



5 Saudi delegation, Omani mediators in Yemen to try to broker new truce



12 India's tiger population rises above 3,000



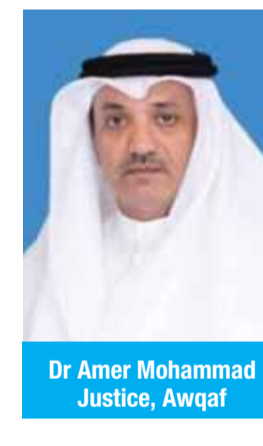
16 Spurs star Son becomes first Asian to score 100 Premier League goals



RAMADAN TIMINGS	
Fajr	04:07
Shurooq	05:28
Dhuhr	11:49
Asr	15:23
Maghrib	18:11
Isha	19:30

New Cabinet finally named

Govt includes six new faces with new finance, commerce ministers



By B Izzak

KUWAIT: An Amiri decree was issued on Sunday announcing the formation of a new Cabinet, almost three months after the previous Cabinet resigned as a result of a political dispute with the National Assembly, which was scrapped by the constitutional court last month. The new 15-member Cabinet, headed by HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Al-Nawaf Al-Sabah, retains Interior Minister Sheikh Talal Al-Khaled Al-Sabah, who is also the acting defense minister, and Oil Minister Bader Al-Mulla.

It saw the exit of six ministers, mainly the finance and commerce ministers. The lineup includes six new faces with new finance and commerce ministers, in ad-

dition to a new minister of state for Cabinet affairs, Municipality minister, justice and awqaf minister and electricity and water minister. The defense portfolio was not filled and the interior minister will continue to be acting defense minister.

Among the main changes is the appointment of newcomer Manaf Al-Hajeri as finance minister, replacing Abdulwahab Al-Rushaid, who was continuously under attack by the dissolved Assembly. It was not immediately known what the prime minister would do after forming the Cabinet. National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem had called for holding fresh polls but only after the Cabinet takes the oath in the Assembly and after passing some laws related to the election process. So far, there has been no response from the government.



Saudi delegation in Iran; Tehran to reciprocate visit

TEHRAN/RIYADH: Iran's foreign ministry said on Sunday a delegation will visit Saudi Arabia by Friday to pave the way for reopening its diplomatic missions there following a similar move by Riyadh. The announcement comes a day after a Saudi delegation arrived in Tehran on a similar diplomatic trip, and follows a historic meeting between the two Gulf countries' foreign ministers in China.

"We are expecting a foreign ministry delegation to visit Saudi Arabia" by Friday, Deputy Foreign Minister Alireza Enayati said in an interview with state television. "Two separate delegations will go to Riyadh and Jeddah", ahead of reopening Iran's embassy and consulate respectively.

The Saudi diplomatic delegation arrived in Iran to discuss the reopening of its missions after a seven-year absence, Riyadh's foreign ministry said. Cited by the official Saudi Press Agency (SPA), the ministry called the visit part of "implementing the tripartite agreement" reached on March 10 between the two regional powers, brokered by China, to restore ties ruptured in 2016. The two longtime Middle East rivals have now pledged to work together.

When Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan and his Iranian counterpart Hossein Amir-Abdollahian met in Beijing on Thursday they vowed to bring security and stability to the turbulent Gulf region. "The two sides emphasized the importance of following up on the implementation of the Beijing Agreement and its activation in a way that expands mutual trust and the fields of cooperation and helps create security, stability and prosperity in the region," a joint statement said. On Saturday, a Saudi "technical delegation" met Iran's chief of protocol, Mehdi Honardoust, at the foreign ministry in Tehran, SPA said.

The two countries severed ties after protesters in the Islamic republic attacked Saudi diplomatic missions following Riyadh's execution of a prominent Shiite cleric. The shock rapprochement between Saudi Arabia, the world's biggest oil exporter, and Iran, strongly at odds with

Continued on Page 6

Kuwait News' AI anchor Fedha grabs headlines

KUWAIT: Kuwait News introduced on Saturday virtual reporter 'Fedha' (Silver), the first newscaster created by artificial intelligence used by a news service in Kuwait. The Arabic-speaking AI news anchor learns with the help of live videos and works 24/7.

In her first broadcast, the anchor introduced herself as 'Fedha', the first AI anchor in Kuwait working for Kuwait News, then asked followers to mention

the type of news they would like to hear about. Several global news agencies covered the news, highlighting Fedha in their feed with pictures that show people following news read by the AI anchor, reflecting their understanding of the importance of integrating and using innovative methods into media.

Established in 2006, Kuwait News is a leading online news service in Kuwait with over 1.5 million followers across Twitter, Instagram, Facebook and other social media platforms. The new AI news service is the next step in Kuwait News' journey, which started as an SMS news service then evolved into a news website and entered the social media field.



KUWAIT: A journalist watches an introductory video by artificial intelligence anchor Fedha on the Twitter account of Kuwait News on April 9, 2023. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

Dishdasha delays as summer and Eid converge

By Shakir Reshamwala

KUWAIT: As Eid al-Fitr approaches, tailors in Kuwait are neck-deep in backlogged orders for dishdashas and are scrambling to deliver the traditional robes on time. Many tailoring shops in Kuwait City and other areas have affixed notices on their shopfronts saying no new orders are being accepted, sometimes for months ahead, leaving customers looking for new outfits increasingly frustrated.

Dishdasha tailoring shops have been facing this situation for the last couple of years amid the repercussions of the COVID pandemic and an exodus of workers, but the situation has exacerbated this year due to a variety of additional factors. "The summer season and Eid have converged this year, which has led to an unprecedented demand for new light-colored dishdashas," a Pakistani tailoring shop owner in Sharq, who has been in this business for decades, told Kuwait Times.

Omar Al-Mutairi, a 29-year-old Kuwaiti, said the last time he had a dishdasha stitched was last year. "I went to a number of tailors, but most of them have a sign on the door that says 'Come after Eid'. I still haven't found a tailor, even though I have the fabric ready." (See Page 3)



KUWAIT: A notice is displayed for customers that no new orders will be accepted until after Eid at a dishdasha tailoring shop in Kuwait City. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat



Local

Why is visiting a therapist seen as taboo in Kuwait?

Fear, negative perception worsens

By Ghadeer Ghloom

KUWAIT: Although visiting a therapist can help a person understand many emotional chaos and avoid life difficulties, so many people still avoid visiting a therapist to avoid being mortified by it. Many people believe that visiting a therapist is a confirmation of having an unhealthy mentality that can possibly result in dehumanizing them and hinder their life progress. This negative perception of visiting a therapist further worsens the case of not only those who need therapy, but also others that may become victims of some mentally ill people's actions. To further understand the reasons behind people avoiding visiting a therapist, Kuwait Times interviewed Dr Ali Al-Baghiani, a specialist in psychiatry.

Society's awareness and acceptance of undergoing therapy

Dr Baghlani highlights social media's major part in developing people's beliefs and ideologies. "I believe that in the last few years, people somehow started to become aware of the necessity of therapy. Social media have raised awareness and created a sense of acceptance of visiting a therapist when needed," he said. Awareness about the fact that some people need help in order to move on easily with their lives is growing due to social media illuminating its necessity. However, it is not normalized as it should be yet. We cannot deny that society still suffers from people who need therapy, who do not admit it and keep avoiding treatment," he said.



Dr Ali Al-Baghiani

Reasons why people avoid undergoing therapy

Dr Baghlani said there are several reasons for this hesitance. The most remarkable element is fear of people's looks and shameful comments. Apart from other factors that affect people once they are prescribed as mentally ill, they fear losing their custody rights and job opportunities, besides other matters related to their social and personal lives. According to Dr Baghlani, people refuse to admit their need for therapy in order to safeguard their image and belonging to society.

Treating mental illness is not based on one's choice

Treating one's mental illness cannot be left to one's preference because it can badly affect other people. This makes going through therapy a social responsibility. "If the issue of viewing therapy treatment as shameful is not resolved in society, the number of victims is going to increase, as people will face problems with mentally unhealthy people," said Baghlani.

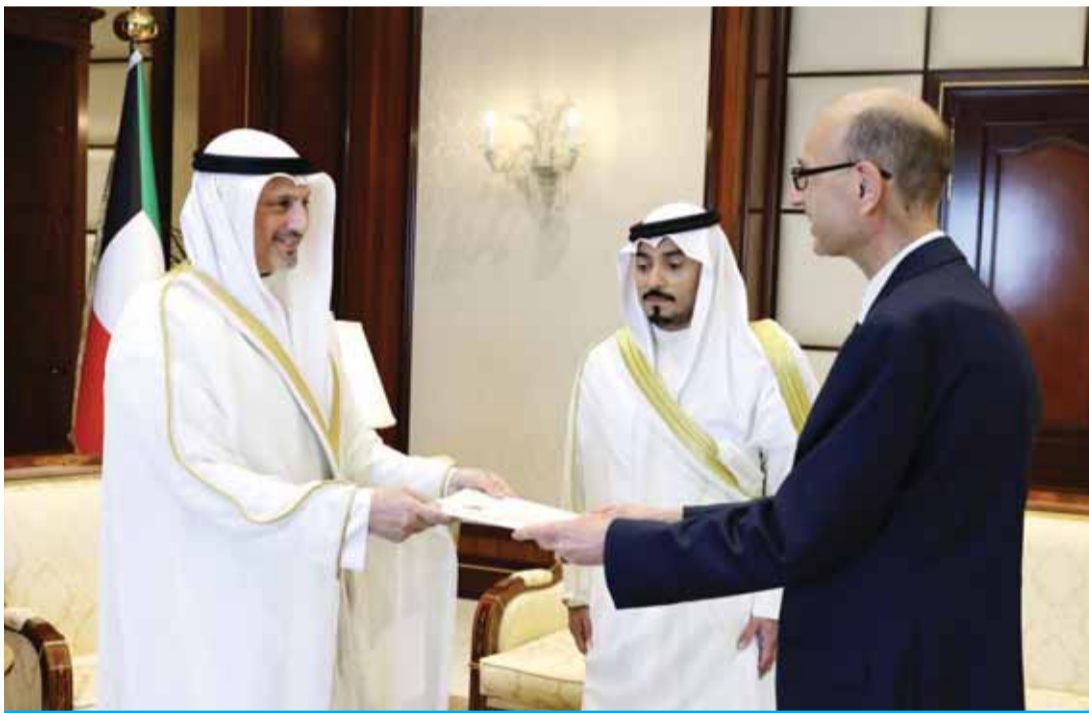
He added mentally ill people may affect regular people's mental wellness due to the fear



normal people may suffer from while interacting with people with mental illness. Thus, when people need therapy, they must visit a therapist so that they can better move on with their personal

and social life at different levels without suffering personally or causing problems to others. This will also result in benefiting society, as it remains powerful and productive.

FM receives Malta ambassador



KUWAIT: Foreign Minister Sheikh Salem Abdullah Al-Jaber Al-Sabah on Sunday received credentials of the newly Ambassador-Designate of the Republic of Malta to Kuwait Prof Dr George A Said-Zammit. Sheikh Salem expressed best wishes and success to the ambassador as they talk about bilateral relations.— KUNA

MoH brings in new doctors and nurses

KUWAIT: The Health Ministry is bringing in new batches of doctors, nurses and medics after a new batch of Pakistani doctors arrived in Kuwait recently to work in new hospitals and medical centers. "The Ministry of Health requested to bring in doctors from Iran and addressed security authorities to allow them to do so, as it is exempted from strict regulations when bringing in workers from certain countries for security reasons, including Iran," sources revealed to Kuwait Times

"The Ministry of Health believes Iranian doctors are distinguished and can benefit Kuwaiti hospitals and health centers. It also believes in the importance of diversifying recruitment of medical workers. If an agreement is reached to bring in doctors from Iran, then the first batch will not be less than 200 medical personnel, which may be followed by more batches," sources added.

"Approving the recruitment of doctors from Iran, if it takes place, will open the door to bringing in workers from other specialties and fields, especially since Iranian workers in Kuwait have reduced a lot throughout the previous years, as their number in the country has become less than 50,000 people," sources clarified.

Kuwait Cultural Office, Royal Irish College ink MoU

KUWAIT: The Ministry of Higher Education announced that the Kuwait Cultural Office in Bahrain represented the Ministry in signing a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with the Royal Irish College of Surgeons in Bahrain on organizing the enrollment of Kuwaiti students in the Bachelor of Medicine Program. The Ministry explained in a press release on Sunday that one of the most important items of the memorandum is the exemption of Kuwaiti students wishing to study at the Royal Irish College of Surgeons in Bahrain from studying the preliminary year.

The statement quoted the head of the Kuwaiti Cultural Office in Bahrain, Dr Mohammed Al-Dughaim, as saying that under this agreement, 40 seats are provided each academic year through scholarship (direct dispatch) to study the Bachelor's program in medicine at the Royal Irish College of Surgeons in Bahrain, starting from the academic year 2023-2024.

Al-Dughaim explained that these seats correspond to the quality of Higher Education outputs and meet a basic need of the labor market needs. He pointed out that the relationship with the Royal Irish College of Surgeons in Bahrain is old and distinguished, as hundreds of Kuwaiti doctors have graduated from it, who practice their work with re-



Officials from Kuwait Cultural Office in Bahrain and the Royal Irish College of Surgeons sign a memorandum of understanding (MoU).— KUNA

markable efficiency in the Kuwait health sector.

He pointed out that the number of Kuwaiti students studying at the college is about 200 students in the specialty of human medicine under the supervision of the Kuwaiti Cultural Office and direct attention and care from the ambassador of Kuwait in Bahrain Sheikh Thamer Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah.

In a related context, the head of the Kuwaiti Cultural Office in Dublin Dr Fahima Al-Awadi, said according to the statement, that the agreement is the result of cooperation between the cultural office in Dublin and the cultural office in Bahrain, which comes as a reflection of the cooperation and efforts carried out by the offices directly aligned with the objectives of the Ministry of Higher Education.

Al-Awadi explained that these efforts come within the framework of the state's interest in the human

Minister reaffirms Kuwait stance on supporting Turkey

KUWAIT: Minister of Social Affairs and Women and Childhood Affairs Mai Jassem Al-Baghli reaffirmed Kuwait stance on supporting Turkey and its friendly people following the destructive earthquake the country suffered from that killed and injured thousands and caused huge damage. Baghli remembered the victims of this catastrophe and prayed to Allah Almighty to bestow His mercy on them, wishing the injured speedy recovery, during

a ghabqa hosted by the Turkish Embassy.

Baghli said in response to the instructions of the political leadership, the social affairs ministry moved to coordinate efforts with various state entities and NGOs and launched the national campaign "Kuwait is with you" to help those affected by the catastrophe. Turkish Ambassador Tuba Nur Sonmez thanked Kuwait, the leadership, government and people for the quick response in helping her country face the quake tragedy.

The ambassador honored Baghli for her major role during the crisis, as she was among the first officials who visited the affected areas and gave support to the afflicted. She said that she personally felt her keenness on removing all obstacles to support the relief campaigns and coordinate the efforts of Kuwait.



9 injured in fire incident

KUWAIT: The public relations and media department at the Kuwait Fire Force (KFF) received a report of fire that erupted in a building in Farwaniya. Teams from Farwaniya and Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh rushed to the scene. The fire started in an apartment (sixth floor) and spread to the seventh floor through the balcony. Nine people were injured and was transferred for medical attention.



development and the creation of opportunities to enable promising Kuwaiti youths to obtain the scholarships offered by the Ministry of Higher Education. She added that the conditions of admission to study at the Royal Irish College of Surgeons in Bahrain are fully identical to the conditions of admission to the Royal Irish College of Surgeons in Ireland after the signing of this agreement to ensure equality be-

tween Kuwaiti students studying at both colleges in Dublin and Bahrain. The president of the Royal Irish College of Surgeons in Bahrain Dr Samir Al-otum, welcomed the memorandum of understanding with the Ministry of higher education in Kuwait, explaining that the college is always looking forward to strengthening and continuing the relationship with the ministry.—KUNA

Local

Summer-Eid double whammy overwhelms dishdasha tailors

Expats over 60 leaving Kuwait compounding problem



KUWAIT: Tailors make dishdashas at shops in Kuwait City amidst high demand for Ramadan and Eid. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat



Notices are displayed at shops that no new orders will be accepted until after Eid.

A tailor hands over a customer his order of dishdashas after a waiting period of a month and a half.

By Shakir Reshamwala

KUWAIT: As Eid al-Fitr approaches, tailors in Kuwait are neck-deep in backlogged orders for dishdashas and are scrambling to deliver the traditional robes on time. Many tailoring shops in Kuwait City and other areas have affixed notices on their shopfronts saying no new orders are being accepted, sometimes for months ahead, leaving customers looking for new outfits increasingly frustrated.

Dishdasha tailoring shops have been facing this situation for the last couple of years amid the repercussions of the COVID pandemic and an exodus of workers, but the situation has exacerbated this year due to a variety of additional factors. "The summer season and Eid have converged this year, which has led to an unprecedented demand for new light-colored dishdashas," a Pakistani tailoring shop owner in Sharq, who has been in this business for decades, told Kuwait Times.

He said each customer orders seven to eight dishdashas at a time, despite every bespoke dishdasha costing around KD 15. So, a family can have

orders of dozens of dishdashas on the books at a time, and with each of them custom-made, the process is time-consuming. "Many experienced tailors left during the pandemic, while others who reached the age of 60 also had to leave due to the exorbitant iqama renewal fees," he lamented, calling for relaxing visa rules to facilitate the entry of new workers.

Abu Khaled, a Kuwaiti customer, said people have to place their orders at least a month and a half before Eid, otherwise they will not accept them. He said there was a shortage of tailors even for winter dishdashas, adding he had extra robes tailored last summer for his future needs. "Prices have also risen. Dishdashas now cost around KD 17 — KD 10 to 11 for the fabric and KD 6 for tailoring," he pointed out.

"This crisis happens every Eid, of finding a tailor who can get me a dishdasha on time. I went a week before Ramadan, but they told me it will only be ready two weeks after Eid. I finally found a tailor through wasta of a friend. He told me he can finish it in three days, otherwise I would not have gotten the dishdasha. I already had the material, but the tailor-

ing cost me KD 9.5!" said Mohammed Hamada, a 27-year-old Kuwaiti.

"The reason for the problem is because expats over 60 are forced to leave the country. I hope the country has more compassion towards these workers. They should not be forced to leave if they want to serve the country. This will really benefit us as nationals more than expatriates," he told Kuwait Times.

Those looking for readymade dishdashas can also be out of luck finding the color, size and style of their choice, at the right price. "Even readymade dishdashas are in short supply. People made their purchases long before Eid," said a veteran Indian tailor who runs a ready-to-wear dishdasha shop in Souq Mubarakia. He said the shortage of skilled workers has been roiling the dishdasha market for the past few years. Prices have also gone up due to the supply and labor crunch, he added.

Omar Al-Mutairi, a 29-year-old Kuwaiti, said the last time he had a dishdasha stitched was last year. "I went to a number of tailors, but most of them have a sign on the door that says 'Come after Eid'.



I still haven't found a tailor, even though I have the fabric ready. This problem has been occurring for a while, but this time it has worsened. This is because of tailors over 60 who left, as most tailors are older in age. The authorities should open the door to bringing tailors back to resolve this issue — it is not that hard," he contended.

'Fun with Textiles' Ramadan bazaar at Sadu House

By Ghadeer Ghloom

KUWAIT: Sadu House held a Ramadan bazaar on April 8, 2023 titled 'Fun with Textiles'. The bazaar included an exhibition for selling participants' art and handcraft products, free workshops and a photography corner. During the event, Sadu House Chairperson Sheikha Bibi Duajj Al-Jaber Al-Sabah told Kuwait Times the 'Fun with Textiles' project was launched 12 years ago. The purpose of this event is to train children in handcrafts. Free workshops and classes teach children to work with textiles.



"This year's graduation was held during the time of Girgian celebrations. The event exhibited the

handcrafts of students learning at Sadu House in the past 12 years. Students at Sadu House are taught the value of giving by giving a certain percent of the money they earn from selling their arts and crafts to children affected by the earthquake that struck Turkey and Syria recently. This day is an open day for children to come and enjoy making handcrafts and celebrate Girgian with everyone," she said.

"After graduating, many of the graduates join 'Insij' workshops, which transferred their Sadu talents, in addition to other creative design projects. We love to embrace our graduates, as we have grown together in the past 12 years," Sheikha Bibi added. Sarah Al-Mousawi, supervisor of the 'Fun with Textiles' event, said they have trained approximately 1,000 students, both boys and girls, on how to work with textiles in different ways. In order to keep up with the students after graduating, Sadu House is holding this event to see how far they have progressed.

The exhibition includes artworks and handcrafts of previous students of Sadu House, along with other participants who were not students at Sadu House, but wanted to display their personal works. Around 30 percent of the profit realized from selling the products will go to charity organizations. Mousawi added Sadu House holds an annual event to display the final works of their students during the year.



KUWAIT: Sadu house held a Ramadan Bazaar on Saturday April 8th 2023. The Bazaar includes an exhibition, handcraft productions, free workshops and a photography corner. —Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat



Arab League slams Zionists' terrorism

CAIRO: The Arab League deplored Zionist racist and terrorist actions against the Palestinian people and systematic breach of their basic human rights. Dr Saeed Abu Ali, the assistant secretary general for Palestine, recalled the 75th anniversary of Dair Yaseen massacre that took lives of more than 250 Palestinians and wounded 300 others.

The international community, vis a vis such actions, must take a serious stance and coerce Zionists immediately to heed resolutions of the international legitimacy, he said. He re-affirmed necessity of forcing Zionists adhere to the UN resolutions that call for attaining justice on the basis of the two states' settlement. Zionist entity has continued committing abhorrent crimes latest of which was scorching the village of Hawarah and desecrating sanctities in Jerusalem and Al-Khalil, said Dr Abu Ali also alluding to the recurring attacks on Al-Aqsa Mosque.

Meanwhile, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) has strongly condemned the serious escalation by the occupation forces and settlers by repeatedly storming Al-Aqsa Mosque during Ramadan, attacking worshippers, including women and children. This came in a final communique issued by the OIC following an open-ended extraordinary meeting of the OIC Executive Committee, held at the invitation of Palestine and Jordan on the continued aggression by Zionists on the holy city.

The conferees cautioned against the ramifications of the continued infringement by the occupation authorities on the sanctity of Al-Aqsa Mosque, including continuous provocations, abuses, daily severe assaults, and incursions in gross violation of international law and unprecedented tampering with the existing historical and legal situation to perpetuate the temporal and spatial division of the mosque.

They underlined that the occupation has no sovereignty over any part of Al-Aqsa Mosque and that Muslim worshippers have the absolute right to pray freely and safely there, according to the statement. They also held occupation authorities accountable for the consequences of these serious and provocative actions of its racist government, due to its attempt, through systematic brutal attacks, deliberate provocation and repeated incitement, to escalate the situation.

They sounded the alarm about the possible consequences of international peace and security, calling on the international community, particularly the UN Security Council, to live up to its due responsibilities by taking urgent action and necessary measures to deter and stop the serious escalation. In their final communique, the conferees underscored the significance of continuing coordination and cooperation among the OIC, the Arab League and the African Union (AU) to protect the occupied city of Al-Quds against systematic Zionist policies and attacks. —KUNA

Diplomatic Women's Committee organizes Ghabqa



KUWAIT: The Diplomatic Women's Committee prepared the "Ghabqa celebration" within the activities of the holy month of Ramadan, a cultural and a social entertainment gathering, in the presence of the honorary President of the committee, Sheikha Halah Bader Muhammad Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, the committee's advisor Nargis Al-Shatti, and the media and public relations officer Fauzia Abdul Basit.

Among the attendees were a large group of lady diplomats, spouses of ambassadors, and friends of the committee. The event was organized in the middle of the courtyard of the Naif Palace, which is considered the oldest palace for the ruling family in Kuwait, it is distinguished by its historical virtues, and today it is a building for the Capital Governorate.

The program was presented by the famous Kuwaiti anchor Abdul Aziz Darwish, who described the event of Ghabqa as a cultural celebration that

people of Kuwait celebrate in Ramadan to bring joy and happiness to the hearts of their families. The Ghabqa was inaugurated with the Kuwaiti traditional cuisine and the baker who baked the tortillas, which is specially prepared in Ramadan along with old Kuwaiti folk songs that are sung in Ramadan and some folkloric dances.

The guests visited the museum located in the palace which tells the history of the palace as Sheikha Halah gave a detailed explanation of the history of the ruling family. At the end, the governorate official, Abdul Karim Mahdi, was honored for his kind efforts to make this evening a success as everyone enjoyed this wonderful cultural evening of Ramadan, the honorary President of DWC, Sheikha Halah Al-Sabah thanked and praised the members of the committee for their efforts organizing such a distinguished cultural Ramadan evening, wishing them all the success in future.



KUWAIT: The Diplomatic Women's Committee celebrate Ghabqa - a cultural and a social entertainment gathering, in the presence of the honorary President of the committee, Sheikha Halah Bader Muhammad Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, the committee's advisor Nargis Al-Shatti, and the media and public relations officer Fauzia Abdul Basit.



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CAN organizes Girgian party

KUWAIT: The National Campaign for Cancer Awareness (CAN) held a Girgian party at the National Bank Children Hospital for children receiving treatments. Gifts were given to them. Dr Hussa Al-Shaheen said the Girgian CAN offered healthy sweeteners as recommended by nutritionists. She said the cooperation by the Director of NBK Hospital Dr Ali Al-Mulla Ali reflects the importance of societal partnership between government entities and the civil society in creating awareness programs.

Dr Hussa said leukemia is the most common cancers in children and the recovery rate increases with early detection, so it is very important for family members and health care providers to be aware of the early signs and symptoms. There are some symptoms that could be early warning for children - such as when a child feels very tired for several days, loss of appetite - accompanied with weight loss, feeling bone pain, continued fever for weeks and red spots on the skin. Such symptoms may be similar to other illnesses, so when such symptoms appear, a doctor's advice is necessary.





Iraq condemns 'bombardment' near airport in Kurdish region

China simulates Taiwan strikes in second day of military drills

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Saudi delegation, Omani mediators in Yemen to try to broker new truce

Houthis' demands include lifting of blockade, monetary compensation



This handout picture obtained from the Twitter account of Abdulqader al-Mortada, head of the Houthi National Committee for Prisoners Affairs (NCPA), shows 13 prisoners released by the Saudi authorities in exchange for a Saudi prisoner freed earlier, upon their arrival at Sanaa International airport. — AFP photos



SANAA: A man rides his bike past the closed embassy of Saudi Arabia in Sanaa on April 9, 2023.

SANAA: A Saudi delegation was in the rebel-held capital of Yemen on Sunday to negotiate a new truce with Iran-backed Houthi rebels, diplomats said. The Saudi officials are "in Sanaa to discuss moving forward to create peace in Yemen," said a Yemeni diplomat based in the Gulf region, information that was confirmed by a second diplomat.

Omani mediators arrived in Yemen Saturday to discuss a new truce between the Houthi rebels and Saudi Arabia, an airport source said, amid renewed moves to end the conflict. Diplomatic efforts to resolve the conflict have multiplied since the Yemeni government's main foreign backer Saudi Arabia signed a Chinese-brokered deal to restore relations with Iran last month.

The top Saudi and Iranian diplomats met in Beijing Thursday, resuming diplomatic relations and pledging to work together to bring "security and

stability" to their turbulent region. Nearly a decade of war in Yemen has claimed hundreds of thousands of lives, both directly and indirectly, and triggered what the United Nations has called the world's worst humanitarian crisis.

The Houthis seized the capital Sanaa in 2014, triggering the conflict with the government which has been backed for eight years by a military coalition led by regional heavyweight Riyadh. The rapprochement between the two great regional rivals, Shiite-majority Iran and mainly Sunni Saudi Arabia, has fueled hopes of reduced tensions in the Middle East, particularly in Yemen.

"A delegation from Oman has arrived in Sanaa to hold talks with Houthi leaders about the truce and the peace process," a source at the capital's airport, who requested anonymity as he is not authorized to speak to journalists, told AFP. The source said the delegation

was accompanied by Mohammed Abdelsalam, the rebels' chief negotiator, who lives in Muscat.

Oman has forged a reputation as a discreet mediator in Gulf disputes often involving Iran. Abdelsalam himself tweeted that he had arrived in Sanaa with the Omani delegation, but without providing further details. The rebels' news agency, Saba, quoted Abdelsalam as saying the Houthis' demands included "an end to the (Saudi) aggression, the total lifting of the blockade, and payment of the salaries of all civil servants using revenues from oil and gas".

Abdelsalam added that, "Our just demands are the departure of the occupying forces from Yemen, compensation and reconstruction." The United Nations special envoy on Yemen, Hans Grundberg, was in the Omani capital this week for talks on "the political process". A Yemeni government source, speaking to AFP on condition of anonymity, told AFP that

the Saudis and Houthis have agreed in principle on a six-month truce to pave the way for three months of talks on establishing a two-year "transition" for the war-torn country.

The country enjoyed a six-month lull in fighting during a ceasefire last year, but that truce was not renewed after it expired on October 2. Iran views the United States as an archenemy, but on Wednesday welcomed a call by the American special envoy for Yemen to back "the political process that we hope is coming". Also Saturday, the head of the Houthis' prisoners of war committee told rebel media that 13 prisoners freed by the Saudis had arrived in Sanaa, in exchange for one Saudi released earlier. Saudi officials did not comment. In early March, the UN confirmed that the rebels and Yemen's internationally recognized government had agreed to exchange more than 880 prisoners. — AFP

Zionist entity army launches strikes in Syria

JERUSALEM: The Zionist entity launched artillery strikes on Syria Sunday morning, the Zionist army announced, after several rockets were fired from there and landed in the Zionist-occupied Golan Heights.

The Zionist entity's retaliatory strike to rocket attacks from Syria — which no one has claimed — is the latest episode in escalating violence in the region. "In response to the rockets fired from Syria at (the Zionist entity) earlier today, IDF Artillery is currently striking in Syrian territory," the military tweeted.

A drone was also "currently striking the launchers in Syria from which rockets were launched into Zionist territory". Six rockets were launched towards the entity Saturday night, with two landing in the Golan Heights, the army said. At least one was intercepted by the Zionist air-defense system.

The 1,200 square kilometer (460 square mile) region — patrolled by Zionist soldiers and bordering Lebanon — was seized from Syria in the 1967 Six-Day War. The Zionist entity later annexed it in a move that was never recognized by the international community.

Syrian state news agency SANA said the Zionist strikes took place around 5:00 am (0200 GMT). Cit-

ing an unnamed military source, SANA said Syria's military had "intercepted the rockets ... and brought down some of them".

The surge in violence and unrest comes as the Muslim fasting month of Ramadan, Jewish Passover, and Christian Easter coincide. On Wednesday, Zionist police stormed the prayer hall of Al-Aqsa Mosque, Islam's third-holiest site, in a pre-dawn raid aimed at dislodging "law-breaking youths masked agitators" they said had barricaded themselves inside.

The next day, more than 30 rockets were fired from Lebanese soil into the entity, which the Zionist army blamed on Palestinian groups, saying it was most likely Hamas, which rules the Gaza Strip. The Zionists then bombarded Gaza and southern Lebanon, targeting "terror infrastructures" that it said belonged to Hamas.

It was the biggest salvo fired from Lebanon since Zionists fought a devastating 34-day war with Iran-backed militant group Hezbollah in 2006 and the first time Zionists have confirmed an attack on Lebanese territory since April 2022.

The Zionists and Lebanon are technically in a state of war, and the ceasefire line is patrolled by the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL), deployed in the country's south. On the Syrian side, the Zionist entity has recently intensified its raids targeting positions of pro-Iranian groups.

On Friday evening, an Italian tourist was killed and seven other people injured in a suspected car-ramping attack on pedestrians on the Tel Aviv seafloor. In response, Zionist Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu instructed the police to "mobilize



GOLAN HEIGHTS: Zionist soldiers patrol Zionist-annexed Golan Heights on April 9, 2023. — AFP

all reserve border police units". He also directed the army to "mobilize additional forces", his office said. Earlier Friday, two British-Zionist sisters aged 16 and 20 were killed and their mother seriously wounded when their car was fired on in the Jordan Valley in the Zionist-occupied West Bank.

Police said four reserve battalions of border police would be deployed in city centers from Sunday. The defense ministry confirmed late Saturday it had mobilized soldiers to support the police, and that it would tighten entry restrictions into the Zionist entity for Palestinians from the West Bank and Gaza, in particular workers. — AFP

Hezbollah, Hamas chiefs meet in Beirut

BEIRUT: The leaders of the armed movements Hezbollah and Hamas have met in Beirut to discuss "the readiness of the axis of resistance" against the Zionist entity, a Hezbollah statement said Sunday. Ismail Haniyeh, the head of the Palestinian Islamist movement Hamas, which rules the Gaza Strip, has been in the Lebanese capital since Wednesday. Zionists blamed Hamas for firing 34 rockets the following day toward its territory from southern Lebanon, the stronghold of the Iran-backed Shiite movement Hezbollah. The Zionist army retaliated early Friday with strikes on both southern Lebanon and Gaza, after rockets targeting the Zionist entity were also fired from the coastal enclave.

During Haniyeh's meeting with Hezbollah chief Hassan Nasrallah, the pair discussed "the readiness of the axis of resistance" and cooperation between its members in the face of recent developments, the Hezbollah statement said. The "axis of resistance" refers to Lebanese, Palestinian, Syrian and other Iran-backed groups opposed to the Zionist entity. The two also discussed "the intensification of resistance in the West Bank and Gaza" and "events at Al-Aqsa Mosque" in Jerusalem, according to the statement, which did not specify when they met. — AFP

Marseille building collapse injures 5, fire hampers search

MARSEILLE: An apartment building collapsed in an apparent explosion Sunday in the French Mediterranean city of Marseille, injuring five people, with authorities warning there are likely to be fatalities as firefighters battled a blaze.

At the moment of the blast, around 12:40 am (2240 GMT), "everything shook, you could see people running and there was smoke everywhere, the building fell onto the street," local grocer Aziz told AFP, asking that his family name not be used.

"We have to be prepared to have fatalities in this terrible tragedy," Marseille mayor Benoit Payan told journalists at the scene in the central La Plaine district, where over 100 firefighters were still getting the blaze under control and the smell of smoke hung in the air. Five people were injured in neighboring buildings which were damaged by the collapse, and 33 were taken into care by emergency responders. It is unclear how many people were inside the fallen block—believed to have one apartment on each floor — at the time of the collapse.

"Not all the people who were supposedly inside the building have been seen, families are worried," Housing Minister Olivier Klein told broadcaster Franceinfo. The intense heat as the building burns



MARSEILLE: Firefighters stand next to a truck moving rubbles where a building collapsed on April 9, 2023. — AFP

has kept search dog teams from picking through the rubble. "Time is of the essence" to discover possible survivors among the ruins, Marseille fire chief Lionel Mathieu said.

Rescuers' task has been complicated by the partial collapse of one of the adjoining buildings, where eight people had to be brought down by ladder after taking refuge on a roof terrace. Other buildings on the street were evacuated and their residents put up in schools, while an aid center for people looking

for missing family members or loved ones has been opened in a neighboring district. Interior Minister Gerald Darmanin was expected on the scene of the disaster on Sunday morning.

"We have to be very cautious about what the cause was at this stage," said Christophe Mirmand, the prefect of the southern Bouches-du-Rhone region. Gas was "one possible option," he added. Gilles, who lives on a side street near the fallen building, told AFP the sound of the crash "was huge". — AFP

Russian strikes kill Ukrainian family

KYIV: A 50-year-old man and his 11-year-old daughter were killed after Russian missiles struck a house in the southeastern Ukrainian city of Zaporizhzhia, officials said on Sunday. It was the latest Russian strike on civilian infrastructure in Ukraine as Moscow's invasion stretches into its second year. "The enemy carried out a missile attack on Zaporizhzhia and killed another Ukrainian family," the head of the State Emergency Service, Sergiy Kruk, said on social media.

The girl died in an ambulance, said the head of Zaporizhzhia City Council, Anatolii Kurtiev. Rescue workers pulled the girl's 46-year-old mother alive from under the rubble. Her elder daughter was not at home when the Russians struck at night, the State Emergency Service said. Kurtiev said two Russian missiles struck a residential building, adding that windows and roofs were damaged in dozens of neighboring houses. The region of Zaporizhzhia is one of four Ukrainian provinces Russian President Vladimir Putin claims to have annexed last year. — AFP

International

China simulates Taiwan strikes in second day of military drills

Taipei defense ministry detects 11 ships, 70 aircraft in largest incursion

BEIJING: Chinese fighter jets and warships simulated strikes on Taiwan Sunday as they encircled the island during a second straight day of military drills launched in response to its president meeting the US House speaker.

The exercises sparked condemnation from Taipei and calls for restraint from Washington, which said it was "monitoring Beijing's actions closely". Dubbed "Joint Sword", the three-day operation — which includes rehearsing an encirclement of Taiwan — will run until Monday, the People's Liberation Army's (PLA) Eastern Theatre Command said.

"I am a little worried: I would be lying to you if I say that I am not," said 73-year-old Donald Ho, who was exercising in a park on Sunday morning in Taipei, in the far north of the self-ruled island. "I am still worried because if a war broke out both sides will suffer quite a lot," he told AFP.

China's war games sent 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", the army said as it launched the exercises, engineered to flex Beijing's military muscles in front of Taiwan and the world.

A report from state broadcaster CCTV on Sunday said drills had "simulated joint precision strikes against key targets on Taiwan island and surrounding waters", adding that forces "continued to maintain the situation of closely encircling the island".

The write-up went on to say the air force had deployed dozens of aircraft to "fly into the target airspace", and ground forces had carried out drills for "multi-target precision strikes". Taiwanese President Tsai Ing-wen immediately denounced the drills, which come after she met US House Speaker Kevin McCarthy in California.

She pledged to work with "the US and other like-minded countries" in the face of "continued authoritarian expansionism". In Washington, a State Department spokesperson said the United States had

"consistently urged restraint and no change to the status quo", but noted it had ample resources to fulfil its security commitments in Asia. The United States has been deliberately ambiguous on whether it would defend Taiwan militarily, although for decades it has sold weapons to Taipei to help ensure its self-defence.

Live-fire exercises

Exercises on Monday will include live-fire drills off the rocky coast of China's Fujian province, about 80 kilometers (50 miles) south of Taiwan's Matsu Islands and 190 kilometers from Taipei. "These operations serve as a stern warning against the collusion between separatist forces seeking 'Taiwan independence' and external forces and against their provocative activities," said Shi Yin, a PLA spokesman.

AFP saw no immediate signs of enhanced military maneuvers on the northern coast of Pingtan, a Chinese island across the strait from Taiwan where the live-ammunition exercises will kick off on Monday.

On a roadside verge high above the ocean, Lin Ren blasted the Chinese national anthem on a loop as he sold cups of coffee from the back of his car. "I think the current exercises serve as a way of putting pressure on Taiwan," the 29-year-old told AFP.

"I think they make it clear to them that we have the capabilities ... to unify," China views democratic, self-ruled Taiwan as part of its territory and has vowed to take it one day, by force if necessary. Taipei's defense ministry said it had detected 11 Chinese warships and 70 aircraft around Taiwan on Sunday.

It said 45 aircraft had crossed the median line separating Taiwan from mainland China on Saturday — the most incursions this year, according to figures maintained by AFP. Over the weekend there were around 150 detections of Chinese ships or aircraft, including fighter jets, drones, bombers, and transport aircraft, according to the ministry.

The island has been on high alert and said its forces "will be well prepared and maintain solid combat

on Thursday as the civilian opposition marked a key anniversary in the decades-old struggle against military rule with new protests.

A new delay to the signing of a deal to restore the transition to civilian government, which had been rescheduled for Thursday, prompted the civilian opposition to call for nationwide protests instead.

Turk, the United Nations' high commissioner for human rights, urged all sides to de-escalate tensions and refrain from violence.

"The country is at a decisive juncture. Much work has been done and many positive steps taken towards the signature of a final agreement -- all efforts

ers in the island's first democratic presidential election. In 2000 elections, the KMT loses power in Taiwan for the first time. Trade links between the two sides improve over the next few years.

2005-2015: Threats and talks

Beijing adopts a law in March 2005 authorizing the use of force if Taiwan declares independence. In April, KMT chairman Lien Chan makes a landmark visit to Beijing for talks with Chinese leader Hu Jintao. In 2008, Taiwan and China resume high-level talks after the KMT's Ma Ying-jeou is elected president on a Beijing-friendly platform. They sign a sweeping Economic Cooperation Framework Agreement in 2010 and in 2014 hold the first government-to-government talks since separation.

2016: Honeymoon over

Tsai Ing-wen, from the traditionally pro-independence Democratic Progressive Party, wins presidential elections in January 2016. In June, China suspends all communications with Taiwan after the new government fails to acknowledge the "One China" policy.

In December, US president-elect Donald Trump breaks with decades of US diplomatic policy by speaking directly with Tsai by telephone. Chinese President Xi Jinping says in January 2019 that the unification of China and Taiwan is "inevitable".

2021: US-China tensions

In 2021, Chinese military jets make hundreds of incursions into Taiwan's defense zone. In October, President Joe Biden says the United States will defend Taiwan if China attacks it, in comments later partly walked back by the White House. Tsai confirms that a small number of US troops are present in Taiwan to help train its forces.

2022: Pelosi visit sparks fury

US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi lands in Taiwan on August 2 during a tour of Asia after days of speculation and stern warnings from Beijing of unspecified "consequences". The highest-profile elected US official to visit the island in 25 years says her visit demonstrates her country's "unwavering commitment to supporting Taiwan's vibrant democracy". — AFP

The United States has for decades been the key diplomatic power in the Middle East and has an alliance, albeit a frequently strained one, with Saudi Arabia. Washington has cautiously welcomed the rapprochement between the Saudis and US adversary Iran despite the role of China, which it sees as its biggest global challenger.

Iran and Saudi Arabia vie for influence in Syria, Lebanon and Iraq. They also support rival sides in several conflict zones across the region, including in Yemen, where Houthi rebels are backed by Tehran and Riyadh leads a military coalition supporting the government. In a separate development on Saturday, Omani mediators arrived in the Yemeni capital Sanaa to discuss a new truce between the Iran-backed Houthi rebels and Saudi Arabia, an airport source said. Diplomatic efforts to resolve the conflict have multiplied since the Chinese-brokered Saudi-Iran deal to restore relations. The two Middle East powerhouses had held several rounds of dialogue in Iraq and Oman before reaching the agreement in Beijing, negotiated over five days between Iran's secretary of the Supreme National Security Council Ali Shahrkhani and his Saudi counterpart Musaad bin Mohammed Al-Aiban. — AFP



HSINCHU, Taiwan: A Taiwanese air force Mirage 2000 fighter jet lands at an air force base in Hsinchu, northern Taiwan on April 9, 2023. — AFP

readiness", while making sure not to "escalate conflict". An AFP journalist saw Mirage 2000 fighter jets scrambling at the Hsinchu air force base in northern Taiwan on Sunday.

Three boats from Taiwan's elite Amphibious Reconnaissance and Patrol Unit were also seen patrolling the Matsu Islands on Sunday, according to an AFP journalist. "The CCP (Chinese Communist Party) has continued to conduct military exercises around the Taiwan Strait and since this morning it has successively dispatched multiple batches of aircraft ... as well as a number of ships in the area," Taiwan's de-

must now be made to get the political transition back on the right path," he said in a statement.

April 6 is a symbolic date for Sudan's civilian opposition, the anniversary of uprisings in 1985 and 2019 that ended up ousting two leaders who had seized power in coups.

Sudan is still ruled by a military leader, General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, who took power in an October 2021 coup, abiding the transition to civilian rule agreed after the 2019 overthrow of Islamist general Omar al-Bashir, who seized power in a 1989 coup.

Turk urged all sides to work together to avoid further delays in signing an agreement for a tran-

sition to civilian government, while also calling on non-signatories to join the process. "I urge the authorities to ensure that the rights of the people to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly are fully respected and that security forces are clearly instructed to respond to demonstrations in line with human rights laws and standards," he said. "We must not see a repeat of the use of unnecessary, disproportionate force." The worsening state of Sudan's economy has put pressure on all sides to reach a deal, which is a precondition for the resumption of international aid to the impoverished country. — AFP

muslims as Al-Haram al-Sharif. The raised compound is home to Al-Aqsa mosque, the third-holiest site in Islam and the focal point for Ramadan celebrations.

An AFP journalist saw more than 500 religious Jews enter the site Sunday morning under police escort while Muslims prayed nearby, without any clashes. Muslims fear the Zionist entity's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's hard-right government may change longstanding rules that allow Jews to visit but not pray at the Al-Aqsa compound, despite his repeated denials. In recent years, the number of Jews visiting the esplanade has increased and ultranationalists sometimes pray there surreptitiously in breach of the rules.

Zionist police stormed the prayer hall of the mosque in a violent pre-dawn raid Wednesday they said was aimed at dislodging "law-breaking youths and masked agitators". Mahmud Mansour, a Palestinian Muslim, criticized the police actions. "This is our place, we have to stay in the evening, in the night, and this is Ramadan -- we have to pray," the 65-year-old told AFP near the mosque compound.

The raid followed reports that Jewish activists were intending to hold a traditional Passover sacrifice at the compound -- a process which is banned and which a top rabbi has moved to prevent. The day after the raid, rockets were fired from Lebanon into the Zionist entity, which the Zionist entity's army blamed on Palestinian groups. The Zionist entity then bombarded Gaza and southern Lebanon.

The Zionist army also said it launched strikes on Syria Sunday morning, after rockets fired from there landed in the Golan Heights that is occupied by the Zionist entity. The Zionist entity has launched hundreds of air strikes during more than a decade of civil war in Syria, primarily targeting Iran-backed forces and Lebanese Hezbollah fighters, as well as Syrian army positions.

Zionists were also set to gather Sunday for the funeral of two sisters killed when their car came under fire in the occupied West Bank on Friday. The mother of the two British-Zionist sisters, aged 16 and 20, was seriously wounded in the attack. — AFP

Worshippers celebrate in Jerusalem amid surge in violence

Worshippers celebrate in Jerusalem amid surge in violence

JERUSALEM: Thousands of worshippers held tense celebrations in Jerusalem Sunday, as Christian Easter coincided with Jewish Passover and the Muslim holy month of Ramadan, amid a surge in violence in the Zionist-Palestinian conflict.

Leading Easter Mass at the Vatican, Pope Francis expressed "deep concern" Sunday over the flare-up in tensions sparked by a Zionist police raid on Al-Aqsa mosque days ago.

The Zionist entity has since struck targets in Gaza, Lebanon and most recently Syria in response to rocket fire mostly blamed on Palestinian militants, while separate attacks in the West Bank and Tel Aviv killed three people including an Italian tourist.

On Sunday pilgrims crowded into the narrow alleyways of Jerusalem's Old City, flanked by heavily-armed Zionist security forces deployed following the recent deadly attacks. Churchgoers were ushered through the courtyard of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, built on the site where Christians believe Jesus was crucified, buried and resurrected. "[I had] some doubt, taking into consideration recent events, but still I decided to go," said 50-year-old Paulius Majauskas, visiting from Lithuania. Near the church, thousands of Jewish pilgrims gathered at the Western Wall for the traditional priestly blessing of Passover. Judy Green, 60, said the blessing was "beautiful, very uplifting" at the Western Wall, the holiest place where Jews can pray.

"I feel that God will protect us, we're all praying together as one people," she said.

The Western Wall lies in annexed east Jerusalem that is annexed by the Zionist entity and sits below the Temple Mount, the most sacred site to Jews, known to



Clergy men attend a mass on Easter Sunday at the Church of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem on April 9, 2023. — AFP

UN calls for de-escalation in turbulent Sudan

GENEVA: UN human rights chief Volker Turk voiced alarm at the tense situation in Sudan, urging all sides to redouble their efforts towards restoring a civilian-led government. Pro-democracy activists in Sudan marched against the army and paramilitaries

China-Taiwan relations: Seven decades of unrest

TAIPEI: As China launches three days of military drills around Taiwan, here's a rundown of the history of relations between the self-ruled island and Beijing:

1949: Separation

Mao Zedong's communists take power in Beijing in October 1949 after defeating Chiang Kai-shek's Kuomintang (KMT) nationalists in a civil war. The KMT flee to the island of Taiwan and form their own government in Taipei in December, cutting off contacts with mainland China. In 1950, Taiwan becomes an ally of the United States, which is at war with communist China in Korea. The United States deploys a fleet in the Taiwan Strait to protect its ally from possible attack.

1971: Beijing gets UN, US nods

In October 1971, Beijing takes over China's seat at the United Nations, previously held by Taipei. In 1979, the United States cuts formal ties with Taiwan and establishes diplomatic relations with Beijing instead. Washington goes on to develop a nuanced Taiwan policy where it "acknowledges" China's claim to the island, which is not the same as accepting Beijing's claim of sovereignty. The United States also maintains trade and military ties with Taipei. It opposes both Taiwanese independence and any attempt by China to forcibly take the island.

1987-2004: Relations improve

In late 1987, Taiwan residents are permitted to visit mainland China for the first time, allowing families to reunite. Taiwan lifts emergency rule in 1991, unilaterally ending a state of war with China. The first direct talks between the two sides are held in Singapore two years later. But in 1995, Beijing suspends talks in protest at a visit by Taiwanese president Lee Teng-hui to the United States.

China tests missiles off Taiwan in 1996 to deter vot-

Saudi delegation in Iran; Tehran to...

Continued from Page 1

Western governments over its nuclear activities, has the potential to reshape relations across a region characterized by turbulence for decades.

Under last month's agreement, the two countries are to reopen their embassies and missions within two months and implement security and economic cooperation deals signed more than 20 years ago. Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi has also been invited by Saudi King Salman to Riyadh, a trip planned to take place after the holy fasting month of Ramadan which ends later in April.

Rabha Saif Allam, specialist in Middle Eastern affairs at the Cairo Center for Strategic Studies, noted "an acceleration" in the normalization of ties. She said this means an intensification of meetings "at the economic and security levels", and believes normalization will be sealed by Raisi's planned visit to Riyadh at the end of April.

International

Iraq condemns 'bombardment' near airport in Kurdish region

Convoy including US military personnel struck in attack: Pentagon

BAGHDAD: The Iraqi president on Saturday condemned Turkey for bombarding an airport in the autonomous Kurdish region, while the commander of the Kurdish-led and US-allied Syrian Democratic Forces was present.

US forces were also present during the incident in Sulaimaniyah, the SDF said, and the Pentagon in Washington confirmed that "a convoy including US military personnel" was struck. "Turkish military operations against the Kurdistan region continue to take place, the last being the bombardment (Friday) against Sulaimaniyah civilian airport," Iraqi President Abdel Latif Rashid said in a statement.

The bombardment caused an explosion near the airport wall and led to a small fire which was quickly brought under control, a statement from airport security said at the time. A source at the Turkish defense ministry denied any involvement by the country's armed forces.

US Department of Defense spokesman Lieutenant Colonel Phillip Ventura told AFP that an investigation is underway and, "Fortunately, there were no casualties." The SDF had previously denied that their commander Mazloum Abdi was in the airport when the strike occurred, but on Saturday clarified that the denial was for "security" reasons.

SDF spokesman Farhad Shami said in a statement that their media center "deliberately contained" the information about Abdi's whereabouts "until he safely arrived" in Kurdish-administered northeast Syria. The SDF commander had been in Sulaimaniyah to coordinate with local Kurdish anti-terrorist forces in the fight against the Islam-

ic State group, with the knowledge of the US-led coalition fighting it, Shami told AFP.

"We confirm the presence of US forces at the airport during the attack," he added, without specifying the reason for their presence or whether they were accompanied by Abdi. The US backs the SDF, the de facto army of the semi-autonomous Kurdish administration in north and northeast Syria, and led the battle that dislodged IS from the last scraps of their Syrian territory in 2019.

Earlier on Saturday, Abdi denounced the bombardment, saying it was a sign of Turkish irritation at the support given to the SDF by the province's dominant faction, the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK). Turkey regards the SDF and its main component, the People's Protection Units (YPG), as an offshoot of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) which has a presence in Iraq's Kurdistan region and is listed as a "terrorist" organization by Ankara and its allies. Around 900 US troops remain in Syria, most in the Kurdish-administered northeast, as part of a US-led coalition battling remnants of IS.

'Terrorize civilians'

Rashid, himself a Kurd from Sulaimaniyah, said such actions by Turkish forces have "no legal justification" and serve only to "terrorize civilians under the pretext that hostile forces are present in Iraq".

He was referring to the PKK which has waged an insurgency in Turkey that has claimed tens of thousands of lives since 1984. Turkey has previously carried out incursions into Syria against Kurdish fighters. In Iraq, Turkey has repeatedly



ARBIL: Chaldean Catholic Iraqis attend the Easter mass at Mar Toma (Saint Thomas) Church, in Arbil, the capital of the autonomous Kurdish region of northern Iraq, on April 9, 2023. — AFP

targeted the PKK in military strikes.

On Monday, Ankara halted flights to and from Sulaimaniyah until at least July 3, blaming increased PKK activity in and around the airport. The Turkish foreign ministry said at the time that

PKK activities were posing a "threat" to air security. In early March, a Turkish drone strike in northern Iraq killed two Yazidi fighters affiliated with the PKK, days after a similar strike killed three other fighters. — AFP

School poisonings affect over 5,000 girls across Iran

TEHRAN: Dozens of schoolgirls were poisoned Saturday in several schools across Iran, local media reported, in continuation of the mysterious phenomenon that has shaken the country for months.

Since late November many schools, mostly for girls, have been affected by sudden poisoning incidents from gases or toxic substances, in some cases causing fainting and hospitalization among the students.

At least "60 students were poisoned in a girls' school in the town of Haftkel" in the oil-rich southwestern province of Khuzestan, state television's IRIB news agency cited a local official as saying.

A number of schoolgirls were poisoned in "five schools in Ardabil in the northwest", where the victims showed symptoms of "anxiety, shortness of breath and headaches", a provincial medical official told the news agency.

In the northwestern town of Urmia, capital of West Azerbaijan province, "a number of schoolgirls were taken to hospital on Saturday after feeling sick", ILNA news agency reported without further elaboration.

According to an official count provided on March 7, "more than 5,000 students" have been affected by similar poisonings in more than 230 establishments, located in 25 of the country's 31 provinces.

On Friday MP Hamidreza Kazemi, the head of the national fact-finding committee formed to investigate these cases, specified that "the final report" would be published "in two weeks".

"We have received reports from various bodies and we are studying the issue in order to present our conclusion to parliament," he was quoted as saying by state television.

Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei had called on March 6 for "severe sentences" up to the death penalty against those found responsible for the poisonings, which he described as "unforgivable crimes".

The poisonings cases began two months after the start of a protest movement in Iran sparked by the September 16 death in custody of Mahsa Amini, 22, following her arrest for allegedly violating the strict dress code for women. —AFP

Migrants die as boats sink off Tunisia, Morocco

TUNIS: Twenty-seven migrants from sub-Saharan Africa are dead or missing and 53 others were rescued after two flimsy boats sank off Tunisia's coast during attempts to reach Europe, an official said on Saturday.

The incidents are the latest of several over the past few weeks, and came after Tunisian officials reported a five-fold increase in rescues compared with the first quarter of last year. In Morocco, 11 migrants drowned when their makeshift boat sank off the west coast, media reports said, adding that the dead were eight Moroccans and three sub-Saharanans trying to reach Spain's Canary Islands.

One migrant was reported to have been rescued. There was no immediate confirmation of the reports from the Moroccan authorities. In Tunisia, Faouzi Masmoudi, the court spokesman in Sfax city, told AFP that four people died, three were missing and another three dozen were saved in the latest tragedy off the country's coast on Saturday.

"There was a new shipwreck this morning — four bodies were recovered from the beach at Sfax and three other people are missing. Another 36 were saved," Masmoudi said. He said that another vessel with 37 people aboard went down after setting off

US eyes aid to stop violence spilling into coastal West Africa

WASHINGTON: The United States is preparing long-term assistance for the Ivory Coast, Benin and Togo as concerns rise that jihadist violence in the Sahel could spill into coastal West Africa, officials said. Speaking to AFP, the officials said Western support was also critical to halting Russia's Wagner mercenary group which has made major inroads in violence-torn Sahel countries, including by allying with Mali's military junta.

Vice President Kamala Harris, visiting Ghana last month as part of a growing US push in Africa, promised \$100 million over 10 years to reinforce resilience in coastal West Africa. State Department officials are also looking at additional funding including from the counter-terrorism budget.

In a new global strategy to prevent conflict and promote stability, President Joe Biden's administration identified coastal West Africa as a priority for the coming decade. The report, released in March, said that the Sahel to the immediate north had experienced more terrorist attacks than any other region and that it was critical to "prevent violent conflicts from emerging or further spreading across the region."

While coastal cities connected to the world through seaports have been mostly unscathed, violence has been rising in areas bordering Mali and Burkina Faso. "It's a significant and burgeoning threat," said Michael Heath, the deputy assistant secretary of state in

charge of West Africa. "It's something of concern to us because the capabilities of the governments in place — they've never faced a threat like this before," he told AFP. "They're trying to cope with this, and we're trying to see what kind of tools they need," said Heath, who recently returned from a trip to the region with other State Department officials to assess needs.

Heath said he has not yet seen a presence in the three countries of the Wagner Group, which zanian city of Arusha, near the Kenyan border, as they attempted to leave the country.

Authorities stopped the black SUV the fugitives were travelling in after it left a hotel. The suspects had arrived in Arusha from Dar es Salaam, Cele said the suspects were each in possession of several passports, he added.

Tanzanian authorities identified the third person as Zakaria Alberto. "All are being held by the police," Tanzania police spokesman David Misime said in a statement. "Arrangements for legal communications both locally and internationally are ongoing."

from Tunisia's coast before it "sank on Friday afternoon", and that 20 people were unaccounted for.

Citing witness accounts, he added that 17 people were rescued from Friday's incident. Enquiries have begun into both incidents, Masmoudi said. He said the objective was to "find out the organizers behind these attempted crossings in boats made from metal sheeting which don't even offer minimum safety conditions but are cheaper to make than wooden ones".

Tunisia's shores, only about 150 kilometers (90 miles) from the Italian island of Lampedusa, are increasingly being used as a springboard for often perilous attempts by West Africans, Sudanese and others to reach safety and better lives in Europe.

Saturday's sinking was at least the seventh since the beginning of March, according to an AFP tally, in incidents which have left around 100 people dead or missing. The latest cases add to the more than 14,000 migrants which Tunisia's coastguard said on Friday it had intercepted on their way to Europe between January and March.

That is more than five times the number from the first quarter of 2022, official data showed. "Coast guard patrols prevent 501 clandestine attempts to cross the maritime border and rescued 14,406 (migrants) including 13,138 from sub-Saharan African countries," between January 1 and March 31, the coastguard said in a statement.

That is up from 2,532 intercepted in the same period last year, including 1,657 from sub-Saharan Africa. National Guard spokesman Houcem Eddine Jebabli told AFP. "The number is well up, because



US Vice President Kamala Harris (C) and Second Gentleman Douglas Emhoff (R) receive Kente cloths from Chief Osabarima Kwesi Atta II (L) at the Emintsimadze Palace in Cape Coast, Ghana, on March 28, 2023. — AFP

has been accused of human rights abuses in several countries including Ukraine, where the unit has played a key role in the invasion. "They're not yet in the coastal West African states, but we know they're looking for opportunities to take advantage of instability wherever they see it," he said. US officials accuse Russia of stepping up disinformation in French-speaking Africa, seeing a ripe audience due to post-colonial resentments. — AFP

Bester's cell had died as a result of blunt force trauma to the head before it was set ablaze.

The body's identity is still unknown. Earlier this week, police raided a villa in an affluent Johannesburg suburb where Bester was thought to have spent time in hiding with Magudumana. Lamola said a South African delegation will travel to Tanzania tomorrow to bring the fugitives back.

"We are confident that we will receive maximum cooperation from our sister nation, Tanzania, to assist us to bring these fugitives to justice," Lamola said. British private security firm G4S, which operates the prison Bester escaped from, has said three employees were dismissed in connection with the incident. — AFP

South African fugitive arrested after prison break

JOHANNESBURG: A South African fugitive who faked his own death in a prison break that embarrassed authorities has been apprehended in Tanzania, the government said on Saturday. Thabo Bester, a convicted rapist, escaped from a privately-run prison in Bloemfontein in May last year — but South African police only found out last month. On Saturday, Justice Minister Ronald Lamola said Bester was arrested by Tanzanian authorities on Friday night along with a woman he is reportedly roman-

Business

MONDAY, APRIL 10, 2023

Small US banks use enlarged deposit guarantee to compete with giants

Small lenders appear vulnerable to an exodus of depositors

NEW YORK: In the wake of the latest US banking meltdown, small lenders might appear vulnerable to an exodus of depositors fleeing for larger banks. US banking rules guarantee deposits of up to \$250,000, meaning that customers with larger holdings face losses if the bank goes under.

The implications of this rule became painfully clear with the collapse of Silicon Valley Bank in early March after it suffered a run from customers with holdings exceeding the \$250,000 Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation (FDIC) threshold. Federal data shows that some depositors at small banks did head for the exits, moving some \$120 billion in a single week into larger banks sometimes viewed as too big to fail. But minnows like Leader Bank of Massachusetts and Heritage Bank of Minnesota also have a solution to the issue that enables them to pitch themselves as safe options for those seeking to safeguard sums well beyond the \$250,000 FDIC limit.

Leader Bank can guarantee up to \$100 million in deposits from individuals through a technology platform run by fintech company IntraFi that essentially helps to distribute the funds among a network of large and small banks. This system of reciprocal deposits—which has been getting more attention since the SVB collapse—allows banks to accept large deposits well beyond \$250,000 while still guaranteeing clients they will be federally insured.

The program appealed to Jennifer Klepper, a cofounder of the startup Early Works, who began looking at different cash management options last fall. The goal was to take advantage of higher interest rates, while making sure the money was federally insured.

"We considered putting \$250,000 in each bank," said Klepper. But that option was an "accounting nightmare," leading Klepper to a program offered by Heritage Bank.

Safer than big bank?

The IntraFi venture and similar offerings from American Deposit Management and Wintrust, though compliant with US law, have not escaped criticism. Former FDIC Chair Sheila Bair has accused the ventures of "just gaming the FDIC rules," arguing it adds moral hazard. The FDIC "takes all the credit risk," resulting in "much bigger costs to the FDIC," she said.

But Jay Tuli, president of Leader Bank, counters that the program mitigates risk "because it spreads the concentration of large depositors among many banks, not just a select few." Further, such reciprocal deposit programs "can help reduce the risk of bank runs because insured depositors have no reason to participate in bank runs, much less start them," said Tom Geiger, chief executive of Heritage Bank.

Since SVB failed, there has been discussion in Washington of raising the \$250,000 FDIC limit, but no consensus has emerged thus far. In any case, small banks have not always been eager to tout reciprocal deposits. Bank employees "are very hesitant to mention deposit insurance," said Geiger, adding that the fear is that borrowers will think "maybe there's something wrong with this bank."

This reticence also explains why reciprocal lending programs are better known even though they have been around since the early 2000s. "It's really unfortunate, because ... we have this great tool at



Silicon Valley Bank headquarters in Santa Clara, on March 9, 2023.

our disposal," said Geiger. But the latest crisis has refocused attention on the FDIC limits, said Tuli of Leader, which added 100 new business clients in the week after SVB failed. "We probably brought in like, you know, six months of business in one week," Tuli said. "We gained a lot of clients since SVB." Con-

sciousness of the FDIC limits is also much higher in the startup world post-SVB, said Klepper.

"There's a lot more awareness now," said Klepper. "We're starting to see more banks advertising their (reciprocal deposit programs) because people are now thinking about it." — AFP

NBK MONEY MARKETS REPORT

Greenback rises on US jobs data

KUWAIT: The highly anticipated US labor report revealed jobs growth moderated in March as the economy added 236,000 positions, down from the upwardly revised 326,000 accrued in February and far below the 472,000 recorded in January. Meanwhile, the unemployment rate slipped to 3.5 percent, just above a multi-decade low, while wage growth remained firm as average hourly earnings gained another 0.3 percent in March after a 0.2 percent increase in February. On a yearly basis, wages increased 4.2 percent. The report follows other data which offered signs that the year-long effort by the Fed to tame inflation is starting to weigh on the historically robust labor market.

Last month, the Fed raised its benchmark overnight interest rate by 25 bps while indicating it was on the verge of pausing further rate hikes amid the banking sector turmoil. The central bank has so far hiked its policy rate by 475bps from near-zero on March 2022 to the current 4.75-5 percent range. Most officials see rates peaking at 5 percent to 5.25 percent this year and forecast no cuts until 2025. Many predict that payrolls will turn negative in the second half of 2023, which would compel the Fed to start cutting rates to avoid plunging the economy into a deep recession, even as Fed Chair Jerome Powell pushed against this assumption. Also complicating the outlook for the Fed is the extent of the economic shock posed by the recent banking turmoil. Fed chair Powell along with other officials have suggested there is likely to be a credit crunch as lenders pullback, although the magnitude is uncertain.

Market reaction

The data placed US government bonds under sell-

ing pressure as the policy sensitive two-year Treasury yield touched a high of 4.13 percent while the 10-year yield rose to 3.54 percent. Stock markets were closed on Friday, however pricing in the futures market indicated investors continue to believe the Fed has implemented its last rate rise this cycle. The dollar index gained ground, ending Friday at 0.15 percent higher and sending the euro and pound lower.

In commodities, gold has caught some attention as prices hold above \$2,000/oz despite the near 5 percent rates available in overnight dollar deposits. Meanwhile, oil prices surged after Saudi Arabia and other OPEC+ producers announced a surprise round of output cuts. The decision heightened worries regarding global inflation, and sent Brent crude surging to a 4-week high of \$86.44.

Data adds to recession fear

Other data last week showed US manufacturing activity slumped in March as new orders plunged. The Institute for Supply Management's manufacturing PMI fell to 46.3 last month from 47.7 in February, reaching its lowest level since May 2022. Placing aside the Covid-19 pandemic, the reading was the weakest since mid-2009. The PMI has now remained in contractionary territory for a fifth straight month. No components of the ISM Manufacturing PMI report crossed the expansionary threshold of 50 in March. Meanwhile, representing a far greater portion of the economy, the ISM's non-manufacturing PMI fell to 51.2 last month from 55.1 in February. The index had rebounded in the first two months of this year, however was unable to hold those gains to close the quarter. Still, the above-50 reading indicates an expansion. The report reveals consumer demand for services remains strong however is moving in the right direction in terms of the Fed's effort to tame inflation.

Swiss inflation down

Consumer price growth eased by more than expected last month in Switzerland, increasing an annualized 2.9 percent in March from 3.4 percent in February. The figure reveals the steepest decline in almost three years, primarily due to energy and fruit costs, as well as holiday accommodation. Underlying infla-

tion was also doing well, with the gauge slowing to 2.2 percent after accelerating since October. Switzerland has had low or negative inflation for decades, and has been able to dodge much of the price pressures that hit Europe and the rest of the world. This is mainly due to a rising Swiss franc which reduced imported inflation. Putting that into perspective, the CHF gained 13 percent against the EUR since its low point in 2021. Another major factor is the central bank's restraint on using quantitative easing compared to its peers. To compare, the US expanded its money supply by 77 percent and the eurozone expanded by 52 percent while Switzerland's saw just a 22 percent increase.

The Canadian economy added more jobs than expected in March, and the unemployment rate remained near a record low for a fourth straight month in a sign of economic resilience ahead of the central bank policy meeting. The economy gained a net 34,700 jobs, almost triple the 12,000 forecasted, while unemployment held steady at 5.0 percent, according to Statistics Canada.

RBA pauses rate hikes

The Reserve Bank of Australia kept its policy rate unchanged at 3.6 percent last week, providing relief for indebted households and businesses after hiking a total of 350 bps since last May. The central bank recognized the lag that comes with policy tightening, noting that the full effect of the increases is yet to be felt by the economy. The decision follows the latest update from the Australian Bureau of Statistics showing inflation rose 6.8 percent in February, down from 8.4 percent in December, but still well above the 2-3 percent target band set by the RBA. The central bank assumes inflation has peaked, and will ease to 3 percent in 2025. Looking at the labor market, conditions remain tight with the unemployment rate dropping back to 3.5 percent in February. Despite the pause on interest rate hikes, RBA Governor Philip Lowe reaffirmed that some further tightening of monetary policy is not off the table and may be considered to ensure that inflation returns to target.

Kuwait

Kuwaiti dinar: USD/KWD closed last week at 0.30620.

Airbus to sell 50 helicopters to Chinese firm

PARIS: France-based Airbus said Friday that it had agreed to sell 50 helicopters to the Chinese leasing firm GDAT, a deal announced on the final day of President Emmanuel Macron's state visit to China. "We are honored GDAT has decided to bolster their all-Airbus fleet of 26 helicopters with the addition of 50 H160 helicopters," Bruno Even, CEO of Airbus Helicopters, said in a statement.

Macron visited Guangzhou in China's southern industrial heartland on Friday, the final stop on a three-day visit in which he has repeatedly pushed his counterpart Xi Jinping to help end the Ukraine conflict. His office had said beforehand that he would seek "another path" from the directly confrontational route often taken by the United States, with trade with China still seen as an important part of ties.

"This contract is a great example of the importance of economic and trade cooperation between France and China," Peter Jiang, chairman of GDAT, was quoted as saying in the Airbus statement. Shanghai-based GDAT specializes in helicopter sales, leasing and maintenance, with clients including the Chinese emergency services and government agencies.

The H160 is marketed as a versatile helicopter by Airbus that can be used for roles ranging from VIP travel to military missions. Airbus said Friday's order was the largest for civilian use since the launch of the H160 in 2015. No financial details were given about the value of the deal. — AFP

Bank takeover prevented Swiss economy collapse

ZURICH: Swiss Finance Minister Karin Keller-Sutter said Switzerland's economy would probably have collapsed had Credit Suisse gone bankrupt, in an interview published Sunday.

Keller-Sutter told Le Temps newspaper that the government had acted in the country's best interests in swiftly arranging the takeover of Switzerland's second-biggest bank by its larger domestic rival UBS. Amid fears of a global banking crisis last month, investor confidence in Credit Suisse collapsed on March 15, with the government then orchestrating a takeover during the weekend before the markets reopened on March 20.

Some 109 billion Swiss francs (\$120 billion) have been put on the table between government guarantors and the liquidity made available by the Swiss central bank.

"Given the circumstances, we acted as best we could to minimize the burden for the state and the taxpayers," Keller-Sutter said. "Without determined intervention by the authorities, the alternative would have been a bankruptcy of Credit Suisse on Monday morning, accompanied by a probable collapse of the Swiss economy."

Like UBS, Credit Suisse was among the 30 banks worldwide deemed of global importance to the international banking system and therefore too big to fail. But it suffered a string of scandals in recent years, and after three US regional banks collapsed in March, it was left looking like the weakest link in the chain.

Double-quick deal

The takeover talks were hastily conducted at Keller-Sutter's finance minis-

try in Bern and the \$3.25 billion deal was announced on the evening of March 19. "The bank would have gone bankrupt on Monday, March 20. For what? Because over the years there has been a culture that seems to have created the wrong incentives. Because there have been many scandals," said Keller-Sutter.

As for whether any executives would be brought to justice, she said: "It's difficult and complex." She said the government's priority was to complete the merger. UBS said Wednesday it should close the takeover within the coming months. The finance minister said it was too soon to talk about the future structure of UBS, which will become a mega-bank with some \$5 trillion in invested assets.

Keller-Sutter said the government would have to analyze what happened in full, and then adapt the regulations on banks considered too big to fail. "But there are limits. Let's not forget that... confidence cannot be regulated." — AFP



BASEL: In this file photo taken on April 4, 2023, a sign of Swiss bank Credit Suisse is seen in Basel. — AFP

Business

NBK unveils commercial credit cards for corporate customers

The first-of-its-kind in Kuwait to provide unparalleled financial solutions

KUWAIT: As part of its ongoing efforts to provide the best financing solutions, exclusive offers, and launch new products and services that meet the diverse banking needs of our customers, National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) has unveiled one-of-a-kind commercial credit cards that provide financial solutions for businesses. These credit cards are the first of their kind in the country, and they reinforce the bank's commitment to delivering exceptional banking experiences.



Pradeep Handa

- Our mission is to provide our customers with a world-class banking service that exemplifies our position as a market leader through the introduction of ground-breaking new products
- NBK always maintains its commitment to innovation by developing new banking products and services

The new commercial cards include:

- NBK Executive Visa Signature Credit Card: Designed with a distinctive metallic finish, with 1.5 percent cashback
- NBK Commercial Visa Signature Credit Card: with 1.5 percent cashback
- NBK Commercial Visa Platinum Prepaid Card: with 1 percent cashback

Applying for commercial card is a hassle-free process, and customers can do so easily using either NBK online banking for corporate banking or through the relationship manager.

Key benefits of commercial cards

The commercial cards offer several advantages, including the opportunity for customers to earn unlimited cashback of 1.5 percent, which is deposited to their card on a monthly basis - a first-of-its-kind feature in Kuwait. Additionally, customers can use virtual cards that facilitate easy fund access while safeguarding their actual card number.

Additional benefits of the newly introduced cards include a lifetime free feature with no annual fees and a consolidated statement accessible to customers through the Visa Spend Clarity for Business platform. This includes easy-to-use expense tracking tools, spend management controls, virtual cards and plenty of business features and solutions. The Visa Spend Clarity for Business platform provides effective work management and enables card spend control through transaction notifications, as well as intuitive dashboards and streamlined reporting that can be easily integrated with various accounting software.

Visa Commercial Cards offer its cardholders various perks like extended warranty and buyer

protection, which are great for everyday business purchases. All this, plus access to free travel insurance, travel offers and exclusive discounts.

In recognition of the innovative design and cutting-edge functionality of the Commercial Cards, Visa has presented NBK with the "Excellence in Commercial Card Launch" award.

Pradeep Handa, General Manager - Foreign Corporate, Oil and Trade Finance Group at National Bank of Kuwait commented on this launch, saying, "The newly launched commercial cards are the first-of-their kind in Kuwait. They offer distinctive financial solutions that enable businesses to have great flexibility and control over their expenses. This aligns with NBK's objective to providing customers with a comprehensive and exceptional banking experience, along with market-leading products that reflect our leadership position."

"With its extensive experience in understanding the unique needs of businesses, NBK is constantly striving to enhance the quality of its banking services to provide the essential support needed to drive the growth of their operations," he added. Handa noted that in creating unique and value added banking solutions for customers, NBK constantly emphasizes innovation, with the purpose of assisting its customers to achieve their goals by providing them with the tools and resources they need to manage their finances effectively.

"NBK collaborates closely with its customers to identify their requirements and establish strong relationships with them. Moreover, the bank invests in developing new products and services



that exceed their expectations," he emphasized.

Ankush Devadason, Visa's Head of Financial Institutions for Kuwait, said: "As the global leader in digital payments, Visa strives to provide innovative and rewarding solutions that address the evolving payment needs of businesses everywhere. These Visa commercial credit cards provide NBK's corporate clients an attractive cashback proposition as well as increased layer of visibility into spending that will help to lower the costs of doing business."

The cards are also backed by Visa's security technology and offer worldwide acceptance at our 70 million plus merchant locations worldwide. We are therefore excited to partner with NBK and support their efforts in bringing innovative and rewarding payment solutions to their corporate clients in Kuwait. Commercial cards are now available for all corporate banking and small and medium enterprises (SMEs).

Jordan, Greece to boost economic cooperation

AMMAN: The Jordanian Businessmen Association (JBA) discussed with Greek Ambassador Eleftheria Galathianaki means of strengthening economic relations and investment opportunities in promising sectors and linking the business communities in the two countries. According to a JBA statement, the association's President Hamdi Tabbaa underscored the business community's commitment to promoting investment in the Kingdom and strengthening Jordan's economic relations with various countries through joint business councils, pointing to a memorandum of understanding signed in 2006 between the association and the Greek Exporters Association in Northern Greece. Tabbaa stressed the need to find joint work programs based on the economic sectors and areas of priority, cooperation at the level of private sector institutions and increasing networking through holding bilateral meetings and delegation visits. He pointed out that the association is about to hold an international conference for French-speaking business owners in mid-May, calling on the Greek business community to participate and visit Jordan to look firsthand at investment opportunities in promising economic sectors and leverage the new investment environment law.

For her part, Galathianaki indicated that the volume of trade exchange between the two countries is still modest and does not reflect the capabilities available to both parties, stressing the importance of institutionalizing efforts to develop joint relations through increasing visits, especially in light of the resumption of the meetings of the joint Jordanian-Greek committee. In 2021, trade exchanges between the two countries amounted to \$79 million, of which \$23 million were exports to the Kingdom including copper, lead, fertilizers and vegetables. — Agencies



شركة الصفاة للاستثمار
AL SAFAT INVESTMENT COMPANY

KUWAIT BOURSA WEEKLY REPORT

WEEK ENDED ON 6 APRIL 2023

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Market	M. Cap (KD ml)	Last Close	WTD %	MTD %	YTD %	Quantity Traded	Value Traded	No. of Trades	P/E	P/B	% of Total M. Cap
Premier Market	33,409	7,725.24	-1.2%	-1.2%	-4.8%	356,670,272	160,774,081	29,614	17.0	1.1	78.7%
Main Market	9,057	5,455.81	-0.8%	-0.8%	-2.5%	224,841,065	19,306,351	10,907	12.9	0.7	21.3%
All Share	42,467	6,969.18	-1.2%	-1.2%	-4.4%	581,511,337	180,080,433	40,521	13.5	0.8	100%

Sector	M. Cap (KD ml)	Last Close	WTD %	MTD %	YTD %	Quantity Traded	Value Traded	No. of Trades	P/E	P/B	% of Total M. Cap
Banking	25,945	1,737.00	-0.9%	-0.9%	-1.4%	165,220,714	108,005,801	15,709	22.5	1.3	61.10%
Basic Materials	478	846.00	-1.3%	-1.3%	-1.3%	1,339,755	981,778	568	7.8	1.3	1.13%
Consumer Discretionary	957	1,428.00	-2.3%	-2.3%	0.4%	86,486,721	3,854,882	3,644	13.0	0.8	2.25%
Consumer Staples	137	451.00	1.4%	1.4%	-4.2%	3,813,951	1,407,252	184	-	0.9	0.32%
Energy	208	996.00	-0.1%	-0.1%	-15.4%	261,652	30,044	49	10.9	0.6	0.49%
Financial Services	4,374	1,203.00	0.5%	0.5%	-2.8%	176,342,965	19,283,309	7,488	14.6	0.7	10.30%
Health Care	229	462.00	1.5%	1.5%	0.1%	6,500	3,059	3	12.0	2.5	0.54%
Industrials	3,384	965.00	-2.2%	-2.2%	-7.8%	55,420,175	30,638,713	6,186	14.7	0.8	7.97%
Insurance	788	1,918.00	0.4%	0.4%	23.5%	1,247,492	383,812	277	10.4	0.8	1.86%
Real Estate	2,330	1,084.00	0.4%	0.4%	-8.9%	75,341,584	7,638,720	3,421	13.4	0.5	5.49%
Technology	9	633.00	-0.5%	-0.5%	-13.9%	103,100	8,537	23	NM	0.8	0.02%
Telecommunications	3,434	1,122.00	-0.9%	-0.9%	-4.0%	13,432,856	7,410,663	2,712	12.8	1.9	8.09%
Utilities	193	461.00	-1.1%	-1.1%	-4.9%	2,493,872	433,862	257	13.3	1.6	0.45%

Top Gainers

Stock	last Close	Change %	Volume	Value	Trades
JYAD	19.4	22.01%	74,141,025	1,438,259	2,026
AMAR	60	19.76%	357,630	17,794	11
DALQAN	212	10.42%	497,753	98,523	77
MUNSHAAT	54.9	8.93%	112,849	5,555	13
EKTITAB	9.3	6.90%	9,298,613	86,545	248

Top Losers

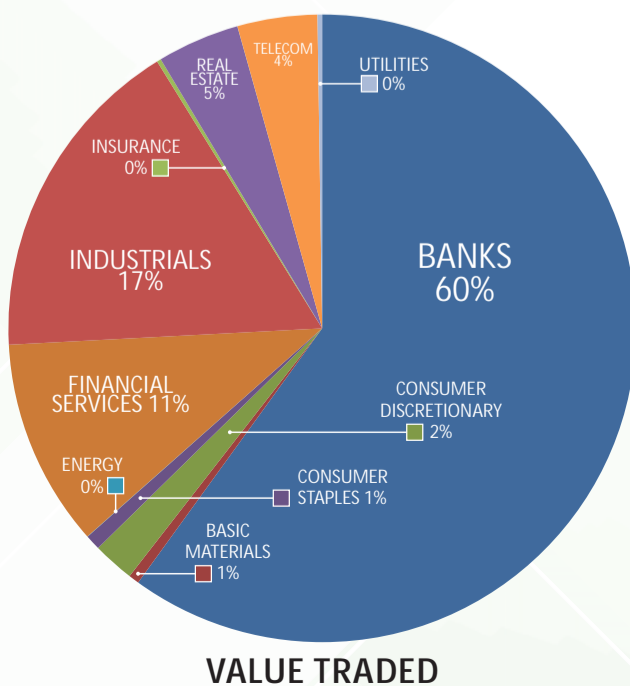
Stock	last Close	Change %	Volume	Value	Trades
KSHC	26.1	-31.32%	174,518	5,163	26
IFAHR	18.4	-23.33%	6,020,865	108,656	408
ALAQARIA	22.5	-18.77%	1,273,153	30,115	83
TAAMEER	12.4	-10.79%	1,055,462	14,144	46
KFH	739	-10.53%	75,172,297	59,818,413	8,224

Top Volume

Stock	Last	Change %	Volume	Value	Trades
KFH	739	-10.53%	79,223,797	59,818,413	8,224
JYAD	19	22.01%	74,141,025	1,483,259	2,026
AGLTY	578	-6.92%	38,319,941	22,363,829	3,496
BOUBYAN	651	1.24%	37,912,983	24,540,116	2,800
GFH	75	-2.99%	29,650,470	2,248,185	952

Top Value

Stock	Last	Change %	Volume	Value	Trades
KFH	739	-1.59%	79,223,797	59,818,413	8,224
BOUBYAN	651	1.24%	37,912,983	24,540,116	2,800
AGLTY	578	-6.92%	38,319,941	22,363,829	3,496
NBK	975	-3.05%	13,955,674	13,841,557	2,819
ZAIN	542	0.37%	10,740,378	5,803,640	1,950



Market Summary:

- Premier market volume with no change while value rose 6% while. Main market volume and value rose 93% and 24%, respectively.
- Premier and Main indexes both declined after failing to overcome resistance levels.
- Technically, the All Share index closed at 6969, with support levels at 6959, 6918, and 6862, while resistance at 6981. The Premier index closed at 7701, and 7639, while resistance at 7784. The Main index closed at 5455, with support levels at 5424, 5393, and 5339, while resistance at 5467.

Business

Gulf Bank is the first bank in Kuwait to offer drive-through ITM services

The daily withdrawal limit is up to KD 5,000

KUWAIT: As part of its ongoing digital transformation plans and its 2025 strategy, that aims to consolidate Gulf Bank's leading position as the Kuwaiti Bank of the Future, Gulf Bank has announced the first drive-thru Interactive Teller machine (ITM) and ATM service in its Sharq branch on Ahmed Al-Jaber Street. Gulf Bank is the first bank in Kuwait to provide this service to its customers, enabling them quick access to their accounts and the ability to access banking services with ease and comfort; and without the hassle of searching for parking or even having to get out of the car.

Gulf Bank's General Manager of Consumer Banking, Mohammed Al-Qattan, noted that Gulf Bank is steadily moving towards digital leadership in the banking sector, through a comprehensive digital transformation journey. Gulf Bank is providing modern technological solutions, adopting the highest global standards in risk management practices, and promoting outstanding employee performance based on dynamic interaction and participation.

Al-Qattan indicated that Gulf Bank's digital transformation journey includes providing the best and most exceptional services through the Bank's website, the newly launched smartphone application, and through branches spread across various regions of Kuwait – creating an easier, simpler, safer, and more effective banking experience than ever before.

He pointed that Gulf Bank was one of the first banks in Kuwait to launch ITMs across branches to enable customers to conduct their daily transactions



Mohammed Al-Qattan:

- The new service ensures customers have quick access to their accounts, simplifying and accelerating customer transactions
- Gulf Bank is moving steadily towards digital leadership with various online services, smartphone applications, and multiple branches across the country

seamlessly. ITMs combine advanced technology with the availability of customer service representatives, making it possible for customers to conduct their banking transactions without entering a branch and waiting for their turn.

The ITM provides customers with multiple services, including cash withdrawals and deposits, and the ability to alter the daily limit allowed for withdrawals and deposits to reach up to KD 5,000. Other services include the freedom to choose their currency denominations from KD 1 to KD 20, and the option to use their civil IDs instead of debit cards. ITMs are available from 8 am to 11.30 pm with customers able to direct their questions and receive instant answers from Bank employees at the ITM through video calls.

The ITM also provides services for inter-account transfers, credit card payments, prepaid cards,

Al-Danah account openings, "KYC" customer data updates, SMS service activation, and ATM/credit card blocking. It is worth noting that the Interactive Teller Machine (ITM) service is currently available in ten Gulf Bank branches, which are: Sharq branch, Crystal Tower, Jabriya, Al-Shaab, Al-Adan, Al-Salam (South Surra), Fahaeel (Al-Ghanim Electronics Complex), Hawally, Kuwait International Airport (TI), and Mishref. 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.

Kalyan Jewellers celebrates Akshaya Tritiya with giveaways

KUWAIT: Kalyan Jewellers, one of the most trusted and leading jewelry brands, has announced the commencement of its Akshaya Tritiya celebrations with exciting offers for customers across the country. To mark the auspicious occasion of Akshaya Tritiya, Kalyan Jewellers is providing customers with appealing discounts and valuable giveaways on their jewellery purchases.

With these one-of-its-kind offers, Kalyan Jewellers aims to ensure that customers get maximum value on their jewelry purchases, across categories – from gold and diamonds to uncut and precious stone jewelry. Customers making gold jewelry purchases worth KD 500 will receive a ½ gram gold coin, whereas those who purchase precious/uncut jewelry worth KD 500 will get a 1-gram gold coin. On purchase of diamond jewelry worth KD 500, customers will be rewarded with a 2-gram gold coin. These bumper offers are valid until 30th May 2023 across showrooms in Kuwait.

Talking about Akshaya Tritiya offer announcement, Ramesh Kalyanaraman, Executive Director of Kalyan Jewellers, said, "Over the years, we have taken significant strides and accomplished major achievements towards creating a comprehensive ecosystem that elevates the overall customer shopping experience. As we kick start our 2023 Akshaya Tritiya campaign, our aim is to ensure that patrons receive highest possible benefit from their jewelry purchases. Our commitment to delivering the finest shopping experience to our valued customers remains steadfast, and we will always uphold the company's fundamental principles of trust and transparency in the future."

The jewelry retailed at Kalyan Jewellers goes through multiple purity tests and patrons also receive the Kalyan Jewellers 4-Level Assurance Certificate which guarantees purity, free lifetime maintenance of ornaments, detailed product information and transparent exchange and buy-back policies. The certification is part of the brand's commitment to offering the very best to its loyalists.



Xcite announces names of XG champions

KUWAIT: Xcite, Kuwait's leading electronics retailer and part of Alghanim Industries (Kutayba Alghanim Group), announced the winners of its eagerly awaited Xcite Gaming (XG) Tournament, which was held between April 3 – 5, 2023, concurrently with the last three days of the second annual Al-Qabas Padel Tournament. The number of participants in the video game tournament exceeded 240 contestants. The event, which was attended by hundreds of spectators, showcased Kuwait's top gamers and title holders battling it out in Fortnite, Valorant, and FIFA 2023.

Since its establishment by Xcite in 2017, Xcite Gaming (XG) has experienced steady growth by organizing live events, online contests, and a variety of gaming-focused initiatives. By actively supporting the development of e-sports in the country, Xcite Gaming has made a significant impact on Ku-

wait's gaming landscape. Their tournaments have gained popularity and recognition, offering talented gamers an opportunity to display their skills and compete for valuable rewards.

As a main sponsor for the Al-Qabas Padel Tournament, Xcite contributed to the event's festive ambiance by setting up a dedicated area for carnival games. This initiative aimed to attract a larger audience and engage with a more diverse demographic, ultimately fostering a more inclusive gaming environment. The Xcite Gaming tournament boasted a prize pool exceeding \$5,000, adding a thrilling dimension to the already intense

competition. The event was a smashing success, with participants and spectators enjoying an unforgettable gaming experience alongside the Al-Qabas Padel Tournament. The gathering also provided a valuable networking opportunity for members of the gaming community.

As part of its ongoing commitment to uniting gamers and promoting esports in Kuwait, Xcite Gaming plans to continue exploring new opportunities for future events. Xcite Gaming remains devoted to organizing events that unite the gaming community and plans to continue exploring new possibilities for future gatherings.

Meanwhile, the influx of Ukrainian grain into Poland will be restricted, the countries announced Friday, following protests by farmers. Ukrainian grain has been transiting through the European Union to other countries after the war-torn country's traditional Black Sea routes were blocked by Russia's invasion. But due to logistical issues, the grain had been piling up and driving down local prices, leading to protests and the resignation of Poland's agriculture minister.

Lavrov also met with President Recep Tayyip Erdogan later Friday. NATO member Turkey, which has good ties with both Russia and Ukraine, has pushed both countries to resume peace talks after negotiations broke down last year. Lavrov, who arrived in Ankara on Thursday, said Moscow wants any peace talks to focus on creating a "new world order".

"Any negotiation needs to be based on taking into account Russian interests, Russian concerns," Lavrov said. "It should be about the principles on which the new world order will be based," adding that Russia rejects a "unipolar world order led by 'one hegemon'". Russia has long said it was leading a struggle against the United States' dominance over the global stage, and argues the Ukraine offensive is part of that fight. The Kremlin this week said it had no choice but to continue its more than year-long offensive in Ukraine, seeing no diplomatic solution.

Cavusoglu, whose country hosted talks between Russia and Ukraine last year, expressed "concerns that the war will escalate in spring," calling for the resumption of dialogue.

Russia meanwhile is mediating talks to normalise ties between Turkey and Syria after years of tensions since the Syrian civil war, which has left 500,000 people dead and displaced millions since 2011. Ankara supported rebel groups fighting to oust Syrian President Bashar Al-Assad. Cavusoglu said problems cannot be resolved in a single meeting, adding: "We are realistic. The dialogue must continue". —AFP



The champions are

Game	First Place	Second Place	Third Place
FIFA 2023	Khaled Abdulbaset	YaqoubAlqatari	Abdulrahman Alenezi
Fortnite (2v2)	Abdulaziz Abdulhameed Abdullah Abdulsalam	Waleed Khaled Osama Almutairi	Abdulaziz Naif Munawer Alharbi
Valorant	Yousef Alrasheedi	Arslan Shakeel	Ashraq Azeem

wait's gaming landscape. Their tournaments have gained popularity and recognition, offering talented gamers an opportunity to display their skills and compete for valuable rewards.

As a main sponsor for the Al-Qabas Padel Tournament, Xcite contributed to the event's festive ambiance by setting up a dedicated area for carnival games. This initiative aimed to attract a larger audience and engage with a more diverse demographic, ultimately fostering a more inclusive gaming environment. The Xcite Gaming tournament boasted a prize pool exceeding \$5,000, adding a thrilling dimension to the already intense

Careem partners with The Avenues to offer ride hailing services

KUWAIT: Careem, the region's leading multi-service platform, expands its presence in Kuwait through a partnership with The Avenues. The ride-hailing service also introduced a 'Ramadan' car type this month, enabling easy donations with each booking.

Customers in Kuwait can book a ride to and from The Avenues through the Careem app, with multiple dedicated pickup locations at the mall's main entrances. Customers can also avail a 10 percent discount on all rides to and from the mall. Careem provides customers the option to pre-book a regular 'Taxi' car as well as a 'Comfort' private car across the country, and accepts both cash and digital payments, made directly through the app.

Average ETAs for Careem rides in Kuwait are just under 5 minutes from the time of booking, and booking prices for 'Comfort' private cars are significantly more affordable than market prices. Careem also introduced features such as shareable ride-tracking to provide customers with an added sense of safety and security when booking their rides.

Antonio Alasmari, GM of Careem in Kuwait said, "We're thrilled to partner with The Avenues to bring the convenience and affordability of Careem's ride-hailing services to one of the busiest locations in Kuwait. Many mall goers spend long periods of time waiting for taxis, which can become even more of a hassle during peak hours and weekends. Our purpose at Careem is to simplify lives in the region, and we're happy to offer our customers in Kuwait a simple and convenient transportation option through Careem."



Careem also introduced a 'Ramadan' car option in partnership with UNHCR for the duration of the Holy Month of Ramadan, enabling customers across Kuwait to donate KD 0.25 to UNHCR with each booking. The amount is automatically included in the car booking price and is donated directly to UNHCR to provide Ramadan meals for refugees across the region. Careem also hosted an Iftar event for over 300 Captains. The event was sponsored by Nestle, who provided over 300 gift boxes to the Captains, as well as Friendi Mobile, who offered discounted calling and internet packages to the Captains.

Careem launched in Kuwait in 2016, and provides its ride-hailing services in every major city across the country. To book a ride, download the Careem app on the App Store or Google Play and select 'Taxi' for regular car bookings, 'Comfort' for private car bookings, and 'Ramadan' to donate 0.25KWD to UNHCR with each ride.

Russia threatens to scrap Ukraine grain deal

ANKARA: Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov threatened to abandon a landmark grain deal with Ukraine if obstacles to Moscow's exports remained. Negotiated in July by Turkey and the United Nations, the agreement allows Ukraine—one of the world's top grain producers—to export grain through a safe corridor in the Black Sea.

"If there is no further progress in removing barriers to the export of Russian fertilizers and grain, we will think about whether this deal is necessary," Lavrov told a news conference in the Turkish capital Ankara, alongside his counterpart, Mevlut Cavusoglu. The agreement has so far allowed the export of more than 27 million tons of grain and agricultural products.

It was renewed twice. When it was extended in March, Russia said it would be valid for 60 days instead of the 120 days in the original agreement. Moscow has been complaining that its side of the agreement, promising the right to export fertilizer, is not being respected. Turkey is pushing for a 120-day extension although it acknowledges that the agreement has not been fully implemented.

"We value the continuation of the agreement which is also important in terms of reducing the global food crisis," Cavusoglu said. There are no sanctions on Russian exports of food and fertilisers to global markets but the problems are related to the secondary sanctions imposed on shipping and insurance companies as well as banks. "USA and England took some steps in terms of payment and insurance but we have to be fair, the problems continue", Cavusoglu said, adding that barriers remained.

Lifestyle

Sarcophagus of Pharaoh Ramses II unveiled in Paris



A photograph shows the Gilded Wooden Mask from the sarcophagus of Egyptian pharaoh Amenemope displayed on the opening day of the exhibition titled "Ramses and the Gold of the Pharaohs" (Ramses et l'or des pharaons) at the Grande Halle de la Villette in Paris.



A photograph shows the sarcophagus of pharaoh Ramses II (and its reflection) displayed on the opening day of the exhibition titled "Ramses and the Gold of the Pharaohs" (Ramses et l'or des pharaons) at the Grande Halle de la Villette in Paris. —AFP photos



The sarcophagus of ancient Egyptian pharaoh Ramses II was unveiled to reporters in Paris on Thursday following its rare journey outside of Egypt. The ornate coffin will be on show to the public in the French capital from April 7 to September 6.

Benedicte Lhoyer, scientific advisor to the exhibition, told AFP the "exceptional" loan was thanks to "an unprecedented cooperation between France and Egypt". The Ramses II exhibition is on a tour that includes the United States and Australia, but only France is receiving the sarcophagus, in recognition of the assistance from French sci-

entists who helped save the mummy from decay following a previous visit to Paris in 1976.

The mummy itself has stayed behind this time, since Egyptian law now forbids transporting royal mummies abroad. Ramses II, also known as Ramses the Great, ruled for more than 60 years during the 13th century BC and oversaw major military conquests and monumental construction projects, while also finding time to father more than 100 children.

"In short, he was an extraordinary king," said Lhoyer. France has 54 antiquities teams working in Egypt, an official said — the most of

the 25 countries who currently have research teams there. The yellow-painted cedar-wood sarcophagus, which depicts the recumbent king in bright colours with his arms crossed on his chest holding a sceptre and whip, was not actually Ramses II's original coffin. Inscriptions on the sarcophagus' sides detail how his body was moved three times from 1070 BC, after his tomb in Luxor's Valley of the Kings was raided by grave-robbers.

Its final resting place was discovered almost three millennia later in 1881, just as it too was being pillaged. The immersive exhibition in Paris also features an abundance of statues, masks

and jewellery from the period — more than 180 objects in total — as well as a 3D recreation of one of the king's battles against the Hittite empire.

Egyptian relics have proved a hit in the past — some 1.4 million people came to see an exhibition about Tutankhamun in Paris four years ago. The new exhibition at the Grande Halle de la Villette promises to be even more popular, organisers said Thursday, with 145,000 tickets already sold, significantly higher than the pre-opening numbers for Tutankhamun. "Ramses II defeated time. Like Tutankhamun, he has become immortal," said Lhoyer. —AFP

The camera never lied... until AI told it to



An amateur photographer who goes by the name "ibreak-photos" decided to do an experiment on his Samsung phone last month to find out how a feature called "space zoom" actually works.

The feature, first released in 2020, claims a 100x zoom rate, and Samsung used sparkling clear images of the Moon in its marketing. Ibreakphotos took his own pictures of the Moon — blurry and without detail — and watched as his phone added craters and other details.

The phone's artificial intelligence software was using data from its "training" on many other pictures of the Moon to add detail where there was none. "The Moon pictures from Samsung are fake," he wrote, leading many to wonder whether the shots people take are really theirs anymore — or if they can even be described as photographs.

Samsung has defended the technology, saying it does not "overlay" images, and pointed out that users can switch off the function. The firm is not alone in the race to pack its smartphone cameras with AI — Google's Pixel devices and Apple's iPhone have been marketing such features since 2016. The AI can do all the things photographers used to labour over — tweaking the lighting, blurring backgrounds, sharpening eyes — without the user ever knowing. But it can also transform backgrounds or simply wipe away people from the image entirely. And the debate over AI is not limited to hobbyists on message boards — professional bodies are raising the alarm too.

Sidestepping the tech

The industry is awash with AI, from cameras to software like Photoshop, said Michael Pritchard of the Royal Photographic Society of Britain. "This automation is increasingly blurring boundaries between a photograph and a piece of artwork," he told AFP. The nature of AI is different to previous innovations, he said, because the technology can learn and bring new elements beyond those recorded by film or sensor.

This brings opportunities but also "fundamental challenges around redefining what photography is, and how 'real' a photograph is", Pritchard said. Nick Dunmur of the Britain-based Association of Photographers said professionals most

often use "RAW" files on their digital cameras, which capture images with as little processing as possible.

But sidestepping the tech is less easy for a casual smartphone shooter. Ibreakphotos, who posted his finding on Reddit, pointed out that technical jargon around AI is not always easy to understand — perhaps deliberately so. "I wouldn't say that I am happy with the use of AI in cameras, but I am OK with it as long as it is communicated clearly what each processing pipeline actually does," he told AFP, asking not to use his real name.

Not 'human-authored'

What professional photographers are most concerned about, though, is the rise of AI tools that generate completely new images. In the past year, DALL-E 2, Midjourney and Stable Diffusion have exploded in popularity thanks to their ability to create images in hundreds of styles with just a short text prompt.

"This is not human-authored work," Dunmur said, "and in many cases is based on the use of training datasets of unlicensed work." These issues have already led to court cases in the United States and Europe.

According to Pritchard, the tools risk disrupting the work of anyone "from photographers, to models, to retouchers and art directors".

But Jos Avery, an American amateur photographer who recently tricked thousands on Instagram by filling his feed with stunning portraits he had created with Midjourney, disagreed. He said the lines drawn between "our work" and "the tool's work" were arbitrary, pointing out that his Midjourney images often took many hours to create.

But there is broad agreement on one fundamental aspect of the debate — the risk for photography is not existential. "AI will not be the death of photography," Avery said.

Pritchard agreed, noting that photography had endured from the daguerreotype to the digital era, and photographers had always risen to technical challenges. That process would continue even in a world awash with AI-generated images, he said. "The photographer will bring a deeper understanding to the resulting image even if they haven't directly photographed it," he said. —AFP



In this file photo former NBA star and owner of Charlotte Hornets team Michael Jordan looks on as he addresses a press conference at The AccorHotels Arena in Paris. —AFP photos



In this file photo the Air Ship, MJ Player Exclusive, Game-Worn Sneaker Nike, 1984, is displayed during a press preview at Christie's New York.



'Air' hero Sonny Vaccaro coaxed Nike into believing in Michael Jordan

The hero of the new movie "Air," released this week in the United States, is Sonny Vaccaro, a Nike employee who saw in a young Michael Jordan what "no one else had seen" and convinced the shoe brand to forge a revolutionary partnership. During a 1984 meeting at Nike headquarters, Vaccaro proposed devoting all the money that Nike had earmarked to recruit future NBA players to one man — rising sports star Jordan.

"Air," directed by Ben Affleck, traces the chaotic journey that brought about the signing of the barely-out-of-college player, even though Jordan had eyes on Nike's competitors, Converse and Adidas. Nearly 40 years later, the Nike partnership with Jordan has grown into an empire, with \$5.1 billion in sales last year from the Beaverton, Oregon-based company's Jordan Brand alone.

"I saw (in Jordan) something that maybe nobody else saw... and I bet my job that he would be the person," says Vaccaro, now 83, whose position at Nike was, at the time, under threat. "Michael had something different. He had a killer instinct," Vaccaro says. "He was always competitive. And I don't know of another player that ever came along (like that)."

"The only one that I could put close to Michael and what he did... was Kobe Bryant," says Vaccaro, a multifaceted entrepreneur, businessman and talent scout. "Kobe had the same instincts... the same 'I don't give a damn about anything, I'm going to be the best.'" In 1996, Vaccaro, who is played by actor Matt Damon in "Air," signed Kobe Bryant to Adidas, his employer at the time. He also came close to recruiting



In this file photo people hold out basketballs to receive an autograph as US former basketball player Michael Jordan leaves following the inauguration of a street basketball court in the Haies sports ground in Paris.



In this file photo former US basketball superstar Michael Jordan speaks during a press conference in Paris.

LeBron James to the brand in 2003.

'Paved the way'

Michael Jordan's arrival at Nike transformed the sports industry, revolutionizing both marketing and mass consumption, with billions of dollars at stake. "That has really paved the way for corporations... to bet big on individual athletes and trend away from the team," says Thilo Kunkel, director of Temple University's Sport Industry Research Center.

Before Jordan, tennis players Stan Smith and Ivan Lendl, as well as basketball star Kareem Abdul-Jabbar, had already had their own Adidas models, as had NBA star Walt "Clyde" Frazier at Puma. "Jordan probably got lucky and benefited from the trends that were happening already but I think he also contributed quite a bit to that trend," Kunkel says. "He accelerated it."

The 'AI obsessed' photographer who tricked Instagram

Jos Avery was given a camera almost four decades ago, sparking a lifelong fascination with photography.

But last September he found a new creative outlet, one that led him to deceive thousands of people: the artificial intelligence program Midjourney, which generates wild and wonderful images from brief text instructions.

"Soon after starting with Midjourney, I became obsessed with the creative possibilities," Avery told AFP. Midjourney and rivals like DALL-E 2 and Stable Diffusion generate unique pictures by mashing up a vast back catalogue of images they have been "trained" on. For Avery, a 48-year-old software engineer and lawyer by training from Virginia in the United States, Midjourney was liberating. He said it allowed him to create beautiful art without needing to tackle his own social anxieties.

"Then I started to wonder if I could make



A handout photo from US amateur photographer Jos Avery shows an image generated by the AI program Midjourney. —AFP

AI images that could pass for photographs," he said. This led to his fateful experiment: He started an Instagram account to house his Midjourney output, without being entirely upfront about the origins of the images.

'Misleading'

"At the beginning, I don't think many people thought the images were photographs," he said. "The eyes and skin were unrealistic." He fixed these glitches with a dose of Adobe Photoshop, eventually populating his Instagram feed with stunning and stark portraits of beautiful — but unreal — people. More users flocked to his feed, and more of them began to think the images were genuine. "People would ask in the comments about my camera and lens equipment," he said. "I'd respond with the equipment I actually use for real photos or equipment I had included as part of the prompt."

He admits his answers were "misleading" since they suggested he had used his gear to create those specific images. Yet he just got deeper into the deception, spending hours choosing and editing images to boost the realism and deleting earlier efforts that were more obviously AI-generated. —AFP

Plastic pollution is scourge of English coastal region



Artist and environmental activist Rob Arnold, works on a sculpture called "A Lesson of history" that he created in 2017, inspired by the Moai heads on the Easter Island, entirely made from nurdles and other micro-plastics collected on the beach, at the National Maritime Museum Cornwall, in Cornwall, south western England. —AFP photos



Environmental activist and artist Rob Arnold poses with his bags containing 20 millions nurdles that he collected over six years during beach cleanings outside a garage where he store them.



A volunteer uses a brush as she takes part in a beach clean organised to collect nurdles and other plastic waste on the Tregantle beach.

On an early spring afternoon, Tregantle Beach is bathed in a dazzling light reminiscent of a painting by British landscape artist JMW Turner as sea, sky and sun merge.

"It's beautiful, right? But look at your feet," says Rob Arnold, 65, an environmental activist and artist, crouching down to pick tiny plastic balls, or "nurdles", sometimes nicknamed "mermaids' tears", out of the Cornwall sand. The size of a lentil, the tiny bits of plastic are used by industry to manufacture plastic products. But when spilt at industrial facilities, they can be swept into drains and then out into the sea. Some 11.5 trillion nurdles end up in the ocean each year, according to UK charity Fauna & Flora International. Once released into the natural environment, the nurdles circulate on ocean currents and often wash up on beaches and other shores.

Due to their resemblance to fish eggs, birds and other sea life will eat the tiny pellets — which also absorb toxic pollutants — adversely affecting the entire food chain, Arnold says. He is among about 10 people taking part in a clean-up on the beach in England's southwestern Cornwall region, using a device he invented made from a plastic basin, a large grid and a set of tubes. "It separates plastic waste from natural waste and sand thanks to a filtering and water floating system," the former engineer says. He then uses the collected nurdles and other microplastics — tiny bits of plastic that have broken off larger pieces — in artworks.

Unearthing 'layers of plastic'

Jed Louis, 58, wearing a khaki hoodie bearing the name of the local beach clean-up association,



Artist and environmental activist Rob Arnold, works on a sculpture called "A Lesson of history" that he created in 2017, inspired by the Moai heads on the Easter Island, entirely made from nurdles and other micro-plastics.

says several factors add to the beach's vulnerability. "This beach is particularly polluted because of its geographical location, the sea currents that affect it and its very open shape," he says.

"In autumn and winter we find the most micro-plastics because of the weather: storms, thunderstorms and winds, it brings them to the surface. Unfortunately the plastic remains, it does not disappear," he says. Another volunteer Claire Wallerstein, 53, says "sometimes it's a bit like doing archaeology. "If you dig in the sand, you'll find different layers of plastic." Some of the nurdles go to Arnold for his artistic creations while others are used to raise awareness in schools.

The rest, which cannot be recycled, end up in



Director of the Marine Institute of Plymouth Professor Richard Thompson poses next to a microscope as he analyses nurdles and other micro-plastics in a laboratory.

the rubbish and are incinerated. After three hours, the volunteers have cleaned just a few square metres of the beach. Arnold looks at his loot — a large tarp several metres (feet) high filled with nurdles and other microplastics. Once dried and re-sorted, he can add them to the 20 million nurdles he has collected in six years and which he stores in a friend's garage.

Like a meteorite

Arnold's most notable work using the nurdles is a 1.7-metre (5.5-foot) high sculpture, similar to the Moai statues of Easter Island with a mysterious past. The work is on display at the National Maritime Museum Cornwall in the coastal town of



Director of the Marine Institute of Plymouth Professor Richard Thompson analyses nurdles and other micro-plastics in a laboratory.

Falmouth under the title "A Lesson from History".

"It's a metaphor to what we are doing here to our planet earth. We are polluting our planet, using its resources. If we destroy it, we have nowhere to go, this is our only home," Arnold says. For his next creation, he wants to mould the tiny plastic pellets into a meteorite headed towards Earth, in a nod to the one that caused the extinction of the dinosaurs and the fragility of our planet. After cleaning up the beach and packing his nurdle-filled bags away, Arnold looks disillusioned. "Sometimes I think about throwing all my bags of nurdles into the river from a bridge. It would be so shocking that maybe, finally, people would realise," he adds. —AFP



A volunteer shows nurdles collected during a beach clean organised on the Tregantle beach part of the Whitesand Bay, near Freathy, south western England.



Volunteers arrive to take part in a beach clean organised to collect nurdles and other plastic waste on the Tregantle beach.



A photograph shows nurdles and other micro-plastics waste collected during a beach clean.



Environmental activist and artist Rob Arnold poses with his bags containing 20 million nurdles that he collected over six years during beach cleanings outside a garage where he store them.

Greek seismologist probed over April Fool's volcano joke

One of Greece's top seismologists is under investigation over an April Fool's joke warning that a huge "funnel" could open up under the popular tourist destination Santorini island. Akis Tselentis, the director of Greece's Geodynamic Institute and Tsunami Center, on Wednesday posted on Facebook a photo of himself in a mock mugshot pose, holding a sign that read "guilty of April Fool's joke".

"We live in a country where humour is persecuted," he added. On Tuesday, a prosecutor ordered a preliminary investigation to determine whether Tselentis' April 1 posting qualified as spreading false news. "Things are not well regarding Santorini," Tselentis had said.

"From January onwards we have a gradual disappearance of magma beneath the volcano," the April Fool's post said. Tselentis said there was a "major possibility" that magma would shift towards a fictional volcano, leaving a funnel vacuum that would "suck the waters of the Aegean". Santorini was completely reshaped by a volcanic eruption in the late 17th century BCE that wiped out a culturally advanced Minoan colony, and geothermal activity accompanied by seismic tremors remains high to this day. The last major eruption of the most active part of the volcano, beneath the uninhabited black lava islet of Kameni near Santo-



India's tiger population rises above 3,000

India's wild tiger population — by far the largest in the world — has risen above 3,000, according to a census released Sunday, boosting efforts to conserve the endangered species.

The largest of all cats, tigers once roamed throughout central, eastern and southern Asia.

But in the past 100 years the tiger has lost more than 93 per cent of its historic range and now only survives in scattered populations in 13 countries, according to the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN). The Indian census found 3,167 tigers in the wild across the country, up from 2,967 reported in the last such count. Surveys are conducted every four years, using camera traps and computer programs to individually identify each creature. The rate of increase has slowed to less than seven percent over the period, down from more than 30 percent in the previous four years.

But Prime Minister Narendra Modi said the new count was a "proud moment". "Our family is expand-

ing," he said at a ceremony in the southern city of Mysuru. "This is a success not only for India but the entire world." Deforestation, poaching and human encroachment on habitats have devastated tiger populations across Asia but Modi said India had been able to increase its numbers thanks to "people's participation" and the country's "culture of conservation".

India is now home to 75 percent of the global tiger population and also the "largest tiger range country in the world", he added. In 1900, more than 100,000 tigers were estimated to roam the planet. But that fell to a record low of 3,200 in 2010. That year, India and 12 other countries with tiger populations signed an agreement to double their big cat numbers by 2022.

India is believed to have had a tiger population of around 40,000 at the time of independence from Britain in 1947. That fell over subsequent decades to about 3,700 in 2002 and an all-time low of 1,411 four years later, but numbers have since risen steadily. —AFP

Third massive whale in a month beaches itself, dies in Bali

A 17-metre-long (56-foot-long) whale died after washing up on a beach in Bali, a conservation official said Sunday, making it the third whale that beached itself on the Indonesian island in just a little over a week.

The male sperm whale was found stranded on Yeh Leh beach in west Bali's Jembrana district on Saturday afternoon.

"We are currently trying to pull the carcass to the shore to make it easier for the necropsy test and we will bury it after the test is concluded," Permana Yudiarto, a local marine and fisheries official, told AFP Sunday. This is the third whale that has beached itself in Bali, a popular destination for holidaymakers, in April alone.

On Wednesday, an 18-metre-long male sperm whale was stranded in Klungkung district, on Bali's eastern coast. Before that, a Bryde's whale weighing more than two tonnes and at least 11 metres long was found stranded on a beach in Tabanan on April 1 — its carcass already rotted when discovered by locals. Yudiarto told AFP that their initial suspicion is that the sperm whale found Saturday also died of sickness, "just like the whale found stranded a few days ago". "The body looked skinny and sickly," he said.

Yudiarto said it would take at least three weeks for the necropsy test to be concluded but forensic experts found some bleeding in the whale's lungs and its colon was filled with fluids.

Police have cordoned off the location to prevent people from stealing the mammal's meat or body parts.

In 2018, a sperm whale was found dead in Indonesia with more than 100 plastic cups and 25 plastic bags in its stomach, raising concerns about the Southeast Asian archipelago's massive marine rubbish problem. Indonesia is the world's second-biggest contributor to marine debris after China. —AFP

Lifestyle



The custom-made white suit worn by John Travolta in "Saturday Night Fever" is displayed at Julien's Auctions.



Wands from the "Harry Potter" movies, an original clapperboard used on the set of "Superman", the Egyptian vulture-shaped coronation head-dress from the 1917 film "Cleopatra", the custom-made white suit worn by John Travolta in "Saturday Night Fever" and an original Hulk figure from the premiere of "The Incredible Hulk" are displayed at Julien's Auctions in Gardena, California. —AFP photos



An original Mattel hoverboard prop from "Back to the Future II" is displayed at Julien's Auctions.

You should be dancing: 'Saturday Night Fever' suit up for sale



Spanish singer Rosalia's memorabilia is displayed at Julien's Auctions.



Spanish singer Rosalia's signed "Move" campaign video-worn butterfly helmet is displayed at Julien's Auctions.



Spanish singer Rosalia's signed glass from the premium influencer box and "Move" limited edition Coca-Cola cans are displayed at Julien's Auctions.

If you've ever fancied yourself as a disco legend — and, let's be honest, who hasn't? — this could be your chance, as John Travolta's "Saturday Night Fever" suit goes up for auction. The most famous three pieces of polyester in movie history are going under the hammer in California this month, offering one lucky buyer the opportunity to set the dance floor on fire — just don't get too close to the naked flames. The wing-lapelled suit, in which a dashing young Travolta broke many a 1970s heart, is the centerpiece of the "Hollywood: Classic and Contemporary" collection at Julien's Auctions in Beverly Hills. "I mean, this is the disco era," said auction house chief executive Martin Nolan.

"This is what we remember. When people talk about disco, you think of 'Saturday Night Fever,' you think of the Bee Gees, you think of John Travolta." The suit, with its high waistband, flared pant legs and — presumably — an inexhaustible supply of static electricity, is expected to fetch up to \$200,000 at the auction on April 22-23.

But, says Nolan, it could go even higher. The of-



The Egyptian vulture-shaped coronation headdress from the 1917 film "Cleopatra" is displayed at Julien's Auctions.



An original clapperboard used on the set of "Superman" is displayed at Julien's Auctions.



Spanish singer Rosalia's "Move" hyper box is displayed at Julien's Auctions.

fering is one of around 1,400 items up for grabs at an auction that runs the gamut of the last 100 years of cinema. Other memorabilia include Charlie Chaplin's

cane, a hoverboard from "Back to the Future III" and the original headdress worn by Theda Bara in 1917's "Cleopatra." Harry Potter fans will be able to bid on

various prop wands, while there will also be costumes from franchises including "John Wick", "Batman," "Iron Man" and "Star Wars." —AFP



Musician Valentyn Dudkin plays at 9.01am every day in Kyiv. His repertoire usually consists of the national anthem and popular folk song Chervona Kalyna.—AFP

Musician, 80, vows to play trombone in Kyiv 'until we win'

Every morning, Valentyn Dudkin picks up his trombone — an instrument he hadn't touched in 30 years — to play Ukraine's national anthem in the courtyard of his apartment building in Kyiv. The 80-year-old retired orchestra director dusted off his musical instrument after Russian leader Vladimir Putin sent troops into Ukraine a year ago.

"I haven't played the trombone for over 30 years," Dudkin, a graduate of the Donetsk Conservatory in eastern Ukraine, tells AFP. "The start of the full-scale war made me pick up the trombone again."

Rain or shine and with his 83-year-old wife by his side, Dudkin begins playing at 9:01 am, after observing a minute's silence first. His repertoire usually consists of the national anthem and "Chervona Kalyna", a hugely popular folk song that has become an unofficial anthem of the resistance.

Dudkin has quickly gained a small following. Neighbours praise his efforts to cheer them up with his outdoor concerts. On a recent morning, several people gather to listen to the musician despite the rain. Two women unfurl the blue and yellow flag of Ukraine with the signature patriotic slogan "Glory to Ukraine! Glory to heroes!" written on them.

Neighbours joke and laugh, while several chihuahua dogs dressed in yellow and blue coats huddle together in the rain. The small crowd then falls silent as Dudkin begins playing. The mu-

sic resonates across the courtyard flanked by colourful tower blocks and the small dogs yap.

'Duty to ourselves'

Dudkin says the locals thank him for his music. "You cheer us up. You bring us back to life," they tell him. Local resident Natalya Chayka says the morning gatherings — "every day, regardless of the weather" — are to tell the universe of their "strong desire" to defeat the Russians. "We got to know each other and decided to sing the Ukrainian anthem every morning under Valentyn's leadership," says neighbour Svitlana Novikova.

"He said: 'We will sing until we win,'" she added. Dudkin's youngest fan is two-year-old Andryusha, who wakes his grandmother up every day, anxious not to miss "Du du". Back at home, Dudkin and his wife, who hail from the eastern region of Donetsk, show AFP black and white photos of their past life.

"We were so beautiful back then... Wow!" Dudkin exclaims. Fighting between pro-Russian separatists and Ukrainian forces in the eastern region of Donetsk broke out in 2014 and intensified after Putin began the full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. Eastern Ukrainian cities like Bakhmut have been razed to the ground. The couple say the outdoor concerts are their contribution to the war effort. "We feel a duty to do so, a duty to ourselves," Dudkin says. —AFP

Jeremy Renner describes snowplough accident: 'My mistake and I paid for it'

Avengers star Jeremy Renner has said the accident in which he was crushed by his snowplough in January was "my mistake, and I paid for it". Renner broke more than 30 bones when he tried to stop the vehicle from running over his nephew on New Year's Day. His first full interview since then was aired on US network ABC on Thursday. "You shouldn't be outside the vehicle when you're operating it, you know what I mean? It's like driving a car with one foot out of the car," he said.

"But it is what it was. And it's my mistake, and I paid for it." Renner, 52, is best known for playing Marvel's Hawkeye and has been nominated for two Oscars. He told ABC's Diane Sawyer he and his nephew Alex, 27, had been using the 6.5-tonne vehicle to move one of the family's trucks out of the snow.

When the snow plough started skidding on the ice, Renner said he put a foot out of the cab to check whether Alex was in its way, without setting the parking brake. But he lost his footing and fell out. "I just happened to be the dummy standing on the dang track a little bit, seeing if my nephew was there."

Afraid that the vehicle would "sandwich" Alex against the truck, Renner tried to jump back in. But he stepped onto the



Avengers star Jeremy Renner

plough's moving wheel tracks, which threw him forward, and the vehicle ran over him. "That's when I screamed, by the way, when I went under the thing," he said. "Not today!" Asked if he remembered the pain, he replied: "Oh yeah, I was awake through every moment. "It's hard to imagine what that feels like... It felt like someone took the wind out of you." Pain is everything - it's like if your soul could feel pain. "Recalling his thoughts at the time, he continued: "I said, 'Oh, that

[leg], that one's really messed up... that leg's [going to] be a problem. "I'm thinking, what's my body [going to] look like? Am I just gonna be like a spine and a brain like a science experiment?"

However, after three months of intensive treatment, Renner was seen in the ABC programme being able to walk with the aid of a frame.

No regrets

He told Sawyer that when he woke up in hospital, he gestured to his family to say he was sorry. "I felt bad that my actions had caused so much pain", he said, and added that hearing his family's perspectives and memories of the accident is "horrifying". "That's real love. It's suffering but that feeds the seeds of what love is." He said he had no regrets and "would do it again", and would refuse to be "haunted by that memory in any way".

"I refuse to have that be a trauma and it be a negative experience. That is a man I'm proud of because I wouldn't let that happen to my nephew." As well as playing Hawkeye in Marvel blockbusters and a Disney+ series, Renner's credits include The Hurt Locker, Arrival, The Bourne Legacy and two Mission: Impossible movies, plus the TV series Mayor of Kingstown. —BBC



Avengers star Jeremy Renner

Sports

Zain joins conclusion of 2nd KEF Showjumping Tour

Company top supporter of local equestrian sports



Masoud Johar Hayat honors Waleed Al Khashti in recognition of Zain's support.



Hayat and Al Khashti with attendees during the event.

KUWAIT: Zain, Kuwait's leading digital service provider, joined the final ceremony of the second season of the Kuwait Equestrian Federation's Showjumping Tour. Zain sponsored the competition in collaboration with the Kuwait Olympic Committee and Public Authority for Sport. The event was attended by showjumpers from across local clubs, as well as crowds of equestrian enthusiasts and fans.

During the final ceremony, Kuwait Equestrian Federation Chairman Masoud Johar Hayat honored Zain Kuwait's Chief Corporate Affairs and Relations Offi-

cer Waleed Al Khashti in recognition of the company's support to this competition since its inception. Ali Al Kharafi emerged as champion of the competition's second season, which kicked-off late last year.

Zain is proud to have supported this unique local sporting event, which the company participated in for the second consecutive year in collaboration with the KEF. Zain's support came under its corporate sustainability strategy towards shouldering Kuwaiti sports and youth. The company is a strong believer in the talents and capabilities of the nation's young athletes,

especially those who are passionate about equestrian sports, which are deep rooted in Kuwaiti, Arab, and Islamic identities.

The second season of the KEF's Showjumping Tour (2022-2023) featured hundreds of showjumpers who represented public and private equestrian clubs from across the nation. The tour featured many competitions held across various clubs, including the Hunting and Equestrian Club, Kuwait Riding Center, and Messilah Equestrian Club. Zain is always keen on supporting sports programs and official competitions

hosted in Kuwait with the aim of elevating the Kuwaiti sports scene. The company strongly believes that the private sector has a vital role in progressing sports and youth initiatives, and it makes this belief a reality by shouldering similar events. As a leading private sector company in Kuwait, Zain is constantly looking to identify and support excellence across the sports sector. The company will continue to put Kuwaiti sports and athletes at the forefront of its priorities and pledges to continue motivating them to achieve all the recognition and support they deserve.

Masters payout hits record \$18m with \$3.24m to winner

AUGUSTA: This year's Masters will pay the winner a record \$3.24 million from a highest-ever \$18 million prize money purse, Augusta National announced on Saturday. But if leader Brooks Koepka captures the green jacket on Sunday, he still won't take home as much money as the \$4 million he took by winning last week's 54-hole LIV Golf League event in Orlando.

That's the crazy state of the sport at the first Masters since Saudi-backed LIV Golf launched last June, luring away several big names from the PGA Tour with record \$25 million purses from 54-hole events. Augusta's 2023 prize money payout—which offers \$1.944 million for second place and \$1.224 million for third—broke last year's overall purse of \$15 million, from which top-ranked Scottie Scheffler took a record \$2.7 million winner's prize.

Historic by Masters standards, the \$18 million pales to the \$25 million LIV purses, which include \$20 for individual competition and \$5 million for a team event. Prize money amounts for this year's other three majors aren't out yet but last year the US Open paid \$17.5 million, the PGA Championship paid \$15 million and the British Open paid \$14 million.

The \$760,000 prize money difference from Orlando, should Koepka triumph at Augusta, might be more than made up for by the achievement of capturing a fifth career major title—which would leave him only a British Open Claret Jug from completing a career Grand Slam. "The whole goal is to win the Grand Slam," Koepka said Friday. "I feel like all the greats have won here and they have all won British Opens as well."

"I guess it's one more box for me to tick to truly feel like I've done what I should have accomplished in this game." Then again, it can be just about showing the money. American Harold Varner made the profit motive clear this week when asked about the biggest benefit of his jump to LIV. "It's the amount of money," Varner said. "It's generational. The way I grew up, it's important to me to take care of my family, and you can do it by just signing on the dotted line... I'd do it again."

Against the LIV challenge, the PGA Tour has banned rebel players from its events and their legal battle is set to reach a courtroom early next year. The PGA has also made changes to its schedule to create 'enhanced events' with larger purses and fewer players. The majors have allowed LIV players to qualify, making them the showdown venues for the PGA-LIV rivalry. From 18 LIV players who qualified for the Masters, 12 advanced to the last two rounds, two withdrew and four missed the cut, including major winners Sergio Garcia, Bubba Watson and Bryson DeChambeau.

Behind Koepka, the next best LIV players were six-time major winner Phil Mickelson and Chile's Joaquin Niemann, both at 4-under and nine off the pace when play was halted until Sunday. Mickelson, a six-time major winner and three-time Masters champion, made a charge in his 30th Masters start. The 52-year-old US left-hander could break his own record as the oldest man to win a major from his 2021 PGA Championship triumph at age 50. —AFP

Clippers down Trail Blazers to close in on playoff berth

LOS ANGELES: Kawhi Leonard scored 27 points and Norman Powell added 23 off the bench as the Los Angeles Clippers beat the Portland Trail Blazers 136-125 to edge closer to an NBA playoff berth on Saturday. The Clippers moved into fifth place in the Western Conference with the same record as reigning champions Golden State. But their fight to avoid the play-in for the seventh- through 10th-placed teams will come down to the final day of the regular season on Sunday, when every NBA team will be in action.

"We started a little slow," center Ivica Zubac said of the Clippers, who trailed Portland by as many as 10 before cutting the deficit to six at halftime. "We knew we had to pick it up, we needed a win so we came out with a lot of energy and we got the job done." Leonard scored 13 points in the third quarter as the Clippers came alive, out-scoring the Blazers 45-26 to seize control.

They made eight of their 12 three-pointers in the third, then pushed the lead to as many as 19 in the fourth. The Clippers win ensured that the Minnesota Timberwolves will be among the four play-in teams battling for two playoff spots, even after Minnesota's monster 151-131 victory over the San Antonio Spurs. Los Angeles, meanwhile, will try to confirm their playoff berth with a win over the

fourth-placed Phoenix Suns on Sunday in what could be a first-round series preview.

The Timberwolves drilled a season-high 24 three-pointers and set a franchise record for points scored in their win over San Antonio. Anthony Edwards made four three-pointers and scored a game-high 33 points. Karl-Anthony Towns added 22 points for the Timberwolves, who can finish no worse than ninth and could move up if they beat eighth-placed New Orleans in their regular-season finale on Sunday. The Pelicans will be looking for a win in that game to keep the pressure on the seventh-placed Lakers, who close the regular-season against Utah.

Delicate balance

Denver who had already locked up the top seed in the West for the first time, fell 118-114 to the Utah Jazz in a contest that Nuggets coach Michael Malone acknowledged was a balancing act between keeping his players, including two-time NBA MVP Nikola Jokic, sharp and letting them risk injury. "Number one is not getting hurt," Malone said of his team's aims before the game. "It's such a delicate balance. Nikola's played in one of our last five games now. Jamal (Murray) has been out with a thumb. "On one level I would love to get our starting group some real minutes together. The flip side is you don't want anybody getting hurt."

Ochai Agbaji scored 28 points to lead the Jazz and Luka Samanic scored a career-high 23 points, Kentavious Caldwell-Pope scored 21 for the Nuggets. Murray added 20 points while Jokic had six points with 10 rebounds and 10 assists. Two days after all five of Denver's starters sat out a loss to Phoe-



Kawhi Leonard #2 of the LA Clippers

nix, the Nuggets got off to a slow start and trailed by as many as 19 in the first half. They missed seven of their first eight shot attempts, but had cut the deficit to 58-55 at halftime, and surged to the lead late in the third quarter. But with Denver's starters on the bench in the fourth, Utah rallied. —AFP



Annual Chess Championship

KUWAIT: Sheikh Mubarak Abdallah Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah Annual Chess Championship was concluded Friday April 7 - coinciding with The World Health Day as approved by the UN. The tournament was held at Sheikh Abdallah Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah Hall in Khalidiya. Tournament sponsor Sheikh Mubarak Abdallah Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah said - selecting the closing day to coincide with the World Health Day is to draw attention to the de-

velopment of mental health and to provide time for fruitful thinking through games.

300 players participated in the event including 92 juniors from 16 Arab and foreign countries in the presence of families and large number of fans. Sheikh Mubarak was happy for the turn out. He said chess is the game of minds that do not need translation and contributes to motivate and activate mental abilities.

Meanwhile, International Chess arbiter thanked all those who contributed to the tournament's success. The two-day tournament had 9 rounds and each move took 10 minutes and 3 seconds. It was open for all nationalities. He also thanked Sheikh Mubarak for his interest.



Chennai floor Mumbai in IPL

MUMBAI: Ajinkya Rahane hit the fastest fifty of the IPL season in 19 balls as Chennai Super Kings hammered Mumbai Indians by seven wickets on Saturday. In another show of destructive batting, England's Jos Buttler and Yashasvi Jaiswal powered Rajasthan Royals to the top of the table with a 57-run demolition of Delhi Capitals. David Warner's Delhi slumped to their third loss of the season despite the captain top-scor-

ing with 65 and becoming the first overseas player to go past 6,000 IPL runs. But Rahane stood out as the day's best performer with his 27-ball 61 on debut for Chennai, guiding them to their target of 158 with 11 balls to spare at Mumbai's Wankhede Stadium. "Me and Jinks (Ajinkya) spoke at the start of the season and I told him to play to his strengths, use your ability to manipulate the fields," said CSK captain MS Dhoni. "I told him to go and enjoy, don't take stress and we'll back you."

Coming in after the fall of Devon Conway for a duck, Rahane tore into the Mumbai attack, which was without Jofra Archer after the England pace bowler was rested due to discomfort in his elbow. Mumbai skipper Rohit Sharma said Archer, who returned to the team in the previous match after missing

last season, not playing was "just a precaution". Rohit said the five-time champions need to be more "brave" in their upcoming matches. Chennai's England stars Ben Stokes and Moeen Ali missed out due to injuries and South Africans Dwaine Pretorius and Sisanda Magala made the team.

Delhi 'long way off'

Ravindra Jadeja made an impression with his left-arm spin as he took the key wickets of Ishan Kishan (32), Cameron Green, out for 12 after an excellent caught and bowled, and Tilak Varma (22) to keep Mumbai to 157-8. Jadeja, who was named man of the match, was ably supported by New Zealand left-arm spinner Mitchell Santner, who returned figures of

2-28. Tim David's late cameo of 31 boosted Mumbai's total but was still not enough to challenge the Chennai batting. Rahane, who was signed by Chennai for his base price of \$61,094 in the December auction, smashed seven fours and three sixes.

Opener Ruturaj Gaikwad made an unbeaten 40 to move to the top of the batting charts with 189 runs this season as he jumped over Buttler (152) and Warner (158). In the first match of the day in Guwahati, last year's runners-up Rajasthan posted 199-4 after an attacking 98-run opening stand between the left-handed Jaiswal (60) and Buttler (79). Jaiswal struck five boundaries in the first over and Buttler soon took charge and, despite a middle-order stutter, took on the bowlers before Shimron Hetmyer hit an unbeaten 39. —AFP

Sports

Furuhashi double fires Celtic to crucial win over Rangers

Celtic move within touching distance of Scottish Premiership title

GLASGOW: Celtic moved within touching distance of the Scottish Premiership title as Kyogo Furuhashi's double inspired a dramatic 3-2 win against Rangers in Saturday's Old Firm derby. Furuhashi has been Celtic's catalyst for much of the campaign and the Japan forward was the key again with his team's opener in a frenetic clash at Parkhead. Rangers captain James Tavernier equalized with a superb free-kick before dismal defending from the visitors handed Celtic second-half goals for Furuhashi and Jota.

Tavernier's second took him to 100 goals for Rangers, but Celtic survived an anxious finish to claim a third victory over their bitter rivals this season. Ange Postecoglou's side sit 12 points clear of second-placed Rangers with seven games left as they look to retain the title. They are on the verge of securing an 11th title in the last 12 seasons and could yet enjoy more success at Rangers' expense, with a Scottish Cup semi-final date set for April 30. Celtic had won the most recent Old Firm showdown in the Scottish League Cup final in February and are now unbeaten in six successive league derbies. "It had a bit of everything. It was very competitive at times. It's only natural that players will be on edge and that showed in our game," Postecoglou said.

"I'm as much an onlooker as anyone else on game-day, and I can't help but admire the character of this group of players. They find a way every time to get the job done." Rangers boss Michael Beale added: "Fine margins. I thought we played well and deserved a bit more. "Obviously two big mistakes were quite costly for us. I thought one or two VAR decisions were harsh on us." There were no Rangers fans allowed into Parkhead due to safety concerns, but the atmosphere generated by the 60,000 crowd was still at fever pitch by kick-off in the east end of Glasgow.

Celtic thought they had made a dream start when Alastair Johnston's lofted pass reached Furuhashi, who poked through the legs of Allan McGregor, only to see his celebrations curtailed by a correct offside call. Rangers were denied in more controversial circumstances when Alfredo Morelos stabbed in at the far post from a corner, with Kevin Clancy disallowing the goal for the Colombian's contact with Johnston as the pair jostled for the ball.

That proved a crucial moment as Celtic broke the deadlock in the 26th minute. Matt O'Riley cut his pass back to the middle of the penalty area, where Furuhashi took a deft touch as he swivelled to plant a clinical finish past McGregor. Against the run of play, Rangers drew level on the stroke of half-time after O'Riley slid in to foul Malik Tillman. Tavernier made O'Riley pay as he curled a sublime 25-yard free-kick past Joe Hart via the underside of the crossbar, reducing Parkhead to stunned silence for the first time all afternoon.

But just as Rangers had seized the momentum, it was snatched away from them in the 62nd minute. Beale's team had only themselves to blame as Ben Davies miscued a clearance in his own six-yard box and tried to rescue the situation with a panicked header that bounced off Jota for Furuhashi to fire home from close range. The frenzied Celtic celebrations on the pitch and in the stands underlined the significance of Furuhashi's 28th goal in all competitions this season.

If the second goal was a gift from Rangers, then Celtic's third in the 73rd minute came thanks to more woeful defending. John Souttar's weak back-pass was well short of McGregor, allowing Jota to nip in and slot into the empty net from an acute angle. Rangers refused to surrender and Tavernier got one back in the 79th minute, arriving at the far



Celtic's Japanese striker Kyogo Furuhashi

post to meet Borna Barisic's cross with a powerful header that gave Hart no chance. In a tense finale, Tavernier was inches away from rescuing Rangers with another header, but this time the defender's effort flashed wide. — AFP

Bologna closing in on Euro spots at Atalanta

MILAN: Bologna increased their hopes of European football for the first time this century with Saturday's impressive 2-0 win at Atalanta, while Sampdoria are heading towards relegation from Serie A after a late defeat by Cremonese. Smart second-half finishes from Nicola Sansone and Riccardo Orsolini moved eighth-placed Bologna to within five points of Atalanta, who sit sixth and in Serie As Europa Conference League spot.

That place in Europe's third-tier club competition will drop down to seventh, currently occupied by Juventus, if a team already qualified for continental football wins the Italian Cup. Of the six teams currently in the European places, Inter Milan are the only one in the semi-finals of the cup. Bologna have not featured in a major European competition since reaching the third round of the UEFA Cup in 1999 but are in fine fettle with nine matches remaining.

Atalanta could have taken fourth place from Inter Milan on goal difference with a win but are now looking over their shoulders at Juventus, who are four points behind the Bergamo outfit and at Lazio later on Saturday. Thiago Motta's team are two points ahead of Fiorentina, whose winning run ended at nine matches after M'Bala Nzola's 13th goal of the season gave Spezia a 1-1 draw in Florence. — AFP



MADRID: Real Madrid's Belgian goalkeeper Thibaut Courtois concedes a goal scored by Villarreal's Spanish forward Jose Luis Morales during the Spanish league football match between Real Madrid CF and Villarreal CF on April 8, 2023. —AFP

Villarreal beat Madrid, as Real Sociedad dig in

BARCELONA: Real Madrid suffered a 3-2 defeat by Villarreal in La Liga on Saturday in a thrilling clash ahead of their Champions League showdown against Chelsea next week. Real Sociedad beat Getafe 2-0 to tighten their grip on fourth place, while Villarreal rose to fifth after their impressive triumph at the Santiago Bernabeu. The champions remain 12 points behind leaders Barcelona, who face Girona on Monday, with Villarreal winger Samuel Chukwueze scoring twice in a sensational individual display.

Pau Torres's own goal sent Madrid in front but Chukwueze levelled before the break. Vinicius Junior netted a superb solo goal before Jose Luis Morales equalised again and Chukwueze curled home a superb winner, which reduced Madrid's hopes of retaining the title to virtually nothing. "The truth is, it was hard for us to be 100 percent motivated, that's quite normal," Real Madrid coach Carlo Ancelotti told Movistar.

"If you aren't 100 percent, you have to be better on the pitch, we weren't organized, they manage the

ball well and it was hard for us to get it back." However the coach said the defeat did not allow any doubts to creep in ahead of Chelsea's visit in the Champions League quarter-final first leg. "No, no doubts," added Ancelotti. "We knew it could be complicated, and Wednesday is another story. Our level dipped a bit today, but on Wednesday it will be at the maximum."

The coach made six changes from the 4-0 Clasico thrashing of Barcelona in the Copa del Rey semi-final midweek, with Europe in mind. However he maintained his attacking trio of Karim Benzema, Rodrygo and Vinicius, looking to put the game to bed early. Marco Asensio and Vinicius combined for Madrid's opener, with Torres deflecting the latter's cross into his own net. The visitors leveled late in the first half when Chukwueze's magical footwork left defender Nacho Fernandez for dead, and the Nigerian finished clinically past Thibaut Courtois.

Madrid came out flying in the second half and Vinicius scored a brilliant goal of his own, nutmegging defender Aissa Mandi to leave a crowd of perusers behind him, before slipping the ball home. The Brazilian winger, on 21 goals across all competitions, should have matched his tally of 22 last season but fired into the side netting after being teed up by Benzema. The French forward, who scored hat-tricks in both his previous two games, was withdrawn before the hour mark to rest him for the Chelsea clash. — AFP

Lazio consolidate 2nd place as Roma up to third

MILAN: Lazio strengthened their grip on second place in Serie A with Saturday's impressive 2-1 win over Juventus, while Paulo Dybala moved Roma just behind their capital city rivals with the only goal at Torino. Sergej Milinkovic-Savic and Mattia Zaccagni struck the goals which sank Juve and gave Maurizio Sarri's team a great chance of reaching the Champions League next season.

With nine matches remaining Lazio are five points ahead of Roma in third and most importantly seven in front of Inter Milan, who have been knocked out of the top four after drawing 1-1 at Salernitana on Friday, the only point they have collected from their last four matches. The Roman side were deserving winners of pulsating match at the Stadio Olimpico which was won by Zaccagni's brilliantly taken goal seven minutes after half-time. Italian winger Zaccagni was a menace all night and ended a superb team move by sweeping home his 10th goal of the season from Luis Alberto's wonderfully disguised flick.

"We're all really happy because tonight's match was really important," Zaccagni told DAZN. "Even in those final minutes when it was a bit on top we really didn't concede very much at all. It's a big step forward. Being second is much more important than my 10 goals." Zaccagni had set up Milinkovic-Savic's 38th-minute opener, which Juve thought was scored after a foul and was cancelled out almost immediately by Adrien Rabiot, and also had a goal ruled out for offside just after putting Lazio ahead.

The hosts' win is also great news for Napoli, whose huge league has been cut back to 16 points but now no longer have to worry about seventh-placed Juve. The Turin giants, who pushed in vain for a second equalizer late on, are hoping to have a 15-point penalty for illicit transfer activity revoked later this month but even if they succeed they would only be a point ahead of Lazio. Massimiliano Allegri's side face Sporting Lisbon in the first leg of their Europa League quarter-final on Thursday with their hopes of making Europe through the league dented.

Dybala fires Roma third

Dybala has been Roma's talisman since arriving as a free agent last summer, and he was once again key when he confidently netted his 11th league goal of the season in the eighth minute in Turin from the penalty



ROME: Juventus' Argentinean forward Angel Di Maria controls the ball during the Italian Serie A football match between Lazio and Juventus on April 8, 2023. —AFP

spot. The Argentina international's strike was enough for Jose Mourinho's solid side to leapfrog both Milan and Inter Milan.

It was a classic Mourinho-style performance from Roma, a traditionally flaky team who have become an extremely well-drilled outfit and could make Europe's top competition next season as a result. "We have a limited squad and we're in the last eight of a Europa League which seems more like a Champions League this year, we're playing three times a week," said Mourinho to DAZN looking ahead to Thursday's Europa League trip to Feyenoord. "That's a problem for us, but I can't think like I'm at a little team... let's go game by game and we'll see where our limits are."

Smart second-half finishes from Nicola Sansone and Riccardo Orsolini at Atalanta moved eighth-placed Bologna to within five points of their opponents, who sit sixth and in the Europa Conference League spot. Bologna have not featured in a major European competition since reaching the third round of the UEFA Cup in 1999 - although they did win the now defunct Intertoto Cup in 2002 - but were excellent in Bergamo. Thiago Motta's team are two points ahead of Fiorentina, whose winning run ended at nine matches after M'Bala Nzola's 13th goal of the season gave Spezia a 1-1 draw in Florence. — AFP

Classifieds

Hospitals & Clinics

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

Clinics

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

Change of Name

I, MOHAMMED ZOAIB HUSAIN holder of Indian passport No. M8399055 having permanent address Maharashtra, India n 400003 residing in Kuwait at present, hereby declare that henceforth my name will be read as: **MOHAMMED ZOAIB HUSAIN BADRI. (C 3200)**

MAHABOOB BASHA SHAIK Father of SYED AAHIL holding of his Indian passport number V5160992 resident in 2-361, Sastri Nagar, Akkayapalli, Kadapa have changed my son's name SYED AAHIL to Given name AAHIL Surname SHAIK. **(C 3199) 10/4/2023**

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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Man City crush Southampton

Spurs star Son becomes first Asian to score 100 Premier League goals



SOUTHAMPTON: Manchester City's Norwegian striker Erling Haaland scores their third goal with this overhead kick during the English Premier League football match between Southampton and Manchester City on April 8, 2023. — AFP

LONDON: Erling Haaland struck twice as Manchester City crushed Southampton 4-1 to close the gap on Premier League leaders Arsenal, while Frank Lampard's first game back in charge of Chelsea ended in a 1-0 defeat at Wolves on Saturday. Haaland took his Premier League goal tally to 30 this season, within four of the single-season record, thanks to a clinical header and a breathtaking overhead kick at St Mary's. The Norway forward's goals, which gave him 44 in all competitions this term, came either side of Jack Grealish's strike against the league's bottom club. Julian Alvarez netted with a late penalty as second-placed City moved within five points of Arsenal, who travel to Liverpool on Sunday.

Arsenal remain firm favorites to end City's reign as champions but with Haaland in this mood and a home game against the Gunners to come on April 26, there is no chance Pep Guardiola's side will surrender without a fight. "The second goal was amazing. It is not easy to pick the ball up in the sky and put it on the grass," Guardiola said. "The first half was not our best level but he changed the game. We lived two incredible decades with Cristiano Ronaldo and Lionel Messi but he is on that level."

Lampard made a surprise return to Stamford Bridge on Thursday when he was appointed until the end of the season following Graham Potter's sacking last Sunday after just seven months in charge. But the ex-Chelsea midfielder, who was dismissed by the club's former owner Roman Abramovich in January 2021, could not provide an immediate lift for the Blues. Matheus Nunes won it for Wolves in the 32nd minute with a superb half-volley into the far corner from the edge of the area. Chelsea remain 11th after a fourth consecutive game without a win. Sacked by lowly Everton in January after less than a year in charge, Lampard said of his Chelsea return: "There has been a lot of change and that's not an excuse but things need to improve. That performance summed it up." At Old Trafford, Manchester

United beat Everton 2-0 to stay fourth and leave the fourth-bottom visitors above the relegation zone on goal difference.

Goals from Scott McTominay and Anthony Martial edged United ever closer to a return to the Champions League next season. Despite the win, United boss Erik ten Hag took aim at his side's congested fixture schedule after Marcus Rashford limped off nine minutes from time. "We have to wait. He doesn't look well," said Ten Hag. "It's due to the schedule. It can't be that you play three games in six days and we have to protect the players."

Newcastle fight back

Third-placed Newcastle are above United on goal difference after a 2-1 success at Brentford made it five consecutive wins for the Magpies. Brentford forward Ivan Toney missed from the spot for the first time since 2018, but made amends when he converted another penalty in the 45th minute. Newcastle equalized through David Raya's 54th-minute own goal as Joelinton's chip went in off the Brentford goalkeeper.

And Alexander Isak won it after 61 minutes with a blistering finish from the edge of the area. Tottenham are three points behind Newcastle after beating Brighton 2-1 in north London. Son Heung-min put Tottenham ahead with a superb long-range curler into the top corner after 10 minutes. It took the South Korean's Premier League tally to 100 goals, making him the first Asian player to reach that landmark. Lewis Dunk headed Brighton's equalizer from Solly March's corner in the 34th minute.

Tottenham interim manager Cristian Stellini and Brighton boss Roberto De Zerbi were both sent off after a touchline spat before Harry Kane lashed home the winner in the 79th minute. Bertrand Traore and Ollie Watkins scored for Aston Villa, who climbed to sixth place after a 2-0 home win against third-bottom Nottingham Forest. West Ham boosted their survival bid as Harrison Reed's 23rd-minute own goal sealed a 1-0 win at Fulham. Bournemouth rose out of the relegation zone thanks to a 1-0 victory at second-bottom Leicester, who were booed off after Philip Billing's 40th-minute winner. — AFP

Messi, Ramos ease pressure on coach

PARIS: Lionel Messi scored one goal and set up another for Sergio Ramos as Paris Saint-Germain won 2-0 at Nice on Saturday to restore their six-point lead at the top of the Ligue 1 table and ease the pressure on coach Christophe Galtier. Messi converted a Nuno Mendes cross in the 26th minute before Gianluigi Donnarumma produced several key saves and Dante was denied by the woodwork as PSG's goal lived a charmed life on the Cote d'Azur. Ramos then ended any doubt about the outcome when he headed in a Messi corner with 14 minutes remaining, as PSG bounced back from suffering consecutive home defeats.

Those losses had piled the pressure on Galtier amid reports he may not even see out the season. The result clearly meant a lot to Galtier, who was in charge at Nice last season and expressed his displeasure at a banner unfurled by the home supporters aimed at his mother. "My mum is 83 and has just had cancer. That's all. And if these people in the stands have been watching games in Europe this season it is because of the work I did last season," said Galtier, who led Nice to fifth in his single campaign at the club.

A win for PSG's nearest challengers Lens on Friday had cut their lead at the top of the table to just three points before this game, and before the top two meet in Paris next weekend. "We knew we had a lot of pressure on our shoulders both because

of our poor performances and because of Lens winning, and especially because Nice are a really good team who have been on a great run," Galtier told broadcaster Canal Plus.

"It was definitely not our best performance of the season but the players fought for each other and it is obviously three important points." He added: "It is better to have a six-point lead than be chasing after a six-point deficit but we know we have a very important match next weekend." It was a first defeat in 15 matches in all competitions for Nice since former PSG midfielder Didier Digard replaced Lucien Favre as coach in January. The Ineos-owned club remain eighth in the table.

Donnarumma stars

Messi's 14th Ligue 1 goal of the campaign that opened the scoring came at the end of a week in which it emerged he was likely to leave Paris when his contract expires in the summer. Before that, Danilo Pereira had already hit the woodwork for the visitors, who also saw injury-prone midfielder Renato Sanches come off hurt early on.

Donnarumma saved well from Nicolas Pepe and Terem Moffi before half-time, and Dante then sent an effort off the underside of the bar six minutes into the second half, with the ball bouncing down onto the line and then hitting the post. It was an incredible let-off for the league leaders, who were grateful to Donnarumma again as he made further stops from Pepe and Youssouf Ndayishimiye. Ramos made it 2-0 but there was still time for Danilo to head against his own crossbar late on. Marseille



NICE: Paris Saint-Germain's Argentine forward Lionel Messi scores a goal during the French L1 football match between Nice (OGCN) and Paris Saint-Germain (PSG) on April 8, 2023. — AFP

can rejoin Lens and close back to within six points of PSG with a win at Lorient on Sunday.

Earlier, bottom side Angers claimed their first Ligue 1 win since September as they beat European hopefuls Lille 1-0. Substitute Halid Sabanovic scrambled in the only goal of the match with six minutes left as Angers ended a run of 21 matches without a

win. That means they will not match the French top-flight record for the most games without a win in a single season—that record is held by Arles-Avignon who went 23 matches without a victory in 2010/11. They nevertheless remain seven points adrift at the bottom of the table and 12 away from safety with only eight games left. — AFP

De Ligt lifts Bayern top of Bundesliga

BERLIN: A superb second-half strike from Matthijs de Ligt gave Bayern Munich a 1-0 victory at Freiburg, keeping them two points clear atop the table as title rivals Borussia Dortmund also won on Saturday. Borussia Dortmund's 2-1 win over third-placed Union Berlin maintains the pressure on the perennial German champions' bid for an 11th straight Bundesliga title. Bayern, who were eliminated by Freiburg 2-1 in the German Cup on Tuesday, had a chance for revenge but lacked fluency despite new coach Thomas Tuchel naming an attack-heavy line-up.

Sadio Mane, starting for the first time under Tuchel, had Bayern's best chance of the first half, beating goalkeeper Mark Flekken but chipping inches wide. Freiburg had a chance of their own just before half-time. Ritsu Doan's shot rebounding off the underside of the bar. Bayern broke the deadlock early in the second half. De Ligt's long-range shot taking a slight deflection and flying past a helpless Flekken. Freiburg nearly equalized late but Bayern keeper Yann Sommer got his foot to a Roland Sallai strike to preserve the visitors' advantage.

"We had many chances and we should have used them better, but thankfully we did not concede a goal," said De Ligt. Bayern now have two wins and a loss under Tuchel, ahead of Tuesday's trip to Manchester City in the Champions League. A late goal from substitute Youssoufa Moukoko took Dortmund to a nervy victory over Union. Dortmund took the lead midway through the first half, Malen poking in a

Raphael Guerreiro cross from close range, his third goal in as many matches.

Union fought back in typical fashion, Kevin Behrens levelling the scores with the away side's first shot on target. Dortmund coach Edin Terzic brought on captain Marco Reus and teenage striker Moukoko with 15 minutes remaining and the two combined for a crucial goal in Dortmund's bid to unseat Bayern as league champions. Moukoko revealed Terzic said "when you come in, decide the game". "I could smell it - it was striker's instinct," he added.

RB Leipzig won 1-0 at Hertha Berlin to leapfrog Freiburg into fourth. With the first half winding down, Leipzig's French defender Mohamed Simakan rose high to meet a corner, with his scuffed shot falling at the feet of midfielder Amadou Haidara, who tapped home. Leipzig wasted several chances to put an end to the match but held on despite a late charge from Hertha.

Hertha are now winless in five and could be in last place with seven matches in the season remaining depending on other results on Sunday. Bayer Leverkusen won 3-1 at home against Eintracht Frankfurt to leapfrog their opponents into sixth, thanks to goals from Amine Adli, Moussa Diaby and Sardar Azmoun. Frankfurt's Djibril Sow pulled a goal back with 15 minutes remaining, but Leverkusen held on for their fifth straight league victory.

The win keeps Leverkusen on track for the Champions League places in a remarkable resurgence under coach Xabi Alonso, who took over with the side in second-last place in October. Elsewhere, goals from Ellyes Skhiri, Eric Martel and Linton Maina secured Cologne a 3-1 win at Augsburg, their first victory since February. Mainz's late season run towards a Europa League place took a hit after a 2-2 home draw against Werder Bremen, with each side scoring twice in the final five minutes. — AFP



BADEN-WURTEMBERG: (Right to left) Bayern Munich's German midfielder Leon Goretzka, Freiburg's German forward Lucas Hoeler and Bayern Munich's Canadian midfielder Alphonso Davies vie for the ball during the German first division Bundesliga football match between SC Freiburg and Bayern Munich on April 8, 2023. — AFP