



3 Kuwait family visa ban leads to frustration, emotional torture



5 China launches three days of military drills in Taiwan Strait



RAMADAN TIMINGS	
Fajr	04:08
Shurooq	05:29
Dhuhr	11:50
Asr	15:23
Maghrib	18:11
Isha	19:30

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Kuwait slams Zionist occupation's continued attacks on Palestinians

Speaker says peace with enemy impossible • Kuwaitis rally in solidarity



KUWAIT: Kuwait on Friday condemned and denounced the continued Zionist assaults on Palestinian people, according to a statement by the foreign ministry. The ministry added Kuwait also holds the Zionist entity fully responsible for the current dangerous escalation in the region, which was started with the Zionist forces' raid on Al-Aqsa Mosque, attacking and forcibly expelling Muslim worshippers.

It reiterated Kuwait's unequivocal rejection to the Zionist unabated offenses and systematic escalation, violations and serious crimes, which breach international humanitarian law and international conventions. The ministry warned such acts risk provoking the anger of Muslims worldwide. It renewed the call for the international community to shoulder its responsibility and take swift action to stop Zionist violence and violations and provide full protection to Palestinian people, worshippers at Al-Aqsa Mosque and Muslim sanctuaries in the occupied territories.

Meanwhile, National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem on Friday called for using all effective means to show solidarity with and support for the Palestinian people at both official and unofficial levels. Ghanem said in a press statement that continued Zionist arrogance and violations at Al-Aqsa Mosque require an immediate Arab move to expose the practices of the occupation entity.

He added that atrocious aggressions targeting Palestinian worshippers at Al-Aqsa Mosque and Zionist military operations in Gaza and south Lebanon show once again that peace with this enemy is impossible. The speaker also underlined that it is necessary to launch



JERUSALEM: A Palestinian devotee reacts as she arrives at the Al-Aqsa Mosque compound for the third Friday noon prayer during the Islamic holy month of Ramadan on April 7, 2023. — AFP

wide-scale political, financial, relief and media campaigns to promote the steadfastness of the Palestinian people and expose the practices of the occupation entity before the international community.

On Wednesday, Zionist riot police stormed the prayer hall of Al-Aqsa Mosque in a pre-dawn raid. A Qatari official said Doha was mediating between the Zionists and the Palestinians. Qatar — which has acted as a broker in previous understandings between the Zionist entity and Hamas — “is working to deescalate the situation on all sides,” the official said, speaking on condition of anonymity. — KUNA

RAMADAN KAREEM

Loving yourself

By Sharafun-Nisa'a Mohammed Farouk

Loving yourself outside worldly measurements may prove to be difficult. But with faith in Almighty Allah, and true understanding of the essence of your existence on earth, you can learn self-love within the parameters of the Islamic teachings. You can't fully love yourself when there's always a definition of perfection out there that doesn't match you or your life. Hence, it's a constant fight you are in — within.

You should understand that the Majestic Allah is your Creator, Cherisher, Protector, Provider and safe haven. He decided to Create you the way you are for a reason. So, be happy with who you are and don't look down upon others. Moreover, Almighty Allah has honored you. Almighty Allah Says what can be translated as: “And We have certainly honored the children of Adam and Blessed them with the means of conveyance on the land and sea and Provided for them of the good and wholesome things. Moreover, We have Preferred them over much of what We have created with [definite] preference.” (Al-Isra'a 17: 70)

Some of halal steps to love yourself: a. Focus on the best in you and be grateful: Yes, I know our hearts have been broken several times, but you know what? Our behavior should only increase in love and positivity, not because we will appear to be beautiful to others but because the Majestic Allah Sees it all. Because He is the Only One who knows how much we have been through, yet we are still keeping our heads up and spreading goodness. He will Protect and Reward us abundantly.

Continued on Page 6

Zelensky hosts iftar, vows to retake Crimea

KYIV: Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelensky on Friday criticized Russia's treatment of the Muslim-minority Tatar community in Kremlin-controlled Crimea and vowed to recapture the peninsula from Russia during a first official state iftar. Russia wrested control of the Black Sea territory from Ukraine in 2014 and pushed through a referendum on the annexation that was condemned as fraudulent and illegitimate by Ukraine and its Western allies.

“Russia's attempt to enslave Ukraine ... began exactly with the occupation of Crimea, exactly with repressions against Crimean, Ukrainian and Crimean Tatar freedom and of Crimean Muslims,” he told Ukrainian Muslim leaders and ambassadors from Muslim countries. The Tatar community, which ac-

Runaway black hole creating trail of stars

LOS ANGELES: A huge black hole is tearing through space, leaving behind a 200,000-light-year-long trail of newborn stars, space scientists say. The supermassive monster — likely born of a bizarre game of intergalactic billiards — is rampaging through the blackness and plowing into gas clouds in its path. The incredible forces at play mean this gas is being forged into a contrail of new stars, which have been captured on camera by NASA's powerful Hubble Space Telescope.

“We think we're seeing a wake behind the black hole where the gas cools and is able to form stars,” said Pieter van Dokkum of Yale University. “What we're seeing is the aftermath. Like the wake behind a ship, we're seeing the wake behind the black hole.” Researchers believe gas is probably being blasted and warmed by the motion of the black hole. “Gas in front of it gets shocked because of this supersonic, very high-velocity impact of the black hole moving through the gas,” said van Dokkum.

The black hole weighs about the same as 20



KYIV: Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky attends an iftar meal with Muslim Ukrainian servicemen during the holy month of Ramadan on April 7, 2023. — AFP

counted for 12-15 percent of the two million Crimea residents, largely boycotted the 2014 vote.

Moscow then banned the Mejlis — the traditional assembly of the Tatar Muslim minority in Crimea — declaring it an extremist organization and has jailed

Continued on Page 6

First image of Kuwait sent by Kuwait Sat-1

KUWAIT: The team of the first Kuwaiti national satellite project of Kuwait University (Kuwait Sat-1) announced on Friday the satellite took its first images of Kuwait since its launch earlier this year and weaved them into a mosaic, providing a beautiful view of the eastern half of the country. The islands of Warba, Boubyan and Failaka, in addition to Kuwait City and its southern coastline are featured, Vice President of the KFAS/KU team Dr Ahmad Al-Kandari said in a press statement, deeming as “fruitful” the constant efforts and hard work of the specialized team of young Kuwaiti scientists and engineers over the past three months since the launch of Kuwait Sat-1.

Continued on Page 6



The image of the eastern part of the country captured by Kuwait Sat-1. — KUNA



Kuwaitis rally in solidarity with Palestinians



KUWAIT: Kuwaiti citizens rally in solidarity with Palestinians in Irada Square opposite the National Assembly on April 8, 2023. Political groups and NGOs also participated in the demonstration. Despite appeals for restraint, violence has surged since Zionist police stormed Jerusalem's flashpoint Al-Aqsa mosque and bombarded both Gaza and Lebanon. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat

Sheikha Abrar Al-Sabah to revive Kuwait's position in 'Khaleeji-wood'

KUWAIT: America's prominent news platforms such as Washington Daily, Yahoo Finance, Market Watch, and many other international renowned news platforms such as UK Times have highly praised the journey of Kuwaiti media entrepreneur and producer, Sheikha Abrar Khaled Jaber Al-Ali Al-Sabah, as a Kuwaiti Royal family member who is contributing to the Arab cinema and drama content through her company Abbey's Productions, a Kuwait-based production house that is dedicated to elevate the cinematic and new media content in Kuwait and the region.

"It is an honor to be making headlines and recognized by regional and international reputable news platforms. My goal from the get-go was to set a benchmark to the media content produced by our region and expose our authentic and raw stories to the global audience. I believe that being recognized by such platforms is an initial step towards achieving this goal," stated Sheikha Abrar Al-Sabah.

The coverage report discussed three main impacts of Sheikha Abrar Al-Sabah's production work on the industry: the impact of her work on the representation of Arab women (specifical-

ly women in the Gulf), the advancement of the film-making equipment and technicalities used in her work, and her contribution to the concept of media entrepreneurship as a Kuwaiti female.

In the article, she stated: "Female filmmakers in the Gulf are breaking the stereotypical roles of women in our region and they are highly contributing to the industry. However, more women in Kuwait need to explore other fields than acting because we are in need of Kuwaiti female writers, directors, and producers depicting accurate pictures and narrating raw stories of women in our country and the region," explained Sheikha Abrar Al-Sabah. She added that women in the Gulf have the power to eradicate the misrepresentation of the region on global motions, and that Kuwaiti women can reshape the nation's policies and contribute to the country's global position by capitalizing on this wide-open window that will expose the real power of Kuwaiti women in different areas of life.

Kuwait's royal family member affirmed that her goal is to elevate the media content produced in the Gulf to align with the international standard of cinema and television. Accordingly, her production house, Abbey's productions, focuses on the technicalities of the produced content by adopting the most authentic stories and well-written scripts, using latest film-making and production equipment, and producing the highest quality of content.

In her statement, Sheikha Abrar Al-Sabah also highlighted Kuwait's key role in the Gulf's drama and film industry, and stressed on the importance of capitalizing on this untapped non-oil economic opportunity to diversify Kuwait's economy saying: "Kuwait needs to invest in this field and reposition itself in the 'Khaleeji-wood'."



Sheikha Abrar Al-Sabah

She also explained the importance of nurturing Kuwait's film-makers, storytellers and content creators; noting how Kuwaiti film-makers are currently being acquired by Saudi Arabia and contributing to the Kingdom's emerging film industry. "Kuwaiti film-makers have had their prints in the region's film and drama industry. In addition to so many Khaleeji (Gulf) drama and movies, Al Sattar (2022) on Netflix

is a Saudi film but was directed by the prominent Kuwaiti director, Abdullah Al Arak. Kuwait's TV drama industry is considered to be the largest and most active drama industry in the Gulf.

Our film-makers, actors, and actresses were the first to pave the way for TV drama and film in the region. Our country must capitalize on this opportunity and reposition itself through Kuwaiti media professionals," she added. As for media entrepreneurship, Sheikha Abrar Al-Sabah elucidated the significance of supporting media entrepreneurs and empowering them through prominent and key festivals such as the Red Sea Film Festival and Gona Film Festival.

"We always hear about tech entrepreneurs, startups, social media influencers, and lifestyle businesses. However, media entrepreneurship is rarely tackled in our region despite this field's hulking revenues," she noted. The article also featured the recent outlook conducted by the international company, PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC), on MENA's cinema revenue and taps onto the large revenues that this industry makes in the region. The outlook report forecasts MENA's cinema revenue to increase by 4% in 2024 compared to the global cinema revenue, which is to decrease by 2.4%.

The report also showed that the revenue of MENA alone constitutes almost 2% of the global cinema revenue (including Asia). "I don't see that there is any contradiction between working in the media and being an Arab woman. I come from a Royal family and I am still committed and dedicated towards my mission and hopes for my country, Kuwait, to be globally positioned through the Global 'wood,'" concluded Sheikha Abrar Al-Sabah.

Fishing sector suffering 'severe labor shortage'

KUWAIT: Kuwait Fishermen Union stressed the importance of filling vacancies in the fishing sector, explaining the sector suffers from a severe shortage of labor, especially since fishing is a hard profession. It is difficult to provide labor from the local market, as it needs special skills, which requires recruitment of labor from abroad.

The union called on the Interior Ministry to save the fishing sector and meet recruitment requests. A large number of fishing license holders have applied to the union, asking it to find a solution, because disregarding their demands threatens the entire fishing sector and forces their ships and boats to a halt, which will result in a severe shortage of local products.

"The Fishing Department of the Public Authority for Agricultural Affairs and Fish Resources understood the problem of fishermen and addressed the ministry of interior. However, so far the fishermen's requests to bring in the necessary labor allowed in fishing licenses have not been approved," the union said in a statement. "What is happening will affect the prices of fish in general, because it is the local product that stabilizes prices in particular and markets in general," the union indicated, calling on officials to protect local products, work to remove challenges facing the fishing sector, listen to the demands of fishermen and resolve the issue of employment with the necessary speed.

The union noted the seriousness of the issue because it is related to food security and concerns citizens, pointing out any rise in prices will have an impact on the consumer. Therefore, the union is ready to cooperate with all parties to put an end to the suffering of fishermen. "We are performing our national duty in providing food security, and we are working hard to manage the stability of prices to preserve local produce," the union said.



KUWAIT: A vendor displays fish at a fish market in Kuwait City in this file photo. Kuwait Fishermen Union stressed the importance of filling vacancies in the fishing sector, explaining the sector suffers from a severe shortage of labor. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

Local

Growing frustration and emotional torture as ban on family visas lingers

‘My wife feels emotionally hurt every time I call her’

By Chidi Emmanuel

KUWAIT: Standing at the entrance of the interior ministry building in Mishref, Abdullah Saad, an Egyptian expat, could not contain his frustration as he narrated his ordeal over the ban on family visas. “This is really frustrating. We (Saad and two of his friends) come here every month to check if the ban has been lifted, but we always get the same answer - no,” he said in dismay.

On June 27, 2022, the Kuwait government announced and implemented a temporary ban on issuing family visas for expatriates. The ban applies to all nationalities, including those who have been residing in the country for many years. The decision was made to reduce the number of foreigners living in Kuwait and address the country’s demographic imbalance. The ban applies to all types of family visas, including those for spouses, children and parents.

Officials have defended the decision, stating that it is necessary to address the country’s demographic challenges. The ban prohibits the issuance of family visas for expatriate family members. This means that those who are currently residing in Kuwait cannot bring their family members to live with them in the country until the ban is lifted. “The ban is preventing family members (especially non-Westerners) from reuniting, thereby causing emotional distress and family strain. I really need my wife to be with me. It has not been easy with me. The separation is affecting our relationship. If I had known, I wouldn’t have sent them home after COVID,” Saad said regrettably.

The family visa ban can have a significant impact on families, both emotionally and financially. “This ban has caused emotional distress for families who are unable to reunite, especially those of us who have young children. I only have 30 days of vacation annually. This is not enough. I wish I can bring my wife and my son here.



According to Kuwait’s family visa rule, I am qualified to bring my family here. I have a monthly salary of KD 700. It is more frustrating to know that you can, but you actually can’t because of the ban. My wife feels emotionally tortured every time I called her,” Raph Davis, an African expat, told Kuwait Times. The ban has also had financial implications for families, as they are now forced to bear the costs of living in two separate locations. “Apart from the emotional torture, the financial burden is much too. I have to pay rent here and (there) for my family in my home country, coupled with the high cost of living now. This ban has triggered emotional stress and financial difficulties for many expats who are struggling to cope with the separation,” Davis added.

“The ban on family visas has a significant impact on the social and emotional well-being of expatriate families. It also makes it challenging for expatriates to manage their work and family responsibilities, as they will have to travel back and forth between Kuwait and their home countries. The ban also has economic effects. It may discourage skilled expatriates from coming to work in Kuwait. Many skilled workers prefer to bring



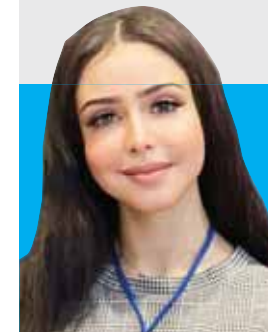
their families with them when they move abroad, and the ban on family visas may make it less attractive for them to work in Kuwait. The ban has led to a decrease in consumer spending, which could affect various sectors of the economy,” explained Ahmed Zaki, a sociologist.

Amir Hassan, an Indian expat, explained the difficulty in renting a flat without a family. “It is hard to find a decent flat in Kuwait unless you have a family. Most building owners and harises (caretakers) prefer to rent flats and houses to families. They always ask for marriage certificates and the wife’s civil ID copies. We are still sharing a flat with another family even though we can afford to pay for a flat,” he said, as his friend nodded in confirmation.

“We are appealing to the government to review this decision so that we can reunite with our families,” Hassan’s friend Vihaan added, as he thanked Kuwait leaders for their wisdom, wishing them Ramadan Kareem. It is important to note that the ban only applies to new applications for family visas. Expatriates who already have family members living with them in Kuwait are not affected by the ban.

In my view

Patriarchy, job opportunities and equal pay



Atyab Al-Shatti

Local@kuwaittimes.com

The issue of gender discrimination in the workplace is not a new phenomenon and is a problem that continues to persist even in modern societies. In Kuwait, women in male-dominated jobs face significant challenges, making it harder for them to earn a living compared to their male counterparts. The discrimination that women face on the basis of their gender is not only unjust, but also perpetuates inequality in the workplace.

One area where this discrimination is particularly evident is in the field of law. Despite the fact that the criminal law does not take into account the gender of the litigator, most clients prefer to hire male lawyers to represent them before the criminal court. This is a clear manifestation of gender bias in the workplace, and it deprives women of equal job opportunities and equal pay.

The discrimination that women face in the legal profession is not limited to criminal law. Women lawyers in Kuwait also face difficulties in other areas, such as family law, where they are often seen as less competent than male lawyers. This stereotype is deeply ingrained in Kuwaiti society, and undermines the efforts of women to break through the glass ceiling and succeed in male-dominated fields.

The issue of gender discrimination in Kuwait is not unique to the legal profession. Women face similar challenges in other male-dominated industries such as engineering and construction. The prevailing attitude in these industries is that women are not suited for the demands of these professions, and this attitude often translates into limited job opportunities for women.

To combat this discrimination, there needs to be a concerted effort to change attitudes and beliefs about gender roles in Kuwaiti society. This change can be achieved through education and awareness campaigns that focus on promoting gender equality and the importance of diversity in the workplace. Additionally, policies need to be put in place to ensure that women have equal job opportunities and receive equal pay for equal work.

Another way to address the issue of gender discrimination is through the active involvement of women in leadership roles. When women hold positions of power, they are better able to advocate for policies that promote gender equality and fight against discrimination. This, in turn, can help to create a more inclusive workplace culture where women are given the same opportunities as men.

In conclusion, the issue of gender discrimination in Kuwait is a serious problem that needs to be addressed. Discrimination against women in the workplace not only deprives them of equal job opportunities and equal pay but also perpetuates inequality in society. To combat this discrimination, there needs to be a concerted effort to change attitudes and beliefs about gender roles in Kuwaiti society. This can be achieved through education and awareness campaigns, as well as policies that promote gender equality in the workplace. By working together, we can create a more inclusive and equitable society for everyone.



Kuwaiti photographer wins Sheikh Saud award

KUWAIT: The Kuwaiti photographer Mohammad Al-Kouh has won Sheikh Saud Al-Thani award for photography in Qatar for his photos of the Kuwait island Failaka. He told KUNA that the award is granted to photographers who shoot in a narrative manner. He added that his photos document all houses and buildings on the island. —KUNA



Kuwaiti photographer Mohammad Al-Kouh

WHO celebrates ties with Kuwait

KUWAIT: In commemoration of 75th Anniversary of World Health Organization (WHO) on the World Health Day (7th of April), the WHO is proud to celebrate its longstanding collaboration with Kuwait. Seventy-five years ago, in the aftermath of the deadliest and most destructive war in human history, the Constitution of the World Health Organization came into force: a treaty between the nations of the world, who recognized that health was not only a fundamental human right, but also fundamental to peace and security. Over the past seven and a half decades, there has been extraordinary progress in protecting people from diseases and destruction, including smallpox eradication, reducing the incidence of polio by 99%, saving millions of lives through childhood immunization, declines in maternal mortality and improving health and well-being for millions more.

In Kuwait over the years, this partnership has resulted in many successful initiatives and programs, including the establishment of the WHO Kuwait Country Office which further strengthened the collaboration between the organization and

the Ministry of Health, enabling them to work together more effectively to improve health outcomes in Kuwait.

As we celebrate 75th Anniversary, we recognize the importance of collaboration and partnership in achieving better health for all. The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the critical role of public health and the need for coordinated action at all levels. WHO Kuwait and the Ministry of Health remain committed to working together to address health challenges the country may face and further enhance the sustainable development goals in Kuwait health and well-being and climate action.

On his behalf Dr Assad Hafeez, WHO Representative to Kuwait, said “The collaboration between WHO and the Ministry of Health in Kuwait is a shining example of how partnerships can drive progress in public health. We are proud to celebrate this partnership on World Health Day and look forward to continuing our work together to improve the health and well-being of the people of Kuwait.” On this day, WHO Kuwait and the Ministry of Health reaffirm their commitment to working together to improve the health and well-being for everyone in Kuwait. Together we can build a healthier and more resilient future for all.

Dedicated to the well-being of all people and guided by science, the World Health Organization leads and champions global efforts to give everyone, everywhere



WHO’s representative in Kuwait Dr Assad Hafeez

and equal chance at a safe and healthy life. We are the United Nations agency for health that connects nations, partners, and people on the front lines in 150+ locations, leading the world’s response to health emergencies, preventing disease, addressing the root causes of health issues, and expanding access to medicines and health care. Our mission is to promote health, keep the world safe and serve the vulnerable.

Health is a human right provided by Sharia, constitution

KUWAIT: Islamic Organization for Medical Sciences (IOMS) President Dr Mohammad Al-Jarallah said health is a human right provided by Sharia and constitution, adding that (COVID-19) and other epidemics, wars and disasters have made health a priority to world policymakers. Dr Al-Jarallah told KUNA on World Health Day, which occurs on Friday, that health in Islam is of great importance and a blessing, because without it humans cannot perform their duties, adding that the 2023 World Health Days celebration takes the “Health for All” as a slogan.

He stressed the importance of having good health while living in a world of peace and progress. It is time that the world takes measures to fulfill its obligations towards universal health, effective health invest-

ments, developing health systems and the use of modern technologies to achieve the goals of sustainable development, noted Al-Jarallah. He stated that although health is a basic human right and everyone should have access to the health services they need, when and where they need them without financial problems, 30 percent of the world’s population is unable to obtain basic health services.

The World Health Organization (WHO) has set a number of goals to make “health for all” a reality, including raising investment rates in strong health systems and reducing health costs paid by patients, while advancing on achieving sustainable development goals with commitment to universal health coverage, Al-Jarallah indicated. He stressed the need to pay more attention to preventive medicine, promote public health, as well as looking into modern technology such as artificial intelligence, and enable nongovernmental organizations to participate in government-led planning, implementation and follow-up with the aim of achieving universal health coverage. —KUNA

Over 8,000 cases registered in first quarter

KUWAIT: New statistics from the Public Prosecution has revealed that more than 8,000 cases were registered in the first quarter of the current year. Justice ministry statistics show that from Jan 1 until March 30, the prosecution received 2,615 criminal cases and 1,175 commercial misdemeanors, while the number of cheque-related misdemeanors reached 641. The number of juvenile misdemeanor cases reached 326. The number of drug addiction cases reached 397, four press-related misdemeanor cases, cyber technology cases amounted to 1,035 and 1,873 environmental cases were recorded.

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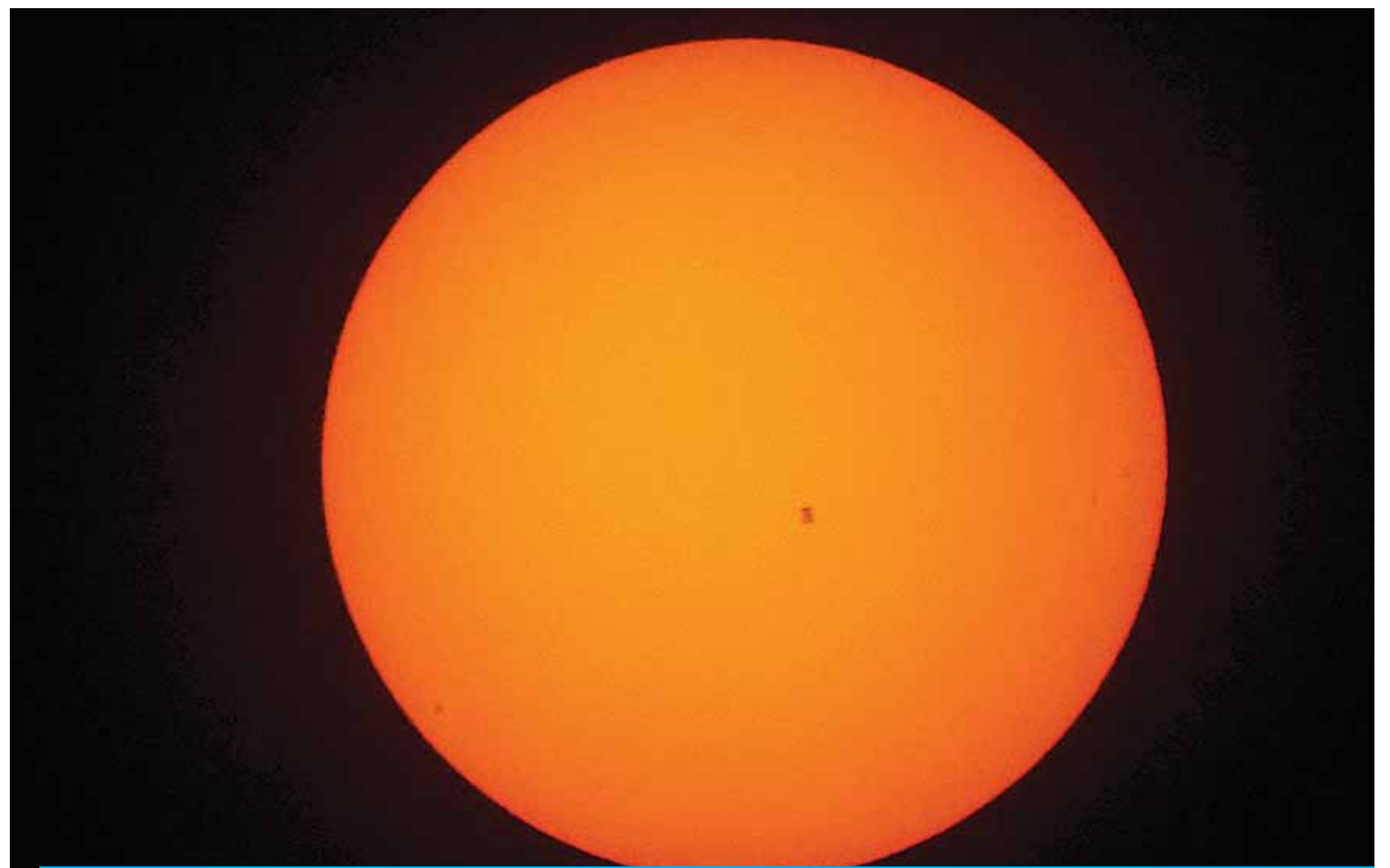
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Arab Parliament robustly decries Zionist attacks

CAIRO: The Arab Parliament has condemned in terse terms the Zionist attacks on Palestinian territories and Gaza Strip in blatant breach of international laws and treaties and human rights. The parliament in a statement held the occupation authorities responsible for the dangerous escalation against the Palestinian people, particularly during the sacred month of Ramadan, challenging Muslims' sentiments throughout the world. It urged the international community to intervene immediately to stop the stepped-up Zionist offensives on the unarmed Palestinian people. The occupation forces have recently burst into Muslims' sacred sites including Al-Aqsa Mosque, attacking worshippers.

Meanwhile, Zionists have bombarded some locations in southern Lebanon hours after a salvo of at least 35 rockets was unleashed from the south where at least three persons were wounded. The Lebanese National News Agency said artillery shells fired by the Zionist Army crashed into locations close to the Palestinian Al-Rashidiya refugee camp, inflicting some damage. Meanwhile, the international peacekeeping force, UNIFIL, said in a statement that it had been notified by the Zionist army that its artillerymen would retaliate for yesterday's attack.

The statement added that the UNIFIL commander Major General Aroldo Lazaro was holding contacts with the authorities in Zionist entity and Lebanon to maintain calm in the border region. The two sides do not desire war, the statement said. However, it affirmed that the situation remained critical in the area, where peacekeepers from various nations patrol a strip of land between Zionist entity and Lebanon. The Lebanese Army declared that its personnel found in Marjayoun plain a rocket launcher loaded with four unfired missiles. Disposal experts defused them. The local visual media had shown a number of unleashed missiles planted in groves close to the coastal city Tyre. —KUNA



KUWAIT: The International Space Station (ISS) transits the sun as seen from the Al-Layah desert, on the outskirts of Kuwait City, on April 7, 2023.

—Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

Social Affairs Ministry marks Arab Orphan Day

Projects aim to integrate orphans with friendly families



KUWAIT: The Social Affairs Ministry marks Arab Orphan Day under the theme 'We are your friends'. —KUNA



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KUWAIT: The Social Affairs Minister Mai Al-Baghli has assured that the keenness of the Ministry to provide all the support to orphans and to reduce all obstacles that they may face during the celebration of the Arab Orphan Day under the theme "We are your friends". Al-Baghli said the Ministry is keen to develop projects related to orphans, especially the "friendly families" and the "surrogate mother" projects, which received great attention from the authorities.

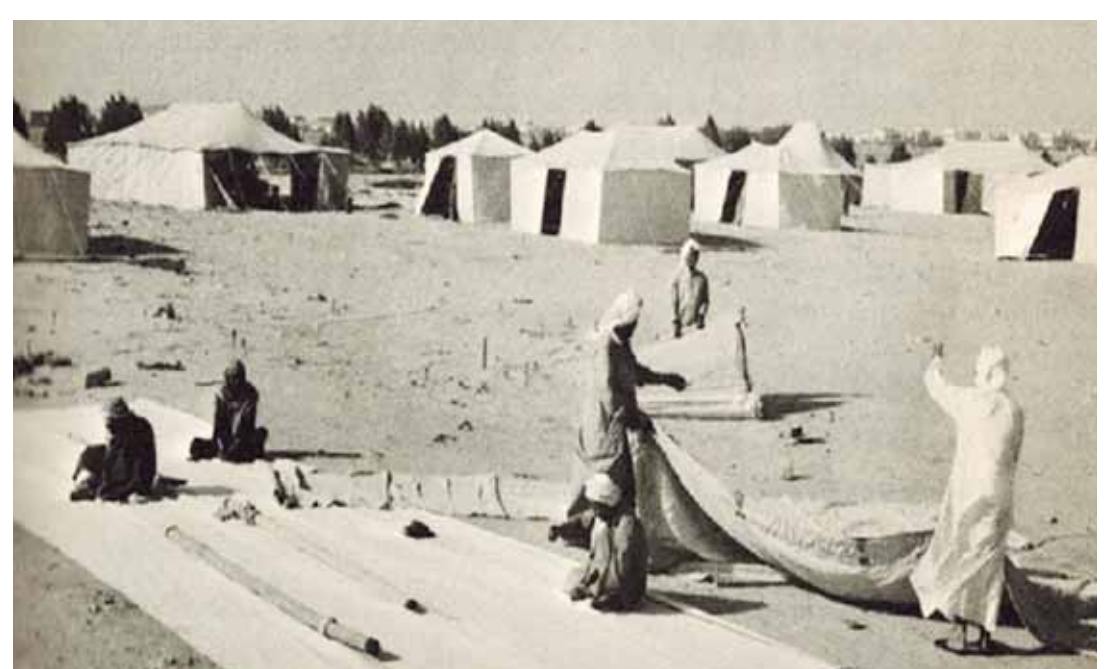
More specifically, the Family Nursery Department has exerted all its capabilities for the success of the two projects through a specialized work team that aims to integrate the orphans psychologically and socially with friendly families. She concluded her statement by thanking the officials of the administration for their pivotal role in rehabilitating the orphans and integrating them into society.

Director of the family nursery department, Dr Khaled Al-Ajmi announced that there are 654 orphan children who are under the care of family nursery. "Orphan care is one of the basic projects that the Family Nursery Department seeks to apply scientific solutions based on social and psychological criteria. We aim to increase the number of children fostered by Kuwaiti families, which is in the interest of orphans," Dr Al-Ajmi said.

He clarified that the Family Nursery Department has an integrated technical team who supervises the foster



children - to ensure their safety and their integration with their surrogate mothers and friendly families. "It works to establish controls that govern the relationship between families and the children in accordance with the law, in a way that guarantees the rights of children and helps them to have a stable family upbringing," he added.



KUWAIT: Photo captures the tent makers in old Kuwait. The workers work to complete one of these tents that are made specifically for sale. (Source: By David Cooke new York, 1970. Prepared by Mahmoud Zakaria Abu Alella, researcher in the heritage at the Ministry of Information)



Christians mark Easter in destroyed Palestinian village

Pyongyang claims another underwater nuclear drone test

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Texas federal judge suspends FDA approval of abortion pill

Unprecedented ruling puts women's health at risk: Biden

WASHINGTON: A federal judge in Texas overturned the two-decade-old approval of a safe and effective abortion pill on Friday, the latest volley in a conservative battle against reproductive rights in the United States. If it stands, the ruling by a Donald Trump appointee would reverse permission granted by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) for a drug widely used to terminate unwanted pregnancies.

The FDA and the Justice Department both filed appeals against the decision on Friday, with President Joe Biden pledging to "fight this ruling". "The lawsuit, and this ruling, is another unprecedented step in taking away basic freedoms from women and putting their health at risk," he said in a statement.

But, in an illustration of how deep the fracture on abortion runs in US society, a judge in Washington state moments later ruled in a separate case that access to the drug must be preserved in more than a dozen states. The dueling legal opinions, along with the appeals, means the issue is almost certain to end up before the Supreme Court. The conservative-dominated panel last year overturned the landmark Roe v. Wade ruling that had enshrined a woman's right to abortion for half a century.

Reaction to the Texas ruling was swift. Biden called it an ideological attack on women's rights and freedoms. "The court ... has substituted its judgment for FDA, the expert agency that approves drugs," he said. "If this ruling were to stand, then there will be virtually no prescription, approved by the FDA, that would be safe from these kinds of political, ideological attacks."

The president of the powerful American Medical Association, Jack Resneck, said that allowing judges to interfere in "extensive, evidence-based, scientific review of ... well-established FDA processes is reckless and dangerous." Planned Parenthood, one of the

largest pro-abortion groups in the United States, said the ruling by Judge Matthew Kacsmaryk — a former conservative activist aligned with the religious right — was an assault on science.

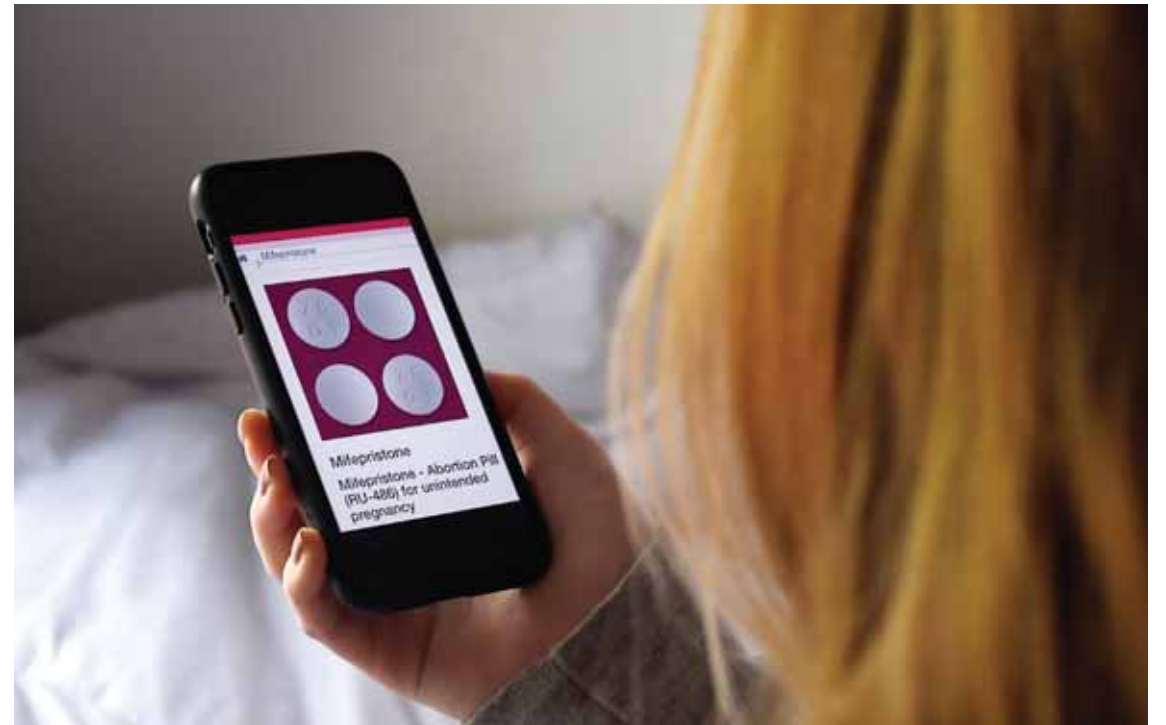
"We should all be enraged that one judge can unilaterally reject medical evidence and overrule the FDA's approval of a medication that has been safely and effectively used for more than two decades," said the group's president Alexis McGill Johnson. Kacsmaryk's ruling came after a coalition of anti-abortion groups sued to freeze the national distribution of mifepristone.

While he stayed the FDA's 23-year-old approval, he also halted "applicability of this opinion and order for seven days" to allow time for appeals. Anti-abortion groups hailed the move. "Today's decision out of Texas is a win for the health and safety of women and girls," said Katie Glenn of Susan B Anthony Pro-Life America. "The ruling reaffirms that pregnancy is not an illness and abortion is not health care. Finally, the FDA is being held accountable for its egregious violation of its own rules."

'Judge-shopping'

The case landed in his court via what critics call "judge-shopping," in which plaintiffs take legal action in a district where the judge has a history of rulings that support their case. Federal judges in the United States have a right to issue rulings that carry national legal force. Opinion polls show a majority of Americans favor access to abortion.

But the issue is an explosive one for those on the right, especially evangelical Christians. A number of Republican-dominated states have begun trying to restrict access to abortion, and have launched legal attempts to overturn what many believed was settled law.



In this file photo illustration taken on May 8, 2020, a woman looks at website with the Mifepristone Abortion Pill on her smart phone in Arlington, Virginia. — AFP

The Supreme Court ruling last year was seen as a major victory for the movement. But it has proved unpopular with the electorate. Some observers said the Republican failure to capture the Senate in last year's midterm elections, along with their lackluster showing in the House, was at least partially the result of their support for the issue. More than half

of all abortions in the United States are performed with medication. Mifepristone is one component of a two-drug regimen that can be used in the United States through the first 10 weeks of pregnancy. It has a long safety record, and the FDA estimates 5.6 million Americans have used it to terminate pregnancies since it was approved. — AFP

China begins three-day drills encircling Taiwan

BEIJING: China launched military drills around Taiwan on Saturday, in what it called a "stern warning" to the self-ruled island's government following a meeting between its president and the US House speaker.

Dubbed "United Sharp Sword", the three-day operation — which state media said includes rehearsing an encirclement of Taiwan — will run until Monday, the People's Liberation Army's (PLA) Eastern Theatre Command said in a statement.

Taiwanese President Tsai Ing-wen immediately denounced the drills, pledging to work with "the US and other like-minded countries" in the face of "continued authoritarian expansionism".

China's war games would send planes, ships and personnel into "the maritime areas and air space of the Taiwan Strait, off the northern and southern coasts of the island, and to the island's east", said Shi Yin, a PLA spokesman. A report from state broadcaster CCTV said: "The task force will simultaneously organize patrols and advances around Taiwan island, shaping an all-round encirclement and deterrence posture."

The report went on to detail the type of weaponry China was putting through its paces, including "long-range rocket artillery, naval destroyers, missile boats, air force fighters, bombers, jammers and refuellers".

Taiwan's defense ministry released a video showing soldiers loading anti-aircraft missile launchers, fighter jets taking off, and other military preparedness exercises. The footage included surveillance of China's Shandong aircraft carrier,



PINGTAN: A man walks with a flag as a ship passes by behind him on Pingtan island, the closest point to Taiwan, in China's southeast Fujian province on April 8, 2023. — AFP

which sailed through waters south of Taiwan earlier this week. The 75-second clip, which included English subtitles, ended with a caption saying: "We seek neither escalation nor conflict, but we remain steadfast, rational, and serious to react and defend our territory and sovereignty."

Live-fire

Exercises on Monday will include live-fire drills off the coast of China's Fujian province, which faces Taiwan, the local maritime authority said. The maneuvers come after a meeting between Tsai and US House Speaker Kevin McCarthy in California.

China views democratic, self-ruled Taiwan as part of its territory and has vowed to seize it one

day, by force if necessary. "These operations serve as a stern warning against the collusion between separatist forces seeking 'Taiwan independence' and external forces and against their provocative activities," the PLA's Shi said.

"The operations are necessary for safeguarding China's national sovereignty and territorial integrity," Taiwan's defense ministry said eight Chinese warships and 42 fighter jets were detected around the island on Saturday. The ministry expressed "solemn condemnation of such irrational actions", adding the detections included 29 jets that crossed into Taiwan's southwestern air defense identification zone (ADIZ), the highest number in a single day this year, according to data collected by AFP. — AFP

Biden weighs in after Tennessee vote to expel Black lawmakers

WASHINGTON: US President Joe Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris on Friday showered attention on three Tennessee officials targeted for expulsion from the state legislature over their support for gun control, as the fracas escalated into a major national row over race and representation.

Biden spoke via phone with the "Tennessee Three" and "thanked them for their leadership in seeking to ban assault weapons," a White House statement said. Biden invited the three to the White House "in the near future," it added.

The Republican-led Tennessee House of Representatives expelled two Black lawmakers on Thursday after they disrupted an assembly session to demand stricter gun controls in the wake of a deadly mass shooting at an elementary school. A third white legislator who joined their protest was not removed.

Accusations of racism have reverberated around the case, and sparked anger among Democrats well beyond Tennessee. Harris, the nation's first Black vice president, arrived in Nashville in a clear message of solidarity with the three officials. She at-

tended a rally at Fisk University, a historically black institution, and met with the three Democrats targeted over the gun protests.

On March 30, just days after a shooting rampage at a Christian school killed six people, legislators Justin Jones, Justin Pearson and Gloria Johnson joined hundreds of protesters on the state House floor to challenge lawmakers to favor stricter gun control. Jones and Pearson used a bullhorn to shout "Gun control now" and "Power to the people" while rallying protesters in the galleries.

The extremely rare move to expel the lawmakers caused an uproar, with Biden calling it "shocking, undemocratic, and without precedent," and reiterated calls for America to overcome its divisions to tackle the scourge of gun violence. Their protest followed the shooting death of three young students and three staff at a private Christian elementary school in the state capital on March 27.

"Silencing the voices of two Black members for peacefully protesting gun violence is not only racist but also a radical shift away from the democratic rules & traditions our nation was founded upon," tweeted Yvette Clarke, a Black congresswoman from New York.

The legislature voted mostly along party lines on Thursday to expel Jones and Pearson for breaching floor rules. A vote to expel Johnson failed by one vote, with half a dozen Republicans joining Democrats to vote against her expulsion.



WASHINGTON: US President Joe Biden invited the three expelled lawmakers to the White House "in the near future". — AFP

Jesse Chism, a Democratic state legislator, compared the vote to the era of racial segregation. "It looked like a Jim Crow-era trial," he said. Speaking to MSNBC, Jones called the expulsion "a dangerous precedent for the nation" and a "direct assault on democracy," urging the Justice Department to look into the legality of the move. "If you didn't tell me this was happening to me, I would think it was 1963 instead of 2023," he went on. "Because what we're seeing is a predominantly white supermajority, undoing democracy, forcing their will on my district which is a predominantly Black and brown district, one of the most diverse in Tennessee." — AFP

US radio NPR halts tweets in Twitter row

WASHINGTON: US radio NPR upheld a freeze of activity on Twitter Friday as a report said Elon Musk was revisiting his decision to label the highly respected broadcaster as "state affiliated." Twitter earlier this week designated Washington-based National Public Radio as "state-affiliated media," branding the venerable news outlet in the same way as government-owned Chinese and Russian platforms.

In its updated Twitter bio, NPR's main account — which has more than 8.8 million followers — invited users to "find us everywhere you read the news." Other accounts run by NPR, such as its music and politics handles, did not have the "state-affiliated" specification and have continued to post tweets.

Musk's move against NPR came just days after Twitter stripped The New York Times of its verified status on the platform, which like NPR, is often accused of left-leaning bias, particularly by US conservatives. According to Twitter policy, the decisions will de-amplify tweets from both companies, limiting their reach on a platform that remains a major communication tool for media outlets, celebrities and officials.

NPR CEO John Lansing said the decision by Twitter was "unacceptable" and the radio's account has remained silent ever since. "We stopped tweeting from the main @NPR account after they attached that false label to it because each tweet, we publish would carry it," NPR spokesperson Isabel Lara said.

The pause would last "until we hear back from Twitter on this," she told the Nieman Journalism Lab. Musk has for years expressed a deep disdain for the news media and in recent weeks installed an automatic response of a poop emoji to emails sent to the site's main press address.

But on Thursday, NPR said Musk had signaled in a series of emails that the re-labeling may not have been "accurate" and that Twitter would look further into the matter. "The operating principle at Twitter is simply fair and equal treatment, so if we label non-US accounts as government, then we should do the same for the US, but it sounds like that might not be accurate here," Musk wrote to NPR.

According to NPR's website, the bulk of its budget comes from fees paid by member stations throughout the United States, who are themselves supported by individual donors and government funds. NPR, one of America's most respected news outlets, told AFP less than one percent of its operational budget comes from federal sources. — AFP

International

Pyongyang claims another underwater nuclear drone test

Test proves weapon system's 'fatal attack ability': State media

SEOUL: North Korea said Saturday it had tested another underwater nuclear attack drone, in its latest response to South Korean and United States military drills, though analysts have questioned whether Pyongyang has such a weapon.

In recent weeks, North Korea has tested what state media have described as an underwater nuclear-capable drone, and also carried out the launch of an intercontinental ballistic missile.

"A national defense science research institute in the DPRK carried out a test of underwater strategic weapon system from April 4 to 7," the official Korean Central News Agency said. "The underwater nuclear attack drone 'Haeil-2'... cruised 1,000 km of simulated underwater distance ... for 71 hours and 6 minutes."

KCNA added that "the test warhead accurately detonated underwater. The test perfectly proved the reliability of the underwater strategic weapon system and its fatal attack ability." North Korea has claimed to have conducted three tests of underwater drones in less than three weeks so far.

On March 23, it claimed to have conducted the first test of the Haeil, which means tsunami in Korean, able to unleash a "radioactive tsunami" as it blamed US-South Korea exercises for a deteriorating regional security situation. Five days later it said it had carried out a second test.

In response South Korean Defence Minister Lee Jong-sup told MPs Seoul was "capable of monitoring and detecting such drones infiltrating underwater". Satellite imagery has also indicated a high level

of activity at North Korea's main nuclear complex after leader Kim Jong Un ordered the production of weapons-grade nuclear material be ramped up.

North Korea last year declared itself an "irreversible" nuclear power and Kim recently called for an "exponential" increase in weapons production, including tactical nuclear weapons. South Korea and the United States on Wednesday staged joint air drills involving at least one US nuclear-capable B-52H strategic bomber, Seoul's military said.

North Korea views such exercises as rehearsals for invasion, and has responded to other recent drills with a spate of increasingly provocative banned weapons tests. North Korea is seeking to diversify its delivery mechanisms in addition to increasing its nuclear stockpile.

Russia has also reportedly developed a similar weapon — nuclear-capable Poseidon torpedoes — but mastering the complex technology required for such weaponry might yet be beyond North Korea, experts said. But the North's claims about the tests should not be "easily dismissed for being exaggerated", Choi Gi-il, professor of military studies at Sangji University, told AFP.

"While the North could have exaggerated the degree of success to some extent, they appear to show Pyongyang's underlying confidence in this technology, some of which could have been transferred from Russia." Russia and North Korea have not officially commented on the transfer of the underwater drone technology, Choi added. — AFP



This undated picture taken from the period of April 4 to 7, 2023 and released by North Korea's official Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) on April 8 shows an underwater strategic weapon system submerging in the East Sea, also known as the Sea of Japan. — AFP

Taiwanese, Chinese unfazed by military drills in Taiwan Strait

TAIPEI: A group of university students practiced their dance moves in Taiwan's Liberty Square Saturday, seemingly unfazed by massive Chinese military exercises around the self-ruled island.

Beijing has termed the three-day drills a "stern warning" to Taiwan over President Tsai Ing-wen's meeting with US House Speaker Kevin McCarthy, but the show of force is part of life for residents of Taipei. "Of course, I am a bit afraid," said Hong Xiang-yu, a 23-year-old university student, after dance practice in the popular public square in central Taipei. "Look, we are at Liberty Square. I hope to stay free, to do whatever I wish and say whatever I want to say."

The imposing square, flanked by Taipei's grand National Theater and National Concert Hall buildings, has become a site for social gatherings as well as rallies and protests. Residents regularly gather there and school bands and dance troupes are a common sight.

Students from a high school ceremonial honor guard twirled imitation rifles on Saturday outside a massive memorial for former Taiwanese leader Chiang Kai-shek. "I think many Taiwanese have gotten used to it by now, the feeling is like, here we go again!" said 16-year-old Jim Tsai.

Chiang, who set up a rival government in Taiwan after his Kuomintang troops lost a civil war to Chinese communists in 1949, is a divisive figure on the island. Many youths see Chiang as synonymous with the kind of authoritarianism now seen in China, which

views Taiwan as part of its own territory. The former leader oversaw a brutal military regime that exiled, imprisoned and killed thousands of opponents until his death in 1975. Liberty Square has become a symbol of the everyday practice of social freedom and a reminder of what Taiwan has overcome.

While people there appeared to have grown accustomed to Chinese aggression, they still hold faith that Taiwan will remain free. "We are concerned, but we need to move on. I believe our government will not let us down," Hong said. Taiwan's flag fluttered in the breeze behind the massive Chinese arches that stand at the square's entrance.

"They (China) seem to like doing it, circling Taiwan like it's theirs. I am used to it now," said Michael Chuang, a 32-year-old construction worker. He, like many others, remained pragmatic. "If they invade, we can't escape anyway. We'll see what the future holds and go from there," Chuang said.

'There's nothing going on'

In China, Chinese tourists on an island near Taiwan sunned themselves and snapped seaside selfies on Saturday, unaware — or at least unbothered — by Beijing's launch of major military drills in the strait beyond.

Brandishing colorful flags and shouting through microphones, tour guides corralled throngs of day-trippers along the coast of Pingtan, a scenic isle that is the closest point on the mainland to Taiwan, the democratic island China claims as its own.

Reactions to the drills were muted, with the sounds of the strong breeze and rolling ocean pierced only by holidaymakers' excited chatter and the whistles of guards warding off those who strayed too close to the rocky shore.

"I saw the news, but it's not going to stop our plans for today," said Wu, a visitor of about 30 years old who was strolling the coastal path with his partner.



PINGTAN: Tourists take photos of the Taiwan Strait at the closest point to Taiwan, on Pingtan island, in China's southeast Fujian province on April 8, 2023. — AFP

"Relations with Taiwan aren't great at the moment, but they're stable. We hope for peaceful reunification," he told AFP. Others said they had not heard about the drills or shrugged off their importance. "What situation? There's nothing going on," a woman in her 20s said, walking off without giving her name.

AFP did not see any military vessels transiting the waters off Pingtan on Saturday morning, though a tugboat and several army helicopters were spotted on Friday afternoon and evening. A handful of cargo

boats cruised through the waters about a kilometer offshore, while tourists in sunglasses and baseball caps crowded around art installations themed around the island's proximity to Taiwan.

The drills "are just a few preventive measures being taken by the government", said Lin, a man of around 50, adding he hoped China and Taiwan would unify one day. "As an average person, I just hope that the mainland does well, and Taiwan does well too," he told AFP. "We're one big family." — AFP

Loving yourself...

Continued from Page 1

This is not easy but it is also not impossible. You have the ability to control your whims or let your heart become their slave.

b. Pray and stick to the Sunnah (sayings, acts, and approvals of Prophet Muhammad - PBUH): Always pray to the Loving Allah sincerely with your heart pouring out love and affection for the Loving God (Allah), then Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). You can't love yourself if you don't love Almighty Allah. If the foundation is weak, the building will definitely collapse and destroy everything in its vicinity. We need to strengthen our connection with our Creator and then leave everything to Him, after trying our best. Our minds need to know that we need Almighty Allah all the time. As an important pillar of salah (Muslim Ritual Prayer), the sujoud (prostration) feels like the best place in this world for a broken heart.

c. Explore yourself and learn about the world more: In order to bloom in the most beautiful colors, you will need to hone your skills as much as possible. Constant reading provides you with the insight into many different aspects of life in this world. It helps your brain grow, and helps you learn to avert some mistakes.

d. Stand up for what's right and safeguard your heart: You don't always need to say, "Yes" to be polite. You don't need to trim your limits for different people. You cannot put ethics and morals on the side for someone. You simply can't let your most precious gift be used by someone else! Your heart is a gift from Almighty Allah, and it is your responsibility to keep it safe from any harm and evil. You belong to Almighty Allah alone.

e. Do what you love and have passion for, and make use of your skills: Salama bin Al-Akwa (RA) narrated that Allah's Messenger (PBUH) went out to some people of the Aslam (tribe) who were competing in shooting in the marketplace, and said (to them) what can be translated as: "Shoot, sons of Ishmael: for your ancestor was an archer. I am supporting the children of so - and - so," referring to one of the two parties. They then stopped, and when he asked what the matter was, they replied, "How can we shoot when you are supporting the children of so - and -

so?" He said, "Shoot: I am supporting all of you." (Al-Bukhari # 3, 507)

f. Forgive yourself and stop self-blame: You skipped two meals because someone just crushed your heart. You did not read the Noble Qur'an because your mind was too distracted. You have cuts on your arms which you hide with the long sleeves of your shirt, but you still laugh in front of others, just to hide and disregard your pain. But why? This will only consume you more, suck up all your energy, and leave you feeling worthless. You need to take your problems seriously and deal with them maturely and not ignore them, because, you are YOUR own superhero! You need to be one! You need to save your life and not encourage pain to grow on you!

g. Use positive affirmations and believe that you're worthy of Allah's bounties and blessings, and in front of Allah (SWT) you are very valued. Remember you are here for a reason and you need to fulfill that obligation and return to Him.

h. Avoid peace-breakers and negative energy, and surround yourself with positive and energetic people. Abu Mousa Al-Ash'arey (RA) narrated that Allah's Messenger (PBUH) said what can be translated as: "Indeed, the example of a good companion and an evil one is that of one person carrying musk and another blowing in bellows. The one carrying musk may give you some perfume as a gift, or you may buy some from him, or you may experience a good fragrance from him. But the one blowing in bellows may burn your clothes or you may get a foul smell from him." (Sahih Muslim # 2, 628)

i. Give and accept love: If you love yourself and others for the sake of Almighty Allah, then this part should be extremely easy. - give love. Be the light that illuminates in absolute darkness, and instill hope in the hearts of the people you interact with. Protect and love everyone, and promise Almighty Allah to never hurt or annoy or harm anyone. Anas bin Ma'lik (RA) narrated that Allah's Messenger (PBUH) said what can be translated as: "None of you (truly) believes until he loves for his brother what he loves for himself." (Al-Bukhari # 13)

j. Remember the Day of Judgment and the Hereafter: The more you remind yourself of the final abode in the Hereafter, the less this world will entice you. You will always resort to Almighty Allah whenever you suffer from any predicament. In every hardship, your prayer and patience will give you strength. — Courtesy of the TIES

Zelensky hosts iftar, vows to...

Continued from Page 1

members of the community since, citing security concerns. "There is no alternative for Ukraine, or for the world, other than the de-occupation of Crimea. We will return to Crimea," Zelensky said, before handing out awards to several Muslim Ukrainian servicemen.

Zelensky, speaking at a mosque outside the center of the capital, announced that Ukraine was beginning a new tradition of hosting an official iftar, the meal breaking the daily fast during the holy month of Ramadan. "Ukraine is grateful to the Muslims of our country and to everyone in the Muslim community of the world who, like us, longs for peace and protection from evil," he added.

Several Muslim-majority countries, including Turkey and Saudi Arabia, have positioned themselves as mediators in the conflict in Ukraine, brokering agreements between Kyiv and Moscow on grain exports or prisoner exchanges. Russia has a large Muslim minority from southern regions, including Chechnya and Dagestan, many of whom are fighting for Moscow in Ukraine.

Top Muslim clerics in the country have put their differences aside and rallied behind the Kremlin, media have reported. Numerous Muslim names have already appeared on lists of Russian captives, and



KYIV: Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky hands a recognition to a serviceman after an iftar meal with Muslim Ukrainian servicemen. — AFP

according to analysis by Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, about one third of casualties are soldiers with non-Slavic, mostly Muslim names.

Notably, Chechen strongman and Putin ally Ramzan Kadyrov has dispatched a unit of loyalists to Ukraine. Kadyrov's forces have become a symbol of Russian tyranny in Ukraine — and for some, Muslim-Christian conflict, according to the Washington Post. Far-right Azov Battalion fighters have filmed themselves smearing bullets in pork grease to antagonize Muslims fighting for Russia. — Agencies

First image of Kuwait sent by...

Continued from Page 1

"This achievement is a badge of honor on the chest of every person who has worked in it and a source of inspiration for Kuwait's youth in the fields of science, technology, engineering and mathematics," Kandari quoted the national project team as saying. He stressed this success constitutes a new beginning to enhance Kuwait's position in the field of space, develop its scientific and technological capabilities, boost Kuwait's research and development

capabilities in the field of space sciences and reflect the country's commitment to promoting a culture of innovation and sustainable development.

Kandari added the team plans to release more images of Kuwait taken by Kuwait Sat-1 in the coming weeks of various natural features and ecosystems, in cooperation with researchers and government agencies. Kuwait Sat-1 is a nanosatellite whose primary mission is to observe the Earth and provide accurate and reliable data for many sectors, including urban and agricultural planning, environmental monitoring and natural resource management. Kuwait Sat-1 has a high-definition camera that enables it to capture images that enable the collection of valuable information to support the sustainable development of the country. — KUNA

International

Christians mark Easter in destroyed Palestinian village

'We're here in our village, but we're refugees in our nation'

IQRIT: Surrounded by spring flowers and the ruins of their family homes near the border with Lebanon, Christians gathered Friday to ensure their Easter traditions survive decades after the destruction of their Palestinian village of Iqrit. As people burned incense beside their relatives' tombs, Father Souhail Khoury recounted the importance his community attached to returning to Iqrit.

"All the families of our village and their children come here on Good Friday to visit (our loved ones buried here) and our parents and to pray," he said at the village cemetery, as people laid flowers.

Khoury said the descendants of Iqrit were keeping their customs in the hope that it would become a habit for residents "to return to their land". The cemetery and a hilltop church are all that remain of Iqrit, whose residents were forced to leave in 1948. Despite a 1951 supreme court ruling that residents should be allowed to return, the Zionist military demolished their homes on Christmas Eve the same year.

The stones of ruined houses are still visible, amid grass and yellow flowers dotting the landscape. "We're here in our village, but we're refugees in our nation," the priest said. Khoury led the congregation of a few dozen, from young children to the elderly, in prayer beside their family tombs.

Congregant Ziyad Hanna said the crowd had put aside fears created by the recent bombardment to visit Iqrit. "We went through a very delicate situation ... But the majority of people, despite that, come to fulfil their duties and meet each other and to continue this process and this tradition," said the computer scientist. "We feel proud to be part of and associated with our village and our heritage," he told AFP.

'Discover our history'

Hundreds of villages were destroyed during the Nakba, or catastrophe, which marks the expulsion of more than 760,000 Palestinians from their homes in 1948. A book by Palestinian academic Walid Khalidi documented more than 400 destroyed or depopulated villages, while the organization Zochrot recorded more than 600 localities.

But these events are "very much denied until now" in the Zionist Entity, according to Rachel Beitarie, director of Zochrot which tries to raise awareness of the Nakba. "Once you start seeing this, you can't unsee this," she said of the destroyed villages. "You see the remains everywhere."

Having failed repeatedly to win a remedy through the Zionist courts, the descendants of Iqrit instead



IQRIT: Christian believers visit a grave at the cemetery of the Palestinian village of Iqrit, on April 7, 2023. — AFP

travel there to celebrate Christian holidays, weddings, and burials. Ranin Attallah, marking Good Friday in Iqrit, is one of those who has also camped beside the church. "We always come here with the people of the village, always for a short period," said Attallah, 45, who works in education and has written poetry about the village. "When we come here we bring (food), we sleep here, we go around, discover new things and discover our history," she added.

As the Iqrit community gathered, Christians in Jerusalem performed a procession through the Old City, retracing the steps they believe Jesus took before his crucifixion. In an Easter message, church leaders in the sacred city warned that Christians have become "targets of attacks" in the Holy Land.

Yaser al-Ayyash, a vicar from the Melkite denomination to which Iqrit residents belong, told AFP that Christian leaders were trying to support

their communities in the face of such challenges. "We have to continue with our traditions because it expresses our faith. It is a part of our faith, it is a part of the traditional life of the church here in Jerusalem, in the Holy Land," he said.

On the periphery of the Holy Land, the descendants of Iqrit are determined to celebrate each Easter. "Today, the church is everyone's home and this here is the community's home," said Khoury. — AFP

Russia formally charges US reporter with spying

MOSCOW: Moscow has formally charged US journalist Evan Gershkovich with espionage, Russian news agencies reported Friday, accusations rejected both by the reporter and his employer. The charges against Wall Street Journal correspondent Evan Gershkovich are the first of their kind in Russia since the fall of the Soviet Union, prompting an outcry from media outlets, rights groups and foreign governments.

Investigators from the FSB, the state security service that succeeded the KGB, "charged Gershkovich with espionage in the interests of his country," state-run agency TASS said, citing a law enforcement source. "He categorically denied all accusations and stated that he was engaged in journalistic activities in Russia," TASS said.

The Wall Street Journal, one of the leading US newspapers, said it heard of the charges through the media reports and rejected them. "As we've said from the beginning, these charges are categorically false and unjustified, and we continue to demand Evan's immediate release," the newspaper said in a statement.

It has previously called Gershkovich a "trusted and dedicated reporter". The case has been classified as secret, limiting the amount of information available. His arrest comes as Moscow's relationship with Washington has seriously deteriorated because of the Ukraine offensive. Washington has long accused Moscow of arbitrarily arresting Americans in order to secure the release of detained Russians.

US President Joe Biden has called for Gershkovich's release. White House Press Secretary Karine Jean-Pierre earlier described the allegation of espionage as "ridiculous." The arrest led the State Department to summon the Russian ambassador and Secretary of State Antony Blinken pressed the case in a telephone call to Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, only their third one-on-one interaction since the Ukraine offensive began in February 2022.

Appeals in Washington

The case has drawn bipartisan alarm in politically divided Washington, where the Democratic and Republican leaders of the Senate issued a rare joint statement Friday to seek Gershkovich's freedom.

"We strongly condemn the wrongful detention of US citizen and Wall Street Journal reporter Evan Gershkovich, and demand the immediate release of this internationally known and respected independent journalist," Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer and Republican leader Mitch McConnell said.

"Let there be no mistake: journalism is not a crime," the Senate leaders wrote. "We demand the baseless, fabricated charges against Mr. Gershkovich be dropped and he be immediately released." Schumer and McConnell also reiterated their "condemnation of the Russian government's continued attempts to intimidate, repress and punish independent journalists and civil society voices." — AFP

Canada repatriates 14 women, children from Syria camps

MONTREAL: Canada repatriated four women and 10 children linked to Islamic State jihadists from camps for displaced people in northeastern Syria this week, police said on Friday. This is the fourth repatriation operation conducted by the Canadian government of its nationals held in camps in Kurdish-administered northeastern Syria.

Three of the women were arrested at the airport

before appearing in court on a "terrorism peace bond application," a type of restraining order, police said in a statement. One of them, an unidentified 38-year-old woman, was transported to Alberta in western Canada and released on bail pending a hearing on conditions of her status.

"This is not a criminal charge," her lawyer, Lawrence Greenspon, told AFP, adding that the prosecutor will want to "ensure that the person follows the conditions for a period of up to one year."

The other two, Ammara Amjad and Dure Ahmed, "will remain in custody until their next hearing, which is scheduled for Tuesday," police added. "Everything was good" regarding the fourth woman, said Greenspon, who is representing all four repatriated women. She faces neither criminal charges nor a request

for a peace bond on terrorism. "The 10 children are repatriated and are with their families here in Canada," the lawyer added.

Canada's Foreign Affairs Department said Thursday it was concerned for the "health and well-being" of the Canadian children following the "deteriorating conditions in the camps" where they were confined until recently.

Last October, Canada repatriated two women and two children held in Syria and, in 2020, Ottawa allowed the return of an orphaned five-year-old girl, after her uncle filed a lawsuit against the government.

Since the end of the "caliphate" established by the so-called Islamic State group in Syria and Iraq, many countries have been reticent to accept the repatriation of the wives and children of jihadists. — AFP

DR Congo jails six for life over Italian envoy's murder

KINSHASA, DR Congo: A military tribunal in the Democratic Republic of Congo on Friday sentenced six men to life in prison for murdering Italy's ambassador in 2021, despite details about the killing remaining murky.

Public prosecutors had originally sought the death penalty for the six accused calling them members of a "criminal gang". But the tribunal decided to sentence the Congolese men — one of whom is on the run — to life in prison.

Lawyers for the accused told AFP they would appeal the verdict. Luca Attanasio was among three people shot dead on February 22, 2021, when a United Nations convoy was ambushed in the DRC's troubled east. The other fatalities were Congolese driver Mustapha Milambo, who worked for the United Nations' World Food Programme (WFP), and Italian police officer Vittorio Iacovacci.

The three had been in a convoy of two WFP vehicles when they were ambushed about 20 kilometres (12 miles) from the eastern city of Goma, near the wildlife haven Virunga National Park. According to the account of the attack delivered before the tribunal, assailants blocked the car containing Attanasio and shot the driv-



KINSHASA, DR Congo: Defendants stand during the sentencing for the killing of Ambassador Luca Attanasio in 2021, at the military prison of Ndolo, Kinshasa, on April 7, 2023. — AFP

er, before leading the other occupants into the bush.

Park rangers alerted to the attack then followed the group and exchanged fire with them. Vittorio Iacovacci, the ambassador's bodyguard, was killed on the spot. Attanasio was also shot and later died of his wounds in a hospital in Goma.

The evening of the attack, the DRC's government blamed the FDLR — a militia descended from Rwandan Hutu extremist groups that carried out the 1994 Tutsi genocide in Rwanda. Other officials cast the attack as an attempted kidnap-for-ransom gone wrong.

The latter version of events won out when Congo-

lese police arrested six suspects in January 2022, and they initially confessed to an attempted abduction. But the defendants denied their confessions at trial, arguing that they had been extracted under torture.

Their lawyers also argued that there was a lack of hard evidence that the accused were involved in the killings, and pushed for acquittal.

During the trial, the prosecution cast the defendants as criminals who had intended to kidnap the ambassador and demand a \$1 million ransom. The prosecutors called no experts or witnesses to the stand in support of their case, however. — AFP

Ethiopia starts dismantling military forces

ADDIS ABABA: Ethiopia has begun dismantling regional forces established by some states, aiming to integrate them into the federal army, police or civilian life, a government spokeswoman said Friday, in a move expected to arouse opposition.

Forces set up unilaterally by some states have sparked controversy, particularly during the brutal Tigray war, with security officials operating in Amhara region accused of severe human rights abuses.

"Special forces members in the entirety of Ethiopia will be reorganized with their choices fully guar-

anteed and their desires respected," federal government spokeswoman Selamawit Kassa told a press conference on Friday.

She said members could either join the federal military, the regional police or return to civilian life. Her comments followed the release of a statement by the government communications service on Thursday, announcing the start of "practical activity to enter the regions' security forces into various security structures." Ethiopia's constitution allows its 11 states, drawn up along linguistic and cultural lines, to operate their own regional police forces. But over the last 15 years, some states have gradually established their own forces, acting outside these constitutional constraints.

In Amhara, which neighbors Tigray, forces of this kind as well as local militias bolstered support for federal forces in their two-year war against Tigrayan rebels, until a peace deal was signed in November

2022. On Thursday, the government said it intended "to build a strong centralized army that can maintain Ethiopia's sovereignty and unity." "An understanding has been reached with the special forces leadership and members," it added.

The statement followed reports of localized unrest in Amhara where regional forces have begun to disarm, with Selamawit on Friday blaming the spread of "false information". "In some places based on lack of information and also without properly understanding the program's aims... some (problems) have occurred," she said. "The society shouldn't listen to false information... intended to confuse the population and to create a country which has a weak and disintegrated force." The peace deal signed last November between the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) and Ethiopia's government has sparked anger among some Amhara residents, who have a long history of border disputes with Tigray. — AFP

Business

SUNDAY, APRIL 9, 2023

Yellen downplays recession fears, expects US economy to grow

World Bank could lend \$50bn more over decade with reform

WASHINGTON: US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen expects the world's biggest economy will continue to grow, despite heightened recession concerns following recent turmoil in the banking sector. The dramatic collapse of Silicon Valley Bank (SVB) and Signature Bank last month had rattled the industry, prompting US authorities including the Treasury Department and Federal Reserve to step in to prevent contagion.

While the situation has calmed, analysts warn that fallout from the recent instability could continue — as banks tighten lending standards, reducing available credit to households and businesses.

But Yellen told AFP in an interview: "I continue to anticipate that the US economy will grow and the labor market will remain strong, and inflation will come down." Her comments came after JPMorgan Chase Chief Executive Jamie Dimon warned this week that the current crisis is not yet over and will be felt for years to come. While he noted that today's conditions are nothing like during the 2008 financial crisis, he added that it was not clear when the problems would end.

Asked about the matter, Yellen said she is committed to ensuring that all deposits are safe and monitoring banking system conditions. Officials are also "prepared to use all of our tools as needed for any size of institutions to keep the system safe and sound," she said.

After SVB's collapse, US authorities set out plans to ensure its customers would be able to access their deposits. A similar exception was announced for Signature Bank.

The Fed and other major central banks later launched a coordinated effort to boost lenders' access to liquidity. "Our banking system is sound and it's resilient," Yellen said, adding that it has strong capital and liquidity as well. "The actions that we have taken are intended to reinforce that and to ensure broad public confidence," she told AFP.

The World Bank's ongoing reform could result in a \$50 billion lending boost over the next decade, Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen told AFP

ahead of stakeholders' meetings next week where key changes are expected to be announced. Central bankers, finance ministers and participants from more than 180 member countries are expected to gather in the US capital for the International Monetary Fund and World Bank's spring meetings in the coming week.

A key topic of discussion will be the World Bank's evolution, amid a push for lenders to revamp and meet global challenges like climate change. The United States is the largest shareholder of the World Bank Group. "I expect there to be an update of the bank's mission to add building resilience against climate change, pandemics, and conflict and fragility to the core goals," Yellen said in the interview with AFP Thursday.

She added that there needs to be a recognition that these challenges aren't separate or conflicting but rather, inextricably linked. "Second, there will be an announcement that the bank is stretching its financial capacity to meet these objectives, and adopting changes or endorsing changes that could result in an additional \$50 billion in extra lending capacity over the next decade," Yellen said.

The move would be a significant resource boost marking a 20 percent rise in the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development's (IBRD) sustainable lending level. The IBRD is the World Bank's middle-income lending arm.

Seeking added reforms

Yellen also said there would be an announcement on updating the bank's operational model to "orient it towards the goals that we're setting." Among other things, this includes creating more incentives for the mobilization of both domestic and private capital. "We seek additional reforms during the rest of this year," Yellen said. In March, the World Bank submitted an evolution plan to be discussed with its development committee on April 12, during the spring meetings.

Noting that World Bank President David Malpass has laid a "solid foundation" for the ongoing



BENGALURU: A customer buys veggies from a stall selling vegetables at the market in Bengaluru on April 7, 2023. The world economy will continue to grow, despite heightened recession concerns following recent turmoil in the banking sector, according to US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen. — AFP

work, Yellen added that she expects US candidate Ajay Banga to be elected to the helm of the organization and continue the revamp. Banga was the sole nominee for the position after Malpass announced this year that he would step down early.

'Hopeful sign'

Also on policymakers' agendas next week are support for war-torn Ukraine and debt restructuring. "We have seen some movement by China on participating in debt restructuring for Sri Lanka, which is a hopeful sign," Yellen said. As global growth slows, the World Bank previously warned that the outlook is especially tough for the poorest economies — which face sluggish growth driven by heavy debt burdens and weak investment. Yellen

had earlier said that China should move more quickly on some debt restructurings.

Discussions on this front will continue next week as a newly formed global sovereign debt roundtable gathers, she told AFP. "We're having useful technical discussions on important elements of debt restructuring. China has been participating, and we all continue to press China for improvements," she said. Washington will continue pushing for a speedier and more predictable operation of the G20 "common framework" for debt restructuring as well.

On Ukraine, Yellen said: "Once again, we will work with all of our allies to insist that Russia cease its brutality in Ukraine." She added that the United States would press for economic support alongside its partners on this front. — AFP

Saudi finances \$240m project in Pakistan

ISLAMABAD: The Saudi Fund for Development (SFD), represented by its CEO Sultan Abdulrahman Al-Marshad, signed on Friday in Islamabad a development agreement with the Islamic Republic of Pakistan to finance the Mohmand Hydropower Dam Project through a soft development loan provided by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia through the Fund at a value exceeding \$240 million. This project aims to enhance the supply of energy and water for agriculture and daily consumption, and protection from flood risks.

At the signing ceremony, the Pakistani side was represented by the Undersecretary of the Ministry of Economic Affairs, Dr Kazim Niaz, in the presence of the Saudi Ambassador to Pakistan, Nawaf bin Saeed Al-Malki, and several officials from both sides.

By financing this project, the SFD seeks to enhance Pakistan's ability to produce clean and renewable energy, by increasing the production capacity

of electricity to generate 800 megawatts, in addition to storing about 1.6 million cubic meters of water to provide sustainable water sources for agriculture and human consumption. The project will also enhance water and food security, irrigating more than 6,773 hectares of new agricultural land, increasing the current cropping area from 1,517 hectares to 9,227 hectares, and protecting the region from the impact of floods.

During the ceremony, the CEO of the SFD said, "This project is an extension of the support being provided by the Saudi Arabia through the Fund since its inception to finance vital and economic projects aimed at achieving growth in development support for the fraternally Islamic Republic of Pakistan, as their number reached approximately 41 development projects and programs with a value of \$1.4 billion, in addition to financing oil derivatives with a value exceeding \$5.4 billion during the past four years.

Dr Niaz thanked the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia for supporting the various development sectors in Pakistan through the SFD and contributing to the financing of this vital project, citing the importance of the project and its developmental impact on Pakistan



ISLAMABAD: Saudi Fund for Development CEO Sultan Abdulrahman Al-Marshad (right) and Pakistan's Secretary Ministry of Economic Affairs Dr Kazim Niaz (center) sign agreement on loan for Mohmand Dam project in Islamabad on April 7, 2023.

and its people through the use of renewable energy to contribute to the provision of sustainable energy as well as providing water sources that enhance water and food security, praising the development efforts made by the Kingdom through the Fund since 1976 to achieve social growth and sustainable economic prosperity. It is worth mentioning that the development projects and programs financed by the Saudi Fund for Development in the energy sector at the level of Af-

rican and Asian countries amounted to 76 development projects and programs since the beginning of its development activity in 1975, of which 33 projects and programs were in African countries, 42 projects and programs in Asian countries, and one project in Latin America, in addition to the Fund's active role in supporting and developing renewable energy sector projects, which numbered 35 projects in 23 developing countries around the world. — SPA

China telecoms to fund 'rival' \$500m undersea cable to Asia

BEIJING: China's telecom giants are funding a \$500-million undersea fiber-optic internet cable network that will link Europe and the Middle East to Asia.

The EMA (Europe-Middle East-Asia) cable project is part of the growing tech war between the two superpowers, and aims to create a Chinese link that rivals a similar US-backed project. China's three main carriers — China Telecommunications Corporation (China Telecom), China Mobile Ltd and China United Network Communications Group Co Ltd (China Unicom) — are mapping out one of the world's most advanced and far-reaching subsea cable networks, according to four sources, who have direct knowledge of the plan.

The proposed cable would link Hong Kong to China's island province of Hainan, before snaking its way to Singapore, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Egypt and France, the sources added. They asked not to be named because they were not allowed to discuss potential trade secrets.

The cable, which would cost approximately \$500 million to complete, would be manufactured and laid by China's HMN Technologies Co Ltd, a fast-growing cable firm. They said HMN Tech, which is majority-owned by Shanghai-listed Hengtong Optic-Electric Co Ltd, would receive subsidies from the Chinese state to build the cable.

News of the planned cable comes in the wake of a report last month that revealed how the US government, concerned about Beijing eavesdropping on internet data, has successfully thwarted a number of Chinese undersea cable projects abroad over the past four years.

Washington has also blocked licenses for planned private subsea cables that would have connected the US with the Chinese territory of Hong Kong, including projects led by Google, Meta Platforms and Amazon.com. Undersea cables carry more than 95 percent of all international internet traffic. These high-speed conduits for decades have been owned by groups of telecom and tech companies that pool their resources to build these vast networks so that data can move seamlessly around the world.

But these cables, which are vulnerable to spying and sabotage, have become weapons of influence in an escalating competition between the United States and China. The superpowers are battling to dominate the advanced technologies that could determine economic and military supremacy in the decades ahead. — Asia Financial

US hiring eases in March as economy shows signs of cooling

WASHINGTON: US job gains eased in March for a second straight month, government data showed Friday, adding to signs that the world's largest economy is cooling as policymakers push on in their fight against inflation. The labor market data is closely watched for its potential impact on the Federal Reserve's policy decisions — but analysts believe the latest figures will not be enough to prompt a pause in the central bank's interest rate hikes.

The report "shows that we continue to face economic challenges from a position of strength," said President Joe Biden in a statement, though he conceded that "there is more work to do." The country added 236,000 jobs last month, slightly less than expected, while the unemployment rate inched down to 3.5 percent, the Labor Department said Friday. These numbers came days after separate reports showed hiring by private US companies and services sector activity eased as well.

But wage growth was solid with average hourly earnings rising 0.3 percent to \$33.18, according to

the latest data. Compared with a year ago, wages increased 4.2 percent.

"Employment continued to trend up in leisure and hospitality, government, professional and business services, and health care," said the Labor Department. The report added that the labor force participation rate continued to move up last month as well. The figures could bring some relief to policymakers who have been battling to rein in stubborn inflation.

To ease demand, the Fed has lifted the benchmark lending rate nine times since early last year.

"The data show that the labor market remains strong with the economy still creating jobs at a rapid pace," said Rubeela Farooqi, chief US economist at High Frequency Economics. However, there appear to be hints of an adjustment, she added. This is seen in areas like a higher level of jobless claims and a decline in job openings. "But with inflation remaining sticky, we anticipate the Fed will hold rates higher for some time, looking for a more significant easing of price pressures," she said.

For now, softer job growth "will comfort Fed officials that the most aggressive monetary policy tightening in four decades is starting to take effect," said Oren Klachkin, lead US economist at Oxford Economics. While the March employment data alone are "nothing like weak enough to persuade the Fed to leave rates on hold in May," a continued surge in



GARDEN GROVE: In this file photo a family walks past a "Hiring" sign at a McDonald's restaurant in Garden Grove, California. — AFP

jobless claims, softer retail sales and cooling inflation could tip the balance, said Ian Shepherdson, chief economist at Pantheon Macroeconomics. Shepherdson also cautioned that March data are effectively a "look back into the pre-SVB world," noting that the payroll survey was conducted the week after Silicon Valley Bank failed. This was "far too soon for employers to have responded," he said, adding that a hit from tighter credit conditions is coming. — AFP

Business

Climate-hit island pushes to reshape World Bank, IMF

Developing nations grapple with rising costs, soaring debts, extreme weather events

PARIS: While conflict and inflation will dominate World Bank spring meetings next week, campaigners are pushing for a redesign of global financial architecture to help countries cope with climate change. Experts say developing nations are struggling to find the funds needed to stop burning planet-heating fossil fuels and prepare for tomorrow's climate disasters, as they grapple with rising costs, soaring debts and extreme weather events. The question is what to do about it, amid international tensions driven by Russia's invasion of Ukraine and trade tussles between the US and China.

Enter Barbados Prime Minister Mia Mottley. "We believe that we have a plan," the head of the Caribbean island nation, threatened by storms and sea level rise, told world leaders at the COP27 climate summit in Egypt in November. Known as the Bridgetown Initiative, the ideas she laid out include using the International Monetary Fund to turn "billions to trillions" in investments to cut carbon pollution, as well as a tax on fossil fuel profits to cushion the economic blows of climate impacts.

While the proposals are still being debated, they have gained traction among the large economies that hold sway over the World Bank and IMF, raising hopes of action in the coming months. The World Bank is under particular pressure, in the wake of the resignation of chief David Malpass amid questions over his stance on climate change. French President Emmanuel Macron has embraced the reform push and will seek to keep up momentum with a climate finance summit in June, ahead of Bank meetings and UN climate summits later this year.

Reform plans are gaining momentum because they fill a "policy vacuum" over funding for the global climate response, said Avinash Persaud, the economist running the Barbados campaign with "one and a half people and a spreadsheet". "I feel we've got a moment here," he told AFP.

'Burning and drowning'

United Nations climate science experts have said time is running out to invest in the changes needed

to limit warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial temperatures.

Currently the world is far off track, risking enormous costs, for nature, human societies and the global economy. "Unless money is put on the table, we won't be able to solve the climate crisis," said Harjeet Singh, Head of Global Political Strategy at the Climate Action Network campaign group.

The last few years have seen waves of crop-withering heat waves, droughts and floods in key global breadbaskets. In Pakistan, for example, the economy was already struggling after years of political upheaval, but a global energy price surge and catastrophic floods last year have pushed it to the brink.

Developing countries are already losing "big chunks" of their gross domestic product each year to climate impacts, said Persaud. "We are burning up and we are drowning in the same year, that's climate change for you," he said.

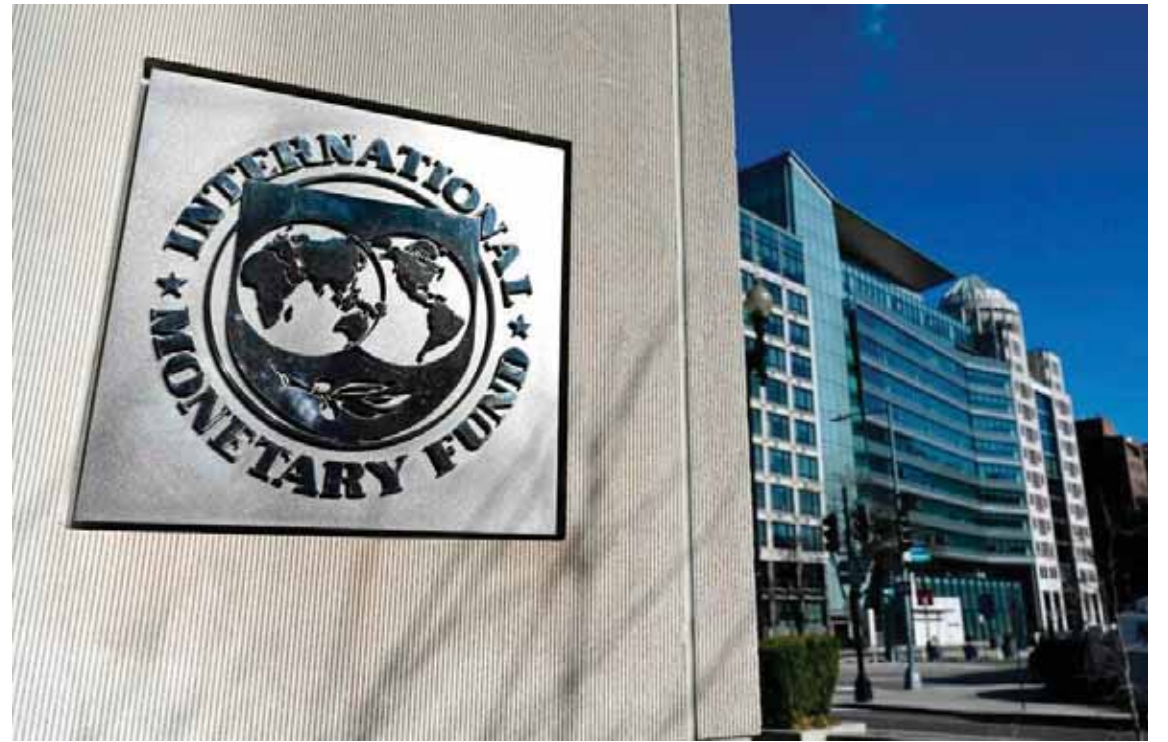
After war

The so-called Bretton Woods financial architecture was created to help rebuild countries shattered by the Second World War and boost global trade and development. The world has now reached a new inflection point, said Cameroonian economist Vera Songwe. "If you combine all these crises we have today, it feels like we just came through a war," she told AFP.

Of those crises, climate change is now "the most critical and the most sustained of risk", she said, adding it is already "permeating every aspect of global economic development".

Financial institutions have started to take action. The IMF has created a new loan-based Resilience and Sustainability Trust to help poorer or vulnerable countries boost sustainable growth. Barbados was the first recipient. The World Bank says it delivered a record \$31.7 billion last year to help countries tackle climate change and has started to draft a roadmap for change.

But even as wealthy nations have failed to meet their own target of providing \$100 billion annually



to help developing nations invest in clean energy and boost resilience to climate impacts, research has shown the true costs already far exceed that figure. Songwe co-led the Independent High-Level Expert Group on Climate Finance, set up under the UN, which last year said they will need over \$2 trillion a year by 2030 to respond to the climate crisis.

Change the world?

The Barbados plan seeks to raise those trillions using roughly \$500 billion in IMF reserve assets — known as Special Drawing Rights — as collateral in a new climate trust, which could borrow cheaply to invest in private sector emissions-reduction projects. It also calls for multilateral development banks to significantly increase their

lending, while stressing that debt arrangements should include, as Barbados has, disaster clauses allowing a country to pause repayments for two years after an extreme event.

And the plan calls for taxes — for example on fossil fuel profits — to help countries cope with climate losses and damages. Singh welcomed the proposal, although campaigners want debt cancellation on the table and a greater acknowledgement of responsibility from rich polluters.

Persaud said the hope was to build a broad coalition of countries on the climate frontlines — roughly 40 percent of the world's population — to push for change. "You will change the world for 3.2 billion people, especially because that group is growing," he said. — AFP

IMF chief calls on CBs to fight inflation

WASHINGTON: Central banks around the world should keep battling inflation by hiking interest rates despite ongoing concerns about financial stability, the head of the International Monetary Fund told AFP on Thursday. Since last year, central banks have been raising their benchmark lending rates to tackle inflation, which rose to levels not seen for decades in many countries including the United States. But their fight has been complicated by the recent collapse of Silicon Valley Bank after taking on too much interest-rate risk, setting off a period of turbulence in the banking sector on both sides of the Atlantic.

"We don't envisage, at this point, central banks stepping back from fighting inflation," IMF managing director Kristalina Georgieva said in an interview ahead of the fund's spring meeting next week.

"They have to stay the course in a much more difficult, more complex environment," she said. The biggest casualty so far has been Swiss banking giant Credit Suisse, which was pushed by regulators to merge with regional rival UBS on concerns about its long-term financial health.



WASHINGTON: International Monetary Fund (IMF) Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva leaves after an interview at Meridian House in Washington, DC, on April 6, 2023. — AFP

But Georgieva said: "Central banks still have to prioritize fighting inflation and then supporting, through different instruments, financial stability."

US-China tensions weigh on growth

Georgieva added that US-China trade tensions — part of a broader realignment of the global economy — was also having a detrimental impact on world growth. While there has been a long period in which decisions on production were guided by costs, "this is no more," she said.

"Today, the US, but also other countries, are saying I want to have security of supplies and I want to protect national security," she added. "The question is how far they should go," she asked, adding that it was possible to guard both aspects "without completely undermining the foundation for growth." Left unchecked, the long-term cost of trade fragmentation could be as high as seven percent of global economic output, she said in a speech earlier on Thursday to ambassadors and officials in Washington.

'Elusive' recovery

In the same speech, she warned that a continued slowdown in almost all the world's advanced economies is expected to drag global growth below three percent this year. "With rising geopolitical tensions, with inflation still running high, a robust recovery remains elusive," she said. "That harms the prospects of everyone, especially for the most vulnerable people and most vulnerable countries."

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 a slowdown expected for 90 percent of the world's advanced economies.

"Growth remains historically weak — now and in the medium term," said Georgieva.

She added that global 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 Georgieva said could cause poverty and hunger to increase. — AFP



Russian ruble hits 12-month low against dollar

MOSCOW: The Russian ruble on Friday fell to its lowest rate against the dollar in a year, dipping to 82 rubles to the US unit on the Moscow Stock Exchange (MOEX). Russia has been under massive sanctions imposed over the Ukraine offensive for more than a year.

Russian President Vladimir Putin — who has until now said Moscow is largely resisting the sanctions — conceded last week that the punishments could have "negative" consequences for his country.

The dollar was trading at 82 rubles on the Moscow exchange office (MOEX) at 0740 GMT. It last dipped that low in April last year, two months after the Kremlin launched its Ukraine operation.

Russia's Finance Minister Anton Siluanov on Wednesday linked the rate to the inflows and outflows of foreign currency to Russia. "These changes are associated with an increase in imports or a reduction in export procedures," he said in an interview on state television. He added the trend had been fluctuating in recent months.

Siluanov said the exchange rate "adheres to market principles, and completely floats in the conditions of changing foreign economic conditions." Asked if Russians should be worried, he said the country could count on cash inflows from the energy it continues to sell on the global market. — AFP

Dockworker shortage shuts California ports

SAN FRANCISCO: Two of the busiest ports in the United States were shuttered Friday because not enough dockworkers turned up for work, a shippers representative said. The shutdown comes as part of a long-rumbling dispute between shippers and the International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU) focused on pay and the role of automation.

"The largest ILWU local on the West Coast has taken a concerted action to withhold labor at the Ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach, resulting in widespread worker shortages," said a statement from the Pacific Maritime Association, the umbrella group that represents shippers. "The workers who did show up were released because there was not a full complement of ILWU members to operate the terminals. The action by the Union has effectively shut down the Ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach — the largest gateway for maritime trade in the United States."

The ILWU insisted the only no-shows were those marking the Christian festival of Good Friday.

"Cargo operations are ongoing as longshore workers at the Ports remain on the job," a union statement said. The two ports — known as the San Pedro Bay Port Complex — move around 20 million shipping containers' worth of goods every year, with a value of over \$300 billion.

The complex is the ninth biggest port in the



LOS ANGELES, US: This file aerial photo taken on October 14, 2021 shows the Port of Los Angeles, in Los Angeles, California. Two of the busiest ports in the United States were shuttered on April 7. — AFP

world by market share, port figures show, and plays a key role in keeping global supply chains moving.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, ports around the globe gummed up, as shippers struggled to meet demand for stay-at-home goods, a problem

that persisted as countries opened up. Economists said the slow-to-shift backlog was a contributing factor in the inflation that has gripped much of the world in the last 18 months as consumers demand products that aren't arriving fast enough. — AFP

Icelandair to buy 25 Airbus A321 jets

REYKJAVIK, Iceland: Icelandair is to buy 13 Airbus A321XLR aircraft with purchase rights for additional 12 jets as it renews its fleet, the company said. "Icelandair and Airbus have signed a Memorandum of Understanding for the purchase of 13 Airbus A321XLR aircraft with purchase rights for additional 12 aircraft," the carrier said in a statement after Thursday's agreement, adding deliveries will start in 2029.

Icelandair added that it plans to start operating Airbus aircraft in 2025, saying it is in advanced talks for four leased Airbus A321LR. "With the acquisition of the Airbus aircraft, Icelandair will complete the replacement of the Boeing 757," said the carrier, without revealing details of the purchase price of the deal. A321XLR and A321LR models belong to European manufacturer Airbus' A320neo family of narrow-body aircraft designed to afford enhanced fuel efficiency and lower carbon emissions.

Icelandair, which carried 3.7 million passengers in 2022, has a 48-strong fleet which it has looked to Airbus to renovate after Boeing ended production of its 757 three years ago. — AFP

Business

Honduras shrimp industry worried by diplomatic break with Taiwan

Free-trade agreement between Honduras and Taiwan in jeopardy

CHOLUTECA, Honduras: On the Pacific coast of Honduras, thousands of people working in the shrimp farming industry are worried about their futures following the government's decision to break diplomatic ties with their largest export market: Taiwan. "We don't want them to stop business with Taiwan," Lorena de Jesus Zelaya, 51, who works in a shrimp packing plant, said to AFP.

Along with another 800 women, she works in a warehouse in Choluteca, around 85 kilometers (50 miles) south of the capital Tegucigalpa, where frozen shrimp is packaged and sent in refrigerated containers to Taiwan, Mexico and Europe.

Wearing a hat, apron and rubber shoes, Zelaya told AFP she has worked in the shrimp industry for 31 years. Leftist President Xiomara Castro announced last month that she was breaking off diplomatic relations with Taiwan and signing on with China instead.

Shrimp workers fear that move could jeopardize the free-trade agreement between Honduras and Taiwan, signed in 2008, on which their livelihoods largely depend. "For Honduras, as a shrimp producer, losing the Taiwanese market is a very difficult situation in terms of price levels," businessman Yader Rodriguez, 46, told AFP. "Taiwan is a high-value market where our shrimp can sell at almost twice the price of the Chinese market."

Although the Chinese economy is 12 times larger than Taiwan's, "we're very worried about what this political decision will bring," he added. Rodriguez said shrimp exports are worth about \$100 million a year. Although Taiwan is a self-ruled democratic island, China claims it as part of its territory to be inte-

grated into the nation one day, by force if necessary.

Beijing refuses to have diplomatic relations with countries that recognize Taipei. Castro's move followed in the footsteps of several other Latin American countries in recent years, including Nicaragua, El Salvador, Panama, Costa Rica and the Dominican Republic. It leaves Taiwan with only 13 diplomatic allies, including Guatemala and Belize, which President Tsai Ing-wan visited last week.

Government 'open to listening'

The shrimp are farmed in huge artificial ponds using seawater from the nearby Gulf of Fonseca. Since it launched in the 1970s, shrimp farming exploded in Honduras, with 324 farms covering an area of 24,500 hectares (60,000 acres). Around 23,000 people are directly employed in the industry, but that figure rises to 150,000 when including those indirectly dependent on shrimp farming. The National Aquaculturists Association of Honduras (ANDAH) has expressed its concerns in several meetings with authorities.

They fear Taiwan could simply refuse to buy shrimp from the Central American nation and have asked the government to write to Taiwan requesting the continuation of trade relations despite the diplomatic rupture. "The government is open to listening and looking for solutions," said ANDAH president Juan Carlos Javier, adding that more than a third of shrimp export revenue last year came from Taiwan. While the government has said nothing about its trade agreement with Taiwan, many people are deeply concerned about the ramifications of ending diplomatic cooperation.



CHOLUTECA, Honduras: People work during the shrimp peeling process for their exportation in Choluteca, Honduras. — AFP

"All the families are worried ... about this (trade) agreement they want to break," Carlos Abrego, 28, who works for a shrimp company, told AFP. "We are really are very worried because here where we live, it's very serious to lose your job or to take a pay cut,"

added laborer Pedro Antonio Martinez, 34.

Shrimp is the fifth largest export for Honduras after coffee, bananas, sugar and palm oil. Last year, the country's exports were worth \$6.1 billion, with \$130 million of that coming from Taiwan. — AFP



Gulf Bank distributes electrical appliances to needy families

KUWAIT: Gulf Bank announced its participation in the humanitarian campaign led by the Red Crescent Society, to distribute electrical appliances to needy families in Kuwait – as part of its commitment towards social sustainability and to support the efforts of civil society organizations.

On this occasion, Gulf Bank's Corporate Communications Officer, Mohammed Al-Hebshi, said, "We are keen to annually participate in Red Crescent Society's generous initiatives, to extend a helping hand to needy families in Kuwait, and to bring joy to their homes during the holy month of Ramadan."

Al-Hebshi mentioned that this initiative is part of the community's initiatives that Gulf Bank organizes and participates in, especially during the holy month of Ramadan; noting that a number of

employees from the bank, volunteered to support the efforts of the Red Crescent team in distributing electrical appliances. He further pointed that the contribution to the Red Crescent's campaign to distribute electrical appliances to needy families in Kuwait is part of the various charitable initiatives launched by Gulf Bank during Ramadan, to support those who face difficult circumstances. Other initiatives include distributing Ramadan food baskets "Majlat Ramadan" to needy families, in addition to other ongoing charitable initiatives throughout the month.

Al-Hebshi indicated that Gulf Bank continues its strong commitment to sustainability programs – at community, economic and environmental levels – through various initiatives that are strategically selected to benefit the Bank and society. This falls in line with the Bank's 2025 strategy, and with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals and Kuwait Vision 2035.

He concluded his remarks stating that, "As a financial institution, Gulf Bank is committed to supporting active civil society organizations, especially the Red



Crescent Society, due to its distinguished social and humanitarian role. We believe that the private sector has a key role to play in raising awareness about these critical issues and look forward to continuing to extend our support in society."

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

Gulf Bank is committed to maintaining robust developments in sustainability at environmental, social and governance levels through diverse sustainability initiatives, strategically selected to benefit the Bank both internally and externally. Gulf Bank supports Kuwait Vision 2035 "New Kuwait" and works with various parties to achieve it.

Canada economy adds more jobs

OTTAWA: The Canadian economy gained 35,000 jobs in March while the unemployment rate remained stable at 5 percent, close to a record low for the fourth consecutive month, Statistics Canada said. Job creation increased in March, after little change in February (up 22,000) and significant gains in December (up 69,000) and January (up 150,000).

"That was a stronger outcome than expected, with the consensus of forecasters looking for only a modest increase in employment," said Royce Mendes, analyst with the Desjardins Group.

Employment rose in the private sector and remained stable in the public sector and for the self-employed. Employment growth was particularly strong in the transportation, finance and insurance sectors, but declined in construction and natural resources.

The average hourly wage for employees rose by more than 5 percent from a year ago, reaching C\$33.12 (\$24.56) in March.

The unemployment rate has not budged since it dipped slightly in December, settling near the record low of 4.9 percent recorded in June and July. According to Statistics Canada, most of the unemployed had been unemployed for 13 weeks or less. The proportion of long-term unemployed, those who had been unemployed for 27 weeks or more, was 16 percent, down from 20.3 percent a year earlier. — AFP

Global markets mixed ahead of key US employment report

NEW YORK: Stock markets were mixed on Thursday, on the eve of a long Easter holiday and key US jobs data that could provide clues about whether the world's biggest economy is headed towards recession. European indices climbed along with Wall Street, where stocks shook off early weakness and finished higher. Asian markets were mixed.

"Growing recessionary concerns cast a pall over markets," said analyst Richard Hunter at trading firm Interactive Investor. "A number of US releases suggested that the economy is beginning to wilt under the pressure of the Federal Reserve's aggressive (interest rate) hiking policy, with attention now turning to the scale of a recession, rather than whether one will happen," he said.

On Friday, investors' focus will turn to the release of key US employment figures. Fresh US government unemployment data on Thursday showed that there were 228,000 new applications for unemployment aid last week, above analyst expectations. And Friday's jobs figures could be crucial to determining the Fed's next interest rate decision. All three major European markets and Hong Kong were shut on Friday and Monday for a four-day Easter holiday weekend.

Wall Street was closed on Friday but open on Monday, with Tokyo, Shanghai and Shenzhen working on both days. "The closure... on Friday means that equity traders will be unable to react to the release until next week which, coupled with the long weekend, has seen some traders squaring positions and being unwilling to open new ones given the extended break," Hunter added. Economic institutes earlier said that Germany would escape recession this year after all and grow 0.3 percent, while fresh data on Thursday showed industrial production rose more than expected in Europe's biggest economy in February. But US data this week has been mostly weak.

On Wednesday, a report from the Institute for Supply Management showed that US services sector activity grew less than forecast last month, while a separate report pointed to private employers slowing their hiring pace in March. While traders have long hoped for a tightening of the labor market and an economic slowdown that would allow the Fed to stop lifting rates, there is now rising concern of a recession. — AFP

Egypt's dollar crunch leads to shortage of medical supplies

CAIRO: Egypt's hospitals are being forced to deal with a critical shortage of essential medical supplies because of a lack of dollars to clear imports held up at the nation's ports. Shipments of medical products, as well as materials needed for their manufacture locally, have been held up at various ports since January, an official of the Cairo Chamber of Commerce said.

"We all know the problem is that banks at this time can't secure the necessary sums in US dollars for most imports," Mohamed Ismail, head of the chamber's General Division for Medical Supplies, told CTV, a Coptic television network, on Wednesday. "But medical supplies are outside the realm of negotiation. They are essential and we simply cannot do without them. They should be made a priority." Ismail said importers has deposited payments for the goods at various banks but these were in Egyptian pounds under local banks' instructions. The General Division for Medical Supplies said it had made an urgent appeal to Egypt's central bank to renew its instruction to local banks to prioritize allocation of their dollar resources to securing essential goods.

Ismail said medical supplies made up around 1 percent of Egypt's annual imports and amounted to \$94.5 billion last year. Among the items in seriously short supply are rubber gloves, which are needed for procedures from simple examinations to surgery, he said. Egypt's import-heavy economy has been hamstrung a dollar shortage since last year after foreign investors pulled out almost \$20 billion from the debt market and a rise in global food and energy prices, brought on by the war in Ukraine, pushed up import bills and depleted its foreign reserves. — Agencies

Samsung expects first quarter profits to plunge 95%

SEOUL: Samsung Electronics said Friday it expected first-quarter operating profits to plunge more than 95 percent on-year to a 14-year low, as memory chip sales were hammered by a global downturn. Weak demand and steep profit fall also led the tech titan to announce it will scale back memory chip production in a "meaningful" manner. The firm said in a regulatory filing that January-March operating profits were expected to drop 95.7 percent to 600 billion won (\$455 million), their lowest level since the first quarter of 2009. The anticipated drop in profits was because of "continuing weak demand for IT products that have aggravated the performances of all sectors", Samsung said in the statement.

"We are cutting memory chips production to a meaningful level," it added, saying the company had "stockpiled enough supplies of certain memory chips products to meet changing market demand down the road". But it said it will continue investments in infrastructure as well as research and development in anticipation that "solid demand (for memory chips) is expected over the long run".

The decision to cut chip output sent Samsung's shares up more than four percent Friday on hopes prices will bounce back down the line.

Rival SK Hynix jumped more than six percent. Samsung did flat in the statement "solid sales of the new Galaxy S23 series" from the smartphone division, said analyst Han Dong-hee of SK Securities in a report. "But with the memory division swinging to the loss, it is inevitable for the operating profit to be at the breakeven point level."

Samsung is the world's largest smartphone maker and the flagship subsidiary of Samsung Group, by



SEOUL: People walk past the Samsung logo displayed on a glass door at the company's Seocho building in Seoul on April 7, 2023. — AFP

far the largest of the family controlled conglomerates that dominate business in Asia's fourth-largest economy. Korean chipmakers — led by Samsung — have enjoyed record profits in recent years as prices for their products soared, but the global economic slowdown has dealt a blow to memory sales.

The recent drop in profits has not deterred Samsung from making bold investments — in March, it unveiled plans to contribute \$227 billion over the next two decades to building the world's largest chip centre in Yongin, south of Seoul.

The plan is part of the South Korean government's drive to invest heavily in six key technologies, including chips, displays and batteries — all areas where the country's tech giants are already well-established. Samsung is expected to release its final earnings report at the end of this month. — AFP



Catholic devotees take part in a Holy Burial procession during Good Friday in Santiago Atitlan, Guatemala. —AFP photos



Mayan Tzutujil indigenous people take part in the (Rilaj Mam) (The great grandfather) during a Holy Burial procession.



Women carry the procession float of the Virgin of Sorrows through the streets of the historic center of Guatemala City.

Guatemala Holy Week unfolds under new UNESCO heritage status



Catholic devotees take part in a mass before the Holy Burial procession.



Catholic devotees take part in a Holy Burial procession.



A Catholic devotee takes part in a Holy Burial procession.



Mayan Tzutujil indigenous people take part in the (Rilaj Mam) (The great grandfather) during a Holy Burial procession.

Thousands of Guatemalan worshippers wearing black hoods and purple tunics funnel slowly through the streets of Antigua carrying images of Jesus over a multicolored carpet of flowers and scented sawdust as somber music rings out. Guatemala's Holy Week celebrations, which mix Mayan rituals with Catholic religious fervor, were given UNESCO heritage status in November, bringing special meaning to this year's Good Friday processions being carried out across the country.



Catholic devotees take part in the procession of Jesus of Nazareth of Humility through the streets in Antigua.

Despite its name, Guatemala's Holy Week festival actually stretches over six weeks, reaching a fever pitch at Easter as the Central American country is transformed by extravagant processions, vigils, and the laying of brightly colored carpets throughout the streets. "For us it is cause for great joy and is a very special day to participate in this offering, especially now," lawyer Roberto Matheu told AFP, referring to the new UNESCO recognition. The 45-year-old spoke as he finished creating a carpet of flowers with his family, an activity he has done since childhood.

Guatemalans "experience Holy Week differently to the rest of the world," said Culture Minister Felipe Aguilar. Guatemala's customs, music, food and art are the result of a "cultural fusion" between the Catholicism of Spanish conquistadores and the ancestral beliefs of the Indigenous Mayan population, he said. Thousands of faithful and tourists have flooded the streets of Antigua,

the colonial capital, since Thursday to take part in the processions.

This tourist town, some 40 kilometers southwest of the capital Guatemala City, is known for its Jesus of Humility procession marking the final part of his life, with some faithful dressed as Roman soldiers. "The Jesus of Humility has always blessed us... we don't want to lose this tradition that identifies us as Guatemalans," Jose Perez,



Aerial view of Catholic devotees taking part in the procession of Jesus of Nazareth of Humility through the streets in Antigua, Guatemala.

44, a restaurant cook, told AFP. Close to churches, street vendors sell food, soft drinks and other products.

'Crawlers'

Spanish colonizers brought Holy Week celebrations to Guatemala in the 16th century but the local Mayan population soon syncretized it with their own traditions and worldview.

Guatemalans prepare typical colo-

rial dishes, such as dried fish, pickled vegetables and sweet preserves. "I feel very satisfied... and I will remain here to be with this devotion," farmer Jorge Pines, 65, told AFP, adding that he had taken part in such processions for the last 40 years.

In Mayan neighborhoods, locals wearing traditional outfits take turns carrying images of their saints through the streets. "People are happy because it has been three years" since the last such procession due to the pandemic, said Susana Leimi, 45, a trader in the village of Santiago Atitlan, around 100 kilometers (60 miles) west of the capital. In the northwestern San Andres Sajcabaja municipality, home to indigenous people from the Mayan K'che' ethnicity, around 15 devotees crawl on hands and knees some five kilometers through the streets to mark the Passion of Jesus, the short painful period before his death.

The "crawlers," dressed only in loincloths with their faces covered, wear thorns on their heads or backs to atone for their sins. Other devotees place rugs in their path to protect their knees. —AFP

Three new Star Wars films on the way

Three new Star Wars movies are in the making, studio executives announced Friday, including the first film in the cinematic universe to be directed by a woman.

Pakistan-born Oscar-winner Sharmeen Obaid-Chinoy is leaping from the Marvel universe to the Star Wars galaxy to direct a new film set 15 years after the end of the last movie.

She will direct British actor Daisy Ridley as she returns to the role of Rey, the heroine of the last trilogy, which wound up in 2019 to mixed reviews.

The new film will follow Rey's efforts to revive the Jedi order. Obaid-Chinoy, who has two Oscars for documentaries denouncing violence against women, said she was "drawn to the hero's journey" in the Star Wars universe.

"I spent the better part of my lifetime meeting real heroes who are overcoming oppressive regimes and battling impossible odds and I think that's the heart of Star Wars," she said. Obaid-Chinoy directed last year's Ms. Marvel television series featuring a Muslim superhero.

Kathleen Kennedy, president of Lucasfilm, the studio bought by Disney in 2012, said each of the three films would cover different periods in the Star Wars narrative. And each will have a different director. James Mangold, himself a two-time Oscar nominee, will helm another of the films,



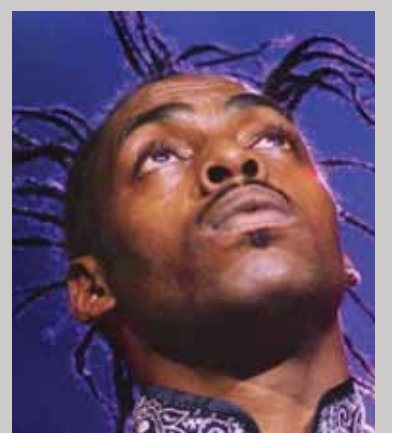
fresh from directing the latest in the Indiana Jones series, which is due for release later this year.

His film will look at the origins of the Jedi order, thousands of years before the original storyline. And the third film will be directed by Dave Filoni, an old hand in the Stars Wars universe, having produced several television series, including the wildly successful The Mandalorian, now

in its third season. Fans at the convention also got a first view of US actress Rosario Dawson in the role of Ahsoka, a female Jedi warrior who first appeared in an animated series. The character has been such as hit with the Star Wars fanbase that she has graduated to a live-action television series, due out in August. But fans will have to wait until 2025 for the first of the three films to be released. — AFP

US rapper Coolio died from fentanyl overdose

Coolio, the US rapper best known for the 1995 hit "Gangsta's Paradise", died last year from an accidental fentanyl overdose, the Los Angeles County Coroner said on Thursday. The Grammy-winning musician, whose real name was Artis Leon Ivey Jr, died in September 2022 at a friend's house in Los Angeles.



At the time of his death at the age of 59, the rapper was suffering from heart disease and asthma, and had recently taken phencyclidine, or PCP — a psychedelic drug that can cause severe mental or emotional disorders, the Los Angeles County Coroner said in a report. Coolio's friend and long-time manager Jarez Posey told celebrity news website TMZ at the time that Coolio had been found unresponsive in a friend's bathroom and pronounced dead at the scene. The rapper began his career in California in the late 1980s, but rose to global prominence in 1995 when he released "Gangsta's Paradise" for the soundtrack of the film "Dangerous Minds." He was awarded Best Rap Solo Performance for the track at the following year's Grammy Awards ceremony. The song sold millions of copies worldwide, topping pop charts in 16 countries and becoming Billboard's top song for 1995. — AFP

Britain finding a soft spot for homemade Brie and Camembert



Production Manager and cheesemaker Charlotte Spruce pours curds into moulds to make Tunworth cheese in the production room at the Hampshire Cheese Company near Basingstoke in Hampshire south east England —AFP photos



Curds are left to settle in moulds to make Tunworth cheese in the production room at the Hampshire Cheese Company.



A cheesemaker pours curds into moulds to make Tunworth cheese in the production room.



A box of Winslade cheese is packed and ready for dispatch at the Hampshire Cheese Company.



Stacey Hedges, Owner and Founder of Hampshire Cheese Company cuts a Tunworth cheese to sample at the Hampshire Cheese Company.

“I never thought it would be as big as this,” says Stacey Hedges of her booming French-style cheese business, as another lorryload leaves the green Hampshire countryside for some of Britain’s finest restaurants.

Former chef Hedges founded the Hampshire Cheese Company in 2005 and started producing Tunworth, a Camembert-style handmade cheese. She is one of dozens of entrepreneurs who have gone into cheese-making across England, Scotland and Wales.

As a result, the country now produces a wider variety of soft cheeses alongside traditional British hard cheeses such as Stilton and Cheddar. France, the “country of a thousand cheeses”, is often a source of inspiration.

Nine employees work in Hedges’ creamery near Basingstoke in En-

gland’s southern Hampshire region, making about 7,000 cheeses a week, and up to 12,000 during the Christmas season. Her website even carries a quote from celebrity French chef Raymond Blanc, who describes Tunworth as “the best Camembert in the world!”

While a provocative remark for Blanc’s countrymen, it is undeniable that the cheese has made its mark on menus and shelves across Britain. In the Basingstoke factory, there is not a machine in sight. Everything is done by hand, from the handling of the milk -- delivered by a neighbouring farm -- to the packaging in a round wooden box imported from France. As well as Tunworth, the Hampshire Cheese Company also makes the softer Winslade, which Hedges likens to Vacherin.

The 61-year-old got help from

French experts to advise her on the manufacturing process. “In this country we have Stilton and Cheddar. But we don’t have the knowledge for soft cheese,” Hedges explained. Her success has inspired other Brits.

‘Cheese every day!’

“It’s a very exciting time to be in the industry,” said Bronwen Percival, technical manager at Neal’s Yard Dairy, which has four shops in London selling almost exclusively British cheese.

“There are new people coming out all the time with a real entrepreneurial spirit,” she added. “We sell mozzarella from Italy, but if somebody (British) arrives on the scene making a beautiful mozzarella, as good as the one we currently sell, we might decide to switch.”

This has already happened with

homegrown varieties of Brie and Camembert, as the UK dairy industry continues to adapt from the shock of deregulation in the 1990s. Prior to then, a state marketing board regulated the production and distribution of milk, setting a floor under prices for other dairy products. After the board was abolished and the price of milk plummeted, dairy producers were under pressure to add value through other products. They responded with soft cheeses, which proved a hit with consumers.

“The key thing is people want to know where the food they eat is from and support local producers,” said Tracey Colley from the Academy of Cheese, which runs tasting courses and events such as the British Cheese Weekend. The pandemic has also helped, she added. “When people stayed at home,

cheese became a treat for some.”

But it’s still a long way from mass consumption. “Everyone has Cheddar in their fridge,” but other cheeses remain fairly niche, said Colley.

“What we’re trying to change with the Academy is to get people in the same mindset as in France: eat cheese every day!” Prices of artisanal cheese remain a challenge to wider adoption, often coming in at around £10 (\$12.50) for a single cheese.

Exports are one outlet. Ironically, France is one of Neal’s Yard Dairy’s top foreign markets. Hedges sells her Tunworth in Hong Kong, the United States, Belgium, the Netherlands and elsewhere. But she draws the line at trying to break into the home of Camembert. “Do you think the French would buy British Camembert?” she joked. — AFP



A cheesemaker cuts the curds and whey, the beginning process to making Tunworth cheese, in the production room.



Stacey Hedges, Owner and Founder of Hampshire Cheese Company (left) looks on as a cheesemaker cuts the curds and whey, the beginning process to making



Stacey Hedges, Owner and Founder of Hampshire Cheese Company carries a box of Tunworth cheese to an awaiting delivery van at the Hampshire Cheese Company.



Cheesemakers pour curds into moulds to make Tunworth cheese in the production room at the Hampshire Cheese Company.

Versailles and Forbidden City to hold France-China exhibition

The Palace of Versailles signed a deal with the Forbidden City in Beijing on Thursday for a 2024 exhibition about historic ties between France and China. The announcement by the French institution came during President Emmanuel Macron’s visit to Beijing where he is hoping to steer China away from its increasingly close ties with Russia.

The exhibition -- due to run April 1 to June 30 next year -- will focus on how ties were forged in the 17th and 18th centuries, especially under king Louis XIV and emperor Kangxi with the arrival of French Jesuit priests at the Chinese court in 1685. It was originally planned for 2020 but was delayed by the Covid-19 pandemic.

Coming 60 years after France re-established diplomatic ties with China, the show “is a sign of confidence for the future and the dialogue between our two cultures,” Catherine Pegard, who heads the palace, told AFP. She said it will bring together objects from both collections to show how exchanges between the two countries fostered French interest in Chinese philosophy, science and art. — AFP

South African pilot lands plane with poisonous cobra on his back

A South African pilot who made an emergency landing after a venomous snake crawled into his seat was praised by the authorities Friday for “displaying impeccable bravery”.

Rudolf Erasmus was flying a small private aircraft with four passengers from Bloemfontein to Pretoria earlier this week, when he felt a large Cape Cobra snake moving across his back. Despite the extreme pressure, he landed the plane incident-free in Welkom, a city located roughly midway along the route.

“I wish to congratulate Rudolf for the courageous steps taken and for how he handled what could have been a major aviation incident,” said South African Civil Aviation Authority (SACAA) director Poppy Khoza. “He remained calm in the face of a dangerous situation and managed to land the aircraft safely without any harm to him or the passengers on board, displaying to the world that he is an aviation safety ambassador of the highest order.”

Erasmus told local media he became aware of the snake mid-flight after feeling something cold pressing against his back.



“At first I thought it was my water bottle... but then I realized it was something else and (so I) didn’t move,” he told the News24 outlet. The incident happened on Monday. Cape cobras

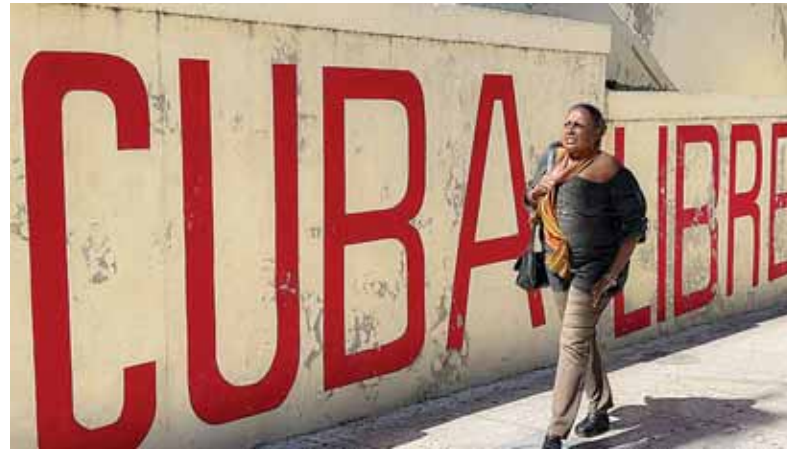
are found mainly in southwestern South Africa and have a potentially deadly neurotoxic venom that requires immediate treatment with an anti-venom. — AFP

Lifestyle

'I've been lucky': Cuba's first black model reflects on career



Cuban actress Luz Maria Collazo gestures next to a poster of the Russian-Cuban film (Soy Cuba) (I Am Cuba) in which she starred, during an interview with AFP at her flat in Nuevo Vedado, in Havana. — AFP photos



Cuban actress Luz Maria walks along a street in Havana.



Cuban actress Luz Maria Collazo shows a portrait of her younger self, during an interview with AFP at her flat in Nuevo Vedado.

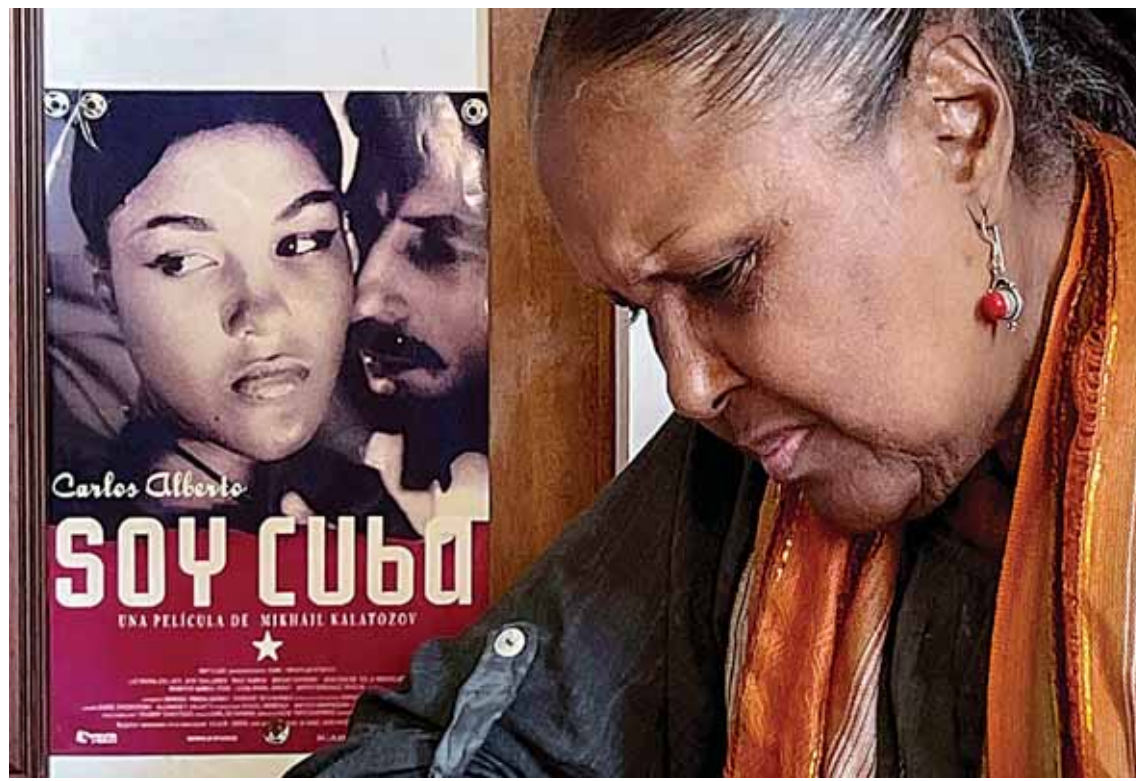
Luz Maria Collazo was Cuba's first black model, a virtuoso of modern dance and star of the film "Soy Cuba" (I am Cuba) — a flop in its time now considered a classic. Sixty years after it was filmed, Collazo looks back with mixed feelings on a career of ups and downs marked by racism, revolution and resilience.

Aged 79, Collazo claims to have a "very bad memory," which she seeks to refresh with the help of envelopes bulging with photos, publicity posters and magazine covers she pulls from drawers in her small Havana apartment. They are mementos of a career launched during an artistic explosion that followed the 1959 revolution, in a period of relative liberal expression after decades of a repressive dictatorship. "I was lucky enough to be there during this period of artistic vitality," the elegant septuagenarian told AFP.

Born in Santiago de Cuba in 1943 but raised in Havana, Collazo was 15 when Fidel Castro's revolution changed the island forever. Three years later, the daughter of a driver and a housewife decided she wanted to study drama. "I saw an ad in the newspaper" to study at the National Theater, she recalled. Modern dance was also on offer, and she passed the entry exam for both disciplines.

When it came to the final choice: "I wanted to be an actress but finally it was dance that seduced me," said Collazo, who went on to have a long career as a dancer and teacher with several companies. Then, in 1963, her life changed in a chance encounter with the wife of Soviet cinematographer Sergei Urusevsky on the streets of Havana. "I used to go every week to get my hair done and as I was in the coffee shop a lady came up and said to me: 'Do you want to make a film?' and I said: 'Oh yes, of course.'"

Urusevsky was in Cuba with director Mikhail



Cuban actress Luz Maria Collazo gestures next to a poster of the Russian-Cuban film (Soy Cuba) (I Am Cuba) in which she starred, during an interview with AFP at her flat in Nuevo Vedado, in Havana.

Kalatozov, recipient of the Palme d'Or at the Cannes Film Festival in 1958. The pair had been entrusted with a joint project of Cuba's ICAIC film institute and Soviet studios to honor the friendship between the communist allies.

Too 'poetic'

"Soy Cuba," which recounts the overthrow of dictator Fulgencio Batista by Castro and his rev-

olutionaries, was filmed in black and white over several months.

Collazo, who said she had been refused many other jobs due to systemic racism in Cuba, played the part of a poor young woman forced to work as a prostitute in casinos. The movie today is hailed for innovative filming techniques. But when it was released in 1964, it had a cold reception in the aftermath of the Cuban missile crisis.

Ties between the nations were frosty after Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev withdrew nuclear missiles from the island in a deal with US President John F. Kennedy, without consulting Castro. In Havana, the film was viewed as too "poetic," an unrealistic portrayal of the Caribbean island, Collazo recalled.

It was shown for a short period before being withdrawn. The film also proved unpopular in the USSR, and in the United States it was banned because of its communist origins. "I was disappointed," said Collazo.

Decades later, the film received a new lease on life after being shown at the Telluride Film Festival in Colorado in 1992 in an homage to Kalatozov. It was discovered by directors Francis Ford Coppola and Martin Scorsese, who actively promoted it. A restored version of the film won a prize at Cannes in 2004, and today it is studied as a masterpiece of cinematography at film schools in Europe and the United States.

'Exceptional at the time'

The film's initial box office failure did not deter Collazo from pursuing her destiny.

Years later, she was again stopped on the street: this time by Cuban photographer Alberto Korda — creator of the legendary portrait of Che Guevara. Korda asked her to pose for him.

"It was exceptional at the time to choose a black woman," said Collazo, who went on to have a successful modeling career that included having her face on ads for Cuban rum. Today, she is filled with "sadness" for the passing years and her precarious situation in a Cuba fraught with economic hardship. "I am very nostalgic looking at these pictures," sighed Collazo. "I think I've been lucky, to have been here and there, to have been a model as well as a dancer." — AFP

Milan Kundera: the unbearable lightness of decluttering



A visitor to the Milan Kundera library in Brno, Czech Republic reads a book by the Czech novelist. — AFP photos



Books by the Czech novelist are on display at the Milan Kundera library.



Visitors to the Milan Kundera library in Brno, Czech Republic browse the books by the Czech novelist.

Milan Kundera has had a bit of a clear-out after his wife had a dream. The author of "The Unbearable Lightness of Being" has gone full Marie Kondo, emptying the shelves of his Paris apartment of 3,000 of his own books. The legendary Czech novelist has given his massive collection of author copies in scores of languages to a new library in his home town of Brno. The epic decluttering was inspired by the writer's wife Vera Kunderova, who said the late American author Philip Roth came to her in a dream and whispered the idea into her ear. "The decision was clear. There was no doubt," Kunderova told Czech radio. "There was no choosing." "I prepared the whole thing and Tomas Kubicek (from Brno's Moravian Library) simply... boxed up all the books and took them away," she added. Although she did have her doubts when movers left. "Sadness came when the shelves were empty so I put out some chestnuts and other small things I used to buy at the Picasso Museum (in Paris). "I couldn't stand the emptiness so I started to put silly things on the shelves." The new Milan Kundera library opened in Brno last week on Kundera's 94th birthday. Fittingly for a literary joker, he was born on April 1.

A kind of homecoming

"Milan was born in Brno, this is a symbolic act, he's returning to Brno," his wife said. Kundera left communist Czechoslovakia for France in 1975, having falling out of favour with the authorities after the Prague Spring reform movement was crushed by Soviet-led armies in 1968. The ageing novelist -- who rarely speaks in public -- has had an often complicated relationship with his homeland. His wife, a literary agent, said the new library will help bridge that gap. "He may depart, but he will live on in Brno. People will go and meet him. The house where he was born is 10 minutes from the library." "It will serve above all students and researchers, but also anyone who wants to reflect on Kundera's work," Kubicek, head of the Moravian Library, told AFP. The new library houses Kundera's drawings, news-



Visitors to the Milan Kundera library in Brno, Czech Republic browse the books by the Czech novelist.

paper articles on his work, but also the 17th-century original of an essay by the French philosopher Montaigne, signed by the author and bound in calf skin, which Kundera received as a prize. "There's so much material and we can't display everything. He received an awful lot of prizes and they are also a part of the library. We'd need a hall for that," said Kubicek. The library will also organize lectures and expert debates with the help of an advisory team that includes French playwright Yasmina Reza and Frankfurt Book Fair head Juergen Boos. Kundera's critics say he turned his back on fellow Czechs and dissidents following his exile in

France. He only regained his Czech nationality in 2019.

In 2008, a Czech magazine accused him of being a police informer under communist rule, which he denied as "pure lies". Kundera stopped books he wrote in French from being translated into his native language. But Kubicek said that Kundera's supposed rift with his homeland was "a big Czech myth". "When people in France speak critically about Kundera, they are talking about his novels, while here all the criticism is down to balcony gossip," he said. "People here don't talk about his texts or ideas. It would be nice if the library changed that." — AFP



Britain's King Charles III (left) and Britain's Camilla, Queen Consort (right) arrive at York Minster. — AFP

Charles backs probe into UK monarchy's slavery links

Britain's King Charles III is supporting research into the historical links between the monarchy and the transatlantic slave trade, Buckingham Palace said on Thursday.

A month ahead of his coronation, the palace said that academics will gain greater access to royal archives, and that Charles takes the issue "profoundly seriously". Charles's 17th century predecessor King James II was the largest investor in the Royal African Company, which became a brutal pioneer of the transatlantic slave trade. Last year, Charles told a meeting of Commonwealth leaders that in order to "unlock the power of our common future, we must also acknowledge the wrongs which have shaped our past".

But there was no apology from the then-heir to the throne for the royal family's involvement in the transportation and selling of people for profit. A royal spokesperson said that since inheriting the throne from Queen Elizabeth II, Charles had continued his pledge to deepen his understanding of slavery's impact with "vigour and determination".

James II, who was deposed in 1688, was not the only one of Charles's forebears who was complicit in the slave trade. In 1689, according to a previously unseen document published by The Guardian newspaper, Royal African Company shares worth £1,000 were transferred to King William III from slave trader Edward Colston. Colston became the centre of fierce controversy in June 2020, when protesters in the western city of Bristol toppled his statue.

Charles is due to be crowned at Westminster Abbey on May 6. Two invitees who have yet to confirm their attendance are his younger son Prince Harry and wife Meghan. In 2021, the couple accused the royal family of racism in an interview with chat show host Oprah Winfrey after they quit royal duties. Harry's brother Prince William furiously responded: "We are very much not a racist family." — AFP

Sports

Devilish duo clash again in cycling's cobbled hell

Rivals Van Aert, van der Poel face off in Paris-Roubaix bike race

PARIS: Belgian favorite Wout van Aert is banking on a collective challenge to bitter rival Mathieu van der Poel in Sunday's Paris-Roubaix bike race, dubbed the "Hell of the North", which could be raced in treacherous conditions. The grueling 256.6km race features 29 sections of rough-hewn cobbled sections which are so notorious they are given a star rating of 1-5 for danger. These cobbles cause crashes galore and riders choose bikes depending on the weather, with Sunday's race more difficult to judge as it should be raced in fine weather, but with puddles in various places from midweek downpours.

At last week's other great cobbled classic, the Tour of Flanders, one hapless competitor, Filip Maciejuk, hit a puddle covering a pothole and veered in front of the peloton causing a race-changing mass crash. On Sunday, riders from Van Aert's Jumbo-Visma team and the German DSM outfit will use a technology which changes the air pressure in the tyres, from soft on the cobbles to hard on the asphalt. Van Aert is the most feared one-day rider around, making him a marked man, but in his favor he will have with him French powerhouse Christophe Laporte and also last year's winner Dylan van Baarle.

"The race can also be won between the cobbled sectors if you have two or three riders with you in the closing stages," Van Aert said. Van Aert was one of the fallers behind the puddle-pothole crash in the

Tour of Flanders. "I could be feeling better. My fall has left me with pains in my knee and ribs," he said, pushing the Paris-Roubaix favorite's tag onto Van der Poel. The Dutch rider declared he was "100 percent ready" this week and is also counting on back-up from his team.

The Trouée d'Arenberg, at the Arenberg coal mine, is the first major difficulty along the route and from there it will be seen how much support remains for the two favorites. The giant Italian Filippo Ganna from Ineos Grenadier is, at 26, emerging as a contender on the road after his years as a time-trialist and track racer. "This is so different from a track, I can't say it's my favorite surface," said Ganna, who will be chaperoned by Luke Rowe and Michal Kwiatkowski. "But I'm a bit heavy to get over the hills," Ganna said. "I'll be conserving energy and fuelling as much as possible up to Arenberg."

The roads along the route, where no cars or tractors run, were covered in grass last week before a last-gasp rush to clear it using grazing sheep and goats. The race often earns its grueling tag. The 2021 winner Sony Colbrelli fell to the floor at the finish line, unrecognizable in a coat of mud while 2022 champion Van Baarle rode into the Roubaix velodrome cloaked in dust. Whoever the 2023 winner is, he will be covered in glory and handed a giant cobble as a memorial trophy. — AFP



WOLLONGONG: Belgium's Wout van Aert competes in the men's road race cycling event at the UCI Road World Championship in this file photo. — AFP

Seifert blasts NZ to T20 series victory

QUEENSTOWN: Tim Seifert was the match-winner for the second straight game as New Zealand (NZ) clinched the T20 series against Sri Lanka with a tense four-wicket victory in Queenstown on Saturday. Seifert blasted a career-high 88 off 48 balls to fire the Black Caps to 183-6 off 19.5 overs after the tourists had posted 182-6 in the third and final game at John Davies Oval. The opener-wicket-keeper struck 10 fours and three sixes in an innings that bore many of the hallmarks of his unbeaten 79 when New Zealand levelled the series at Dunedin on Wednesday.

Captain Tom Latham provided the only meaningful support with 31 off 23 and New Zealand's middle order nearly conspired to lose the game after Seifert departed with four overs remaining. Needing to score at little more than a run-a-ball at that stage, the Black Caps stuttered. Needing 10 runs to win off the final over bowled by Lahiru Kumara (3-38), Mark Chapman struck a six off the first ball before he was the first of three New Zealand wickets to fall. With two still needed off the last two deliveries, Rachin Ravindra held his nerve to find a gap in the outfield and ran two to secure the 2-1 series win.

It completes a disappointing tour for Sri Lanka, who lost the Test and ODI series by the same 2-0 scoreline but were more competitive in the shortest



QUEENSTOWN: New Zealand's Tim Seifert (left) plays a shot as Sri Lanka's wicketkeeper Kusal Mendis reacts during the third Twenty20 cricket match between New Zealand and Sri Lanka on April 8, 2023. — AFP

format. They gave themselves a shot at victory after Kusal Mendis struck a rapid 73 off 48 balls, taking full advantage after being dropped by Daryl Mitchell at slip when on 10. The opener-wicketkeeper went on to hit six fours and five sixes in his 12th half-century, falling just short of his career-high score of 79.

Having been asked to bat, Mendis was the dominant figure in an opening stand of 76 with Pathum

Nissanka (25 off 25), before putting on a further 46 with Kusal Perera (33 off 21). Wickets fell rapidly over the closing overs, preventing the tourists from going close to 200. Ben Lister took 2-37 while fellow-seamer Adam Milne and leg-spinner Ish Sodhi were the most economical of New Zealand's bowlers, recording identical figures of 1-30 off four overs. — AFP

Higueta wins sprint as Vingegaard leads

AMOREBIETA-ETXANO: Sergio Higueta surged away from a small elite group in the closing straight to cruise to victory in the fifth stage of the Tour of the Basque Country on Friday. Jonas Vingegaard finished safely tucked in the leading group of 20 to retain the overall lead. His closest pursuers Mikel Landa finished in the group but lost a second on an intermediate sprint. Vingegaard, a

Dane who rides for Jumbo-Visma, gained a second on Landa, a Spaniard with Bahrain Victorious to lead by 13 seconds heading into the mountainous final stage on Saturday.

Higueta, a Colombian with Bora, said he had targeted the stage. "Positioning was important," he said. "I knew I had to go early because it was a very fast finish and if you wait too long it is difficult to get back." "So I went from long and I had enough strength to stay ahead." Andrea Bagioli, who had been trying to guide Swiss Soudal-QuickStep team-mate Mauro Schmid to the line, gave chase and finished second. "The last meters were a bit chaotic," said the Italian. "Higueta anticipated us." Mattias Skjelmose, a Dane with Trek-Segafredo,

was third and climbed to third overall. He is 32 seconds behind his compatriot Vingegaard but only eight seconds ahead of the 11th place rider.

The pack spent much of a warm spring day chasing an early breakaway by Mattia Cattaneo and Remi Cavagna over a hilly 165.9km circuit that began and ended in Amorebieta-Etxano. "It was a very tricky day, a very warm day," said Vingegaard. "It was a big fight to bring the breakaway back." The rugged race ends on Saturday with a challenging 137.8km circuit starting and ending in Eibar. There are seven categorized ascents and three are rated first category. "It's always a big mess in the last day here," said Vingegaard. "Tomorrow we will have to do everything we can to defend the jersey." — AFP

Lucknow thump Hyderabad in IPL

LUCKNOW: Krunal Pandya's 3-18 led a wounding spin attack for Lucknow Super Giants to outclass Sunrisers Hyderabad on a slow pitch during Friday's five-wicket victory in the Indian Premier League. The visitors wilted under a relentless 13 overs of spin and managed to cobble together just 121-8 after electing to bat first.

Veteran leg spinner Amit Mishra, who missed last year's tournament, vindicated his return to the IPL with 2-23 in four overs on the slowest pitch of the season so far. "I am happy to play a limited role for the side," said Mishra, 40. "There is less bounce on this black soil wicket, and that's the beauty of different conditions in the IPL. We did well to win in these conditions." The Sunrisers tried hard to fight fire with fire but their own spin attack took too long to yield results with too small a total to defend. Lucknow scored 127-5 in 16 overs and Pandya also shone with the bat, scoring 34 off 23 balls for the third wicket. But it was his left-arm spin that sealed the win, with Mayank Agarwal sent back for eight and Aiden Markram falling for a golden duck during his debut as skipper on consecutive balls.

'Tried to fight'

"We didn't really have enough runs on the board. It wasn't a great wicket for batting," said Markram. "We tried to fight and scrap as much as we could, but they bowled well as per the conditions. We didn't have any momentum at all." Leg spinner Ravi Bishnoi took 1-16 for Lucknow and now has six wickets in three outings. He trails English teammate Mark Wood, who has eight wickets in two games but missed Friday's match to illness. Skipper KL Rahul anchored Lucknow's innings with a sedate 35. Hyderabad has now lost both its opening games and is languishing at the bottom of the IPL points table. Lucknow leads the tournament with its second win in three games. They next face Royal Challengers Bangalore on Monday, when flashy South African Quinton de Kock will hope to return after sitting out Friday's home match. — AFP



AUGUSTA: Rory McIlroy of Northern Ireland reacts to a putt on the 18th green during the second round of the 2023 Masters Tournament at Augusta National Golf Club on April 7, 2023. — AFP

McIlroy's Masters misery returns

AUGUSTA: On a day when one of the most prominent players in the breakaway LIV Golf series led the field at the Masters by three shots, Rory McIlroy, the world number two and the PGA Tour's most active supporter, faced an early exit. McIlroy shot a five over-par 77 with seven bogeys, 17 strokes behind pace-setter Brooks Koepka, and is facing his second missed Masters cut in three years in a season where many hoped he could finally win at Augusta and complete his career Grand Slam.

Play was stopped due to stormy weather before the second round was complete but at five-over for the tournament, in joint 61st position, the Northern Irishman is well adrift of the projected cut to the low 50 and level, set at two-over. The 33-year-old has won four majors but it is now nine years since the last of those triumphs in the PGA Championship at Valhalla. McIlroy has been the unofficial player's spokesman for the PGA Tour in its battle with the Saudi-backed LIV and took a prominent role in recent meetings that led to changes to the PGA Tour, with the introduction of 'enhanced events' boasting smaller fields and bigger purses.

After missing the cut at the Players Championship last month, however, McIlroy said his role in rallying players to the changes and defending the tour from the emergence of LIV had taken a toll on his time management ahead of tournaments. "I'd love to get back to being a golfer again," he said, adding that he had "maybe sacrificed a little bit of time with some of this other stuff." Whether his willingness to organize meetings and speak on behalf of the players had any lingering influence on his poor showing at Augusta is, however, uncertain and the Northern Irishman left the grounds during the storm break and did not speak to media.

There certainly did not appear to be much wrong with McIlroy's swing when he practiced on the range ahead of his round on Friday morning and his popularity among the Augusta patrons was evidenced by his warm reception on the first tee. But, after a solid start on the opening hole, he walked to the second tee, oddly just as his ex-fiancé, former tennis champion Caroline Wozniacki, passed by, and from there his round fell apart. McIlroy drove into the sand and then fired over the back of the green as he bogeyed the par-5 second and by the seventh hole he had made three more bogeys. He found water with his approach on the 11th, leaving him looking distraught, and even the boost of birdies on the 13th and 15th was undone by bogeys on the 16th and 18th. As he had shown earlier in the day on the range, McIlroy has one of the best-looking swings in the game and no one has doubted his talent and ability to handle courses as challenging as Augusta.

'The right head space'

Last year, he finished second after a superb final round of 64, just one short of the Masters record, and he came into this year's tournament saying he had all the ingredients in place for success. "I'm feeling as relaxed as I ever have coming in here. I feel like my game is in a pretty good place. I know the place just as about as well as anyone," McIlroy said Tuesday. Ever since McIlroy's meltdown at Augusta in 2011, when the then 21-year-old went into the final round with a four-shot lead but ended it 10 strokes back, there have been people who have questioned his ability to deal with the mental side of the game. — AFP



LENS: Strasbourg's Senegalese forward Habib Diallo (left) reacts to the referee as he receives a yellow card during the French L1 football match between RC Lens and RC Strasbourg Alsace at Stade Bollaert-Delelis on April 7, 2023. — AFP

Lens beat Strasbourg, keep pressure on PSG

PARIS: Lens claimed their fourth straight win with a 2-1 victory over Strasbourg on Friday to close the gap on Ligue 1 leaders Paris Saint-Germain to just three points. The northerners have 63 points and are second behind PSG who traveled to Nice on Saturday after back-to-back defeats. Marseille are third, three points behind Lens with Monaco a further three points adrift in fourth before those clubs visit Lorient and Nantes respectively on Sunday.

After a rough start against their relegation-threatened rivals, Lens found a way through thanks to an impressive move concluded by Polish winger Prze-

myslaw Frankowski in the 11th minute. Frankowski latched onto a pass from former Strasbourg midfielder Adrien Thomasson, with the goal initially refused as offside but validated after a VAR viewing. Strasbourg lacked sharpness on their rare chances in front of goal with Lens adding a second in the 65th minute thanks to Facundo Medina's low deflected shot.

The side from Alsace pulled a goal back with five minutes to go with a curling Kevin Gameiro effort catching Brice Samba napping in the Lens goal. The visitors chased the equalizer but instead finished a man down after Habib Diallo was sent off in injury time. Lens held on to win their 13th out of 15 home league games, more than any team in the top five European leagues. Strasbourg could finish the weekend back in the relegation zone as they sit 16th, equal on 26 points with Auxerre who travel to fellow relegation candidates Ajaccio on Sunday. — AFP

Sports

Burnley secure promotion to English Premier League

The quickest promotion of the Championship era

LONDON: Burnley boss Vincent Kompany said even he is surprised at the speed at which his side secured promotion to the Premier League after they won 2-1 at Middlesbrough on Friday. A 19-game unbeaten league run has taken the Clarets 19 points clear of third-placed Luton, who have just six games remaining, at the top of the Championship. Burnley still have seven games to play, making their promotion the quickest of the Championship era.

"It's Easter and there's seven games to go and we're already celebrating. We didn't expect it," Kompany told Sky Sports. "We wanted to experience this at some point but quicker is better sometimes as well." The decision to act swiftly to land the former Manchester City captain after his first managerial spell at Anderlecht came to an end has proved a masterstroke. Many feared the worst when Burnley's six-year stay in the English top flight came to an end last season.

Due to the terms of a controversial leveraged takeover by an American consortium in late 2020, a "significant proportion" of a £65 million (\$78 million)

loan had to be repaid when they were relegated. Nearly £70 million worth of players departed, but Kompany has put together almost an entirely new squad at a fraction of the cost, with his knowledge of the Belgian market and connections at City helping to land bargains.

"This was a complete surprise, this was not our plan," said Burnley chairman Alan Pace. "Vincent and I talked about it in the summer, we gave ourselves two, three years was our plan. I think what you've seen is a lot of magic coming together. "This team is very, very good. You hear Vincent say it every week. They're surprising each and every one of us every day, they're phenomenal."

Full-back Connor Roberts scored the decisive goal 24 minutes from time at the Riverside when the Welsh international turned home Nathan Tella's cross. Ashley Barnes had given Kompany's men the perfect start before Chuba Akpom levelled from the penalty spot with his 27th goal of the season.

Sheffield Utd boost

Burnley's victory also helped Sheffield United edge closer to a Premier

League return as Middlesbrough remain in fourth. The Blades now have an eight-point cushion in second and a game in hand after Ilman Ndiaye scored the only goal in a 1-0 win over bottom-of-the-table Wigan at Bramall Lane. "If teams around us drop points it's a bonus but we don't focus on results elsewhere," said United boss Paul Heckingbottom, whose side face Burnley on Monday.

"As long as we keep winning and making that margin of error even finer for them we don't have to worry about anything else." Luton extended their unbeaten run to eight games at The Den, but a stalemate with fifth-placed Millwall did little to help either side's promotion chances. Norwich closed to within one point of the playoff places as goals from Liam Gibbs and Gabriel Sara beat Blackburn 2-0 at Ewood Park. Sunderland's hope of back-to-back promotions is fading after remarkable 4-4 draw with Hull at the Stadium of Light.

The lead changed hands four times as Manchester United loanee Amad Diallo struck twice for Sunderland. But Ozan Tufan's penalty with the last kick of the game salvaged a point for the Tigers. At



Burnley's Belgian manager Vincent Kompany

the bottom of the table, Neil Warnock's resurgent Huddersfield won 3-2 at Watford to climb out of the relegation zone. Reading, who were docked six points

this week for breach of the English Football League's financial rules, drop into the bottom three after a 1-1 draw with Birmingham. — AFP

Celta frustrate Sevilla with late comeback

SEVILLE: Celta Vigo produced a stunning late comeback to draw 2-2 at Manchester United's Europa League opponents Sevilla in La Liga on Friday. The draw prevented Sevilla from climbing away from the danger zone. The hosts, who had Pape Gueye sent off after only 19 minutes, led through Youssef

En-Nesyri and Marcos Acuna's strikes as the clock ticked down. However Miguel Rodriguez pulled one back for Celta in after 89 minutes and Gonzalo Pacionia levelled in the third minute of stoppage time. Acuna was sent off for dissent late on, leaving Jose Luis Mendilibar's struggling side with nine men.

Sevilla, who face United in the first leg of the Europa League quarter-finals on Thursday, had looked certain to secure their second victory from two matches under Mendilibar. Provisionally 13th, Sevilla sit five points above the relegation zone, having played a game more than the teams beneath them. The hosts' task became harder against a Celta Vigo side in good form when midfielder Gueye was sent off for two yellow cards af-

ter just 19 minutes. Despite their numerical disadvantage, Sevilla battled well at the Ramon Sanchez-Pizjuan and took the lead when En-Nesyri headed home well from Suso's corner shortly before half-time.

Acuna smashed home the second with nine minutes remaining after winning the ball in the centre circle, driving forward and unleashing a rocket from distance which fizzed into the bottom corner. The record six-time Europa League winners seemed to have some wind in their sails, ahead of their trip to Old Trafford. However Rodriguez swept home from the edge of the box to set up a frantic finale, and Pacionia leapt brilliantly to nod home Hugo Mallo's cross for Celta, ninth. — AFP

Leinster crush Leicester, book semi-finals

DUBLIN: Garry Ringrose starred as four-time winners Leinster crushed Premiership champions Leicester 55-24 to reach the Champions Cup semi-finals on Friday. Ireland centre Ringrose scored two of his side's seven tries in the first half, the first after just one minute at Lansdowne Road, and Leo Cullen's men led 17-10 at half time. Anthony Watson replied for Leicester, but Jamison Gibson-Park, a penalty try, Scott Penny, Jimmy O'Brien and John McKee's tries ensured a dominant win. Leinster, runners-up last year to La Rochelle, will meet the winner of Saturday's quarter-final between Toulouse and South African side Sharks.

A 10-point spurt, including Gibson-Park's try, saw the Irish hosts deal impressively with a Caelan Doris yellow card, before a penalty try and Scott Penny's first Champions Cup score came either side of Charlie Clare's sin-binning. Mike Brown also saw yellow but Leicester were spent by that stage. Four tries were shared out in the final quarter, including John McKee's 79th-minute maul effort. A dozen phases after Hugo Keenan had gathered Ross Byrne's kick-off, Ringrose nipped inside Dan Kelly and burst in behind the posts.

Byrne's conversion with his first kick of an 18-point haul was cancelled out by a Handre Pollard penalty. The visitors also forced an early scrum penalty. Nonetheless a crisp Leinster move from the scrum put Jimmy O'Brien in position to blast through the middle and he fed Ringrose for a simple finish and a 14-3 lead. The Tigers tried to frustrate the home side and when Jasper Wiese was caught high by Doris, the Leinster flanker was sin-binned. However, the seven-man pack calmed the home supporters' nerves with a scrum penalty, slotted over by Byrne, and Leinster had breathing space two minutes later. Robbie Henshaw's nicely-delayed delivery put Ringrose through a gap and his inside pass released Gibson-Park to coast home with Byrne converting. —AFP



CHARLESTON: Jessica Pegula serves to Paula Badosa of Spain during the Credit One Charleston Open at Credit One Stadium on April 7, 2023. — AFP

Pegula holds off Badosa, secures Charleston semis

WASHINGTON: Top-seeded Jessica Pegula held off Paula Badosa 6-3, 7-6 (8/6) on Friday to line up a semifinal clash with defending champion Belinda Bencic as the top four seeds advanced at the WTA Charleston clay court tournament. Switzerland's Bencic, seeded fourth, won her ninth straight match in Charleston when she beat seventh-seeded Ekaterina Alexandrova 6-3, 6-3. Second-seeded Ons Jabeur advanced when Anna Kalinskaya retired from their quarterfinal because of illness. Jabeur was up 6-0, 4-1 when Kalinskaya called it a day, the Tunisian reaching the semifinals for the third straight year.

She will next face third-seeded Daria Kasatkina, who turned the tables on ninth-seeded American Madison Keys 6-7 (5/7), 6-4, 6-2 in a battle of former Charleston champions. Kasatkina notched just her second victory over Keys in 10 career meetings. Pegula, ranked third in the world, needed just 35 minutes to capture the opening set from Badosa, and broke to open the second. Powering through her service games, Pegula served for the match at 5-4 only for Badosa to break and level the set.

The Spaniard held off a break point in the next game as they went to the tiebreaker, where she saved a match point with a forehand winner before giving Pegula another with a forehand long, her backhand into the net finally allowing Pegula to celebrate. Pegula, who is seeking her first clay court title, will have her work cut out against Bencic, who is chasing her third title of the season after victories in Adelaide and Abu Dhabi. Jabeur, who improved to 2-0 against Kalinskaya and reached her second semifinal of the season. — AFP

Today's Matches

English Premier League	
Leeds United v Crystal Palace	16:00
beIN Sports HD 1 English beIN Sports HD 3 TR beIN Sports Connect	
Liverpool v Arsenal	18:30
beIN Sports 1 HD Premium beIN Sports HD 1 English beIN Sports Connect	

Spanish League	
Real Valladolid v Real Mallorca	15:00
beIN Sports HD 1 beIN Sports HD 2 English beIN Sports Connect	
Real Betis v Cadiz	17:15
beIN Sports HD 1 beIN Sports HD 2 English beIN Sports Connect	
UD Almeria v Valencia	19:30
beIN Sports HD 1 beIN Sports HD 2 English beIN Sports Connect	
Rayo Vallecano v Atletico de Madrid	22:00
beIN Sports HD 1 beIN Sports HD 2 English beIN Sports Connect	

German Bundesliga	
Borussia Monchengladbach v Wolfsburg	16:30
beIN Sports HD 3	
VFL Bochum v VfB Stuttgart	18:30
beIN Sports HD 3	
TSG 1899 Hoffenheim v Schalke	20:30
beIN Sports HD 3	

French League 1st Div	
Olympique Lyonnais v Stade Rennais	14:00
beIN Sports HD 2 beIN Sports Connect	
Stade de Reims v Stade brestois	16:00
beIN Sports HD 4 beIN Sports Connect	
AC Ajaccio v AJ Auxerre	16:00
beIN Sports HD 7 beIN Sports Connect	
HSC Montpellier v Toulouse	16:00
beIN Sports HD 2 beIN Sports Connect	
ES Troyes v Clermont Foot	16:00
beIN Sports HD 6 beIN Sports Connect	
Nantes v Monaco	18:05
beIN Sports HD 2 beIN Sports Connect	
Lorient v Olympique de Marseille	21:45
beIN Sports HD 2 beIN Sports HD 1 English beIN Sports HD 3 TR beIN Sports Connect	

Classifieds

Hospitals & Clinics

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

Clinics

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

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: Dulowal (Kapurthala) changed my name to Balvinder Singh & have changed the name of my wife Balvir Kaur to Balbir Kaur. (C 3198) 07/04/2023

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Nets book NBA playoff berth

Warriors and Lakers keep pressure on

LOS ANGELES: The Brooklyn Nets booked an NBA playoff berth on Friday as the Eastern Conference puzzle pieces fell into place, but suspense remained in the wild West with wins for Golden State, New Orleans and the Los Angeles Lakers.

The Nets beat the Orlando Magic 101-84 and clinched the sixth seed in the East, avoiding the play-in tournament in which the seventh-

through 10th-placed teams will fight for two remaining playoff berths.

The Nets actually knew they had secured the spot in the fourth quarter of the contest - when the Miami Heat fell 114-108 to the Washington Wizards to finish seventh in the East. The Heat, clearly content to headline the play-in, rested six of their top players - including Jimmy Butler and Tyler Herro - a strategy repeated around the league by both playoff-bound teams and those already eliminated.

Even with the boost from Miami, the Nets had reason to celebrate their guaranteed berth in a tumultuous season that

saw coach Steve Nash sacked after a stumbling start and Kyrie Irving suspended in an anti-Semitism row. All that before the stunning trades of Irving and superstar Kevin Durant in February. "I think it speaks to the character of the group, the maturity and just the selflessness," said Spencer Dinwiddie, who returned to Brooklyn from Dallas in the trade for Irving.

"I think everybody came in here and tried to figure out what their job was going to be and execute it to the best of their ability and push forward."

Atlanta clinched eighth place in the East despite a 136-131 overtime loss to the short-handed Philadelphia 76ers thanks to Boston's 121-102 victory over Toronto. Jayson Tatum scored 21 points for Boston and sat out the second half as the Celtics easily overcame the absence of Marcus Smart, Malcolm Brogdon and Jaylen Brown - who was a late scratch after needing stitches for a cut on his right hand suffered in an accident at his home.

Mavs surrender

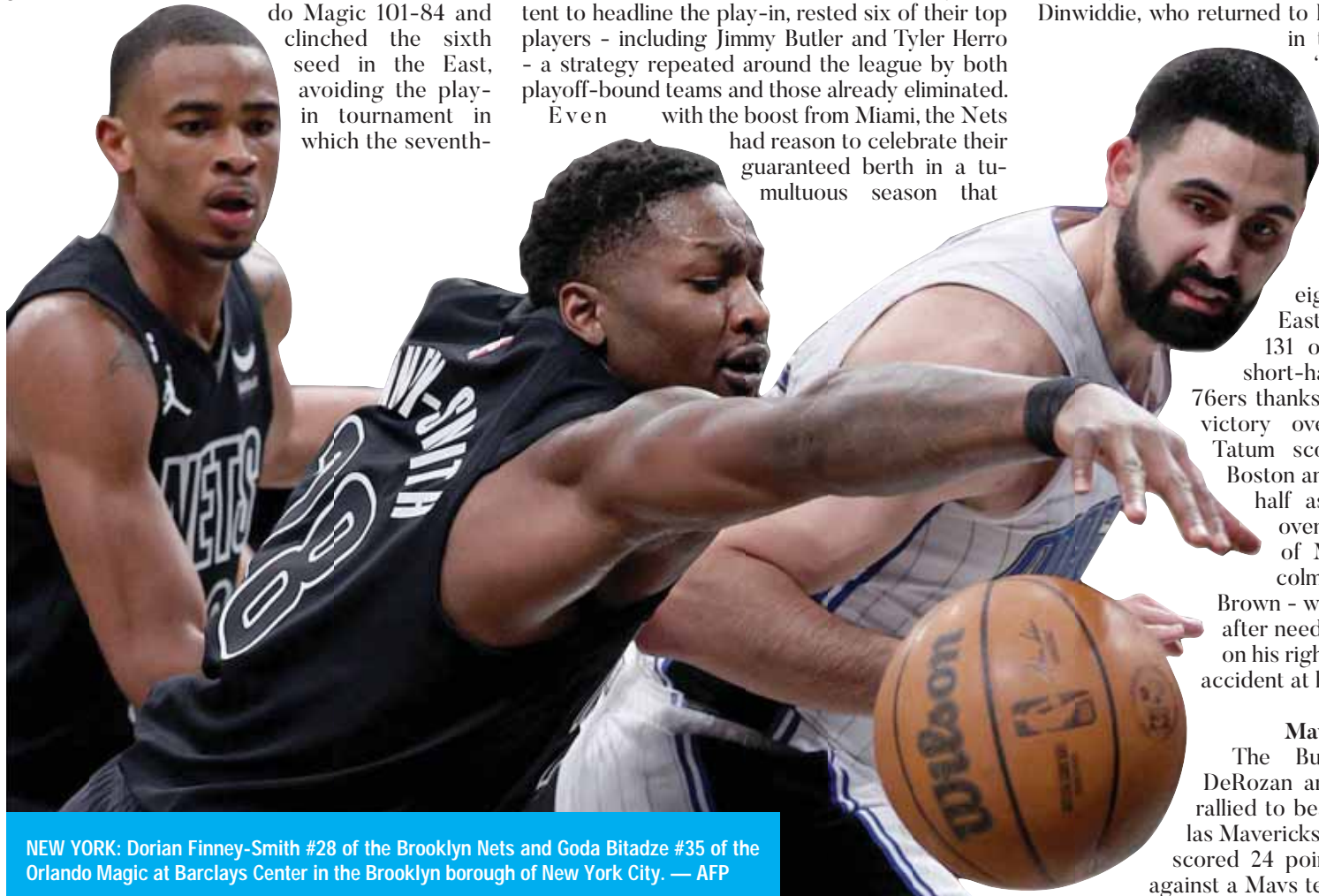
The Bulls rested DeMar DeRozan and Zach Lavine, but rallied to beat the depleted Dallas Mavericks 115-112. Coby White scored 24 points to lead Chicago against a Mavs team that threw in the

towel, abandoning their slim hopes of making the Western Conference play-in as they held out Irving and four other key players - and pulled star Luka Doncic after the first quarter. "We were going to play until told otherwise," Mavs coach Jason Kidd said before the game. "And today is the day that we've been told we're going to do something different."

Kidd said the Mavs players who were on the floor wouldn't "cheat the game" and indeed Dallas started off hot and led 67-54 at halftime. But Chicago clawed back and Dallas' defeat handed a Western Conference play-in berth to the Oklahoma City Thunder. Although the "tanking" maneuver could bolster Dallas' position in the NBA draft, it's an ignominious end to the season for a team that reached the Western Conference finals last year.

Elsewhere in the West, the Lakers beat the play-off-bound Phoenix Suns 121-107 and the New Orleans Pelicans downed the New York Knicks 113-105 to maintain their faint hopes of escaping the play-in. D'Angelo Russell scored 24 points, Austin Reaves added 22 and LeBron James scored 16 for the Lakers, who took advantage of the absence of Suns stars Durant and Devin Booker. The Warriors, led by 29 points from Klay Thompson and 25 from Stephen Curry, moved a half-game ahead of the Los Angeles Clippers for fifth in the West with a 119-97 victory over the Sacramento Kings.

The Memphis Grizzlies clinched the second seed, ahead of Sacramento, with a 137-114 victory over a Milwaukee Bucks team that rested half a dozen stars, including Giannis Antetokounmpo. Jaren Jackson scored 36 points for the Grizzlies, who trailed by one at halftime but out-scored Milwaukee 37-15 in the third quarter to take charge. "These games are important," Jackson said. "Especially down the stretch in the Western Conference. We wanted to make sure we came out of this with a win." — AFP



NEW YORK: Dorian Finney-Smith #28 of the Brooklyn Nets and Goda Bitadze #35 of the Orlando Magic at Barclays Center in the Brooklyn borough of New York City. — AFP

Nervy Napoli squeeze past Lecce 2-1

MILAN: Napoli had unfortunate Antonino Gallo's own goal to thank for getting their Serie A title bid back on track with a 2-1 win at Lecce on Friday, while AC Milan were held to a goalless draw by Empoli. Napoli are 19 points clear of closest challengers Lazio after Gallo's unwitting backpass from a Mario Rui cross slipped through the fingers of surprised Lecce goalkeeper Wladimiro Falcone midway through the second half.

The hosts had been deservedly level with Napoli at the Stadio Via del Mare after Federico Di Francesco's powerfully struck finish cancelled out Giovanni Di Lorenzo's 18th-minute header. Di Francesco's second league goal of the season was his team's first since mid-February and had a tired-looking Napoli at risk of slipping to another defeat after they were hammered 4-0 by champions Milan last weekend. Instead Lecce stay eight points above the relegation zone in 16th while Napoli take another step towards a historic Scudetto with their seventh straight league away win, earned without top scorer Victor Osimhen.

"It wasn't easy getting the result after that defeat (to Milan)... this result gives us some comfort ahead of the coming matches," Napoli coach Luciano Spalletti told DAZN. Nigeria forward Osimhen might be back for Wednesday's first leg of the all-Italian quarter-final with third-placed Milan - who face Empoli in Friday's late match - but they look to have

lost his replacement Giovanni Simeone to a thigh injury he suffered late on. "Osimhen wants to play every match... but these are situations that need to be assessed properly," added Spalletti. As it stands Spalletti's team only need four more wins from their final nine matches to secure the title, and that target will get smaller if Lazio fail to beat Juventus. However it will be all change if Juve have their 15-point penalty for illicit transfer activity revoked later this month, as they are 11 points behind Lazio ahead of their clash at the Stadio Olimpico on Sunday.

Milan flop

Milan flopped at the San Siro ahead of Napoli's visit as Stefano Pioli's much-changed side failed to break down defensive Empoli. The hosts thought they had claimed the points in the final moments when substitute Olivier Giroud netted but his strike was rightly ruled out for handball after he celebrated. That was the second time supporters were ruing VAR officials after Milan were also denied a penalty on the hour after Tyrone Ebuchi had initially been penalized for handball.

Empoli held out for a draw which meant third-placed Milan failed to fully capitalize on another bad evening for Romelu Lukaku in rivals Inter Milan's 1-1 draw at Salernitana. Antonio Candreva's miscued cross in the final minute moved Salernitana 10 points above the relegation zone and left Inter at risk of being knocked out of the Champions League positions.

Wasteful Inter would have been out of sight before old boy Candreva's fortuitous strike had they made the most of their opportunities after Robin Gosens netted their first goal from open play in a month in the sixth minute, with Lukaku the worst culprit in Salerno. Lukaku, who was racially abused



LECCE: Lecce's French forward Remi Oudin shoots the ball during the Italian Serie A football match between Lecce and Napoli on April 7, 2023. — AFP

by Juventus fans midweek, headed a simple opportunity straight at Guillermo Ochoa in the first half. And he somehow managed to scoop a diving header onto the bar from inside the six-yard box in the 65th minute before the superb Ochoa brilliantly kept out Stefan De Vrij on the rebound.

"Our big regret is that we couldn't get that second goal, right now we keep paying a heavy price for not

killing matches off," said Inter coach Simone Inzaghi. Fourth-placed Inter are a point behind Milan and head to Benfica for the first leg of their Champions League quarter-final on Tuesday winless in six and in the midst of a goalscoring crisis. Inzaghi's side are just one point ahead of Roma, who are at Torino on Sunday, while sixth-placed Atalanta can also move above Inter on goal difference if they beat Bologna. — AFP

Ukraine swimmers vow boycott, urge IOC to back 'peace'

KYIV: When Russia invaded last February, Ukraine's Olympic artistic swimmers Maryna and Vladyslava Aleksivna received a barrage of messages from Russian athletes, reassuring them Moscow's forces were actually coming to their aid. But as Russian missiles rained down on their home city of Kharkiv, the 21-year-old twins fled, upending their training regimes and piling the stress of war on the swimmers who are hoping to win gold at the 2024 Olympic Games in Paris.

The invasion has pushed the sisters to join a chorus of Ukrainian athletes vowing to boycott Paris in 2024 if the International Olympic Committee (IOC) allows Russian athletes - including those who sent them "crazy" messages in the first days of the war - to compete. "Maybe it's better to not allow a terrorist country that killed our sportsmen (to participate)," Maryna Aleksivna told AFP after a six-hour training session in their new training pool in Kyiv.

"(The IOC) must show that the Olympic Games are about peace. They must show this to the whole world," she added, as divers vaulted from boards behind her. The standoff between Kyiv and the IOC points to the widening fallout of the conflict and how sports bodies are facing pressure to appease both Moscow and Kyiv or find a fine line of neutrality.

Russia and its ally Belarus have been sidelined from most Olympic sports since Moscow invaded Ukraine but the IOC last week recommended they be allowed to compete as neutral athletes. In response, Ukraine has slammed the IOC as a "promoter of war" and won the backing from Germany, Poland and other allies in its call to bar Russia and Belarus. Kyiv says Russian forces have damaged at least 343 sporting facilities, including the pool in Kharkiv where the Aleksivna sisters trained before the war.

But Moscow has condemned what it says is "discrimination on the basis of nationality" and says all athletes must be allowed to compete. As well as throwing uncertainty over their careers, the daily grind of war has badly impacted the rigorous training cycles of Ukrainian athletes. "When there is an air raid siren, men in swimming trunks and women in swimsuits run to the bomb shelter and wait until the siren ends," said 26-year-old Ukrainian diver Stanislav Oliferchik.

He, like the Aleksivna sisters, has vowed to boycott any competition where Russians or Belarusians are allowed to compete. "It would have been much better without all this but we work with what we have," he added. Russians, he added, "train calmly in calm conditions and are surrounded by calm." Oliferchik was in Kyiv when the war began, he said, and was woken up on February 24 to the sounds of explosions. And he recounted that he only managed once to train in a new and "beautiful" pool in his hometown of Mariupol before the port city in east Ukraine was brutally besieged and captured by Russia.

He also said he had minimal contact now with the Russian athletes he used to compete alongside and



KYIV: Ukrainian Olympic artistic swimmers take part during a training in Kyiv, amid the Russian invasion of Ukraine. — AFP

believes should be barred. "They are silent. And the silence - I think - is an indicator that they support this war," he said. Oliferchik says the IOC's allowing them to compete is unacceptable even as neutrals. "Everyone knows what country they will represent if they are allowed under a neutral flag," he told AFP. "If they are still allowed, our team will boycott," he added.

The prospect of staying away from the 2024 Games has not interrupted the Aleksivna sisters' rig-

orous preparations - they spend at least six hours a day in the pool, six days a week. AFP journalists this week saw them practicing an acrobatic routine to swelling orchestral music as the women's legs twisted and pivoted in unison above the water. "We have one goal," said Vladyslava, referring to success at the upcoming World Cup in France next month, and then the Games in Paris. "We must do everything we can, and not think if Russians are allowed or not." — AFP