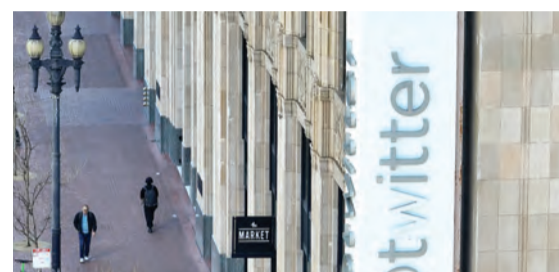




3 DHAMAN completes hospital building in Jahra governorate



6 Scotland's leader Sturgeon announces shock resignation



11 Archaeologists uncover remains of 5,000-year-old tavern in Iraq



RAMADAN TIMINGS	
Fajr	03:55
Shurooq	05:18
Dhuhr	11:47
Asr	15:22
Maghrib	18:17
Isha	19:37

Govt tries to remedy population structure

Authorities target 70-30 percent ratio of Kuwaitis to expats

KUWAIT: Official government sources said the government will start discussing several decisions to remedy the population structure after the Eid al-Fitr holiday and then send them to authorities to start implementing them immediately. They said the government is implementing legislation to remedy the population structure that was issued by the parliament earlier. It agreed on serious steps that guarantees the reduction of expatriate numbers to 30 percent, while Kuwaitis will be 70 percent of the population, contrary to the current situation, as expatriates form the majority of the population.

Sources said the government will approve the comprehensive national development plan that de-

tails the need for expat labor and programs that organize professional qualifications mentioned in this plan and sets certain ceilings on the number of expats. Sources said the government will set the policies and various plans for government entities with regards to the replacement of expat labor by Kuwaitis and improve programs of the Public Authority for Applied Education and Training to affirm the replacement policies.

Sources said government discussions include implementation procedures to adopt means of prevention and treatment of diseases and epidemics in the health system for labor coming from abroad, as well as setting the policies of banning the transfer of expat workers between various sectors.

They said the government's decisions will focus on the relative weight of each community as well as the relative weight of the number of expats in general, but the decisions will exclude GCC citizens, Kuwaitis' foreign spouses and their children, heads and members of diplomatic missions in Kuwait and their families and employees on condition of reciprocity. Military missions of countries Kuwait has security treaties with and workers assisting them and aviation operators are also excluded.

Labor that is brought from abroad and working on infrastructure projects or other economic development projects are also excluded until the project is

handed over to the concerned entity. Also excluded are domestic helpers, medical and educational professions and any other category for whom a decision is issued by the Cabinet based on the concerned minister's recommendation.

Sources said the government will caution government entities not to approve the transfer of domestic helpers to the private sector under any circumstances, or transfer visit visas to work permits or family visas. Renewal of the residencies of laborers brought on government contracts is also not allowed after the project is completed and there is no need for them in another government project.

Flexible working hours to continue

KUWAIT: The Civil Service Commission announced that the flexible working hours' system for the public sector will continue after the Eid Al-Fitr holiday and for several months until a study for the system is completed. As per the system, state departments can choose from the following seven-hour-long work timings:- From 7:00 am to 2:00 pm; From 7:30 am to 2:30 pm; From 8:00 am to 3:00 pm; From 8:30 am to 3:30 pm.

RAMADAN KAREEM

Wisdom behind fasting

By Hassan T Bwambale

First and foremost, it should be clear that every act of worship has immediate benefits to us in various ways. However, we worship Almighty Allah only because we love Him, fear Him with awe and reverence and expect His rewards. Almighty Allah tells us what can be translated as: "O you who believe, respond to Allah and to the Messenger when he calls you to that which gives you life. And know that Allah intervenes between a man and his heart, and that to Him you will (assuredly) be gathered." (Al-Anfal 8: 24)

The white days are present in every lunar month. In those days the moon full, from the beginning of the night to its end. They are the thirteenth, fourteenth and fifteenth of every lunar month. They are called white because of the whiteness of the night by the moon, and whiteness and brightness of the day with the sun. It was also said that they were called so because Almighty Allah forgave Adam (AS) during that period of time and whitened his scroll. (Islamonline.net)

Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) urged us to fast those days. Abu Huraira (ra) narrated, "My intimate friend (ie, Prophet Muhammad - PBUH) advised me to do three things and I will never leave them until I die. They are: To fast three

Continued on Page 6

Sudanese flee as death toll mounts

KHARTOUM: Thousands of residents on Wednesday fled Sudan's capital, where witnesses said bodies lay in the street from fighting between the army and paramilitaries after a 24-hour truce failed to take hold. Five days of fighting in Khartoum and elsewhere in the northeast African country have killed at least 185 people, according to the most recent UN toll.

Foreign diplomats have been attacked, and United Nations emergency relief coordinator Martin Griffiths said the UN had received "reports of attacks and sexual violence against aid workers". Governments started planning to evacuate their citizens, among them

many UN staff. The violence erupted on Saturday between the forces of two generals who seized power in a 2021 coup: army chief Abdel Fattah Al-Burhan and his deputy, Mohamed Hamdan Daglo, who commands the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF).

It followed a bitter dispute between them over the planned integration of the RSF into the regular army - a key condition for a final deal aimed at restoring Sudan's democratic transition. "Life in Khartoum is impossible if this war does not stop," said Alawya Al-Tayeb, 33, on her way out of the capital. "I tried to make children not see the slain bodies on the streets," she said, adding that her children currently suffer from shock and will need treatment.

Continued on Page 6



KHARTOUM: Smoke rises behind buildings in Khartoum on April 19, 2023, as fighting between the army and paramilitaries raged for a fifth day after a 24-hour truce collapsed. — AFP

India population to surpass China

NEW DELHI: India is set to overtake China as the world's most populous country by the end of June, UN estimates showed Wednesday, posing huge challenges to a nation with creaking infrastructure and insufficient jobs for millions of young people. The seismic shift will see India's population hit 1.4286 billion - almost three million more than China's 1.4257 billion - at mid-year, the United Nations Population Fund's State of World Population report forecast.

China has generally been regarded as the world's most populous country since the fall of the Roman Empire but last year

its population shrank for the first time since 1960, while India's has continued to rise. The South Asian giant spreads from the Himalayas to the beaches of Kerala, with 22 official languages, and nearly half its inhabitants are under 25.

The country faces huge challenges providing electricity, food and housing for its growing population, with many of its massive cities already struggling with water shortages, air and water pollution, and packed slums. According to the Pew Research Centre, the number of people in India has grown by more than one billion since 1950, the year the UN began gathering population data.

China ended its strict "one-child policy", imposed in the 1980s amid overpopulation fears, in 2016 and

Continued on Page 6



MUMBAI: Commuters exit Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Railway terminus during the morning rush hour in Mumbai. — AFP

Zionist soldiers shoot seven in West Bank raid

JERUSALEM: Seven Palestinians were injured in a Zionist army operation in the occupied West Bank, the Palestinian health ministry said, hours after two men were injured by gunfire near a Jewish site in annexed east Jerusalem. The shooting comes amid a period of deadly attacks and military raids across the West Bank, along with killings in Zionist entity.

The Palestinian ministry reported six people with "minor injuries from live fire" had gone to Jenin gov-

ernmental hospital, while another person shot had been admitted to a nearby hospital following the raid in the northern West Bank city. A statement from the military confirmed that an operation was underway in the Jenin refugee camp, without giving further details. Earlier Tuesday, Zionist authorities said a suspected Palestinian gunman had wounded two men in the Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood of east Jerusalem after firing at their car. "Police officers are at the scene conducting searches for the suspect who fled," the police said in a statement. Zionist security forces closed off streets in the neighborhood, where an AFP journalist saw officers entering a Palestinian home, with a drone and helicopter as well as police dogs aiding the search. Officers enforcing the shutdown prevented cars and people from moving in the centre of the neighborhood, as heavily armed forces combed the area.

Continued on Page 6



WEST BANK: A man holds bullet casings and shrapnel found following a Zionist military operation at the Jenin camp for Palestinian refugees in the occupied West Bank. — AFP



Expats find joy during Eid despite longing for home

Going to restaurants, visiting relatives are some of the ways expats mark the holiday

By Ghadeer Ghloom

KUWAIT: After Muslims from all around the globe fast for an entire month during the holy month of Ramadan, they come together to celebrate their adherence and obedience to Allah's obligations on Eid Al-Fitr. The ways of celebrating Eid differs lightly from one culture to another. Muslims in Kuwait usually celebrate Eid by wearing the best clothes they have and visiting family and friends to enjoy a massive feast during the day, where different kinds of the best food are served.

Like their elders, children also await Eid and enjoy it. During Eid, kids usually receive money from their elders as a gift to make them happy and mark the importance of this celebration in their minds. Kuwait Times interviewed some Muslim expats to get a closer look at the way they celebrate Eid in Kuwait while being away from their family due to various circumstances.

Mohammad, a Nigerian man in his early twenties, told Kuwait Times: "On Eid, we make plans to go out with friends, such as booking a trip to Failaka Island for the day or visit other places. We also visit people who are from the same country we come from and spend Eid with them." Although Mohammad gathers with his friends to share the joy of Eid in Kuwait, it is not as enjoyable as it is with his family. "I wouldn't say that we do not really feel the joy, because there are still people to meet up with



Rizwan Shaikh

during Eid. So, yes, I can say that I do feel it a bit. But of course, it's not as it is back home," he said.

Menna, an Egyptian woman also in her early twenties, said: "I used to enjoy Eid in Egypt way more than I do in Kuwait. In Kuwait there is not much to do because it is only my parents and I here. We do not have any other family members here. Therefore, our Eid celebration is very simple — we basically go out for lunch and come back home. I'd rather spend Eid in my country if circumstances were easy."

Rizwan Shaikh, an Indian senior accounting system specialist, also misses his relatives and hopes to celebrate Eid with them here, even though he enjoys the company of his wife and kids in Kuwait. "As expats, we miss our family in India. We wish we could bring them here for Eid, specifically our parents, but



unfortunately Kuwait stopped issuing visas, even for families. I only have my immediate family here. We do not have other relatives in Kuwait," he said.

Despite being away from his relatives in India, Rizwan tries to have fun. "We spend our Eid days with family and friends. Usually, we dine out with friends. As for activities, we arrange a picnic and get together. This Eid we have plans to visit Jaber Al-Ahmad Cultural Center and Khairan resort," he said.

Reem, a middle-aged Lebanese woman, said that her siblings and herself were born, raised and married in Kuwait. A large number of her relatives are also in Kuwait, so she enjoys celebrating Eid in Kuwait more than she does in her home country. She is used to Kuwait and feels closer to the people she knows in

Kuwait. Reem also highlighted the issue of forcing expats aged over 60 to leave. "Everyone used to come to my parents' house, as they are the elders among our family members who live in Kuwait. However, after the law forced people over 60 to leave, my parents had to go back to Lebanon, so, we no longer gather in one place," she said.

Reem added in order to meet at one place, they book a chalet or a family table at a restaurant so they can enjoy their Eid feast. When it comes to visiting each other's homes, Reem said they divide their visits among themselves. Only a certain number of families can visit one house, based on the capacity of that house. According to Reem, the visits usually start with visiting the elder relative's home, then to the younger ones.

Indian Ambassador sends Eid greetings

On behalf of the Embassy of India in Kuwait, I extend my warm greetings to His Highness Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, Amir of the State of Kuwait, His Highness Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, Crown Prince of the State of Kuwait, His Highness Sheikh Ahmad Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, Prime Minister of the State of Kuwait, the government and the friendly people of the State of Kuwait, on the occasion of the advent of Eid Al-Fitr. I also take this opportunity to convey my good wishes to all members of Indian community in Kuwait.

As in Kuwait, Eid Al-Fitr is a special festival in India that is celebrated with full festivities across the country with different regional variations. India is home to the second largest Muslim population in the world. The diversity of religions and beliefs, with people from different socio-cultural, linguistic and religious backgrounds living in complete harmony, is the hallmark of India.

As the largest expatriate community in Kuwait, the Indian community continues to be an integral part of the fabric of Kuwaiti society. Our shared history and cultural ties have fostered strong bonds of friendship and cooperation between our two countries. We are proud of the contributions that the Indian community has made to Kuwait's development and growth. I am confident that these ties will only continue to strengthen in the years ahead.

On this auspicious occasion, I would like to express my continued commitment to further strengthen the historical and time-tested ties between India and Kuwait, including fostering greater people to people contacts. I wish all a joyous Eid, filled with love, happiness, and blessings. Eid Mubarak!



Dr Adarsh Swaika

French ambassador sends Eid greetings

On behalf of the French Embassy in Kuwait, it gives me great pleasure to extend our warm wishes to His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and HH the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, to the people of Kuwait and all Muslims on the joy-

ous occasion of Eid Al-Fitr. With the end of the holy month of Ramadan, which was indeed a wonderful opportunity to connect and meet through Diwanis and ghabqas, I cannot wait to celebrate Eid Al-Fitr.

Eid Al-Fitr, embodies the spirit of mercy and provides another opportunity to promote unity and understanding. It is this festive spirit that unites human hearts, and it is the same spirit that is at the core of Franco-Kuwaiti bilateral relations. May this Eid bring peace, success and happiness to the Kuwaiti people, Muslims and all peoples around the world. I wish you all Happy Eid Al-Fitr!



Claire Le Flecher, Ambassador of France to Kuwait



Local

Zain's Iftar Program continues during last 10 days of Ramadan

Company's team visited Mubarakiya Market, joined by CEO Eaman Al-Roudhan



KUWAIT: Eaman Al-Roudhan and Meshal Al-Ansari with Zain and Kuwait Food Bank teams.



Al-Roudhan joins in distributing meals at Mubarakiya Market.

KUWAIT: Zain, Kuwait's leading digital service provider, announces the continuation of its annual Iftar Program during the last ten days of Ramadan, part of the company's social campaign during the holy month. Zain provided meals daily at its iftar hall in Ardiya, as well as across the nation in collaboration with its strategic partner, the Kuwait Food Bank, reaching a total of nearly 40,000 meals throughout the holy month.

Zain recently visited Mubarakiya Market, located at the heart of Kuwait City, to distribute iftar meals. The visit was joined by Zain Kuwait CEO

Eaman Al-Roudhan, Vice Chairman of the Kuwait Food Bank Meshal Al-Ansari, as well as Zain and Food bank teams and volunteers.

Zain's Iftar Program, which came back in its 16th year, is one of the main pillars of the company's Ramadan campaign, springing from its Corporate Sustainability and Social Responsibility Strategy. Zain is proud to be one of the local private sector's leading institutions that exert numerous charitable and volunteer efforts during the holy month.

Zain offered the daily iftar meals to fasting individuals at its hall in Ardiya, as well as via trucks

that delivered the meals daily across the country in strategic partnership with the Kuwait Food Bank. Trucks visited the most populated areas to secure the daily Iftar meal for workers, underprivileged individuals, families, and others who are in most need during Ramadan.

This annual program is considered a main pillar of Zain's comprehensive Corporate Sustainability and Social Responsibility (CSSR) campaign during the holy month of Ramadan. The Iftar Program is supervised by Zain's team as part of its commitment to present an added

value to the community.

This initiative is part of a series of programs the company has organized throughout the holy month of Ramadan with the aim of having a deep positive impact on the community's various segments, especially the most vulnerable ones. The company's solid CSSR strategy primarily focuses on the wellbeing of the entire nation. For this reason, the company has maintained its support of numerous initiatives that spread awareness and help make a difference to people's everyday lives.

Ukrainian FM lauds Kuwait's support for peace

KUWAIT: Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba lauded Kuwait's firm stance and commitment to international laws and its support for peaceful resolutions to conflicts. This came in an interview with KUNA and Kuwait TV during the Ukrainian minister's visit to Kuwait Tuesday, which also marks the anniversary of 30 years since the inception of diplomatic ties between the two friendly countries. The Ukrainian foreign minister's visit is the first of its kind to any GCC country since the start of the war in his country.

"We have not had any single black spot in our relations in the last 30 years," said Kuleba. "We are grateful to Kuwait for the support we have received since the war in Ukraine began and in particular the humanitarian aid Kuwait has been providing."

Foreign Minister Sheikh Salem Abdullah Al-Jaber Al-Sabah welcomed Kuleba to the General Diwan of the foreign minister where they discussed bilateral ties in the fields of trade, investment and business-to-business development. They also discussed the latest developments of the Ukrainian crisis. Sheikh Salem held an iftar banquet in Kuleba's honor.

"Our economy suffered because of the war but our intrapreneurial companies have adapted to the new reality which is another reason why I am in Kuwait, to promote and welcome not only businesses from Kuwait to Ukraine but to restore a positive dynamic in Ukrainian exports to Kuwait," Kuleba stated.

Sheikh Salem praised the strength of the bilateral relations between the State of Kuwait and Ukraine, expressing his pride in the results of the joint cooperation between the two friendly countries in various fields. He affirmed the position of the State of Kuwait

regarding the Ukrainian crisis, calling for the necessity of adhering to the principles of international law and the Charter of the United Nations, and affirming the principle of the sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity of states in accordance with their internationally recognized borders.

He also stressed the importance of supporting international efforts aimed at a cease-fire and de-escalation to find a peaceful solution to the crisis, in compliance with the principle of resolving disputes by peaceful means and through dialogue in accordance with the law. International and the Charter of the United Nations.

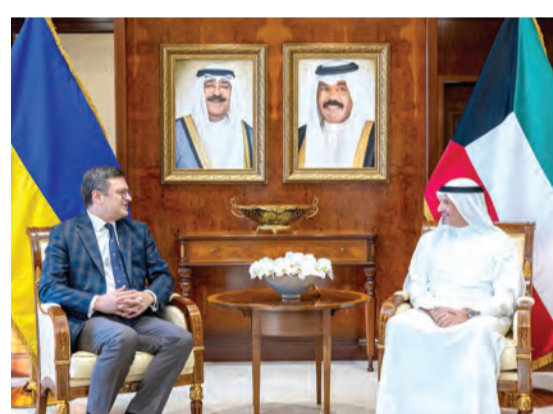
Kuleba also mentioned several historic events where the two countries exercised their goodwill toward one another. Among them is Kuwait's support in constructing shelters for the surrounding areas of the Chernobyl nuclear disaster in 1986.

He also expressed his gratitude towards Kuwait's stance in the international scene when it voted in favor of resolutions related to Ukraine, especially the United Nations resolution that called for peace for the ongoing conflict, calling Kuwait's support "the best example of how Kuwait supports Ukraine in international organizations".

"No other country in the world wants peace more than Ukraine and having Kuwait on our side and its support extended to our territorial integrity and sovereignty is a very important part of the global coalition that is struggling to establish peace," referring to the mentioned UN resolution that attracted 141 in favor votes in the general assembly.

Kuleba then said that Ukraine "was a food security guarantor, exporting millions of tons of grain globally; allowing prices to be controlled and to avoid food crises and famines in many countries," stating that "since the war began, Russia has been blocking our ports putting a risk on the export of Ukrainian grain, yet what is more important are the lives of the millions of people that consume Ukrainian grain that is put to risk."

"Because we know what it means to starve," Kuleba stated, referring to the famine that befell sov-



KUWAIT: Foreign Minister Sheikh Salem Abdullah Al-Jaber Al-Sabah welcomes Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba during his visit to Kuwait. — KUNA

iet-Ukraine in the 30s of the last century when millions died of starvation. "We promised ourselves, no matter how difficult our own situation is, we will be providing bread to people around the world," he said, mentioning various initiatives and programs Ukraine put forward to keep the export of Ukrainian grain going.

Kuleba then said that he expects Ukraine to be "the biggest construction site in the world (after the war), to restore what is being destroyed by guns now." He mentioned the vast opportunities that are available to further expand cooperation in all fields, hoping for both sides to seize them for the utmost benefit.

"While looking at the way you live, I imagine that we want to build the same quality of life when we win and liberate our country, we want to follow in your footsteps to overcome the tragedy of war, to be a peaceful prosperous country like Kuwait," Kuleba said. Kuleba was in Baghdad Monday where he met with several top officials including Iraq's Prime Minister Mohammad Al-Sudani and his Iraqi counterpart Fouad Hussain as part of a regional tour to expand and tighten relations. — KUNA

Arab League launches new media award

CAIRO: The Arab League announced on Wednesday a new award to encourage and promote media services in member countries taking on written, radio, television and digital works related to the environment.

The selection of winners for the Arab Media Excellence Award 2023 will be sponsored by Kuwait, said Assistant Secretary-General and head of media and communication at the Arab League Ambassador Ahmed Khattabi.

"The jury will meet soon to decide on the submitted nominations, in preparation for the delivery of awards to the winning personalities and institutions. ... (The meeting will be held) on the sidelines of the 53rd Session of the Council of Arab ministers of information next June in Rabat," he said.

The winning works will highlight the media's contributions to achieving the goals of the United Nations Agenda for Sustainable Development 2030. He pointed out that the Arab League is exerting every effort in full cooperation with member states, professional organizations and federations working under its umbrella to support media work and ensure its content remains creative, interactive and open to its social, economic and cultural environment.

Khattabi expressed his appreciation and gratitude to Arab media organizations for their role in circulating information, enlightening public opinion and making an effective contribution to national and developmental structure in the region, in addition to defending Arab issues, at the forefront of which is the Palestinian issue. — KUNA

Greenhouses 'better option for Kuwait'

By Faten Omar

KUWAIT: Farming in a greenhouse can help limit the effects of climate change and it is possible to tweak the temperature, humidity and other environmental variables. Experts have called to use greenhouses as a better option for the Kuwaiti environment. Farmer and agricultural expert Abdulrahman Mohammad told Kuwait Times these greenhouses can produce premium crops out of season, efficiently manage pests and grow crops year-round.

"Greenhouses are used in Kuwait to grow plants and vegetables in the difficult desert climate while providing a controlled environment that can help protect plants from extreme temperatures, dryness and wind, which are common in Kuwait," he said, noting greenhouses are used by both commercial farmers and home gardeners in Kuwait.

"Some of the crops that are commonly grown in greenhouses in Kuwait include tomatoes, cucumbers, lettuce and herbs," Mohammad said, revealing that building and maintaining a greenhouse in Kuwait can be challenging due to the extreme weather conditions, but with proper planning and management, it is possible to grow a variety of crops successfully. He added that many greenhouse owners in Kuwait use a combination of techniques such as proper ventilation, shading and irrigation to ensure that their crops thrive. "Greenhouses are used for many different things, such as growing crops, conducting research and experiments," he added.

Mohammad explained the key consideration for building and operating greenhouses in Kuwait is the location should receive plenty of sunlight and is protected from strong winds, in addition to choosing a



design that is appropriate for Kuwait's climate, where the greenhouse should be well-insulated to retain heat during cooler months and have sufficient ventilation to prevent overheating during the summer.

"In Kuwait's dry climate, irrigation is essential for greenhouse plants to thrive. A drip irrigation system is recommended, as it is efficient and conserves water. Also, the soil is generally low in organic matter and nutrients, so it is important to add compost and other organic matter to improve soil quality while controlling pests and disease and selecting the right crops that are well-suited to Kuwait's climate and can thrive in a greenhouse environment," Mohammad said.

Regarding maintaining greenhouses in the summer of Kuwait, the expert said: "It can be challenging due to the extreme heat and dry conditions. But proper ventilation is essential to prevent overheating, as well as shading, watering and maintaining proper humidity levels. With proper management and planning, you can successfully grow crops in a greenhouse even in the extreme summer heat."

Mohammad noted there are some disadvantages of greenhouses — they can be expensive to build and require constant monitoring, maintenance and care, which could increase the use of electricity and water.

Officers sincerely serve worshipers during Ramadan



KUWAIT: Ministry of Interior officials in various sectors were examples of dedication and sincerity in providing all humanitarian and security assistance and facilitating traffic for worshipers throughout the blessed month of Ramadan. The "watchful eyes" are keen to continue working diligently and sincerely around the clock in maintaining the security of the homeland and the safety of its citizens. — KUNA

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Debtors-relief campaign gets more donations

KUWAIT: The Minors Affairs Authority has donated KD 250,000 for the initiative launched by the social affairs ministry to help debtors, in cooperation with the communications and justice ministries.

The authority said the initiative has helped relieve the distress of a number of debtors who were burdened with debts and failed to pay them because of their economic. It embodies the authority's leadership in social responsibility and achieving sustainability and its keenness to support the state's social initiatives, reflecting the vision of Kuwait's leadership and people in humanitarian work.

It is noteworthy that the authority has previously provided various contributions to support the state's efforts in facing many social and health crises, the latest of which is the COVID crisis, with an amount of KD 250,000, in addition to its contribution to the relief campaigns provided by Kuwait to support friendly nations in crises.

In related news the Kuwaiti Zakat House announced on Tuesday its donation of KD 250,000 to the debt-relief campaign.

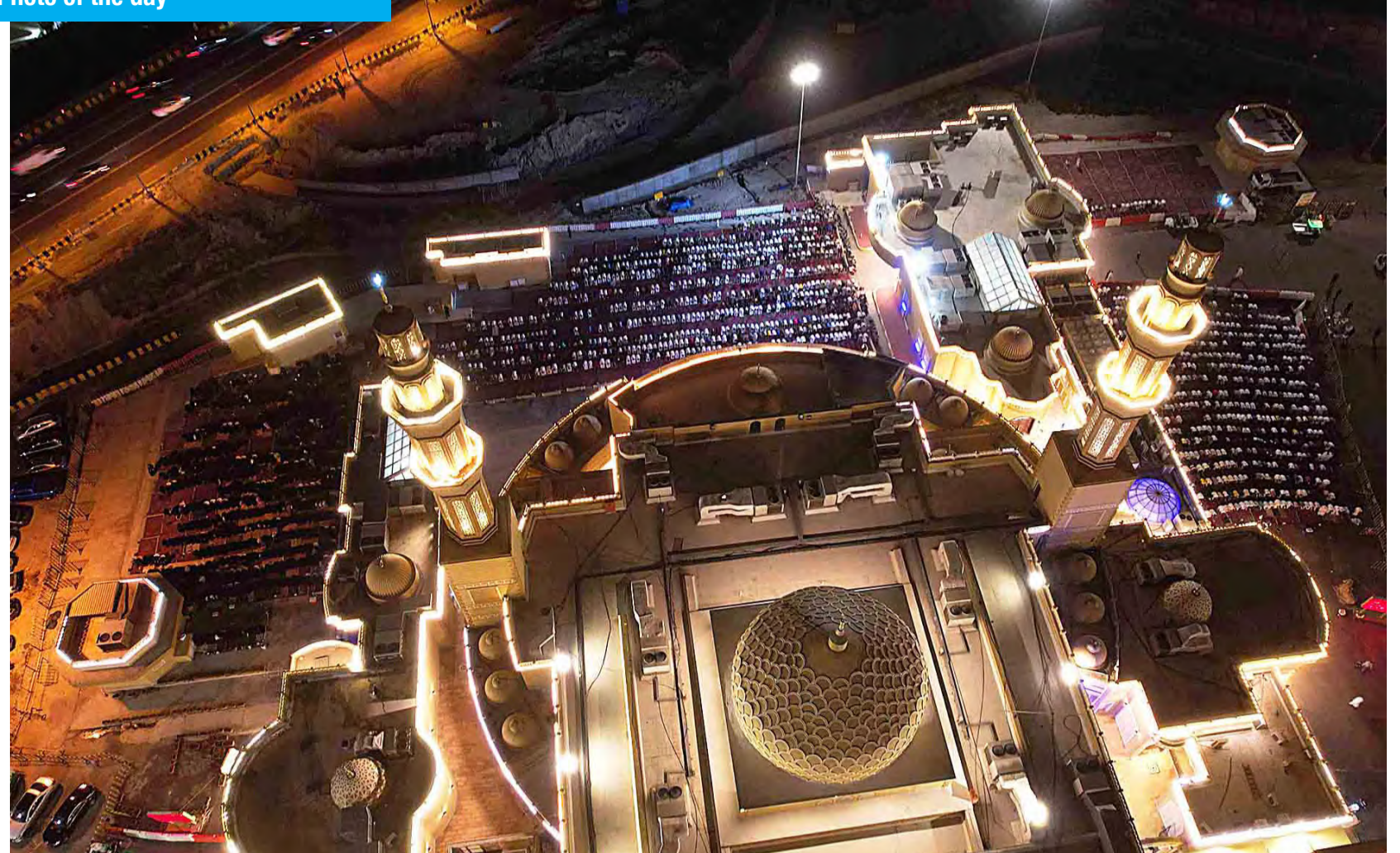
Director of the Zakat House Dr Majid Al-Azemi said: "The Zakat House could not miss the opportunity of being part of the national campaign to help pay the debts of debtors announced by the social affairs ministry."

"The donation of 250,000 dinars is only part of the permanent and continuous role of the Zakat House in helping debtors and paying their debts, as they are eligible for zakat," he said.

Azemi said the Zakat House seeks to adopt campaigns that bring benefit to the Kuwaiti family and society, calling on the esteemed benefactors to extend a helping hand and participate in these campaigns to protect the pillars of Kuwaiti families from collapse.

"Over the past years, the House has carried out similar campaigns that resulted in the payment of debts and the lifting of arrest and habeas corpus for a large number of citizens," he explained. — Agencies

Photo of the day



KUWAIT: An aerial view shows worshippers performing qiyam ul-layl prayers at Bilal bin Rabah Mosque. — Photo by Fouad Al-Shaikh

Eidiyah ATMs provide new bank notes for Eid

Machines to remain in malls across the country until second day of Eid



KUWAIT: ATM machines for Eidiyah have been distributed in malls and shopping centers across the country to provide new banknotes during Eid celebration.



KUWAIT: ATM machines for Eidiyah have been distributed in malls and shopping centers across the country to provide fresh bills for those looking to gift money during Eid. The machines, which will be in place until the second day of Eid Al-Fitr, provide notes of KD 1, KD 5, KD 10 and KD 20.

The Central Bank of Kuwait provided the Eidiyah ATMs in cooperation with Kuwaiti banks and the Shared Automated Banking Services Company (KNET), in order to facilitate and speed up citizens' access to Eidiyah, and in response to the expected increase in demand for new banknotes to be distributed on the occasion of Eid.

Giving Eidiyah is a main part of Eid festivities for many Muslim families. The term "Eidiyah" refers to

money given to children as gifts on both Eid Al-Fitr and Eid Al-Adha. It is typically distributed to the younger members of the family after the morning Eid prayer when kids gather around elders to receive their bills. This gives them the choice to decide what to buy as a gift for themselves.

Many families also use it as a reward for kids who successfully complete the month-long fasting month of Ramadan. Others give it out as a token of love and appreciation to young family members during the celebration. While giving Eidiyah is predominantly limited to children in some families, others extend the tradition to female members of the family, including sisters, mothers, wives and even sisters-in-laws. — Agencies

Kuwaiti detained in Armenia for over a year, without charge

KUWAIT: Lawyer Mohamad Al-Muthafar is calling on Kuwaiti citizens to respect and apply the laws of the countries they visit. Muthafar has taken on a case of a Kuwaiti citizen who has been detained in Armenia for more than a year, with his family unable to help him despite travelling to the country. Muthafar said he has taken necessary measures to end the suffering of this detained citizen.

Teacher's society decries decision to stop transfers

KUWAIT: The Kuwaiti Teachers Association called on the Civil Service Commission to exclude the Ministry of Education from the decision to continue stopping transfers, assignments and secondments which was issued this week. It said the commission's decision will negatively affect the education process

According to Muthafar, it is legally not permissible to detain a person of any nationality for such period without being charged with any accusation, or referring him to court. "It is illegal and violates the rules of justice and humanity, whatever the reason for the detention is," he said. "It violates all principles, legal norms and international laws."

Muthafar said he recognizes that the Kuwait Foreign Ministry is doing its best to help the detained citizen, as well as the ambassador of Kuwait in Armenia Nawaf Al-Enezi, who has spared no effort in providing the assistance required. He thanked the Assistant Secretary of Consular Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ambassador Aziz Al-Dehani for their keen concern for the safety and security of Kuwaiti citizens abroad.

and comes at a difficult time, where the association anticipates vacancies in many supervisory positions, in addition to vacancies currently present.

Head of the society Hamad Al-Houli said: "It is really surprising that this decision comes from the Civil Service Bureau at a time when the Ministry of Education is seeking to accommodate leadership and supervisory positions ... and trying to secure plans for its preparations for the new academic year, which requires the accommodation of these positions and the activation of assignment, transfer and other decisions." The Civil Service Commission had issued a circular on April 17, 2023, regarding stopping appointments to leadership positions and filling supervisory positions.



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Taiwan civilians train for Chinese invasion

Foreign players lurk as Sudan rival generals battle it out

Page 6

Page 7

China hospital fire leaves 29 dead

Twelve people detained in connection with the blaze

BEIJING: Chinese authorities said on Wednesday they had detained a dozen people over a hospital fire in Beijing that left at least 29 dead and forced desperate survivors to jump out of windows to escape. The blaze, which broke out on Tuesday afternoon at the Changfeng Hospital in China's capital, killed mostly patients, and left scores of other people injured.

Dramatic footage posted to social media showed people clinging to ropes and jumping from the building, while others perched on external air conditioning units in a desperate bid to shelter from the flames. The Fengtai district's deputy mayor expressed his "deep condolences" over the deaths of the 16 women and 13 men killed in the inferno, the deadliest in Beijing in over two decades.

"We feel deep remorse and guilt," Li Zongrong told journalists as he announced the toll at a press conference on Wednesday. "I hereby express our deep condolences for the victims, and express our sincere respects to the victims' families, the injured and their relatives, and apologise to the people of the whole city," he said.

Twelve people, including the hospital's director, have been detained in connection with the fire, said Sun Haitao from Beijing's public security bureau, adding that representatives from a company renovating the facility were among those being held.

A preliminary probe revealed the blaze had been caused by "sparks generated during the internal renovation and construction of the inpatient department of the hospital", according to

Zhao Yang from the city fire brigade. The sparks "ignited the volatile elements of the flammable paint on the site", Zhao said.

39 hospitalised

State broadcaster CCTV reported that out of the dead, 26 were patients at the hospital, two were hospital staff, and one was a patient's family member.

State-run People's Daily reported that as of Wednesday morning 39 people were being treated in hospital with injuries, and another three had been discharged. Top city officials visited the hospital shortly after the fire, which broke out at around 1:00 pm on Tuesday and was extinguished half an hour later. Beijing party secretary Yin Li vowed to "quickly identify the cause of the accident and hold the relevant responsible persons accountable", according to the Beijing Daily.

AFP journalists on Wednesday saw dozens of people outside the entrance to the hospital, where a large number of police officers were stationed. Some of the hospital's windows appeared blackened and at least one was broken.

The facade of one of the hospital buildings was completely blackened by soot. AFP journalists saw people who appeared to be investigators taking photos from inside the blackened building, with the interior visibly damaged by the flames. Many family members lost contact with patients in the aftermath of the disaster, the China Youth Daily said in a separate report on Wednesday, adding that many of them were elderly people with mobility problems.



BEIJING: Police officers are seen at the Changfeng Hospital in Beijing, after a fire broke out a day earlier. An investigation was underway on April 19 after a fire ripped through a hospital in China's capital Beijing, killing 29 people, state media reported. —AFP

A police officer on the scene on Wednesday told AFP the city "will probably make the appropriate arrangements" to take care of victims' relatives. The hospital is located in the capital's western urban area, about 25 minutes by car from Tiananmen Square. Deadly

fires are common in China due to weak safety standards and lax enforcement.

Tuesday's tragedy was the deadliest in the Chinese capital since a June 2002 fire at an internet cafe killed 25 students. Ten people died in an apartment block blaze in northwestern Xin-

jiang in November, sparking protests against COVID-19 lockdowns blamed for hindering rescue efforts.

And 38 people were killed in a fire at a factory in central China, also in November, with authorities blaming workers for illegal welding. —AFP



WILMINGTON: Justin Nelson (2R), joined by fellow members of the Dominion Voting Systems legal team, depart the Leonard Williams Justice Center in Wilmington, Delaware. Vote machine maker Dominion and Fox News settled a defamation case over falsehoods about the 2020 presidential election aired on the conservative TV network, a US judge announced Tuesday. —AFP

Fox faces stain of disinformation engine despite settlement

WASHINGTON: Fox News averted a potentially humiliating defamation trial after a last-minute settlement Tuesday, but it took a reputational beating that observers said was unlikely to spur the influential broadcaster to tame its "disinformation engine."

The network, one of the most powerful and profitable in the United States, agreed to a \$787.5 million settlement in a lawsuit launched by voting technology company Dominion over its coverage of false rigging claims in the 2020 election.

While Fox News wriggled out of what was expected to be an explosive trial, analysts said the settlement was a rare example that showed there could be a heavy price for blatant disinformation—even for once-untouchable media giants.

"This can be seen as a wake-up call for live broadcasters and a reminder that there really is a difference between false factual statements, and knowingly broadcasting such false information, and protected speech," Roy Guterman, a Syracuse University professor, told AFP.

Dominion, which sued Fox News for \$1.6 billion, had alleged that the network promoted Donald Trump's unfounded claim that its voting machines were used to rig the 2020 election in favor of Joe Biden. The settlement meant that none of the broadcaster's high-profile personalities—including Fox Corporation chairman Rupert Murdoch and hosts such as Tucker Carlson and Sean Hannity—will have to testify. "A loss—and the trial process itself—would have been much worse for Fox," John Culhane, a professor at Delaware Law School at Widener University, told AFP. "They were staring down the prospect of a parade of high-profile witnesses having to try to defend their disinformation machinery to a jury. The audio would have been replayed a thousand times, forever."

'Stain'

Dominion had released copious amounts of internal Fox News communications, including text messages and emails, showing that its executives dismissed Trump's

claims and even expressed a revulsion for the former president despite praising him on air. "The stain this leaves on Fox can't be wiped out with money," said Angelo Caruone, president of the advocacy group Media Matters.

"The network has been completely exposed as a partisan propaganda outlet that is willing to do anything for profit and power." Under the terms of the settlement, the broadcaster will neither have to apologize for or admit to spreading falsehoods on network programming, according to US media.

Will the huge settlement be enough to stop the conservative network from doing the same in the future? Many analysts were sceptical. "Will Fox's disinformation engine be chastened? I doubt it," Gregory Miller, the co-founder of the nonpartisan nonprofit OSET Institute, told AFP.

"It may bring about some cooling off, but I fear it will be in full gear" in the lead up to the 2024 presidential election. Experts predict a highly polarized 2024 race. Trump—whose false claim that the previous election was stolen from him incited a violent mob to attack the US Capitol on January 6, 2021—is running for president for a third time and remains a front-runner for the Republican nomination.

'Roadmap for falsehoods'

Fox News's legal troubles are hardly over. It faces another \$2.7 billion defamation lawsuit by another voting technology company Smartmatic, which has similarly accused the network of false narratives that it played a role in Trump's 2020 defeat.

"Dominion's litigation exposed some of the misconduct and damage caused by Fox's disinformation campaign," a Smartmatic attorney said in a statement reported by US media. "Smartmatic will expose the rest." Miller voiced concern that Tuesday's settlement, which arguably reaffirms the high bar for media defamation, could provide "other networks with a legal roadmap for disseminating future falsehoods." And if the settlement is characterized by Fox or its supporters as a "victory" that could be even more disruptive, he added.

"Fox can basically flip this as being the victim," Andrew Selepak, media professor at University of Florida, told AFP. "I'm sure there are some people... who might be celebrating this result, but don't recognize that once a precedent is set, it can be turned on anybody. "While Fox can survive a settlement this large, you know, there (are) a lot of news organizations that would not be able to." —AFP

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Business

THURSDAY, APRIL 20, 2023

Musk touts new moderation policy to reassure advertisers

Twitter to soon begin tagging posts whose visibility has been limited

MIAMI: Twitter head Elon Musk on Tuesday attempted to reassure wary advertisers by hyping up the site's newly introduced content moderation policy against hateful material. Speaking at a meeting in Florida, the controversial billionaire outlined new rules, first announced Monday, to limit the reach of tweets that do not conform to the platform's guidelines.

"If somebody has something hateful to say, it doesn't mean he should have a microphone," the self-described free-speech absolutist told gathered journalists. "He still should be able to say it, but it needs to be not them pushing it on people," he added.

Under the new policy, unveiled in a blog post titled "Freedom of Speech, Not Reach," Twitter will soon begin tagging posts whose visibility has been limited. The labels will "bring a new level of transparency to enforcement actions," the blog post said. "Tweets with these labels will be made less discoverable on the platform. Additionally, we will not place ads adjacent to content that we label."

Since purchasing the so-called bird app in a rollercoaster \$44 billion deal last year, Musk has sharply reined in content moderation on the platform, allowing the return of many users who had been banned for posting tweets that incite hate or spread misinformation.

At the same time, he also reduced the

company's workforce from more than 7,500 to fewer than 2,000 employees. Last week, US public radio NPR said it was quitting Twitter after the site labeled the highly respected news outlet's account as "state-affiliated media," branding it the same way as media in authoritarian countries such as Russia or China.

The tag was later amended to read "government-funded media," which was also applied to Britain's BBC. Following the row, Canada's CBC/Radio-Canada and Swedish public radio Sveriges Radio (SR) also quit the social network.

The drama came against the backdrop of the rollout of yet another contentious new policy, as Twitter has said that starting April 20, it will only grant its famous blue checkmark to accounts that pay for its Twitter Blue service.

According to analyst Jasmine Enberg at market research firm Insider Intelligence, Twitter's revenue is set to drop 28 percent this year, because "advertisers don't trust Musk." But for Musk, the ability to tinker with Twitter's protocol might be worth the financial risk of spooking advertisers. "It's totally cool to say that you want to have your advertisement appear in certain places in Twitter and not in other places," Musk said Tuesday.

"But it's not cool to try to say what you can do or not do. And if that means Twitter loses hundreds of thousands of dollars, we'll lose it," he said. — AFP



MIAMI BEACH: Twitter CEO Elon Musk holds one of his children after a keynote speech at the "Twitter 2.0: From Conversations to Partnerships," marketing conference in Miami Beach, Florida, on April 18, 2023. — AFP

OAPEC reviews preparations for energy conference

CAIRO: Egypt's Petroleum and Mineral Resources Minister Tarek Al-Molla discussed with newly-appointed Secretary General of the Organization of Arab Petroleum Exporting Countries (OAPEC) Jamal Issa Al-Loughani latest preparations for the 12th Arab Energy Conference, which is scheduled to be held in Doha during December 11-12, 2023.

In statements on Tuesday, Molla affirmed support to Egypt's relentless efforts to promote the organization's work mechanisms and enhance cooperation frameworks between the member states of the organization, which was established in 1968. Loughani reviewed the general framework to enhance the organization's work mechanism in light of the successive changes taking place in the global petroleum industry.

OAPEC, which includes 10 Arab countries, is aimed to enhance and strengthen the cooperation between member states in the petroleum industry, to safeguard the individual and collective interests of members in oil-related fields, to coordinate the activities of members in order to realize a just and reasonable supply quota to the oil consumer market, and to create a favorable environment for the capital and technical transfers to the oil industry. — Agencies

China's CATL unveils battery planned to power planes

SHANGHAI: China's CATL said Wednesday it was working with partners to develop electric passenger planes as they unveiled a condensed matter battery it said was strong enough to power such an aircraft.

The world's biggest maker of batteries for electrical vehicles made the announcement at the Shanghai Auto Show and said it would also launch a version for cars that would go into mass production this year. "The launch of this cutting-edge technology breaks the limits that have long restricted the development of the battery sector and will open up a new scenario of electrification centering on a high level of safety and light weight," the company said in a news release.

CATL did not specify who its airline partners were but said it was practicing aviation-level standards and testing in accordance with industry requirements. "We believe that condensed batteries will have a positive and far-reaching impact on achieving carbon neutrality," CATL's chief scientist Wu Kai told a media conference. The company announced on Tuesday that its core operations would be carbon neutral by 2025, with the rest following in 2035. Its Yibin factory in the southwestern province of Sichuan was certified as the world's first zero-carbon battery factory last year. — AFP

'Stamp of approval': Musk amplifies misinformation

WASHINGTON: Elon Musk promised to make Twitter the "most accurate source of information about the world," but he has repeatedly used his own account to amplify false claims from some of the most notorious disinformers on the internet, according to an AFP analysis of his online activity. The posts show Musk drawing attention to misinformation about everything from the war in Ukraine to the attack on US Congresswoman Nancy Pelosi's husband. Last week, the billionaire boosted a tweet that wrongly suggested doctors misdiagnosed flu cases as COVID-19 deaths.

"One of the greatest mysteries of COVID-19: Where did the flu go in 2020 and 2021?" an account called "KanekoaTheGreat" said, to which Musk replied: "Good question."

It was one of at least 40 times the billionaire replied to the profile, which has promoted the QAnon

conspiracy theory, since purchasing Twitter for \$44 billion nearly six months ago. He has only replied to a handful of accounts more in that time. Using data from PolitiTweet, a website that tracked public figures' posts until Twitter cut off its access, AFP reviewed thousands of replies Musk published between late October and March.

He shared a fabricated CNN segment, called a made-up quote "wise words" and falsely claimed police escorted a rioter through the US Capitol on January 6, 2021. He amplified a post blaming mass shootings on LGBTQ individuals and endorsed a fake casualty count from Ukraine.

Musk has also downplayed COVID-19 and promoted spurious claims about vaccines causing blood clots, miscarriages and heart problems. "We are running out of 'conspiracies' that turned out to be true!" the Twitter owner said in March, replying to a tweet that listed Covid-19 and vaccine safety among the "biggest media lies."

Days later, he tweeted that the "best way to fight misinformation is to respond with accurate information." Experts say Musk's activity is concerning — and not just because of his online influence.

"Musk has almost 135 million Twitter followers and

forced his engineers to increase the reach of his tweets, so we should worry when he spreads misinformation," Brendan Nyhan, a Dartmouth College professor who studies misperceptions in politics, told AFP. "I'm most worried, though, about what these tweets reveal about the judgment of the person who determines the policies of a major social media platform."

Musk's feed

Researchers have tied Twitter's recent policy changes — including Musk's reinstatement of suspended accounts and its overhaul of verification practices — to spikes in misinformation.

NewsGuard, a company that assesses websites' credibility, found accounts paying for Twitter's subscription service are inundating the site with false claims. Musk is driving attention to some of these accounts. "Got the Elon Musk stamp of approval," said "KanekoaTheGreat" on Telegram after one such reply.

A January study from the Institute for Strategic Dialogue, a London-based think tank, recorded a "staggering" increase in Musk's interactions with right-wing accounts since acquiring Twitter, including several profiles other research identified as spreaders of US election misinformation. — AFP

Bulgaria bans Ukraine grain imports, Hungary widens restrictions

BUDAPEST, Hungary: Bulgaria's government on Wednesday approved a temporary ban on imports of Ukrainian grain and other food products after Hungary widened the scope of its ban to include more foodstuffs. In recent days, Poland, Hungary and Slovakia banned the import of grain and other food items from war-hit Ukraine after a slump in prices triggered protests from local farmers.

"The government... passed a decision that temporarily bans... a range of products originating from Ukraine... following the example of three other countries," Bulgarian farming minister Yavor Gechev said after a government meeting.

Sofia said it was "forced to adopt... today's extreme measure" after unilateral bans by other countries were announced, "seriously" increasing the risk for Bulgaria due to the potential diversion of goods. The ban will enter into force from April 24 and last until the end of June, but will not apply to the transit of goods through Bulgarian territory.

Bulgaria hopes for a common EU decision in the next weeks, it added. In May 2022, the European Union allowed Kyiv to export its grain stocks through the bloc after the closure of the Black Sea shipping lanes following Russia's invasion sparked a global food crisis. Member states agreed to import certain products from Ukraine without quantitative restrictions, and without customs and official inspection.

'Serious disturbances'

Earlier Wednesday, Hungary's government widened its temporary ban on the imports of Ukrainian agricultural products to include honey, wine, bread, sugar, and a range of meat and vegetable products. The list of items to be banned were revealed in a



Truck drivers queue on over ten kilometers at the Rava-Ruska border checkpoint on the Ukrainian-Polish border, on April 18, 2023. — AFP

government decree, after Budapest announced on Saturday a measure to halt the import of grain, oilseeds, and several other products.

Budapest complained that a significant proportion of imported Ukrainian products do not leave the EU, and instead have been sold at dumping prices in the member states. Orban's spokesman Zoltan Kovacs on Wednesday denounced "the sudden influx of cheap products" that has created an "untenable situation" for European farmers. "In the absence of the obligation to comply with the strict production rules required by EU law, Ukrainian products have a competitive advantage... which causes serious disturbances in the internal market of the member

states," the decree stated.

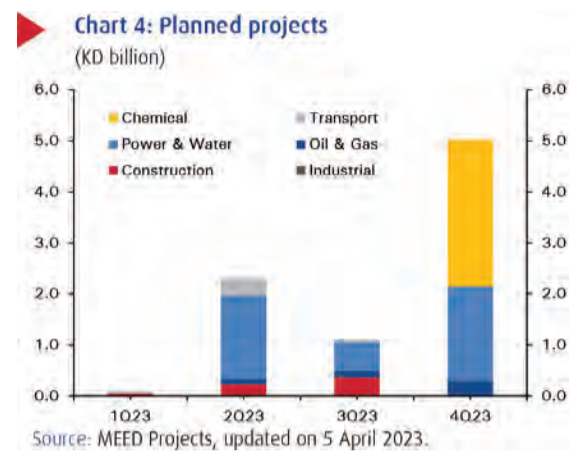
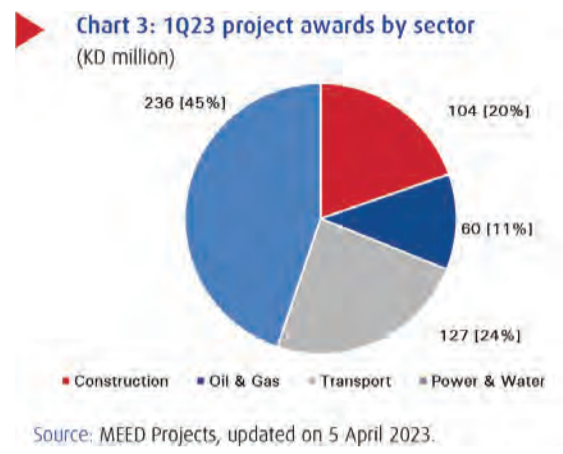
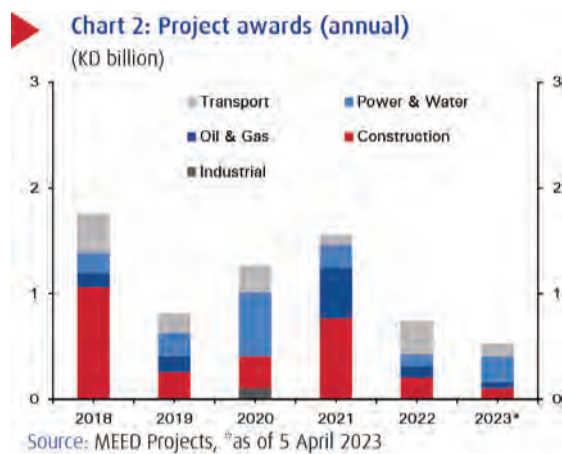
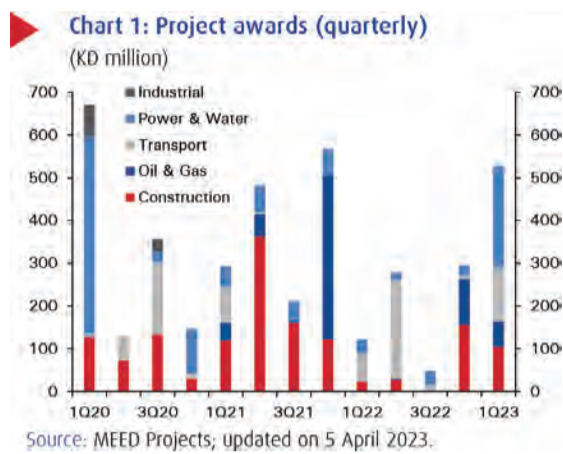
Hungary's decree, published overnight, said that its ban would also apply to flour, cooking oil, and wine imports. The temporary ban will last from Wednesday until June 30. Yet, it will not apply to the transit of these products through Hungary, the decree specified. Hungarian authorities will seal shipments of the affected products at the border and monitor them with the help of electronic devices and patrols, it added. Carriers who break the rules may be fined up to the full value of the shipment. Poland and Ukraine on Tuesday struck a deal to allow Ukrainian grain to transit through Poland after Warsaw banned imports. — AFP

Business

NBK ECONOMIC REPORT

Kuwait project market recovers in 1Q23, sets positive tone for 2024

Road and infrastructure works form bulk of KD 127bn awards



KUWAIT: Kuwait's project activity in 1Q23 staged a rebound following a lackluster 2022. The value of awarded projects rose 78.3 percent quarter-on-quarter (q/q) to KD 527 million (+332 percent y/y) in 1Q23. Three months into 2023, and this figure is already equivalent to more than 70 percent of the total value of projects awarded in 2022.

The acceleration was mainly due to projects in the power and water sectors, awarded by the Ministry of Electricity & Water (MEW). These totaled KD 236 million and accounted for 45 percent of total project awards in 1Q23. Activity in the power sector was notably strong, rising to its highest level in almost six years, with KD 150 million worth of MEW projects and KD 60 million of GCC Interconnection Authority (GCCIA) projects awarded.

The transport sector continued its solid performance. Total project awards came in at KD 127 million, the bulk of which relate to road and infrastructure works on Sabah Al-Ahmad City by the Public Authority for Housing (KD 110 million).

Activity in the construction sector was firm, though it softened from the previous quarter. Total construction awards declined 33 percent q/q to KD 104 million. The main awards were for Kuwait Oil Company's soil remediation project SKETR-2 (KD 45 million) and for the construction of multiple headquarters for the Capital Markets Authority and the Institute of Banking Studies.

Oil and gas project awards fell quarter-on-quarter but were, nevertheless, solid. Awards in the sector tumbled 44 percent q/q to KD 60 million in 1Q23. Limited activity is expected this year, though KOC's Debottlenecking of Gathering Centers

in East Kuwait (KD 210 million) could push total awards above 2021 levels.

There were no projects awarded at all in the chemical and industrial sectors. The chemical sector could see some activity this year if the Kuwait Integrated Petroleum Industries Company's (KIPIC) Al-Zour Petrochemicals project (KD2.9 billion) is awarded in 4Q23.

Looking ahead to the rest of 2023, positive momentum could continue. The partial recovery in the expatriate workforce in 2022 could point to some project mobilization and the government could in months to come prioritize an acceleration in development plan execution once parliamentary elections are completed. For the time being, however, the domestic environment remains challenging with a projected decline in government

capital spending outlined in the FY23/24 draft budget, a slowdown in the consumer-spending boom, relatively high costs of labor and construction materials which have weighed on project activity previously and higher borrowing costs as monetary policy tightens.

Nevertheless, MEED Projects sees KD 8.4 billion worth of awards in the remainder of the year, more than four times higher than in 2022. Admittedly, almost half of that figure relates to KIPIC's Al-Zour Petrochemicals Complex (KD2.9 billion) and Kuwait Authority for Partnership Projects' (KAPP) Al-Zour North Independent Water and Power project (KD 1.2 billion). But even if only 30 percent of the remaining project awards expected this year materialize, it would represent an improvement on 2022's outturn.

Lebanon's caretaker govt raises public sector salaries

BEIRUT: Lebanon's caretaker cabinet has approved a decision to raise public sector salaries and the nation's minimum wage in an effort to match the local currency's rapid devaluation amid a shortage of US dollars reserves and growing public discontent. The cabinet meeting, which lasted four hours, was held on Tuesday as hundreds of protesters from the public sector — civil servants, public school teachers, and retired soldiers — demonstrated outside the government building, promising they would not leave until

salaries were increased. "We came here to discuss the demands raised, which are justified," caretaker Prime Minister Najib Mikati said at the beginning of the session. He explained that the salary increases would be approved in proportion with available resources in the central bank's dwindling reserves, and through revenue generated from customs.

The salaries of public sector workers were increased fourfold, the country's state news agency reported. However, the increase was capped at a total 50 million Lebanese pounds a month, or about \$500, and came with the stipulation that employees must attend at least 14 days of work each month.

The salary increase for the public sector will take effect from May 1. The national minimum wage for the private sector was also raised to nine million pounds, or \$90 at today's market rate, up from 2.6 million pounds, or \$26 a month. — Agencies



UK inflation holds above 10% on rampant food prices

LONDON: UK inflation slowed last month but held above 10 percent on soaring food prices, official data showed Wednesday, further fuelling a cost-of-living crisis despite a series of aggressive interest-rate hikes. The Consumer Prices Index rose by a stronger-than-expected 10.1 percent in March from 10.4 percent in February, the Office for National Statistics (ONS) said in a statement. Inflation held in double figures on surging food and housing costs, dashing expectations for a drop below 10 percent after the Bank of England sharply raised borrowing costs.

The rate had zoomed to a 41-year peak at 11.1 percent last October on sky-high energy bills after key gas producer Russia invaded Ukraine. The UK's Conservative government, headed by Prime Minister Rishi Sunak, had last month unveiled a budget aimed at tackling the cost-of-living crisis, which has sparked strikes as wages drop in value. "These figures reaffirm exactly why we must continue with our efforts to drive down inflation so we can ease pressure on families and businesses," said finance minister Jeremy Hunt. "We are on track to do this... and we'll continue supporting people with cost-of-living support." Despite the efforts, official data this week showed that pay continues to grow more slowly than prices.



LONDON: UK food price inflation rocketed in March to 19.1 percent, hitting the highest level since August 1977. — AFP

price inflation rocketed in March to 19.1 percent, hitting the highest level since August 1977.

The food rate has hit a series of 45-year peaks for several months. There were record March gains for bread and cereal, chocolate and confectionery, other food products including ready-meals and sauces, and hot beverages, the ONS said. "The cost of simply living has crept insidiously higher and wage increases are struggling to keep pace with such high inflation," noted AJ Bell analyst Danni Hewson.

Food prices rocket

"Inflation eased slightly in March, but remains at a high level," said ONS chief economist Grant Fitzner. The main downward impact was from falling motor fuel and heating oil costs, while clothing, furniture and household goods rose by less than one year ago. Fitzner cautioned that this was "partially offset by the cost of food, which is still climbing steeply". Food

Rate cuts

"UK consumers will be utterly fed up with the situation and they'll be angry that other parts of the world seem to be benefiting from inflation falling much faster."

Hunt in March extended a subsidy on energy bills

for a further three months, after the Ukraine conflict sent them surging — and fuelled runaway global inflation. The government forecasts inflation will sink to 2.9 percent by the end of this year. The Bank of England has ramped up interest rates 11 times in a row since late 2021 in a bid to tame consumer prices. The BoE's key rate currently stands at 4.25 percent, the highest level since late 2008. Yet inflation remains at more than five times its official target of two percent. The central bank's next decision is due in May.

"The (inflation) drop is too modest for the (BoE) to stop raising rates: we now look for a final 25 basis-point hike," commented Pantheon Macroeconomics analyst Samuel Tombs. BoE governor Andrew Bailey recently warned that policymakers needed to see inflation come down sharply before ending its current monetary-tightening cycle. — AFP

Goldman Sachs hit by slowdown in corporate mergers

NEW YORK: A slowdown in corporate transactions and weak trading results weighed on Goldman Sachs' first-quarter results on Tuesday, sending shares lower. The big investment bank pointed to a "significant decline in industry-wide completed mergers and acquisitions transactions" and much lower revenues for currency and commodities trading as drivers of the dip in profits.

Net income came in at \$3.1 billion, down 19 percent from the year-ago period on a five percent drop in revenues to \$12.2 billion. The results came on the

heels of a stream of solid earnings reports by JP-Morgan Chase, Citigroup and other large banks that benefited from a rise in interest rates that allowed them to charge more for loans in their vast consumer banking businesses.

Goldman's results included a \$470 million loss connected to a partial sale of the loan portfolio of Marcus, a consumer banking initiative Goldman launched in 2016 that has been largely phased down.

On the positive side, Goldman scored higher revenues in asset and wealth management, thanks partly to the rise in public equity investments during a quarter in which US stocks rallied. Alluding to the travails of mid-sized US banks following the demise of Silicon Valley Bank as "another real-life stress test," Chief Executive David Solomon said the events last month showed "the resilience of Goldman Sachs and the nation's largest financial institutions."

Shares of Goldman dropped 3.7 percent to \$327 in pre-market trading. — AFP



NEW YORK: In this file photo taken on January 17, 2023, the Goldman Sachs booth at the New York Stock Exchange in New York City. — AFP

EU agrees plan to boost chip production

STRASBOURG: The European Parliament and EU member states reached an agreement Tuesday on a plan to boost the supply of semiconductors in Europe, as the bloc races to reduce its dependence on Asian suppliers. The European Union has prioritized local chip production after the coronavirus pandemic triggered supply chain shocks that led to significant shortages.

Asian industry, especially firms in China and Taiwan, currently dominate the manufacture and export of semiconductors. EU chief Ursula von der Leyen said the deal "will allow for a competitive chips industry and build the foundation for a global market share. It will power a clean tech industry made in Europe and strengthen our digital resilience and sovereignty."

Under the provisional political agreement, the EU aims to double its current global market share to 20 percent in 2030 and mobilize more than 43 billion euros (\$47.2 billion) in public and private investments to feed Europe's growing appetite for chips. Europe will need to quadruple its production to meet this target.

Funding will come from existing EU budget money and the deal will also loosen state aid rules to spend money on developing centers to produce the key component. The EU will also mobilize 3.3 billion euros for research and development, and the deal includes a system to monitor supply shortages to act in times of crisis. The legislative text also forms part of the bloc's bid to produce more in Europe to reduce its vulnerability to geopolitical shocks like the war in Ukraine.

When Russia invaded Ukraine last year, the EU scurried to find alternative energy sources after years of relying upon Russian fossil fuels.

"This will allow us to rebalance and secure our supply chains, reducing our collective dependence on Asia," Thierry Breton, the EU's industry commissioner, said in a statement after the parliament and the European Council reached an agreement.

Hunger for chips

Europe was under pressure to act fast. In August, the United States approved its own Chips and Science Act that included around \$52 billion to promote production of microchips and tens of billions of dollars more for scientific research and development.

Japan and South Korea have also vowed to spend billions on developing their countries' semiconductor production. Washington has leaned on allies including Japan and the Netherlands this year to curb exports on semiconductor technology to China, much to Beijing's chagrin.

French-Italian chipmaker STMicroelectronics, US-based GlobalFoundries and US tech giant Intel said last year they would pour billions into new production sites in France and Germany. They will now be able to seek state subsidies for their projects. Brussels is racing to protect the bloc's competitive edge in the face of threats from China and the United States, which have ploughed billions into green technology.

Last month, the EU's executive arm published two proposals to push Europe to produce more clean technology including critical raw materials needed to manufacture batteries for electric vehicles.

"Europe aims to become an industrial powerhouse in the markets of the future — the digital and clean technologies that will allow us to remain a competitive export force, generate quality jobs and ensure our security of supply," Breton said. "Because there will be no green or digital transition without a strong manufacturing base," he added. — AFP

Lifestyle

ARAB, TURKISH SWEETS HEAVILY SOUGHT DURING RAMADAN IN ISTANBUL



Sweets, originating from Arab and Turkish cultures, meet in the Holy Month of Ramadan in Turkiye, bringing the demand for such delights to a crescendo. No matter the preference or the taste, those with a sweet tooth would surely find their desire fulfilled especially in Al-Fatih district of Istanbul where an assortment of Arab restaurants are located. — KUNA

Turkish sweets heavily sought during Ramadan in Istanbul. — KUNA photos



AI work sparks fierce debate after winning photo award

German artist has sparked an angry row after winning a prestigious photography prize with an entry that was generated by artificial intelligence. Boris Eldagsen eventually rejected the gong from the Sony World Photography Awards after concluding that such competitions were not yet equipped to handle AI entries. The awards organizers initially accused the artist of “misleading” behavior, but removed the accusation from a later statement after a furious reply from Eldagsen on Tuesday.

Many photographers and artists fear their livelihoods are under threat from AI tools that allow anyone to create striking images with just a quick text prompt. The rapid rise of AI image generators has already sparked legal cases, as the tools are “trained” on a vast number of images—many of which could be copyright protected. Last year, an

AI-generated artwork won a prize at the Colorado State Fair, prompting soul-searching in the art world.

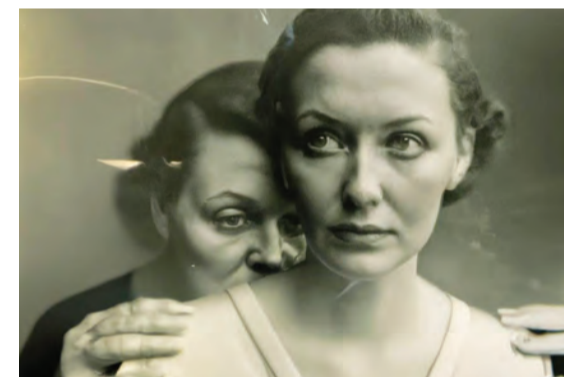
Sony World Photography Awards announced Eldagsen’s entry—a sepia-toned image of two women entitled “Pseudomnesia: The Electrician”—as the winner of its creative category in mid-March. Eldagsen gave interviews at the time explaining how he had made the work and saying he wanted to spark a debate over AI.

However, he wrote last week that “AI images and photography should not compete with each other in an award like this” and rejected the prize. “I applied as a cheeky monkey, to find out if the competitions are prepared for AI images to enter. They are not,” he wrote. The awards body said in its initial response that it had been looking forward to engaging the artist in a discussion about AI but had withdrawn

the work “in keeping with his wishes”.

Its statement added: “Given his actions and subsequent statement noting his deliberate attempts at misleading us, and therefore invalidating the warranties he provided, we no longer feel we are able to engage in a meaningful and constructive dialogue with him.” But Eldagsen wrote on his website that it was “nonsense” to suggest the awards body had been willing to engage.

“They had so many options to use this for good. They used none of them,” he wrote, accusing them of ignoring questions from the media and other photographers. The organizers later sent an edited version of the statement to AFP removing the accusation that they had been misled but insisting they had been prepared to engage with Eldagsen and the AI debate.—AFP



A sepia-toned image of two women entitled “Pseudomnesia: The Electrician”.

Michelle Yeoh urges women to resist being ‘put in a box’

Oscar winner Michelle Yeoh spoke up on Tuesday for diversity and women’s empowerment in the entertainment industry, telling reporters in Kuala Lumpur “we should never allow somebody to put us in a box”. Speaking at her first news conference in her home country since her historic best actress win, the Malaysian star returned to themes that had been staples of her awards season interviews. “I have been very blessed that I’ve continuously been able to work, and work (with) very interesting, very diverse and very forward-thinking filmmakers. That has enabled me to fight for what I

‘Directors have no life’

Yeoh, 60, won the award for her portrayal of Chinese-American laundromat owner Evelyn Wang, who deals with family turmoil while battling an interdimensional villain in the sci-fi action comedy “Everything Everywhere All at Once”. The lack of Asian representation at Hollywood’s highest levels had been a recurring topic in her interviews ahead of the awards. Yeoh later met around 2,000 fans at a trendy shopping mall in the Malaysian capital, many of them screaming and taking photos and videos.

There were more cheers when she lifted her statuette to show it to the fans. “She is a role model for me. Her tough and no-nonsense attitude empowers young women like me,” Ng Xue Ying, a 21-year-old broadcast student, told AFP. Asked at the news conference for her advice to young people around the world, Yeoh said: “Don’t become me, be you... I believe that you are going to be better.”

The Hollywood veteran was born to Chinese-Malaysian parents in the northern city of Ipoh. She em-



Malaysian actress Michelle Yeoh (L), winner of the Oscar for Best Actress in a Leading Role for “Everything Everywhere All at Once”, greets fans during a public appearance in Kuala Lumpur. — AFP photos



Malaysian actress Michelle Yeoh (center), winner of the Oscar for Best Actress in a Leading Role for “Everything Everywhere All at Once”, waves to fans during a public appearance in Kuala Lumpur.



A fan holds a drawing of Malaysian actress Michelle Yeoh, winner of the Oscar for Best Actress in a Leading Role for “Everything Everywhere All at Once”, as she waits for Yeoh’s public appearance in Kuala Lumpur.



Malaysian actress Michelle Yeoh, winner of the Oscar for Best Actress in a Leading Role for “Everything Everywhere All at Once”, gives a press conference in Kuala Lumpur.



Malaysian actress Michelle Yeoh arrives on the red carpet for the 41st Hong Kong Film awards in Hong Kong.

truly believe in: representation, diversity, especially empowerment of women,” she said.

“I don’t believe just because we are women, we are a weaker sex... We should never allow somebody to put us in a box.” Winning the best actress Oscar—as the first Asian woman ever to do so—“represents so much to so many of us”, she said, adding that she “heard the roar of joy, happiness all across the world to Los Angeles” following her victory.

braced dance as a child and specialized in ballet, which she studied in England. Yeoh’s film credits stretch back to the 1980s, but her Hollywood breakthrough came when she was cast as the first ethnic Chinese Bond girl in 1997’s “Tomorrow Never Dies” opposite Pierce Brosnan.

She also starred in the Oscar-winning 2000 martial arts film “Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon”, the 2005 period drama “Memoirs of a Geisha” and the

2018 romantic comedy “Crazy Rich Asians”. Yeoh said she has no interest in becoming a film director. “Directors have no life. I love my life so much,” she said. “You have no time for anything because being a director you have to know everything and be everywhere all at once.” — AFP

Lifestyle

'No legs, no limits': Amputee veteran eyes Everest summit

Gurkha veteran Hari Budha Magar grew up in the shadow of the Himalayas, but only after losing his legs did he resolve to make his childhood dream of scaling Everest a reality. Magar, 43, stepped on an improvised explosive device in 2010 while serving in Afghanistan with the Brigade of Gurkhas — a unit of Nepalis recruited into the British Army.

After years of rehabilitation and training, next month he plans to summit the world's highest mountain, an endeavour promoted on his website under the slogan "no legs, no limits". If successful, the expedition will make him the first double above-the-knee amputee to see the world from the 8,849-m peak.



"After losing both of my legs, my aim became to see what I could do physically. It opened my mind, and I attempted everything I could put my hands on," Magar told AFP before setting off for the Everest base camp. Magar grew up in Nepal, in the foothills of the Himalayan

mountain range, and was always drawn to adventure sports. "When I would ski, the sight of the mountains would remind me of Everest. I would always wonder if I could climb," he said.

Two below-the-knee amputees have reached the peak in the past — New Zealander Mark Inglis in 2006 and China's Xia Boyu in 2018. Magar began preparing for his own expedition the same year as Xia's ascent. But he was forced to put his training on hold to campaign against a since-revoked Nepal law that banned climbers with disabilities on safety grounds. He climbs wearing a specially designed suit and grips attached to shortened prosthetics, with silicon liners under his thighs to prevent frostbite.

Magar finally feels ready for the monumental task ahead after successful summits of Nepal's Mera Peak (6,476 m) and the highest peak in the Alps, Mont Blanc (4,808 m). "There have been many difficulties, but finally everything is coming together for my dream," he said. His expedition has echoes of the first-ever summit of Everest by Edmund Hillary and Tenzing Norgay Sherpa, news of which reached the United Kingdom on the day of Queen Elizabeth II's coronation.

It is a happy coincidence for Magar that his summit coincides with next month's crowning of King Charles III, almost 70 years later, giving him an opportunity to honor the country he served in battle. "That's the crown I fought for. That's the crown I lost my legs for," he said.

'I thought my life was over'

Magar wears shorts everywhere, even in the chilly Himalayan weather, to proudly flaunt his prosthetic legs — but it took him a long time to come to terms with his injury. "I thought my life was over, I thought I would have to spend the rest of my life in a wheelchair," he said. The father of three felt suicidal and developed a drinking problem before the thought of his children's futures forced him to re-evaluate his own.



Gurkha veteran Hari Budha Magar poses during an interview with AFP in Kathmandu. — AFP photos

"My main aim is to raise awareness about disability. Because if I was aware, I wouldn't waste two years of my life, I would have made good use of it," he said. Magar said he wanted to show that people with disabilities can do anything, but there is "just a different way of doing things". "As long as you can adapt your life according to the time and the situation, we can do anything we want. There is no limit, the sky is the limit," he said. Magar's guide, Krishna Thapa, is confident the expedition will succeed. "He is a great mountaineer... he has six years of preparation and several records," he told AFP. "None of the other climbers have that." — AFP



Ali Sethi's infectious hit 'Pasoori' reverberates from Pakistan to Coachella

A tale of forbidden love with an infectious hook, Ali Sethi's song "Pasoori" has become an international phenomenon, fusing poetic tradition with global beats to fuel the rise of the Pakistani singer's star. The Punjabi track whose title roughly translates to "difficult mess" was 2022's most-searched song on Google and has surpassed half a billion views on YouTube, offering a melodic metaphor for conflict between India and Pakistan in the form of an impassioned love song with an eminently danceable flow.

The song's origins stem from when Sethi was asked to pen a song for the popular Pakistani television program Coke Studio, which occurred just after an experience where an Indian broadcaster had pulled out of a creative partnership because the 38-year-old is Pakistani. "You're a Pakistani, and India and Pakistan are at war, and now we can't really put up a billboard saying we're working with you because extremists will set fire to our building," the singer recalls being told. "As a Pakistani I've grown up with that... 'Oh you can't do this because it's prohibited, yada yada.'"

The experience got his creative wheels turning: "Of course the theme of prohibition is such an eternal theme in South Asian love songs—all true love is prohibited," he told AFP following an electrifying party of a performance at the Coachella music festival in the United States, a cherry on top of his remarkable year. "So I wanted to write a song that was sort of a flower bomb hurled at nationalism and hetero-patriarchy," Sethi continued, wearing a wide-brimmed hat and black button-up with colorful embroidery alluding to styles of the American southwest. "With all the fun innuendos and all this camp energy."

He says he drew on Punjabi folk songs of his youth, imbuing the lyrics with puns and double entendres, "a nice way to slip in and subvert orthodox views without really appearing to be out beyond the veil." He performs the track with Shae Gill, a singer born to a Christian family in Lahore. Sethi was "astounded" by the global response to the song, which has the improvisational framework of a traditional South Asian "raga" mixed with the region's contemporary sounds, along with Turkish strings, flamenco-style claps and the four-four Latino reg-



Pakistani Singer Ali Sethi poses for a portrait during the first weekend of the Coachella Valley Music and Arts Festival in Indio. — AFP photos

gaeton beats keeping rhythm for much of today's reigning pop. "I thought it was going to be this like, indie, niche thing that a bunch of my nerdy fans were gonna like," Sethi laughed. "I'm just astounded by how many people around the world—particularly in India—loved it and embraced it."

'The latest wild idea'

The son of journalist Najam Sethi and politician Jugnu Mohsin, Ali Sethi is also a published author, who began his formal Hindustani classical musical training after graduating from university. He studied Qawwali, a form of Sufi devotionals, and ghazal, a style of lyricism traceable to ancient Arabic poetry. Today he lives in New York, and is enjoying the "fertile frontier" of experimenting outside the confines of his education, and collaborating with musicians spanning genres including jazz, reggaeton, hip hop and salsa.

"Bringing my stuff to dialogue with it feels very

exciting," Sethi said, adding that it's helped him embrace a multiculturalism that societal strictures had denied. "Multilingual, multi-ethnic, multi-valent identities were celebrated in the Sufi shrines 800 years ago—in Lahore, which was where I was born," he continued. "And yet growing up I was never really encouraged to think of it that way."

For his Coachella set on Sunday—he'll perform again at the major festival next weekend—he brought onstage Raja Kumari, an American rapper and singer born in California to Indian parents. "What we can't do over there we can do over here," he said as he grasped Kumari's hand onstage following their electrifying "Pasoori" duet. "There's all kinds of forbidden love represented here today." "If you forbid it we will do it!" he said to resounding applause.

Sethi has toured recently across the United States and Canada, in cities where he can reach fans in the Indian diaspora. Yet he can't perform in India itself, where, according to streaming met-

rics, he has an enormous fan base. But for all the surface-level novelty of singing ragas in the California desert, Sethi noted that the form has been thriving there for decades.

The Indian Hindustani classical musician, Ali Akbar Khan, was instrumental in popularizing the genre in the United States, establishing a music school and also teaching at the University of California, Santa Cruz. "There's like this ancestry... but it's also so American on some level," he said with a wide smile. "America is the land of wild ideas, and I'm just the latest wild idea." "And I love it—it feels fine to be a little eccentric, a little new, a little unexpected, a little extra, a little too traditional," Sethi said. "That makes sense to me." — AFP



Pakistani Singer Ali Sethi performs during the first weekend of the Coachella Valley Music and Arts Festival in Indio.

Iranian filmmaker recounts torture to 'unsettle' abusers

One man mimes his bones being broken, a woman recounts her surrender to religious brainwashing, and a third man replicates his confinement in a tiny prison cell.

With his new documentary "Where God is Not", French-Iranian filmmaker Mehran Tamadon hopes that the testimonies of former detainees who say they were tortured in Iran will "unsettle" some of their persecutors. All recount abuse that occurred before the protests that are now shaking Iran, from the brutal repression of the 1980s in the immediate aftermath of the revolution up until the last decade.

But "everything I am filming speaks of today," said the director who was born to communist parents in Iran in 1972, but fled to France with his mother as a child. "Right now, there are people being tortured in prison in Iran."

Iranian authorities have arrested thousands since nationwide protests broke out following the September 16 death in custody of 22-year-old Mahsa Amini for allegedly breaching the country's strict dress



Iranian director Mehran Tamadon poses during a photo session in Paris.—AFP photos

rules for women. Security forces have also killed 537 people during the crackdown, Norway-based Iran Human Rights watchdog says.

"For 43 years," since the 1979 revolution that installed an Islamic theocracy in the country, Iran has been in the grips of a "totalitarian system", said Tamadon, an architect who turned to cinema in the first decade of the millennium when he lived in Tehran. After 2009 documentary "Bassidji" ("Basiji") in which he interviewed members of the paramilitary volunteer force, the atheist engaged in conversation



with four clerics for his 2014 work "Iranian".

The authorities were so unhappy with him that they confiscated his passports.

After they returned them to him in 2012, he decided to leave Iran, where he says violence has become so ingrained that, "like a Russian roulette", it can strike at any time.

In "Where God is Not", which premiered at the Berlinale in February, 50-year-old Mazyar welds a metal bed frame like the one he was tortured on after being detained for alleged spying and murder.

It was there the once business manager was tied up, and his torturers broke the bones of his feet with a metal rod, he says. When he was no longer able to walk, he was dragged in front of a camera to confess to crimes he had never committed.

Also in the film, Homa, a Marxist woman who was detained in an overcrowded prison in the 1980s, breaks down in tears as she recounts being so blasted with endless religious chants that she woke up one day brainwashed and started to pray.

Taghi Rahmani, a political activist who was locked up for 15 years for his views, re-enacts his confinement in a tiny Parisian cellar.

"I spent six months like this," he said, counting out the three steps between the two walls of a former cell. Rights groups have long lambasted the use of torture in Iranian jails, with Amnesty International in a September 2020 report detailing methods including beatings, floggings, electric shocks, stress positions, mock executions, water-boarding and sexual violence. The group said in March that in the crackdown on the protest movement child protesters as young as 12 were being subjected to torture that included electric shocks and rape. — AFP

Spain envoy sends Ramadan greetings, hails bilateral ties



Group photo with local media

Firstly, please let me take this opportunity to start by conveying a warm message of congratulations to HH the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and to HH the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal, on the occasion of the Ramadan celebrations, and extend our best wishes for the people of Kuwait in these important festivities for all Muslims throughout the world, including Spain.

Our bilateral relations are strong - strengthened by the traditional friendship between the Royal Houses of the two countries. Fruitful political consultations were held in Madrid last June 2022 at the level of Vice Minister of Foreign affairs, where many issues were discussed including high level contacts. The Joint Trade Committee discussed ways to increase the volume of our bilateral exchange, the cooperation in the realms of defense, cultural or in the promotion of the Spanish language, science, or sports. Many issues of international and regional dimension were discussed.

Real hallmark

Let me point out that there is indeed a large space of understanding and for collaboration between both countries. I sincerely hope that soon, there will be a normalized cycle of high-level visits in both directions, giving an impulse to these multifaceted relations. Kuwait Airways presented officially in Madrid last September its first direct flight between both capitals in almost 40 years, as well as an agreement with the Spanish Air Europa for a shared code agreement, a real hallmark in our relations and a wonderful bridge for both countries to improve our links in all fields.

Important new avenues are from now on to be explored and rendered effective. The first bilateral Joint Economic and Trade Committee took place in Madrid on November 14 and 15, 2022, which was a hallmark in our bilateral relations. I would also like to mention here that around 600 Spaniards are living in Kuwait now. I am proud to say that they are a well-integrated community present in almost every sector: education, business, sports, engineering. They are a very valuable part of these people to people relationship between Spain and Kuwait, and I want to thank them for their contribution.

Additionally, let me emphasize the value of the EU-Kuwait relations. Spain, as one of the largest EU countries, is fully committed to the strengthening of these relations and from next July, we will hold the six-month Presidency of the Council, when will try to give an impulse to the EU-GCC and EU-Kuwait relations. A Spanish Business Council was created last year, which I hope will definitely help to give our economic relations more vitality and visibility. We already enjoy a strategic partnership, bound to grow exponentially in the next few years, if we all make the right decisions and take the adequate steps.

I sincerely think we can do better to improve our cultural links, in both directions. Spanish culture is well-known all over the world and Kuwait people, due to their special bond with Spain, really like every aspect of our culture. For instance, flamenco is very popular in Kuwait, as well as the Spanish gastronomy. What can we say about Spanish sports like football or tennis! Both Real Madrid and Barcelona have academies in Kuwait and even Rafael Nadal inaugurated his fabulous academy here.

Bringing Spanish artists

In this spirit, we are working hard to bring Spanish artists to Kuwait. As a result of these endeavors, a Spanish duo playing guitar and violin will perform a concert here in Kuwait on May 14th, with the much appreciated collaboration of the National Council. There is a huge potential but more must be done. In this regard, the academic exchanges and internships are vital. Every year dozens of Kuwaitis go to Spain, most of them, for post-graduate studies in some of our excellent business schools.

Several young Kuwaitis come to our country too, thanks to the generosity of the Kuwait Fund in order to work in some of the best companies of engineering and architecture. On the other hand, I would like to highlight the contribution of Al



Spanish Ambassador to Kuwait Miguel Maro Aguilar — Photo By Jana Al-Naqeeb

Babtain Foundation to promote, in collaboration with several Spanish Universities, the study and research of the Arabic language and its literature. Many youngsters are learning Spanish in Kuwait and every year the official exams of Spanish as foreign language are held. We want to encourage more and more people to starting learning Spanish, doubtlessly that would be a very important investment in the relations between our countries.

Unfortunately, there is not an Institute Cervantes, the Spanish entity in charge of promoting our language, but I had the chance to meet many teachers of Spanish as a foreign language who are doing a great job in the Institut FranAais, the American University of Kuwait, the Gulf University or in Kuwait University. I really would like to work with them so that we can all together raise awareness about the importance of the Spanish language.

Economic, trade relations

Economic and trade relations between Kuwait and Spain have intensified with a sustained increase in Spanish exports (from €149 million in 2009 to €394 million euros in 2022). The Spanish imports from Kuwait have also increased 145% until €133 million in 2022, mainly oil products. There is a trade balance favorable to Spain, with a diversity of Spanish exports compared to imports concentrated in oil, plastics and chemical products and the high relative weight of clothing items. The main chapters exported were mechanical machinery, non-knitwear (14%), knitwear (9%), fuels (7%) and ceramics (5%).

The main chapters imported were mechanical machinery... (50%), organic chemical products (30%) and plastics (14%). Clothing in our export, especially the INDITEX group among others, results in the extensive presence of scores of fashion brands under franchise in the major malls and shopping centers in the country. There is a growing number of Spanish companies (14), with awarded projects worth €4,300 million in various fields of activity, (infrastructure and engineering, oil and gas, health, security...), and a greater flow of Kuwaiti investors in Spain in recent years.

Institutionally, the Agreement to Avoid Double Taxation (2013) and several Memoranda of Understanding of economic content are helping to the strengthening of existing relations. There is no data available on our services trade with Kuwait and its classification but they are definitely an important part of our relationship.



Carmen Paredes, Deputy Chief of Mission

Tourism, transport

The main services demanded by Kuwait are tourism, transport and insurance operations. On tourism, let me tell you first that Spain was visited in the last few years by almost 90 million people (with the exception of the Pandemic period), making our country the second most visited worldwide. Spain is also a traditional destination during holidays for many Kuwaiti families. Tens of thousands of Kuwaitis travel to Spain every year, among them a considerable number even own their own properties, especially in the south of the country.

Spain offers high quality services with very competitive prices and beyond the famous slogan "Spain everything under the sun", our country has many more things to offer, such as one of the best football league in the world, a great gastronomy with scores of Michelin. Starred chefs, an incredible variety of landscapes, a magnificent architecture, hundreds of thrilling golf courses or great shopping facilities all over the country are only some of the attractive features in our country. Spain is full of wonderful sites and towns, a rich nature and a variety of landscapes. I can only recommend you to explore it and enjoy it.

The activity of our consular section regarding the visas is hectic. On average, we issue between 25,000 and 30,000 visas per year, most of them during the summer season. We are also responsible for Bahrain visas at our Embassy. We don't only issue visas for tourism, also for students, businessmen or for medical reasons, which shows the diversity of our relations. In Health, every year hundreds of Kuwaiti citizens sponsored by the Ministry of Health, or on their own expense, travel to Spain for health reasons. The Spanish health system is one of the best and more solid ones in the World and It's time now to boost all kind of cooperation and exchange information and best practices.

We can mention in that regard the recent agreement with the Spanish Ribera Salud for the management and operation of the DHAMAN healthcare network within the framework of an integrated health maintenance organization system, with 3 hospitals, 15 primary care centers and about 7,000 employees. The objective of this great PPP project is to relieve the public health through more efficient private management.

Railway project

Another area of potential, cooperation is the Railway project in the GCC and in Kuwait. Let me highlight the important cooperation in the region

and in particular in Saudi Arabia, which has several projects with Spanish companies. In particular, I would mention the Haramain High Speed Rail, capable of reaching speeds of approximately 320 km/h, an electrified line with a length of more than 300 kilometers. Spanish companies are very competitive in the supply of electrified high-speed rolling stock, more respectful with the environment and more efficient in energy consumption. As regards the renewable energy, Kuwait has announced its commitment to boost renewable energy to reach the 15 percent in 2030.

We have to point out that for Shagaya's solar power station, the Spanish company TSK has developed and is operating the biggest project in the area and in the country. ELECNOR and GAMESA are also part of the first wind projects



Spanish Ambassador to Kuwait Miguel Maro Aguilar with Jana Al-Naqeeb, Public Relations and CSR Manager of Kuwait Times

in the same Shagaya area. Spain wants to become one of the major European hubs in green hydrogen produced exclusively from renewable energy. We are ready to collaborate with Kuwait in this field and in the Renewable energies in general. There is room for improvement regarding the cooperation between Kuwait and Spain in science and technology.

We want to boost this cooperation, and on the 11th of May, the Director General for the Center for the Development of Technology and Industry will visit Kuwait to explore new ways of collaboration between both countries. As Ambassador of Spain in Kuwait, I would like to express my gratitude to all the Kuwaiti people who have shown me, from the very first minute, their love and fondness of Spain. I feel myself at home, so often surrounded of so many friends of my country. This encourages me to keep on working along with the authorities and the Kuwaiti society so that together we build an even stronger friendship between our two countries.



Real Madrid beat wasteful Chelsea



LONDON: Chelsea's Brazilian defender Thiago Silva and French defender Wesley Fofana vie with Real Madrid's Brazilian striker Vinicius Junior at Stamford Bridge on April 18, 2023. — AFP

MADRID: Rodrygo scored twice as Real Madrid cruised into the Champions League semi-finals on Tuesday, completing an emphatic 4-0 aggregate win against Chelsea that ends a disastrous season for the London club. The home team, with Frank Lampard back in the dugout for a second spell, came into the match at Stamford Bridge with form and history against them.

They started brightly but rued a number of huge missed chances that would have heaped pressure on the defending champions. The Spanish giants made Chelsea pay for their profligacy when Rodrygo scored in the 58th minute after a speedy counter-attack and he made it 2-0 with 10 minutes to go. "We suffered a lot and helped us stay at 0-0 at the end of the first half," Real Madrid boss Carlo Ancelotti told BT Sport. "Second half we were much better and scored the two goals. We are happy to have qualified."

Chelsea, the 2021 European champions, have now lost all four of their matches since Lampard returned

to the club as caretaker boss earlier this month in place of the sacked Graham Potter. Lampard, who also managed the club from 2019 until early 2021, bemoaned his team's profligacy. "We played really well for 60 minutes," he said. "We created chances but you have to take them."

The former Chelsea midfielder said his men must find motivation from playing for the club as they contemplate a bleak final few weeks of the season. "You're playing for Chelsea," he said. "So regardless, every game you play you have to give everything. I won't let anyone off the hook and we have to show. That standard cannot drop."

Ancelotti stuck with the same team that won the first leg 2-0 last week while Chelsea caretaker boss Lampard restored Reece James, Mateo Kovacic and N'Golo Kante to his line-up. Roared on by an expectant crowd despite their current woes, the home side made a good start against the 14-time winners.

Chances

They had a glorious chance to take the lead but Kante skewed his left-foot shot wide from about 12 yards. The visitors, content to bide their time, looked sharp on the break. Midway through the opening period Rodrygo created space for himself and thumped an effort against the outside of the post from an acute angle while Luka Modric tested Kepa. But Chelsea should have been ahead on the stroke of half-time when James fizzed a ball across the box from the right and it fell to Marc Cucurella at the back post.

The defender took a touch and shot but Thibaut Courtois came flying out of his goal to save. Kante had another golden opportunity to take the lead early in the second half but his close-range effort hit Eder Militao and deflected away to safety. Real took the wind out of Chelsea's sails with just over half an hour to go, when Rodrygo scored from close range after an assist by Vinicius Junior.

Lampard made a number of attacking substitutions, bringing on Raheem Sterling, Joao Felix and Mykhailo Mudryk in a desperate bid to get back into the match. But Rodrygo found the net again in the 80th minute, tapping home after a clever assist from Federico Valverde. Real Madrid will likely play Manchester City in the semifinals, with Pep Guardiola's team 3-0 up against Bayern Munich after the first leg of their last-eight tie.

Former Chelsea boss Ancelotti is chasing a record-extending fifth win as a coach in the tournament. But Chelsea, used to winning silverware over the past two decades, are contemplating the final stretch of a horrendous campaign despite a staggering spend of more than £500 million (\$621 million) in the first year of the club's new ownership. Trophyless this season, they are languishing in 11th in the Premier League and look unlikely to qualify for European football next season. — AFP

Giroud seals Milan's passage past Napoli

NAPLES: AC Milan reached the semifinals of the Champions League on Tuesday after Olivier Giroud struck the crucial goal in a 1-1 draw at Napoli which completed a 2-1 aggregate victory over their fellow Italians. Giroud tapped in what turned out to be the decisive goal two minutes before the break after a blistering run from Rafael Leao, who was once again key as Milan beat Napoli for the third time this month.

The France striker's 13th goal of the season saved his blushes after he missed a penalty midway through the first half. Stefano Pioli's side now have the prospect of a local derby in the last four as Inter Milan hold a two-goal lead ahead of their second leg with Benfica on Wednesday night. "I'm very proud of this team, with that spirit we can dream of anything," said Giroud to Mediaset. "In the next round there will be another hard match whether it's against Inter or Benfica, but if we keep this spirit we can go anywhere."

After the match Mediaset showed Leao a video of Ruud Gullit setting up a goal with an almost identical run at Napoli in 1988. "It's the same," said a shocked Leao. "It's what I try to do, go at players, it's how I can make difference. If I can't score I look for my teammates. I saw Giroud there." Milan have not contested a Champions League semi-final since they were crowned kings of Europe for the

seventh and most recent time in 2007. Victor Osimhen scored in stoppage time but it was not enough for Napoli who are creaking as they come towards the end of what has been a phenomenal season. Luciano Spalletti's once freewheeling team are struggling for goals and Khvicha Kvaratskhelia also had a penalty saved with 10 minutes remaining, a miss which condemned his team to defeat. Napoli are on the verge of their first league title since 1990, but after being placed on the easier side of the draw Tuesday's exit was an underwhelming end to their European adventure.

Their hardcore fans had agreed a truce in an ideological battle with owner Aurelio De Laurentiis which had made the atmosphere at home matches poisonous, and on Tuesday a packed Stadio Maradona was initially in fine voice. Their team went straight at Milan, dominating possession and pushing the opposition back towards the vibrating stands. However, the best they could muster was two long-distance efforts from Matteo Politano which crept wide. On Milan's first serious attack Mario Rui clattered into Leao and handed Giroud the chance to give the away side a huge advantage from the penalty spot.

However Giroud's weak effort was easily stopped by Alex Meret, whose save unleashed a roar from the stands, a colossal racket repeated when he prevented Giroud netting a more than presentable chance shortly afterwards. Napoli had scored at least three goals in all of their previous Champions League home games this season but looked short on ideas against a well-organized Milan defense which kept a tight lid on Osimhen. And as the hosts pushed to level the scores on aggregate,



NAPLES: AC Milan's French goalkeeper Mike Maignan dives in the net with the ball after conceding a last-minute goal against Napoli on April 18, 2023 at the Diego-Maradona stadium. — AFP

gate, Milan pounced at the end of the first half. Leao scooped up the ball after Tanguy Ndombele's sloppy control and charged from deep his own half, breezed past three Napoli players and rolled an unmissable chance across to Giroud, who fell to his knees in a mixture of joy and relief.

Napoli were again on the front foot after the break but struggled to create much, with Mathias Olivera's header wide from a 64th-minute corner the best chance until Fikayo Tomori handled Giovanni Di Lorenzo's low cross as he put in a challenge in the penalty area. Kvaratskhelia fluffed his own spot-kick just like Giroud, meaning Osimhen's bullet header in the 93rd minute meant nothing for Napoli who will wonder what might have been after wasting so many chances in the first leg. — AFP

Hamlin resumes NFL activities after heart stoppage

NEW YORK: Buffalo Bills safety Damar Hamlin, who went into cardiac arrest after making a tackle and was resuscitated on the field, rejoined the team for a workout on Tuesday as he began his NFL comeback. "This event was life-changing, but it's not the end of my story," Hamlin said. "I plan on making a comeback to the NFL. I've been beating the statistics my whole life so I like my chances."

Bills general manager Brandon Beane said Hamlin had been medically cleared to resume NFL activities despite his near-death experience on an NFL field. "He's fully cleared," Beane said. "He's here and he's of the mindset — he's in a great headspace — to come back and make his return." During the first quarter of a nationally televised NFL game at Cincinnati in January, Hamlin tackled Bengals wide receiver Tee Higgins after a 13-yard reception.

Hamlin rose to his feet, then collapsed backward onto the ground. The Bills said his heartbeat was restored on the field by medical technicians before he was transported to a nearby hospital for further treatment. "I died on national TV in front of the whole world, so I see it from all perspectives," Hamlin said. "That right there is the biggest blessing of it all — for me to still have my people and my people to still have me."

Players from both teams were emotional and shaken while Hamlin was being treated, loaded onto a stretcher and

driven off the field in an ambulance. The game was halted and never completed. Hamlin revealed that his diagnosis was commotio cordis, or a blow to the chest during a heartbeat that led to a cardiac shutdown. Since then, Hamlin has seen multiple specialists who all agree he's ready to return to NFL activities.

"Damar saw his last specialist on Friday," Beane said. "It's not 2-to-1 or 3-to-1 or anything like that. They're all in lockstep of what this was and that he is cleared (to) resume full activities just like anyone else who was coming back from an injury or whatever." US President Joe Biden was among those who paid tribute to Hamlin, saying his "courage, resilience, and spirit inspired the American people." Hamlin, who turned 25 in March, was able to breathe on his own four days after the injury and made a video call to his teammates. He made his first public appearance since the incident at a Bills home playoff game and also attended the Super Bowl in February.

Watching NFL games in a hospital bed days after the incident was, Hamlin said, when he decided he would attempt to strap on a helmet and pads once more. "That's where I was like, 'I don't want to be done yet,'" Hamlin said. "My heart is still in the game. I love the game. It's something I want to prove to myself not nobody else. I just want to show people that fear is a choice and you can keep going." — AFP