitter boss Elon Musk joined hundreds of experts in calling for a halt in development of powerful AI systems, a move prompted by the release of GPT-4. After Italy's order to halt ChatGPT, OpenAI told AFP that it was "committed to protecting people's privacy" and believed the tool complied with the law.—AFP

Lifestyle

Young Libyans finally able to answer call of e-gaming



In this picture a youth plays an electronic auto sports game on a dedicated car simulator at a video gaming centre in Libya's capital Tripoli.



In this picture youths play at a video gaming centre in Libya's capital Tripoli.—AFP photos



In this picture youths play at a video gaming centre in Libya's capital Tripoli.

In a Tripoli arcade, players banter amid the bleeping and music of video games. Isolated by decades of dictatorship and post-revolution chaos, Libyan gamers are finally taking on the world. It's late at night in the Muslim holy month of Ramadan, and in the suburb of Tajoura, teenagers with headphones clamped to their ears gaze into state-of-the-art screens in the ultra-modern gaming complex. One sits behind a steering wheel, racing a car. Others make their way through virtual worlds, huge 3D glasses covering their faces.

Such a space would have been unimaginable a few years ago in the North African country. Unlike in other Arab states, "the gaming community

was completely dead here" until recently, says Sofiane Mattouss, who runs the business set up in 2022. Gaming industry experts say the Middle East and North Africa are high-growth regions, with Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Egypt among the largest markets. Libya lags behind, having seen little investment in technology or entertainment during the 42-year rule of autocrat Moummar Gadhafi, whose toppling in a 2011 revolt marked the start of a violent decade-long power struggle.

But as that isolation has ended, Libyans have shown "high demand" for places where they can finally play together and take part in tour-

naments, Mattouss says. At just 18, the computer science student only recently began working at the centre, putting an end to years of frustration playing on outdated university computers. More than a decade since Ghadafi's death, new pastimes and private sector investment are surging into Libya, which even launched an e-sport federation in 2018.

Epic electronic battles

Six gaming halls have already sprung up in the capital, with others in major cities such as Benghazi. In Tajoura, comfortably installed on beanbags or perched on stools, rowdy students play football or engage in epic

electronic battles. In skinny jeans and a white jacket, Youssef Younsi trades wisecracks while playing a game on a giant screen.

The 20-year-old student was used to playing in small arcades in Tripoli and had "never seen" such modern spaces in Libya until recently. Now back on holiday from studying in Turkey, Younsi says he regularly visits big gaming halls in Istanbul. "In other countries, when I travel, they are everywhere but I didn't expect to see so many people interested in it here," he says.

Tripoli's mushrooming arcades have driven rapid growth in Libya's nascent gaming community, Mattouss says. The increasingly organ-

ised community is "motivating players and pushing other young people without experience to start training". He predicts that the sector will continue developing quickly. While some in this conservative society criticise video games, Mattouss argues that unlike dictatorship and chaos, they have not destroyed Libya's youth.

E-sport gives them a purpose, which is better than "hanging around outside doing nothing", he says. Player Karim Ziani, 20, puts down his headphones and declares that the growth of e-sport is "a good thing, even for the development of the country". "I hope it grows, for the good of the youth and society."—AFP



In this picture youths play at a video gaming centre in Libya's capital Tripoli.



In this picture youths play an electronic football game at a video gaming centre in Libya's capital Tripoli.



In this picture youths play an electronic football game at a video gaming centre in Libya's capital Tripoli.



In this picture a youth plays an electronic auto sports game on a dedicated car simulator at a video gaming centre in Libya's capital Tripoli.

Dissident Chinese artist Ai Weiwei launches new London show

China feels it has the "right to redefine the global world order", Chinese dissident artist Ai Weiwei told AFP on Wednesday ahead of the opening in London of his first design-focused exhibition.

The show at the capital's Design Museum features hundreds of thousands of objects collected by the Chinese artist since the 1990s, from Stone Age tools to Lego bricks, and draws on his love of artefacts and traditional craftsmanship.

The son of a poet revered by former communist leaders, 65-year-old Ai is perhaps China's best-known modern artist and helped design the famous "Bird's Nest" stadium for Beijing's 2008 Olympics. But he fell out of favour after criticising the Chinese government and was imprisoned for 81 days in 2011 and eventually left for Germany four years later.

Among the artefacts in the new exhibition are thousands of fragments from Ai's porcelain sculp-



Chinese artist Ai Weiwei poses in front of his art pieces displayed during the press preview for the exhibition "Ai Weiwei: Making sense" at the Design Museum, in London.—AFP

tures which were destroyed when the bulldozers moved in to dismantle his studio in Beijing in 2018. Launching the show which opens on Friday, Ai, said he believed China was "not moving into a more civilised society, but (had) rather become quite brutal on anybody who has different ideas".

"Tension between China and the West is very natural," added the artist, who has lived in Europe since 2015. "China feel

they have their own power and right to redefine the global world order.

"They think China can become an important factor in changing the game rules, basically designed by the West world," he said. And he said that even though Europe had been relatively peaceful for 70 years there were many problems including much less concern for "humanity" and threats to "freedom of speech".

Lego bricks

Objects due to go on display include 1,600 Stone Age tools, 10,000 Song Dynasty cannon balls retrieved from a moat and donated Lego bricks which the artist began working with in 2014 to produce portraits of political prisoners. The exhibition will also feature a number of large-scale works installed outside the exhibition gallery. They include a piece entitled "Coloured House" featuring the painted timber frame of a house that was once the home of a prosperous family during the early Qing Dynasty (1644-1911).

Exhibition curator Justin McGuirk said the things Ai had been collecting over the years represented "a body of evidence about different histories, different cultural moments in China's history (that...) maybe have been forgotten or not thought about enough". "Ai Weiwei always makes something out of destruction and plays on the idea of construction," he added. "Making Sense" will run from Friday until July 30.—AFP



A team of veterinarians and wildlife experts from Four Paws International, examine elephant Noor Jehan during a medical assessment at the Karachi Zoo in Karachi.—AFP

Ailing Pakistan elephant survives jumbo diagnosis

International vets "nearly lost" a 17-year-old elephant in Pakistan on Wednesday after knocking her out to perform diagnostic tests, but they now hope to treat multiple issues that have left her crippled for months. Noor Jehan has been barely able to walk around her enclosure at Karachi Zoo because of a huge growth between her back legs, sparking concern from keepers and visitors.

A team of veterinarians and wildlife experts from Four Paws International intervened after images of the ailing African elephant were shared across social media. "We nearly lost Noor Jehan when we gave the sedative," veterinarian Amir Khalil told reporters after the jumbo diagnosis. "It was a risky procedure." A huge crane was deployed on Wednesday to lift the 3.5-ton pachyderm after she had been tranquillized.

Ultrasound and other tests suggest Noor Jehan has a huge hematoma inside her abdomen, as well as issues

with her intestines. "It is clear Noor Jehan is in serious pain and suffering," Khalil said.

"There is a treatment for this... it needs some luck and it needs a lot of work in coming days." Pakistan's zoos are frequently criticised for disregarding animal welfare, and in 2020 a court ordered the only zoo in the country's capital to shut because of its decrepit state. The zoo drew international condemnation for its treatment of an Asian elephant named Kaavan, who was later airlifted to retirement in Cambodia in a project spearheaded by US popstar and actor Cher, and carried out by Four Paws. Last year a zoo in the eastern city of Lahore called off plans to auction 12 lions to private individuals after overbreeding, saying it would instead create new enclosures for the big cats. "It is high time to phase out zoos from Pakistan," said Mahera Omar, the chief of Pakistan Animal Welfare Society.—AFP

Sports

Tucker's debut hundred leads Ireland fightback in Dhaka

Ireland reached 286-8 at stumps on third day to lead the hosts by 131 runs

DHAKA: Debutant Lorcan Tucker became only the second Irishman to hit a Test century, ably assisted by Andy McBrine's unbeaten 71, to lead a tenacious fightback against Bangladesh in Dhaka on Thursday. Ireland reached 286-8 at stumps on the third day to lead the hosts by 131 runs after resuming on a precarious 27-4 in the one-off Test.

Tucker made 108 off 162 balls before falling to the bowling of Ebadot Hossain, with Shoriful Islam taking the catch at extra cover. The wicket-keeper-batsman hit 14 fours and a six during his time at the crease and was brilliantly assisted by Harry Tector and McBrine in partnerships of 72 and 111 to put the pressure back on Bangladesh.

Tector resumed overnight for a 28-run partnership with Peter Moor before left-arm pacer Shoriful Islam gave the hosts their first breakthrough of the day. Moor was gone for 16 but Tector and Tucker staved off further damage with their stand.

Tector departed after he was found leg before wicket off Taijul Islam, but his 56 made him the first Irish cricketer to hit half-centuries in both innings of a Test match. Tucker brought up his century with a cover drive for four off left-arm spinner Taijul, raising his bat after hugging McBrine.

Mark Adair was next to bat, accompanying McBrine in a 31-run stand before he was removed by Taijul, the most successful Bangladesh bowler of the innings with 4-86. Kevin O'Brien



DHAKA: Ireland's Harry Tector celebrates after scoring a half-century (50 runs) during the third day of the Test cricket match between Bangladesh and Ireland at the Sher-e-Bangla National Cricket Stadium in Dhaka on April 6, 2023. — AFP

is the only other Irishman to hit a Test century, scoring 118 against Pakistan during Ireland's 2018 maiden Test in Dublin.

Ireland have lost all three of their previous Tests since becoming a full member of the International Cricket Council in 2017. —AFP

means the squad will be split into two over almost 24 hours. "We don't complain, but the players' comfort comes second," Sharks assistant coach Yannick Bru told French radio station RMC Sport this week. "It's pointless to say that we travel in business class," the former France and Toulouse hooker added.

Kolisi will be missing scrum-half Jayden Hendrikse and potentially lock Eben Etzebeth with injuries for the trip to Stade Ernest-Wallon, another set of flights which add to the tournament's environmental impact. "Munster don't have world class players in each position. That is the case though with Toulouse," Bru said before facing the likes of Antoine Dupont and Romain Ntamack.

"I know that danger comes from everywhere and we're not favourites," he added. Later on Saturday, the Stormers visit 2020 champions Exeter, who beat Top 14 title holders Montpellier on tries scored after extra time in the last round. Stalwarts at the English club, including No. 8 Sam Simmonds and winger Jack Nowell, will leave Sandy Park at the end of the campaign.

The Chiefs' Scotland full-back Stuart Hogg will retire after this year's Rugby World Cup. "Saturday doesn't win it for us but it puts us in a good spot," Exeter centre Henry Slade told the BBC on Monday. "We want to send those boys out on a high and to do that we're going to have to beat a hell of a Stormers team on Saturday," he added.

Good Friday

Elsewhere, four-time winners Leinster welcome Premiership champions Leicester to Lansdowne Road on Friday in front of a restricted crowd of 27,000 in Dublin. The Irish province filled the 52,000-capacity stadium for last Saturday's win over Ulster but they will have had just five working days to sell tickets for the fixture on a busy Easter weekend due to the tournament's scheduling.

Around 500 Tigers fans will travel to the Irish capital for a rerun of 2009's final. On Sunday, champions La Rochelle will host three-time winners Saracens as Australia lock Will Skelton welcomes his former side to the Atlantic coast. — AFP

S Africans storm Champions quarters with added bite

PARIS: South African sides the Stormers and the Sharks will compete in Champions Cup quarter-finals on Saturday, in a first for the country. Until this season the competition, launched in 1995 as rugby union turned professional, was reserved for European clubs. The Stormers from Cape Town, Sharks from Durban and Pretoria's Bulls made their debuts in December's pool stage.

The Sharks visits record five-time winners Toulouse in the quarter-finals, who overcame the Bulls in last weekend's last 16. Siya Kolisi's side beat Munster last Saturday in Durban and face a long journey after numerous visits north during their United Rugby Championship campaign.

The difficulty of booking flights at short notice

Saad Al-Tamimi Padel Tournament concludes tonight

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: The Saad Al-Tamimi first Ramadan Padel Tournament will come to a conclusion tonight (Friday) with two final matches one for amateurs and another for the professionals.

The preliminary matches for both categories proved highly technical and competitive, and players displayed various skills particular to the Padel game. The first stage of the tournament had 64 amateur and 16 professional teams.

The organizing committee was keen on having several exhibition matches during the three days of the tournament as the first match had Spanish pro player Erik Carrasco, British Christian Murphy, coach Ahmad Ashoor, and Mohammad Mirza. The second match had the stars of Arabi and Qadesiya football players in a Padel derby as Hussein Al-Mousawi, Fahad Al-Ansari, Khalid Mohammad Ibrahim, Ahmad Al-Riyahi, Saud Al-Ansari and Abdelrahman Al-Kout participated.



Former Arabi and Salmiya football player Hussein Al-Mousawi lauded the Padel tournament adding that "Padel sport has spread fast in Kuwait and now has several stars and committed fans". He added that there are many athletes of different sports playing Padel in their spare time.

Many participating teams played hard and main-

tained their levels and qualified for the round of eight including the teams of Ahmad Ashour, Abdelmohsen Al-Kout, Duajj Al-Duajj, Abdelaziz Al-Qaseer, Nasser Burashed, Yousuf Al-Safar, Abdelrahman Al-Shai-bani, Mohammad Al-Khannah, Baker Al-Najjar, Yousuf Al-Attar, Khalifa Al-Mulla, Omar Al-Massabahi, Musahari Al-Bannai and Ammar Shaaban.



Tennis missed chance to ban Russians and Belarusians: Swiatek

LONDON: Women's world number one Iga Swiatek says tennis authorities missed an opportunity to ban Russian and Belarusian players outright after Moscow's invasion of Ukraine, but the moment has passed to do so now, she told the BBC.

The 21-year-old Pole has been a staunch supporter of her Ukrainian rivals criticizing the WTA for not doing enough to support them. Unlike other sports which imposed an outright ban following the invasion in February 2022, tennis officials permitted those from Russia and Belarus to continue playing,

but as neutral athletes. They were allowed to play three of the four Grand Slam tournaments, with Wimbledon the exception.

Authorities punished Wimbledon organizers by not awarding the tournament ranking points, but Russian and Belarusian players will be able to compete this year after the ban was lifted. Both countries were also barred from team events like the Davis Cup, in which Russia were the defending champions.

"I heard that after World War Two, German players were not allowed as well as Japanese and Italian, and I feel like this kind of thing would show the Russian government that maybe it's not worth it," Swiatek told the BBC.

"I know it's a small thing because we are just athletes, a little piece in the world but I feel like sport is pretty important and sport has always been used in propaganda. "This is something that was considered at the beginning, tennis didn't really go that way, but

now it would be pretty unfair for Russian and Belarusian players to do that because this decision was supposed to be made a year ago."

Swiatek, who won her second French Open title in 2022 and added the US Open crown, said both the WTA and ATP had shown a "lack of leadership" following the invasion, and as a result tennis was in a "chaotic place". "I feel like tennis, from the beginning, could do a bit better in showing everybody that tennis players are against the war," she said. "I feel they could do more to make that point and tell their views, and help us cope a bit better in the locker room because the atmosphere there is pretty tense."

Last week Ukrainian tennis player Lesia Tsurenko slammed Belarus's Australian Open champion Aryna Sabalenka for claiming she had never felt so much hate in the locker room. "I think this is another game they are starting, now they are the victims, we are not," Tsurenko said. — AFP

78 shooters to partake in shooting tourney

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: The Sporting Shooting Tournament, organized by Bayan Shooting Club started on Thursday at the Equestrian and Hunting Club in Sabhan with 78 shooters participating.

Bayan Shooting Club Chairman of the Board Sheikh Sabah Ali Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah said the club is used to organizing such a tournament each Ramadan and the numbers of participants is on the rise each year.

Sheikh Sabah lauded the technical level of the shooters and competitions continue all the way to the final rounds, adding the club prepares all that is required prior to the start of competitions to create a suitable environment for shooters to perform at their best. He said Kuwait produces outstanding shooters and this is reflected positively on the national teams during international tournaments and wished shooters success.



Sheikh Sabah Ali Jaber Al-Sabah

Masters gets under way at overcast Augusta

AUGUSTA: The 87th Masters got under way on Thursday with the world's top golfers, from both sides of the sport's PGA Tour-LIV Golf divide, set to do battle at Augusta National. Former winners Jack Nicklaus, Gary Player and Tom Watson, drove off the first tee as honorary starters in the traditional ceremonial launch to the year's first major tournament.

Conditions were warm with temperatures expected to reach 87 degrees F, overcast but dry although rain is forecast for later in the week and could impact the schedule. Canada's Mike Weir, the 2003 Masters champion, was the first player in the field to get under way, playing in the opening pair with American Kevin Na.

Na is one of 18 players in the field from the new Saudi-backed LIV Golf League, which is locked in bitter legal battles with the established PGA Tour. This Masters is the first time that the top-ranked players from the PGA Tour and LIV Golf are in the same field at Augusta National.

The PGA Tour has banned LIV players, with their US court fight set to begin early next year. Just hours before the start, a tribunal in London ruled against LIV players in their dispute with the DP World Tour, formerly the European Tour.

The arbitration panel ruled that the DP World Tour was entitled to sanction the players for appearing in LIV events without authorization. The full impact of that decision will unfold in the coming weeks but players have insisted their focus this week is on the battle for the green jacket.

World number one Scottie Scheffler is looking to become just the fourth player to win back-to-back Masters. The American world number one is the bookmaker's favorite to slip into the famous green jacket when the four rounds are complete on Sunday evening.

Scheffler has been a model of consistency over the past 14 months, which has seen him win six PGA Tour titles, most recently at the Players Championship in March. Only Nicklaus, Nick Faldo and Tiger Woods have achieved successive victories in the Masters. Woods will also be out on the pristine course later on Thursday in what he has speculated could be one of his last appearances in the tournament he has won five times.

Dampening expectations

A victory for Woods would see him equal Nicklaus' record of six triumphs in the Masters, but hampered by a series of injuries, the 47-year-old has been dampening expectations. "I don't know how many more I have in me," Woods said. "So just (have) to be able to appreciate the time I have here and cherish the memories." Last year's runner-up, Northern Irishman Rory McIlroy, is hoping to finally complete his career Grand Slam with a long-awaited Masters triumph. McIlroy has been a leading supporter of the PGA Tour, for whom a nightmare scenario would be the sight of a LIV rebel celebrating in the green jacket — not an entirely fanciful notion.

Australian Cameron Smith, the reigning British Open champion, tied for third at Augusta last year, while fellow LIV Golf player Brooks Koepka has won four majors and Dustin Johnson, who won LIV's first season, triumphed in Augusta three years ago. The PGA Tour has a much deeper list of contenders with world number three Jon Rahm of Spain, 2015 winner Jordan Spieth and two-time major winner Justin Thomas among those in with a chance. — AFP

Sports

Bucks clinch top playoff seeding

Lakers remain less clear after their loss to Clippers

LOS ANGELES: The Milwaukee Bucks downed the Chicago Bulls 105-92 to clinch top seeding throughout the NBA playoffs on Wednesday as the Los Angeles Lakers' charge towards the postseason stumbled in a defeat to the Los Angeles Clippers. Bobby Portis scored 27 points while Brook Lopez added 26 points as the Bucks bagged their 58th win of the season to seal top spot in the Eastern Conference.

The win means Milwaukee will have home-court advantage through the playoffs as owners of the best record in the NBA. With Giannis Antetokounmpo rested, Milwaukee demonstrated their strength in depth with a balanced offensive display.

Point guard Jrue Holiday took on the play-making responsibilities, with 15 assists and eight rebounds in addition to a 20-point haul, while Jevon Carter added 16 points. Milwaukee's offense turned the game around in the third quarter, transforming a 61-51 deficit with a 15-0 run that put the Bucks into a 66-61 lead.

The only blemish on the evening for Mike Budenholzer's side was an injury scare to Khris Middleton, who departed after less than nine minutes on court with a knee problem. Wednesday's victory however means the Bucks can rest their frontline players through the final two games of the regular season, which wraps up on Sunday before the playoffs get under way on April 15.

"Obviously, over an 82-game season there's going to be highs and lows, there's going to be times when you struggle and times when you're hot," Portis said after the win. "But staying together, building our habits on a daily basis, building our chemistry has been key, and hopefully we can take that into the postseason," he added.

The identity of Milwaukee's first-round opponents in the playoffs will not be determined until the

completion of next week's play-in tournament.

Elsewhere on Wednesday, the Boston Celtics clinched second seeding in the Eastern Conference with a 97-93 win over the Toronto Raptors.

Boston's victory ensured that the Philadelphia 76ers will finish third in the Eastern Conference.

The Sixers are poised to face the Brooklyn Nets in the first round of the postseason. The Nets all but guaranteed sixth place with a 123-108 win over Detroit on Wednesday.

Clippers down Lakers

In the Western Conference the Denver Nuggets were confirmed as number one seeds in their half of the playoffs after the Memphis Grizzlies were beaten 138-131 in overtime by the New Orleans Pelicans.

But the playoff hopes of the Los Angeles Lakers remains less clear after their 125-118 loss to the Clippers. A weary-looking Lakers side—who returned to Los Angeles after a gruelling overtime victory in Utah on Tuesday—trailed for almost the entire game as the Clippers brought up their 11th consecutive win over their city rivals.

The Clippers set the tone early on, jumping out to a 15-3 first-quarter lead in the opening minutes.

The Lakers rallied to lead by one briefly in the opening period before the Clippers reasserted themselves to pull clear, at one stage opening up a 24-point lead in the third quarter.

LeBron James led the scoring for the Lakers with a game-high 33 points while Norman Powell (27 points) and Kawhi Leonard (25) carried the Clippers to victory. The loss leaves the Lakers outside the top six automatic playoff spots with two regular-season games remaining.

The Lakers are seventh in the standings with a 41-39 record, with the Clippers and Golden State Warriors just ahead of them with identical 42-38 records.



MILWAUKEE: Brook Lopez #11 of the Milwaukee Bucks and Derrick Jones Jr. #5 of the Chicago Bulls dive for a loose ball during the second half of a game at Fiserv Forum on April 05, 2023 in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. — AFP

Elsewhere, the Dallas Mavericks kept their faint hopes of a playoff spot alive with a 123-119 win over the Sacramento Kings in Texas.

Kyrie Irving led the Mavs' scoring with 31 points while Luka Doncic finished with 29 to give Dallas a fighting chance of reaching next week's play-in tournament.

Dallas are 11th in the standings, one place outside

the play-in qualification spots. "It's not over until it's over," Irving said. "We've just got to keep putting one foot in front of the other and keep maintaining the poise and mentality and the results will come."

"We don't control our own destiny but we can control our effort out here right now." Four clubs advance to the play-in mini-tournament to determine the final two teams that join the top six finishers in each conference. — AFP

Nantes down Lyon to reach French Cup final

PARIS: Nantes reached a second straight French Cup final as Ludovic Blas' brilliant goal gave the holders a 1-0 last-four victory over Lyon on Wednesday. Antoine Kombouare's side booked a place in the April 29 showpiece at the Stade de France against either Toulouse or second-tier Annecy.

Lyon are still waiting for a first appearance in the final since winning the competition in 2012, after failing to back up last weekend's Ligue 1 victory over Paris Saint-Germain. Nantes, whose Cup triumph last season was their first major trophy since winning the league in 2001, have a golden chance of a successful defence.

"These are rare, exceptional moments," said Nantes coach Kombouare. "When you experience a season like last year, you tell yourself that it doesn't only happen once in a lifetime, and then here we are again."

Record 14-time winners PSG suffered a second straight early exit in the last 16 to Marseille, who were then dumped out by Annecy. Nantes started brightly on Wednesday as they continued their bid for a fifth French Cup.

Jean-Charles Castelletto was denied an opening



NANTES: Nantes' Cameroonian forward Igniatius Ganago (C) heads the ball during the French Cup semi-final football match FC Nantes vs Lyon at the Beaujoire stadium in Nantes. — AFP

goal in just the second minute by Lyon goalkeeper Anthony Lopes, who also saved from Blas 20 minutes later. Samuel Moutoussamy thought he had broken the deadlock just after the half-hour mark but his effort was ruled out for offside.

Nantes striker Mostafa Mohamed missed good chances either side of half-time, calling Lopes into

action again before blazing wide. Blas made no such mistake in the 57th minute, though, controlling Fabien Centonze's long ball on his chest before slamming a left-footed volley past Lopes.

Bradley Barcola went close to a late equaliser as Lyon belatedly woke up, but Nantes held on for a deserved victory. — AFP

ities and the police to find out what happened.

"If you continue like this, you will get a situation where even home supporters will be banned," Yesilgoz told the ANP news agency. Games between the bitter Amsterdam and Rotterdam rivals are often flashpoints but there has been a rising incidence of football violence in the Netherlands.

Fifa President Gianni Infantino urged Dutch authorities to take action. "There is absolutely no place for violence in football, on or off the field," Infantino said on his Instagram account. "Such events... have no place in our sport or in society all players have to be safe and secure to play the game, and I call on the relevant authorities to ensure that this is respected at all levels."

The Dutch Football Federation KNVB also condemned the incident. "Dutch football has sunk to a new low", the KNVB said in a statement. "Thousands of people go to the stadium to watch the

players play football. Then it is insane that they are apparently not safe on the field." Referee Allard Lindhout stopped the game in the 63rd minute for almost half an hour after a lighter thrown from the stands hit Klaassen, who was left with a bleeding head wound. Ajax eventually won 2-1 to qualify for the final where they will play PSV Eindhoven.

Klaassen, who scored his team's second goal in the 51st minute, tried to continue after the restart but left the pitch a few minutes afterwards, holding his head. Dutch newspapers called for action. "How long will this still go on?" asked the daily tabloid De Telegraaf in a headline. "Yet again something went wrong at this classic match, where away supporters are in any case not allowed," the paper said. The Dutch police union told the Algemeen Dagblad tabloid that the referee should have stopped the match altogether. "Such bad behaviour should not be rewarded," the union said. — AFP

Napoli to bounce back at Lecce with Milan showdown

MILAN: Napoli travel to Lecce on Friday trying to bounce straight back from their crushing home defeat at the hands of AC Milan with the all-Italian Champions League quarter-final between the two looming. Coach Luciano Spalletti said he would know whether his team's four-goal thumping on Sunday was "a crack or a crater" after a Good Friday trip across to the Adriatic coast. With Napoli then travelling up to the San Siro for the first leg of a blockbuster European tie on Wednesday, Spalletti and a surprisingly split fan base will want the hole Milan punched through to be quickly closed.

A 16-point advantage over second-placed Lazio with 10 games to go, means Napoli are still all-but guaranteed their first Scudetto since 1990 but a strong display is needed after Milan made them look ordinary in the first of a trio of clashes. Star striker Victor Osimhen will again be out of action with a thigh injury after also missing the Milan defeat, but the Nigerian and Napoli are both cautiously optimistic he could return midweek.

He will also have a new face mask to wear on the pitch after losing the now iconic headgear while on international duty with his country, with whom he picked up his knock. In his place will be either Giovanni Simeone or Giacomo Raspadori, the former more likely to start by virtue of his performance when Osimhen was last injured in the autumn.

For Milan, who take to the field at the San Siro in the third game on Friday, mid-table Empoli are the perfect opposition to test whether last weekend was a freak result or a blazing return to the form which won them the league last season.

Stefano Pioli has finally returned to a back four, the formation which served him so well in his team's thrilling run to the title. Brahim Diaz, who starred in Naples alongside side two-goal Rafale Leao, is set to be rested ahead of Wednesday's Champions League clash. In Serie A, Milan are trying to cut a four-point gap between them and second-placed Lazio.

Maurizio Sarri's Lazio host Juventus on Sunday night with both teams involved in racism controversies, the capital club for anti-Semitic chanting during last month's Rome derby and Juve for monkey chants aimed at Romelu Lukaku on Tuesday night. — AFP

Dutch to probe Feyenoord-Ajax violence

THE HAGUE: The Dutch government pledged a top-level investigation on Thursday after Ajax's Dutch Cup semi-final at Feyenoord was halted when a player was injured by an object thrown from the stands. The game was stopped for almost 30 minutes after Ajax midfielder Davy Klaassen suffered a head wound, and there was also crowd trouble with fireworks and anti-semitic chants.

Dutch Justice Minister Dylan Yesilgoz said the incident would be investigated "at the highest level." She and Sports Minister Conny Helder will hold talks with the Dutch Football Federation, clubs, municipal

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, RAJAMANICKAM NAGARJAN, holder of Passport No. M5456534 having permanent address at India 609402 residing in Kuwait at present. Do hereby change my name to SUJAI (as given name) RAJAMANICKAM (as surname) for all purposes. I will henceforth be known in the name SUJAI RAJAMANICKAM and I also undertake to carry out this name change in all my documents. (C 3197)

I, Balvinder Singh S/o Sadhu Singh R/o Vill: Dulwal (Kapurthala) changed my name to Balvinder Singh & have changed the name of my wife Balvir Kaur to Balbir Kaur. (C 3198) 07/04/2023

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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CivilID card is 1889988

Benzema hits treble as 'complete' Real Madrid smash Barca to reach Copa final

Xavi booked for protesting a foul as tempers boiled over



BARCELONA: Real Madrid's French forward Karim Benzema kicks the ball and scores his team's fourth goal during the Copa del Rey (King's Cup) semi-final second leg football match between FC Barcelona and Real Madrid at the Camp Nou stadium in Barcelona. — AFP

BARCELONA: Karim Benzema struck a hat-trick as Real Madrid hammered Barcelona 4-0 at Camp Nou to reach the Copa del Rey final on Wednesday, progressing 4-1 on aggregate. Vinicius Junior opened the scoring just before the break as Carlo Ancelotti's side mounted a spectacular comeback from their one-goal semi-final first leg deficit, with Benzema adding a second-half treble.

After netting three at the weekend against Real Valladolid in La Liga, Benzema repeated the trick to humiliate Barcelona on a painful night for coach Xavi Hernandez in front of almost 95,000 distraught fans. Los Blancos trail their arch-rivals by 12 points in La Liga and were beaten by Barca in the Spanish Super Cup final in January, but triumphed here to reach the Copa final for the first time since 2014, where they will face Osasuna.

"It was a complete game—when you play a complete game, you win 4-0 like that," said Ancelotti. "This is the most important moment of the season and when we're at the right temperature (like this), we're good."

Madrid turfed out the record 31-time cup winners with a muscular performance on a spiky night in Barcelona, where they also ended a demoralising run of three consecutive Clasico defeats. Barcelona's Sergi Roberto said letting in Vinicius' goal on the stroke of half-time was a huge blow. "Their goal at the

end of the first half killed us, we didn't deserve to let in that goal. I think we were better in the first half," the midfielder told RTVE.

"We created more chances that we didn't put away, and that goal hurt our morale. In the second half they scored the second and we couldn't play our game." The Catalan said defeat would not damage Barcelona's title bid in the final weeks of the season. "Now we have a considerable points distance, it will not affect us, we have to continue and go for the league," he added.

Lethal Madrid

Xavi was without injured quartet Ousmane Dembele, Pedri, Frenkie de Jong and Andreas Christensen, and eventually it told. The game started at a furious pace and intensity, both teams keen to reach the final, but absolutely desperate not to be knocked out by the other.

Barca coach Xavi was booked for protesting a foul as tempers boiled over, while Gavi and Vinicius were also issued yellow cards as they scrapped. Thousands of Barcelona fans chanted Lionel Messi's name in the 10th minute, amid speculation he could leave Paris Saint-Germain, and they would have dearly loved some of the Argentine's magic.

Los Blancos took the lead in stoppage time at the end of the first half, when they showed their prowess on the counter-attack. Thibaut

Courtois made a fine save to deny Robert Lewandowski and exactly 20 seconds later, Vinicius struck at the other end.

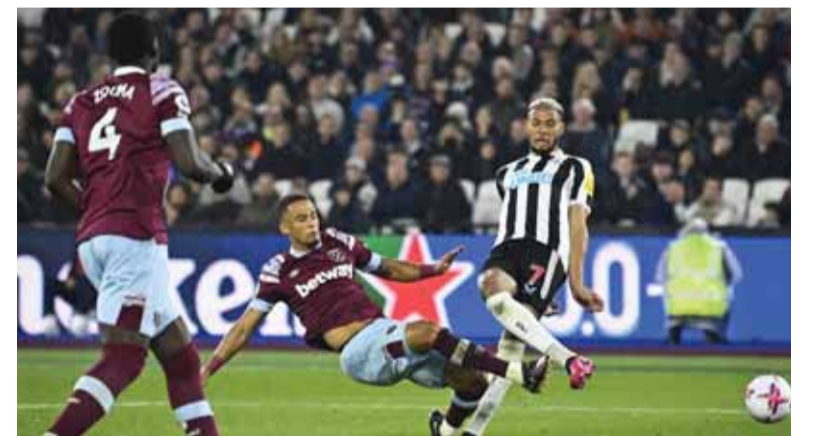
Rodrygo cut the ball back to the forward, who squeezed a shot home despite Jules Kounde's best attempt at a goal-line clearance. Benzema was on hand to make sure, but Vinicius' effort had already crossed the line.

The French forward soon was able to pounce though, finishing lethally from the edge of the box in an ocean of space after Luka Modric easily skipped away from Sergi Roberto. Barcelona collapsed after that—Benzema slotted home his second from the penalty spot before the hour mark, sending Marc-Andre ter Stegen the wrong way after Franck Kessie clumsily fouled Vinicius.

Ter Stegen denied Marco Asensio and then Benzema completed his hat-trick with a cool finish after a fine dribble and pass by Vinicius. "Congratulations to Real Madrid, they had a great second half and compete very well," said Xavi.

"If you let Madrid off the hook, they don't forgive you. It's not by chance they have won the Champions League—they have a great team." Madrid have lifted the Copa del Rey on 19 occasions, while their opponents Osasuna have never won it, securing passage to their second final after beating Athletic Bilbao on Tuesday. — AFP

Rashford fires Man Utd into top four



LONDON: West Ham United's German defender Thilo Kehrer (L) and Newcastle United's Brazilian striker Joelinton (R) during the English Premier League football match between West Ham United and Newcastle at the London Stadium, in London. — AFP

MANCHESTER: Marcus Rashford sent Manchester United back into the Premier League top four with the winner as the Red Devils beat Brentford 1-0 on Wednesday, while Newcastle won 5-1 at West Ham to stay third. Callum Wilson and Joelinton each scored twice for the Magpies, who remain above United on goal difference.

Both sides now have a three-point lead over Tottenham and a game in hand on Spurs in the race for a place in next season's Champions League. United had slipped to fifth after a run of three league games without a win and cup commitments that meant they had not registered a Premier League win since mid-February.

Erik ten Hag's men also had a score to settle with the Bees after a humiliating 4-0 defeat when the sides last met in August. The Dutch coach was stinging in his criticism of his players' attitude and desire in losing 2-0 to Newcastle on Sunday and got the response he was looking for.

"Hopefully we can build on that and get back to where we were a couple of weeks ago," said Rashford. "Everyone's clear on the fact that we're not going to play our best football every week, but we have to maintain our standards."

Rashford started through the middle as Ten Hag's patience with Wout Weghorst finally ran out and that decision bore fruit when the England international was perfectly placed to side-foot home Marcel Sabitzer's knockdown for

his 28th goal of the season. Brentford had lost just one of their previous 16 Premier League games to rise to ninth in the table.

Thomas Frank's men had offered barely anything of an attacking threat for the first hour but were nearly gifted an equaliser when Ivan Toney charged down David de Gea's clearance and the ball flew inches wide.

De Gea made amends when he spread himself to block from Kevin Schade with Brentford's only other clear sight of goal. "We want to play as a machine and not make mistakes," said Ten Hag. "We made one mistake and thankfully they didn't benefit from it. This is a massive win."

A fourth consecutive win edged Newcastle closer to the Champions League for the first time in 20 years. "We weren't at our very best but we were clinical today," said Newcastle boss Eddie Howe. "It's been a while since we've been like that. We set such high standards for ourselves, we want the team to be at our highest level."

Wilson was restored to the starting line-up by Howe in place of Alexander Isak and rewarded his manager's trust by heading home the opener after just six minutes. Joelinton doubled the Magpies lead inside 13 minutes as the Brazilian latched onto Fabian Schar's ball over the top and coolly rounded Lukasz Fabianski before slotting into an empty net. — AFP

Werner sinks Dortmund to send Leipzig to German Cup semis

LEIPZIG: Holders RB Leipzig kept their hopes of a second straight German Cup title alive, winning 2-0 against Borussia Dortmund to reach the semi-finals on Wednesday. The home side started fast against a poor Dortmund, taking the lead midway through the first half when a rampaging Mohamed Simakan found Timo Werner on the break to tap home from close range.

Defender Willi Orban scored on the counter deep into injury time to send Leipzig through to the semis for the fourth time in five seasons. After the game, Orban toasted "a beautiful ending for us" after an "emotional match, from both sides." Dortmund captain Marco Reus told German TV "in the first half, Leipzig ate us up." "We did not deserve to win that game," he added.

Dortmund midfielder Julian Brandt said his side were "extremely lucky to have survived the opening stages only conceding one goal." The two most recent Cup winners faced off in what has become an increasingly bitter rivalry between the sides most likely to challenge Bayern Munich for major trophies in Germany.

With Bayern eliminated by Freiburg on Tuesday, both sides knew a win would place them in pole position for the Cup. Leipzig came into the match having lost four of their past five matches but showed fluency and aggression in attack, peppering a shell-shocked Dortmund defence.

Visiting goalkeeper Gregor Kobel, after a howler which led to his side's collapse on Saturday against



LEIPZIG: Dortmund's German forward Marco Reus (C) and Leipzig's Spanish midfielder Dani Olmo (R) vie for the ball during the German Cup (DFB Pokal) quarter-final football match RB Leipzig v BVB Borussia Dortmund in Leipzig, eastern Germany. — AFP

Bayern, held firm, pulling off several acrobatic saves in the early stages. Leipzig eventually claimed a deserved lead on 22 minutes. Simakan running 50 metres to set up Werner for the former Chelsea striker's fifth goal this Cup campaign.

Despite a raft of attacking changes from coach Edin Terzic, Dortmund were ineffective up front, missing the link-up play of injured striker Sebastian Haller. Dortmund dominated possession late

on and went close to scoring deep into injury time, but with Kobel pushed up, Leipzig scored a second through Orban on the break to seal the victory.

Dortmund, who opened 2023 with 10 straight wins in all competitions, have now lost three of their past five. Sitting two points behind Bayern in the league, Dortmund will need to arrest the slide at home against third-placed Union Berlin — AFP