



3 Mobile clinics for worshippers during Ramadan's last 10 days



6 US' raid in Syria targets top Islamic State leader



16 NBA injury fears for Giannis, Morant as Lakers, Heat win



RAMADAN TIMINGS	
Fajr	03:56
Shurooq	05:19
Dhuhr	11:47
Asr	15:22
Maghrib	18:16
Isha	19:37

2020 ASSEMBLY DISSOLVED

'Dissolution came upon the will of the people'; Fresh elections within months



His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah — KUNA

By KUNA, B Izzak

KUWAIT: HH the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah on Monday dissolved the 2020 National Assembly which was reinstated last month in a landmark ruling by the Constitutional Court which also scrapped the parliamentary elections held in September 2022. In a speech read by HH the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, HH the Amir said he invoked article 107 of the constitution in dissolving the Assembly.

He also said that fresh elections will be held "within months". Article 107 of the constitution gives the Amir the power to dissolve the Assembly after stating reasons for the action. The article also states that fresh polls must be held within two months of the dissolution date. The Amir also called on all parties to abandon disputes and stressed that the Kuwaiti leadership will not accept efforts that threaten to undermine national unity.

The reason for dissolving the parliament came upon the will of the people, and this requires a new election that will be accompanied by some legal

and political reforms to help turn the country to a new phase of discipline and legal reference. His Highness the Crown Prince read out the speech. His Highness the Crown Prince asked the government to bear its responsibility towards the tasks. Finally, His Highness the Crown Prince prayed to Allah the Almighty to accept the fasting of people and return these days with further blessings and goodness to Arab and Muslim nations.

In the meantime, the new government decided on Monday to approve a decree that calls to implement the Constitutional Court ruling issued on March 19. The ruling annulled the entire 2022 election process, scrapped the 2022 National Assembly and reinstated the previous assembly elected in 2020 headed by Marzouq Al-Ghanem. The previous Assembly was dissolved following non-stop political disputes between the government and MPs. During the 2022 elections, the opposition scored a landslide victory which brought veteran opposition politician Ahmad Al-Saadoun back to lead the Assembly.

RAMADAN KAREEM

Fasting is a shield

Dr Shariffa Carlo

Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), said that fasting is a shield by which the slave of Allah seeks protection. What does this mean and how does it serve as an incentive for Muslims, worldwide, to continually push themselves and suffer through hours of fasting? Muslims believe in the Mercy and Beneficence of The Creator. We understand that every human is both capable of sin, and incapable of perfection.

As a result, we know we will eventually disobey a Command or fall short in an obligation. We all sin. It is inevitable. When any rational, intelligent being is given choices, they will often choose incorrectly. We, humans, have desires, needs, personalities, perspectives, environmental influences and other factors that color the choices we make.

Muslims believe that we have free choice and that we will never be able to consistently and constantly choose correctly. Coupled with this understanding is the reality that we believe in Allah, His Mercy and His Wrath. We want to experience His Mercy and avoid His Wrath. So, when we know there is an option that, while it may be difficult, will offset our shortcomings, we usually appreciate and take advantage of it.

Fasting, in Ramadan, is one of the greatest of these options. Because billions of people, worldwide, are fasting at the same time, the media and society are all helping us to fulfill this requirement, and the only demons we have to fight are our own, it is easier to fulfill this requirement. So, we can see Allah's Mercy. When we add the understanding that fasting has a special reward, unlimited Blessings, we can more easily suffer through a temporary trial of extreme heat, cold, hunger, thirst and self-control.

Continued on Page 6

Kuwait, UAE open direct maritime trade route

KUWAIT: Docking of the container freight ship of Abu Dhabi Ports Group at Al-Shuwaikh Port set the stage for boosting Kuwaiti-UAE commercial exchanges, said the Acting Director General of Kuwait Ports Authority, Issa Al-Mulla, on Monday. Speaking to KUNA on the occasion of the ship (Barayed) docking at the port, Al-Mulla said the event constituted the inauguration of a direct maritime navigational route between Khalifa Port and Al-Shuwaikh Port.

Al-Mulla confirmed that the docking of the first container ship belonging to

Abu Dhabi Ports Group at Shuwaikh Port is among the steps that strengthen Kuwaiti trade relations. Al-Mulla told KUNA on the sidelines of the ship's arrival that this also marks the inauguration of the first direct shipping line for containers from Khalifa Port in Abu Dhabi to Shuwaikh Port.

He stressed the keenness to strengthen Kuwaiti trade relations, pointing to the remarkable growth that these trade relations have witnessed in the past few years. He explained that this growth reflects the tireless efforts of the wise leadership in both brotherly countries to expand the horizons of cooperation and enhance the volume of non-oil trade exchange.

The acting CEO of the maritime sector at the Abu Dhabi Group,

Continued on Page 6



The ship (Barayed) docking at the port. — KUNA

Qatar expects more than five million visitors

DOHA: Qatar expects more than five million people to visit the Gulf state in 2023 despite a post-World Cup lull, its tourism chief said on Sunday. Akbar Al-Baker, head of Qatar Airways and Qatar Tourism, admitted that hotels had fallen quiet after the World

Cup final on December 19. But he insisted that every World Cup host has the same lull after the tournament and that hotels were still 65-70 percent full.

Baker told a press conference there were 1.16 million visitors in the first quarter of 2023 and told AFP on the sidelines that he expected "at least" five million over the year. In 2019, before the coronavirus pandemic, there were about 2.1 million tourists. By comparison, rival Dubai had more than 14 million tourists in 2022. As part of a bid to end reliance on its natural gas riches, Qatar has spent billions of dollars on infrastructure for tourism and hosting major sports events.

The government has set a target of six million foreign tourists a year by 2030. "I think we will not be too far away from the target" in 2023, Baker said. "Because of FIFA we built so much infrastructure in the hospitality industry and of course now it is our job to make sure that in the coming months we are making sure that occupancy rates go up." Qatar, which says there were 1.4 million visitors during the World Cup, is predicting foreign travelers will make up about one third of the three million people expected to attend an international horticultural expo that runs from October 2 until March 28, 2024. — AFP

Sudan death toll surpasses 100; Kuwaitis safe

KUWAIT: Kuwait's Ministry of Foreign Affairs is following up, through Kuwait Embassy in Khartoum, the situation of Kuwaitis stranded in Sudan due to the current security developments seen in the country. The ministry reassured about the Kuwaiti nationals and urged them to keep at their residence, be cautious and vigilant, avoid conflict areas and abide by instructions issued by Sudan's official bodies.

The ministry said that it is currently in contact with the concerned bodies in Sudan to study all possible alternatives to ensure the Kuwaitis' safety and evacuate them if security conditions are suitable.

Continued on Page 6



KHARTOUM: This handout aerial SkySat image shows a view of several planes damaged at the Khartoum International Airport. — AFP



Local

56 percent of Kuwaitis suffer from vitamin D deficiency

Severe vitamin D deficiency can cause rickets

By Faten Omar

KUWAIT: Vitamin D is an essential nutrient that plays a crucial role in maintaining the health of bones, teeth and muscles. According to an awareness campaign launched by Kuwait Medical Student Association, 56 percent of Kuwaiti people suffer from vitamin D deficiency, based on studies. The association revealed that vitamin D deficiency is important and is considered an essential factor for the absorption of calcium and phosphorus from food and a key factor in strengthening immunity, preventing osteoporosis and reducing the risk of cancer.

They revealed that there are several causes of vitamin D deficiency. The most common cause is a lack of exposure to sunlight, explaining that the body produces vitamin D when the skin is exposed to sunlight, but many people spend most of their time

indoors or use sunscreen, which can block the production of vitamin D. Those most at risk of vitamin D deficiency are those who are dark skinned, vegetarians, obese people, the elderly, pregnant women, nursing mothers and patients with liver and kidney diseases. The association revealed that one of the symptoms of vitamin D deficiency is classified into two parts: moderate deficiency, whose symptoms include headache, fatigue, loss of appetite and hair loss; and severe deficiency, whose symptoms include bone pain, muscle weakness, severe joint pain and depression. Kuwait Medical Student Association said that among the most important sources of vitamin D are egg yolks, fortified milk products, liver, salmon, cod liver oil, mushrooms and nutritional supplements under the supervision of a doctor.

The study confirmed that vitamin D levels affect the bones and immunity, causing rheumatism and

weakening the muscle of the heart, as well as affecting mental health and cognitive functions of the brain. Vitamin D deficiency can also lead to more serious health problems. In children, severe vitamin D deficiency can cause rickets, a condition that results in soft, weak bones. It has also been linked to an increased risk of certain cancers, including breast, colon and prostate cancer. The recommended daily intake of vitamin D varies depending on age and other factors, but most people need between 600 and 800 IU per day. However, some people may need higher doses of vitamin D to correct a deficiency but too much vitamin D can also be harmful.

According to study estimates, 50 percent of the world's population suffers from vitamin D insufficiency, and there are an estimated 1 billion vitamin D deficiency cases globally. The incidence of vitamin D deficiency has been estimated to be between



20 to 90 percent across Europe, the United States and the Middle East. Countries including Australia, India, Africa, South America, Turkey, and Lebanon have reported experiencing comparable patterns. According to research, vitamin D deficiency affects both emerging and industrialized nations.



Kuwait and Ukraine: 30 years of sustainable multifaceted dialogue

By Dr Oleksandr Balanutsa
Ambassador of Ukraine to Kuwait

Today, Ukraine and Kuwait mark a very special day – the 30th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between our friendly countries. On behalf of our Embassy, I sincerely congratulate Kuwaiti friends and partners on this highly symbolic occasion. Throughout these years of building strong ties, we have managed to achieve great results in the mutually beneficial political, trade, educational, cultural and other types of cooperation.

Only during my cadence here, we have held two Weeks of Ukraine in Kuwait and dozens of other public diplomacy projects, introduced numerous Ukrainian businessmen to Kuwaiti counterparts, received a couple of official delegations from Ukraine. I wish we could celebrate our anniversary in better circumstances – with diplomatic receptions, smiles and wishes of further well-being. However, my people back at home are fighting in the existential defensive war.

The enemy is still committing atrocities, war crimes, missiles and drones' terror through all the territory of Ukraine. Kuwait has also passed at the time through a similar ordeal. The black Thursday of the 24th February, 2022 became a turning point for Ukraine, its statehood and identity, just like the black Thursday of the 2nd August, 1990 for Kuwait. It is essential that Kuwait's example has demonstrated that the international law and justice finally prevails, so we spare no efforts to make it happen for Ukraine.

Kuwait as Humanitarian Leader always stands by the side of good and justice. My team and I are deeply grateful to Kuwait for its firm stance towards Ukraine at the UN and regional levels, as well as all that assistance provided to my people in the most critical moments of our existential struggle. We are blessed to share the same language of values and aspirations for peace.

Needless to say that Ukraine as an open and multicultural country is seeking to further enhance bilateral cooperation with Kuwait. Hopefully, when the President Zelenskyy's 10-point Peace Formula works and brings us a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in Ukraine, we will be able to open up new, yet undiscovered prospects for the bilateral cooperation between Ukraine and Kuwait.



National guard deputy chief tours monitoring stations

KUWAIT: Deputy Chief of the National Guard Sheikh Faisal Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah inspected the two fixed pollution and radiation monitoring stations in the northern industrial island and the southern industrial island of Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah Causeway. The stations are under the jurisdiction of Sheikh Salem Al-Ali Center for chemical defense and radiation monitoring at the National Guard.

Sheikh Faisal toured the two stations, which are among 29 in the country, and reviewed the chemical, radiation and biological pollutant detectors,

Applications open for manpower student program

KUWAIT: The Public Authority of Manpower announced Monday that it will begin receiving applications from students who would like to join the authority's summer training program. Applications will be open from April 23 until June 6, said the authority.

"The project aims to spread awareness about the importance of working in the private sector as it can have a great effect on helping with an individual's professional development," said Spokeswoman of the Public Authority of Manpower (PAM) and Director of Public Relations and Information Aseel Al-Mazyad.

The authority, in cooperation with many companies, will offer through the program about 800 different job opportunities specifically chosen to develop students' skills and prepare them to work in the



ensuring they gave accurate readings. He said the centers include the latest equipment and devices that allow for chemical and radiation detection in selected areas of the country and are able to record pollution rates and perform their role in combating radiation leakage.

private sector. More job opportunities are expected to become available within the next few weeks, Mazyad said.

The program, which is launching on July 9 and is expected to last for a month, will allow students to get training in various fields, including retail, banking, hotels, the legal sector and the insurance sector. It targets high school students in grades eleven and twelve, students in their second year of certificate programs and university students their third and fourth years of education.

"Nineteen years in the running, the program has trained nearly 12,000 male and female students in various fields, preparing them for the needs of the labor market," said Mazyad. Anyone looking to register in the program can do so through the official website of the manpower authority. —KUNA



Aseel Al-Mazyad



KUWAIT: Iran's Ambassador to Kuwait Mohammad Irani hosted a ghabqa recently on the occasion of the holy month of Ramadan. Senior officials including Kuwait's Assistant Foreign Minister for Asian Affairs Sameh Johar Hayat, ambassadors and other dignitaries attended the event. — Photos by Fouad Al-Shaikh

In my view

The fifth column



Dr Khalid Al-Saleh

Local@kuwaittimes.com

There is no doubt that there is a conflict between some values of Islam and some of the West's, and I say some values because most values of Islam and those countries are similar. Freedom, justice and equality are shared values; rather Islam has precedence with those values and a tinge of mercy in their application. Since the Islamic caliphates surrounded Europe and wars and counterwars erupted between them, it became clear that these wars will continue forever, whether it is cold or hot.

The two sides have their tools, but maybe the most important tool of the conflict against Arabs and true Islam is the recruitment of agents. The idea of recruiting agents began since the seventh Crusade in 1250, and it was expressed by King Louis IX of France and the leader of the eighth Crusades.

The same idea was confirmed by the senior Archbishop of Greece Gregory, who despite the generosity of the Ottoman state and hosting him, was not ashamed to give advice to the Russians on how to defeat Muslims, most important of which is to damage their internal structure and pure faith through the agents.

Today we see the agents in every place of our Muslim world, and they are more concentrated among Arabs, especially in the countries of the Arab peninsula, in which the elements of the coming hope have gathered. The foundations of love in society are being damaged with sectarianism, tribalism, categorization, and most dangerously, Westernization.

We see among us today a group of people who agree only on the hatred of religion. They do not pray and fast and speak day and night about religious terrorism. They claim to be liberals, but do not understand any rule of liberalism. They understand freedom as freedom to drink alcohol and have mixed parties. As for democracy, it means they alone can win elections. They understand equality as we Arabs becoming part of the Western culture.

They spread among our youth all the heresies of cultures. They fought our beautiful language and culture in all fields and succeeded in making some of our youth alien in their dressing, tongue and thought. They preoccupied the society in never-ending domestic wars and preoccupied opinion holders in their trivial issues instead of concentrating on true science and development of culture.

Those today are the strongest enemies of Islam, as their clothes are stretchy and loose, as the sectarian who hates true Islam removes the clothes of his sectarianism and wears those of liberalism to attack whoever he chooses among Muslim scholars. The corrupt person who becomes angry towards the society's view of him and objection towards his behavior wears the clothes of liberalism to claim that he is a person of intellect instead of a drunkard.

So, liberalism was transformed with their own hands from noble values to just a claw of the agents of the West in the war against Islam. Gentlemen, the values of true liberalism came with the first word the Prophet of Humanity (PBUH) — "Read". It came with a collection of practices the generation of the Prophet's (PBUH) companions understood ("When did you start enslaving people, when their mothers gave birth to them free?") These are practices of the best nation in the world that all nations learned and issued under various names. The clear truth is that the values of our religion suit every searcher of freedom, justice and equality, and whoever hates our religion is not a liberal — rather he is a mere fifth column living among us.

Local

Mobile clinics to serve worshippers during final days of Ramadan: MoH

Worshippers with chronic diseases urged to take medication regularly



The minister of health poses with officials and paramedics during his tour to Bilal bin Rabah Mosque.



Minister of Health Dr Ahmad Al-Awadhi is seen with paramedics and other officials during the tour.

In my view

Ramadan experience

By Antonio Coelho

Ramadan, the holy month when the Noble Quran was revealed to Prophet Muhammed (PBUH), falls in the ninth month of the Islamic lunar calendar. Kuwait has many beautiful Ramadan traditions that one can look forward to, like exchanging ideas at ghabqas and diwanias, giving out sweets to children in their traditional dress for Girgian, and trying out traditional Kuwaiti dishes for futoor and suhoor.

Muslims look forward to welcoming Ramadan as a season of family, faith, community and reflection: important aspects of life that can fall by the wayside in the midst of our day-to-day responsibilities. The holy month of Ramadan creates space to center oneself and focus on what we value most as human beings, especially appreciating the concentration on philanthropy and the many opportunities to volunteer and give back to the community.

Ramadan has been enjoyed by expats and Kuwaitis for decades. Working hours are cut short and a mood of relaxation appears, where people tend to devote more of their time to worship followed by trying out different recipes to appease the tastebuds of both young and old in the family and invited friends. There seems to be a particularly joyful relaxed atmosphere this year, as people are finally able to gather in large numbers without restrictions to celebrate Ramadan festivities for the first time since the onset of COVID-19.

The Grand Mosque has re-opened after a gap of three years, welcoming worshippers for night prayers known as qiyam al-layl, as the intensity of prayers increases during the last 10 days of Ramadan. Families get together for iftar, inviting friends and colleagues, and having the opportunity during Ramadan to connect with many wonderful people who were hitherto strangers.

There is warmth and hospitality everywhere in Kuwait. People love these gatherings which are unique to Kuwait and an excellent way for different generations of families to meet and learn more about local traditions. People share their stories of the past, which makes the atmosphere exciting and interesting.

Ramadan brings in a sense of brotherhood. Even during the past two years of the pandemic, Muslims worldwide tried to come together virtually in different ways, but it is so much nicer to do it in person. Ramadan is a time when one is privileged to get to know people at a deeper, more personal level, being invited into their homes and meeting their families. It is also a period of reflection, spiritual renewal and a time to focus on cultivating healthy habits and choices.

The focus on giving and ensuring the best in our actions and behavior towards others is something that resonates deeply with every family. Children turn innovative and creative, like making an advent Ramadan calendar that records helpful or kind acts performed daily during Ramadan, which means that getting lots of extra hugs and toys get cleared away without parents having to remind them.

Ramadan is a month when everybody loves to dress in their best traditional or national dresses. Ladies love their stunning Ramadan kaftans with their gorgeous colors and designs. Throughout the month of Ramadan, shopping malls are crowded, beaming with enthusiastic shoppers shopping late at night.

As in Kuwait and other parts of the world, Ramadan is a period of reflection and connection for Muslims. Each person is on a kind of journey during Ramadan, which may feature prayers, fasting, donations and for many, a focus on self-discipline and being more conscious of their thoughts and actions and the impact they have on society. Family and friends gather for iftar and suhoor and many make a point of inviting non-Muslim friends to partake in order to help encourage understanding of Islam and the spirit of Ramadan.

It is often found that Ramadan presents an opportunity to build bridges between other society more broadly. Ramadan highlights not only what binds us together, but also the wonderful pluralism and diversity that exists within the Muslim community and the rich tapestry of traditions and practices this creates. As the blessed month of Ramadan comes to an end, the people have turned toward the joys of planning the celebration of Eid al-Fitr.

KUWAIT: Kuwait authorities secured 27 mobile medical clinics with the required equipment and staff to operate during prayers in the last ten days of Ramadan throughout the country, Minister of Health Dr Ahmad Al-Awadhi said Sunday. The announcement came during a tour to the Grand Mosque and Bilal bin Rabah Mosque to inspect the medical preparations for these days, namely the 27th of the fasting month.

The clinics, said Awadhi, are staffed with paramedics to care for the large numbers of worshippers expected at mosques across Kuwait. He indicated that medical personnel had already provided treatment and aid to cases of high blood pressure, diabetes, asthma, fatigue and other symptoms. Awadhi also urged worshippers who suffer from chronic diseases to take their medication regularly as prescribed by doctors.

The final stretch of the holy month is known to be the most blessed, with Muslims increasing their good deeds to seek Allah's mercy. Many Muslims seek Laylatul Qadr, which means the night of decree or the night of power, during the last ten days as it is one of the most sacred nights in the Islamic calendar.

Although the exact date of Laylatul Qadr is unknown, it's thought to occur on an odd night, with many observing it on the 27th of Ramadan. It's believed to be the night in which Allah shows great mercy to all creatures, so Muslims spend



KUWAIT: Minister of Health Dr Ahmad Al-Awadhi listens to a briefing during his tour of the Grand Mosque and Bilal bin Rabah Mosque on Sunday. — KUNA photos

it praying at mosques or at home while praising Allah, thanking him for his blessings and asking for forgiveness.

Offering prayers and remembrance (thikr) and reading the Quran are examples of acts of worship Muslims do during the night. Some Muslims choose to spend the last ten days of Ramadan in

seclusion (i'tikaf), where one solely focuses on worshipping Allah and refrains from involvement in worldly affairs. I'tikaf, which usually takes place at the mosque, is a great opportunity to reconnect with Allah in solitude. It is also a time to implement good religious practices which can be carried on throughout the whole year.

Iftar break at Kuwait's Mubarakiya Market



Muslim workers break their fast at a market in Kuwait City on April 16, 2023, during the holy month of Ramadan. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat

KUWAIT: Mubarakiya Market is bustling with life during Ramadan. And near iftar time, it is more alive than ever. Restaurants are filled with customers who take a break and gather to break their fast in the market that has served as the beating heart of Kuwait City for generations. And while

shoppers leave shops empty to break their fast, workers take that moment to gather for an iftar meal before going back to work until the early hours of the morning. This dynamic paints a holistic picture that encapsulates Kuwait's lively evening spirit in Ramadan.

Deputy FM receives Bangladesh's envoy



KUWAIT: Kuwaiti Deputy Foreign Minister Ambassador Mansour Al-Otaibi on Monday met with Bangladeshi Ambassador to Kuwait Major General Md Ashikuzzaman at the ministry's headquarters. The ambassador

delivered a letter addressed to Kuwait Foreign Minister Sheikh Salem Al-Sabah from Bangladesh counterpart Dr A K Abdul Momen. The letter highlights bilateral relations and ways to boost them in various fields. — KUNA

A major organization (5000+ personnel) is seeking a highly skilled and experienced HUMAN RESOURCES MANAGER

The HR manager will be responsible for managing all the aspects of the HR including recruitment (local and from abroad) for all levels, employee engagement and induction, providing guidance on performance management, etc.

The candidate should be:

- Holding a bachelor degree in Human Resources or in a related field,
- Fluent in English; Arabic being a plus,
- Having 15+ years of experience in the field, among which 10+ years in the Gulf; previous experience in Kuwait is a plus; Kuwaiti residence is also a plus

Please send your Résumé along with a presentation letter to the following address:
senior.recruitment202304@gmail.com

News in Brief

Minors authority
deposits Eid aid

KUWAIT: The General Authority for Minors Affairs announced that it has finished depositing Eid Al-Fitr aid for minors who are under the authority's care. The beneficiaries who meet the authority's criteria include 1,060 families, with 2,390 minors. As part of its plan for 2023-2024, the authority will implement comprehensive development programs for the services provided to minors and other categories under its care, said acting director of the authority for minors affairs Hamad Al-Barjas. The plan will focus on expanding the use of technology in administering services, including communication through smart phone applications.

Government cancels
exceptional salaries

KUWAIT: The Cabinet decided on Monday to cancel the exceptional salaries given to ministers listed in decree 191/2022. This came during a meeting for the Cabinet chaired by His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah at Seif Palace. —KUNA

Municipal Council approves
request for recycling project

KUWAIT: The Municipal Council has approved the request of the Direct Investment Promotion Authority to allocate land for the establishment of industrial projects to recycle oil waste north of the Al-Zour refinery in its main session on Monday. The Council rejected the request of the Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs to expand the residence of the imam and muezzin next to a mosque in the back area of Plot 4, while the proposal to create road entrances and exits to the Jabriya area to King Fahd Road towards Kuwait City directly remained on the table. The Council also answered questions about the types of contracts for the municipality's urban projects, development projects and initiatives. —KUNA

Donations for defaulting debtors exceed \$1.7m

Chamber of Commerce to donate KD 300,000 to national campaign

KUWAIT: The sum of donations for aiding defaulting debtors has exceeded KD 517,000 (\$ 1.7 million) since the launch of the national campaign to relieve this segment of the society. Spokesman of the unified government application for electronic services (Sahel) Yousef Kadhem said in remarks to KUNA that much more donations are expected. He lauded the citizens who have rushed in large numbers to relieve debt-burdened people in line with the campaign launched by the Ministry of Social Affairs.

Minister of Social Affairs, Women and Childhood Mai

Al-Baghli had announced Sunday the launch of the national campaign aimed at aiding debtors, with donations open until Thursday midnight. The campaign, conducted in cooperation with ministries of Information and Justice, comes as an extension of Kuwait's humanitarian role, stated Baghli in a press briefing.

It is religiously permitted to donate Zakat for the campaign, explained the minister, adding that a link will be provided to collect donations, and the amount will be transferred to the Ministry of Justice's General Directorate of implementation. The campaign targets people

with disabilities or special needs, elders and women, with the condition that all related rulings are of civil cases.

In related news, the Head of the Chamber of Commerce Mohammed Al-Saqr announced that the chamber has conducted a meeting on Monday morning where they agreed to donate KD 300,000 to the national campaign. Saqr has praised the idea of the campaign, its organization and timing. He also expressed his trust in companies and institutions of the private sector, which always act in accordance with Kuwait's charitable heritage. —Agencies



Jazeera Airways hosts kids from KACCH and BACCH

KUWAIT: Jazeera Airways, Kuwait's leading low cost carrier hosted a total of 100 children from Kuwait Association for the Care of Children in Hospital and Bayt Abdullah Children's Hospice (KACCH & BACCH) along with their families at the National Geographic Ultimate Explorer in Assima Mall. Together, KACCH and BACCH operate child life programs at hospitals in Kuwait providing specialized child life and therapeutic play programs for children and their families.

Bayt Abdullah is well known as the first and only children's hospice in the Middle East. Children un-

der palliative care receive specialized treatment at the hospice to ensure a higher quality of life and the best day to day care possible. Their families are also assisted with expert clinical, psychosocial, emotional, and spiritual support throughout their challenging journey.

The National Geographic Ultimate Explorer Family Entertainment Center aims to inspire children between the ages of 5 and 14 to explore the world through educational adventure. The facility comprises of various experiences that involve a fully immersive play-based learning for children and also offer entertainment options for adults. It is a great blend of virtual reality and 3D technology to inspire children to explore scientific pursuits in a fun environment.

Ahmad Al-Khifat, General Manager, National Geographic Ultimate Explorer said: "We are very excited to be cooperating with active partners such as Jazeera Airways on social initiatives that reach

out to wider audiences and have them experience unique entertainment in Kuwait." The children and their families were welcomed by the Jazeera Airways mascot "Captain Zak" with gifts from the airline before heading off to enjoy the attractions. These entertaining experiences allowed the children to enjoy a stress free atmosphere away from their illnesses and medical concerns.

Marwan Boodai, Chairman, Jazeera Airways said: "We are excited to partner with National Geographic Ultimate Explorer to host children from Bayt Abdullah for this social initiative. At Jazeera Airways, we believe in the power of giving back to local communities, especially children and youth. Children are a true blessing and it is an absolute pleasure to see smiles on their faces as they enjoyed their time at the attractions. Ramadan is a time for giving and we are pleased to have had this opportunity to give back to the local community during this Holy month."



Scan & Subscribe KD 20 a year

For Individuals Only



Scan Now

Kuwait Times

The First English Daily in the Arabian Gulf



Tel: 24833199 Ext: 220



Information minister to study media proposals

KUWAIT: Minister of Information, State Minister for Youth Affairs Abdelrahman Al-Mutairi received Kuwait Journalist Association Chairman of the Board Adnan Al-Rashid and a delegation that included Secretary Jassim Kamal, Treasurer Dhairan Aba Al-Khalil and Board Member Abdelrahman Al-Alyan.

The two sides discussed several KJA requests and proposals that aim at improving the mission of

Kuwaiti Journalism and strengthening its leading role at the regional and international levels.

The information minister promised to study the requests and to work on bringing them to fruition, adding that he is keen on giving unlimited support to all efforts seeking to develop Kuwait media be it governmental or private. While he lauded the achievements of KJA and its well-known effort domestically, regionally and internationally, he appreciated KJA's keenness to welcome the youth and develop their skills.

KJA Chairman Adnan Al-Rashid thanked Minister Al-Mutairi for his continued efforts in supporting media establishments and his efforts to take Kuwaiti Journalists to higher levels in a way that contributes to the freedom of the press in Kuwait.



KUWAIT: Bedouin men sit in Al-Safat square within Kuwait's wall in 1924. Bedouins met at the square to trade and exchange news in peace. Source: 'Kuwait in the Eyes of Early Photographers,' by William Facey, Gillian Gran, London 1989. Prepared by: Mahmoud Zakaria Abu Al-Ella, researcher in heritage at the Ministry of Information.



Myanmar junta free 3,000 prisoners in New Year amnesty

US helicopter raid in Syria targets senior IS group leader: Centcom

Page 6

Page 7

Foreign Ministers' Meeting KARUIZAWA, NAGANO April 16-18, 2023



KARUIZAWA: (Clockwise from top center) Japan's Foreign Minister Yoshimasa Hayashi, Canadian Foreign Minister Melanie Joly, French Foreign Minister Catherine Colonna, Italy's Foreign Minister Antonio Tajani, Deputy Secretary-General of the European External Action Service (EEAS) Enrique Mora, British Foreign Secretary James Cleverly, German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock and US Secretary of State Antony Blinken pose for a photo at the start of the first working session of a G7 Foreign ministers' meeting. — AFP

G7 offers common front on China

The unity of G7 is extremely important: Yoshimasa Hayashi

KARUIZAWA: For G7 diplomats meeting in the Japanese resort town of Karuizawa, unity was the name of the game on Monday, with ministers lining up to insist there is no daylight between them on China policy. The two days of talks are taking place under the long shadow cast by controversial remarks from French President Emmanuel Macron, who last week suggested Europe should avoid "crises that aren't ours".

From the opening remarks of Monday's first session, the desire to emphasize common ground was on clear display, with Japan's Foreign Minister Yoshimasa Hayashi telling his counterparts "the unity of the G7 is extremely important".

Monday's first session, and the ministers' working dinner the night before, focused on China and regional challenges, with Hayashi urging counterparts to "demonstrate to the world the G7's strong determination" to defend the "international order based on the rule of law".

Host Japan has put regional challenges atop the

agenda, and recent events including Chinese military drills around Taiwan and North Korean missile tests have sharpened that focus. As the ministers began talks, the US Navy announced it had sailed a guided-missile destroyer through the Taiwan Strait in a freedom-of-navigation operation, with Beijing saying it had tracked the vessel.

The controversy over Macron's remarks will prompt closer scrutiny of whatever language a final statement uses on China and its threats to seize self-ruled Taiwan. But comments during bilateral talks on Monday showed the direction of travel, with US Secretary of State Antony Blinken saying discussions so far had "only reinforced the convergence of views that we have", as he met with his French counterpart Catherine Colonna. "We're united, we're giving clearly the same signal to the rest of the world that any situation requires respect of international law as a precondition to the rest," Colonna added.

The ministers are expected to agree strong lan-

guage in a final statement on Tuesday, warning against militarization of the South China Sea, and repeating opposition to any "change of the status quo by force" on Taiwan. They are also likely to warn about the weaponization of trade, and the need for diversification of supply chains on sensitive material like semiconductors -- seen as another message directed at Beijing. "There is a lot of unity in the room and basically you'll see that reflected," a senior State Department official said.

The ministers will send the message that "we want to work with China but we are certainly going to stand up against any coercion" or market manipulation, the official added. Still, for all the outward expressions of unity, Macron's comments reflect the fact that there are real differences among the allies, said Jacques deLisle, director of the Asia programme at the Foreign Policy Research Institute in Philadelphia.

"Europe's assessments of China and views of Taiwan have moved toward positions that the US has

avored. But this has not brought consensus," he said. "Washington's views of China have become still more negative and, relatedly, signals of support for Taiwan have grown much stronger, maintaining a gap between European and American positions."

And in a sign that the daylight between the allies remains a concern, German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock warned Europeans "must not withdraw into our shells." "We must not limit ourselves to defending the European peace," she told a press conference in Karuizawa.

Despite the focus on China, Ukraine has remained a priority at talks with the diplomats committing to "intensifying" sanctions against Russia, without outlining any specific new measures. They also agreed stepped-up efforts to "prevent and respond to evasion of sanctions as well as third party weapon supply to Russia," likely to be seen as a further warning to China, among others, on cooperating with Moscow on its war in Ukraine. — AFP

Four dead, 28 hurt in Alabama birthday party shooting

WASHINGTON: At least four people were killed and more than 20 others injured, mostly teens, in a Saturday night shooting at a birthday party in Alabama, officials said, in the latest spasm of American gun mass violence. Local news reports said the shooting occurred at a Sweet 16 party at a dance studio in Dadeville, a small town northeast of the state capital Montgomery.

"There were four lives tragically lost in this incident, and there's been a multitude of injuries," Sergeant Jeremy Burkett, a spokesman for the Alabama Law Enforcement Agency (ALEA), told reporters Sunday. He

specified later that 28 people had been wounded, some of them critically, and urged residents to come forward with any information they might have related to the attack. But Burkett provided no further details on how the shooting unfolded or why.

Annette Allen told the Montgomery Advertiser that her grandson Phil Dowdell was among those who died: He had been celebrating his sister Alexis' 16th birthday when gunfire ripped through the party. "He was a very, very humble child. Never messed with anybody. Always had a smile on his face," Allen said of her grandson, a high school senior and football player due to graduate within weeks. "Everybody's grieving," Allen said of the small community of some 3,000 residents.

President Joe Biden, who was briefed on the shooting, said the nation was again grieving over young Americans killed in gun violence. "What has our nation come to when children cannot attend a birthday party without fear?" Biden, who has long sought tighter gun safety measures, asked in a statement.

"Guns are the leading killer of children in America, and the numbers are rising—not declining," he added. "This is outrageous and unacceptable." The nearby Lake Martin Community Hospital received 15 individual gun-shot wound patients, mostly victims in their teens, Heidi Smith, marketing director for the rural health facility's operator IvyCreek Healthcare, told AFP.

Six of the patients were discharged and nine have been transferred to facilities with higher levels of care. Of those, five were in critical condition, Smith said. "It's been terrible," she said. More than 12 hours after the tragedy, neither Burkett nor other law enforcement officials provided any details on who may have perpetrated the shooting and why, or whether a suspect has been detained.

"We can't share anything further at this time," the sergeant said, adding only that "it was tied to a birthday party." Dadeville Chief of Police Jonathan Floyd called the town "a tight-knit community full of wonderful people."

The Alabama Law Enforcement Agency said its State Bureau of Investigations has launched a probe together with Dadeville police and federal agencies including the FBI.

Television station WRBL of nearby Columbus, Georgia reported heavy police activity overnight and crime scene tape around a building in Dadeville, where it said white sheets could be seen covering parts of the floor.

State leaders took to Twitter Sunday offering prayers and decrying violence but they did not provide details on what happened. "This morning, I grieve with the people of Dadeville and my fellow Alabamians," Governor Kay Ivey posted. "Violent crime has NO place in our state."

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. The latest deaths came on the 16th anniversary of the deadliest US school shooting on record, in which 32 people were killed at Virginia Tech in 2007. — AFP

Ukraine's war widows count the cost

KYIV: Olga Slyshyk began to fear the worst in January this year when her husband, Mykhailo, a military engineer serving on the front line in eastern Ukraine, didn't contact her on her birthday. It wasn't unusual for the 40-year-old trained lawyer to be offline for days at a time, but Slyshyk knew he would reach out — one way or another — on January 14 if he was alive and well.

"I was sure he would call or find some way to congratulate me. But I had had a very bad dream and I already knew something was wrong," she told AFP in Kyiv wearing black and holding her two-year-old son Viktor.

"On January 15, I found out he had died." More than one year after Moscow invaded, Slyshyk is among a growing number of women widowed by Russian forces and left to count the cost of Ukraine's determination to hold out and push Moscow's invasion back.

Neither side has disclosed the exact figures of troops killed, though recently leaked US intelligence documents suggest as many as 17,500 Ukrainian servicemen have been lost. Slyshyk said a social media group for war widows she joined had more than 300 members after her husband was killed defending Soledar in the eastern Donetsk region, but it had doubled in size since.

'You to live with it'

President Volodymyr Zelensky last August hosted widows and their children at an honors ceremony to reassure next of kin their loved ones'

sacrifice had not been in vain. "They will remain forever at battle. But they live on in the memory of their relatives," he said, greeting mourning women and their children one by one.

Thirty-year-old Slyshyk, who was born in Mariupol — a port city besieged and captured by Russian forces last spring — said she often evokes the memory of her killed husband. "All the time. Both in my head and aloud. I'll be unable to open a tin can, weeping from frustration, and I cry out: 'Misha, I'm not even able to do this' and then suddenly, it opens."

Daria Mazur, 41, said she learned of her husband's death in 2014 from graphic pictures of his bloodied corpse published on Russian media after fierce fighting with Kremlin-backed separatists. He was killed while withdrawing from Ilovaisk, an infamous and costly chapter of the conflict for Ukraine that saw hundreds killed that August as Kyiv troops pulled back in the face of advancing pro-Russian forces. — AFP



KYIV: Ukrainian Olga Slyshyk poses during an interview with AFP journalists in Kyiv, amid the Russian invasion of Ukraine. — AFP

International

US helicopter raid in Syria targets senior IS group leader: Centcom

Target of the strike was 'responsible for planning terror attacks in ME and Europe'

BEIRUT: A US helicopter raid on Monday targeted a senior Islamic State group leader in Syria suspected of plotting attacks in Europe and the Middle East, US Central Command said. "US Central Command forces conducted a unilateral helicopter raid in northern Syria in the early morning... targeting a senior ISIS Syria leader and operational planner," Centcom said in a statement, using another acronym for IS.

The target of the strike was "responsible for planning terror attacks in the Middle East and Europe", it alleged. "The raid resulted in the probable death of the targeted individual" while "two other armed individuals were killed", the statement said, without identifying any of them.

No civilians or US troops were hurt, the statement added. The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said the strike "targeted the building where an IS member was present" in Al-Suwaydah, a village about 25 kilometres (15 miles) west of the town of Jarabulus on Syria's northern border with Turkey.

The Observatory, a Britain-based war monitor that relies on sources on the ground, said the strike killed the main target and two other fighters. The IS member had previously been imprisoned in Kurdish-held Manbij, south of Jarabulus, according to the Observatory.

He had taken refuge in the Al-Suwaydah area around six months earlier under the protection of a pro-Turkish group, it added. Local residents told AFP that the man was killed as he was trying to flee and that his body was handed over to one of his brothers.

A Turkish-backed rebel group deployed in the Al-Suwaydah area said in a statement that two of its fighters were killed after they went to the site of the raid. Many former IS militants joined pro-Turkish groups after the jihadists lost their last scraps of territory in Syria in March 2019, Observatory chief Rami Abdel Rahman said.

Earlier this month, the US military said it had launched a strike in Syria killing senior IS leader Khalid Aydd Ahmad al-Jabouri, who Centcom said was responsible for planning attacks in Turkey and Europe. In October 2019, Washington announced it had killed IS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi in an operation in northwestern Syria.

His two successors have also been killed: The first in a US operation in northwestern Syria and the second in an operation by former Syrian rebels in the country's south. Some 900 US troops remain in Syria, most in the Kurdish-administered northeast, as part of a US-led coalition battling remnants of IS, which remains active in both Syria and neighbouring Iraq, operating out of hideouts in desert and mountain areas.

IS "remains able to conduct operations within the region with a desire to strike beyond the Middle East", Centcom chief General Michael Kurilla was quoted as saying in Monday's statement. In separate attacks on Sunday, suspected IS fighters killed at least 36 truffle hunters and five shepherds in Syria, the Observatory reported, with 17 pro-regime fighters among the dead. — AFP



AS SUWAYDAH: A man walks past the sign of Soueida near Jarabulus, in the north-east of Syria's Aleppo province, on April 17, 2023, following a US helicopter raid on an Islamic State group leader in the village. — AFP

Sudan's Daglo, feared Darfuri general fighting for power

KHARTOUM: Feared Sudanese paramilitary commander Mohamed Hamdan Daglo went from a militia chief in war-torn Darfur to the country's second-in-command -- to now battling the regular army for control of the country. Daglo, leader of the large and heavily-armed paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF), collaborated with his now arch-rival, army chief Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, in a 2021 military coup that derailed a transition to civilian rule following the 2019 ouster of hardline president Omar al-Bashir.

Often dressed in desert fatigues, the tall and slightly stooped Daglo -- widely known by his nickname Hemeti, short for Mohamed -- has crafted a distinct image for himself and his troops, positioning the RSF as autonomous from the military. An experienced battlefield commander, he has in recent months also deployed a savvy use of social media with posts on Facebook, Instagram and TikTok to address the country's overwhelmingly young population, with two thirds of Sudanese aged under 30.

Darfur upstart to statesman

Born in around 1975, a camel and sheep trader with little formal education, he rose to prominence when Khartoum's hardline government under Bashir began arming nomadic Arab raiders to counter an ethnic minority rebellion that broke out in the western Darfur region in 2003.

The groups known as Janjaweed were sent to attack villages on camel and horseback as part of a campaign of terror that saw Bashir indicted for war

crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide by the International Criminal Court. The war in Darfur left hundreds of thousands dead and more than two million displaced. By 2013, Bashir had appointed him commander of a new force made up of former, mostly Arab, militiamen as Khartoum once again sought to crush the insurgency -- the RSF. But many in Khartoum looked down at the rise of the Darfuri, who hails from the Arab Rizeigat people.

"The old guard, dominated by the old Sudanese elite around Khartoum, very much view Hemeti as an illiterate, upstart thug whom they first armed to do their dirty work in the war in Darfur," said Alan Boswell, Horn of Africa director at the International Crisis Group.

Closer to power

For nearly a decade, Daglo used his reputation as a ruthless militiaman and street-smart leader to maneuver his way closer to power, all the while growing richer off lucrative RSF-controlled gold mines. The RSF were deployed in Yemen when Sudan joined the Saudi-led coalition fighting in the civil war there in 2015, in what proved a major boon for both Daglo and his future coup partner, army chief Abdel Fattah al-Burhan.

"It allowed him, alongside Burhan, to meet United Arab Emirates officials and Saudi officials and present themselves as possible successors of Bashir," researcher Jerome Tubiana said. According to experts, the force has also been involved in the conflict in neighbouring Libya.

When the military toppled Bashir in 2019, Daglo became the second most powerful man in the country, but accusations of RSF atrocities continued in the ensuing security crackdown. When security personnel attacked pro-democracy demonstrators camped out in the heart of the capital in June 2019, it was the RSF that witnesses said were at the forefront of the bloodshed, killing at least 128 people.



PORT SUDAN: Photo shows Sudanese army soldiers, loyal to army chief Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, posing for a picture at the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) base in the Red Sea city of Port Sudan. — AFP

His sights were set still higher, and experts warned he was a man with massive forces at his disposal and lofty political ambitions, whose actions should be closely watched. Since the coup, Daglo's power has only grown, as he sought to craft a more palatable image -- working on his heavily-accented Arabic, for instance -- while building key alliances.

Though experts have long drawn links between the RSF and Russian mercenary group Wagner, Daglo gained new access as second-in-command, landing in Moscow the day after its invasion of Ukraine. As the rift with Burhan grew, Daglo came to call the coup he had helped lead a "mistake" that had failed

to bring about change and invigorated remnants of Bashir's Islamist regime.

After battles erupted on Saturday -- with fighting still raging through densely-populated streets of Khartoum -- Daglo has portrayed himself and the RSF on social media and international TV as the saviours of Sudan.

In regular posts in both Arabic and English, the RSF claim to be safeguarding democracy against "the putschist forces" led by Burhan, who Daglo slammed as a "criminal" and "a radical Islamist". In turn, Burhan has called Daglo a "criminal" and the RSF a "rebel militia". — AFP

Another 104 freed in Yemen prisoner swap

RIYADH: More than 100 prisoners of war were flown from Saudi Arabia to Yemen on Monday, further buoying peace hopes a day after a major exchange of 869 captives ended, the ICRC said. Two International Committee of the Red Cross planes carrying 48 prisoners each flew to Sanaa, Yemen's rebel-held capital, while a third with eight captives headed for government-controlled Aden in the

south, the humanitarian group said.

The "unilateral" release is outside the terms of the three-day exchange that was negotiated between Yemen's Houthi rebels and government officials and finished on Sunday, ICRC media adviser Jessica Moussan told AFP. "We welcome this initiative and are pleased to see that humanitarian considerations are being taken for the sake of reuniting families," Moussan said. "This will bring immense relief to the families of the detainees," she added.

The ICRC is "facilitating" the transfer by providing air transport and logistical support, and by interviewing the captives, Moussan said. The release of 104 captives, days before the major Muslim festival of Eid Al-Fitr, takes the total number to 973 freed since Friday. — AFP

Shuwaikh and Shuaiba ports with weekly flights - in addition to transporting refrigerated containers. The Emirati ambassador to Kuwait, Dr Matar Al-Neyadi, said in a press statement that the launch of this new shipping service would contribute more to enhancing trade exchange and expanding economic cooperation.

Al-Neyadi pointed out that the launch of this new navigation service will provide the private sector with more options for transporting goods and commodities, reflecting the vision and aspirations of the wise leadership in both brotherly countries.

The Abu Dhabi Ports Group was established in 2006 and specializes in the management and operation of local ports and a number of international ports. It also has a maritime sector specialized in shipping and the management and operation of waterways in Abu Dhabi, in addition to the management of warehouses and industrial cities. — KUNA

actually fasting, that saves us from a fate we probably deserve, but which Allah doesn't want for us.

Muslims have a lot of faith in Allah's Mercy. We believe His Words that His Mercy is greater than His Wrath. We can see the thousands of simple good deeds that we can do to compensate for our sins. So, we place full confidence in His Promise of fasting being a shield from the Hellfire, and we wholeheartedly seek it out, year after year, to the extent that we, actually, look forward to this time of sacrifice and mourn its passing. — Courtesy of the TIES

Sudan death toll surpasses 100...

Continued from Page 1

The ministry further pointed out that it is communicating with the embassy to make sure of the safety of nationals and provide them with public guidelines to guarantee their security and safety in such difficult and unstable conditions.

Explosions rocked the Sudanese capital Khartoum Monday as fighting between the army and paramilitary forces led by rival generals raged for a third day with the death toll surpassing 100. The violence erupted Saturday after weeks of power struggles between the two generals who seized power in a 2021 coup, Sudan's army chief Abdel Fattah Al-Burhan and his deputy, Mohamed Hamdan Daglo, who commands the powerful paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF).

The intense conflict, which has seen air strikes, tanks on the streets, artillery fire and heavy gunfire in crowded neighborhoods both in Khartoum and other cities across Sudan, has triggered international demands for an immediate ceasefire. "The death toll among civilians... has reached 97," the doctors' union said, adding later that "dozens" of fighters had been killed. The figure does not include all casualties as many could not reach hospitals due to difficulties in movement amid the fighting.

The Central Committee of Sudan Doctors, a separate pro-democracy organization, had also reported dozens of deaths among security forces, and some 942 wounded. Amid wide appeals by medics for safe routes to move casualties, the two sides agreed to a UN proposal for a window on Sunday to evacuate the wounded, but the heavy gunfire did not stop. UN Special Representative Volker Perthes, who is in Khartoum, said he was "extremely disappointed" by the failure of both sides to abide by the humanitarian pause.

The World Health Organization warned that "several" of Khartoum's nine hospitals receiving injured civilians "have run out of blood, transfusion equipment, intravenous fluids and other vital supplies". The violence has forced terrified Sudanese civilians to shelter in their homes with fears of a prolonged conflict that could plunge the country into deeper chaos, dashing hopes for return to civilian rule.

The RSF was created under former autocratic pres-

ident Omar Al-Bashir in 2013, emerging from the Janjaweed militia that his government unleashed against non-Arab ethnic minorities in Darfur a decade earlier, drawing accusations of war crimes. The fighting broke out after bitter disagreements between Burhan and Daglo over the planned integration of the RSF into the regular army - a key condition for a final deal aimed at ending a crisis since the 2021 military coup they orchestrated together.

The two sides accuse the other of starting the fighting, and both claim the upper hand by declaring control of key sites, including the airport and the presidential palace - none of which could be independently verified. Three UN staff from the World Food Program are among those killed in fighting in the western region of Darfur, forcing a "temporary halt" to all operations in a country where one-third of the population needs aid. On Monday morning, loud gunfire and deafening explosions again shook buildings and echoed across the streets of Khartoum as street fighting continued, AFP journalists said.

Power has been off across swathes of Khartoum, and the few grocery stores remaining open warn they will only last a few days if no supplies can enter the city. Appeals to end the fighting have come from across the region and the globe, including the African Union, Arab League and East African bloc IGAD. UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres has warned an escalation in the fighting would "further aggravate the already precarious humanitarian situation". US Secretary of State Antony Blinken urged the warring rivals to agree an "immediate cessation of violence" and start talks.

'Unprecedented' violence

Despite the wide calls for a ceasefire, the two generals have appeared in no mood for talks with each one calling the other "criminal". Medics have repeatedly pleaded for safe corridors for ambulances and a ceasefire to treat the victims, because the streets remain too dangerous for transporting casualties to hospital. While Sudan has endured since independence decades of multiple bitter civil wars, coups and rebellions, Sudanese analyst Kholood Khair said the level of fighting inside the capital was "unprecedented". "This is the first time in Sudan's history - certainly in its independence history - that there has been this level of violence in the centre, in Khartoum," she said. — Agencies

Fasting is a shield...

Continued from Page 1

The statement of the Prophet (PBUH), that fasting is a shield, gives that final push. We know that this deed, even if it doesn't fully make-up for what we have committed of sins, will serve as a shield from the hellfire. It could be the act, because it is done sincerely for Allah and because no one but us & Allah can ever truly know whether we are

International

US warship sails through Taiwan Strait days after China war games

First such US operation through the waterway since January

TAIPEI: A US warship sailed through the waters separating Taiwan and mainland China, the US Navy said, days after Beijing staged war games around the self-ruled island. Led by the United States, multiple Western navies regularly conduct "freedom of navigation operations" to assert the international status of regional waterways such as the Taiwan Strait and the South China Sea.

The USS Milius guided-missile destroyer "conducted a routine Taiwan Strait transit April 16 (local time) through waters where high-seas freedoms of navigation and overflight apply in accordance with international law", the US Navy said in a statement. "The ship transited through a corridor in the Strait that is beyond the territorial sea of any coastal State."

This was the first such US operation through the waterway since January. The US 7th Fleet shared images Monday on Twitter of crew looking out into the strait, one of the most crucial waterways in the world for international shipping.

China said on Monday it had tracked a US warship through the Taiwan Strait, adding that the United States had "hyped up" the transit. Colonel Shi Yi, a Chinese military spokesman, said troops in the area "remain on a high level of alert at all times and will resolutely defend national sovereignty and security as well as regional peace and stability".

China claims Taiwan as its territory and has vowed to bring the island under its control one day. It also claims the entire Taiwan Strait as its territorial wa-

ters. Taiwan's defense ministry said on Monday that during the vessel's transit, its military had "closely monitored the dynamics in our surrounding sea and airspace, and the situation was normal."

China launched three days of military exercises around Taiwan on April 8, simulating targeted strikes and a blockade of the island. The drills were in response to Taiwanese President Tsai Ing-wen's recent visit to the United States, where she met with Speaker of the House Kevin McCarthy. Beijing bristles at any official contact between Taipei and foreign governments.

On the final day of last week's drills, Taiwan's defense ministry said 54 Chinese planes crossed into Taiwan's southwestern and southeastern air defense identification zone (ADIZ) -- the highest recorded in a single day since October 2021. That same day, the USS Milius sailed through waters claimed by Beijing in the South China Sea. That deployment triggered condemnation from China, which said the vessel had "illegally intruded" into its territorial waters.

Since the war games ended, Chinese warships and aircraft have continued to circle Taiwan. On Monday, Taipei's defense ministry said it had detected four warships and 18 aircraft, four of which had crossed its southwestern ADIZ.

The guided-missile destroyer USS Chung-Hoon sailed through the Taiwan Strait on January 5, months after McCarthy's predecessor Nancy Pelosi visited the island. Pelosi's trip sparked China's largest-ever war games around Taiwan. — AFP



Photo shows US Navy the Arleigh Burke-class guided-missile destroyer USS Milius (DDG 69) conducting routine operations in the South China Sea. The US Navy said its guided-missile destroyer the USS Milius had sailed through the Taiwan Strait in a "freedom of navigation" operation carried out days after China staged massive war games. — AFP

News in Brief

Killer cop pleads not guilty

NAIROBI: A Kenyan police officer accused of murdering two teenagers in 2017 pleaded not guilty to the charges on Monday, in a case that raised questions about extrajudicial killings after video footage of the shootings went viral. Dubbed the "killer cop" by media outlets, Ahmed Rashid was filmed shooting the two young men as they lay on the ground on a busy street in the capital Nairobi on March 31, 2017. The Independent Policing Oversight Authority (IPOA) watchdog recommended murder charges against him last November, saying that its investigation into the deaths "established that the fatalities were occasioned by police action." But Rashid contested the charges, telling the Nairobi high court that he was a law-abiding police officer who was carrying out his duty. He was arrested and immediately released on bail of 200,000 Kenyan shillings (\$1,500) on Monday, following an application by his lawyers. Kenyan police are often accused by rights groups of using excessive force and carrying out unlawful killings, especially in poor neighborhoods. Last October, President William Ruto disbanded a feared 20-year-old police unit accused of extrajudicial killings and vowed an overhaul of the security sector. — AFP

Putin praises Pacific drills

MOSCOW: Russian President Vladimir Putin on Monday praised the "very high level" of military drills in the Pacific as Moscow seeks closer ties with China amid a stand-off with the West. The surprise drills announced last week come as Chinese Defense Minister Li Shangfu is in Russia on a visit which will last until Wednesday. Putin received Chinese leader Xi Jinping last month in Moscow for a summit showing the nations' united front against the West. During a meeting with Putin and Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu on Sunday, Li hailed ties with Moscow, saying they "surpass the military-political alliances of the Cold War era". The exercises in the Pacific involved over 25,000 Russian military personnel, 167 warships and support vessels, including 12 submarines as well as 89 aircraft and helicopters, Shoigu said. "The first stage of this surprise inspection did indeed take place at a very high level," Putin said during a televised meeting with Shoigu. "Today we have clear priorities for the use of the armed forces and, above all, this concerns the Ukrainian direction and everything related to protecting our people in the Donbas" in eastern Ukraine, Putin said. — AFP

Prague Castle scraps checks

PRAGUE: Czech President Petr Pavel said Monday that Prague Castle, the presidential seat, would scrap security checks introduced in 2016 following a wave of terror attacks in western Europe. "We will begin to remove most metal detector arches and cancel security checks at noon (1000 GMT) today," Pavel told reporters. The measure will eliminate long queues forming at entrances to Prague Castle, which is a part of the UNESCO-listed historic centre of the Czech capital and a popular tourist attraction. "People coming to visit Prague Castle or to work there are not happy if they have to spend an hour in a queue," Pavel added. Pavel, who won a five-year presidential term in a direct vote in January, said he also wanted to open the castle for different social and cultural events. Czech police head Martin Vondrasek said the checks had been introduced in the wake of terror attacks in Paris in 2015 and Brussels in 2016. "At that time, Prague Castle was identified as a major potential soft target" for terrorists, he added. — AFP

Myanmar junta free 3,000 prisoners in New Year amnesty

YANGON: Myanmar's junta on Monday began releasing more than 3,000 prisoners to mark the Buddhist New Year, without specifying whether those jailed in its bloody crackdown on dissent would be freed. The military has arrested thousands since its coup more than two years ago, which plunged the country into turmoil and sparked widespread clashes with anti-coup fighters.

Junta chief Min Aung Hlaing "pardoned 3,015 prisoners... to mark Myanmar New Year, for the peaceful mind of the people and on humanitarian grounds", the junta's information team said in a statement. Those who re-offend would have to serve the remainder of their sentence with an additional penalty, the statement said.

It did not say whether anti-junta protesters or journalists jailed covering the coup and its aftermath would be among those freed. A further 98 foreigners serving sentences in Myanmar would also be pardoned and freed, according to a separate junta statement that did not provide details.

Around 100 people gathered outside Insein prison in commercial hub Yangon after the announcement, hoping their friends and loved ones would be included in the amnesty. Win Win Htay said her younger brother had been jailed for four months after police stopped him at a checkpoint and found a small knife



YANGON: Relatives wait for the release of prisoners outside the Insein prison in Yangon. — AFP

on his keychain. "I hope he will be released today," she told AFP as she waited outside the prison. Two yellow buses later pulled out from the prison compound, with some in the waiting crowd waving and calling to those inside. Shortly after its coup, the junta released around 23,000 prisoners, with some rights groups at the time fearing the move was to free up space for opponents of the military as well as to cause chaos in communities.

The country typically grants an amnesty to thousands of prisoners to mark its traditional Buddhist New Year holiday — which in previous years was a joyous affair. But this year, streets in many major cities

were silent in boycott after a military air strike on a village in a resistance hotspot that media and locals said killed more than 170 people.

More than 21,000 people have been arrested since the military ousted Aung San Suu Kyi's government in February 2021, according to a local monitoring group. Suu Kyi has been detained since the early hours of the coup. In December, the junta wrapped up a series of closed-court trials of the 77-year-old Nobel Peace laureate, jailing her for a total of 33 years in a process rights groups have condemned as a sham. At least 170 journalists have been arrested since the putsch, according to the United Nations. — AFP

Heat kills 11 at India awards event

NEW DELHI: Eleven people died of heatstroke in India after an estimated one million spectators waited for hours in the sun at a government-sponsored awards ceremony, officials said on Monday. Around 20 people were hospitalized and 300 felt ill at the event near the western city of Mumbai on Sunday, when temperatures hit close to 38 degrees Celsius (100 Fahrenheit) with high levels of humidity, local media reported.

Senior government officials attended the ceremony, including Interior Minister Amit Shah, who praised the crowd for waiting so long in the sun. The office of Maharashtra state Chief

Minister Eknath Shinde described it as a "sad and disturbing incident" and promised compensation for the victims' relatives.

India's ruling Bharatiya Janata Party said around a million people attended the event, the Indian Express newspaper reported. The opposition Congress party accused the government of negligence and said it should face criminal charges.

Heatwaves have killed more than 6,500 people in India since 2010, and last year saw record temperatures in several cities across the country. The hot spells are becoming harsher and more frequent across South Asia, spurred by climate change, according to scientists.

Authorities in the eastern state of West Bengal announced a week-long shutdown of all schools, colleges and universities from Monday due to the heat, local media reported. Last year,



MUMBAI: In this photograph taken on April 16, 2023, people gather to attend an award ceremony on the outskirts of Mumbai. Heatstroke killed 11 people in India after an estimated million spectators waited for hours in the sun. — AFP

India suffered coal shortages, the main source of electricity in the nation of 1.4 billion people, as electricity demand peaked in the heat.

Many parts of India rely on trains

to supply water during the summer. Scientists also believe the annual monsoon rainy season is becoming more erratic and powerful, causing greater flooding. — AFP

Top honor for Merkel

BERLIN: Former chancellor Angela Merkel will receive Germany's highest honor on Monday despite facing continued criticism of her legacy since leaving office, especially over her policy towards Moscow. Merkel, who led Europe's biggest economy from 2005 to 2021, is due to receive the special class Grand Cross from President Frank-Walter Steinmeier on Monday evening.

The award has been handed out only twice before, to former chancellors Konrad Adenauer and Helmut Kohl. Though hugely popular through most of her time in power, Merkel, 68, has seen her star fade since she retired in December 2021.

The long-time leader has in particular faced criticism of her policy towards Russian President Vladimir Putin and for leaving Germany dependent on Russian energy -- a weakness laid bare by the war in Ukraine.

"At the end of her time in office, our country was not in good shape," Bijan Djir-Sarai of the pro-business FDP party told the RND broadcaster. Merkel has also been criticized for her decisions in 2011 to exit nuclear power and in 2015 to welcome hundreds

of thousands of refugees from Syria and Iraq.

The former chancellor had "great merits, particularly at an international level", Carsten Linnemann, vice-president of Merkel's own conservative CDU party, told the NTV news channel. But she "also made mistakes, some of them glaring", he said.

The nuclear exit, agreed after the Fukushima disaster, was "a mistake" because it was decided "without establishing how we were going to supply ourselves with energy in a reasonably self-sufficient way", Linnemann said. Some "glaring mistakes" had also been made with regard to the decision to leave Germany's borders open in 2015, he said.

But Merkel, who has been writing her memoirs since she retired, has also continued to win praise, even from her Social Democrat (SPD) and Greens rivals. "I particularly appreciated her diplomatic skill and empathetic wisdom, thanks to which she always succeeded in forging viable coalitions and compromises on the national and international stage," SPD co-leader Saskia Esken told RND.

Greens leader Omid Nouripour said Merkel had "shaped our country with her chancellorship like few others". "You do not have to agree with everything she did to recognize her great merits," he said. Some commentators have questioned the logic of Merkel receiving the award from Steinmeier, who was foreign minister in her government. — AFP

Bangladeshis pray for rain as temperatures soar

DHAKA: Hundreds of Bangladeshi Muslims gathered on an open field in Dhaka on Monday to pray for rain after the metropolis of 20 million people recorded its hottest day in almost 60 years. Police said more than 500 worshippers congregated on the Aftabnagar playing ground, where popular TV cleric Shaikh Ahmadullah led the prayers.

"They held the prayers for rains. They also held prayers for easing the temperature and protection from the heatwave," local police chief Abul Kalam Azad told AFP. The poor, low-lying South Asian nation of 170 million people is at the forefront of climate change with frequent deadly floods and ever-more-erratic rains.

The rains that usually fall in April and May have failed to materialize this year and the country has been gripped by unusually hot weather since April 4, Afroza Sultana from the Meteorology Department told AFP. On Sunday temperatures in Dhaka soared to 40.6 degrees Celsius (105.1 Fahrenheit), the highest since April 30, 1965, when the temperature hit 42 degrees Celsius, she said. Sultana said temperatures would gradually decline in the coming days and rains were expected later in April, just before the country celebrates its largest festival, Eid Al-Fitr. — AFP

Business

TUESDAY, APRIL 18, 2023

NBK reports KD 134.2 million in net profit for the first 3 months of 2023



Hamad Al-Bahar

- NBK delivered strong performance in 1Q2023, building on the momentum of its exceptional performance in 2022
- In 2023, we will continue to invest strategically in our people and digital technologies to drive future growth
- Our steadfast commitment to sustainability not only strengthens our prospects for long-term growth, but also solidifies NBK's position as a regional leader in the industry



Isam J Al-Sager

- We saw a robust start in 2023, marked by exceptional operational performance across our business sectors
- We are currently realizing the advantages of our diversified business model and investments in technology
- Our proven track record of delivering long-term results, combined with our robust balance sheet, positions us well to continue our evolution into the bank of the future

KUWAIT: National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) has announced its financial results for the three-month period ended 31 March 2023. The Bank reported a net profit of KD 134.2 million (\$437.8 million), compared to KD 116.6 million (\$380.3 million) for the corresponding period in 2022, improving by 15.1 percent year-on-year.

Total assets as of the end of March 2023 grew by 8.2 percent year-on-year to reach KD 36.5 billion (\$118.9 billion), whereas total loans and advances increased by 5.7 percent year-on-year to KD 21.2 billion (\$69.1 billion), while shareholders' equity reached KD 3.5 billion (\$11.5 billion), growing by 3.5 percent year-on-year.

Commenting on the bank's 1Q 2023 financial results, Hamad Al-Bahar, NBK Group Chairman, said: "NBK delivered a strong performance in the first quarter of 2023, building on the momentum of our exceptional performance in 2022. This performance is despite the challenging global economic environment, including geopolitical tensions, persistent inflation and the banking crisis in Europe and the United States".

Al-Bahar highlighted that NBK's balance sheet is robust, with a solid and stable capital base, supporting the Bank's ability to meet the expanding customer needs while maximizing shareholder returns. He added that in 2023, NBK would continue to invest strategically in its people, and its digital capabilities to ensure the bank's future success.

Al-Bahar also emphasized NBK's unwavering dedication to sustainability, which enhances prospects for long-term growth and reinforces the Bank's position as a leader

in the region. He noted that NBK is actively implementing various initiatives that promote responsible business practices and contribute to the sustainable development of Kuwait's economy. One of the Bank's recent endeavors in this regard was joining the United Nations Global Compact, the world's largest corporate initiative advancing sustainable and socially responsible business practices.

Meanwhile, Isam J Al-Sager, NBK Group Vice Chairman and CEO, said: "We saw a robust start into 2023 marked by substantial increases in both revenue and profit, sustained exceptional operational performance across our business, and ongoing advantages derived from our diverse business model and strategic investments in talents and technologies."

Despite the political volatility in Kuwait, Al-Sager pointed out that the operating environment remained stable during the first quarter of 2023. He emphasized the impressive performance of NBK's core business activities during the current quarter, as well as significant advancements in strategic segments such as wealth management, underlining that the bank's success is built upon a foundation of prudent risk management and a steadfast commitment to maintaining high credit quality. Al-Sager also reaffirmed that these strengths will be leveraged to drive value and growth throughout 2023, as NBK remains dedicated to creating added value for its shareholders.

"During the first quarter of the year, the drivers of operational activities continued to demonstrate positive progress, and higher interest rates played a significant role in the robust growth of

net interest income," Al-Sager confirmed.

"The group's net operating revenues rose by 18.4 percent year-on-year, reaching KD 277.9 million (\$906.4 million), driven by overall revenue improvement stemming from the diversified revenue stream across various business sectors," Al-Sager added.

"In 2023, our focus remains on investing in the future, with a strategic emphasis on enhancing our digital capabilities to provide unparalleled experience to our clients. This includes the development of innovative products and solutions aimed at making banking easier and more convenient for consumers, in order to meet their evolving demands," Al-Sager noted.

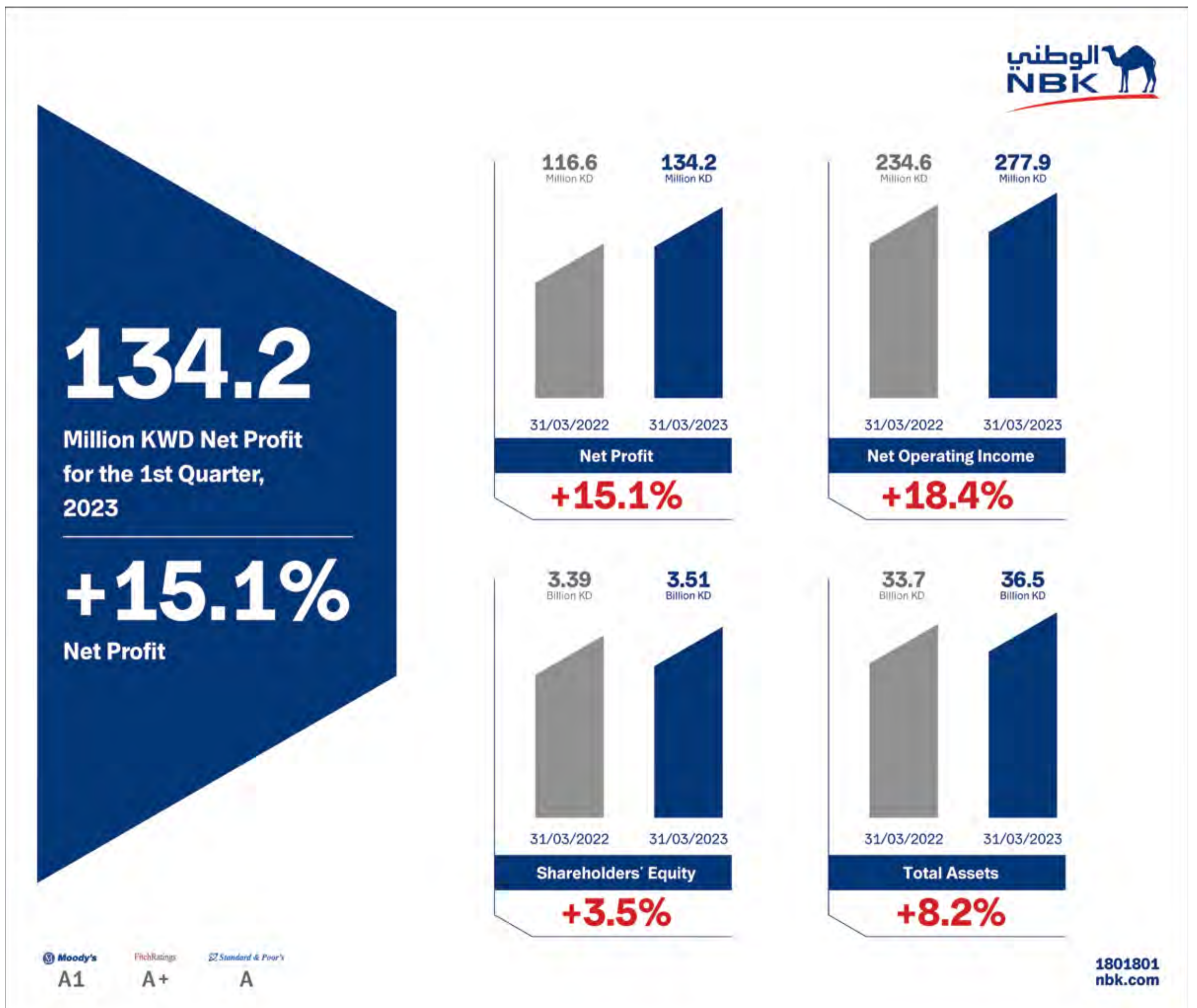
"Our consistent track record of delivering long-term results speaks for itself, and we remain committed to enhancing operational efficiency and maintaining prudent capital management practices. This strategic focus ensures that we are well-prepared to navigate any potential scenarios in the global economy," Al-Sager confirmed. "Leveraging our robust balance sheet, we are well-positioned to continue to evolve into the bank of the future, delivering value to our customers, communities, and shareholders. With the support of our solid financial position, strong capitalization rates, and ample liquidity levels, we are positioned for sustained earnings growth," Al-Sager explained.

"We, at NBK, take pride in our meaningful contributions to our communities and the significant progress we have made in advancing sustainability across our operations and corporate culture through various initiatives.



This includes our commitment to achieve carbon neutrality by 2060 and reduce operational emissions by 25 percent by 2025, as we continue to strengthen the pillars of sustainability across our organization," Al-Sager confirmed.

Al-Sager pointed out that NBK has recently received a score of 'C' from CDP, a global non-profit that runs the world's leading environmental disclosure platform, for its Climate Change and Forests 2022 Categories. "As pioneers in our industry, we recognize the importance of setting an example of responsible leadership that drives long-term growth. We believe that our commitment to sustainability and responsible business practices is crucial in contributing to a better future, and we strive to lead by example in our pursuit of sustainable growth," Al-Sager concluded.



Business

Ooredoo Kuwait reports 2% increase in revenue to KD 155m for Q1 2023

Earnings per share reached 106 fils

KUWAIT: National Mobile Telecommunications Company KSCP "Ooredoo" announced on Monday its financial results for the quarter ended March 31, 2023:

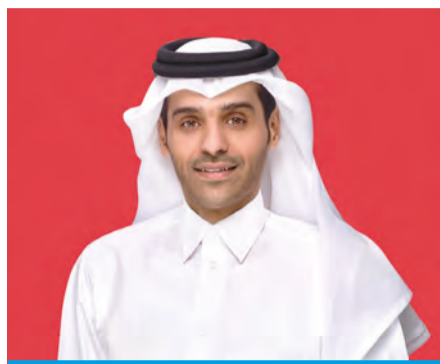
- Consolidated revenue increased by 2 percent to KD 155 million in Q1 2023, compared to KD 153 million in Q1 2022. Revenues were positively impacted because of efficient operations in Kuwait and a year-on-year improvement in Maldives and Algeria

- Consolidated customer base increased by 2 percent to 25 million in Q1 2023 compared to 24 million in Q1 2022
- EBITDA stood at KD 55 million in Q1 2023

- Net profit attributable to NMTC increased to KD 53 million in Q1 2023 from KD 8 million in Q1 2022. Net profit growth came mainly from Ooredoo Kuwait after winning a final court ruling related to recovery of excess regulatory tariff paid amounted to KD 43.8 million in a case against Kuwait's Ministry of Communication "MOC" and Communications and Information Technology Regulatory Authority "CITRA"

- The consolidated earnings per share were 106 fils for Q1 2023, compared to 17 fils earned in Q1 2022

Sheikh Mohammad Bin Abdullah Al-Thani, chairman of the Board of Directors commented: "I am delighted to announce that NMTC has continued its upward trajectory in Q1 2023, with



Sheikh Mohammad Bin Abdullah Al-Thani

consolidated revenue increasing by 2 percent to KD 155 million compared to KD 153 million in Q1 2022. This achievement was made possible by our efficient operations in Kuwait, as well as a year-on-year improvement in Maldives and Algeria. Our consolidated customer base also grew by 2 percent to 25 million in Q1 2023 compared to 24 million in Q1 2022, which reflects our ongoing commitment to delivering high-quality services to our valued customers.

I am pleased to report that our net profit attributable to NMTC grew to KD 53 million in Q1 2023 from KD 8 million in Q1 2022. This growth was due to a final court ruling in favor of Ooredoo Kuwait against the Kuwaiti regulator. This resulted in the recovery of excess regulatory



tariffs previously paid. Furthermore, our earnings per share for Q1 2023 increased significantly to 106 fils, up from 17 fils in Q1 2022. The increase is attributable to the aforementioned final court ruling.

Reviewing our operations, we are thrilled to report that Ooredoo Kuwait's customer base increased by 8 percent to 2.8 million in Q1 2023, while revenue increased by 3 percent to KD 60 million in the same period. In Q1 2023, Ooredoo Tunisia saw a 2 percent increase in its customer base, but experienced a decline in revenue compared to the same period in 2022. Meanwhile, Ooredoo Algeria's revenue grew by 6 percent, with an accompanying increase in its customer base. Palestine and Maldives also recorded increases in their customer bases. Ooredoo Maldives reported a 7 percent growth in revenue in Q1 2023.

Our commitment persists in enhancing operational efficiency to foster growth across the company while providing exceptional services that maximize shareholder value."

Review of operations
The Group's operational perfor-

Financial Highlights	Quarterly Analysis		
	Q1 2023	Q1 2022	% Change
Consolidated Revenue (KWD m)	155.3	152.9	2%
EBITDA (KWD m)	55.4	55.8	-1%
EBITDA margin (%)	36%	37%	-
Net Profit attributable to NMTC (KWD m)	53.0	8.4	529%
Consolidated Customers (m)	24.7	24.2	2%

mance can be summarized as follows:

Ooredoo – Kuwait

Ooredoo's customer base in Kuwait increased to 2.8 million in Q1 2023, up by 8 percent compared to Q1 2022. Ooredoo Kuwait reported 3 percent increase in revenue to KD 59.6 million in Q1 2023 compared to KD 57.6 million in Q1 2022. EBITDA increased 17 percent to KD 19.2 million in Q1 2023 compared to KD 16.5 million in Q1 2022, driven by operational efficiencies across the business.

Ooredoo - Tunisia

Ooredoo's customer base in Tunisia increased by 2 percent to 7.1 million customers in Q1 2023. Revenues decreased to KD 28.9 million in Q1 2023 compared to KD 31.6 million in Q1 2022. EBITDA decreased to KD 8.4 million in Q1 2023 compared to KD 13.6 million in Q1 2022.

Ooredoo – Algeria

Ooredoo Algeria's customer base

stood at 13.0 million in Q1 2023. Revenue increased by 6 percent to KD 48.1 million in Q1 2023 compared to KD 45.4 million in Q1 2022. EBITDA increased by 9 percent to reach KD 18.8 million in Q1 2023 compared to KD 17.3 million in Q1 2022.

Ooredoo – Palestine

Customer base in Palestine increased by 2 percent to 1.4 million customers in Q1 2023. Revenue decreased to KD 8.5 million in Q1 2023, compared to KD 8.7 million in Q1 2022. EBITDA increased by 3 percent to KD 3.4 million in Q1 2023 compared to KD 3.3 million in Q1 2022.

Ooredoo - Maldives

Customer base in Maldives increased by 2 percent to reach 402,000 customers in Q1 2023. Ooredoo Maldives reported a 7 percent increase in revenues to KD 10.2 million in Q1 2023, compared to KD 9.6 million in Q1 2022. EBITDA improved by 7 percent to reach KD 5.6 million in Q1 2023 compared to KD 5.2 million in Q1 2022.



RIYADH: Saudi Arabia's annual inflation eased in March, marking the lowest rate of price growth since July 2022.

Saudi inflation trends lower

RIYADH: Saudi Arabia's annual inflation eased in March, marking the lowest rate of price growth since July 2022. The kingdom's consumer price index slowed to 2.7 per cent last month compared to 2 per cent for the same month last year, according to Saudi Arabia's General Authority for Statistics (Gastat).

Rents were the main driver of inflation, with housing costs increasing 8.7 per cent in March, driven by higher apartment rents, which soared 22 per cent. Rents account for 21 per cent of the Saudi consumer basket. Restaurant and hotels prices surged by 6.3 per cent as catering costs increased by an equal amount, while transport prices increased by 1.8 per cent.

Education prices also increased 3.1 per cent in March, mainly resulting from the increase in pre-primary and primary education fees by 4.6 per cent, the latest data shows. Personal goods and services prices, on the other hand, decreased by 0.4 per cent, due to the decrease in domestic workers' recruitment fees. Clothing and footwear prices also declined by 2.2 per cent as garment prices fell during the month. The Arab world's largest economy continues to recover from the coronavirus pandemic-induced slowdown on the back of higher oil prices and diversification efforts by the government.

Last week, the kingdom launched four special economic zones that will offer companies financial and non-financial incentives as the country seems to attract more foreign investment and position itself as a global business centre. The new zones will focus on the key growth sectors of advanced manufacturing, cloud computing, medical technology and maritime.

Saudi Arabia was the fastest growing economy among the world's 20 biggest economies in 2022, according to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). Meanwhile, compared with February of this year, the consumer price index in March increased by 0.1 per cent.

Food and beverage prices during the month fell 0.4 per cent, while furnishings, household equipment and maintenance prices declined 0.5 per cent, the latest data shows. Housing, water, electricity, gas and other fuels prices, on the other hand, rose by 0.4 per cent compared to the previous month as a result of the increase in rents for housing by 0.4 per cent.

Transport prices increased by 0.2 per cent, mainly due to the increase in transport services prices by 3.6 per cent, while personal goods and services prices increased by 0.3 per cent, and restaurants and hotels prices rose by 0.1 per cent during the month, according to the data. Business activity in Saudi Arabia's non-oil private sector economy remained robust in March with the latest purchasing managers' index remaining in expansionary territory as output and new business accelerated, further supporting employment growth in the kingdom. — Agencies

ifying, and rising temperatures are reducing its absorption capacity. The UCLA team wants to increase that capacity by using an electrochemical process to remove vast quantities of CO2 already in seawater — rather like wringing out a sponge to help recover its absorptive power.

"If you can take out the carbon dioxide that is in the oceans, you're essentially renewing their capacity to take additional carbon dioxide from the atmosphere," Sant told AFP.

Trapped

Engineers built a floating mini-factory on a 100-foot (30-meter) long boat which pumps in seawater and subjects it to an electrical charge. Chemical reactions triggered by electrolysis convert CO2 dissolved in the seawater into a fine white powder containing calcium carbonate — the compound found in chalk, limestone and oyster or mussel shells.

This powder can be discarded back into the ocean, where it remains in solid form, thereby storing CO2 "very durably... over tens of thousands of years," explained Sant.

Meanwhile, the pumped water returns to the sea, ready to absorb more carbon dioxide from the atmosphere. Sant and his team are confident the process will not damage the marine environment, although this will require further testing to confirm. — AFP

New CO2 tech taps oceans to tackle global warming

SAN PEDRO, US: Floating in the port of Los Angeles, a strange-looking barge covered with pipes and tanks contains a concept that scientists hope to make waves: a new way to use the ocean as a vast carbon dioxide sponge to tackle global warming.

Scientists from University of California Los Angeles (UCLA) have been working for two years on SeaChange — an ambitious project that could one day boost the amount of CO2, a major greenhouse gas, that can be absorbed by our seas. Their goal is "to use the ocean as a big sponge," according to Gaurav Sant, director of the university's Institute for Carbon Management (ICM).

The oceans, covering most of the Earth, are already the planet's main carbon sinks, acting as a critical buffer in the climate crisis. They absorb a quarter of all CO2 emissions, as well as 90 percent of the warming that has occurred in recent decades due to increasing greenhouse gases.

But they are feeling the strain. The ocean is acid-

Britain's Royal Mail boosted by union deal

LONDON: Shares in Royal Mail's parent group rallied Monday after the UK postal operator clinched a deal with union leaders to end a long-running dispute over pay, jobs and conditions. The share price of International Distributions Services (IDS) jumped about five percent to 243 pence in early afternoon London deals

as investors welcomed the news. Royal Mail and the Communication Workers' Union (CWU) said Saturday that they have reached a provisional agreement over strikes that had sparked huge losses at the postal firm.

Britain's private and public sectors have faced industrial action as workers protest at wages that have failed to keep pace with elevated inflation, which remains above 10 percent. The nation faced fresh walk-outs Monday by staff at energy regulator Ofgem, the Passport Office and driving test centers. "After almost a year of talks, Royal Mail and the CWU are pleased to announce they have reached a negotiators' agreement in principle," the Royal Mail and CWU said in a joint statement on Saturday. — AFP

OOREDOO KUWAIT

FINANCIAL RESULTS

For the first quarter of 2023

Net profit to NMTC
+529%

Business

Boursa Kuwait sheds light on its ESG commitments and achievements

Company publishes its second standalone Sustainability Report

KUWAIT: Boursa Kuwait published its second standalone Sustainability Report, demonstrating the company's ongoing commitment to reporting environmental, social and governance (ESG) principles and their adoption in its operations and the wider Kuwaiti capital market. In line with the objectives of its Corporate Sustainability (CS) strategy, the report highlights Boursa Kuwait's strategy, partnerships and initiatives in ESG reporting and implementation for the year 2022.

The Report includes ESG metrics and measurements for the activities, management and operations of Boursa Kuwait, with analysis of their economic, social and environmental impacts. It also highlights the company's achievements in the areas of ESG reporting and implementation as well as its efforts to achieve added value for shareholders, customers, partners and various other stakeholders, in line with the United Nations Sustainability Development Goals (SDGs), the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) as well as the "New Kuwait 2035" vision and the national development plan of the State of Kuwait.

Mohammad Saud Al-Osaimi, CEO of Boursa Kuwait, commented on the release, saying, "Boursa Kuwait has a mission to develop a strong and efficient financial market that fosters li-

quidity and transparency, empowering the Kuwaiti economy and enabling market participants to achieve sustainable growth. The company understands its role in the global movement towards sustainability and is committed to demonstrating that role in order to achieve a more sustainable future."

Corporate sustainability

Boursa Kuwait has been a champion of corporate sustainability since its establishment, making a formal commitment to sustainability when it joined the United Nations-led Sustainable Stock Exchanges Initiative as a partner and supporter in 2017. The company has also garnered numerous awards from prestigious organizations and publications in the field of sustainability and ESG for its efforts over the past two years.

Boursa Kuwait's corporate sustainability strategy stipulates ensuring initiatives apply and fall in line with the company's corporate social responsibility (CSR),



Mohammad Saud Al-Osaimi

industry best practice standards and investor expectations, creating strong and sustainable partnerships that ultimately achieve success and allow Boursa Kuwait to leverage the capabilities and strengths of other companies or organizations that have experience in different fields, and

Report outlines the company's vision for a more sustainable capital market that thrives on liquidity, efficiency and transparency



integrating sustainability efforts with the company culture, in order to achieve longevity and an ongoing impact that is carried on and instilled in the day-to-day operations of the stock exchange.

Boursa Kuwait has launched many initiatives in partnership with local and international organizations, focusing on support for nongovernmental organizations and charity programs, financial literacy and capital market awareness, the empowerment of women, and environmental protection.

Since its inception, Boursa Kuwait has implemented many steps in accordance with international practices and standards to enhance the position of the exchange locally, regionally and internationally as well as transform Kuwait into a regional and global investment destination, focusing on creating an attractive issuer base and broadening its investor base, increasing the depth and breadth of its products, as well as upgrading its infrastructure and business environment to international standards.

Danah Hamed Bahman wins KD 100,000 prize from Gulf Bank

KUWAIT: As part of its keenness to reward its customers, Gulf Bank has announced Danah Hamed Ismael Bahman as the lucky winner of the quarterly Al-Danah draw prize of KD 100,000 which took place last on April 13, 2023 under the supervision and presence of representatives from both the Ministry of Commerce and Industry and Ernst & Young.

The Al-Danah Millionaire account is one of the most rewarding and prestigious savings accounts in Kuwait, with periodic draws that have been creating millionaires since its launch in 1998. Gulf Bank is proud to add two new winners to the country's list of millionaires annually. For the seventeenth consecutive year, Al-Danah account has been offering monthly opportunities to win KD 1,000 to ten lucky winners, in addition to two quarterly draws with KD 100,000 prizes each, a semi-annual draw prize of KD 1,000,000 and a grand draw prize of KD 1,500,000.

Al-Danah Millionaire account customers stand to win the semi-annual draw prize of KD 1 million on July 13, 2023, and the opportunity to deposit and qualify for the grand prize of KD 1.5 million still applies until September 30, 2023.

Gulf Bank is the only bank in Kuwait that creates two millionaires annually, as it gives Al-Danah account customers the opportunity to win KD 1 million and KD 1.5 million prizes. The KD 1 million winner was announced last July, while the winner of the KD 1.5 million prize will be announced in the grand annual draw on January 18, 2024.

One of the many advantages of the Al-Danah account is being the only account in Kuwait that transfers the customers' chances of winning from the previous year to the next as part of a program that rewards customers for their loyalty to Gulf Bank. In order to increase one's chances of winning, customers must maintain a minimum of KD 200 in their accounts, or deposit continuously to increase their chances of winning. Al-Danah account holders are eligible to win Gulf Bank's monthly, quarterly, and annual Al-Danah draws. 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.

Al-Muzaini Exchange opens its 127th branch in Kuwait

KUWAIT: The number one money exchange company in Kuwait, Al-Muzaini Exchange Company recently opened its new branch in Sulaibikhat and Al-Doha Cooperative Society. The number of the company's branches within Kuwait has become 127, in addition to its self-service machines, Al-Muzaini online and the Al-Muzaini application. This expansion reflects the company's endeavor and commitment to providing the highest quality of financial services such as money transfers, foreign currency exchange and bill payments with ease, comfort and safety and at the best prices, seven days a week.

The General Manager of Al-Muzaini Exchange Company, Hugh Fernandes and the company's department managers, along with a number of the company's valued customers inaugurated the new branch on Thursday, April 6, 2023, and Fernandes stated: "We are keen to strengthen our leading position in the local market and to ensure that we provide the best financial services experience to our customers and meet all their money transfer needs."

The company always strives to make its financial services accessible to all. In addition to its strong network of branches, Al-Muzaini application provides safe and simplified financial solutions with



many features such as: Availability in all digital platforms, new customer registration, the ability to add a new beneficiary, the foreign currency delivery service wherein customers can order their desired currencies and have it delivered to their doorsteps within hours and various benefits from the Western Union service and Visa Direct service with simple steps to assist you with your transfers anywhere, anytime.

Al-Muzaini also has an ongoing mega promotion campaign 2023. Transfer money through Al-Muzaini for a chance to win a BMW X3 2023 and incredible prizes worth over \$130,000. Send money through Al-Muzaini's branches, self-service kiosks, online or the mobile app and use any of their services for a chance to win every day. Transferring through the app multiplies your chances of winning. The campaign lasts from March 23 to June 11, 2023.

Renters despair over cut-throat London market as prices soar

LONDON: With soaring rent prices and cut-throat competition, Cyndi Cheng, 34, thought she would never find a place to rent in London after moving from Hong Kong earlier this year. Her disillusionment is shared by many who have had to act fast and bid high to secure a home in a competitive rental market fuelled by high tenant demand and a dwindling supply. Stories abound of prospective tenants being asked to pay 12 months' rent up front to secure a property, offering more than the asking price and detailed background checks.

Cheng says she was regularly "ghosted" during her search. One landlord refused to let her view a property because she did not have a full-time employment reference, having just moved from Hong Kong on a UK special visa granted to residents after the imposition of China's security law.

"It's just hard for all these boxes and criteria to be

out there in a rental market like this," she told AFP. "The competition is keen and real."

Record high

Housing body Propertymark found that for every 10 new prospective tenants registering in its member branches in February, there was only one property available for rent. Matt Hutchinson, director of SpareRoom, a popular flat-sharing platform, said the hardest part for renters is "getting the attention of the landlord".

"Most people aren't even getting a viewing," he added. Cheng eventually secured a "tiny" property, relieved that the stress of endlessly checking her messages to see if she had been successful is over.

London rents have historically been higher than the rest of the UK but in the first quarter of this year they have sky-rocketed, a SpareRoom study said. Now, the average room rent in London is at a record high of £952 (nearly \$1,200) per month. As mortgage rates and other cost-of-living pressures jumped last year, landlords passed on costs to tenants or simply chose to sell, pushing up rents and squeezing already hard-pressed supply. This is the "hardest time we've ever seen for renters, and we've been running the site for 20 years now," says Hutchinson.

Soaring demand

Joey Mazars, 28, has been on the other end of the letting ad. Last November, he and his flatmate put out a call on SpareRoom to find a third flatmate. Within 48 hours of posting, they received around 120 messages. Unable to sift through all, Mazars had to eventually use random criteria to filter out applicants, from how their SpareRoom profiles looked to discounting those with "weird hobbies". "We had to find any reason eventually to not choose them," he said. Even then, Mazars added, the process took them hours. "I hope I don't have to do it again soon," he said. Just two years ago, the situation was "dramatically" different, he explained. Only last year, he had received a mere handful of responses to an ad.

Will Barber-Taylor, digital campaigns officer at Generation Rent, which advocates for renters' rights, says many are hesitant to even enter the market, and have "been forced to stay in housing conditions that don't suit them". This includes people staying in relationships that they want to leave and living in disrepair because they fear being unable to find a new place. "There is a general worsening of people's lives," he said.

The government has promised to bring forward this year a long-awaited Renters' Reform bill that

aims to improve conditions for renters. However, Hutchinson fears that the regulations will reduce the number of rental properties. Even though rent prices are high, Hutchinson says, landowners are reluctant to put properties on rent due to regulations and high interest rates. "The market doesn't work for anybody at the moment."

Paris Williams, 24, has been on the rental market for over a year now, and has faced practices that she considers discriminatory, including being asked to share her LinkedIn profile. Williams says that discrimination is rife right now because more landlords and prospective flatmates are "picking and choosing".

According to Barber-Taylor, Generation Rent has seen an uptick in discrimination against LGBTQ and ethnic minority renters in recent months. He has also heard cases of renters being asked for detailed bios and pictures. "This opens (the process) to discrimination. Because why would they need pictures?" After several negative experiences, Williams began asking herself, "Is it because I'm black?" Cheng also considers this, although she says she has not been directly confronted about her ethnicity. "It's difficult for everyone, and for people of color... some of the treatment did make me question: what's wrong, is it my culture?" — AFP

News in Brief

IMF, Egypt hold talks

WASHINGTON: The International Monetary Fund's discussions with Egypt will continue virtually towards starting its first review mission, according to an IMF statement. Discussion between the IMF and Egypt were "fruitful" in preparation for the review, the statement said Sunday. The IMF in December approved a \$3 billion Extended Fund Facility loan for Egypt. Disbursements under the 46-month program are subject to eight reviews, the first of which was dated March 15, 2023, in an IMF staff report published in December.

Iraq, Jordan plan economic city

AMMAN: The Iraqi-Jordanian Company for Industry announced an open international tender to build a joint economic city on the border between the two countries. The company added that the developer will finance, implement, manage, invest, promote and operate the planned economic city and maintain its facilities. You will never turn off your computer again. Yanal Nawaf Al-Barmawy, chairman of the Board of Directors of the Company, explained that the project would be built on an area of 22 million square meters allocated from the border lands of Jordan and Iraq, with the aim to enhance bilateral economic cooperation, and contribute to Arab economic integration in a number of fields. In a statement to Oman News Agency, Barmawy noted that the project seeks to bring about the required development in the eastern regions of Iraq and the western regions of Jordan.

Loan guarantee deal for SMEs

AMMAN: Director General of Jordan Loan Guarantee Corporation (JLGC), Mohammad Jaafari, and Chairman of Al-Namothajiah for Islamic Microfinance Company, Adel Asaad, on Sunday signed a guarantee agreement for financing micro and small businesses. The agreement aims to provide guarantees for financing the company's clients, primarily small and micro projects, home-based micro businesses, professionals, craftsmen and self-employed individuals on soft deadlines and costs, according to a joint statement. This process aims to help beneficiaries continue their business and cover their operational and capital expenses, especially with the economic challenges following the COVID-19 crisis, the statement added.

Lifestyle

Boubyan Bank records KD 20.6m in net profits for first quarter of 2023

Nomo Bank takes regional expansion steps towards further global reach

KUWAIT: Boubyan Bank has announced KD 27.6 million in operating profits for the first quarter of this year, thus recording KD 20.6 million in net profits at a growth rate of 22 percent compared with last year, while the earnings per share amount to 4.4 fils.

Boubyan Bank's Vice-Chairman & Group Chief Executive Officer Adel Al-Majed stated: "Thanks to Almighty Allah, our Q1 profits are good, which is a good start to this year as we hope it would be a good year for everyone. Of course, we had to allocate additional precautionary provisions to support the bank's financial position, and to bolster our ability to face any future repercussions of the regional and international developments."

Al-Majed highlighted the most significant numbers recorded by the bank during Q1, where the bank's assets grew to KD 8 billion at a growth rate of 8 percent compared with last year, while the bank's financing portfolio grew by 5 percent to reach KD 6 billion, and operating income grew by 6 percent to KD 52.6 million, whereas the bank's market share of local financing increased to 11.4 percent.

The bank's new brand identity

Al-Majed stated: "This year witnessed the launch of the bank's new brand identity titled "Imagine the possibilities". The launch is aligned with the bank's success and achievements over the past years as well as its ambitions for the future."

"The rebranding process aimed to keep up with our growth, while expressing the bank's ambition and passion to build a strong relationship with customers, and to refresh our messages to various segments of customers and stakeholders and, thus, we updated our logo, our mission, vision, and Boubyan core values," he added.

This year, Boubyan Bank continued topping the pyramid of customer service in Kuwait, evidenced by earning two awards from Service Hero, the international consumer-driven customer satisfaction index. The bank was named the Best Islamic Bank in Customer Service for the 13th year in a row since 2010, in addition to receiving the First Place Award in Customer Service as a Country Winner across all economic sectors in Kuwait.

Al-Majed stated: "We take pride in this achievement which highlights our commitment in Boubyan Bank to the highest levels of customer satisfaction. We are keen on continuous engagement with our customers to guarantee that we offer them quality banking services and products that meet their expectations and needs, thus raising the bar for offering outstanding service levels that exceed customers' expectations."

He went on to add: "Receiving this award for the 13th year in a row reiterates our customers' trust in our bank and their satisfaction with our level of service, which has not been compromised despite the ongoing increase in our customer base, which always represents a fresh challenge to our employees to maintain the same levels of service."

"Our digital transformation strategy and leadership in offering leading digital services and solutions enhanced customers' satisfaction with our services, contributed to their successful banking experience, and proved the necessity of investment in digital services and expansion of the same. Boubyan is always engaged with customers through studies, surveys, and data analysis to ensure reaching the highest levels of satisfaction, and implementation of the same as per international standards," Al-Majed highlighted.

Nomo - A distinctive mark in Islamic digital banking sector and a GCC expansion

During the past period, Nomo Bank, the Digital Bank of the Bank of London and the Middle East "BLME", a subsidiary of Boubyan Bank Group, launched unique products and services that put it on par with top financial institutions. This aligns with its strategy that focuses on enhancing and improving its core digital business in order to ensure offering the best banking experience to individual customers through the best digital solutions so as to provide easier, more convenient, and secure digital payment solutions.

Moreover, in line with its expansion strategy in

Adel Al-Majed :

- This year witnessed the launch of the bank's new brand identity in a step to keep up with our current growth
- Maintaining our leadership in customer service confirms our kept promises to customers to offer them the best services

the GCC and the Arab regions, the bank has recently launched the first phase of this expansion by announcing a strategic partnership with ADCB and its digital Islamic arm, Al-Hilal Digital Bank, to offer the services of Nomo Bank in the UAE. This is a significant milestone in the bank's growth journey and its expansion, which is well-aligned with the strategy set right from the establishment of the bank around two years ago.

This year, the bank launched its property finance product, which is an excellent investment opportunity for Middle East customers to help them realize their dream of owning properties in the United Kingdom, whether for investment, lease, or as a private residence, and since this is one of the most attractive and important real estate markets worldwide. This comes as a major step towards employing the digital bank's services in providing easier, more convenient, and secure property finance solutions.

Highlights:

In 2023, Boubyan launched its new logo and brand identity, which aim to:

- Align and integrate our cultures seamlessly.
- Inspire, retain, and attract talent.
- Build strong bonds with customers.
- Enhance our competitiveness.

Additionally, Nomo launched its new multi-currency account, which allows customers to perform their banking transactions in six different currencies while linking them all to one card, thus offering a comprehensive banking solution that allows customers to use it instead of carrying several banking cards or cash at hand by offering them a world-class banking experience backed by state-of-the-art and innovative technology.

Customers can now benefit from making digital payments using six different currencies, enabling them to make payments in local currencies in more than 25 countries spanned across Europe and the Middle East, thus helping them save various FX fees and commissions. This can be done by opening a multi-currency account within seconds using Nomo App, and immediately benefiting from its remittance and fund-transfer services, coupled with the possibility of linking the account with Nomo card and Apple Pay.

Digital collaborations and expansion in customer service

Despite the fierce competition in the market for banking services, particularly digital services, Boubyan managed to achieve a new milestone by offering a set of exceptional digital and conventional services: the bank announced the launch of Boubyan Visa-Oasis Digital Prepaid Card in collaboration with Kuwait Airways, making it the first digital prepaid card of its kind in Kuwait. Through this card, the bank offers innovative solutions to its customers who have a passion for travel, allowing them to collect air miles on their spending inside and outside Kuwait.

The bank further announced collaboration with Alhisba App through which the bank offers excellent services to its customers using the best

modern tech-solutions to facilitate their access to information and data related to the Kuwait real estate market.

Additionally, Boubyan inked a strategic partnership agreement with Baims App, a Kuwaiti remote-education startup, to ensure PRIME university and high school students have access to a set of great offers on training courses and tuition, while providing them with integrated educational services tailored to their specific curricula, in addition to giving them the opportunity to communicate with approved and vastly experienced instructors, thus offering new solutions that meet students' needs.

This year Boubyan opened its 46th branch in Kuwait in Al-Daiyeh, thus offering a comprehensive banking network, which is able to reach to various segments of its customers in application of the financial inclusion principle, which is the most important pillar in the bank's strategy, and is of paramount importance to the bank.

Digitalization of corporate services to offer unique solutions

Moreover, Boubyan Bank continued attracting more companies across various sectors in the local market through offering a group of outstanding banking services and solutions that meet all the needs of corporate customers. The Corporate Banking Group is also keen on developing and improving advanced digital products and services that support and expand the scope of offered services.

During this year, Boubyan Bank announced the launch of a new service offered for the first time in the local market for instant collection of commercial receivables of suppliers and extension of payment terms for them, allowing customers to better manage their liquidity by improving financial statements of companies, through offering preferential financing rates through integrated solutions of a smart supply chain financing platform.

The fastest growing brand in Kuwait

Brand Finance, the international brand-valuation consultancy, ranked Boubyan as the fastest growing brand in Kuwait at a growth rate of 33 percent in terms of valuation in 2023.

Boubyan aspires that BLME becomes the Islamic bank of choice for GCC customers in the United Kingdom as we have incorporated a set of main principles for the bank as a part of its transformation strategy following the acquisition, including having a sustainable customer-focused brand aligned with Boubyan Bank's Group.

National cadres: A main pillar

Boubyan continued supporting its human resources and recruiting national cadres, and was able to reach the highest percentage of manpower across the private sector which now exceeds 80 percent, and continued its enablement approach for women who now account for 26 percent of the bank's employees, with many of them occupying leadership positions.

Additionally, it continued investing in its human cadres to improve their competence and sharpen their skills by offering them training programs and courses in cooperation with top companies specialized in human resources consulting and development. This came out of Boubyan Bank's keenness to adopt leading international standards to ensure that the bank is ready for future challenges by qualifying its leaders and providing them with the necessary tools to sufficiently compete in the market.

CSR and the holy month of Ramadan

Following its annual tradition, Boubyan Bank continued launching many initiatives and programs



Adel Al-Majed

that suit the nature of the Holy Month of Ramadan in an attempt to spread the knowledge of the Glorious Quran among Muslims in Kuwait, the region, and the world. To this end, Boubyan Bank launched "Kuwait's App for the Glorious Quran with the 10 Recitations" in collaboration with the Public Authority for Printing and Distribution of the Holy Quran, Sunnah, and Related Sciences, which adopt modern technologies that guarantee communicating the same to millions in the manner that ensures everyone benefits from the same.

Kuwait's App for the Glorious Quran with the 10 Recitations is the first official App of its kind in Kuwait and the world that serves the Glorious Quran, its sciences, translation of its meanings, interpretation, and protection of the Quranic text against distortion, and which aims to reinforce the habit of reciting the Quran.

Additionally, a partnership was announced with the Grand Mosque of Kuwait whereby most of the bank's events during the Holy Month were held at the mosque such as the "Recite with Boubyan Competition", "Niqsat Boubyan" initiative, and the Iftar campaign, in addition to service and hospitality for worshippers during the last ten days of Ramadan with the participation of a group of volunteers from Boubyan Bank's employees from various departments in order to support the efforts of the organizers of Qiyam Prayers "Night Prayers" at the Grand Mosque. "Steps Campaign" continued sending its encouraging messages to citizens and residents to help them exercise walking during the Holy Month of Ramadan in the presence of the bank's team of volunteers at Al-Asima Mall. The campaign's proceeds will be allocated for the continued eyesight-restoration surgeries in Africa led by the "Noor Boubyan Campaign".

Why is Boubyan the best?

Boubyan's choice by Service Hero relied on a group of criteria including a survey that extended over one year among consumers, who evaluated companies on a scale of 10 against their service-level expectations, their experience and satisfaction following the customer-service experience.

The evaluation relied on many elements such as staff's attitude, location of the bank, speed of service, confidence in the product, quality of service or product, value for money, the contact center, and the website of the bank. Service Hero's survey implements a strict protocol to confirm the identity of consumers who take part in the survey.

Kuwait's App for the Glorious Quran with the 10 Recitations has many innovative features that make it stand out from the rest of Apps: the most important of which is that it contains 10 different recitations, thus allowing users to listen to a complete collection of the best reciters of the Glorious Quran, while displaying the characteristics of the recitation, principles, different illustrations, and setting a bookmark for ease of reference in the 10 recitations, in addition to the possibility of selecting a specific word and listening to it in all available recitations.

In the first quarter of this year, Boubyan launched the "Boubyan Glow Up" health challenge for its customers in collaboration with Nutribox with prizes of KD 2,400 in value. This represented a pursuit of the bank's vision of adopting a healthy lifestyle and following healthy diets to avoid obesity and malnutrition diseases. In this challenge, the goal was for all participants to reach the optimal weight through a 6-week wellness program.

Al-Shall Weekly Report

Kuwait's real estate activity picks up in March

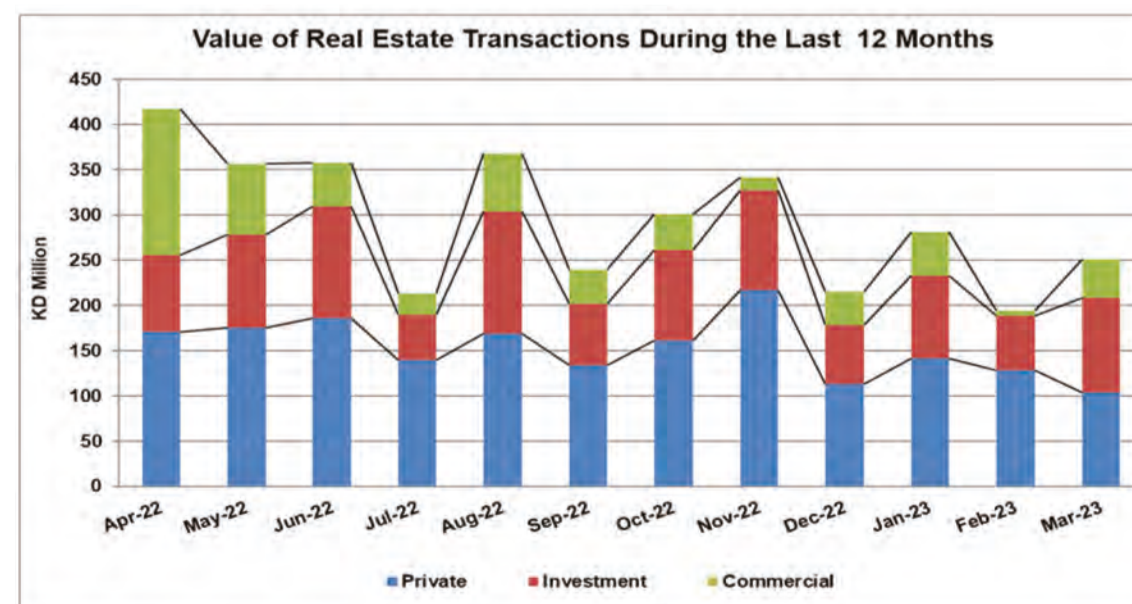
KUWAIT: The latest released data by the Ministry of Justice, Real Estate Registration & Authentications Department, indicates an increased real estate market activity during March 2023 versus February 2023 (after excluding the crafts activity and the coastal strip system). Total value of traded contracts and power of attorneys (POAs) was at KD 257.2 million in March, a 32.7 percent rise versus KD 193.9 million in February 2023 while declined by 30.8 percent versus KD 371.9 million in March 2022. Trading during March 2023 was distributed between KD 255.7 million in contracts and KD 1.4 million in POAs.

Number of real estate deals during March reached 351, of which 348 are contracts and 3 are POAs. The highest share in real estate deals went to Ahmadi governorate with 112 deals representing about 31.9 percent of the total number of real estate deals. Hawally governorate came second with 86 deals and representing 24.5 percent of total deals. The lowest share went to Jahra governorate with

10 deals, representing 2.8 percent of the total. The value of private housing activity reached KD 103.3 million, dropping by -19.2 percent compared with KD 127.9 million in February 2023. Its share of total real estate activity dropped to 40.2 percent versus 66 percent in February. The 12-monthly average of private housing activity stood at KD 153.3 million.

This means that March's trading value is 32.6 percent lower than the average. The number of deals for this activity dropped to 226 deals versus 258 deals in February. Accordingly, the value of private residential deals averaged KD 457,000 versus KD 496,000 in February, indicating a 7.8 percent decrease. The value of total investment activities scored KD 105.3 million, increasing by 73.9 percent when compared to KD 60.6 million in February 2023. Its contribution to overall real estate trading activity increased to 41 percent versus 31.2 percent in February. The trailing 12-month trading average of investment activity scored KD 91.5 4 million.

This means that the average trading value during March was 15.2 percent higher compared with the 12 months' average. In addition, the number of its deals rose to 121 compared with 93 deals in February. Therefore, the average value per deal for the investment activity reached KD 871,000 versus KD 651,000 in February, an increase by 33.7 percent. Commercial activity trading value increased to KD 42.4 million or by 685.5 percent, compared with KD 5.4 million in February 2023. Its share out of total real estate trading value increased to 16.5 percent compared with 2.8 percent in February.



The average value of commercial activity trading in the past 12 months scored KD 50 million. This means that trading value in March was 15.2 percent lower than the 12 months' average. Its deals totaled three compared to eight deals for February. The average value per deal for March reached KD 14.1 million versus a KD 675,000 average for February. Moreover, the warehousing activity had a single deal in March with a total value of KD 6.1

million. When comparing total March 2023 trading with March 2022, we note that liquidity in the real estate market decreased from KD 371.9 million to KD 257.2 million, i.e. a 30.8 percent decrease as mentioned previously. The drop was driven by the decrease of the private residential activity by 56.2 percent and the investment residential activity by 9 percent, while the commercial activity increased by 130.2 percent.



Sarah Brightman, Andrew Lloyd Webber, Cameron Mackintosh and Laird Mackintosh as the Phantom, take a bow at the end of the final performance of the musical "Phantom of the Opera" at the Majestic Theater in New York City.



Fans wait outside the Majestic Theatre during the final performance of the musical "Phantom of the Opera" at the Majestic Theater in New York City. —AFP photos

'Phantom of the Opera' ends record run with final Broadway bow



Laird Mackintosh as the Phantom takes a bow at the end of the final performance of the musical "Phantom of the Opera" at the Majestic Theater in New York City.



Exterior view of the Majestic Theatre in New York City in New York.



A fan dressed as a chandelier waits outside the Majestic Theatre during the final performance of the musical "Phantom of the Opera" at the Majestic Theater in New York City.



Phantom of the Opera actor Murray Melvin.

After 35 years and almost 14,000 performances, the curtain fell for the final time Sunday on the longest-running show in Broadway history -- "The Phantom of the Opera."

Since opening in January 1988, Andrew Lloyd Webber's megahit musical has wowed New Yorkers and tourists alike, becoming a symbol of the famous theater district. The melodrama about a masked musical genius who haunts the Paris Opera House and whose heart aches for the young soprano Christine has been seen by 20 million people and grossed over \$1.4 billion in ticket sales.

But producers decided it was time to end the record-breaking run after the show struggled to rebound from Broadway's 18-month closure during the Covid-19 pandemic. Spectator Daniel Wright said that while he'd seen the show multiple times, the final night was "extraordinary."

"There were so many moments when I teared up, goose bumps, it was just a well-crafted show," the 56-year-old told AFP. "There are reasons why it has been around for 35 years. It's a timeless classic, it has touched so many people's lives." The show, adapted from Gaston Leroux's French novel of the same name, won seven 1988 Tony Awards, including best musical, and became the longest-running show in Broadway history on January 9, 2006. The production estimates that it has employed 6,500 people, including 450 actors, over the years. Sunday's show in front of a sold-out crowd at the Majestic Theatre off Times Square was performance number 13,981. The 1,600-strong

audience stood and applauded wildly as Lloyd Webber joined original and current cast members on the stage for the final curtain call. The septuagenarian British composer, who has been commissioned for King Charles III's coronation, dedicated the show to his son who died of cancer in March. "Thank you all, thank you everybody and thank you New York for being

turn of international visitors to the Big Apple after the pandemic. Rising production costs, which were at \$950,000 net a week, were also a factor.

'Got to come back'

It takes about 125 actors, musicians and technicians to put on the musical, which sees a chandelier crash to the

make," Mackintosh said.

Still, amid the final bows, Mackintosh underscored the show's triumph. "In our wildest childhood dreams, we could never imagine the success of Phantom," he said. The announcement that "Phantom" was ending its run boosted ticket demand so much that the closing date was pushed back from February to April. In the run-up to the final performance this week, the last tickets were selling for more than \$500 on booking sites. Extensive renovations are now due to begin at the Majestic Theatre.

The accolade for longest-running musical on Broadway now belongs to "Chicago," which premiered in 1996, ahead of "The Lion King," which opened the following year. The 41 Broadway theaters near Times Square that make up New York's cultural and touristic heart average between 200,000 and 300,000 spectators every week, bringing in more than \$30 million in weekly revenue.

"The Phantom of the Opera" premiered in 1986 in London, where it continues to be performed. Dedicated fans Christina Lewis and her teenage daughter Sparrow are ready to travel to the Big Smoke to get another "Phantom" fix, having seen the show at least 11 times. "It's sad it's going out but we are very, very excited to be able to be here and see the final curtain call. We cried a few times throughout the night," said 36-year-old nurse Lewis.

The pair were among audience members already clamoring for a return of the production, with fellow spectator Richard Rodriguez, 38, saying, "It's got to come back, bring back the Phantom!" —AFP



Laird Mackintosh as the Phantom takes a bow at the end of the final performance of the musical "Phantom of the Opera" at the Majestic Theater in New York City.

such a wonderful home for us," he said. Despite its many mega-fans, a lack of turnout since Covid-19 spelled the show's Broadway end. British producer Cameron Mackintosh told the New York Times in September last year that the production began incurring losses due to the slow re-

turn of international visitors to the Big Apple after the pandemic. Rising production costs, which were at \$950,000 net a week, were also a factor.

Coachella globalizes in step with international music trends

The original 1999 Coachella lineup was decidedly oriented towards rock acts and full of white men, but today, the premier music festival's lineup is more diverse and international than ever. The 2023 edition of the massive desert festival is a showcase of global talent, with more than half of the performing artists hailing from outside the United States, including artists from Puerto Rico, South Korea, Belgium and Pakistan.

The centering of genre-spanning music performed in a variety of languages highlights the US industry's evolving response to global tastes, as streaming and social media offer obvious metrics on what's popular, and profitable. Bad Bunny, the Puerto Rican reggaeton master and world's biggest star, headlined the weekend's opening night with an adrenaline-pumping performance that paid homage to Caribbean music's influential lineage and had his fans screaming with delight.

On Saturday night, the K-pop megastars BLACKPINK put on one of the weekend's buzziest shows — and made history as the first Asian act to headline the festival — with tens of thousands of revelers descending on the main stage for a bombastic set of pop bangers preceded by a mesmerizing, drone-powered light show and punctuated by pyrotechnics. For CedarBough Saeji, a professor of Korean and East Asian studies who specializes in K-pop, the festival lineup emphasizing the hottest acts from across the globe is long overdue.

And when it comes to K-pop, "we've reached a point where the ongoing public de-

mand for K-pop... is clear, even to people who may be watching the financial bottom line much more than they're watching trends," she said.

"America's a very large music market, there's a lot of people there," Saeji continued. "It's a very, very important tastemaker — but world cultural flows have shifted." "You don't have to be American to be the top group in the world."

'A new trip'

Major artists, including Spain's Rosalia, Iceland's Bjork and Nigeria's Burna Boy received top billings on the festival's main stage, while India's Diljit Dosanjh and Pakistan's Ali Sethi drew large crowds to their high-energy sets.

"When I saw those brown faces in their best, sort of like, South Asian regalia with a twist, it gave me so much courage," Sethi told AFP following his set. For "those of us who are coming from other places, coming from other traditions, who are speaking languages — musical languages, visual languages, and literally languages that haven't been heard here before — that Coachella welcomes us and has us here, it's a new trip." Sethi was already wildly popular prior to his Coachella performance: his song "Pasoori" was Google's most searched song in 2022 and boasts more than half a billion views on YouTube. According to scholar Saeji, the internet has played a vital role in "leveling the playing field."

"The internet is the reason why worldwide audiences have so much more awareness now of artists coming out of countries that ar-



People walk by the "Molecular Cloud" installation by Vincent Leroy during the first weekend of the Coachella Valley Music and Arts Festival in Indio, California. —AFP photos

en't traditional hegemony," she said. "I predict that no matter how much the US music industry may try to continue to try to gatekeep, eventually, we're going to see a situation where we have charting music coming from multiple languages all the time." "And that's beautiful."

Colorful

Also on feature were France's Christine and the Queens, Argentina's Los Fabulosos Cadillacs and Belgium's Angèle. And Palestinian-Chilean Elyanna broke ground as the first artist to per-

form a full set in Arabic at the festival. Turkish electronic artist Omer Mesci, who performs under the name Minus the Light, was born and raised in Turkey and told AFP after his set that it's particularly "inspiring" as a DJ to encounter an international slate of performers. "Music is music," he said. "That's what makes it beautiful. It's so colorful in terms of the music, in terms of the people." Rosalia — the Spanish superstar who made her name as a flamenco revisionist before soaring to the top of pop with her blockbuster third album, "Motomami" — was among the weekend's most hotly antic-



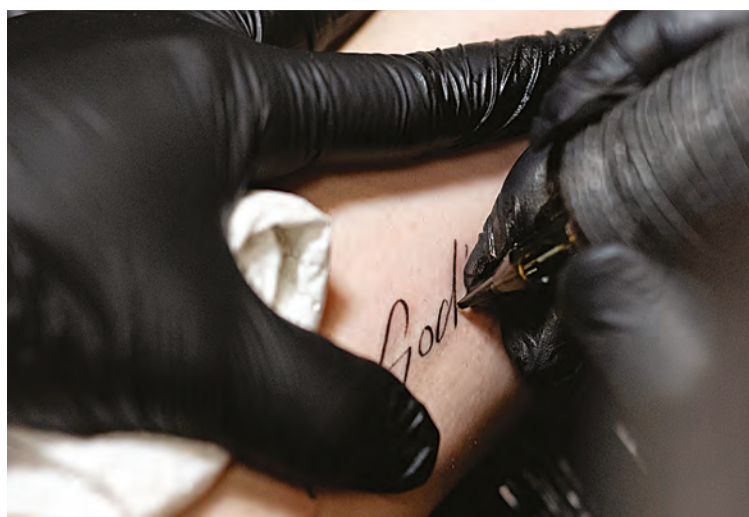
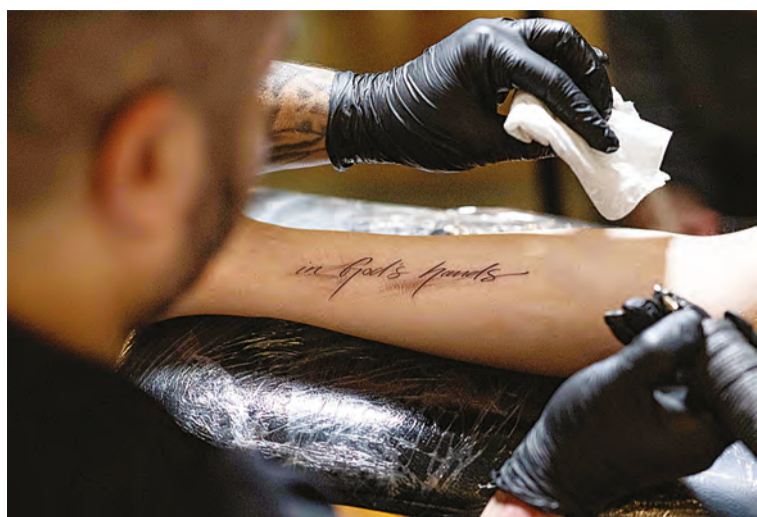
US rapper Tyler, The Creator performs during the first weekend of the Coachella Valley Music and Arts Festival.



Musician Liz Trujillo of Conexon Divina performs during the first weekend of the Coachella Valley Music and Arts Festival.

ipated acts, with fans clamoring for her as she blasted through a set of her daring, kaleidoscopic songs blending styles. —AFP

Lifestyle



Tattooer Silas Becks puts protective patch over a tattoo reading 'In God's hands..' on the arm of a young man in Vienna, Austria. —AFP photos

Catholics line up for free tattoos in Austria

In God's hands" read several of the tattoos inked during a free-of-charge session over the weekend -- organized by none other than Austria's leading group representing Catholic nuns and monks. "It's important for the church to look at how people express their piety, including on their bodies," said Christopher Paul Campbell, director of Quo Vadis.

He added that the church -- parts of which have frowned upon tattoos -- had to "learn to be sexy" if it wanted to keep attracting followers. The number of people leaving the Catholic church in Austria has been rising, reaching a record of almost 91,000 people last year. About half of the Alpine EU member's nine million people are Catholic. Quo Vadis said hundreds of believers were keen to attend the first such tattoo session near Vienna's iconic St. Stephen's Cathedral on Saturday.

In the end, the dozens of slots available were allotted in a lottery. The night before the

session, the German tattoo artist, his needles and everyone wanting to get tattooed were blessed in a mass. Believers could select from a list of intricate Christian motifs, including crosses and fishes.

Austrian Ursula Noe-Nordberg asked to get a small cross tattooed on her wrist. "It will be a surprise" for my family, the grandmother-of-five told AFP, adding the cross would remind her of her tattooed grandchildren. But not everyone was happy about the initiative, with organisers saying they received hate mail. Some people believe body art is satanic, despite the practice of tattooing stigmata or tributes to a pilgrimage dating back centuries. Even famous Austrians such as the 19th-century Empress Sisi were tattooed. "I got the criticism that we've turned the church into a disco. I say: okay, then I'm the DJ," countered Father Sandesh Manuel. The Franciscan monk, who wears a baseball cap and likes to rap, also got inked with the words "Humanity is the greeting of religion". —AFP



Tattooer Silas Becks curves a tattoo reading 'In God's hands..' to the arm of a woman.



In this file photo US actress Anya Taylor-Joy attends Universal's "The Super Mario Bros. Movie" special screening at the Regal LA Live in Los Angeles. —AFP

'Super Mario' games out second straight box office win

The Super Mario Bros. Movie" retained the top spot in North America's box office one week after its epic debut, as Universal's popular game-themed animation again trounced all competitors, estimates showed Sunday. The joint effort of Universal, Nintendo and Illumination studios raked in \$87 million in ticket sales in the Friday-through-Sunday period, bringing the movie's total haul to more than \$347 million, according to Exhibitor Relations.

The industry watcher had already predicted "Super Mario" -- with its foundation in one of the most popular video games ever -- will be the top movie of the year. Debuting in a very distant second place was Sony's "The Pope's Exorcist," starring Russell Crowe, which earned \$9.1 million.

"This is a solid opening for a modestly-budgeted original horror film," said analyst David A. Gross. Third spot belonged to Lionsgate's neo-

noir "John Wick: Chapter 4," with \$7.9 million bringing the thriller's four-week North America total to \$160 million.

Keanu Reeves stars as the titular hitman who finds himself fighting an international crime group. Horror-comedy "Renfield," distributed by Universal, pulled in \$7.7 million in its opening weekend to place fourth.

And Amazon Studios' "Air," a sports drama about the business deal surrounding Nike and the Michael Jordan basketball shoe that gives the name its title, slipped one spot to fifth, bringing in \$7.7 million.

Rounding out the top 10 were:
 "Dungeons & Dragons: Honor Among Thieves" (\$7.3 million)
 "Suzume" (\$5 million)
 "Mafia Mamma" (\$2 million)
 "Scream VI" (\$1.4 million)
 "Nefarious" (\$1.3 million) —AFP

Sega to buy Angry Birds maker Rovio

Japanese gaming group Sega has offered to buy the creator of the popular Angry Birds franchise, Finland's Rovio, in a deal worth more than 700 million euros (\$770 million), the companies said Monday. The deal would mark the end of the independence of Finnish mobile game makers, which burst into the scene when Rovio launched its slingshot-bird game more than a decade ago.

The bid by Sega, famous for its own animal character, Sonic the Hedgehog, is also the latest high-profile acquisition in the gaming sector. The offer, which represents a 19 percent premium over Rovio's closing share price on Friday, is part of Sega's "long-term goal" of expanding into the mobile gaming market, Sega CEO Haruki Satomi said.

"Among the rapidly growing global gaming market, the mobile gaming market has especially high potential," he said in a statement. Angry Birds instantly became one of the most successful mobile games ever released when it made its debut in 2009, with a variety of birds flying through the air to crash into structures and take down armies of green pigs. In 2016, the "Angry Birds" movie, produced by Sony Entertainment, was a massive success that grossed \$350 million worldwide. But Rovio has remained heavily reliant on its flagship game, struggling to develop another similar hit. In 2015, it laid off a third of its staff. "Combining the strengths of Rovio and Sega presents an incredibly exciting future," said Rovio chief executive Alexandre Pelletier-Normand. Rovio recommended that shareholders accept the offer.

Gaming consolidation

The Finnish company, which employs over 500 people, reported a revenue of 317.7 million euros for 2022, with an adjusted net profit of 31.4 million euros. Sega is aiming to open the offer period in early May and complete the deal in the third quarter, the company said. A major player in video games in the 1980s and 1990s, the Japanese company went into decline after it failed to compete against Japanese competitors Nintendo and Sony's consoles. Gaming companies are fighting it out for a slice of an industry worth hundreds of billions of dollars.

In the biggest bid in the sector's history, Xbox-maker Microsoft is seeking to buy "Call of Duty" and "Candy Crush" owner Activision Blizzard in a \$69 billion deal facing scrutiny from regulators. While more modest, Sega's acquisition of



In this file photo the Sega logo is pictured at the company's booth during the Tokyo Game Show in Chiba prefecture.

Rovio would bring down the curtain on Finland's independent mobile game industry. In 2013, Supercell, creator of the Clash of Clans game, was bought by Japanese firms for \$1.5 billion -- and the company was later scooped up by Chinese conglomerate Tencent. The small Nordic country is still home to smaller independent video game studios for consoles, such as Remedy Entertainment known for hit franchises such as Alan Wake and Max Payne.

Three university students

Started in 2003 by three university students, it took Rovio -- which means "bonfire" in Finnish -- six years to hit it big in the nascent mobile game business, brought about by the widespread adoption of smartphones. Rovio had already launched 50 other games and was hovering near bankruptcy when it launched Angry Birds in 2009. To their great relief, mobile users quickly became addicted to demolishing fortresses built by egg-snatching green pigs and the game swiftly moved to the top downloads on Apple's App Store.

With hundreds of millions of players, Angry Birds became one of the most successful mobile games ever launched. By 2011, the small three-person company had turned into a multi-million euro gaming giant employing over 200 people. Rovio launched its initial public offering on the Helsinki stock exchange in 2017, valuing the company at almost 900 million euros.

Capitalizing on the popularity, Rovio turned the game into one of the most recognizable brands in the world. The company manages Angry Birds theme parks in several countries and oversees the publication of children's books about the famous birds in a dozen languages. —AFP

American jazz piano great Ahmad Jamal dies at 92

Ahmad Jamal, a towering and influential US jazz pianist, composer and band leader whose career spanned more than seven decades, died at age 92 on Sunday, according to news reports.

Jamal's widow Laura Hess-Hey confirmed his death, The Washington Post reported, while his daughter Sumayah Jamal told The New York Times the cause was prostate cancer. Music news outlets in France and Britain also reported his death.

Jamal was friends with music greats such as Miles Davis, and influenced his work and that of other musicians, including the pianist McCoy Tyner. Born Frederick Russell Jones in Pittsburgh, Jamal converted to Islam in 1950. He won myriad awards over the course of his career, including France's prestigious Ordre des Arts and des Lettres in 2007 and



File photo shows US jazz pianist and composer Ahmad Jamal. —AFP

a Grammy Lifetime Achievement Award in 2017.

Jamal was credited with luring a larger pop audience to enjoy jazz. His playing style was described as lean, with The Post citing his "less-is-more dynamics." One technique he used to great effect was placing silence between notes.

The New Yorker, writing last year to mark the release of some unis-

sued recordings, said that in the 1950s "his musical concept was one of the great innovations of the time, even if its spare, audacious originality was lost on many listeners."

Jamal's commercial breakthrough was a 1958 album entitled "Ahmad Jamal at the Pershing: But Not for Me." It stayed on the Billboard magazine charts for more than 100 weeks. The New York Times said it became one of the best-selling instrumental records of its time. Dozens more followed in what The Times called "a catalog sprinkled with gems."

In his autobiography, Davis the trumpeter wrote of Jamal: "He knocked me out with his concept of space, his lightness of touch, his understatement, and the way he phrased notes and chords and passages." —AFP



In this file photo a visitor walks through Shanghai's first Angry Birds Activity Park at Tongji University in Shanghai. —AFP

Sports

Ukrainian club Shakhtar reaches out to wounded soldiers and war orphans

PARIS: Shakhtar Donetsk's objectives used to be confined to silverware but now the storied Ukrainian football club have loftier aims, financing hospital care abroad for wounded soldiers and finding new homes for orphans. The club — whose lifting of the 2009 UEFA Cup makes it one of only two Ukrainian teams to win a European club competition — has through its foundation Shakhtar Social spared no expense since Russia invaded Ukraine in February 2022.

They have paid €100,000 (\$110,000) each for five severely wounded soldiers to be sent for medical treatment in hospitals in the United States and Spain. "You cannot imagine what injuries they have," Shakhtar CEO Sergey Palkin told AFP in a phone interview. "Two of them are paralyzed, others suffered catastrophic wounds in a rocket detonation. It is very difficult to control one's emotions when one sees them. We want to give them a chance of a normal life. These hospitals have very sophisticated procedures. The families cannot sustain those expenses and the government has no capability to provide this financial help so we are taking care of them."

Children have suffered too amid the death and destruction. Some have been killed, some have been left as orphans and others have been forcibly taken to Russia. "We have looked after 31 children, who lost their parents due to the war and we have found them 17 families," said Palkin. "We provide living expenses, medical treatments, iPads and try to normalize the situation from a psychological point of view. "These children have been left traumatized by the violent loss of their parents."

Shakhtar's Ukrainian international defender Ivan Petryak knows what it is like to lose a family member.

His father-in-law Ivan Petrenko was killed in action in the Donbas in May last year. "The guys who were with him saw him die," Petryak told AFP. "For us as a family it is the worst situation as we cannot find the body and we cannot make the funeral to say goodbye. This is the worst for us as we do not know what to do as we have no information about him."

'Bit of a circus'

Shakhtar have bitter experience of what it is like to be displaced. The club hosted matches in the 2012 European Championship but two years later they were on the move after the Russians seized Crimea. They played in Kyiv before the war and are now in Lviv. Little did they realize they would play host to more refugees from the Donbas region eight years later as the Russian army swept in once again. "We accepted more than 2,000 refugees from the eastern part of Ukraine," said Palkin. "We provide food, medical treatment, including psychological treatment, helping people to concentrate on what they should do regarding their next steps. Many lost houses, apartments, their passports and personal documents."

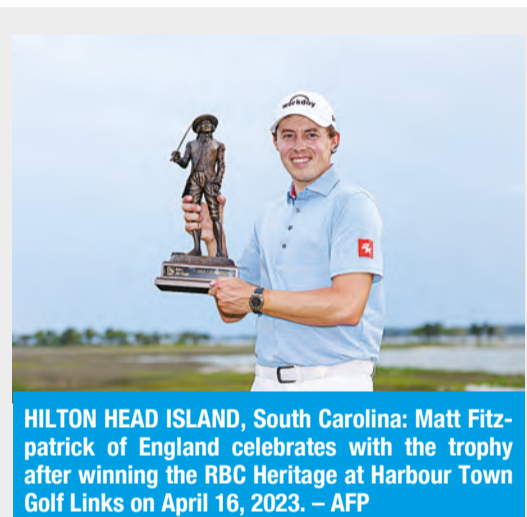
Petryak says he cannot envisage a scenario where he takes to a pitch in the future against a Russian team — "they are like zombies" he says of the Russian players and their support of President Vladimir Putin. Equally he is dumbfounded that IOC President Thomas Bach has left the door open for Russian and Belarusian athletes to compete in the Olympics in Paris next year. "The situation is not possible," he said.

"Bach is very wrong. Every day they kill our children, people, athletes. More than 200 athletes have been killed and he wants to say Russia and Belarus are allowed at the Olympic Games. How is it possible? It is unbelievable. For me it is a bit of a circus." Petryak says he understands why the vast majority of foreign players went out on loan once the conflict took hold. He is extremely proud though that despite losing a huge amount of Brazilian talent, the club still finished third in their Champions League group and reached



This combination of undated photographs created on April 16, 2023 shows from top left to bottom right: Shakhtar Donetsk's CEO Sergey Palkin, Shakhtar's Ukrainian international defender Ivan Petryak, Petryak in action on the pitch and CEO Sergey Palkin on the football pitch. — AFP

the last 16 of the Europa League this season. "Some athletes have taken up the gun," he said. "My team, we support the country with money and we can give more from this side. I am not criticizing those who took up the gun but we feel the better we play, the more money we can send to the army and other athletes. We are like a big family." — AFP



HILTON HEAD ISLAND, South Carolina: Matt Fitzpatrick of England celebrates with the trophy after winning the RBC Heritage at Harbour Town Golf Links on April 16, 2023. — AFP

Fitzpatrick wins playoff with Spieth to clinch Heritage

MIAMI: England's Matt Fitzpatrick beat defending champion Jordan Spieth in a thrilling sudden-death playoff on Sunday to win the PGA's RBC Heritage tournament. The pair, who played in the same group in the final round, both ended regulation play on 17-under 267 after Spieth shot 66 and Fitzpatrick 68 at Harbour Town on Hilton Head Island, South Carolina.

It took until the third hole of the playoff for a champion to be decided when Fitzpatrick produced a brilliant 9-iron approach shot on the par-4 18th and made a simple birdie putt to win. Spieth, who beat fellow American Patrick Cantlay in a playoff last year, had over-hit his approach going to the back of the green and needed two putts to make par.

Fitzpatrick, the US Open champion, becomes the first Englishman to win the tournament since Nick Faldo in 1984 and he did so in the town where he spent many of his family vacations after first visiting as a six-year-old. "It's hard to describe. I said to (caddie) Billy (Foster), it doesn't get better than this — walking down here, just looking around. It's a course I dreamed of playing when I was young," he said, with his family congratulating him at the side of the green. "I managed to play a couple of times with my dad and yes, this one means more than anything."

Spieth had made four birdies in the opening six holes but he missed a short putt for bogey on the par-3 14th and left the door open for Fitzpatrick. The Englishman then made birdies on the 15th and 16th to grab a share of the lead and could have won it at the death if Spieth hadn't made a tricky six-footer to force the playoff.

"It was a really good round. I got off to a dream start and then just kind of hung in there for a little while and then made a nice putt to get into the playoff, and then played the playoff really well," said Spieth. "Someone was going to make a birdie. It wasn't going to be a bogey to lose that playoff the way that we were both playing today. He just did what he needed to do on 15 in, when it had been kind of me and Patrick for a little while there. He just snuck in and played some tremendous golf."

Cantlay, the other member of the leading group, finished in third after carding a 68 to leave him one shot behind Fitzpatrick and Spieth. Cantlay paid the price for bogeys on the par-4 13th and the par-3 14th, where his ball had stuck in the wood barrier by the water-side green. Xander Schauffele's final-round 66 earned him fourth place, two shots behind the leaders after he ended with a late surge by making birdies on 15, 16 and 17. World number two Scottie Scheffler's final round of 70 left him 12-under overall and tied for 11th while Masters champion and world number one Jon Rahm shot 68 but was tied for 15th, six shots off the pace. — AFP

'Bit of revenge' as Hetmyer blitz keeps Rajasthan top of IPL

AHMEDABAD: West Indies powerhouse Shimron Hetmyer's batting onslaught lit up the IPL on Sunday as he fired Rajasthan Royals to a stunning three-wicket win over holders Gujarat Titans. Venkatesh Iyer made an impact with his 104 in the first match of the day but his team Kolkata Knight Riders went down to Mumbai Indians who created IPL history by handing a debut cap to Arjun Tendulkar, son of cricket legend Sachin Tendulkar.

The Tendulkars became the first father-son duo to play in the Indian Premier League T20 tournament, which began in 2008. The second match produced fireworks after Hetmyer's unbeaten 26-ball 56 steered Rajasthan to victory, set up by skipper Sanju Samson, who hit 60 off 32 balls. "I just really wanted to win against these (Gujarat) guys because they beat us three times (including the final) last year so it was a bit of revenge really," man of the match Hetmyer said.

Chasing 178 for victory, Rajasthan were in trouble at 55-4 when Samson and the left-handed Hetmyer turned on the chase at the world's biggest cricket stadium in Ahmedabad. Samson took on leg-spinner Rashid Khan in an over and smashed a hat-trick of sixes and then took on another Afghanistan spinner before departing. Noor Ahmad, a left-arm wrist spinner, came in as impact player for Gujarat and after getting smashed for a six and four got Samson caught out.

But the dismissal only fired up the left-handed Hetmyer who kept up the charge as he and Dhruv Jurel, who hit 18, got 20 runs from an Alzarri Joseph over to near the target. Hetmyer finished off the chase with a six off Ahmad, an IPL debutant who was given the final over by Gujarat skipper Hardik Pandya. Mohammed Shami stood out with figures of 3-25 for Gujarat, who won the title last year in their fairytale debut IPL season. Earlier Shubman Gill (45)

Rins rules in Austin after Bagnaia blunder

AUSTIN: Alex Rins won Sunday's attritional Grand Prix of the Americas following a blunder from Ducati's MotoGP world champion Francesco Bagnaia. Rins capitalized on a fall from leader and pole-sitter Bagnaia to claim the third leg of the season and end Honda's long winless run. Luca Marini (Ducati-VR46) took second with Fabio Quartararo (Yamaha) in third.

Bagnaia won Saturday's sprint but left the showpiece race in Austin pointless as Marco Bezzecchi, who finished sixth, extended his lead at the top of the riders' standings. Rins, a winner for Suzuki at the circuit in 2019, was gifted the lead before the halfway stage of the 20-lap race when Bagnaia's bike hit the Texan tarmac.

O'Callaghan beats McKeon in clash of champions

GOLD COAST: World champion Mollie O'Callaghan won a showdown with Olympic gold medalist Emma McKeon on Monday to take the women's 100m freestyle title at the Australian championships in the fastest time this year. The 19-year-old touched in a sizzling 52.63 seconds to beat a top-notch field. Shayna Jack (52.64) hit the wall second ahead of seven-time Tokyo Olympic medalist McKeon (53.22) in a race that also featured returning veteran Cate Campbell.

Campbell, who has won eight medals over four Olympics, including four gold, was mulling retirement after Tokyo, where she took 100m bronze behind winner McKeon. But she returned for her first major event since then to finish fifth in 53.78, with her eye on the world

championships in Japan this year and a fifth Olympics in Paris in 2024.

"It hurts, but great to touch the wall," said O'Callaghan, whose time was quicker than the 52.67 that won her gold at the world championships in Budapest last year, an event McKeon skipped. "I'm just so happy I got to have an awesome training mate in Shayna. It's been working out really great." Australia's world championship trials are in Melbourne in June.

Kaylee McKeown, who shattered the 200m backstroke world record last month, also raced the 100 free and came eighth. She earlier won the 200m medley in a personal best 2:08.16, second only to Canadian sensation Summer McIntosh this year and quicker than the pace that earned her silver in Budapest in 2022.

Swimming royalty Ariarne Titmus, whose 400m freestyle world record was broken by McIntosh last month, won the 800m freestyle in 8:20.19 ahead of world short-course champion Lani Pallister. Titmus dethroned Katie Ledecky in the Olympic 200m and 400m freestyle but could only finish second to the American great over 800m. — AFP



AHMEDABAD: Rajasthan Royals' Dhruv Jurel plays a shot against Gujarat Titans at the Narendra Modi Stadium on April 16, 2023. — AFP

and David Miller (46) guided Gujarat to 177-7 after being invited to bat first.

SKY hits form

In the afternoon match, Iyer hit his maiden T20 century to guide Kolkata to 185-6, but five-time winners Mumbai overhauled the total with 14 balls to spare at the Wankhede Stadium. Iyer's knock was the first ton for two-time champions Kolkata since former New Zealand captain Brendon McCullum smashed 158 runs in the first ever IPL match in 2008.

Mumbai opener Ishan Kishan blasted 58 off 25 balls but it was T20 sensation Suryakumar Yadav's quickfire 43 that brought the home crowd to life, as he looked like returning to form after a rough patch. "I relaxed and

had an easy walk to the wicket, took my time for the first 6-7 balls," said Suryakumar, fondly called SKY who led the side after skipper Rohit Sharma opted out of the XI but later came in as impact sub. "And then I thought if I get my eye in I can take it forward."

The left-handed Kishan gave Mumbai a flying start in a 65-run opening stand with Rohit, who made 20 off 13 balls. Kishan was bowled by leg spinner Varun Chakravarthy but Suryakumar, who got a first-ball duck in the previous match, soon took charge to smash three sixes in his 25-ball blitz. Shardul Thakur denied Suryakumar his fifty, before Tim David steered the chase with an unbeaten 24. Mumbai started by handing debut caps to Arjun and South Africa fast bowler Duan Jansen, twin brother of Sunrisers Hyderabad's Marco Jansen. — AFP

Second to Bagnaia in the sprint 24 hours earlier, Rins controlled the race perfectly from that moment on for his sixth win in motorcycling's premier class and his first for his new team. "I was trying to push 'Pecco' (Bagnaia), in the chicanes pushing so much, so I'm very happy, and so proud of the team," said Rins, beaming from beneath a traditional Texan cowboy hat.

Boost for Honda

Marini crossed the line almost three and a half seconds back for his best result in MotoGP. "I was careful at the beginning, I didn't want to make a mistake," he said. "I had good pace. After Pecco's crash I tried to overtake Fabio and catch Alex, but he was so strong and Honda had the best bike, they were impossible to beat but I'm really satisfied with my result."

Bezzecchi, who won the main event in Argentina, takes an 11-point lead over Bagnaia to the fourth race of the season in Spain at the end of the month. Rins, 27, moves up to third, six points behind Bagnaia, for whom this blunder followed the one he made when nailed on for second in Argentina. "I don't understand, I'm so disappointed and



AUSTIN: Alex Rins of Spain and LCR Honda Castrol celebrates the victory on the podium at the end of the MotoGP Of The Americas Race on April 16, 2023. — AFP

quite nervous as it wasn't my fault," said a dejected Bagnaia, who was within one point of Bezzecchi in the rider's standings going into the race. — AFP

Kirkwood wins at Long Beach for first IndyCar crown

LOS ANGELES: American racer Kyle Kirkwood held off French teammate Romain Grosjean down the final laps to win Sunday's Long Beach Grand Prix and capture his first career IndyCar title. The Andretti Autosport duo led a showing of three cars in the top four but it was Kirkwood who came out on top by 0.9907 of a second after 85 laps over the 1.968-mile, 11-turn temporary course on the streets of Long Beach, California.

"I felt like I needed this win and we got it. A moment of relief, no doubt," the 24-year-old US driver said after taking his 20th career IndyCar start. "I just had a moment of relaxation. I was just like, 'Finally.' It's not really finally because we're only three races in (the season). But it felt like it for me." Grosjean, who went for his last refuelling one lap before Kirkwood, was second with

Sweden's Marcus Ericsson, last year's Indianapolis 500 winner, taking the last podium spot ahead of another Andretti driver, American Colton Herta. "I'm very happy for him," Grosjean said of Kirkwood. "I wish I was in his position right now. He drove a hell of a race, like a champ. He deserved that. "We tried everything we could on our end. It was not easy. With our fuel situation we couldn't really attack. I knew it wasn't going to work out." Team owner Michael Andretti was overjoyed after struggles in the two opening races of the campaign. "I'm so happy for everybody that worked so hard for us. It was definitely big," he said. "That was the medicine we needed."

Kirkwood's best prior finish in 19 IndyCar races was 10th at Long Beach last year for A J Foyt Racing. Pole sitter Kirkwood stayed in the lead until compatriot Josef Newgarden, last year's Long Beach winner, zipped in front on a lap-27 restart when slower traffic held back Kirkwood. But Kirkwood used a superior time on the last pit lap exchange to return to the track ahead of Newgarden, who faded while conserving fuel over the final 31 laps. — AFP

Sports

Liga leaders Barca drop more points, Atletico beat Almeria

BARCELONA: A subdued Barcelona could not break down Getafe in a 0-0 draw on Sunday, dropping more points but still sitting 11 clear of Real Madrid at the top of La Liga. Third-place Atletico Madrid beat Almeria 2-1 at home with Antoine Griezmann netting a brace as he continued his sparkling form. Valencia sunk deeper into the relegation mire with a 2-0 home defeat by Sevilla, who host Manchester United in the Europa League on Thursday.

Champions Madrid beat Cadiz on Saturday to cut back Barcelona's lead, and with nine games remaining it seems highly unlikely they will catch Barcelona — but Xavi Hernandez's side are limping over the line. Barcelona drew 0-0 at home against Girona on Monday and followed that up with a second consecutive stalemate, the team still wallowing after their Copa del Rey semifinal thrashing by Madrid earlier in April.

The one positive for Barca was a 22nd clean sheet of the season in the top flight, with Getafe, 15th, not creating much danger. "Here you suffer, because the grass is high, the usual tricks, so it's hard, the clear chances you have — you have to put them away," Barca goalkeeper Marc-Andre ter Stegen told DAZN. "It's a dry pitch, so it's difficult. We did things differently to normal." Xavi echoed Ter Stegen's complaint that the low quality of the pitch played a part in the result, but said Barca could not hide behind it. "It's not an excuse, we weren't accurate, we made chances but we could not finish them," said Xavi. "But yes, the grass did hurt us, the ball didn't run."

No way through

After a slow start, the Catalans created the first clear chance at the Coliseum Alfonso Perez, when Raphinha fired against the post, with Balde's follow-up also striking the woodwork. Sergi Roberto pulled up injured, seemingly with a hamstring issue, adding to Barcelona's long list of absentees.

The league leaders have badly missed explosive winger Ousmane Dembele and creative midfielder Pedri in recent weeks.

Getafe were content with the point, sitting back as Barcelona probed for a breakthrough and found goalkeeper David Soria in their way, although Borja Mayoral almost snatched a winner for the hosts on the break. Xavi's side are still firm favorites to lift the title for the first time since 2019, but should they stumble at home against Atletico next weekend, doubts could creep in.

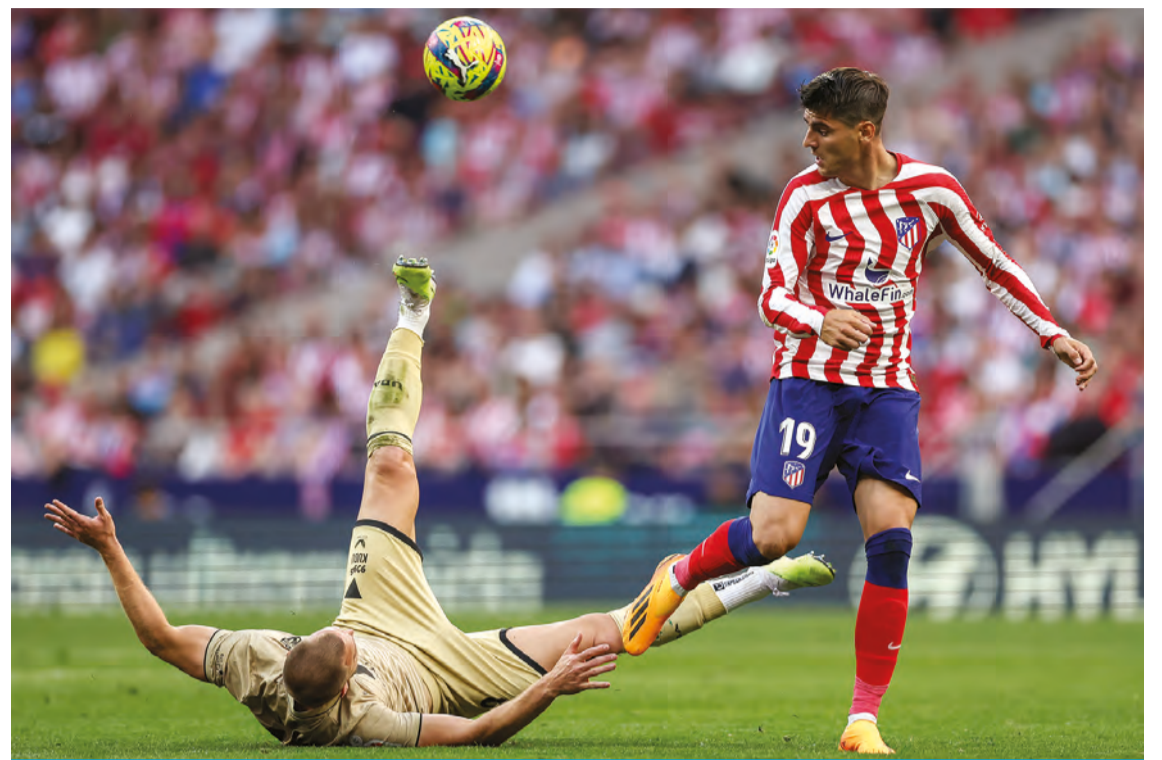
Getafe are four points above the drop zone, after Valencia, 18th, lost at Mestalla. Sevilla, who welcome Manchester United for the Europa League quarter-final second leg clash next week, earned a hard-fought win over the frustrated hosts, for whom Ilaix Moriba was sent off late on. Defender Loic Bade sent Sevilla ahead at Mestalla early in the second half, with Suso doubling the visitors' lead.

Valencia's anger grew when they were not awarded a penalty after the ball struck Fernando's hand in the area, and then later on had a spot kick award cancelled by the referee after VAR showed no foul had been committed. The victory helped Jose Luis Mendilabar's Sevilla rise to 12th, eight points clear of the bottom three, continuing their improvement since he replaced Jorge Sampaoli at the helm in March.

Griezmann goals

Atletico stayed two points behind Real Madrid with a narrow win over Almeria, 17th, which should have been more comfortable than it proved to be. Antoine Griezmann headed Atletico ahead in the fifth minute when Angel Correa nodded on a corner to the back post. Diego Simeone's side were dominant throughout, but Almeria pulled level when Leo Baptistao's shot deflected in off Jose Gimenez.

Griezmann sent the Rojiblancos ahead again



MADRID: Almeria's Brazilian defender Rodrigo Ely fights for the ball with Atletico Madrid's Spanish forward Alvaro Morata at the Wanda Metropolitano stadium on April 16, 2023. — AFP

before the break, finishing clinically from Yannick Carrasco's pass at the end of a fine team move for his 11th league goal. Carrasco and Griezmann both hit the post in the second half as Atletico looked to kill the game. They could not find the third and Almeria gave Atletico a few scares in the final stages, appealing for a penalty when Gimenez handled but

VAR showed there was an offside. "I think I'm at my most complete version in terms of assists and goals," Griezmann told Movistar. "I'm happy with my performances but I haven't reached my ceiling yet — I hope I can soon." Girona, ninth, beat bottom-of-the-table Elche 2-0, leaving the stragglers 17 points from safety. — AFP

Vitinha double lifts Marseille second

PARIS: Marseille new signing Vitinha scored his first ever Ligue 1 goals in Sunday's 3-1 win over Troyes that lifted the south coast club into second behind Paris Saint-Germain. The 23-year-old Portuguese was on the mark for the first time in the league since a 32 million euros move from Braga in January, as the goalmouth predator began to deliver for his new owners. For relegation-threatened Troyes this was a 14th Ligue 1 match without a win as they remain level second bottom.

Marseille's win edged them above Lens into second, and trimmed PSG's lead to eight points, with seven games left to play, a day after the leaders had beaten Lens 3-1. At Marseille's raucous Velodrome stadium there were 63,800 fans on hand to see Croatian coach Igor Tudor's charges bounce back from a 0-0 stalemate at Lorient last week.

Vitinha's two tap ins and a fine goal from Turkish striker Cengiz Under left them a point above third-placed Lens and three above Monaco, who beat Lorient 3-0. Lille scored twice in two minutes late in the second half as they fought back earlier on Sunday for a 2-1 home victory over Montpellier. With his 20th goal Lille's Canadian Jonathan David joined



MARSEILLE: Marseille's Portuguese forward Vitinha heads the ball against Troyes at the Velodrome stadium on April 16, 2023. — AFP

PSG's Kylian Mbappe as leading scorer in Ligue 1 this season.

Elsewhere Strasbourg beat Ajaccio 3-1, Auxerre edged Nantes 2-1 and Clermont-Ferrand also beat Angers 2-1 as Nice went down 1-0 at Brest. On Saturday, Kylian Mbappe became PSG's all-time top goalscorer in Ligue 1 with 139 strikes in 169 games, while his teammate Lionel Messi scored the goal of the game against Lens. — AFP

Verona and second-placed Lazio won at Spezia on Friday. Jose Mourinho's Roma bucked the trend by beating Udinese 3-0 with Eduardo Bove slamming home a loose ball after a saved penalty for the opener. Lorenzo Pellegrini and Tammy Abraham also scored as Roma consolidated third place, five points ahead of Inter in fifth.

On Sunday Juventus, dressed in a pink and blue strip, started with Arkadiusz Milik and Dusan Vlahovic up front in a drab first half. Shortly after the break Drefel pounced on an error, pivoted, and fired a low hard shot past Mattia Perin in the Juve goal. Coach Massimiliano Allegri then made a swathe of substitutions bringing on Paul Pogba and Angel di Maria to no avail. Perin was in goal as regular keeper Wojciech Szczesny was benched after being subbed with chest pains in midweek. Juve beat Sporting 1-0 in the Europa League in midweek, and here showed signs of fatigue. Juventus are also waiting to see if they and 12 other current and former club figures will face trial for alleged financial crimes in May. — AFP

Ten-man Union go third despite Bochum stalemate

BERLIN: Union Berlin remain on course for a first-ever Champions League qualification, reclaiming third in the Bundesliga with a 1-1 home draw against Bochum on Sunday. Union took the lead late in the first half thanks to a Josip Juranovic free kick, before Bochum's Kevin Stoeger equalized from the spot early in the second.

Union were reduced to 10 men shortly after the penalty but were the more dangerous side in the closing stages, forward Kevin Behrens going agonizingly close to a winner with five minutes remaining. Despite dropping points, Union leapfrogged RB Leipzig who won 3-2 at home against Augsburg on Saturday to move back to third. Union manager Urs Fischer blamed his side's "lethargic minutes" at the start of the second half, saying "in football, you get punished for mistakes".

Free-kick specialists Union opened the scoring in typical fashion in first-half injury time. Croatia international Juranovic hit a perfectly weighted free kick between a gap in the wall and past keeper Manu Riemann, his fourth goal since arriving from Celtic in January. Bochum grabbed control of the fixture in a ten-minute period early in the second half, starting with a seemingly harmless tactical yellow card for Union's Paul Jaeckel after 50 minutes.

Union's Aissa Laidouni swept Ivan Ordets' legs out from under him in the penalty box shortly after, with Stoeger blasting the equaliser straight down the middle from the spot. Five minutes later, Jaeckel picked up a second yellow for a foul on Patrick Osterhage, reducing the home side to ten men. Union's Behrens' had a 64th-minute goal chalked off for offside. The big forward had another golden chance with five minutes to go when Seraldo Becker found him unmarked in front of goal, but he headed just wide. Bochum, who have claimed eight points from their past five matches, got three points clear of the relegation places with the draw.

In Sunday's late game, Wolfsburg dented Bayer Leverkusen's hopes of an unlikely return to Champions League football, holding Xabi Alonso in in-form side to a 0-0 draw at home. Leverkusen, who had been in the relegation zone when the former Bayern



BERLIN: Union Berlin's Croatian defender Josip Juranovic and Bochum's Austrian midfielder Kevin Stoeger vie for the ball on April, 16, 2023. — AFP

Munich, Liverpool and Real Madrid player took over as coach earlier in the year, won five league matches in a row to sit in the Europa League placings.

Leverkusen's Sardar Azmoun rattled the bar after 27 minutes and Moussa Diaby was a constant source of danger for the visitors, a long-range bullet forcing a two-handed save from Wolfsburg goalie Koen Casteels with 20 minutes remaining. Casteels again intervened with just one minute left, rushing off his line to stifle Amine Adli, who was one-on-one with the 'keeper, securing a point for the home side. — AFP

Sassuolo stun Juve, Roma in race for second place

MILAN: Juventus were beaten 1-0 by modest Sassuolo to remain stuck in seventh in Serie A on Sunday when Gregoire Drefel reacted fastest to score from a fluffed clearance. The defeat leaves Juventus below the European spots after the Turin giants were docked 15 points for illicit transfer activity in January. Runaway leaders Napoli drew on Saturday as Italy awaits an explosive party in Naples where Napoli look certain to clinch a first title since the days of Diego Maradona.

Italy's champions-elect have had their imposing league lead cut to 14 points after a second-string XI could only manage a goalless stalemate with

Today's Matches

UEFA Champions League

Napoli n v AC Milan 22:00

beIN Sports 2 HD Premium
beIN Sports HD 2 English
beIN Sports 1 FR

Chelsea v Real Madrid 22:00

beIN 4K HDR
beIN Sports 1 HD Premium
beIN Sports HD 1 English

Classifieds

Hospitals & Clinics

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

Clinics

Kaizen center	25716707
Rawda	22517733
Adaliya	22517144

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

Change of Name

I SEKHAR KAKI holder of Indian passport no L4533078 Indian permanent address Hno 4112 Rv Nagar Cuddapah Ysr Dist 516003 India residing in Kuwait at present hereby declare that henceforth my name will be read as under Given name SEKHAR and Surname NAGAPPAGARI. (C 3505) 18/04/23

I, MOHAMMED, holder of Indian passport no. M8399055 having permanent address in Mumbai 400 003, Maharashtra, India residing in Kuwait at present hereby declare that henceforth my name will be read as MOHAMMED BADRI. (C 3503) 17/04/23

Automated enquiry about the Civild card is 1889988

For labor-related inquiries and complaints:
Call MSAL HOTLINE 128

Arsenal blow lead again in draw

Man Utd beat Forest to climb to third in Premier League



LONDON: Arsenal's English midfielder Bukayo Saka fights for the ball with West Ham United's Algerian midfielder Said Benrahma at the London Stadium on April 16, 2023. — AFP

LONDON: Arsenal blew a two-goal lead for the second game in a row as Bukayo Saka's penalty miss proved crucial in the Premier League leaders' damaging 2-2 draw against West Ham on Sunday. Mikel Arteta's side struck twice in the first 10 minutes at the London Stadium thanks to goals from Gabriel Jesus and Martin Odegaard. But just seven days after squandering a 2-0 advantage in their 2-2 draw at Liverpool, the Gunners again cracked under the pressure of the title race.

Said Benrahma's penalty reduced the deficit for West Ham before the interval and after Saka fired his spot-kick wide early in the second half. Jarrod Bowen volleyed in an equalizer for the struggling hosts. It was a hammer blow for Arsenal, who sit four points clear of second-placed Manchester City but have ceded the title race momentum to Pep Guardiola's team.

City had closed within three points of the Gunners after beating Leicester 3-1 on Saturday and it is the champions who have the destiny of the title in their hands despite trailing Arsenal for much of the season. City, who have won their last 10 matches in all competitions, have a game in hand on Arsenal. With a home game against Arsenal looming on April 26, City know they will lift a fifth title in six seasons if they win their remaining eight matches. By the time Arsenal travel to the Emirates Stadium they will be seven points clear of City if they beat bottom-of-the-table Southampton on Friday.

Yet that gap would still look uncomfortably small to Arsenal fans fearing their team are in the process

of wasting a golden opportunity to win a first title since 2004. While City are battle-tested in handling the tension of the title race, Arsenal's young squad look to be suffering an ill-timed attack of nerves.

Arsenal anxiety

Arsenal needed just seven minutes to take the lead as Odegaard's deft pass found Ben White, who delivered a low cross that Jesus slotted home at the far post. Jesus's fourth goal in his last three games was followed by the Gunners' second three minutes later as they ruthlessly punished West Ham's woeful marking. Gabriel Martinelli's pinpoint cross found Odegaard in acres of space and the midfielder blasted a volley past Lukasz Fabianski from an acute angle six yards out.

The turning point came in the 33rd minute when Arsenal, looking a little overconfident after such a swaggering start, needlessly conceded a penalty. Thomas Partey surrendered possession to Declan Rice and when the West Ham midfielder picked out Lucas Paqueta's run, Gabriel Magalhaes' mistimed sliding tackle was correctly ruled a penalty despite Arsenal appeals for handball.

Mohamed Salah had missed a penalty against Arsenal last weekend, but they were out of luck this time as Benrahma sent Aaron Ramsdale the wrong way from the spot. Saka should have eased Arsenal's mounting anxiety when Antonio conceded a 50th minute penalty with an outstretched arm that blocked Martinelli's flick. But instead Saka spiked

the tension level even higher with a woeful spot-kick that completely missed the target, a costly blunder that recalled the England forward's Euro 2020 final penalty shoot-out failure against Italy.

Saka held his head in his hands and with Arsenal clearly rattled, David Moyes' side snatched an equalizer in the 54th minute. Thilo Kehrer guided the ball into the Arsenal area and Bowen was just outside as his volley ricocheted off the turf and skidded past Ramsdale's despairing dive. Michail Antonio nearly won it for West Ham in the closing stages, rising to head Benrahma's cross against the bar.

Manchester United win again

Meanwhile, Injury-hit Manchester United beat relegation-threatened Nottingham Forest 2-0 on Sunday to strengthen their push for a top-four Premier League finish. Erik ten Hag's men took full advantage of defeats for rivals Newcastle and Tottenham the previous day to climb to third in the table, courtesy of goals from Antony and Diogo Dalot.

The teams had already met three times this season, including in a two-legged League Cup semi-final — with United winning on each occasion. Injured United central-defensive pairing Raphael Varane and Lisandro Martinez were replaced by Harry Maguire and Victor Lindelof, while Dalot came in for Tyrell Malacia.

The visitors, also missing top-scorer Marcus Rashford, were forced into a late change when midfielder Marcel Sabitzer was injured in the

warm-up and replaced by Christian Eriksen, making his first start since January following an ankle injury. Forest, who had not won in their past nine games, made four changes. United were quickly out of the blocks and Jadon Sancho had a strike blocked in the opening moments.

The visitors dominated possession but Steve Cooper's Forest were a menace from set-pieces. Forest goalkeeper Keylor Navas saved from Bruno Fernandes before a VAR check for a potential penalty at the other end after the ball hit Maguire's arm from a corner. United took the lead in the 32nd minute when Antony poked home after Navas parried a powerful shot from Anthony Martial. Dalot almost gifted Forest an equaliser shortly before half-time after some sloppy play but Taiwo Awoniyi smashed the ball well over.

Fernandes put a header wide from the centre of the box just before the break. United continued to dominate in the second half, with Fernandes and Eriksen pulling the strings. Portugal international Fernandes produced a stunning curling effort from the left of the box that was pushed on to the bar by Navas and Antony fired just wide. Martial missed a glorious chance to extend United's lead when he headed wide with 20 minutes to go before Forest defender Felipe nodded over from close range. United finally got the reward their dominance deserved in the 76th minute when Dalot burst into the box to meet a pass by Antony to score his first Premier League goal. — AFP

NBA injury fears for Giannis, Morant as Lakers, Heat win

LOS ANGELES: Milwaukee superstar Giannis Antetokounmpo and Memphis star guard Ja Morant suffered serious injuries that threatened to disrupt two title contenders on Sunday in NBA playoff series-opening defeats. The Los Angeles Lakers took advantage of Morant's absence late in the fourth quarter for a late surge that produced a 128-112 victory at Memphis while the top-seeded host Bucks, who lost their Greek star in the first quarter, fell 130-117 to the eighth-seeded Miami Heat.

But injury fears for Antetokounmpo and Morant, two of the NBA's most electrifying stars, were amplified by upset home losses for their clubs in best-of-seven first round openers. Antetokounmpo averaged 31.1 points and 11.8 rebounds a game this season for an NBA-best 58-24 Bucks squad while Morant averaged 26.2 points for a Grizzlies team that was 51-31.

Morant hurt his already-sore right hand midway into the fourth quarter trying to brace a hard landing after contact while driving to the basket. Morant's taped right hand took the impact. Morant rose and ran off to the locker room, grabbing his sore hand and screaming as he exited after scoring 18 points. "I'm in a good bit of pain," Morant said after the game, declaring his status was "in jeopardy" for game two on Wednesday. "Feels like it's one thing after another."

Memphis coach Taylor Jenkins said after the game that x-rays on Morant's right hand were negative but he would likely be kept out of workouts, his status "one game at a time". At Milwaukee, Antetokounmpo went onto the floor in the first quarter after defensive



MILWAUKEE: Giannis Antetokounmpo of the Milwaukee Bucks drives between Jimmy Butler and Bam Adebayo of the Miami Heat at Fiserv Forum on April 16, 2023. — AFP

contact on a move to the hoop and suffered a lower back bruise that ended his night with game two in Milwaukee on Wednesday.

"We'll monitor him," said Bucks coach Mike Budenholzer, who added an x-ray came back "clear" on Antetokounmpo. "We have to wait and see what the doctors say... you've got to take it day by day and see how he's doing and how he feels."

The Heat, among the NBA's worst 3-point shooting teams this season, made 15-of-25 from beyond the arc at Milwaukee. While the Bucks had gone 11-8 in games without Antetokounmpo this season, the Heat led by as many as 15 points with the big man gone. Miami suffered its own injury setback when guard Tyler Herro broke his right hand diving for a loose ball in the second quarter. He's expected to be out four to six weeks after averaging 20.1 points this season.

Jimmy Butler led Miami with 35 points and 11 assists. Gabe Vincent was 4-of-5 from 3-point range and Kevin Love was 4-of-7 on 3-pointers. With Antetokounmpo scoring only eight points, Khris Middleton led the Bucks with 33 points. — AFP

Rublev relishes Monte Carlo 'fairytale'

MONTE CARLO: Andrey Rublev said winning his first Masters 1000 trophy in Monte Carlo on Sunday was like a "fairytale" after the Russian battled past Denmark's Holger Rune in three sets. The fifth seed came from 4-1 down in the deciding set to defeat sixth-seeded teenager Rune 5-7, 6-2, 7-5 after one hour 34 minutes on the red clay of Court Rainier III. The 25-year-old achieved the biggest win of his career after losing Masters finals in Monte Carlo and Cincinnati, both in 2021, to boost his confidence heading into next month's French Open on clay.

"It's a great feeling. Today I handled my emotions really well," said Rublev. "After struggling so much, so many times, losing in the finals, semifinals, losing even earlier, to win first 1000 Masters and finally I did it. "To win a match like this, losing 4-1, Love-30, breakpoint for 5-1, and to be able to come back and to win is like a fairytale today," said the world number six, who blasted down 33 winners on the way to his 13th career title.

"I remember the previous finals and when I was losing I thought I'd have no chance and mentally I was going down. But today I thought, 'Just believe until the end', and this is what I was trying to do in the third set, hoping I would have an extra chance to come back and what a way to do it." Deprived of his national flag after the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the player from Moscow thanked the crowd for their support. "Coming from the country where I come from, to receive such international support, it is enormous," he said.

Rune was aiming for his second Masters 1000 title after defeating five Top 10 players en route to the title in Paris last year. But the 19-year-old conceded he did not have enough time to recover from his thrilling three-set win over Italy's Jannik Sinner on Saturday. "I didn't have



MONTE CARLO: Russia's Andrey Rublev celebrates with his trophy after winning the Monte-Carlo ATP Masters Series tournament on April 16, 2023. — AFP

any more in me," he said. "I was definitely in control in the third set and also I would say mostly in the first set as well but didn't manage to close it out. "Disappointing, but the most important tournament of the clay season is the French Open, so if I can prepare myself as best as possible for that one, that's what matters."

The two players had previously played each other twice — the Dane won last year at the Masters 1000 in Paris in the quarter-finals before defeating Novak Djokovic in the final. In January, it was Rublev who won their Australian Open clash after saving match points in the last 16. But on Sunday, the meeting of these two fiery big hitters failed to live up to expectations.

The Dane saved seven of the eight break points he faced in the first set, before benefiting from a big unforced error by Rublev on the last game's break point. The Russian immediately took the lead in the second set to lead 2-0, but Rune came back to 2-2. In the process, Rublev chained four games to equalize at one set all. Rune seemed to be on a roll to victory in the third set racing to 3-0 and had a double break point to lead 5-1. — AFP