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RAMADAN TIMINGS

Fajr	04:05
Shurooq	05:26
Dhuhr	11:49
Asr	15:23
Maghrib	18:12
Isha	19:31



Crown Prince urges new Cabinet to push for reforms, development

Prime Minister vows to serve people after new Cabinet sworn in



KUWAIT: His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah with His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah and the ministers pose for a group photo during the oath taking ceremony. — KUNA

RAMADAN KAREEM

Let us not forget the real benefits of fasting-I

By Dr Imam M Musa Azam-Ibrahimi

Shahru Ramadan, the month of Ramadan, is, as every Muslim knows, the month of fasting. As our Creator says: "The month of Ramadan is the month in which The Quran was revealed as guidance for humanity and as clear evidence of guidance and criterion. So whoever sights the new moon of the month, let him fast it..." (Quran 2:185)

Thus, Ramadan is a special time of worship that comes once a year, and we are ordered to fast. During this fasting month, Allah commands us to abstain from eating, drinking and being intimate with one's spouse during daylight hours. Countless ulama have, over the centuries, written on the value of obeying this divine command. However, a few of them have commented on the health benefits of fasting.

In our modern era, where science and materialism seem to reign supreme, abstention from food and drink during Ramadan has caused many of us to only focus on the physical benefits of fasting – often to the neglect of the spiritual benefits. Hence we find the internet filled with articles discussing the advantages that fasting gives to health and physical well-being – things like weight loss, improved blood lipid profiles, blood glucose control, improved immune functions, etc. As a result, the health benefits of the Ramadan fasting are well-known.

There is no doubt that these (and other) health benefits can be harvested through fasting and are a consequential effect of our abstaining from food and drink for one month. Allah certainly never commands us to carry out

Continued on Page 6

Jana Alnaqeeb joins Kuwait Times/Kuwait News as PR and CSR Manager

KUWAIT: Kuwait Times newspaper and Kuwait News have announced appointing Jana Khaldoun Alnaqeeb as Public Relations and CSR Manager. With an extensive background in Mass Communications and Visual Media obtained at the American University in Washington DC in 2003, Alnaqeeb has worked in a variety of fields, including academia at Kuwait Maastriht Business School (KMBS) as the Head of Admissions and the Australian College of Kuwait (ACK) as Sports and Recreation Manager. Prior to that, she worked as a creative consultant at TMI-J Walter Thompson.

Alnaqeeb also co-founded the Kuwait Charity Run @kcr_runs, which was at the time a non-profit charity sporting event and the first half marathon in Kuwait. In addition, she also co-founded the Yoga Center Kuwait (www.theyogacenter.me) and is a certified yoga instructor. In parallel to her professional career, Alnaqeeb also enjoys beauty in the aesthetic nature through photography, while shedding light on important



Jana Khaldoun Alnaqeeb

issues in society through blogging at www.thegenalist.me.

She is also the curator, designer and director of www.khaldounalnaqeeb.com, an archival website dedicated to the works and academic legacy of her late father Dr Khaldoun Alnaqeeb. Joining Kuwait Times will further cement Jana's ability to hone in on strategic public relations, communications and the integration of company values within corporate social responsibility.

5 killed in US bank shooting

WASHINGTON: Five people were killed and at least six others hospitalized following a shooting targeting a bank Monday in downtown Louisville, in the US state of Kentucky, according to police who said the assailant had been neutralized. Police tweeted that calls had come in around 8:30 am (1230 GMT) for an "active aggressor" at the Old National Bank in Louisville, the largest city in the southern state, and that officers were on the scene in "minutes".

"Five people have been confirmed to have been killed inside. At least six were transported to University of Louisville hospital, including one officer with various injuries," a police spokesman told a press conference, adding he could not confirm the status of the injured. "There is no active danger to the public at this time," said the spokesman, Lieutenant Colonel Paul L. Humphrey.

"There is no longer an active aggressor threat. The suspected shooter has been neutralized," the police department confirmed on Twitter, while urging residents to stay clear of the area.

Continued on Page 6

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: HH the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah on Monday swore in the new Cabinet headed by HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Al-Nawaf Al-Sabah and urged the new government to push for reforms and development. Sheikh Mishal stressed in a speech to the new Cabinet to exert all efforts and do their best to "push the process of development forward" in which the citizens of Kuwait will feel the results of those achievements.

HH the Crown Prince also called on the Cabinet to push to undertake reforms in main fields and work as one team to apply the law equally on all, achieve security for the people and upgrade all public services. He also called on the Cabinet to eradicate corruption and bribery and pay great attention to other important issues. He conveyed during this occasion greetings from HH the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, saying Ku-

wait's top leadership had placed its trust on members of the new government.

HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad vowed that he and his Cabinet will pursue all measures to bring prosperity and development to Kuwait and its people. He added the government will serve people from all walks of life to ensure welfare and happiness of all, thanking the leadership on its trust in the new government.

The new Cabinet was announced on Sunday, three months after the previous government resigned over political disputes with the National Assembly that was scrapped by the constitutional court in a landmark ruling on March 19. The ruling also reinstated the old National Assembly elected in 2020, which was dissolved by HH the Amir in August last year, after which fresh parliamentary polls were held on Sept 29 in which the opposition scored a landslide victory. It is not immediately known if the new government would deal with the revived Assembly.

Zionist forces kill Palestinian teen in raid

JERICHO: Zionist forces killed a Palestinian teenager and injured two other people in the West Bank Monday, the Palestinian health ministry said. Mohammed Fayez Balhan, 15, was killed after being shot "with live occupation (Zionist) bullets in the head, chest and abdomen", the ministry said. An earlier statement said two people were injured by "occupation (Zionist) bullets". The Zionist army confirmed its forces were operating in the Aqabat Jaber camp near Jericho.

The Palestinian Red Crescent said it had transferred one person to hospital with a bullet wound to the head. Clashes erupted when the army entered the camp and surrounded several houses, according to Palestinian news agency Wafa. A Palestinian security official told AFP that five individuals were arrested during the raid.

The Zionist entity has occupied the West Bank since the 1967 Six-Day War and

hundreds of thousands of Zionist settlers live in Zionist-approved settlements there, considered illegal under international law. The Jericho raid came as hundreds of Zionists marched in the northern West Bank, pushing for state approval of a Zionist settler outpost.

Several ministers — including Zionist far-right National Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir — were expected to appear at the march to Eviatar, whose residents agreed to leave in 2021 while officials examined their case. Demonstrators of all ages waved Zionist flags as they rallied along closed-off roads, accompanied by a heavy security presence. Rivka Katzir, a 74-year-old resident of Elkana, another West Bank settlement, told AFP "the one solution for this problem is if we settle this place".

The rising tension has bought widespread concern and calls for calm from across the region.

On Wednesday, Zionist police stormed the prayer hall of Al-Aqsa mosque, Islam's third-holiest site, in a predawn raid. The Aqabat Jaber camp has been the site of several deadly Zionist raids since the start of the year, notably in January when the Zionist entity said it killed five people in a single operation. — AFP



Local

Crown Prince lauds Nabati Poets' Diwaniya's digitization efforts

Nabati poetry cements national, religious allegiances: Amir's Representative



KUWAIT: HH the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah addresses the attendees during his visit to the Nabati Poets' Diwaniya. —KUNA photos



HH the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and senior officials react during his visit to the Nabati Poets' Diwaniya.

KUWAIT: Representative of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, accompanied by His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah visited the Nabati Poets' Diwaniya on Sunday evening.

They were welcomed by Minister of Amiri Diwan Affairs Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah and Secretary and Director of the Diwaniya Nassar Al-Khamsan. His Highness the Amir's Representative congratulated — in a speech on this annual occasion — the audience on the holy month of Ramadan and conveyed to them greetings of His Highness the Amir. He praised the Diwaniya as a great edifice for conserving literary heritage, social traditions and national identity of the country. His Highness the Amir's Representative spoke highly of the Nabati poets' noble message and eloquent poetry, which cement the national and religious allegiances. He also commended efforts of the Diwaniya to digitize the traditional Nabati poetry, keep abreast with the advancement of information technology and tap into the experience of the Ministry of Information in this regard.

His Highness the Amir's Representative called on Diwaniya members to adhere to the rules and parameters of Nabati poetry, continue excelling in producing creative poems and organize more competitions and symposia. He urged the Diwaniya to encourage young poets to adopt this style of poetry and publicize it via



HH the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah is seen at the meeting.

traditional and modern mass media.

Secretary and Director of the Diwaniya Khamsan expressed — on behalf of Diwaniya members — best wishes for His Highness the Amir, His Highness the Amir's Representative and Crown Prince and the audience. He read a Nabati poem welcoming the visit of His Highness the Amir's Representative and Crown Prince, His Highness the Prime Minister and other Sheikhs attending. Khamsan paid homage to late Amir Sheikh



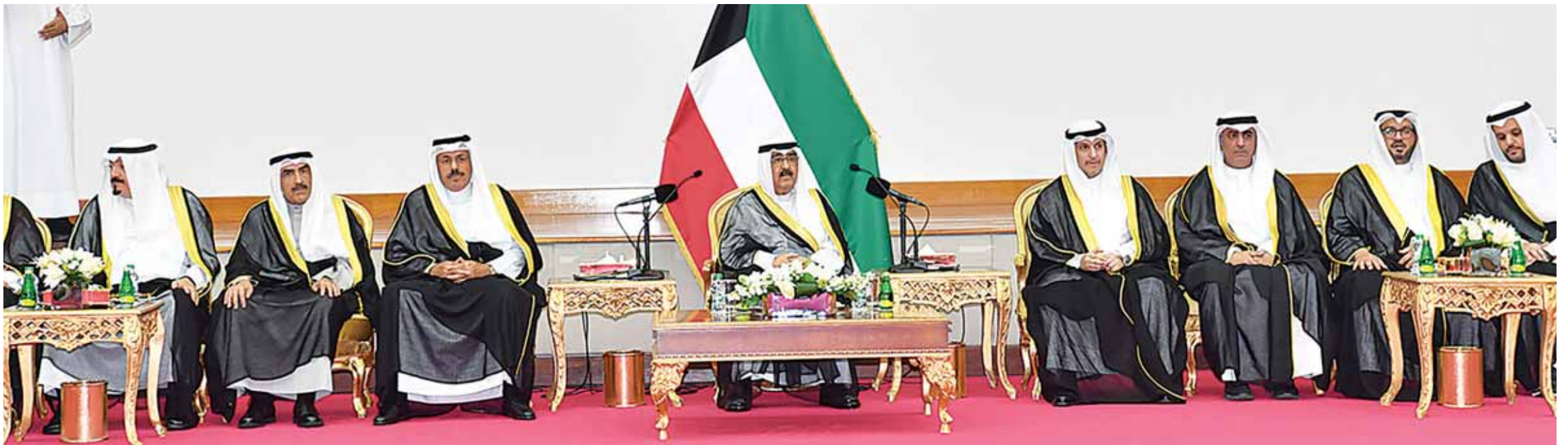
Secretary and Director of the Nabati Poets' Diwaniya Nassar Al-Khamsan presents HH the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah with a souvenir at the meeting on April 9, 2023.

Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah who founded the Diwaniya in 1977 and late Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, who offered essential support to the Diwaniya and its members.

His Highness the Amir's Representative and Crown Prince was also accompanied by First Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Interior and Acting Minister of Defense Sheikh Talal Khaled Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah and other senior state officials. —KUNA

Highlights from the visit:

- HH the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah praised the Diwaniya as a great edifice for conserving literary heritage, social traditions and national identity of the country.
- HH the Crown Prince called on Diwaniya members to adhere to the rules and parameters of Nabati poetry, continue excelling in producing creative poems and organize more competitions and symposia.
- His Highness urged the Diwaniya to encourage young poets to adopt Nabati poetry and publicize it via traditional and modern mass media.
- Secretary and Director of the Nabati Poets' Diwaniya Nassar Al-Khamsan paid homage to late Amir Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah who founded the Diwaniya in 1977 and late Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, who offered essential support to the Diwaniya and its members.



KUWAIT: HH the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah speaks during his visit on Sunday to the Sports Club for the Deaf while surrounded by senior officials. — KUNA photos



HH the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah interacts with attendees at the Sports Club for the Deaf on April 9, 2023.



HH the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah (center right), HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah (center left), Information Minister and Minister of State for Youth Affairs Abdurrahman Al-Mutairi (right) and Chairman of the Sports Club for the Deaf Anwar Al-Harbi (left) pose for a photo with senior officials.

Crown Prince reiterates keenness to support Sports Club for Deaf

KUWAIT: Representative of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, paid a visit Sunday to Kuwait Sports Club for the Deaf.

His Highness the Crown Prince delivered a speech, in which he conveyed greetings and con-

gratulations of His Highness the Amir to the club's staff on the holy month of Ramadan. "It is my pleasure to meet and convey to you His Highness the Amir's greetings over the blessed holy month of Ramadan," His Highness the Crown Prince said. Sheikh Mishal expressed appreciation to all staff of the club for their efforts and contributions in all activities, especially sports, on both local and international levels.

He reiterated Kuwait's keenness to provide all support and care and ensure the development and improvement of skills of all members of the club. Sheikh Mishal prayed to Almighty Allah to maintain security, stability and pros-

perity in Kuwait under the wise leadership of His Highness the Amir.

His Highness the Crown Prince was accompanied by First Deputy Prime Minister, Interior Minister and Acting Defense Minister Sheikh Talal Khaled Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah as well as senior state officials. At His Highness' reception were Information Minister and Minister of State for Youth Affairs Abdurrahman Al-Mutairi, Acting Director General of Public Authority for Sports Faisal Al-Yateem and Chairman of the Club Anwar Al-Harbi. During the visit, His Highness the Crown Prince was presented with a souvenir marking the visit. —KUNA



HH the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah signs the guestbook during his visit to the Sports Club for the Deaf.

AI: A bane and boon for art, science fields

Boosting human intelligence with AI

By Ghadeer Ghloom

KUWAIT: Artificial Intelligence (AI) is becoming part of our lives although humanity might not be prepared for it. Despite how useful it can be, many people are still concerned about how quickly it's infiltrating humans' lives, jobs and security. To shed light on people's thoughts regarding AI's impact on people's role in both art and science fields, Kuwait Times interviewed Senior Content Editor Zainab Patwa, and Fatmah Taqi, a pharmacy student.

Fascination and concern

Patwa said that AI has evolved into a multidisciplinary field that spans computer science, machine learning, and cognitive computing. When she first encountered ChatGPT, a cutting-edge AI chatbot, she was fascinated by its ability to mimic human intelligence in tasks such as perception, reasoning, learning and decision-making. While some view AI as a transformative technology with the potential to revolutionize industries and society, as a writer, Patwa recognizes that it can pose a threat to traditional content creation.

AI could eliminate jobs

With the rapid advancements in AI, Patwa said, companies are leveraging this cutting-edge technology to optimize their operations and gain a competitive edge. As an editor and writer, she has experienced both the benefits and drawbacks of AI in her work. On one hand, AI has proven to be a boon by boosting creativity, minimizing research time and generating factually accurate articles in minutes by



Fatmah Taqi

simply inputting keywords. However, this feature has also raised concerns among Patwa's colleagues about the potential for job displacement, as AI's ability to generate well-researched articles eliminates the need for external human intelligence.

In the field of graphic design, AI has brought significant simplification, with programs, such as Midjourney and Dall-E 2, rendering the process of generating concepts and ideas more efficient. AI programs also saves time and provide step-by-step guidance for non-designers using software such as Illustrator and Photoshop.

AI can streamline certain tasks, but human creativity, intuition and critical thinking remain invaluable in the field of graphic design, which requires originality and innovation. Being a pharmacy student, Taqi said AI could have a huge impact on her future career in many ways across industries, diag-



Zainab Patwa

nosis, managing medical records, research, drug discovery and development.

For example, one of the pharmacies in Ireland where she's studying, use a sophisticated robot designed to organize medicines and separate those that expired. She said that even if AI becomes more advanced, it won't be able to compete with the expertise of pharmacists.

Boosting human intelligence with AI

Both Patwa and Taqi agree that AI could enhance humanity's quality of life as long as it's used wisely to help with some tasks, rather than using it as replacement to human expertise. As AI is still evolving, it's difficult to predict its impact on stability and job security, said Taqi. This provides humanity with an opportunity to adapt and optimize its application in a way that benefits both companies and employees.



AI (Artificial Intelligence) concept.

It also allows for flexibility in utilizing AI to gain a competitive edge, while ensuring that employees can retain their jobs by leveraging technology to enhance their skills and productivity.

With careful management and keeping ethical considerations at top of mind, AI can be harnessed as a valuable tool that complements human capabilities, rather than replacing them, leading to a harmonious integration of AI into various industries. Taqi added that AI could present both positive and negative outcomes. On the bright side, it could boost human creativity, by reducing the time needed to complete some tasks and allowing humans to multitask. AI could also improve the capabilities of people with disabilities. The dark side of AI, on the other hand, is that it cannot learn to think outside the box and is only able to learn over time through what humans feed it.



National Guard officers urged to fulfil duty oath

KUWAIT: Deputy Chief of the National Guard Sheikh Faisal Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah congratulated the graduates of batch 18 from the Ahmed bin Mohammed Military College in the State of Qatar.

He stressed the leadership's keenness on meeting the graduates and called on them to fulfil the oath they took to serve their country and take advantage of their education while performing their duties.

Sheikh Faisal relayed Kuwait's leadership's blessings for the graduates, who earned the honor of defending their homeland alongside their colleagues in the National Guard and under Kuwait's wise leadership.

Sheikh Faisal conveyed a congratulatory message to the graduates on behalf of the Chief of the National Guard His Highness Sheikh Salem Al-Ali Al-Sabah, according to a press statement released Sunday. The graduates took their oath in the presence of Sheikh Faisal. One of the graduates, Lieutenant Abdullah Musfer Saad, was honored for placing ninth among his peers. — KUNA



FM receives letter from Palestinian counterpart



KUWAIT: Foreign Minister Sheikh Salem Abdullah Al-Jaber Al-Sabah on Sunday received a written letter from Palestinian counterpart Dr Riyad Al-Malki concerning the recent development in Palestine and Zionist repeated action of aggression, and violations to international law. The letter was delivered by Palestinian Ambassador to Kuwait Rami Tahboub in the foreign ministry headquarters. During his meeting with the Ambassador, Sheikh Salem renewed Kuwait principled stance with Palestine, expressing denunciations to repeated violations and aggression by occupying forces. — KUNA

healthcare services provided to citizens so as to achieve the goals upon which the Ministry's plan is based. In a press statement, on renewing the political leadership's confidence in him as Minister, Al-Awadi said that he will continue what he started in terms of continuing on digital transformation efforts, automating health services, and completing the operation of new facilities.

He expressed his gratitude and appreciation to His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad

Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, and His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah for their trust in him. He pointed out that the development of professional performance, which is one of the fundamental pillars of the healthcare system, is a top priority to achieve further excellence, in parallel with the quality of services provided to citizens in accordance with international standards. — KUNA



Deputy FM receives Indian ambassador

KUWAIT: Deputy Foreign Minister Mansoor Al-Otaibi received Indian Ambassador Dr Adarsh Swaika in his office on Monday. The Ambassador apprised the minister of prospects of bilateral relations, including new proposals and initiatives in different areas. Consular matters related to Indian community were specifically highlighted during the meeting.

Minister pledges to improve Kuwait healthcare services

KUWAIT: Health Minister Dr Ahmad Al-Awadi stressed on Monday the need to improve the

In my view

Dream, reality: Arab Thought Foundation



Dr Khalid Al-Saleh

Local@kuwaittimes.com

Arab Thought Foundation is an independent international private organization that is nearly 23 years old and works on being proud of the principles, values and ethics of the Arab nation, with the approach of responsible freedom. This intellectual foundation adopted an important research project that ended with an important statement by leading Arab intellectuals. They stressed that the Arabic language is an original component of the nation's identity and a moral symbol of its people belonging.

It represents its cultural and civilized memory and contributes through exchanged translations in enriching dialogue and rapprochement between people. Meanwhile, I still remember the speech of the President of Arab Thought Foundation Prince Khalid Al-Faisal at the conference in Morocco, when called for a comprehensive Arab awakening that shuns ignorance and backwardness. He also condemned the disputes that made Arabs forget their most important issues. The follower of the Arab Thought Foundation can notice the following:

First: It is being led by a strong group of elite Arabs, who have an ambitious thought and major abilities, be it in human resources or financial. Second: It held 16 conferences (one was cancelled due to politics in Lebanon), nine of which were held in the GCC and the latest was in Dhahran prior to the coronavirus pandemic, and this reflects the seriousness of this work, especially that the average age of Arab intellectual gatherings is no more than seven years. Third: The foundation enjoys strong support from the Arab educated class, as participations are increasing from various countries of the Arab World.

So, we today are owning an effective tool to strengthen the ambitions of our Arab people. It is closer to being the only lifeline that is thrown to us when we are about to drown in the middle of a rough sea, so what is our stand towards it? Do we quarrel about it and leave the deep state to fail it by ideologization, so this promising foundation will become far from our reality as the case with others, or do we keep it and use the values it is calling for to become the next cry of our nation?

How beautiful is this cry, a cry of pride in the principles of our nation as per responsible freedom, a cry that hits the depth of our thirsty roots to water us again with the hope of an intellectual unity that is almost forgotten. Fourth: The foundation needs real practices and be away from showing off the intellectual abilities, and this is done if educated Arabs find a new reality.

For example, if the foundation adopts the issue of Arabizing sciences, which is the most important obstacle for the advancement of the Arab nation and the major obstacle populists and Arab civilization fighters put in front of our youth. If they succeed in creating Arab Universities in Gulf countries that teach science in Arabic, instead of the universities that spread among us like a malignant disease to keep our children away from their language. If this prestigious foundation succeeds in this major goal, then the foundation will have a new reality that will fulfill idle dreams. The intellectual foundation itself is a maker of a new history for the Arab nation. It is a dream, but not far.

Sarayat to stay until May 15th

KUWAIT: The head of the Kuwait Astronomy Association, Adel Al-Saadoun, announced that the Sarayat period will continue from April until mid-May - officially ending the rainy season. "The rainy season ends with the end of Sarayat, and sometimes it ends before May 15th, and it may be delayed until the end of that month. During that period, atmospheric depressions that form quickly are accompanied by sandstorms and rapid rains, with which hail falls in separate areas," Adel Al-Saadoun said.

He mentioned that the word Sarayat is the plural of Sarya or Sarwa, which means what comes or goes in the latest period of the day, so we note that the rains that fall during the Sarayat period are from afternoon to evening. During that period, northwest winds blow and storms occur with wind speeds that sometimes reach more than 100 kilometers per hour. Sometimes sandstorms followed by heavy rains are accompanied by hail. The Sarayat is caused by the mixing of the two seasons. With the end of winter and the entry of summer, storms come from the west and carry with the moisture in the upper layers of the atmosphere.

"Sarayat is characterized by sudden climatic fluctuations. During the day, the weather is clear; then, clouds form in the afternoon, and the wind blows with rain falling quickly for several minutes before the weather returns to its previous state. The areas adjacent to the rainy area are affected by fast winds that carry dust with them. This is due to the fact that the area of the transmission center has lower air pressure than surrounding areas, which have higher air pressure," Al-Saadoun added.

He also mentioned that the Sarayat takes place in the time of the afternoon and sunset, and it does not happen before noon - except rarely. "The reason for this is that during the day, the earth is affected by the heat of the sun's rays, and the temperature begins to rise with what is called thermal escalation in the post-afternoon and night period after the cooling period of the sun's heat, which carries with it water vapor that forms into clouds due to the cold weather at the top." — KUNA

HB COMICS



Butterflies beautify Kuwait with multi-colored wings



KUWAIT: Butterflies are one of the most beautiful, most gentle, calm and peaceful flying insects, and their charm lies in the beauty of their delicate multi-colored and beautiful wings painted with exquisite geometric shapes and their wings are covered with flat delicate scales overlapping among themselves.

The Kuwait and Gulf environment has been in-



habited by several types of butterflies, such as the Tiger butterfly, Lady versicolor, Thorny, Spotted and Rocky, which are characterized by their charming colors, as if it were a traveling bird exhibition showing small paintings that move between the flowers with lightness and grace.

About butterflies and their season in Kuwait, the head of the Kuwait environmental lens team, Rashid Al-Hajji, told the Kuwait News Agency (KUNA) that butterflies are one of the kindest flying insects and are active during the spring season. Wherever the insects appear, they bring surprise, joy and happiness, especially to children who innocently pursue them among the flowers.

Al-Hajji added that butterflies adore the sun's rays and enjoy multiple and beautiful colors, and their wings are covered with flat micro scales that overlap with each other. He explained that these scales are the source of the wonderful colors and formations found in the wings and contain pigments and mineral coloring materials that give the colors their charm when sunlight is reflected.

Al-Hajji pointed out the presence of a large number of overlapping colors in a wonderful way on the wing of one butterfly and harmonious geometric shapes as if they were accurately drawn and matched on the wings. He stated that the wings of the butterfly are transparent at the beginning of their formation, then they quickly change the colors of their legs. A butterfly doesn't have a mouth - indicating that most butterflies go to rest with their wings erect on top of the body and most live only a week or two, but there are other species that may live about 18 months.

Regarding the most famous species of butterflies in the Kuwait environment and the Arabian Peninsula region, Al-Hajji said that the (Tiger) butterfly is the most widespread and common and in line with the conditions of the environment. He said that the Tiger butterfly is characterized by an interesting lifestyle. "Its larva feeds on milkweed containing cardiac toxin, which is transmitted to the cells, which provides it with protection from birds and lizards."

He added that the Spotted and Rocky butterflies are found in abundance in the Arabian Gulf region and are characterized by their dancing and attractive ways of flying among plants, while the violet butterfly is considered one of the most attractive butterflies migrating through the regions of the Arabian Peninsula and is known for its love of the sun and its presence in spacious grassy areas.

He pointed out that one of the most common species is the lady versicolor butterfly, which is also



called the Thorn butterfly due to its larval food consisting of a type of plants called (tooth thorns) and is characterized by its speed and strength in flight, which makes it difficult to hunt. The lemon butterfly is one of the most famous butterflies in the Gulf region and is known for feeding on the leaves of citrus trees, while its larva is harmful to plants. He explained that the large Arabian salmon butterfly is a constantly traveling butterfly that abounds during the summer in the Arabian Peninsula and inhabits desert areas. It is fast flying, which makes it difficult to catch it.

He pointed out that all the data indicate and confirm the decreasing numbers of these fluffy creatures, which are threatened with extinction year after year, pointing out that some of their species have disappeared completely while some are rarely found due to urban projects and the widespread use of pesticides and the disappearance of natural habitats.



For his part, a member of the Kuwaiti environmental Lens team, Mohammed Al-Saleh, said in a similar statement that the arrival of spring in the country earlier this year helped the emergence of butterflies in abundance, as they can be seen in various areas, especially gardens and farms. Al-Saleh explained that the good rains this year came early and instinctively during the past October and November, which accelerated the blooming of wild flowers in an exceptional way.

Wild plants and herbs flourished in most regions of the country, and flowers also spread. He stated that early spring flowering provides food for butterflies. They suck the nectar through a long proboscis, through which they are able to extract the liquid substance in the flower core. — KUNA



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Ukraine conflict on Lula's agenda in delayed China visit

Two migrants dead, 20 missing in Mediterranean

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BALLINA: Derek Furlong poses in the window of his Ballina photo centre, as he and others dress up their business properties in Ballina town centre as the town prepares to welcome President Biden to the town in Co Mayo, his ancestral home. — AFP

Sunak, Biden to mark 25 years since Northern Irish peace deal

So-called 'Troubles' killed more than 3,500 people

LONDON: Northern Ireland on Monday marks the 25th anniversary of its landmark 1998 peace accords, with the UK province mired in political dysfunction and security concerns that threaten to overshadow the milestone. No major public events are planned for the day itself, but British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak and US President Joe Biden will arrive Tuesday to launch several days of high-profile commemorations.

The territory has been reshaped since pro-UK unionist and pro-Irish nationalist leaders struck an unlikely peace deal on April 10, 1998 -- Easter Good Friday—following marathon negotiations. Brokered by Washington and ratified by governments in London and Dublin, the Good Friday Agreement largely ended three decades of devastating sectarian conflict in Northern Ireland and intermittent terrorist attacks on mainland Britain.

The so-called "Troubles" killed more than 3,500 people. They pitted the province's majority Protestant unionists, wanting continued British rule, against Catholic republicans demanding equal rights and reunification with the Republic of Ireland. But a quarter-century on, Northern Ireland is struggling to consolidate the gains of its hard-earned peace, with post-Brexit trade arrangements

prompting political instability, and violence by disident republicans on the rise.

"While it is time to reflect on the solid progress we have made together, we must also recommit to redoubling our efforts on the promise made in 1998 and the agreements that followed," Sunak said in a statement marking Monday's anniversary. "As we look forward, we will celebrate those who took difficult decisions, accepted compromise, and showed leadership."

'Potential'

Sunak will attend a commemorative conference at Queen's University in the capital, Belfast, and host a gala dinner to honour the anniversary, his Downing Street office has said. Biden will "mark the tremendous progress since the signing of the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement," White House Press Secretary Karine Jean-Pierre told reporters ahead of his visit.

It will "underscore the readiness of the United States to support Northern Ireland's vast economic potential to the benefit of all communities," she added. The Irish-American president will then travel south on Wednesday to Ireland, spending three days in his ancestral homeland, in part tracing his family history.

While there he will "deliver an address to celebrate the deep, historic ties" the country shares with the US, according to the White House. His visit will be closely scrutinised for any signs of pressure on Sunak to end the logjam in the North Ireland legislature caused by the Conservative Party's loyalist allies.

The following week, Northern Ireland will continue its peace accord commemorations with a three-day conference starting April 17 hosted by former US secretary of state Hillary Clinton. Her husband, Bill Clinton, played a pivotal role in securing the 1998 deal as US president from 1993 to 2001.

The upcoming events will celebrate Northern Ireland's subsequent transformation, but focus will undoubtedly be drawn to its present woes. In the years after 1998, Northern Irish paramilitaries were disarmed, its militarised border dismantled and British troops departed. However, the peace process is perhaps more precarious now than it has been at any other point since then.

'Up and down'

Power-sharing institutions created by the accords have been paralysed for more than a year over bitter disagreements on post-Brexit trade. Despite Brit-

ain and the European Union agreeing in February to overhaul the arrangements, that new deal—the Windsor Framework—is yet to win the support of the pro-UK Democratic Unionist Party (DUP).

It has boycotted Northern Ireland's devolved government for 14 months over the issue, crippling the assembly, and is showing no sign of returning to power-sharing. Irish Prime Minister Leo Varadkar said Sunday that Dublin, London and Belfast were "working towards having the institutions up and running in the next few months".

Meanwhile, the security situation has deteriorated, with Britain's security services last month raising the province's terror threat level to "severe". Police last week warned of "strong" intelligence that dissidents were planning attacks against officers in the city of Londonderry on Easter Monday.

It follows the attempted murder in February of police officer John Caldwell, the latest act of violence claimed by republican dissidents which served as a stark reminder of Northern Ireland's dark past and fragile peace.

Northern Ireland minister Chris Heaton-Harris warned in the Sunday Telegraph that "a small number of people... want to drag us all back to the dark old days." — AFP

Toll rises to three in French building collapse

MARSEILLE: Searchers on Monday recovered a third body from the rubble of a collapsed apartment in France's Marseille, as rescue workers raced against the clock to find five people still missing. More than 24 hours after a suspected explosion at the building, where residents reporting a strong smell of gas, dozens of searchers and dogs worked among the debris as a fire still smouldered underneath.

But the mayor of the Mediterranean port city said rescue workers were still optimistic they could find survivors. "There is still hope, and as long as there is hope, we will not stop," said mayor Benoit Payan, at the scene of the disaster. Lionel Mathieu, the commander of the city's fire department, said his team was waging a "battle against time". "The fire has not reached all parts, so there is hope that some people are still alive," he said. The fire at the site has made it hard for sniffer dogs to detect more victims or survivors.

On Sunday, before the discovery of the bodies, local prosecutor Dominique Laurens told reporters that eight people "were not responding to phone calls". Five people in a neighbouring building sustained minor injuries in the blast and collapse, which occurred around 12:40 am on Sunday (22:40 GMT Saturday).

The cause of the explosion is still to be determined, but investigators are looking at the possibility it was the result of a gas leak. Saveria Mosnier, who lives on a street near the site in the La Plaine neighbourhood, said she was sleeping when a "huge blast... shook the room".

"I was shocked awake as if I had been dreaming," she told AFP. "We very quickly smelled a strong gas odour that hung around, we could still smell it this



MARSEILLE: Firefighters stand aside as an excavator clears rubble at 'rue Tivoli' after a building collapsed in the street, in Marseille, southern France. — AFP

morning," Deputy mayor Yannick Ohanessian told journalists at the scene that several witnesses had reported "a suspicious smell of gas". Two buildings next to the destroyed property were severely damaged, with one collapsing later in the day without injuring any rescuers. Almost 200 residents were evacuated from surrounding buildings. The city provided some emergency shelter, and the local community also sprang into action to help coordinate housing and aid for them. "A lot of families in the neighbourhood are afraid," said Arnaud Duplex, the president of a parents' association at the nearby Tivoli elementary school. A ninth person living in a neighbouring building had also been feared missing,

but has since been in touch with relatives, the prosecutor's office said. In 2018, eight people were killed in Marseille when two dilapidated buildings in the working-class district of Noailles caved in.

That disaster cast a harsh light on the city's housing standards, with aid groups saying 40,000 people were living in shoddy structures. But authorities on Sunday appeared to rule out structural issues in the latest collapse.

"There was no danger notice for this building, and it is not in a neighbourhood identified as having substandard housing," said Christophe Mirmand, prefect of the Bouches-du-Rhone region. — AFP

Bangladeshi cleric among four held for stoning woman

DHAKA: An Islamic cleric and three village elders in Bangladesh were arrested on charges they ordered a woman to be caned and stoned after she was accused of an extramarital affair, police said Monday. Police said Hamida Sultana was "caned 82 strokes" and "stoned 80 times" with small brick pieces after an imam issued a religious decree, or fatwa, punishing her last week.

Sultana told AFP she was "a victim of terrible injustice". "I can't express in language what they did to me," the 30-year-old said. The Muslim South Asian nation of 170 million people has a secular legal system and applying sharia law in criminal cases is illegal.

The fatwa triggered an outcry, with feminist groups and rights activists staging protests to demand the perpetrators' prosecution. "They acted like medieval people," Fausia Moslem, the president of the country's largest women's group, told AFP.

Police inspector Zakir Hossain said officers arrested four people, including the imam of the mosque in Habiganj in the northeast, after Sultana filed a criminal case on April 7 against 17 people. "The village council ordered the caning and stoning in the name of sharia law after she was accused of an extramarital affair," Hossain told AFP.

The village elders "said it will absolve her from her sin and will redeem her honour", he added. Sultana's husband Anwar Mia, who works in the Gulf country of Oman, returned after the incident, he added. "He also seeks justice for what happened to his wife." Decades ago, village councils in rural Bangladesh commonly used sharia to punish Muslim women accused of adultery. — AFP

International

Thousands of opposition supporters rally in Georgia against government

Georgian government is being controlled from Moscow

TBILISI: Thousands of opposition supporters rallied Sunday in the Georgian capital Tbilisi as the Black Sea nation's government faces mounting accusations of backsliding on democracy. Demonstrators gathered outside the Georgian parliament for a rally organized by the country's main opposition force, the United National Movement (UNM), founded by jailed ex-president Mikheil Saakashvili.

Protesters waved Georgian, Ukrainian and European Union flags and held a huge banner that read "For European future." The crowd chanted "Long live Mishal", referring to his diminutive to Saakashvili, who is serving a six-year jail term for abuse of power — a conviction that international rights groups have condemned as politically motivated.

Doctors have said the pro-Western reformer is at risk of death from a litany of serious conditions which he developed in custody. The ruling Georgian Dream party's government faces accusations of jailing opponents, silencing independent media, covertly collaborating with the Kremlin and leading the country astray from its EU membership path.

Addressing the rally, UNM chairman Levan Khabeishvili listed protesters' demands that included the "liberation of political prisoners and implementing reforms" demanded by the EU as a condition for granting Tbilisi a formal candidate status.

'Peaceful but uncompromised'

"(The) Georgian government is being controlled from Moscow and our obligation is to save our homeland from Russian

stooges," former Georgian president Giorgi Margvelashvili told the crowd. "We are freedom-loving people, part of the European family, we reject Russian slavery."

One of the demonstrators, 27-year-old painter Luka Kavsadze, told AFP: "Our struggle will be peaceful but uncompromised and will lead us to where we belong — the European Union." Last month, tens of thousands took to the streets in Tbilisi after parliament gave initial backing to a draft law "on foreign agents", similar to the legislation used in Russia to suppress dissent. The bill, which has sparked strong criticism from the European Union and the United States, was dropped under pressure from street protests that saw police use tear gas and water cannon to disperse crowds. The ruling party has insisted it remains committed to Georgia's EU and NATO membership bids, enshrined in the constitution, and supported — according to opinion polls — by 80 percent of the population.

But party leaders have stepped up anti-Western rhetoric after Washington last week banned visas for four powerful judges in Georgia over alleged corruption. The move marked the latest toughening of Washington's approach towards an ally after concerns of a shift in Tbilisi toward Russia.

Georgia applied for EU membership together with Ukraine and Moldova days after Russia invaded its pro-Western neighbor in February 2022. Last June, EU leaders granted formal candidate status to Kyiv and Chisinau but said Tbilisi must implement reforms first. — AFP



TBILISI: Georgian opposition supporters rally in the center of Tbilisi. Thousands of opposition supporters rallied in the Georgian capital Tbilisi as the Black Sea nation's government faces mounting accusations of backsliding on democracy. — AFP

S Africa remembers anti-apartheid hero Chris Hani

JOHANNESBURG: South Africa on Monday commemorated slain anti-apartheid activist Chris Hani amid calls for a fresh probe into the murder that almost plunged the country into a race war 30 years ago. Hani, a hugely popular figure and the then leader of the South African Communist Party (SACP), was gunned down by Janusz Walus, a white supremacist, on April 10, 1993.

Three decades on, many South Africans harbour questions about the killing, suspecting Walus and his accomplice did not act alone. Conspiracy theories, involving anyone from the secret services to the ANC, abound.

"I don't have closure," Hani's widow, Limpho, told a memorial ceremony attended by SACP party leaders and foreign dignitaries on Monday. "That is why I am wearing black today. Until such time the truth comes out I am in mourning for life."

Last week, the SACP called for a fresh inquest

into the murder, with a petition hoping to collect 30,000 signatures. "There were many... factors that were not properly investigated," SACP's leader, Solly Mapaila told AFP on Wednesday. "We need to know the truth."

Aged 50, Hani was shot dead in the driveway of his home in eastern Johannesburg in front of his 15-year-old daughter. The incident led to protests and rioting in black townships. As anger within South Africa's black majority reached boiling point, Nelson Mandela appeared on national television to appeal for calm. The move helped ease tensions and open the way to South Africa's first multi-racial elections the following year. Walus's and his accomplice, Clive Derby-Lewis, had hoped to spark a racial conflict but were quickly arrested. Derby-Lewis was released in 2015 on medical parole after 22 years in jail. He died of lung cancer in 2016, aged 80. Walus was released on parole in December last year in a controversial decision.

"The democratic government, which my husband died for, has betrayed Chris and his family by releasing his assassin," Limpho Hani told the memorial ceremony on Monday. "The killer is free. And the opportunity for full truth on the wide conspiracy of Chris Hani assassination is now buried and lost completely." — AFP

Two migrants dead, 20 missing in Mediterranean

ROME: At least two migrants have died and around 20 others are missing after their vessel sank in the Mediterranean between Tunisia and Italy, German aid group ResQship told AFP Sunday. The group's ship, the Nadir, rescued another 22 people and took them to the Italian island of Lampedusa, said Stefan Seyfert of ResQship. Their boat sank overnight Saturday to Sunday.

Among those rescued were men, women and children from Cameroon, Ivory Coast and Mali, Ingo Werth, captain of the Nadir, told AFP. A pregnant woman was among those saved, while the boat's crew also recovered the bodies of two men.

In all, around 40 migrants were on the boat when it left Sfax in Tunisia, said Seyfert. "We did everything we could to save more people, but didn't manage to," he added. He acknowledged the "good cooperation" with the Italian coastguard. According to the Italian news agency ANSA, nine women were among the survivors. It put the number of missing at 18.

The migrants are believed to have paid 3,000 Tunisian dinars (about \$980) each to get passage on the



AT SEA, UNITED KINGDOM: Crew aboard Royal National Lifeboat Institution (RNLI) Severn class lifeboat, the City of London II, pick up migrants in an inflatable boat who were travelling across the English Channel, bound for Dover on the south coast of England. — AFP

vessel. Describing their operation earlier Sunday on Twitter, ResQship said that when they arrived at the scene of the wreck, the migrants had already been in the water for about two hours.

As well as rescuing 22 people, they had recovered two bodies, they said. "This is an unspeakable tragedy that could — and should — have been prevented by a humanitarian approach to migration instead of barb-wiring the European borders," the group added. — AFP

Let us not forget the real benefits of...

Continued from Page 1

ibadah that can harm our physical well-being. However, we must be careful not to make these beneficial properties the goal of our fasting during the month of Ramadan. Our intention to fast must be for the sake of pleasing Allah alone and fulfilling the obligations of our servanthood. Doing this will bring about many of the highest spiritual benefits. Below we will remind our dear readers of a few of these countless spiritual benefits, insha Allah!

Fasting Brings Reflection of Allah's Blessings

Allah Almighty created our universe and filled it with endless blessings. With these blessings, he surrounds us human beings — the most valuable guests in the universe. These blessings are brought from haythu la yahtasibu [At-Talaq, 65:3], unexpected places, and handed over for our use.

Let us look at two of these "unexpected places" — simple insects. Honeybees produce far more honey than they could possibly need. We harvest this excess and benefit from eating it. Silkworms, too, are blessings to us. They eat leaves and then produce silk by the command of Allah, allowing us to benefit from their work. Like this, Allah has put the entire universe at our service so we can understand His provision for us.

However, we often live under the veil of forgetfulness and do not fully realize the blessings given by Allah. We assign origins to these blessings without seeing that Allah is the source of all blessings.

Each day during Ramadan, we wait for permission to eat and drink, like guests invited to a feast given by Al-Razzaq, the Almighty Provider. While we wait, we stay away from food, drink, and intimate relations and try our best to behave like true servants of our Lord. We take the opportunity as we fast to reflect on how valuable our blessings are, and we try to develop our sense of gratitude. We reflect on the amazing ways and means our blessings have reached us, and in that reflection, to see the work of our Creator.

In such a lofty season of servanthood, should those who prefer to eat and drink like animals instead of spending time in reflection and gratitude truly be worthy of the name human being? Thus, one of the benefits of fasting in Ramadan is that it helps us understand the value of our blessings and the importance of gratitude.

Fasting Brings Gratitude for Allah's Blessings

As we said, our blessings reach us in various, often unexpected ways. For example, let us consider how a simple apple reaches us. Think about all the stages needed to be in place for the apple to reach our hands — from the apple tree growing and blooming, to the farm-

er who collects the apples from the tree, to the grocer who sells them.

We often know our blessings from these means and do not see our Almighty Lord setting all the means in place. We usually only thank the person who offered or sold us the apple instead of thanking Allah Almighty, who is worthy of all thanks!

We do not see how the whole universe has been set in motion "behind the scenes" for that apple to come to us. Because for that apple to be, the sun must shine, and the world must rotate. The winds must blow, clouds must work and the rain must fall ... A lifeless seed that enters the lifeless, colorless, tasteless, odorless soil turns into a living plant, yielding sweet, colorful, fragrant fruits. Subhan Allah! All these objects (sun, soil, rain, and wind), with their purposeful work, show us how Allah Almighty manifests His knowledge, His will, and His power "behind the scenes."

We can better understand the position of those who give importance to the means through which the blessings come to us instead of seeing the cause of all blessings with an example:

Suppose a king, through his envoy, sends us some gifts. Would it be proper to convey all our thanks to the envoy who handed us the gifts without thinking about the king? The envoy is merely the means by which we receive the king's gifts. We appreciate the envoy, but our gratitude goes to the king!

According to this example, all the ways and means that bring us blessings are like the envoy, and the king is Allah Almighty — the ultimate King! He deserves all thanks for the gifts He gives us. Thanking Allah means knowing our blessings come directly from Him, appreciating the value of our blessings, and understanding our need for those blessings.

Fasting in Ramadan is the key to developing genuine and sincere gratitude for the Malik ul-mulk, the King of kings. How? Let us explain — Under the normal conditions of our lives, we do not feel real hunger. In the absence of hunger, the value of food is under-appreciated. The value of a single piece of bread is not seen by a person whose stomach is full.

However, we all know how precious a piece of bread becomes at the time of iftar! That piece of bread becomes a precious blessing, and its value is tasted. Everyone, from the richest to the poorest, develops gratitude in Ramadan by understanding the value of these blessings. This gratitude is brought about by the temporary hunger and thirst imposed upon us by fasting. While food and drink are out of our reach during the daytime, we know, "Food and drink do not belong to me, since I cannot even approach them at this time. My nourishment comes from the Nourisher, and I await His permission to enjoy it." If we have such reflections, we will see our blessings as true blessings and develop our gratitude. Fasting, then, becomes the key to gratitude, an attitude incumbent on us as Muslims.



QUETTA: Men look through a shattered glass of a building near the site of a bomb blast on April 10, 2023. — AFP

Blast kills 4 in Quetta

QUETTA: A bomb blast in Pakistan's southwestern province of Balochistan killed at least four people and wounded 15 others on Monday, officials said. The bomb targeted a police vehicle in a busy market in Quetta, the capital of Balochistan, which is home to a separatist insurgency and several Islamist armed groups.

"Initial probe suggests that the explosion was caused by an IED (improvised explosive device)

5 killed in US bank shooting...

Continued from Page 1

The incident triggered a massive police deployment outside the Old National bank building. CNN reported that some people had been able to take refuge in the bank vault and lock themselves in — contacting police from inside.

Fox affiliate WDRB cited a witness saying she heard multiple gunshots and breaking glass while in her car at an intersection near the site of the shooting. "Gunfire erupted, like, right over my head," said the woman, who gave her name only as Debbie. "When I turned, I saw that one of the windows in the bank had been blown out," she added. Governor Andy Beshear tweeted that

that had been planted on a motorcycle and was detonated using remote control," police official Azfar Mehsar told AFP. "At least four people were killed in the incident — that includes two policemen and two civilians," he added.

The Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA), a separatist group, claimed responsibility for the attack. Wasim Baig, spokesman for the Sandeman Provincial Hospital in Quetta, confirmed the death toll, adding that the civilian casualties included a five-year-old girl. The BLA made no mention of civilian deaths in their claim, saying only that two police officers were killed because of their involvement "in inhumane treatment of Baloch civilians under the pretext of investigations". — AFP

he was headed to the scene, adding: "Please pray for all of the families impacted and for the city of Louisville."

The United States, a country of around 330 million people, is awash with some 400 million guns, and deadly mass shootings are a regular occurrence. Efforts to tighten gun controls have for years run up against opposition from Republicans, staunch defenders of America's constitutional right to bear arms. The political paralysis endures despite widespread outrage over recurring shootings.

In the latest illustration of the deadlock, two Tennessee lawmakers were expelled from the state legislature last week after staging a floor protest calling for tougher gun control, in the wake of a deadly mass shooting at an elementary school in Nashville. Monday's mass shooting in Louisville was the 146th of the year according to data from the Gun Violence Archive — defined as incidents in which four or more people were shot or killed, excluding the assailant. — AFP

International

China ends Taiwan war games aimed at 'sealing off' island

'This freedom of navigation operation upheld the rights and lawful uses of the sea'

PINGTAN: China declared it had "successfully completed" three days of war games around Taiwan on Monday, after it deployed dozens of aircraft to launch simulated strikes and an aerial blockade of the self-ruled island.

Beijing held the exercises in response to Taiwan President Tsai Ing-wen's meeting with US House Speaker Kevin McCarthy last week, an encounter it had warned would provoke a strong response. After three days of drills, the Chinese military said it had "successfully completed" tasks related to its "Joint Sword" drills.

The exercise "comprehensively tested the integrated joint combat ability of multiple military branches under actual combat conditions", the People's Liberation Army's (PLA) Eastern Command said in a statement. The war games saw Beijing simulate targeted strikes on Taiwan and encirclement of the island, including "sealing" it off, and a state media report said dozens of planes had practised an "aerial blockade".

One of China's two aircraft carriers—the Shandong—also "participated in today's exercise", the military said. The United States, which had repeatedly called for China to show restraint, on Monday sent the USS Milius guided-missile destroyer through contested parts of the South China Sea.

"This freedom of navigation operation upheld the rights, freedoms, and lawful uses of the sea," the US Navy said in a statement.

It added that the vessel had passed near the Spratly Islands—an archipelago claimed by China, Taiwan, the Philippines, Vietnam, Malaysia and Brunei. It is about 1,300 kilometres (800 miles) from Taiwan. The deployment of the Milius immediately triggered a condemnation from China, which said the vessel had "illegally intruded" into its territorial waters.

Separately, Beijing warned Monday that Taiwanese independence and cross-strait peace were "mutually exclusive", blaming Taipei and unnamed "foreign forces" supporting it for the tensions. "If we want to protect peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait we must firmly oppose any form of Taiwan independence separatism," foreign ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin warned. Close Chinese ally Russia defended the drills, with a Kremlin spokesperson saying Beijing had a "sovereign right" to respond to what Moscow called "provocative acts".

'No war'

On Beigan island, part of Taiwan's Matsu archipelago that is within sight of China's mainland, 60-year-old chef Lin Ke-qiang told AFP he did not want war. "We, common people, just want to live peaceful and stable lives," Lin said, adding that Taiwan's military was no match for China's.

"If any war happens, now that their missiles are so advanced, there's no way our side could resist. This side will be levelled to the ground." China and Taiwan split at the end of a civil war in 1949. China views democratic Taiwan as part of its territory and has vowed to take it one day.

The United States has been deliberately ambiguous on whether it would defend Taiwan militarily. But for decades it has sold weapons to Taipei to help ensure its self-defence, and offered political support. Tsai met McCarthy outside Los Angeles on her way home from a visit with two allied countries in Central America.

In August last year, China deployed warships, missiles and fighter jets around Taiwan in its largest show of force in years following a trip to the island by McCarthy's predecessor, Nancy Pelosi. Tsai meeting with McCarthy in the United States, rather than in



PINGTAN: A man sets up a Chinese flag on his car as he prepares to look at the view of the Taiwan Strait, towards the zone where China said it would conduct live fire exercises northeast of Pingtan island. — AFP

Taiwan, was viewed as a compromise that would underscore support for the island but avoid inflaming tensions with Beijing.

But China had repeatedly warned against any meeting, and began the latest war games soon after Tsai returned to Taiwan. "These operations serve as a stern warning against the collusion between separatist forces seeking 'Taiwan independence' and external forces and against their provocative activities," Shi Yin, a PLA spokesman, said about "Joint Sword". Tsai responded to the drills by pledging to work

with "the US and other like-minded countries" in the face of "continued authoritarian expansionism".

Live-fire exercises

Monday's exercises were to include live-fire drills off the rocky coast of China's Fujian province, about 80 kilometres south of the Matsu islands and 190 kilometres from Taipei, maritime authorities said on Saturday.

The local maritime authority said the exercises would be held between 7:00

am and 8:00 pm around Pingtan, a southeastern island that is China's nearest point to Taiwan. A video published Monday to the Chinese Eastern Theatre Command's official WeChat account showed a pilot saying he had "arrived near the northern part of Taiwan Island", with missiles "locked into place".

In another video with dramatic orchestral accompaniment, an officer's piercing whistle sends military personnel running into position as a simulated barrage on Taiwan unfolds on screen. — AFP

Thai shooting death toll rises to six

BANGKOK: Two more people have been found dead following a weekend shootout in southern Thailand, police said Monday, taking the death toll to six. Police are hunting two gunmen over the bloodshed in the southern province of Surat Thani, while local media reported that a third was among the dead.

Authorities found the body of a man in his 20s in a car on Sunday evening, and a woman's body was found on Monday, police officer Ampai Meemassu told AFP. Four people had been confirmed dead on Saturday. The two newly confirmed victims were identified as the son and wife of one of the suspects, Ampai said.

Thai media reported that the victims and suspects were all part of the same extended family. Thailand has high rates of gun ownership and there has been a steady trickle of violent incidents in the past 12 months, including one of the deadliest attacks in recent history.

The kingdom was stunned in October after a former police sergeant murdered 36 people, 24 of them children, in the northeastern Nong Bua Lam Phu province. And last month, three people were killed and another three wounded in a Phetchaburi province shooting, which ended only after a 15-hour stand-off. — AFP

Philippines rules out 'offensive actions' on bases US can use

MANILA: The Philippines will not allow "any offensive actions" from the bases it has opened to US troops, President Ferdinand Marcos said Monday. Manila last week announced the locations of four more military bases it is allowing the US military to use on top of the five agreed on under the 2014 Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement, known as EDCA.

The deal allows US troops to rotate through and store defence equipment and supplies. China warned last week the expanded military deal could endanger regional peace, and accused Washington of a "zero-sum mentality".

The four additional bases include sites near the hotly disputed South China Sea and another not far from Taiwan. Marcos said China's reaction over the expanded military deal was "not surprising", but assured them the Philippines is only shoring up its territorial defence.

"We will not allow our bases to be used for any offensive actions. This is only aimed at helping the Philippines whenever we need help," Marcos told reporters. "If no one is attacking us, they need not worry because we will not fight them." The pact stalled under former president Rodrigo Duterte, who favoured closer ties with China.

But Marcos, who succeeded Duterte in June, has adopted a more US-friendly foreign policy and sought to accelerate the implementation of the EDCA. Marcos has insisted he will not let Beijing trample on Manila's maritime rights. His remarks came on the heels of China's third day of war games around Taiwan on Monday, where it simulated "sealing off" the self-ruled island. — AFP

Ukraine conflict on Lula's agenda in delayed China visit

BRASILIA: Brazil's leftist President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva will meet Chinese counterpart Xi Jinping in Beijing this week to discuss trade and Ukraine mediation, having overcome the pneumonia that forced him to postpone the trip.

Lula, 77, also hopes to reclaim Brazil's role on the geopolitical stage following a period of isolation under his far-right predecessor, Jair Bolsonaro. Expected to arrive in China on Tuesday, Lula, who was originally due to visit the Asian powerhouse from March 25-30, will meet Xi on Friday.

They "will talk about the war in Ukraine," Foreign Minister Mauro Vieira told reporters, with Lula hoping to promote his proposal for mediated talks to end Russia's invasion of the country. By the time Lula returns home, a group of mediator countries will have been "created," said Vieira.

Lula, who has been president of Brazil twice before, is keen to position the South American giant as a go-between, as he did in his second term, which ended in 2010, during nuclear discussions between Iran and the United States.

However, his diplomatic stock took a hit last year when he came under fire for claiming that Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky was "as responsible" for the war as his Russian counterpart, Vladimir Putin. He has also refused to join Western nations in sending weapons to Ukraine to help in its defense.

And on Thursday, while Lula said that "Putin cannot keep Ukrainian territory," he qualified that statement by insisting that Zelensky "can-

not want everything." He also suggested that Kyiv renounce its claim to Crimea, annexed by Moscow in 2014 -- words that did not endear Lula to authorities in Ukraine.

"There is no legal, political or moral reason why Ukraine should give up even a centimeter of its land," Foreign Ministry spokesman Oleg Nikolenko said on Twitter. "Any mediation efforts to restore peace must be based on respect for the sovereignty and full restoration of Ukraine's territorial integrity in accordance with the UN Charter," he said.

'Exaggeration'

China, for its part, has proposed a 12-step resolution to the conflict, based on a ceasefire and dialogue, a plan Xi discussed with Putin during a visit to Moscow last month. "Those are basic conditions" for peace, said Vieira, judging Beijing's proposal as "very positive." Ukraine's Western allies have heavily criticized Xi's approach as tacitly supporting Moscow's invasion. In a joint statement with French president Emmanuel Macron, who was visiting Beijing, Xi pledged on Friday "to support any effort in favor of a return to peace in Ukraine."

But Moscow has rejected any "political solution" to the conflict. And after Lula's chief adviser Celso Amorim met Putin in Russia last month, the Brazilian diplomat told CNN it would be an "exaggeration" to say that the doors were open for a negotiated peace.

Trade no longer tops agenda

Just over three months into his third term as president, Lula is making his third major foreign trip, having previously visited Argentina and the United States. China is Brazil's largest trading partner and key to Lula's ambitions to re-establish the South American giant on the global geopolitical stage.

Officials in Beijing also see Brazil—a leader in the global south—as a linchpin in their strategic and



BRASILIA: File photo shows, Chinese Vice-President Xi Jinping (L) shakes hands with Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva, during a meeting in Brasilia. — AFP

economic plans. Lula's original trip was due to put trade at its core, an important topic even if the focus has shifted.

Last week, ahead of his arrival, China hosted a forum for 500 Brazilian and Chinese business people that resulted in the signing of more than 20 cooperation agreements. One of those was to allow business transactions between the two countries to be carried out in reais and yuan rather than US dollars.

Bilateral trade between the two countries reached a record of more than \$150 billion in 2022. Brazil was also the main destination for Chinese investment in Latin America from 2007 to 2020, worth \$70 billion according to the Brazil-China Business Council.

But this trip will be primarily political. From Beijing, Lula will travel to Shanghai, where his domestic political ally Dilma Rousseff, who succeeded him as president in 2011, recently took over as head of the New Development Bank, also known as the BRICS bank. — AFP

Rescuers find sixth body after French Alps avalanche

LYON: Emergency workers found two more victims of an avalanche near Mont Blanc in southeastern France on Monday, bringing the death toll from the tragedy to six. A massive body of snow swept down the Armanette glacier in the Alps on Sunday, killing two mountain guides and four of their clients.

Searchers recovered the bodies of the guides and a couple in their twenties on Sunday, and the remaining victims were found on Monday morning, said prosecutor Karline Bouisset. They were a 39-year-old woman and a man in his early forties who was "probably" her partner, she said.

One person also suffered slight injuries in the avalanche while eight others also swept up were unharmed, the prefecture said. The avalanche occurred without warning on a sunny day, covering an area of 1,600 metres (nearly one mile) by 500 metres.

Skiing conditions had been "good" on Easter Sunday, the mayor of the town of Contamines-Montjoie, Francois Barbier, told AFP. "I think it's the most deadly avalanche this season."

Weather authority Météo France had not issued any avalanche alert for the region, but a combination of warmth and wind may have been behind the disas-



HAUTE SAVOIE: File photo taken on February 13, 2016, shows a banner indicating a high risk of avalanche placed at the top of the slopes in the Haute Savoie resort of Les Carroz d'Araches. — AFP

ter, local authorities said. "It's a particularly alarming tragedy in such good conditions," said Dorian Labaye, president of France's mountain guide union.

"We have tens of thousands of people doing ski touring at the moment in the Alps, there are usually lots of people on the Easter weekend and conditions are usually pretty stable at this time of year," he told the France Info radio channel.

President Emmanuel Macron on Twitter said he was thinking of the families. Two brothers died in an avalanche on the same glacier in 2014, both experienced climbers in their 20s. — AFP

Texas governor seeks to pardon convicted killer

WASHINGTON: Texas's Republican governor has said he is seeking a pardon for an Uber driver convicted of murder for shooting a protester during a Black Lives Matter rally in 2020. Governor Greg Abbott said Saturday that he had asked the state's Board of Pardons and Paroles to recommend a pardon for Daniel Perry, who was convicted after an eight-day jury trial of killing protester Garrett Foster.

"I look forward to approving the Board's pardon recommendation as soon as it hits my desk," Abbott said in a statement on Twitter. Under Texas law, he said, he needs such a recommendation before acting. Perry, a US army sergeant and part-time ride-hailing service driver, has said he was driving through capital city Austin when he turned into a street full of demonstrators protesting in the wake of the police killing of George Floyd in Minneapolis, Minnesota.

Police said Perry honked at the protesters and drove into the crowd trying to get through. Foster, a 28-year-old white man, was legally carrying an AK-47 rifle. The jury heard conflicting testimony as to whether Foster pointed the AK-47, but Perry, who is also white, said he feared for his life and opened fire with a handgun he was legally carrying. Perry's lawyers said the state's "Stand Your Ground" law justified his action. — AFP

Business

TUESDAY, APRIL 11, 2023

Kuwait's economy expected to slow down in 2023: World Bank

Tight monetary policy and falling import prices to keep inflation subdued

KUWAIT: Kuwait's economy is expected to slow down in 2023, after performing strongly in 2022, and stabilize over the medium term. The projected economic slowdown is driven by the sluggish global economic activity and OPEC+ cautious production schedule, according to a report by World Bank.

Softer energy prices will narrow fiscal surpluses and raise deficit concerns in the medium term. Generous subsidies, tight monetary policy, and falling import prices will keep inflation subdued. Downside risks to the outlook include global oil price volatility, a stronger-than-anticipated global economic slowdown, and continued political deadlock over key reforms, the report said.

Key conditions and challenges

Kuwait's long-term economic challenges are linked to its dependency on oil, domestic consumption as key driver for growth, and slow implementation of its diversification agenda. Nonetheless, sizable foreign assets held through Kuwait's sovereign wealth fund (KIA), one of the largest globally, continue to underpin the country's economic resilience.

These assets, however, cannot mitigate the risk of low future oil demand. Such risk has to be addressed through deep fiscal and structural reforms. Progress on the diversification agenda has been slow to a large extent, due to the political deadlock and repeated resignations of government which is hindering economic reform implementation, the report said. The projected elevated oil prices in the medium term could still play a key role in financing economic transformation and promoting sustainable, inclusive, and green growth. Key short- and medium-term risks include the potential impact from a deeper than-expected global economic slowdown, oil price volatility, delay in fiscal and structural reforms, and labor shortages.

These could hamper growth in both the oil and non-oil sectors as well as have a significant impact on macroeconomic balances. Direct adverse economic spillovers from the Russian invasion of Ukraine have been contained in Kuwait due to limited financial linkages and trade flow between both countries. Recent developments Economic growth rebounded

sharply in 2022, reaching 7.9 percent year-on-year, driven by the strong performance of the oil sector which grew by 13.3 percent.

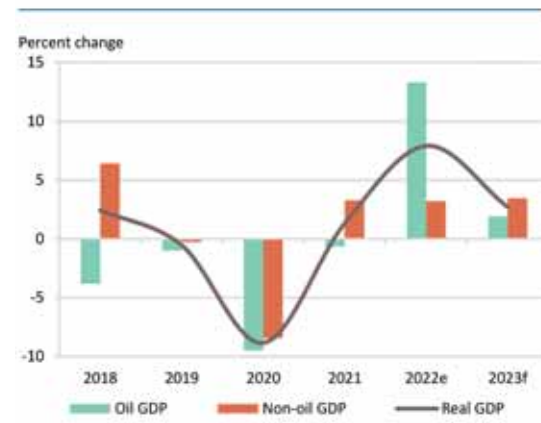
However, signs of a slowing oil sector are evident since November 2022 and reflect OPEC+'s latest agreement on cutting production quotas. The non-oil sector continued its recovery trajectory in 2022, growing by 3.2 percent, supported by high oil prices, strengthening consumer spending, increased government spending, and restoration of projects suspended by the pandemic. Private sector credit grew by 7.7 percent in 2022 — the fastest rate during the past 7 years — driven by the real estate, construction, and services sectors. Monetary policy tightening as well as government subsidies on food and energy helped to contain the level of inflation, which averaged around 4 percent in 2022. Supported by higher oil production and prices, the fiscal surplus is estimated at 2.2 percent of GDP during 2022.

In November 2022, the National Assembly passed the 2022-23 General Budget with an estimated fiscal deficit of KD 123.8 million (0.2 percent of GDP) based on an oil price assumption of \$80 per barrel and an average oil production level of 2.7 million barrels/day. The government continues to implement measures to enhance Kuwait's public financial management (PFM) including financial technology improvement, digitalization, and green energy investment.

The banking sector continues to be well capitalized and liquid. Financial soundness indicators remain strong with nonperforming loans estimated to reach 1.9 percent of total gross loans. Following tighter global financial conditions, the Central Bank of Kuwait raised policy rates from 1.6 to 4 percent (7 times) since March 2022, with the most recent hike in February 2023.

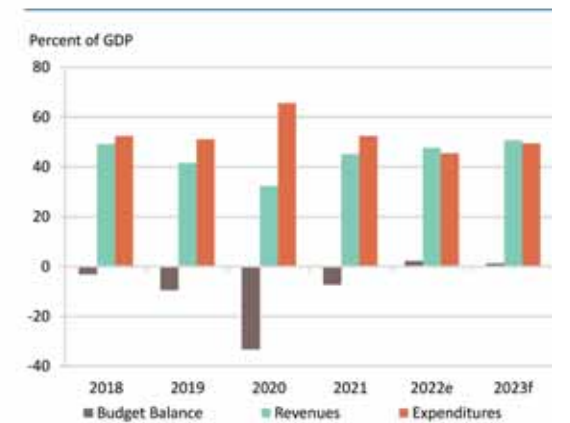
Official reserve assets continue to stay at their comfortable levels, reaching KD 14.8 billion (18 months of imports) in 2022. The strong currency peg and higher oil receipts widened the current account surplus considerably during 2022, reaching 26.3 percent of GDP. Kuwait's labor market continues to recover from the impact of the pandemic, although many indicators have not yet rebounded to their pre-pandemic levels. The labor force participation rate is projected to increase

FIGURE 1 Kuwait / Annual real GDP growth



Sources: Kuwait CSB and World Bank staff estimates.

FIGURE 2 Kuwait / General government operations



Sources: World Bank, MTI Global Practice and IMF WEO. Notes: Based on the fiscal year cycle (April to March 31). Fiscal balances exclude investment income and FGF transfers.

slightly to 71.7 percent in 2023 (ILO) but remains about 1.3 percentage points lower than in 2019.

Unemployment rates are expected to remain relatively steady in 2023 at 1.2 percent among men and 6.4 percent among women, still higher than the 2019 rates by 0.2 and 0.5 percentage points, respectively. The shares of youth not in employment, education or training for 2022 suggest a faster post-pandemic recovery, as they are now estimated at 18.1 percent among men and 34.7 percent among women (below pre-pandemic shares by 0.6 and 0.8 percentage points, respectively).

Economic growth is expected to slow to 2.7 percent in 2023 in response to a more cautious OPEC+ production approach and sluggish global economic activity. However, the newly established Al-Zour refinery will support growth in the oil sector which is expected to reach 1.9 percent in 2023. Based on the recent trend, political uncertainty is projected to remain elevated and cause delays in deciding and implementing new infrastructure projects as well as in pushing the reform agenda forward. Kuwait's non-oil sector is anticipated to grow by 3.4 and 3.7 percent in 2023 and 2024, respectively; driven primarily by private consumption.

Meanwhile, tighter monetary policy and declining global commodity prices will translate into lower inflation rates (to 2.6 percent in 2023, and 2.5 percent in the following two years).

Lower projected oil prices during 2023 will narrow the fiscal surplus to 1.3 percent of GDP — excluding investment income and FGF transfers. Softer projected oil prices will narrow fiscal balance surpluses and raise deficit concerns in the medium term. Implementing the economic diversification program and introducing the VAT, in line with other GCC peers, would enable Kuwait to diversify its revenues and enhance fiscal sustainability.

Monetary policy is projected to continue to closely follow the US Federal Reserve policy as the US dollar is the dominant currency in the Kuwaiti dinar pegged basket. Despite possible further monetary policy tightening, domestic credit is expected to continue growing but at a slower pace. Strong oil receipts and cheaper import prices should keep the current account surplus at comfortable levels during 2023 (21.9 percent of GDP) before moderating to an average of 20 percent of GDP in the medium term, the report added.

World Bank, IMF spring meetings begin this week

WASHINGTON: The World Bank and International Monetary Fund's spring meetings get underway later this week with an ambitious reform and fundraising agenda likely to be overshadowed by concerns over high inflation, rising geopolitical tension and financial stability. "Growth remains historically weak—now and in the medium term," IMF managing director Kristalina Georgieva said during a speech last week.

The fund now expects global growth to fall below three percent this year, and to remain at close to three percent for the next half a decade—its lowest medium-term prediction since the 1990s.

Close to 90 percent of the world's advanced economies will experience slowing growth this year, while Asia's emerging markets are expected to see a substantial rise in economic output—with India and China predicted to account for half of all growth, she said. Low-income countries are expected to suffer a double shock from higher borrowing costs and a decline in demand for their exports, which Georgieva said could fuel poverty and hunger to increase.

Updated growth projections published in the IMF's World Economic Outlook on Tuesday will provide a broader look at how different countries are

Egypt's inflation rose in March

CAIRO: Egypt's annual urban inflation rose last month to its highest level in six years, mostly on the back of soaring food prices linked to the decline in the value of the local currency, state statistics agency Capmas said on Monday. Inflation climbed to 32.7 percent in March from 31.9 percent the previous month, it said. While the rate of increase was below analysts' forecasts, it is expected to hit consumers hard in a country where half of the 104 million population are poor or hovering just above the poverty line. On a monthly basis, prices grew 2.7 percent in March, compared with 6.5 percent in the previous month. The slower pace of increase is partially statistical because declines in the currency a year ago created a high base of comparison.

The latest annual inflation figure is narrowly below the all-time high of 32.952 percent in July 2017, less than a year after Egypt devalued its currency by half as part of a \$12 billion support package offered by the International Monetary Fund. Egypt has devalued its currency three times since last March, slicing the pound's value by nearly 50 percent. But a persistent shortage of foreign currency and the subsequent delays in getting imports into the country have con-

tinued to play havoc with the economy, placing the pound under continuing pressure.

Tackling inflation remains a priority

This year's spring meeting will be held against the backdrop of high inflation and ongoing concerns about the health of the banking sector following the dramatic collapse of Silicon Valley Bank. Georgieva told AFP last week that central banks should continue battling high inflation through interest-rate hikes, despite concerns that it could further inflame the banking sector. "We don't envisage, at this point, central banks stepping back from fighting inflation," she said during an interview on Thursday.

"Central banks still have to prioritize fighting inflation and then supporting, through different instruments, financial stability," she said. Ahead of the spring meetings, the IMF and World Bank also called on wealthier countries to help plug a \$1.6-billion hole in a concessional lending facility for low-income countries that was heavily-used during the COVID-19 pandemic. Many low-income countries are now facing mounting debt burdens due in part to the higher interest-rate environment.

US pushes for World Bank reforms

The spring meeting also provides an opportunity to make progress on an ambitious US-backed agenda to reform the World Bank so it is better-prepared to tackle long-term issues like climate change. US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen told AFP in an interview that she expects member states will agree to update the World Bank's mission statement to include "build-



WASHINGTON: International Monetary Fund (IMF) Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva poses for a portrait during an interview at Meridian House in Washington, DC. —AFP

ing resilience against climate change, pandemics, and conflict and fragility," to its core goals.

Yellen said she also expects an agreement to "significantly" stretch the World Bank's financial capacity, which "could result in an additional \$50 billion in extra lending capacity over the next decade." The changes will likely fall to the bank's next president to implement, with current World Bank president David Malpass due to step down early from a tenure marked by concerns over his position on climate change. Malpass is widely expected to be replaced by US-backed former Mastercard chief executive officer Ajay Banga, who was the only person nominated for the position. —AFP



CAIRO: A fruit and vegetable vendor in Cairo where annual urban inflation rose to the highest in six years.

dan, which began in the third week of last month.

The government blames the country's economic woes entirely on the fallout from the Russia-Ukraine war, but critics claim that significant spending on national infrastructure projects over the past decade, excess borrowing and lack of transparency have been contributing factors. However, President Abdel Fattah El Sisi, a former general who has been in charge of the economy since taking office in 2014, is confident that the country will pull through the crisis. —AFP



TOKYO: Pedestrians walk past an electronic quotation board displaying the closing numbers of share prices of the Tokyo Stock Exchange in Tokyo. —AFP

Asian markets mixed as traders weigh US jobs data

HONG KONG: Asian equities were mixed Monday in holiday-thinned trade after US jobs data indicated the Federal Reserve would likely have to hike interest rates again but soothed recent worries about a possible recession. The closely watched non-farm payrolls reading on Friday followed a string of figures last week showing the world's top economy was slowing down and dented investor sentiment.

Focus is now on the release of inflation figures later this week, which will play a crucial role in the Fed's decision-making when it meets early next month. While rates are seen going up, bets are for officials to end their hiking cycle earlier than previously thought, with a nervous eye on the banking sector after last month's turmoil that saw two lenders go under and Credit Suisse taken over.

Some commentators have even suggested that the Fed would announce cuts by the end of the year.

"It seems the Fed will unlikely 'budge' on cuts unless the US economy is amid a deep downturn," said SPI Asset Management's Stephen Innes. "And given the still sticky inflation outlook and the less dovish drumbeat from the Fed speak, cuts may need to be removed from the market unless we enter an actual recession—and of course, neither outcome is an excellent backdrop for equities." He added that the jobs report "was encouraging, signaling a subtle rebalancing of the labor market that again points to a soft landing". With much of the region still closed for the Easter break, trading was light again on Monday. Tokyo, Seoul, Mumbai, Bangkok and Taipei rose but Shanghai, Singapore and Jakarta turned negative. Expectations for another Fed hike also lifted the dollar against its peers.

Oil prices edged down as investors weighed OPEC's decision to cut output by more than a million barrels a day with the outlook for the global economy and the impact on demand. —AFP

Business

NBK ECONOMIC REPORT

Oil market weakness in March spurs OPEC+ to deepen production cut

Oil prices trend lower, but outlook for 2023 remains bullish

KUWAIT: Oil prices trended lower in March as fears of bank failures in the US and Europe raised risk-off sentiment in financial markets during the first half of the month. International benchmark Brent crude fell to \$73.0/bbl on 17 March, its lowest level since December 2021, before rallying in the final two weeks of the month to reach \$79.8/bbl (-4.9 percent m/m; -7.1 percent ytd) as banking fears subsided and as supply disruptions in northern Iraq came into play.

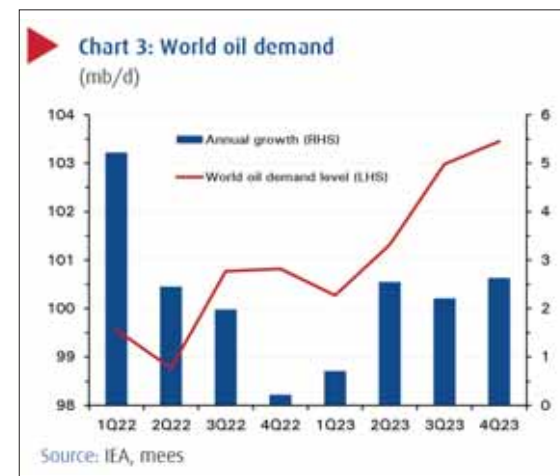
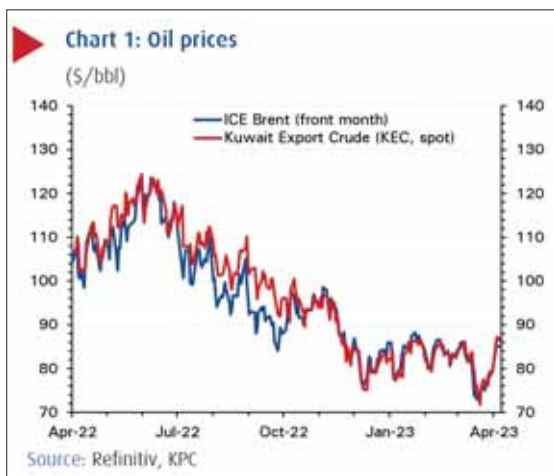
The improved sentiment has carried over into April, with prices surging by more than 8 percent in opening day trading after OPEC+ surprised markets overnight with its announcement of deeper production cuts. Brent stood at \$85/bbl in early April. Local marker Kuwait Export Crude (KEC) dropped 4.4 percent in March to close at \$79.3/bbl (-3.3 percent ytd) and has since rallied to \$87.0/bbl.

Oil prices were also helped in late March by Turkey suspending 400 kb/d of oil exports from the semi-autonomous Kurdistan region through its territory following an arbitration ruling by the Paris-based International Chamber of Commerce in favor of Iraq in its dispute with the Kurdistan Regional Government. Overall sentiment has been subdued, however, with speculators increasingly betting on oil prices falling.

The piling up of significant 'short' positions in oil futures and the market's underwhelming reaction to the Iraqi supply disruption reportedly caused much consternation among OPEC+ oil producers and likely influenced the decision to deepen pre-existing production cuts at this juncture.

Price pressure in March came despite a more optimistic assessment of oil demand growth by the International Energy Agency (IEA) for the year ahead. Citing expectations of strong consumption in non-OECD countries and especially in China following its reemergence from COVID-19 lockdown, the IEA in its March oil market report raised its oil demand forecasts for 2023 by 100 kb/d to a record annual average level of 102.02 mb/d. It sees demand growing by 2.0 mb/d on average in 2023.

Though lower than last year's increase of 2.3 mb/d, it is still a solid growth rate. OPEC, meanwhile, kept its overall oil demand estimate for the



year unchanged in March (+2.3 mb/d), though did adjust lower its growth estimates for 1Q23 and 2Q23 on weaker demand in the OECD. Both organizations see Chinese consumption as the main driving force for global oil demand growth. Early signs look encouraging, with the authorities hiking the quantity of crude local refiners are allowed to import for the year and refining activity accelerating.

On the supply side, OPEC+'s deeper output cut announcement on 2 April caught the markets off guard as it deviated from previous reassurances that the group would keep production steady. It will see a further reduction of about 1.15 mb/d in OPEC+ supply from May until the end of the year on top of the 500 kb/d that Russia signaled it would reduce from March and which it too said would be extended until end-2023. Among regional oil producers, Saudi will cut by 500 kb/d, Iraq by 211 kb/d, the UAE by 144 kb/d, Kuwait by 128 kb/d and Oman by 40 kb/d. Total indicative cuts could therefore top 1.65 mb/d, bringing OPEC+ output down from 38.2 mb/d (excluding Iran, Libya, Venezuela and Mexico) in February, based on OPEC secondary source and S&P Global data, to 36.7 mb/d for most of the year.

The voluntary and involuntary supply shortfall (members producing below their quota due to capacity erosion, well or pipeline repairs, strife dis-

rupting supply etc.) could exceed 2.4 mb/d.

Kuwait's crude production stood at 2.68 mb/d in February, down a marginal 11 kb/d from the previous month but up 7 kb/d above its OPEC+ quota (95 percent compliance), according to official sources. Kuwait's Integrated Petroleum Industries Company recently announced the inauguration of the second phase of its 610 kb/d Al-Zour refinery, boosting its output of refined products. Data from Kpler show that exports from the refinery surged 50 percent m/m in March to 279 kb/d, with further gains likely once the third and final processing unit comes on line by mid-year.

To capitalize on this recent expansion while adhering to the OPEC+ quota, Kuwait is reducing outbound crude exports, particularly to Asia, in favor of domestic processing. For now, Kuwaiti refined products are mainly sent to Asia, though the gap left by the EU's embargo of Russian crude products leaves the country well-positioned to supply Europe with large volumes of middle distillates such as ultra-low sulfur diesel and kerosene.

In the US, crude production dropped slightly to 12.2 mb/d in March (+100 kb/d ytd), according to US Energy Information Administration data (EIA). Meanwhile, US oil rig counts continued to trend lower, standing at 592 (-4.7 percent ytd) by end-

March. The EIA sees this year's output surpassing 2019 levels as US shale production picks up as elevated oil prices spur increased investment, production and exports.

Indeed, US oil producers have taken advantage of the positive Brent-WTI spread (averaging \$6.0/bbl in March), which widened in the aftermath of Russia's invasion of Ukraine and subsequent EU sanctions on Russia, to ramp up exports to a record high of 3.6 mb/d in 2022, especially to crude and refined products-short Europe. Elevated oil prices, however, will likely delay the Biden Administration's attempts to refill the much-depleted Strategic Petroleum Reserve.

The outlook for oil prices this year has improved following the unexpected OPEC+ output cut announcement. The probability that a currently adequately supplied oil market—stock builds were expected through 2Q23—will tighten and slip into a deficit in the second half of the year has risen significantly. Indeed, stocks could begin to draw down from June onwards, assuming full OPEC+ compliance with the deeper cuts, non-OPEC supply growth does not accelerate and that a China-driven oil demand rebound continues apace and offsets any potential further weakness in OECD economic activity.

Gulf Bank celebrates graduation of senior leaders from Harvard

KUWAIT: As part of its continuous efforts to develop human capital, Gulf Bank announced the graduation of its senior leaders from the Harvard Business School executive program – a custom executive development program for banking and finance executives that are part of the Kuwait Institute of Banking Studies. The program is designed to support and develop leaders in the banking and financial sector, under the theme "Strategic Leadership in a Changing World".

This program is part of the "Kafaa" initiative launched by the Central Bank of Kuwait, in cooperation with Kuwaiti banks to help develop and qualify national talents and is managed by the Institute of Banking Studies, in cooperation with Harvard Business School.

The Bank celebrated the leaders for completing the program and receiving the Harvard Business School certifications, namely: Abdulaziz Al-Zamel, Assistant General Manager Investments, Ali Al-Safar -Assistant General Manager Consumer Banking and Qutaibah Al-Homoud -Senior Manager Finance. The program focuses on two primary themes: Financial markets strategy and leadership, equipping participants with concepts and tools for successful leadership in a rapidly changing financial landscape, and ways to impact the performance, innovation, and culture of their organization.

On this occasion, Gulf Bank's General Manager of Human Resources Salma Al-Hajjaj, said: "At Gulf Bank, we believe that our employees are the foundation of our success and the drivers of our excellence. Therefore, we are continuously working on training and developing them, which contributes towards consolidating Gulf Bank's leading position in the banking sector."



Al-Hajjaj mentioned that the major transformations recently witnessed by Gulf Bank as part of its 2025 strategy, especially when it comes to digital transformation, makes the Bank's employees' participation in such specialized programs a top priority. Noting that digital transformation requires strategic leaders capable of facing market fluctuations, and to make the most of the opportunities they generate; ensuring the best results are achieved with the fast-changing financial technologies.

She pointed that the program provides an opportunity for participants to anticipate and respond quickly, and effectively, to strategic opportunities and threats in financial markets, such as: Understanding risks and appropriate responses to cyber threats, managing, and leading digital innovation, and ways to understand and manage investor concerns around ESG and sustainability.

Al-Hajjaj also expressed her pride in Gulf Bank for being one of Kuwait's leading banks that generously invests in human capital in order to enhance the competencies of its employees – as they are the

key for achieving its strategic objectives. This is accomplished through providing employees with the latest expertise and skills necessary to keep pace with the major banking developments that the banking industry is undergoing locally and internationally.

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.

But the bank's two-percent inflation target has remained out of reach, with wages stubbornly stagnant. Prices have jumped by as much as four percent in recent months, though they increased just 3.1 percent in February from a year earlier, slowing from the four-decade highs seen in previous months. The bank says current price hikes are largely transitory, and the result of temporary factors like the war in Ukraine and resulting energy price spikes.

There have been some signs that wages may finally be rising, with major Japanese companies including Toyota, Nintendo and Uniqlo parent Fast Retailing announcing substantial wage increases in recent months. Ueda said wage hikes achieved in the annual Shunto spring negotiations were "a welcome development", but warned "we need to find out whether this will continue and take root".

He declined to set any new deadline for achieving the bank's two-percent inflation target, but said he would work to reach it within his five-year term. The respected economist, described as being cautious, was a surprise pick for the change of guard after the outgoing governor's deputy reportedly turned down the job. He has a PhD in economics from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and is regarded as a good communicator who prefers reflection over abrupt action. — AFP

New BoJ chief says no major rate hike on horizon

TOKYO: Japan's new central bank chief said Monday no major rate hikes were on the horizon, and that a long-standing loose monetary policy remained "appropriate". Kazuo Ueda took over this month from Haruhiko Kuroda, the bank's longest-serving governor and architect of a monetary policy intended to help boost the world's third-largest economy.

Ueda, 71, takes the reins with the central bank under pressure to join international peers that have hiked rates to address inflation. He has, however, made it clear that there will be no immediate shake-up of the bank's existing approach. "Japan is currently not in a situation where interest rates need to be significantly raised," Ueda told reporters at his first press conference since taking office.

Kuroda, who became governor in 2013, tried everything from a negative interest rate to spending vast sums on government bonds to bolster Japan's moribund economy.



TOKYO: Bank of Japan's new governor Kazuo Ueda (center) speaks to reporters after a meeting with Prime Minister Fumio Kishida at the prime minister's office in Tokyo on April 10, 2023. — AFP

CBK bonds and related Tawarruq

KUWAIT: The Central Bank of Kuwait (CBK) announced the most recent issues of CBK bonds and related Tawarruq at a total value of KD 240 million for six months with a rate of return at 4.375 percent.

Twitter now calls NPR and BBC 'government-funded'

WASHINGTON: Twitter has backtracked after an uproar for labeling the US radio network NPR as "state-affiliated media" and now calls it "government-funded." Elon Musk's social media network has also applied that new label to the BBC, which is funded predominantly by British households paying a license fee. Britain's beloved national broadcaster has reached out to Twitter for clarification, news reports said.

The change in how Twitter refers to Washington-based National Public Radio happened quietly overnight Saturday and comes after the network complained that the term "state-affiliated" was disparaging and inaccurate. Twitter last week branded NPR in the same way as government-owned Chinese and Russian platforms.

In protest, NPR stopped tweeting. In its updated Twitter bio, NPR's main account—which has more than 8.8 million followers—invited users to "find us every other place where you read the news."

NPR CEO John Lansing said the decision by Twitter was "unacceptable" and the radio's account has remained silent ever since. Other accounts run by NPR, such as its music and politics handles, did not have the "state-affiliated" specification and have continued to post tweets. Musk's move against NPR came just days after Twitter stripped The New York Times of its verified status on the platform, which like NPR, is often accused of left-leaning bias, particularly by US conservatives.

According to Twitter policy, the decisions will de-amplify tweets from both companies, limiting their reach on a platform that remains a major communication tool for media outlets, celebrities and officials.

Musk has for years expressed a deep disdain for the news media and in recent weeks installed an automatic response of a poop emoji to emails sent to the site's main press address. But on Thursday, NPR said Musk had signaled in a series of emails that the relabeling may not have been "accurate" and that Twitter would look further into the matter. "The operating principle at Twitter is simply fair and equal treatment, so if we label non-US accounts as government, then we should do the same for the US, but it sounds like that might not be accurate here," Musk wrote to NPR.

According to NPR's website, the bulk of its budget comes from fees paid by member stations throughout the United States, who are themselves supported by individual donors and government funds. — AFP

Business

Growth in GCC economies may slow down to 3.2% in 2023: World Bank

MENA economies to grow by 3% in 2023, 3.1% in 2024

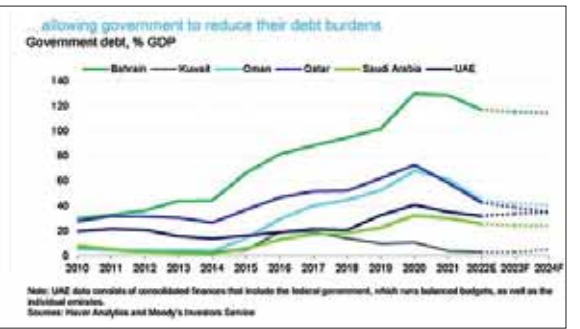
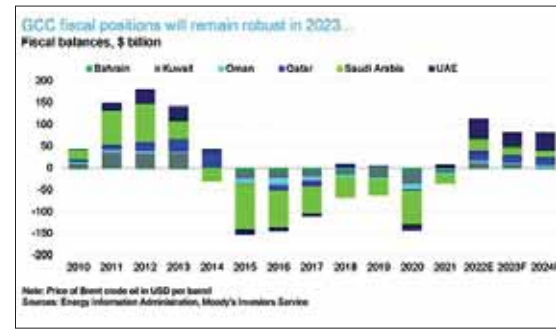
ABU DHABI: Growth in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries is expected to decelerate from 7.3 percent in 2022 to 3.2 percent in 2023, driven by the expected decline of oil prices from the highs reached in 2022, according to forecasts by World Bank economists. Developing oil exporters are forecast to grow at 2.2 percent in 2023, a deceleration from their 3.9 percent growth in 2022, the forecast said.

The economists forecast that the MENA region will grow by 3 percent in 2023 and by 3.1 percent in 2024, much lower than the growth rate of 5.8 percent in 2022-2023. "The MENA average growth rate masks the stark differences across countries," the World Bank noted. Developing oil importers are expected to grow by 3.6 percent in 2023 and 3.7 percent in 2024 — although this is largely driven by Egypt's relatively high expected growth. Setting Egypt aside for a moment, other developing oil importers are expected to grow by 2.8 percent and 3.1 percent in 2023 and 2024 respectively. Changes in real GDP per capita are arguably a more accurate

measure of changes in living standards. Following a recovery of 4.4 percent in 2022, growth in real GDP per capita for Mena is expected to decelerate to 1.6 percent and 1.7 percent in 2023 and 2024 respectively, the report said.

The slowdown in growth will be experienced across the region, but more acutely in the GCC. GDP per capita growth for GCC countries is expected to decelerate from 5.5 percent in 2022 to 1.8 percent in 2023 and 2 percent in 2024. For developing oil exporters, the corresponding rates are 0.8 percent in 2023 and 1 percent in 2024. For developing oil importers, GDP per capita is expected to grow 2.1 percent in 2023 and 2.2 percent in 2024, World Bank said.

Food price inflation reached double digits for most of the middle-income and low-income Mena economies in 2022, the World Bank noted. For most Mena economies, food price inflation is "much higher" than headline inflation. In fact, food inflation accounts for about half or more of headline inflation in many countries in the region, even though food's



weight in the consumer price index (CPI) is typically around 25 percent. Importantly, the data indicate that that poorer households in December 2022 experienced about 2 percentage point more inflation (year-on-year) than rich households on average in the Mena region. Countries whose currency depreciated vis-a-vis the US dollar also experienced higher levels of inflation in MENA. After accounting for exchange rate fluctuations, inflation in most MENA countries was moderate or low, indeed lower than

the levels seen in the United States.

When faced with rising prices in commodity markets, in particular oil and food, countries in MENA put in place policies aimed at containing domestic inflation. Despite these efforts, food inflation in most Mena economies increased since the war in Ukraine and indeed was higher than headline inflation. Increases in the price of food products accounted for half or more of the headline inflation, World Bank noted. — Agencies

NBK doubles the Welcome Oasis Miles for Customers

KUWAIT: National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) always seeks to reward its customers with exclusive offers that meet their needs and expectations. In this context, and within its strategic partnership with Kuwait Airways, the bank is offering its customers guaranteed double Welcome Oasis Miles when applying for NBK-Kuwait Airways (Oasis Club) Visa Platinum Prepaid Card. Eligible cardholders will instantly get 1,000 Oasis Miles upon card activation and additional 3,000 Oasis Miles when spending KD 500 within the first 90 days of card issuance date.

In addition, NBK is currently offering 10 percent discount on airline tickets from Kuwait airways when purchased using NBK - Kuwait Airways (Oasis Club) Visa Credit/Prepaid Cards.

Commenting on this offer, Hisham Al-Nusif, Deputy GM - Consumer Banking Group at National Bank of Kuwait said: "We are keen to provide our customers with exclusive offers and exceptional rewards all year round in a way that suits their needs on various occasions. Therefore, we provide this unique offer as we approach the travel season during Eid Al-Fitr holidays."

"NBK always seeks to design offers according to customers' needs and expectations from the bank,



Hisham Al-Nusif

which makes us always closer to our customers on all occasions," he noted. "We maintain solid relationships with key leading institutions across many sectors, which we seek to leverage to offer our customers the best exclusive offers and benefits and innovative services in line with their needs and expectations," he added.

On his part, Meshal Al-Mutairi, Director, Commercially Important Persons at Kuwait Airways, said: "Our partnership with NBK is one of the key strategic partnerships whose main goal is to provide ultimate luxury for Oasis Club credit/prepaid cardholders, which are exclusive for Kuwait Airways customers, whether during travel or stay."

"We are also pleased to develop all types of digital services offered through our website, as well as ground and onboard services to provide added-value services for customers. We also boast a call center attending to customers' queries and requests 24/7 on 171, through which the earned Oasis Miles can be used to book air tickets and hotel, as Kuwait Airways always aspires to the best," he added. NBK Credit and Prepaid Cards are the best payment method for the various benefits they offer, including NBK - Ku-



wait Airways (Oasis Club) Visa Cards, which offer limitless services and rewards for travel lovers.

NBK - Kuwait Airways (Oasis Club) Visa Credit / Prepaid Cards offer customers an array of benefits including earning Oasis Club Miles when using the card, redeeming earned miles for tickets with Kuwait Airways, upgrading to Business or First Class, seat selection, as well as extra baggage.

The cards also allow customers to enjoy more privileges that make travelling a lot more comfortable and luxurious, such as access to major airport lounges, travel insurance and special assistance at airports, as well as earning points with NBK Rewards Program, which can be redeemed at 900+ participating outlets.

Chinese shopping app Temu wows US amid TikTok fears

BEIJING: Shopping online at Temu, Laurie Silva paid just \$1.25 for earrings and \$15 for a cardigan—she is among millions of US consumers the Chinese platform is wooing with low-cost bargains and a dizzying array of products. Temu topped US app download rankings in early April, a spot it held since January, but its rapid rise comes as platforms with links to China face growing scrutiny and when a ban on youth favorite TikTok appears increasingly inevitable.

According to Sensor Tower data, some of the most popular platforms downloaded in the US currently have Chinese roots, including TikTok, video-editor CapCut and fashion upstart Shein.

Temu is positioned as an Amazon-like superstore, selling everything from make-up to home-ware and electronics, and its quiet launch last September marked Chinese e-commerce giant Pinduoduo's first foray into the US market. Based out of a Boston office block, Temu's out-of-the-blue success makes it the second Chinese-made shopping app—after Gen Z darling Shein—to make a splash in America in recent years.

"I've seen so many things in their catalog... offered on Amazon and other online retailers for much more," Silva, a 65-year-old in California, told AFP. She has placed around 20 orders on Temu, buying craft supplies, jewelry and gifts. Another customer, 38-year-old Stephanie Wolfe, said she first bought items like eyeliner and jewelry to test the service in January.

"It got here so quick, I couldn't believe it," she said. "Once I realized it was legit, I just started ordering more." Fueling the frenzy were Temu's commercial spots during the Super Bowl in February that asked more than 100 million US viewers to "shop like a billionaire."

Tesla to build battery plant in Shanghai

SHANGHAI: Tesla will build a new facility in Shanghai to make its Megapack batteries, Chinese state media reported on Sunday. The factory, which will have an initial capacity of 10,000 Megapack units per year, is expected to "start production in the second quarter of 2024", according to the Xinhua News Agency. The US electric car maker says its Megapacks are intend-

"I was like: 'Oh that's what I use!' Since then I've noticed it's gaining more traction," said Wolfe.

According to Sensor Tower, Temu has had 33 million US downloads since its launch, with user numbers surging on the month of the Super Bowl, the most-watched TV event in the US.

China connections

The rise of Shein and Temu comes as leading US fashion companies seek to reduce their exposure to China with worries intensifying over growing US-China tensions, said Sheng Lu, a professor of fashion and apparel studies at the University of Delaware. Both brands primarily source their products from China and Temu mostly ships its goods directly from there as well, he added, contrasting this against Amazon's US-based distribution centers.

This allows Temu to tap China's strengths in producing apparel in greater varieties with greater flexibility—all while qualifying for US waivers on import duties for lower value shipments, Lu said.

A recent notice for Shein suppliers in China seen by AFP requires turnaround times of just seven to 18 days on factory orders. For Shein in particular, artificial intelligence and big data play a "critical role" in its expansion and success, Lu said.

"Shein has utilized data collected from its apps and other social media channels to gain insights into consumers' shopping habits and lifestyles, enabling the company to offer in-demand items," he added.

Fast fashion scrutiny

But the ascent of Chinese apps have been accompanied by scrutiny that Temu may too have to grapple with. In 2021, non-governmental group Public Eye found that some workers behind Shein's breakneck production toil for 11 to 13 hours a day. It has also come under fire for generating fast fashion waste and apologized for products like a swastika necklace in 2020.

"Additionally, similar to the case of TikTok, Shein and Temu's rapid expansion in the US has resulted in the collection of vast amounts of personal data from American consumers," said Lu of the University of Delaware. TikTok faces a potential US ban amid al-

legations that its data haul amounts to a national security threat and that its algorithm poses a danger to mental health.

So far, Temu and Shein have avoided the fate of TikTok, whose CEO faced a brutal hearing in US Congress last month, with unanimous accusations by lawmakers that the social media app was a threat to America. Georgia Institute of Technology professor Milton Mueller downplayed the danger of shared data, arguing that that "the nationality of the company is a very crude and nationalistic criterion" in assessing security threats. A research paper co-authored by Mueller released in January concluded that "data collected by TikTok can only be of espionage value if it comes from users who are intimately connected to national security functions and use the app in ways that expose sensitive information."

"These risks arise from the use of any social media app," the paper said. Meanwhile, the vast majority of US consumers shrug off security concerns. But Wolfe said she uses virtual private networks and makes payments through PayPal for added layers of security. "Because I'm taking precautions, I'm not worried," she said. —AFP



This photo illustration shows the Temu app in the App Store reflected in videos of Temu consumers, in Washington, DC.

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lyst for a revolution in transportation, with much of the automobile sector's innovation efforts moving away from the internal combustion engine towards EVs. Even with that success, Musk has fallen short of some of his outsized goals. Tesla's lowest-priced vehicle, the Model 3, begins at \$43,000 in the United States—too pricey for many consumers for a vehicle that had been pitched at the mass market.

Musk has also missed his own deadlines for a fully autonomous vehicle, with Tesla driver-assistance technology spurring US regulatory probes. Musk's ties to China have also raised eyebrows in Washington, with US President Joe Biden saying in November the executive's links to foreign countries were "worthy" of scrutiny. — AFP

Jordan's economic recovery picked up momentum in 2022

AMMAN: Jordan economy made significant strides towards economic recovery in 2022, presenting positive performance in many important economic indicators, especially in the external ones, despite the crises that have affected the global and local economies over the past years, according to the Jordan News Agency, Petra.

Citing data of various economic indicators, Petra reported that the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) at constant market prices grew by 2.5 percent during the past year, compared with 2021. The agricultural sector achieved the highest growth during the past year at a rate of 4.8 percent, followed by the construction sector at a rate of 3.2 percent, the manufacturing sector 2.7 percent, followed by the wholesale and retail trade, hotels, and restaurants sector at a rate of 2.6 percent.

Tourist income increased during the past year by 110.5 percent, reaching \$5.816 billion, compared with 2021, due to the increase in the arrivals to the Kingdom by about 2.69 million to reach 5.048 million tourists. Thus, tourist income during the past year exceeded its level recorded in 2019 (pre-COVID pandemic) by 0.4 percent. Remittances of workers abroad increased during the past year by 1.5 percent, reaching \$3.452 billion, compared with 2021, representing 93.1 percent of the amount recorded in 2019 (pre-pandemic). Foreign reserves of the Central Bank recorded a high increase last year, reaching \$17.3 billion, which is sufficient to cover the Kingdom's imports of goods and services for a period of 5-7 months.

Facilities offered by banks increased by JD2.6 billion in 2022 to JD32.6 billion, as well as bank deposits also increased by JD2.6 billion in the same year, reaching a total of JD42.1 billion. According to statistical data, foreign direct investment flows into the Kingdom increased to \$1.1 billion in the past year, showing a growth rate of 83 percent compared with 2021. Travel data released by International Airport Group, the number of passengers through Queen Alia International Airport increased to approximately 7.83 million last year, a 71.9-percent increase compared with 2021.

The unemployment rate in the Kingdom decreased by 0.4 percent in the last quarter of 2022 compared with the same period in 2021, and by 0.2 percent compared with the third quarter of last year, standing at 22.9 percent. According to statistical data, the general consumer price index, a measure of inflation, increased by 4.23 percent in 2022, reaching 106.79 points compared with 102.46 in 2021. As for foreign trade, national exports grew by 33.8 percent in 2022, amounting to JD8.081 billion compared with JD6.038 billion in 2021.

The value of the Kingdom's imports during the past year stood at JD19.375 billion, marking a 26.7 percent increase compared with JD15.295 billion in 2021. The Kingdom's trade deficit increased by 22.4 percent last year, reaching JD10.585 billion compared with JD8.651 billion in 2021.

The general producer price index also increased by 13.97 percent in 2022, reaching 141.72 compared with 124.34 in 2021. The general industrial production quantity index increased by 2.69 percent last year, reaching 92.27 compared with 89.85 in 2021. The Amman Chamber of Industry's exports increased to JD7.577 billion last year compared with JD5.296 billion in 2021. All 10 sub-industrial sectors recorded growth last year, ranging from 4 percent for leather and textile industries to 89 percent for mining industries. The market value of stocks listed on the Amman Stock Exchange increased by approximately 16.2 percent to about JD18 billion last year, compared with 2021.

The total area of licensed buildings in the Kingdom increased by 3.6 percent during the past year, and the total number of building licenses issued in the Kingdom decreased by 3.5 percent during the past year, compared with 2021. — Agencies

Lifestyle

Subtle paintings that whisper messages

Canadian expat Rachael Sinclair's works speak up for the voiceless



Dawn Rachael Sinclair during the interview.—Photo by Sajeev K Peter



Exodus



The Muses

By Sajeev K Peter

Rachael Sinclair's paintings speak loudly for themselves. They communicate with you, touch your sensibilities and often ignite a notion in you that could at times call for action from the viewer. "I want to create paintings that people look at and feel emotional about," says Canadian expat Rachael, an English instructor at Gulf University of Science and Technology, Kuwait. Her oil paintings composed in multitude of colors represent not just a theme, be it political, environmental or cultural, but hide something deeper and more meaningful within themselves.

In an interview with the Kuwait Times, the artist reflected on how she regained the once-lost passion to paint after she came to Kuwait. Her inspiration comes mostly from her travels and from contemporary news around the world. As a result, she has been painting about the war and exodus in Syria, women's fights for equality and justice, the Russian aggression on Ukraine, environmental issues, climate change, etc.

"Lots of my paintings have drifted away from romanticism into symbolism. Some may appear even like puzzles. I think, with social media around and with everything that is bombarding our senses, there is more than what is being told. We have to dive deeper into what

is really going on behind the scenes. So, my paintings represent that kind of a notion. What you see is not what you always get. There is always something hidden, like a Da Vinci code," Rachael explains. For instance, her work, 'The Muses' is inspired by the women of Iran and their fight for freedom. Similarly, the Syrian exodus has prompted her to do 'Exodus.' While 'Inheritance' is about this beautiful planet and its inheritors, her intriguing work 'Disillusionment' suggests that 'what we perceive to be real in this world can actually be a subtle illusion'.

Culture shock

Rachael came to Kuwait in 2006. "When I arrived at Kuwait airport some 16 years ago, the culture shock was extraordinary, to say the least. It was a unique and different experience," she said recalling her early days in Kuwait. Before taking up the job in GUST, she taught at The American Academy in Salwa and later joined Al-Bayan Bilingual School, Hawally.

"I had abandoned my passion to paint in Canada. But, I started painting again two years after I reached Kuwait because of a Lebanese friend who inspired me to pick up the brush again. My Arab friends showed me the Behbehani Complex in Kuwait City which houses and sells so many beautiful art supplies. They got me some basic brushes and

oil paints," Rachael said. "So, I started observing, learning, and embracing the culture and people around me. Kuwait's distinct culture fascinated me and inspired me to paint again," she said.

The first painting she did in Kuwait was inspired by Monet's 'Lilies'. "All my friends appreciated my work and said 'yalla, paint more'. It was really a breakthrough for me. It was a way to distract myself from being alone and thousands of miles away from home. It was a way to find solitude and peace within myself through the tip of my brush as it filled the canvas with colors and to see all the creativity that comes from that. It is euphoric when you can express your emotions and feelings through a paintbrush," she explained. Rachael has held her own painting exhibitions in Kuwait at venues like The Avenues mall and Al-Kout Mall. "When you paint, remember to paint what YOU the artist sees, not what you think others see," she commented.

Symbolism

As an avid traveler, she takes a sketchbook with her on her adventures. "When I travel, I enjoy nature. I think it's beautiful to not only see but feel the vistas and imagery you see and experience when you travel," she pointed out. For Rachael, mornings are the best times to paint. "It's the dawn of a new perspective.

Plus, coffee goes great with painting!"

Rachael admits that her style is still evolving. "Well, when I first started painting, it was not in any particular style. If you see my evolving collection of paintings, you will see they are very eclectic and different from each other. I respect Pablo Picasso and the abstract style. I have closely viewed some of his works at the Prado Museum in Madrid and at the Louvre in Paris. But I don't try to follow his style. I am not a huge fan of Salvador Dali either, though I have found some of his works quite fascinating. I find the American artist Jackson Pollock's works fabulous and riveting. You might see some traces of these masters in my works, although I don't try to imitate them. Some of my paintings are abstracts, some are expressionistic. I am trying to develop my own style," she pointed out.

"I am leaning more towards symbolism based on what is happening in the world today. I want to create subtle paintings which whisper messages which may in turn, motivate people to go and speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves. This is what I want to be known for before I leave this planet, being able to produce paintings that inspire people to join a cause or effort in making this planet a better place to live and thrive not only for us but for our children and future generations," Rachael concluded.



Disillusionment

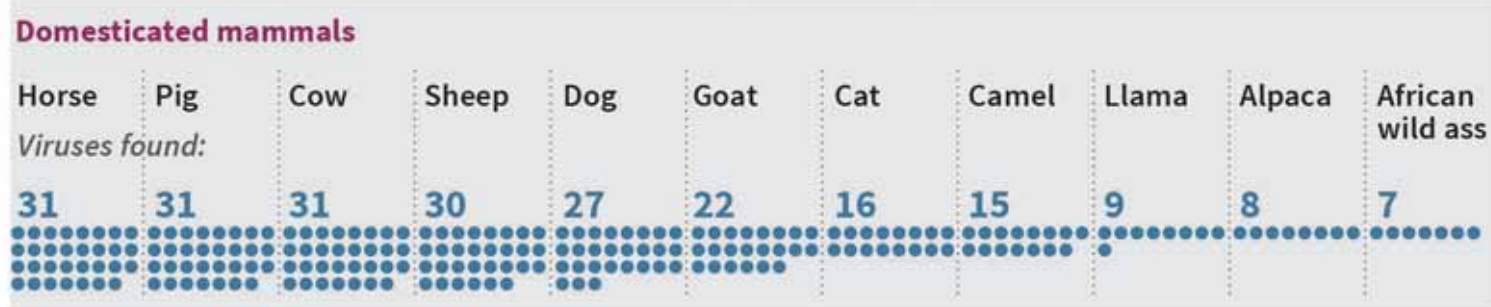


Inheritance

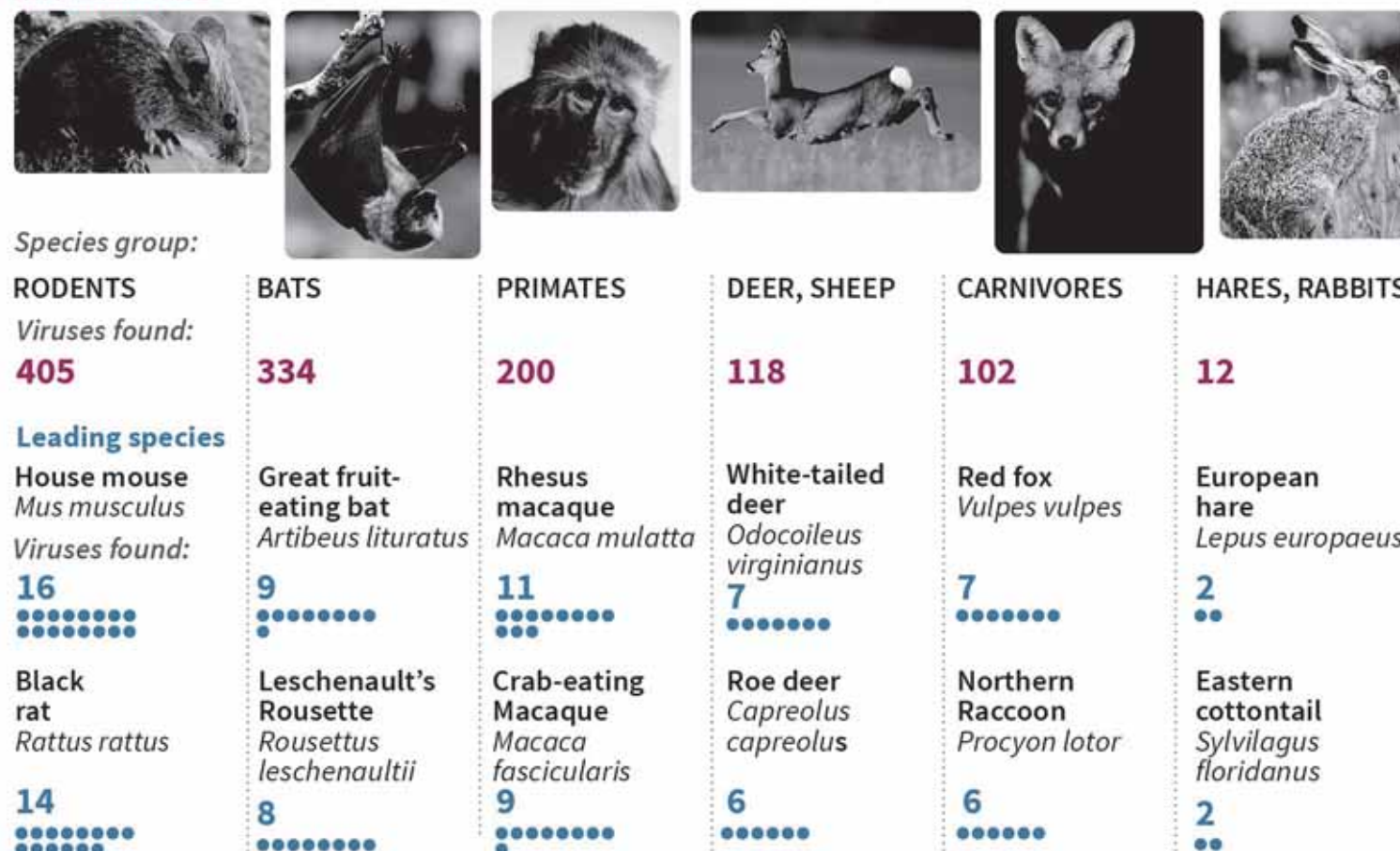
Spillover: sources of zoonotic viruses

Top harbourers

Of zoonotic viruses, (viruses that have jumped from animals to people), according to a study published in April 2020 in Proceedings B of the Royal Society



Wild mammals



Source: <https://royalsocietypublishing.org/doi/10.1098/rspb.2019.2736> -- Global shifts in mammalian population trends reveal key predictors of virus spillover risk



Why are animal-to-human diseases on the rise?

From COVID-19 to monkey pox, Mers, Ebola, avian flu, Zika and HIV, diseases transmitted from animals to humans have multiplied in recent years, raising fears of new pandemics.

What's a zoonosis?

A zoonosis (plural zoonoses) is a disease or infection transmitted from vertebrate animals to people, and vice versa. The pathogens involved can be bacteria, viruses or parasites. These diseases are transmitted either directly during contact between an animal and a human, or indirectly through food or through a vector such as an insect, spider or mite. Some diseases end up becoming specifically human, like COVID-19. According to the World Organization for Animal Health, 60 percent of human infectious diseases are zoonotic.

What types of diseases are involved?

The term "zoonoses" includes a wide variety of diseases. Some affect the digestive system, such as salmonellosis, others the respiratory system, such as avian and swine flu as well as COVID, or the nervous system in the case of rabies. The severity of these diseases in humans varies greatly depending on the disease and the pathogen's virulence, but also on the infected person, who may have a particular sensitivity to the pathogen.

What animals are involved?

Bats act as a reservoir for many viruses that affect humans. Some have been known for a long time, such as the rabies virus, but many have emerged in recent decades, such as Ebola, the SARS coronavirus, Sars-CoV-2 (which causes Covid-19) or the Nipah virus, which appeared in Asia in 1998. Badgers, ferrets, mink and weasels are often implicated in viral zoonoses, and in particular those caused by coronaviruses. Other mammals, such as cattle, pigs, dogs, foxes,

camels and rodents, also often play the role of intermediate host. All the viruses responsible for major influenza pandemics had an avian origin, either direct or indirect. Finally, insects such as ticks are vectors of many viral diseases that affect humans.

Why has the frequency of zoonoses increased?

Having appeared thousands of years ago, zoonoses have multiplied over the past 20 or 30 years. The growth of international travel has allowed them to spread more quickly. By occupying increasingly large areas of the planet, humans also contribute to disrupting the ecosystem and promoting the transmission of viruses. Industrial farming increases the risk of pathogens spreading between animals. Trade in wild animals also increases human exposure to the microbes they may carry. Deforestation increases the risk of contact between wildlife, domestic animals and human populations.

Should we fear another pandemic?

Climate change will push many animals to flee their ecosystems for more livable lands, a study published by the scientific journal Nature warned in 2022. By mixing more, species will transmit their viruses more, which will promote the emergence of new diseases potentially transmissible to humans. "Without preventative strategies, pandemics will emerge more often, spread more rapidly, kill more people, and affect the global economy with more devastating impact than ever before," the UN Biodiversity Expert Group warned in October 2020.

According to estimates published in the journal Science in 2018, there are 1.7 million unknown viruses in mammals and birds, 540,000 to 850,000 of them with the capacity to infect humans. But above all, the expansion of human activities and increased interactions with wildlife increase the risk that viruses capable of infecting humans will "find" their host.—AFP

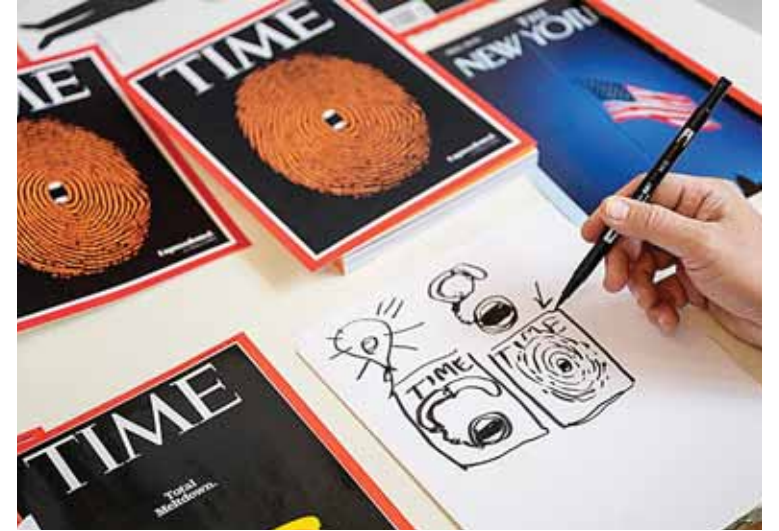
Edel Rodriguez, the artist who DRAWS TRUMP TO FIGHT HIM



Cuban American artist and illustrator Edel Rodriguez shows his covers of Time at his studio.—AFP photos



Cuban American artist and illustrator Edel Rodriguez shows his illustrations created during the Trump administration in his studio.



Cuban American artist and illustrator Edel Rodriguez draws in his studio.

Edel Rodriguez's striking, at times controversial, illustrations of Donald Trump have graced the covers of major publications like Time and Der Spiegel — and with the indictment of the former president, the artist is back at it.

The Cuban American's latest illustration set for the next edition of Time will run next week in the United States, but it's already been released and shared millions of times.

It features a stark black background on which a fingerprint spirals outward from the howling mouth of the Republican mogul. "He's caught in a storm of his own making," Rodriguez says of Trump, speaking from his Victorian home in a bucolic corner of New Jersey.

The image is far from his most controversial: in early 2017, to criticize Trump's decree targeting immigrants from Muslim-majority countries, he published a cover with the German magazine Der Spiegel that showed the then-American president brandishing a knife and holding the bloody, decapitated head of the statue of liberty. Anti-Trump demonstrators deployed the image at their rallies, but it triggered outrage from some politicians and opinion writers.

Responsibility versus 'neutrality'

The 51-year-old artist who left Cuba as a child says his images are intended to stir something in viewers in the face of dangers to democracy.

Rodriguez also does not impose the duty of "neutrality" on himself.

"I understand that you have to maintain a certain neutrality," he says, sitting among a smattering of his illustrations, including on the covers of The New Yorker and the French review America.

"But you always have to ask yourself when is the neutrality going too far, and I felt that being neutral with Trump in 2016 was not the right thing to do, because I could see what was coming." Rodriguez has depicted Trump like a meteor about to smash Earth, or a child sitting atop a missile with North Korea's Kim Jong Un.

And like other artists, he has also depicted



Cuban American artist and illustrator Edel Rodriguez holds up a copy of Der Spiegel in his studio.

ed Trump with symbols of the Ku Klux Klan, particularly when the 45th president failed to condemn white supremacist activists who attacked anti-racism demonstrators in Charlottesville in 2017.

Per Rodriguez, the January 6, 2021, storming of the US Capitol building by Trump supporters lent credence to the notion that danger was brewing and neutrality was moot. "We were this close to a coup," he says.

Rodriguez's own story feeds his work: as a nine-year-old he fled Fidel Castro's Cuba with his parents. In a comic book to be published this fall, he recounts his experience with "dictatorship" and the Mariel boat lift of 1980 in which he migrated to Florida, which saw a mass exodus of Cubans.

Rodriguez feels that Trump brought out the worst in people, creating an image of the United States that contrasted with his own experience: "I know how good the people in this country are," he says. He says he draws inspiration from his family and Cuba but also the work of Picasso, Matisse, or Paul Klee.

In drawing Trump, he uses recurring visual codes, like orange skin, bright yellow hair, an open, yelling mouth, and a lack of eyes. "These covers that I create don't normalize (him) and they show him as who he is," Rodriguez said.—AFP



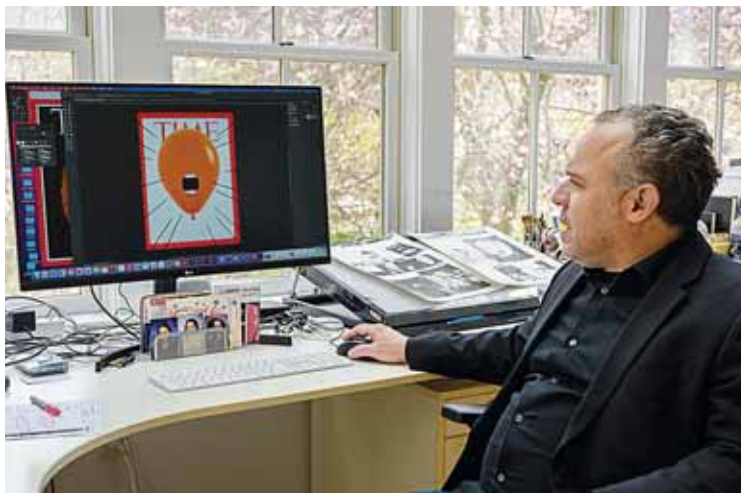
Cuban American artist and illustrator Edel Rodriguez shows his illustrations created during the Trump administration in his studio.



Cuban American artist and illustrator Edel Rodriguez shows his illustrations on the cover of Time.



Cuban American artist and illustrator Edel Rodriguez shows his illustrations in his studio.



Cuban American artist and illustrator Edel Rodriguez looks at a Time cover on his computer.



Cuban American artist and illustrator Edel Rodriguez shows his illustrations created during the Trump administration in his studio.

Deinfluencing, or the art of negative reviews

Looking straight into the camera, Valeria Fride holds up a tube of lip gloss. But instead of saying how amazing it is, the young brunette trashes it as "so sticky" and "really expensive," with not enough color. "It just didn't do it for me," the 23-year-old concludes. Welcome to the art of deinfluencing, one of the latest trends on TikTok, in which influencers tell you what not to buy. As of early April, the hashtag had more than 430 million views on the wildly popular video-sharing app. "It's an honest version of what we see every day on social media," Fride tells AFP.

If you venture onto TikTok, you can find all kinds of videos about which soaps not to buy because they're too pricey, or which dumbbells not to buy if you're just a beginner with using weights.

Some have cast deinfluencing as a response to soaring inflation, or even an anti-consumerist movement — basically, don't buy things that are not worth your money. "Do you really need 25 different perfumes? Are you really going to use them all?" said a TikTok user in a video with the hashtag.

But others say influencers are doing the same thing as before, with a slightly more palatable name. Indeed, influencers are everywhere on social media. They make short, catchy videos promoting everything from mascara to tea to sneakers to video games — all for a tidy fee. In theory, criticizing products would run counter to their business model. Who would pay for that?

Fride admits that at first, she was "really scared" how certain brands would respond to her new tactics. When one of her videos went viral, she says she told her mother: "I hope they don't hate me." But it ultimately led to offers of new partnerships with companies who appreciated her negative reviews for their rivals. For Fride, it's a sign that companies "want a more nuanced review."

56 pairs of shoes

Jessica Clifton, a 26-year-old American influencer, explains that the deinfluencing trend rang true for her. A few years ago, she became aware of the impact her conspicuous consumption — new clothes virtually every day in separate packaging, endless varieties of founda-



tion makeup, a plethora of lipsticks — was having on the environment.

"I don't even know how to use makeup," Clifton told AFP, adding that she realized she owned 56 pairs of shoes. "I was like, 'Oh my God, how did I get here?'" Clifton opened a new TikTok account dedicated to responsible consumption. So she was thrilled when deinfluencing took off. She's even posted a few videos with the hashtag. But she says she's disappointed that the trend quickly became about "buy this, not that" instead of curbing overall consumption, and about users simply trying to get new followers.

Authenticity

A quick glance at the latest videos posted on TikTok with the #deinfluencing hashtag shows that Clifton is not alone in her disappointment. But Lia Haberman, an expert on influencer marketing who lectures in the continuing education program at University of California Los Angeles (UCLA), says seeing the deinfluencer trend as a rejection of consumer culture is misguided. "That's not how the trend originated," she told AFP.

According to Tubular Labs, a social media analytics firm, the trend — which really took off in January — first emerged in September 2022, thanks to one Maddie Wells. Wells is not exactly a campaigner; the influencer was simply using her experience working in cosmetics stores to explain why customers were unhappy with certain products. Her videos were not "really a judgment call," explains Haberman. For Americus Reed, a professor of marketing at the University of Pennsylvania's Wharton School of Business, influencers are "no longer seen as authentic" by the public, which knows they are being paid to promote products. A deinfluencer, at least for now, is seen as more honest. "That's a way to stand out," Reed says, while admitting that in the end, "a deinfluencer is still an influencer."—AFP

UK royals unveil emoji, procession details for coronation

Britain's royal family revealed new details Sunday about King Charles III's coronation next month, including a new Twitter emoji based on the crown the monarch will wear at the landmark ceremony. Charles, 74, immediately became king when Queen Elizabeth II died last September after her record-breaking 70-year reign but will be formally crowned at a May 6 service inside London's Westminster Abbey.

The three-day weekend will also feature a star-studded concert, nationwide "big lunch" and volunteering initiatives, as well as the traditional royal processions associated with the coronation. Unveiling a host of ceremonial details, Buckingham Palace said the new emoji created to mark the historic occasion is based on the 17th-century St Edward's Crown.

The centrepiece of Britain's famous Crown Jewels and worn by Charles's late mother at her coronation in 1953, it has been altered for him to wear seven decades later. The motif will appear on Twitter when any of various hashtags — including #Coronation, #CoronationBigLunch and #TheBigHelpOut — are used. It follows royal social media channels deploying a crown-wearing corgi emoji, named PJ, for Elizabeth's platinum jubilee last year — just three months before her death aged 96. Corgis were the late queen's favourite canine breed.

Scaled-down service

The latest plans released for the coronation ceremony — which will also see Charles's wife Camilla crowned queen consort — confirmed it will be less elaborate than the one staged in 1953. The royal couple will travel along a shorter procession route and break with tradition by only using the elaborate 260-year-old Gold State Coach on their



Flags celebrating the upcoming Coronation of Britain's King Charles III are placed in central London, Britain.

return to Buckingham Palace.

The pair will make the 1.3-mile (2.1-kilometre) outward journey — known as the King's Procession — from the palace in the more modern, comfortable Diamond Jubilee State Coach. It has shock absorbers, heating and air conditioning. The service will begin at 11:00 am (1000 GMT) and is expected to be much shorter than in 1953, when it lasted almost three hours.

The palace also confirmed the priceless array of regalia from the Crown Jewels to be used during the hour-long ceremony, which will include among other elements an orb, swords and sceptres. On Friday, it revealed over 850 community and charity representatives from across the UK have been invited to the service, which will also be attended by foreign royals, leaders and heads of state. They include 450 recipients of the British Empire Medal — awarded for achievement or contribution of service in local communities — and 400 young people representing charitable organisations.—AFP

Lifestyle



Spectators watch a reindeer and jockey compete the finals of the PoroCup, a Finnish reindeer race on the frozen lake of Inari, Finland. —AFP photos



Reindeers are seen during the finals of the PoroCup



Reindeer herders watch the finals of the PoroCup



A reindeer is pictured inside the starting gate moments before the start at the finals of the PoroCup.



A reindeer and jockey compete the finals of the PoroCup.

Reindeer racing king crowned in Arctic tournament



A reindeer and jockey compete the finals of the PoroCup.

Finland crowned its reindeer racing king on Sunday when 14 reindeer and jockeys competed for the title in the season's final match of the increasingly popular Arctic sport.

Wearing skis, helmets and ski goggles and pulled by harnesses attached to the reindeer, Finland's top 14 competitors raced one kilometre around an oval against the clock in the northern town of Inari. Reindeer Verner and jockey Janne Alatalo came out on top in one minute and 35.26 seconds, in mild six-degree Celsius (43 Fahrenheit) weather that made for slushy snow conditions at times.

Reindeer races have been organised in Finland since the 1950s, according to Seppo Koivisto, president of the country's reindeer racers' association Suomen Porokilpailijat, which organises competitions. "This is a hobby for those involved in reindeer herding. The animals are usually reindeer herders' reindeer," Koivisto said.

Racing reindeer are trained pro-

fessionally during the winter season. From spring to autumn, they live freely in the forest.

'Desire to compete'

Koivisto said the sport has "developed enormously in recent years". "There are currently 700 racing reindeer in the register," he told AFP ahead of the weekend event. "Two characteristics are sought after in a reindeer. One is physical characteristics, as in structure, and the second is the mental side," he said.

"No matter how good the physical qualities are, if it doesn't have the desire to compete, it won't do anything in the races." Sunday's final race of the season, the Poro Cup, attracted several hundred spectators. The races have even caught the eye of tourists. "The exoticism also seems to be of interest to foreign visitors who happen to be here in Lapland ... and they come and watch the races," Koivisto said. —AFP



A reindeer and jockey compete the finals of the PoroCup.



A reindeer is taken to the starting grid by its owner for the finals of the PoroCup.



The starting grid is pictured at the finals of the PoroCup.



A jockey reaches the starting grid for the finals of the PoroCup.

'Super Mario' movie hops to a huge North American opening

It's only April, but Universal's "The Super Mario Bros. Movie" racked up such huge numbers in its North American opening weekend that analysts say it could top the list for all of 2023.

The animated film, a joint effort of Universal, Nintendo and Illumination studios, sold an estimated \$146.4 million in tickets over the Easter weekend, and \$204.6 million in its first five days, industry watcher Exhibitor Relations said Sunday, adding, it "will easily be the #1 flick of 2023."

"The numbers are sensational," agreed analyst David A. Gross. He said the results were the best ever for a first episode animation, largely due to the film's broad appeal, drawing both families and young and old viewers, both male and female.

With its foundation in one of the most popular video games of all time, "It's a marketer's dream," Gross added.

In second place for the weekend — with one-tenth the ticket sales of "Super Mario" — was Lionsgate's neo-noir "John Wick: Chapter 4," at \$14.6 million. The thriller has been praised for its action choreography, largely the work of director and former stunt man Chad Stahelski. Keanu Reeves stars as the titular hitman who finds himself fighting an international crime group.

Third spot went to last weekend's leader, Paramount and eOne's "Dungeons & Dragons: Honor



Among Thieves," at \$14.5 million. Based on the popular role-playing game, it stars Chris Pine, Michelle Rodriguez and Hugh Grant. Amazon Studios' new release "Air," on the origin of Nike's Air Jordan basketball shoe line, placed fourth, at \$14.46 million, which Gross called "an excellent opening for a sports drama." He attributed that to the film's "elite cast" — Matt Damon, Ben Affleck, Jason Bateman, Marlon Wayans, Chris Messina, Chris Tucker and Viola Davis — as well as "outstanding" reviews and the worldwide familiarity of the Nike brand. And in fifth was horror flick "Scream VI," from Paramount and Spyglass Media, at \$3.3 million.



Rounding out the top 10 were: "His Only Son" (\$3.3 million) "Creed III" (\$2.8 million)

"Shazam! Fury of the Gods" (\$1.6 million) "Paint" (\$750,000) "A Thousand and One" (\$600,000)—AFP

Sports

Jabeur stuns Bencic to win the WTA Charleston crown

Tiafoe beats Etcheverry to win ATP Houston title

News in Brief

MLS probe racism allegation

LOS ANGELES: Major League Soccer has launched an investigation into allegations made by San Jose Earthquakes striker Jeremy Ebobisse that a New York Red Bulls player made a racist remark during the two teams' 1-1 draw on Saturday. Ebobisse said a New York Red Bulls player used a racist epithet early in the second half of the clash at Red Bull Arena. Play was held up for around 15 minutes as San Jose's players protested and debated whether to continue playing. Ebobisse said following the game that the Earthquakes decided to continue after the Red Bulls player involved insisted he had not directed the remark at a particular opponent. "What is important for me to share is that I know what I heard and the reason why I felt, after a lengthy conversation, we should continue with the game is because the player who said the word claimed it was not aimed at any of us," Ebobisse said. —AFP

Rider Van der Poel wins

ROUBAIX: Mathieu van der Poel won the Paris-Roubaix cycling classic on Sunday, breaking away solo on a dangerous cobbled section for a magnificent solo triumph. The 28-year-old Dutch rider produced a string of aggressive attacks before the decisive move on the epic 256.6km race which included 54.5km of rough cobbles. Jasper Philipsen finished 46sec behind to beat fellow Belgian rider Wout van Aert into second at the Roubaix velodrome finish-line. After an early fall featuring three Ineos riders an elite clique broke away until only seven top riders were left, including Filippo Ganna, Mads Pedersen, Stefan Kung and 2015 winner John Degenkolb. The action then exploded on the Carrefour de L'Arbre five-star cobbled section with 20km to go when Degenkolb fell sprawling on the ground, several riders swerving to avoid him in a move that caused Van Aert to puncture. —AFP

Swanson facing WCup KO

LOS ANGELES: United States women's soccer star Mallory Swanson will almost certainly miss this summer's World Cup after suffering a serious knee injury during Saturday's friendly victory over Ireland. US Soccer said in a statement on Sunday that Swanson, one of the stars of the US team, had torn a patella tendon in her left knee during Saturday's friendly in Austin. Swanson was stretchered off the field in distress near the end of the first half after crumpling to the turf following a heavy challenge from Ireland's Aoife Mannion. "Swanson suffered a torn patella tendon in her left knee," US Soccer said in a statement on Sunday. "She returned to Chicago today for further evaluation." Swanson has been replaced by Alyssa Thompson in the US squad for Tuesday's return fixture with the Irish women in St. Louis. No timeline for Swanson's recovery was given, but a torn patella tendon can often take at least six months to recover from. —AFP

Sundowns fail to score

JOHANNESBURG: Champions Mamelodi Sundowns failed to score in successive South African Premiership matches for the first time this season when held 0-0 at lowly Swallows on Sunday. The draw in windy Soweto followed a similar scoreline when they hosted fifth-placed Cape Town City in Pretoria five days ago. Queried about the sudden lack of goals, Sundowns coach Rhulani Mokwena responded that "you cannot always get everything you want from a football match." "We failed to score in two matches, and that is disappointing, but we did not concede any goals either and clean sheets are very welcome." Sundowns, who clinched a sixth straight league title last weekend, have failed to score in just three of 25 Premiership matches during this campaign. The first time they failed to find the net was last August in matchday two when they suffered a stunning 1-0 home defeat by TS Galaxy. —AFP

Markande, Tripathi lift Hyderabad

HYDERABAD: Indian spinner Mayank Markande's 4-15 and an unbeaten 74 by Rahul Tripathi gave Sunrisers Hyderabad their first IPL win this season as they thrashed Punjab Kings by eight wickets on Sunday. Skipper Shikhar Dhawan hit an unbeaten 99 off 66 balls in Punjab's 143-9 after Markande got the key wickets, including big-money signing Sam Curran for 22, in Hyderabad. Tripathi led the chase and put on an unbeaten 100-run stand with skipper Aiden Markram (34) after former champions Hyderabad lost their openers, with Harry Brook out for 13. Markram smashed three successive boundaries before Tripathi hit the winning runs as Hyderabad bounced back from their opening two losses. Hyderabad's bowlers set up the victory after Bhuvneshwar Kumar struck with the first ball of the match and left-arm quick Marco Jansen followed up with two more strikes. —AFP

Baena wins Marrakesh title

MARRAKESH: Spain's Roberto Carballes Baena won a three-hour final against Frenchman Alexandre Muller in Marrakesh on Sunday to claim his second ATP title. Carballes Baena dropped the first set against his 126th-ranked opponent but rallied to earn a 4-6, 7-6 (7/3), 6-2 victory. "I am so tired, but I am very, very happy. It was a very, very tough match," Carballes Baena said in his on-court interview. "I tried to fight every point. I don't know what to say. I am so happy." The 30-year-old Carballes Baena is expected to enter the top 50 for the first time on Monday after beginning this week as world number 82. His only other tour-level title also came on clay at Quito in 2018. —AFP

LOS ANGELES: Ons Jabeur defeated defending champion Belinda Bencic in straight sets to win the WTA Charleston Open clay court tournament on Sunday. Jabeur, the world number five from Tunisia, avenged her defeat to Bencic in last year's final with a hard-fought 7-6 (8/6), 6-4 victory in just under two hours.

Switzerland's Bencic was forced to make a quick turnaround on Sunday, completing a 7-5, 7-6 (7/5) weather-disrupted semi-final win over Jessica Pegula before returning to face Jabeur in the final around 30 minutes later. There was no immediate sign of weariness from the Swiss player as she started strongly to take a 5-3 lead in the opening set. However, Jabeur held and then conjured a break to level at 5-5 before holding again for a 6-5 lead.

Bencic was soon in trouble on her serve, but fought back brilliantly from 0-40 down to hold and force tie-break. Again momentum swung back and forth, with Bencic holding two set points after opening up a 6-4 lead in the tie-break before Jabeur reeled off four straight points to take the set. Jabeur then raced into a 4-1 lead in the second set, and although Bencic responded well, Jabeur was soon

serving for the match at 5-4 up. Bencic squandered three break points that would have levelled the set at 5-5 before Jabeur eventually converted her second match point to seal the fourth title of her career.

ATP Houston title

In another development, Frances Tiafoe defeated Thomas Etcheverry 7-6 (7/1), 7-6 (8/6) to win the ATP clay court title in Houston on a double-duty day in Texas. The American, playing his first ATP tournament as the top seed, had to win twice on Sunday to secure the crown thanks to the weather delays earlier in the week. After beating Gijs Brouwer 6-4, 6-1 in the semi-finals he said he was up for the challenge. "I'm running on adrenaline," Tiafoe told the crowd after beating Brouwer. "I'm on a mission so I'm happy."

By Sunday night it was mission accomplished as Tiafoe claimed his second ATP title and his first since 2018 in Delray Beach. Since then he'd come up empty in four finals appearances. The soggy week meant Tiafoe in fact had to win four matches in two days, playing his first two of the week on Saturday. He



CHARLESTON: Ons Jabeur of Tunisia poses with the trophy after defeating Belinda Bencic of Switzerland during the Finals of the Credit One Charleston Open at Credit One Stadium on April 09, 2023. —AFP

didn't drop a set and was broken just once—when he served for the title against Etcheverry at 5-4 in the second set. He trailed 1-3 and 3-5 in the tiebreaker but clinched the victory on his second match point with his 12th ace of the contest. —AFP



Al-Kharafi wins Equestrian Federation Championship

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: For the second consecutive year, Ali Jassim Al-Kharafi won the Kuwait Equestrian Federation League Championship as he won the championship last year. Al-Kharafi, at the end of the

eighth round was first with 199 points; Abdelrahman Al-Fuzaie took second with 165 points, while Ghazi Al-Juraiwi grabbed 111 points. In the Grand Prize round (145cm height), Ali Al-Kharafi took the first place in 79.36 seconds without faults. He was the only rider to win without faults. He was followed by Abdelrahman Al-Fuzaie, Enaz Al-Enaz.

Chairman of the Board of Kuwait Equestrian Federation Masoud Hayat and Chief of Corporate communications and relations at Zain Waleed Al-Khashti and other dignitaries awarded the winners. Rider Ali Al-Kharafi was pleased with the title. "I was successful in five rounds out of eight - which enabled me to win for the second year in



Spain's Rahm follows Ballesteros with glory

AUGUSTA: Jon Rahm was nearly in tears after winning an emotional triumph at the Masters on Sunday, what would have been the 66th birthday of his idol Seve Ballesteros. Rahm overcame a four-stroke deficit at the start of a marathon 40-hole final day at Augusta National to defeat Americans Brooks Koepka and Phil Mickelson by four shots for his second major title, a victory that returns him to world number one. "This one was for Seve," Rahm said. "He was up there helping, and help he did."

The 28-year-old Spaniard said he felt bolstered by the spirit of the late Ballesteros, who won his second Masters title 40 years ago. "For me to get it done on the 40th anniversary of his win, his birthday, on Easter Sunday, it's incredibly meaningful," Rahm said. Rahm achieved what he called a "true honor" in becoming the fourth Spaniard to grab the green jacket after Sergio Garcia, Jose Maria Olazabal and Ballesteros, who died of brain cancer in 2011 at age 54. "Rest in peace Seve," Rahm said to close his victory ceremony.

Rahm won the green jacket and took a record top prize of \$3.24 million from a record \$18 million purse. Olazabal greeted Rahm with an emotional embrace just off the 18th green moments after the triumph was complete. "He said he hopes it's the first of many more," Rahm said. "We both mentioned something about Seve, and if he had given us 10 more seconds, I think we would have both ended up crying."

LIV's Koepka fires back at rebel tour's critics after Masters

AUGUSTA: American Brooks Koepka stumbled in his final-round bid to win the Masters on Sunday but then took aim at those who had doubted the ability of he and other players on the breakaway LIV Golf tour. Koepka had a two-stroke lead going into the final round but finished four strokes behind Spanish winner Jon Rahm, shooting a disappointing three-over 75 to settle for tied second place after leading alone following the second and third rounds.

He shared second with fellow LIV rebel Phil Mickelson, while another member of the Saudi-backed tour, 2018 Masters winner Patrick Reed, finished tied for fourth. Koepka was asked what he felt the displays from the LIV players at Augusta had proved about the quality

Rahm's methodical precision shotmaking down the bogey-free back nine delivered the triumph, a contrast to his emotional mood after the victory.

"I might have looked calm, but I was definitely nervous out there," Rahm said. "I never panicked. I felt comfortable with my game. I never got frustrated. I never felt like anything was out of control. But there was tension out there." Rahm rescued a poor shot off the 18th tee for a closing par in much the same manner Ballesteros was known for doing. "To finish it off the way I did—an unusual par, very much a Seve par—it was in a non-purposeful way a testament to him," Rahm said. "He was pulling for me."

Rahm held firm with a final-round three-under par 69 to finish on 12-under par 276 with four-time major winner Koepka and six-time major winner Mickelson sharing second on 280 and fellow Americans Jordan Spieth, Patrick Reed and Russell Henley on 281. Rahm, who also won the 2021 US Open, became the first European golfer to own that title and a Masters. "To be the first to do something like that, it's a very humbling feeling," Rahm said. Rahm, who won three prior PGA Tour titles this year, overtook 2022 Masters champion Scottie Scheffler atop the rankings after the American shared 10th on 284.

Koepka, whose lead was trimmed from four shots to two just after the third-round restart Sunday morning, fired a closing 75. He surrendered the lead to Rahm with a bogey at the sixth—part of a 6-over 19-hole stretch—and never recovered. "Some days you have it, some days you don't, and today wasn't one of those," Koepka said. "Tried to give it a run there at the end, but just wasn't good enough." Rahm's five-foot birdie at the par-5 13th, four-foot birdie at 14 and

on that tour which critics have suggested is well below the level of the established PGA Tour. "We're still the same people. So I mean, I know if I'm healthy, I know I can compete," said the four-time major winner.

"I don't think any of the guys that played this event thought otherwise, either. When Phil plays good, we know he's going to compete. P-Reed, the same thing. "I think that's just manufactured by the media that we can't compete anymore, that we are washed up." Players from both sides of golf's bitter divide have been keen to observe an unofficial cease-fire during the tournament, stressing their good personal relations despite the rancor and legal battles that remain. Koepka said that while the divide is real, the Masters week had proven that personal relationships remain intact.

"I guess it is fractured from the fan's perspective. But as far as us, I think everybody saw it this week. It's nice to see everybody. There's no hard feelings pretty much. I think that's the way everybody should see it," he said. In the build-up to the tournament, LIV chief executive Greg Norman had fantasized about the entire contingent of his players at Augusta celebrating a victory for one of

a row despite very strong competition from riders of both genders". He thanked his father and uncles for supporting him along with the Kuwait Riding Center administration.

Meanwhile, Masoud Hayat said Kuwait Equestrian Federation succeeded in organizing the second league championship with the support of the Public Authority for Sport and private sector entities. Chief of Corporate communications and relations at Zain Waleed Al-Khashti said "we were honored to be sponsors of Kuwait Equestrian Federation League for the second consecutive year and there is an improvement as the number of participants increased".



AUGUSTA: Jon Rahm of Spain poses with the Masters trophy during the Green Jacket Ceremony after winning the 2023 Masters Tournament at Augusta National Golf Club on April 09, 2023. —AFP

four closing pars foiled 52-year-old Mickelson's bid to break his own mark as the oldest major champion.

Mickelson encouraged

Three-time Masters champion Mickelson birdied five of the last seven holes to shoot 65, the lowest Masters round ever for a player over 50. "Unfortunately it wasn't enough, but it was really a lot of fun for me to play at this level again," said Mickelson. "It's encouraging for me going forward the rest of the year." He had a chance to match the greatest last-round comeback in major history—Paul Lawrie's 1999 British Open rally from 10 adrift. But the US left-hander settled for being the oldest player to finish in the top-five at a Masters. —AFP

them, en masse at the 18th green. While Koepka wasn't able to deliver that moment for his employers, he certainly showed that he is close to his best after long-running injury problems.

However, there was no escaping the sense that he had let a chance of glory slip through his hands with his six bogeys. "Obviously it's super disappointing. Didn't play good enough to win. Hit some shots where I also feel like I didn't get some good breaks... hit some good shots and just ended up in some terrible spots where it was quite difficult. "Didn't feel like I did too much wrong, but that's how golf goes sometimes. It is what it is. I tried. Gave it my all, so I can go to sleep at night," he said.

The 32-year-old said that he didn't feel his performance level had dropped significantly from the previous rounds where he had finished atop the leaderboard. "I think it felt the same. I feel like I was striking the ball pretty well. Poor tee shot on one but got lucky," he said, noting that his round had changed just before the turn. "Poor tee shot on eight, which is a big birdie hole, and I felt like that's kind of where the momentum shifted right there on eight and nine, is what I felt like." —AFP

Sports

Warriors barrel into NBA playoffs, Lakers in play-in

Timberwolves snatch eighth spot from New Orleans

LOS ANGELES: The Golden State Warriors roared into the NBA playoffs with a 157-101 blow-out of Portland on Sunday, ensuring the Los Angeles Lakers will battle in the play-in after a 128-117 victory over the Utah Jazz. Every team was in action on the final day of the regular season, but all eyes were on the Western Conference where more than a dozen potential seeding outcomes rested on the results of four games. The reigning champion Warriors moved quickly to simplify matters for themselves, exploding for an NBA first-quarter record of 55 points in the opening frame.

Klay Thompson made five of the Warriors' 12 three-pointers in the period - a record for treys by any team in an NBA quarter. Thompson - who finished with six three-pointers and 20 points - became the third player in NBA history to hit 300 three-pointers in a single season. Teammate Stephen Curry has done it four times and James Harden has done it once. The Warriors led by 28 after the first quarter, and Curry took over with 10 of his 26 points in the second as the Warriors took an 84-53 halftime lead.

They coasted home, with all the Warriors starters sitting out the fourth period. "It's been a very up and down season, but when you get to the playoffs none of that matters," said Warriors talisman Draymond Green after the team clinched the sixth seed and a first-round series against the third-seeded Sacramento Kings. "The real season starts," Green said. "And that's what matters." The Los Angeles Clippers snagged the fifth seed with a 119-114 victory over the fourth-seeded Phoenix Suns - and the teams will meet again in the first round.

Kawhi Leonard scored 12 of his 25 points in the fourth quarter as the Clippers finally got past the Suns, who played without Kevin Durant, Chris Paul, Devin Booker and Deandre Ayton. Leonard said the Clippers will have to do better against a full-

strength Suns squad. "The last two games teams have been sitting their stars, and we're struggling," he said. The Lakers, meanwhile, finished seventh and will host the Minnesota Timberwolves in the play-in on Tuesday, the winner advancing to the playoffs as the seventh seed in the West.

LeBron James drained eight three-pointers on the way to 36 points for the Lakers, who started the season 2-10 but have clawed their way to a post-season spot. Anthony Davis scored 16 points and pulled down 13 rebounds and D'Angelo Russell added 17 points for the Lakers, who have won nine of their last 11 games. "Our team is very well put together," James said. "We got a lot of good balance. We did a good job of putting together a team that fits around AD and myself after the break. We're just trying to make it happen on the floor."

Timberwolves tumult

The Timberwolves snatched the eighth spot from New Orleans with a tumultuous 113-108 victory over the Pelicans. The Timberwolves never led until the fourth quarter. They were down by 12 when a heated exchange between forward Kyle Anderson and center Rudy Gobert during a second-quarter timeout ended with Gobert taking a swing at his teammate before others stepped in to separate the two. "Guys were just frustrated - we weren't playing well, we weren't sharing the ball, we looked sluggish," Timberwolves coach Chris Finch said. "But obviously it's not something we're going to be able to tolerate here."

Minnesota quickly announced that Gobert would not return to the game, and Jaden McDaniels also had to leave the contest after injuring his hand punching a wall in frustration. However, Karl-Anthony Towns scored 12 of his 30 points in the final quarter and the Timberwolves - with 26 points and 13 rebounds from Anthony Edwards - withstood a



PORTLAND: John Butler Jr #21 of the Portland Trail Blazers blocks the shot of Jordan Poole #3 of the Golden State Warriors during the second quarter on April 09, 2023. — AFP

42-point performance from New Orleans' Brandon Ingram to give themselves a more favorable play-in position. If they lose to the Lakers, they can still reach the playoffs with a win over the play-in game between the Pelicans and Oklahoma City Thunder.

With seeding settled in the East going into Sunday's games there was little drama. The Philadelphia 76ers beat the Brooklyn Nets 134-105 in a preview

of their upcoming first-round playoff series. Brooklyn guard Mikal Bridges was the only regular starter for either team to play, clocking just seconds on court but extending his streak of consecutive games played to 392 - a perfect record over the first five seasons of his NBA career. Bridges played his 83rd game of the 82-game season - gaining an extra game because of his February trade from Phoenix. — AFP

Ligue 1: Marseille draw at Lorient as Monaco frustrated

PARIS: Marseille lost ground in the race for automatic Champions League qualification after a 0-0 stalemate at Lorient in Ligue 1 on Sunday, while Monaco blew a two-goal lead to draw with French Cup finalists Nantes. Cengiz Under forced a good save from Lorient goalkeeper Vito Mannone in the first half but Marseille struggled to create chances as their eight-match winning run away from home ended. "It's disappointing. The match was within our grasp but we were a bit lacking when it mattered most," Marseille midfielder Matteo Guendouzi told Prime Video.

Former Marseille striker Bamba Dieng went close to scoring against his old club but was denied by Pau Lopez on the hour as Igor Tudor's side dropped two points behind second-placed Lens. "There's no pressure, there's still a lot of matches," said Guendouzi. Marseille also missed the chance to further distance themselves from Monaco, who were held 2-2 at Nantes earlier in the day.

Axel Disasi lashed Monaco ahead on 21 minutes and Eliot Matazo got his team's second when Nantes goalkeeper Alban Lafont flapped at a corner and the ball trickled in off the Belgian midfielder. But Egypt international Mostafa Mohamed headed Nantes back into the game midway through the second half before fellow substitute Ludovic Blas nodded in an equaliser at the far post.

Lyon bounced back from their stinging midweek



LORIENT: Marseille's French midfielder Jonathan Clauss (left) fights for the ball with Lorient's French midfielder Jean-Victor Makengo (right) during the French L1 football match on April 9, 2023. — AFP

loss at Nantes in the French Cup semi-finals as they came from behind to beat Rennes 3-1. After winning 1-0 at Paris Saint-Germain last weekend, Lyon's hopes of silverware this season were dashed when Blas got the only goal for Nantes to keep the holders on track to retain the cup. Laurent Blanc's side trailed against

Rennes as Amine Gouiri struck against his former club, but Lyon recovered in the second half to win a game after going behind for the first time this season. Corentin Tolisso curled in a sublime long-range shot to haul Lyon level and Alexandre Lacazette's 18th goal this term soon put the hosts in front. — AFP

Hoffenheim push Schalke rock bottom

BERLIN: A penalty from Ihlas Bebou and an own goal from Alex Kral took Hoffenheim five points clear of the relegation spots, with a 2-0 home win over Schalke on Sunday. Hoffenheim, who collected just one point from their first nine league matches in 2023, continued their strong form, having won their last three. Around 10,000 Schalke fans made the trip south, packing out the 30,000-seat Rhein Neckar Arena, with their side entering the match in last place after Stuttgart's win at Bochum earlier on Sunday. Hoffenheim struck first when former Manchester City wing back Angelino delivered a dangerous cross into the box, the ball rebounding off Schalke's Kral and into the net.

Japan defender Maya Yoshida brought down Hoffenheim's Christoph Baumgartner in the second half, the referee pointing to the spot. Bebou scored the penalty to give his side a 2-0 lead and a crucial three points amid a tight relegation battle. Schalke, having gone unbeaten in eight matches, have now lost two in a row and sit bottom of the ladder with seven matches remaining this season. Schalke striker Marius Buelter said simply "we didn't get it right, it hurts" while goalkeeper Ralf Faehrmann called on his side to win Friday's "brutal" match against second-last Hertha Berlin.

Stuttgart leapfrog Schalke

Earlier, Stuttgart's resurgence under new coach Sebastian Hoeness continued with a 3-2 win at Bochum to move up from last place in the table to 16th, leapfrogging Schalke and Hertha. Goals from Hiroki Ito, Serhou Guirassy and Joshua Vagnoman took Stuttgart to victory, their second win since Hoeness was appointed manager on Tuesday, including a German Cup quarter-final victory over Nuremberg.

Before the match, Stuttgart had won just one of their previous 12 in the league. Iko gave his side the best possible start, pouncing on a poor clearance from Bochum goalkeeper Manuel Riemann, slamming home to give the visitors an early lead. Bochum equalized midway through the second half when Kevin Stoecker converted a penalty, but Stuttgart regained the lead just 90 seconds later. Borna Sosa swung in a swerving cross from the left flank, which found Guirassy a metre from goal. Stuttgart added another just three minutes later, Vagnoman heading in from close range. Bochum's Philipp Hofmann scored with five minutes remaining to give the home fans hope of a comeback, but Stuttgart held on for a crucial victory. — AFP

Benfica rely on 'extraordinary' striker Ramos

BARCELONA: A lot of responsibility lies at the feet of Benfica striker Goncalo Ramos, who is aiming to fire his side past Inter Milan and into the Champions League semi-finals for the first time since 1990. The striker is growing used to the pressure, shooting into the global football consciousness during the World Cup in December when he was picked to start for Portugal ahead of Cristiano Ronaldo in the last 16 against Switzerland. Ramos hit a hat-trick as his country thrashed their opponents 6-1, leaping into the limelight having made his international debut just a few weeks earlier, in a friendly.

In March the striker dazzled against Club Brugge in the Champions League last 16 second leg, scoring a brace in the 5-1 win to guide Benfica into the quarter-finals for the second season running. Inter's visit to Lisbon on Tuesday is an opportunity for the forward to put himself in the shop window, as many other young Benfica talents have done over the years. The latest was midfielder Enzo Fernandez, who joined Chelsea in January for a stratospheric 121 million euros (\$133 million) fee after winning the World Cup with Argentina, following the likes of Joao Felix, Ruben Dias and Ederson.

Ramos's development took a step forward at Benfica after Liverpool signed Darwin Nunez last summer for an initial 75 million euros (\$82 million), leaving a void up front, which he willingly filled. The 21-year-old forward became the focal point of the attack, having played a supporting role to Nunez and others since making his debut in 2020. Ramos came through Benfica's admired Seixal academy after

joining the club at 12 years old, and nearly a decade later many of Europe's giants are chasing him.

The forward has been linked with Real Madrid, Manchester United and Chelsea of late, while Patrick Kluivert recommended his former side Barcelona to sign him. "I am very satisfied with Goncalo Ramos, but not only for what he did against Club Brugge," said Benfica coach Roger Schmidt in March. "I love his attitude, which he gives to the team. He is young, he is scoring goals in the Champions League and it is normal for him to attract the attention of other clubs."

Ramos's 17 goals in 23 appearances in the Portuguese top flight have helped Benfica open up a seven-point lead at the top of the table. They did stumble to a 2-1 defeat against rivals Porto, second, on Friday, although it was Ramos hitting the bar which forced Diogo Costa's own goal to open the scoring. The striker has also netted seven times in 12 appearances in Champions League, including the qualifying rounds. — 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
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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

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Arsenal fail to end Anfield hoodoo

Gunners throw away a 2-0 lead, draw 2-2 with Liverpool



LIVERPOOL: Liverpool's French defender Ibrahima Konate (2nd left) and Arsenal's Brazilian midfielder Gabriel Martinelli vie in the air for the ball during the English Premier League football match between Liverpool and Arsenal on April 9, 2023. — AFP

LIVERPOOL: Arsenal's failure to end their Anfield hoodoo by throwing away a 2-0 lead to draw 2-2 away to Liverpool on Sunday has opened the door for Manchester City to snatch the Premier League title away from the Gunners. Mikel Arteta's men still lead by six points at the top of the table, but for the first time in nearly two months City have the destiny of the title back in their own hands.

City have nine league games remaining to Arsenal's eight and home advantage when the two sides meet at the Etihad on April 26. Since losing to City in mid-February, Arsenal have belied their relative lack of experience in a title tussle. A run of seven consecutive league victories contained the mixture of late

winners and routine wins sprinkled with dazzling football that champions are made of. However, they finally came unstuck when put under the pressure of an Anfield crowd baying for blood after a difficult season for Liverpool.

Arteta warned ahead of the game he expected to face a "jungle" of an atmosphere at a stadium where Arsenal have still not won in the league since their manager was patrolling the midfield in 2012. Yet for 35 minutes, the visitors showed why Liverpool's league position of eighth in the table does not lie. Arsenal scored twice through Gabriel Martinelli and Gabriel Jesus and could have had more but for wayward finishing by Jesus and a fine save from Alisson Becker

to deny Oleksandr Zinchenko. "We started the game exceptionally well, dominated it, and took the game where we wanted," said Arteta. "Scored the first one, and continued to play the way we wanted. We scored the second one and that was a moment to kill the game. And yet, before half-time, we gave them hope." Mohamed Salah's strike just before the break flipped the momentum of the game and despite the Egyptian then missing a penalty early in the second-half, Arsenal were incapable of turning the tide.

Wave upon wave of Liverpool attack after the break was finally rewarded when Roberto Firmino headed in three minutes from time. The drama did not end there as Aaron Ramsdale produced miracles in the Arsenal

goal just to salvage a point. "We gave every single ball away, especially in very dangerous areas when you allow open spaces in big transition moments against the best team in the world doing that," added Arteta.

"When that happens, it's chaos. It's a lot of balls in your box, it's difficult to get out of those situations and then you have to suffer." Arsenal's second-half retreat does not bode well for more tough tests to come on the road in the coming weeks. As well as their trip to City, Arsenal also have to travel to third-placed Newcastle. Avoid defeat at the Etihad in 17 days' time and the title is very much still Arsenal's to lose. But on a day when Liverpool's outside shot at a top-four finish was realistically killed off, City were the big winners. — AFP

Atletico close in on Real Madrid

BARCELONA: Atletico Madrid cut the gap on second place Real Madrid to just two points with a 2-1 win over 10-man Rayo Vallecano on Sunday in La Liga. Valencia fell to a damaging 2-1 defeat at Almeria which leaves them in the relegation zone, while nine-man Real Betis lost 2-0 at home against Cadiz, denting their bid for Champions League football. Defenders Nahuel Molina and Mario Hermoso struck first-half goals two minutes apart to put Atletico into a dominant position at Vallecas.

Rayo had defender Florian Lejeune sent off in the second half for a professional foul on Alvaro Morata, allowing Atletico to stroll, but Fran Garcia's powerful drive gave the hosts some hope in the final stages. Atletico held on to keep up the pressure on their rivals, champions Real Madrid, who lost 3-2 at home against Villarreal on Saturday. Diego Simeone's side have been in superb form in 2023, unbeaten in their last 12 league games, winning nine of those matches.

"The first thing we did was take stock of what we weren't doing well," Hermoso told DAZN, when asked about his side's form. "We wanted to turn around the situation, which wasn't nice, and we know what Atletico's shirt means, what it demands." The Rojiblancos took the lead after a slick break, with Yannick Carrasco and Antoine Griezmann combining well, before the latter played a fine pass to Morata. The striker nudged the ball on to Molina, racing up on the right, who swept the ball home to net his first goal for the club.

Molina dedicated his strike to team-mate Angel Correa, absent from the squad after his mother died this week, raising the Argentine's number 10 shirt into the air. "We know what 'Angelito' means to us, how hard it must be to go through a moment like this, and the team dedicates this win, with all the love in the world, to his family, to his people," added Hermoso. Atletico soon grabbed their second with Hermoso heading home from Carrasco's corner for his fourth goal of the season.

After Lejeune was dismissed Atletico cruised, with Griezmann, Morata and Marcos Llorente all missing chances. However Garcia smashed past Jan Oblak from distance in the 85th minute to give Atletico a scare, but they saw the game out to move six points ahead of Real Sociedad in fourth and put Real Madrid firmly within their sights. Rayo, ninth, have failed to earn a victory in their last eight league games. "We were having a good



MADRID: Atletico Madrid's Spanish midfielder Pablo Barrios (left) fights for the ball with Rayo Vallecano's Argentinean midfielder Oscar Trejo during the Spanish league football match between Rayo Vallecano de Madrid and Club Atletico de Madrid on April 9, 2023. — AFP

game, then they scored their first goal which gave them wings." Rayo midfielder Oscar Valentin told DAZN. "We are calm because we know the team is competing well in every game and sooner or later those three points will come, which will bring calm."

Betis beaten

Nine-man Real Betis fell to a shock home defeat by Cadiz, leaving Manuel Pellegrini's side sixth in La Liga. After Villarreal's win on Saturday they leaptfrogged Betis, who could not go back ahead of Quique Setien's side as they stumbled in an Andalusian derby. Betis playmaker Sergio Canales made his comeback after being given a reprieve from a four-game ban by court order, but it only lasted 38 minutes. The Spaniard was sent off for pulling down Ruben Sobrino and stopping the Cadiz forward from running through on goal.

Ruben Alcaraz sent Cadiz ahead with a penalty and they doubled their lead when Theo Bongonda broke away and unselfishly teed up Chris Ramos to tap home his first goal for the club. Betis were soon reduced to nine men on a miserable afternoon for the hosts as Aitor Ruibal twice swung his elbow at Fali and was dismissed. "I'm sorry team, fans, Real Betis," wrote Canales on Twitter. "Today I made a mistake, a grave error, and I'm responsible for the defeat. "I have to be self-critical and keep working like never before to help you." Vedat Muriqi hit a brace, including a stoppage-time penalty, to rescue Real Mallorca a 3-3 draw at Real Valladolid. — AFP

Palace demolish Leeds 5-1, boost EPL survival bid

LEEDS: Crystal Palace boosted their bid for Premier League (EPL) survival with a 5-1 demolition of relegation rivals Leeds on Sunday. Roy Hodgson's side erased Patrick Bamford's first half opener with a superb display of counter-attacking at Elland Road. Marc Guehi equalized just before the break and Palace turned on the style after half-time with emphatic finishes from Jordan Ayew, who netted twice, Eberechi Eze and Odsonne Edouard.

Palace's first win at Elland Road since 2006 lifted them six points clear of the relegation zone, while Leeds remain just two points adrift of the bottom three. The south Londoners were without a win in 2023 before Hodgson replaced the sacked Patrick Vieira until the end of the season. Palace had gone three games without mustering a single shot on target in the final days of Vieira's reign, but their biggest league win since 2020 showed Hodgson has already made a major impact.

Hodgson, in his second spell as Palace boss, had inspired an important 2-1 win against fellow strugglers Leicester in his first match and his second game was even more impressive. "This was a good day. They won't be good days forever. If I was a younger, less cynical person I might be enjoying it more than I am because I have an eye that we aren't clear of the relegation zone," Hodgson said. "It was a very encouraging performance. We will congratulate ourselves on that but I hope the players understand you can't just relax and enjoy this until you are out of the mire."

Rampant Palace

Palace star Wilfried Zaha was sidelined due to a groin injury, an ominous absence given they had won only four of their last 33 league games without the Ivory Coast forward. The early signs were not encouraging for Palace as Sam Johnstone, making his first top-flight appearance since 2021, had to repel Brenden Aaronson's shot before leaping to his left to save Luis Sinisterra's stinging strike.



LEEDS: Crystal Palace's French-born Ghanaian striker Jordan Ayew (2nd left) scores their fifth goal during the English Premier League football match between Leeds United and Crystal Palace on April 9, 2023. — AFP

Sinisterra was a constant menace in the first half and the Colombian tested Johnstone twice in quick succession from a pair of Luke Ayling crosses. Leeds' pressure was finally rewarded in the 21st minute when Bamford met Aaronson's corner with a glancing header that bounced in off the far post. Barely able to escape their own half before Bamford's goal, Palace threatened when Jeffrey Schlupp headed against the post before Ayew's effort was cleared off the line.

Leeds resumed their barrage, with Jack Harrison's free-kick palmed away by Johnstone and Robbin Koch's header saved by the over-worked Palace keeper. Pascal Struijk's header forced yet another superb save from Johnstone moments later. But somehow Palace survived the siege and snatched an equaliser in first half stoppage-time. Eze whipped in a free-kick that Schlupp flicked towards Guehi, who got to the ball before Leeds keeper Illan Meslier and volleyed home from close-range.

Palace were energized by their leveler and took the lead in the 53rd minute. Ayew had scored only once all season but he rose to meet Olise's pin-point cross with a fine header that gave Meslier no chance. Hodgson's men had all the momentum and they struck again two minutes later as Eze found Olise, raced onto his return pass and slotted home from 10 yards. With Leeds in disarray, Edouard drove in Palace's fourth goal from Olise's pass in the 69th minute and Ayew bagged the fifth with a close-range finish eight minutes later. — AFP