

3 Salon employees suffer from exhausting work on Eid days



5 'Like hell': 16 killed in Pakistan munition blasts



11 'Cringeworthy' cartoon cars make image U-turn in Japan



15 Arsenal on the ropes as Man City aim for knockout blow



Biden announces re-election bid

Let's finish this job: 80-year-old US president seeks second term



In this still image taken from video released on April 25, 2023, US President Joe Biden announces he is running for re-election in 2024. — AFP

WASHINGTON: US President Joe Biden announced Tuesday his bid "to finish the job" with re-election in 2024, plunging at the record age of 80 into a ferocious campaign that could set up a rematch against Donald Trump. Launching his pitch in a video on the fourth anniversary of the day he first began his 2020 challenge against Trump, Biden said he was still fighting to save American democracy from Republican "extremists".

"When I ran for president four years ago, I said we're in a battle for the soul of America. And we still are," Biden pronounces in the voiceover. "That's been the work of my first term: to fight for our democracy," Biden says. "Let's finish this job - I know we can."

After a series of big domestic legislative wins, a strong economic recovery from

the COVID pandemic, and momentous foreign policy struggles, Biden has no real challenger from within the Democratic Party. But he will face constant and fierce scrutiny over his age. The veteran Democrat would be 86 by the end of a second term. Even if a medical exam in February found him "fit" to execute the duties of the presidency, many including in his own voter base believe he is too old.

"I like what Biden's done. I think he's done a really good job," said retiree Roger Tilton, 72, as he walked near the White House. But "he's really too old for the job," Biden likes to answer those concerns by saying, "watch me" - meaning voters should focus on his policy wins at home and his marshaling of an unprecedented Western alliance to help Ukraine defend itself against Russia's invasion. He made no

reference to the age issue in his video, although a segment near the end showed him grinning and jogging into a public event.

Over the next year and a half, Biden will have all the advantages of incumbency, backed by a united Democratic Party, while Republicans are only just starting their messy primary season. Trump, despite becoming the first former or serving president to be criminally indicted - and still facing probes into his attempt to overturn his loss to Biden in the 2020 election - is the overwhelming Republican frontrunner.

The most likely Republican challenger to 76-year-old Trump, Florida Governor Ron DeSantis, presents a similarly right-wing figure, though starkly younger at 44. Trump savaged what he called Biden's "calamitous and failed presidency".

Continued on Page 6

NEWS IN BRIEF

Saudi seizes 12m meth pills

RIYADH: Saudi Arabia announced on Tuesday the seizure of more than 12 million amphetamine pills hidden in a shipment of pomegranate fruit, amid a crackdown on the widely used Captagon drug. Authorities thwarted "an attempt to smuggle 12,729,000 tablets of amphetamine" concealed in the shipment passing through the Jeddah port, the official Saudi Press Agency reported. Four people were arrested in connection with the case — two Egyptians, one Syrian and one Yemeni national. — AFP

Harry Belafonte dies at 96

NEW YORK: Harry Belafonte, the superstar entertainer who introduced a Caribbean flair to mainstream US music and became well known for his deep personal investment in civil rights, died Tuesday in Manhattan, his publicist said. He was 96. The barrier-breaking artist-activist died of congestive heart failure at his New York home, according to the publicist's statement. Belafonte's calypso, the genre of Caribbean music that drew from West African and French influences, saw him skyrocket to fame in the midst of post-World War II prosperity and suburbanization. — AFP

Yacht missing near Saudi, Yemen

RIYADH: A yacht carrying three Russian nationals is missing in the Red Sea off the coast of Saudi Arabia and war-hit Yemen, the Russian embassy in Riyadh said on Monday. The Djibouti-bound vessel named "30 Minutes" refueled on April 17 in the southern Saudi port of Jazan, but "radio contact was lost" two days later, the embassy said in a statement. — AFP

Iran charges two actresses

TEHRAN: Iran has charged two prominent actresses for publishing pictures of themselves flouting the country's dress code for women, just weeks after announcing a crackdown on breaches, local media reported. Police in Tehran have referred the case against Katayoun Riahi and Pantea Bahram to Iran's judiciary, accusing them of "the crime of removing the hijab in public and posting photos on the internet", the Tasnim news agency said late Monday. — AFP

Kuwait: UN charter crucial to defend smaller countries

NEW YORK: Kuwait has affirmed the UN charter constitutes the frontline for small countries, citing the reference in 1991 to UN rules for liberating Kuwait under the auspices of the international organization. The reference to UN conventions at the time revealed significance of states' coordinated efforts under the UN umbrella through resolutions of the UN Security Council in support of law and justice, First Secretary at Kuwait's Permanent Delegation to the UN Fahad Hajji said.

Hajji was addressing a UN Security Council session for open discussion on international peace and

security by defending UN principles. "The liberation of the state of Kuwait constituted a successful historic example regarding potentials of the Security Council," Hajji said, alluding to the flagrant violation of the UN charter by invading Kuwait in August 1990.

This session is held at a very critical time where the world is witnessing unprecedented, intertwined and complex political, security, economic, humanitarian and environmental challenges, he said. These challenges have put the multiparty international order under a real test that may be the hardest and most urgent since the establishment of the UN in 1945, the Kuwaiti diplomat elaborated. Facing this historic test warrants unified and collective action among the UN member states and shunning deep divisions, he continued.

"We must act collectively to check violence and aggression and act to build cordial relations among states...and encourage respect for human rights," he said. Citing principles for states' rela-



Fahad Hajji

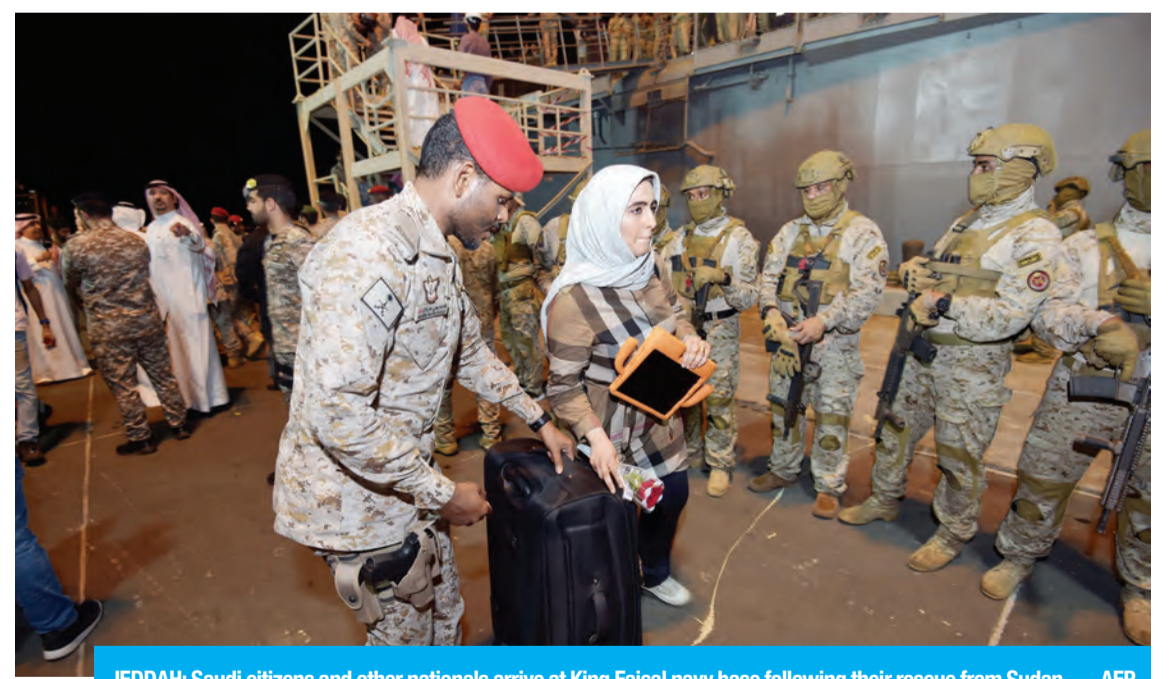
tions, he noted countries' sovereignty, independence, territorial sanctity, nonintervention in each other's domestic affairs, settling conflicts peacefully and abstention from threats and using force by a state against another. — KUNA

Foreigners flee as Sudan truce largely holds

KHARTOUM: A US-brokered ceasefire between Sudan's warring generals was largely holding in much of the capital on Tuesday, but witnesses in some areas reported ongoing clashes between the army and paramilitary forces. Foreign nations stepped up efforts to evacuate their nationals from the chaos-torn nation, but security fears were compounded when the World Health Organization (WHO) warned of a "huge biological risk" after fighters occupied a Khartoum laboratory holding samples of cholera, measles, polio and other infectious diseases.

Ten days of heavy fighting until Monday — including air strikes and artillery barrages — have killed hundreds of people, many of them civilians, and left some neighborhoods of greater Khartoum in ruins.

Continued on Page 6



JEDDAH: Saudi citizens and other nationals arrive at King Faisal navy base following their rescue from Sudan. — AFP

UAE probe offers unprecedented view of Mars moon

PARIS: The United Arab Emirates' Hope space probe on Monday revealed Mars' smaller moon Deimos in unprecedented detail, shedding new light on the origin of the mysterious lumpy satellite. The probe, the Arab world's first interplanetary mission, has been orbiting Mars for two years, regularly flying past Deimos and its big sibling moon Phobos. It came within 110 km from Deimos, a rocky object the shape of a bean just 12 km wide, according to the Emirates Mars Mission (EMM).

The probe - named "Al-Amal", Arabic for "Hope" - sent back to Earth the most precise images and observations of the moon ever captured, using instruments that measure the infrared and ultraviolet wavelengths. It also observed for the first time the far side of the moon, revealing regions whose compositions have never been studied, the mission said. The probe could also prompt new debate over how exactly the strange moons ended up in the Martian orbit.

"We are unsure of the origins of both Phobos and Deimos," the EMM's science lead Hessa Al-Matroushi said in a statement. One leading theory is that the two moons were once asteroids passing by when they were unexpectedly captured into the orbit of Mars. But Matroushi said that "our close observations of Deimos so far point to a planetary origin".

Continued on Page 6



This composite image released on April 24, 2023 shows Mars' moon Deimos in the foreground. — AFP



Kuwait spends \$8.2 billion on military expenditure in 2022

Kuwait now ranks 30th in military spending worldwide

By Nebal Snan

KUWAIT: Kuwait's military expenditure has dropped by 11 percent in 2021-22, with the country spending \$8.2 billion on training and equipping forces for military operations, according to data released this week from the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI). Kuwait now ranks 30th in military expenditure worldwide, dropping four ranks from its spot as the 26th largest spender in 2021. Spending has however increased by 25 percent compared to ten years ago.

Military expenditures data from SIPRI are derived from the NATO definition, which includes all current and capital expenditures on the armed forces, including peacekeeping forces, defense ministries and other government agencies engaged in defense projects, paramilitary forces — if these are judged to be trained and equipped for military operations — and military space activities.

They also include military and civil personnel, including retirement pensions of military personnel and social services for personnel, operation and maintenance, procurement, military research and development and military aid. Total military expenditure by countries in the Middle East is estimated at \$184 billion in 2022, up by about 4 percent from 2021 but down by 1.5 percent from 2013. SIPRI attributes the increase in 2022 a 16 per cent growth in Saudi Arabia's military spending. The kingdom was the largest spender in the region and the fifth largest worldwide, allocating an estimated \$75 billion in

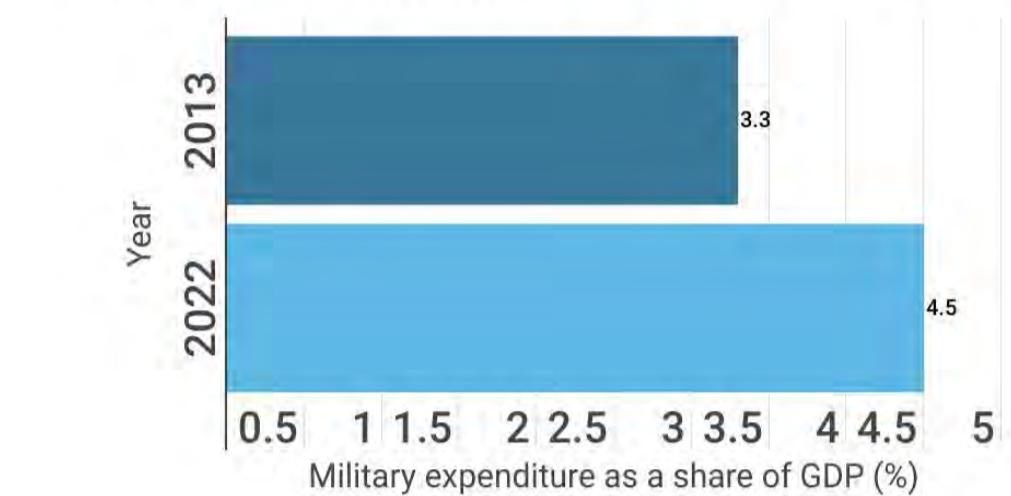


2022 to its armed forces.

On average, SIPRI found that states in the Middle East had the highest military burden, defined as military spending as a share of gross domestic product (GDP), in 2022. Spending reached 3.9 per cent of GDP in Middle Eastern countries, followed by 2.5 per cent of GDP in Europe, 1.7 percent in Africa, 1.5 percent in Asia and Oceania and 1.2 percent in the Americas. Arab countries swept the top 10 list of countries with highest military spending as a share of GDP. Kuwait ranked 9th, with 4.5 percent of its GDP going to its armed forces. Saudi Arabia came in second at 7.4 percent, Qatar third at 7 percent, Oman fifth at 5.2 percent, Jordan sixth at 4.8 percent and Algeria seventh at 4.8 percent.

World military expenditure rose by 3.7 per cent in real terms in 2022, to reach a record high of \$2,240

Kuwait's military spending as part of its GDP is estimated at 4.5% in 2022.



billion. Global spending grew by 19 per cent over the decade 2013-22 and has risen every year since 2015, SIPRI data showed. Military expenditure in Europe rose by 13 per cent in 2022, the largest annual increase in total European spending in the post-cold

war era. According to SIPRI, the exceptional growth was largely accounted for by substantial increases in Russian and Ukrainian spending. Many other European countries have also boosted their military budgets in 2022.

Readjusting sleep patterns after Ramadan and Eid

By Faten Omar

KUWAIT: Due to spiritual activities and eating habits during Ramadan, many people now have disruptions in sleep patterns, which has resulted in a shortened sleep duration, leaving people feeling tired and sluggish during the day, even after Eid. To improve and maintain a consistent sleep schedule, Coach and Nutrition Consultant Abdullah Al-Mesbah gave some advice to people with sleeping problems and how they can adjust after Ramadan. "It is normal that most people get used to staying up late because of the Ramadan routine but they find it difficult to return to the normal sleep routine after it," he said.

"Therefore, some solutions and strategies may help people adjust their hours of sleep in the fastest way possible. First, it is necessary to force yourself to get up early. For example, you have to get up at 10 in the morning and not sleep until the evening. The person will then be tired at night and will be able to sleep. If you do not have a job, the situation can be difficult and tiring. So, the person must distract themselves until the evening with sports, visits, etc in order not to stay home and sleep in the afternoon and spoil the plan," Mesbah said.

Mesbah said it is possible to adjust sleeping and waking up daily step by step. "For example, going to sleep at four instead of five in the morning, and waking up at 11 in the morning instead of noon. On the second day, sleep at three and wake up at 10, and



so on until the normal routine returns after about a week," he advised.

"Cut caffeine sources such as coffee and tea at least six hours before bedtime, and preferably 10 hours; you can drink decaffeinated coffee as an alternative. Also, eating a meal high in carbohydrates or starch such as rice, bread, potatoes and oats before bedtime may help you sleep, but choose healthy options not high in fat," he pointed out.

Mesbah revealed some fruits may help one go to sleep, such as bananas, cherries and kiwis, as well as

reducing blue light, such as neon lights, especially in the evening. "Turn on the night mode on smart devices and stay away from them an hour and two hours before bed. This will help," he said. To adjust sleeping hours, he advised people to take supplements such as a dose of 200-400 mg of magnesium bis-glycinate half an hour before bedtime. "Also, they can take 3-4 mg of melatonin half an hour before bedtime. In addition, lavender oil can be applied on the pillow, body or used as a scent, along with 100-200 mg of L-theanine supplement," he added.

Interior minister to present latest population policy

KUWAIT: The Interior Minister Sheikh Talal Al-Khaled Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah in his capacity as Chairman of the Supreme Committee for Demographics, will present to the Council of Ministers, at a meeting next month, a set of what the committee has approved in the file assigned to it. The meeting is the first step before the government presents a request to ministries and government agencies to implement decisions aimed at reducing marginal employment.

Sources revealed to Kuwait Times: "The demographics committee prepared its plan for the Council of Ministers to accelerate the Kuwaitization plan and increase the number of Kuwaitis, as opposed to expatriates, who are hired in organizations across the country, including in important economic sectors in the private sector, the first of which is the insurance sector." "The committee has put in place executive procedures to launch "Kuwait Visa" app, which aims to organize entry visas and verify the validity of all procedures that precede the entry of workers and visitors to Kuwait," sources said. The app was launched for a trial period last February.

These procedures will include adding an inspection service that identifies persons, their permits status, and the validity of their information through "Kuwait Mobile ID" application, meaning that employers can inspect the identity of workers wishing to work for them. Sources also indicated that the Public Authority of Manpower will begin, in collaboration with the Civil Service Commission, motivating citizens to work in the private sector through the "Fakharna" platform for hiring citizens, in addition to following up on the Kuwaitization of supervisory positions in cooperative societies.



12 suspects arrested

KUWAIT: General security department embarked on security campaigns across the governorates. Three underage criminals were arrested, 10 vehicles were impounded and 56 traffic

violation tickets were issued. Seven Iqama violators were detained as well. All suspects were referred to concerned departments for further investigation. In another development, security officials from the general security department have detained two people for being in possession of illegal substances.

Ministry of Electricity prepares for summer

KUWAIT: Electricity, Water and Renewable Energy Minister Mutlaq Al-Otaibi announced the ministry is prepared for the summer season, as most periodic maintenance programs have been completed. Otaibi was visiting the Doha East Station for electric power and water distillation, accompanied by Undersecretary Maha Al-Asousi and Assistant Undersecretary for Electric Power and Water Distillation Stations Haitham Al-Ali, in the presence of the station director and workers. Otaibi expressed his deep thanks and gratitude to all the shift workers in the various sectors of the ministry for their dedication to work during Eid days and all official holidays.

"The percentage of maintenance of electricity units and water distillation units that has been completed is close to 78 percent. The ministry expects production of electricity during the summer months will be approximately 18,000 megawatts, while expected consumption during the summer of 2023 will reach a maximum of 16,880 megawatts," he said, calling on citizens to cooperate in rationalizing the consumption of electricity and water by paying attention to improving energy efficiency in order to get through the summer period safely.

Otaibi also indicated the ministry aims to accelerate the implementation of development projects related to increasing the production capacity of electricity and water. "The ministry is in the process of signing a contract to expand the Subiya power and water distillation plant with a capacity of 900 megawatts. The necessary approvals have been obtained from the regulatory authorities to complete the project, and the contract will be signed after Eid. Their approval will increase the production capacity at the station by 250 megawatts," he explained.

Otaibi addressed the employees' financial claims for some jobs of a special nature, as the percentage of Kuwaitization in the ministry exceeded 95 percent. "They are part of the ministry and deserve to have their demands fulfilled," he said, pointing out that a committee was formed to designate jobs at electric power stations and water distillation plants as hazardous work.

"A meeting was held between the leadership of the ministry and those in the Civil Service Commission, Ministry of Health and the General Organization for Social Insurance to meet the shortcomings and to fulfill the requirements in an effort to endorse the hard work law," he added. He stressed that one of the current priorities is to conduct written exams to fill vacancies in supervisory positions, as they will resume in the next few days. With regards to working hours, the CSC's circular's first choice on the new official working hours was applied.



Kuwait's Ministry of Water and Electricity control center.

Local

Salons' female employees overwhelmed during Eid

'I'm working since yesterday morning'

By Majd Othman

KUWAIT: On the first day of Eid Al-Fitr, at around 4:30 pm, a female expat employee at a popular women's salon in Kuwait was doing her usual job to serve a customer, despite looking pale and being exhausted. "I'm working since yesterday morning — I started at 9:00 am and worked until 2:00 am. I went home for barely two hours and came back again to the salon to continue working," the Filipina worker said.

She said her Filipino, Asian and African colleagues have been working since the day before the first day of Eid Al-Fitr, pointing out that this happens every year during the holidays, especially Eid, as the salon won't close its doors on the first day of Eid until the last customer leaves. The worker, who declined to give her name for fear of retribution, pointed out that neither her or her colleagues get any overtime pay for extra work.

Meanwhile, an Indian worker at the same salon told Kuwait Times that several times during the day she and her colleagues feel they would pass out due to a lack of sleep. When Kuwait Times asked if she requested to leave the salon to get some sleep, she stressed she cannot do this because the owner will terminate her or cut her salary. "The owner needs us to be here as long as there is a customer,"

she said, adding, "we wish customers could feel us and only come during regular hours and not at 1:00 am on Eid day."

She said the situation depends on the business owner's ethics too. "The previous owner used to give us all our financial and holiday rights, but the new owner canceled our holidays and kept only the weekly day off," she said.

At another women's salon, a worker from India said her Indian coworker was fired despite working for more than 10 years after demanding a raise after all these years, especially since most customers came to the salon because of her excellent service. "After she was terminated, most of the customers stopped coming to the salon, so the salon owner immediately filed an absconding case against her claiming she is absent from work despite her termination being witnessed by all the workers," she told Kuwait Times.

At the same salon, an African employee said many other salons pay extra to workers for overtime work, especially during Eid, while others provide workers transportation to relieve them from the burden of financial costs and as a matter of safety, especially since during the holidays, they finish their work after midnight. She said work violations do not only impact them financially, but also pose a medical threat due to a lack of sleep and excess pressure at work that exceeds during holidays at some salons to more



than 24 workhours.

According to the Kuwait labor law, employers are obligated to pay their workers and employees extra pay for overtime, which should not exceed two hours

per day and six hours per week, and add 25 percent of daily wages to their monthly salaries due to the extra working hours, and 50 percent of their daily pay if they work during their off days.

Kuwait eyes latest tech for integrated security system

KUWAIT: First Deputy Prime Minister, Interior Minister and Acting Minister of Defense Sheikh Talal Khaled Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah has confirmed the keenness of the political leadership to provide the latest technologies to achieve the integrated security system in the country. Sheikh Talal Al-Khaled said that the security institution's strategy stems from permanent development, continuous training, and the use of technology to

control and monitor borders.

He conveyed to the border security men the greetings and congratulations of the political leadership, commending their constant vigilance to serve the country and maintain its security and stability, pointing out that border security and safety are a priority in the comprehensive security system. During the visit, Sheikh Talal Al-Khaled listened to a brief explanation of the radar system and the response to smuggling and infiltration attempts. Sheikh Talal Al-Khaled was received during his visit to the northern border by the Undersecretary of the Ministry of Interior, Lieutenant General Anwar Al-Barjas, and several senior security leaders.

The development of the armed forces will be attainable through dependence on "our faithful children who are armed with science and knowl-

edge," First Deputy Prime Minister, Interior Minister and Acting Minister of Defense said. The minister, during an inspection of "Wajeb Force" (Sabah), expressed satisfaction with capacities and vigilance of the personnel who have been executing their tasks in cooperation with the Interior Ministry personnel, safeguarding the country's security, the land and sea borders in the north. Their Highnesses the Amir and the Crown Prince admire the heroic role of the army troops for defending the homeland, its security, safety and territorial integrity, he said in his address to the forces.

He urged the troops to pursue their service for the homeland and wished return of the happy occasion under the sagacious leadership of His Highness the Amir and the Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces and His Highness the Crown Prince. — KUNA



KUWAIT: Interior Minister listens to a brief explanation of the radar system. — KUNA

Causes and effects of coldness, unhealthy relationship

By Ghadeer Ghloom

KUWAIT: Coldness between partners in a relationship is a common issue that many couples fear, due to its impact on their bonding. There must be some factors that resulted in this frostiness, which like many other issues, can be fixed in different ways. To better understand the reasons behind relationships getting stagnant and find some solutions, Kuwait Times interviewed Sociologist and Family Consultant Dr Jamil Al-Marri and Educational and Family Consultant Dr Safaa Al-Zaqqah.

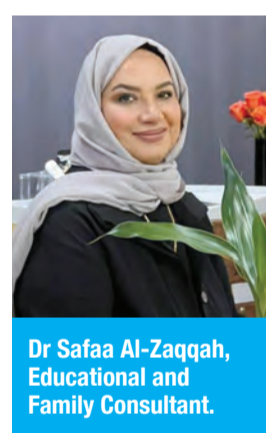
Dr Marri said in case of coldness in a relationship between couples, we need to know what are the reasons that resulted in reaching this phase in order to find a solution. "We also need to distinguish the type of coldness, whether it is emotional, social or financial, as people might go through hard times. Being preoccupied with life and work's demands and responsibilities, or being busy at home with household chores and raising children, are examples of the most common reasons that lead to coldness between couples. Therefore, as a partner, you need to sit with yourself and try to understand how your life is going," he said.

Dr Marri also highlighted the role of diwanias in affecting men's relationship with their wives and children in Kuwait. He said diwanias for some husbands are a priority over their wives. As a man may go to the diwania daily, he does not spend enough time with his partner, which may create an emotional coldness from her side towards him and vice versa.

He said a lack of romance is another major element that leaves an impact on couples' bonding. As the partners may not present any romantic gestures towards each other, such as bringing a gift



Dr Jamil Al-Marri,
Sociologist and
Family Consultant



Dr Safaa Al-Zaqqah,
Educational and
Family Consultant.

without an occasion or on any occasion, besides a lack of preparedness for one another through various things such as their looks or the atmosphere at home. Also, the presence of small children is an impediment, as the partners may be preoccupied with their children and not pay enough attention to one another. So, romance between partners is reduced and needs to be revitalized.

To help couples rejuvenate their bonding, Dr Marri said that it does not have to be an overwhelming task, as it can be done by simple actions such as making a few changes in their daily routine with each other. Despite the fact that problems might happen between any couples, they should not let their problems grow. Couples need to be ready to compromise and forgive one another. Maturity is key for couples



to get over their problems and be prepared for any obstacles. Blaming one another for everything and constantly complaining about trivial issues ruins the relationship. There has to be a sense of forgiveness and letting trivial mistakes pass.

Also, couples have to be aware of things that might anger them outside their house in order to avoid venting one's anger on the other due to outside pressure. Discussions must be postponed if the partners feel tense and angry to avoid starting an argument. Partners should be responsible and mature to be able to stand up for one another during hard times. Even when one is not responsible for the hardship that their partner is going through, they have to be supportive, at least emotionally, if they cannot fix anything materially.

Dr Marri mentioned the relationship between Prophet Muhammed (PBUH) and his wife Khadija (RA), who was his supporter in his worst times, as she supported him both emotionally and financially in all aspects and stood up for him during the most difficult phases in his life. Dr Zaqqah said communication and discussion between partners can lead to finding the problem and fixing it. This in addition to the necessity of breaking their daily routine together and doing new activities together, such as traveling or going out together to new places, booking a hotel or a cruise, etc.

The International Monetary Fund predicted in 2020 that oil demand is expected to peak by 2040, with the world moving to a post-oil economy afterwards. Osamah Al-Sayegh, visiting research scholar at Baker Institute for Energy Studies and the Edward P Djerejian Center for the Middle East as well as research scientist at the Energy and Building Research Center at the Kuwait Institute for Scientific Research (KISR), wrote in a study published on April 5, 2023 whether Kuwait's democratic system contributes to its slow pace of development towards energy transition goals, stressing the study should be looked at as an analysis of the lessons learned from the exercise of Kuwait's political system with regards to transition to clean energy.

"There are three main factors hindering the Kuwaiti government's progress toward energy transition goals — lack of coordination, contradictory legal and legislative proposals and low interest in advancing the energy transition," he explained. Sayegh clarified the main challenge is "encouraging society to embrace clean and efficient energy consumption. The government will need to implement long-term policy changes if it is to embed energy transition values in societal norms."

However, Sayegh finds that there is a solution, which "lies in the coordination between the Cabinet and National Assembly members who support the transition to renewable energy in order to propose and lobby for more energy transition-related legislation."

Meanwhile, Munira Rajkotwala wrote in an article published in Cambridge Journal of Political Affairs on Dec 8, 2020 that focuses on the impact of oil rent — revenue from the export of oil — and the role of the rentier state, which is primarily to distribute oil rent to its citizens. "Informal systems of patronage are the means by which the government distributes oil wealth. As such, the 'rentier state theory' posits a causal relationship between oil wealth and patronage structures in the Gulf. Second, citizens of a rentier state develop a 'rentier mentality', whereby an expectation of oil revenue leads to a break in the 'work-reward' causation," Rajkotwala explains.

Understanding the development of the social structure in place in Kuwait is necessary to understanding the current situation in Kuwait. Having a historian's hat on while looking at history will allow us to understand our current situation and how we got here. This will also allow us to have an understanding to the best ways of reaching the status of a self-reliant, developed and global country that has an economy capable of coping with the rest of the world.

EU to boost strategic cooperation with GCC

BRUSSELS: The European Union on Tuesday reiterated its intention to boost strategic cooperation with the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and announced that a decision on the appointment of the first EU Special Representative for the Gulf will be made soon. "We need to step up our engagement with the countries of the Gulf and this was outlined last year in the joint communique by the EU High Representative and the European Commission on strategic partnership with the Gulf," EU spokesman for foreign affairs and security policy, Peter Stano, told a news conference in Brussels today.

"So it is very important that the EU has a special representative for engagement with the countries of the Gulf," he added. "This special representative will play an important role in implementing the strategy and taking forward this strategy and our determination to increase our multifaceted cooperation with the countries of the Gulf," he said in reply to a question by KUNA, on the issue.

Commenting on media reports saying EU High Representative Josep Borrell has sent a letter to the 27 EU foreign ministers proposing former Italian Foreign Minister Luigi Di Maio as European Union Special Representative for the Gulf, Stano said: "we on our side are very loyal to the procedures and proper manners and we usually never comment on the correspondence sent by High Representative to the EU member states." "So I cannot confirm anything. I can only say that the procedure in order to select, nominate, and to adopt the concrete person as the new EU special representative to the Gulf is not completed yet," he said.

The procedure within the EU Council of Ministers, which represent the 27 EU member states, has "not been finalized. So it is still running. So we cannot comment publicly on something that is internal and ongoing. So we would not contribute to speculation out there," he pointed out. "We hope that the Council will soon be able to make a decision and appropriate announcement when it comes to the specific person," he added.

However, according to KUNA's information, EU Permanent Representatives are expected to discuss and approve the nomination of Luigi Di Maio during their meeting in Brussels on Thursday. The EU Council of Ministers is then expected to give its green light to the ex-Italian FM as the first EU special representative to the Gulf within a month. Italian media on Sunday broke the news of Di Maio's nomination and quoted the letter sent by Borrell to the EU foreign ministers who met in Luxembourg on Monday.

"Following very careful deliberation, I consider that the best-suited candidate is Mr Luigi Di Maio," wrote Borrell. "As former foreign minister of Italy, Luigi Di Maio has the necessary political profile at the international level for this role," he noted. Di Maio's "broad contacts" with Gulf countries "will allow him to engage with the relevant actors at the appropriate level," said the EU foreign policy chief. He proposed the appointment of Di Maio as EU Special Representative for the Gulf "for an initial period of 21 months", starting on June 1, 2023 until February 28, 2025. The 6-member GCC includes Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and UAE. — KUNA

Experts underline need to diversify Kuwait economy

By Khaled Al-Abdulhadi

KUWAIT: Oil has always been the main economic benefactor of Kuwait's economy, as evidenced by past yearly budgets, as it constitutes around 90 percent of total revenue for the country. The need for diversification of the economy is clear, especially when considering the possibility of exponential growth of GDPs worldwide.

Yousif Al-Ameen describes the importance of oil to the development of Kuwait's social structure in his study "The Norwegian Oil Experience of Economic Diversification: A Comparative Study with Gulf Oil", published in 2016 in the European Journal of Business and Management. "Since Kuwait began exporting oil in the 1940s, its citizenry has become accustomed to a rentier state culture in which wealth distribution management dominates public and political affairs," he wrote.

News in Brief

Manpower to continue
approving transfers

KUWAIT: The Public Authority of Manpower announced they will continue to approve transfers for work permits for people registered in the administration's most distinguished lists. The authority allows transfer of work permits a year after it's issued, as long as an approval from the employer is obtained. The decision was first implemented in 2021 in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Previously, workers who have permits that allow them to work for employers listed on the distinguished lists could only get their permits transferred three years after issue date. The transfer of labor can only take place among those included in the distinguished lists. The decision is aimed at helping private sector employers on these lists in line with the decisions taken by the government in this regard and to meet the needs of the labor market during the current period.

Motorists urged
to drive carefully

KUWAIT: Interior Ministry asked motorists to take the middle lane in case of water accumulating on both sides of the road during rain in order to safeguard lives of all. Department of relations and security information asked in a press statement not to hesitate to call 112 when necessary for any help. The statement asked motorists to reduce speed to avoid slipping and use the caution lights when completely stopped and stay away from water puddles. —KUNA

Awqaf to further
consider new shifts

KUWAIT: The Director of the Media Department at the Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs, Dr Ahmed Al-Otaibi, announced that the ministry has suspended a decision regarding the working hours of ministry employees during the morning and evening shifts. The decision will be suspended pending further study after employees complained that the new timings inconvenienced female teachers working evening shifts.

Photo of the day



KUWAIT: This picture taken on April 23, 2023 from Kuwait City shows a view of the conjunction of the Moon and Venus. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

Kuwaitis in the past celebrated Eid with meager resources

KUWAIT: Kuwaitis in the old times used to usher the Eid Al-Fitr with utter joy and celebrations although they lived in tough conditions with scarce necessities, living and entertainment resources. The ancestors enjoyed the occasion with simple activities and facilities as they had limited living means, however the bonds among families and neighbors were much closer and stronger as compared to the modern times' social relations.

Saleh Al-Mesbah, a researcher specialized in the Kuwaiti heritage, said in an interview with KUNA that Eid Al-Fitr was one of the most important religious occasions celebrated by the Kuwaitis in the old times, along with Muslims of other nations. The ancestors celebrated the occasion with new clothes, eating sweets, lavish meals and exchanging visits. They cleaned their houses, sprayed them with rose water and perfumes including bukhoor and stopped work for a whole week.

Mesbah said that housewives used to make popular sweet dishes and girls dyed their hands and feet with henna. Also, majority of the housewives tailored Eid dresses for their children. Water sellers adorned their transport donkeys, strapped bells to their necks and made tours for the kids for some coins. In the early hours, the men, el-

derly and children performed Eid prayers chanting "Allah Akbar". Women performed the prayers at home, at the time, and many people would break their fast with some dates. The children would congratulate the elderly, namely the grandparents for the happy occasion advent, and they would give the kids pocket money to spend during the celebrations on amusement rides and candies. The children looked forward for the "Eidiya," the pocket money, usually a rupee (currently equal to 50-75 fils). Those who would gather the largest amount of Eidiyas would boast among the kids. The Kuwaitis in the past used to head to the Amir's residence after the Eid prayers to extend their felicitations to Al-Sabah family members. Residents of a district (fereej) would go to another district to congratulate the neighbors. Guests were welcomed with coffee, tea and rose water.

Many Kuwaiti families used to offer food to the poor during Eid, gather at the diwaniyas for greeting relatives and acquaintances. Yacoub Al-Ghnaim, also a heritage specialist, said the historian Sheikh Abdulaziz Al-Rshaid narrated about Eid celebrations in 1926 when the Kuwaitis used to visit the Amiri palace for congratulations. Men used to perform "Al-Arda" folkloric dance every day during the Eid holidays, brandishing rifles, swords and chanting. The



KUWAIT: A man wearing traditional dress pours coffee, a traditional drink in Kuwait during Eid. (Source: 'Kuwait' by Ralph Shaw, London, 1976. Prepared by: Mahmoud Zakaria Abu Al-Ella, researcher in heritage at the Ministry of Information.)

celebrations were held at the main yards including Al-Safat Square. Children enjoyed primitive toys made from wood, relished popular candies and nuts. —KUNA

Operations resume at Al-Zour Refinery

KUWAIT: Operations have resumed at the First Al-Zour Oil Complex following some technical issues at the refinery that led to halting them partially. Kuwait Integrated Petroleum Industries Company (KIPIC) declared. KIPIC spokesperson Abdullah Al-Ajmi said in a statement to KUNA that operations and back-up teams exerted intensive and continuous efforts to resume the operations at the refinery gradually and within a record time.

Preparations are underway for exportation after resuming the operations, he said. Al-Zour Refinery had met external demand for high-grade oil derivatives, supplying 18 countries until March 13. Al-Ajmi added, noting that the sales would back the state oil-related income and contribute to boosting the economy. KIPIC declared on April 12 that the refinery operations partly stopped due to technical problems. The First Al-Zour Refinery was launched in November in a major step forward for the Kuwaiti oil industries. —KUNA



that it contributed a sum of KD 2.2 million (\$7.2 million) to the World Health Organization (WHO) and KD 1.5 million (around \$4.8 million) to the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria.

It went on to say that contributions worth KD 699,000 and 304,000 (around \$2.2 million and \$992,000) were allocated to the US Carter Center and the Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance respectively to combat malaria. The KFAED also supported efforts by the WHO's Global Malaria Control and Elimination program, established in 2008, in addition to the program launched by the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria in 2002. The World Malaria Day, marked on April 25, is a global event that highlights the need for a continuous political commitment to invest in malaria prevention and elimination efforts. Members of WHO established it during their World Health Assembly held in Geneva in May of 2007. —KUNA

KFAED contributes KD 4.7 million in fighting malaria

KUWAIT: Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development (KFAED) had contributed KD 4.7 million (around \$15.5 million) until April 2023 in the global efforts to combat malaria and other infectious diseases, according to a statement from the fund released on Tuesday. In a press release marking World Malaria Day, the KFAED affirmed that it was keen on supporting programs and efforts to fight malaria on a global scale. In this regard, the fund revealed

Oil workers demand information on raises

KUWAIT: President of Kuwait Oil Company Workers Union Abbas Awadh is calling on the government to release more information about who the "strategic alternative to salaries" will include.

The strategic alternative, which has been in discussion for about eight years, is an initiative aimed at re-evaluating the structure of salaries in the country. The file was put back on the table earlier this year, when the government announced it was handing it over to the Civil Service Council for further study. The "strategic

alternative" will increase the basic salary of employees, which are reportedly considered "very low" without taking allowances and cadres into account. Basic salaries have not received any increase over the past few decades, according to local media.

"The provocation of oil sector laborers with leaked information on the issue without denying or confirming whether workers will be included under the decision will shake up their feelings of job security and negatively affect their performance," Awadh said in a statement.

Awadh said he supports any increase in basic salaries for all sectors, as long as they don't infringe the rights of oil-sector workers. "Kuwait Oil Workers Union protects its laborers and we will not be lax towards their rights," he said. —Agencies



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Guatemala vows to stand by 'solid' ally Taiwan

Turkey detains 110 pro-Kurdish journalists, lawyers ahead of vote

Page 6

Page 7

South Africa's ruling party wants to quit ICC

ICC does not serve the interest of all but the interest of a few: Mbalula

PRETORIA: President Cyril Ramaphosa said Tuesday his ruling ANC party had resolved that South Africa should quit the International Criminal Court, which last month issued an arrest warrant against Russian President Vladimir Putin.

The ICC issued an arrest warrant against Putin in March meaning Pretoria, due to host the Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa bloc summit this year, would have to detain him on arrival. "Yes, the governing party... has taken that decision that it is prudent that South Africa should pull out of the ICC," Ramaphosa said during a press conference co-hosted with the visiting President of Finland Sauli Niinisto.

Ramaphosa said the decision, which follows a weekend meeting of the African National Congress (ANC), was reached "largely" because of what is perceived as the court's unfair treatment of certain countries.

"We would like this matter of unfair treatment to be properly discussed, but in the meantime the governing party has decided once again that there should be a pull out," he said. The arrest warrant against Putin followed accusations that the Kremlin unlawfully deported Ukrainian children.

On whether South Africa would arrest Putin, Ramaphosa said "that matter is under consideration". But his party's secretary general Fikile Mbalula earlier declared that "Putin can come anytime in this country". "This ICC does not serve the interest of all

but the interest of a few," Mbalula told a separate news conference.

'Needs to be negotiation'

Pretoria has close ties with Moscow dating back decades to when the Kremlin supported the ANC's fight against apartheid. The continental powerhouse has refused to condemn the invasion of Ukraine which has largely isolated Moscow on the international stage, saying it wants to stay neutral and prefers dialogue to end the war.

South Africa has "adopted this stance of being non-aligned is to ensure that we are able, as a country to play a role in helping conflict to come to an end," said Ramaphosa. He said he had spoken to Putin several times and "my message has been clear. There needs to be negotiation".

It is not the first time South Africa has attempted to withdraw from the ICC. It made an attempt in 2016 following a dispute a year earlier when then-Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir visited the country for an African Union summit. It refused to arrest him despite the then-leader facing an ICC arrest warrant over alleged war crimes.

The controversial decision to pull out was however revoked when a domestic court ruled such a move would have been unconstitutional. Earlier this year, it held a controversial joint military exercise with Russia and China, which critics cite as evidence of a tilt towards the Kremlin. — AFP



PRETORIA: South African President Cyril Ramaphosa (R) and Finland's President Sauli Niinisto (L) pose for a photograph during the welcoming ceremony for his state visit to South Africa at the Union Buildings in Pretoria. — AFP

Biden's reelection bid renews spotlight on Kamala Harris

WASHINGTON: If Joe Biden wins a second term, Kamala Harris will again find herself a heartbeat away from the presidency. The only difference: this time it will be an 82-year-old heart. Vice presidents are often an afterthought in Washington, but with Biden smashing previous age records in the Oval Office, the three-decades-younger Harris will go into the election under searing scrutiny.

If anyone needed a reminder how much Harris could matter one day, they got it in November 2021, when Biden went under anesthesia for a routine colonoscopy. The procedure was quick but for those 85 minutes, the United States had its first female acting president.

Biden, 80, is broadly in good health, according to his doctor, and eager to remain commander in chief. However, if he wins reelection in 2024, he will be 82 by the time he swears the oath of office and 86 when he steps down. Harris, 58, has already brought a wind of change to the White House. She's not only the first woman ever in the job but the second person after Barack Obama to hold either of the top two executive spots who was not white. But despite—or some say because of—that trailblazing achievement, Harris has polarized Americans.

Glass ceiling

In 2020, Harris wanted the presidency herself. After a strong campaign launch, notable for a stinging attack on Biden during a debate, she floundered in the polls. As Biden's running mate, however, she consolidated a coalition leaning heavily on Black voters and so helped defeat the disgraced incumbent Donald Trump.

16 killed in Pakistan munition blasts

KABAL: The death toll from a series of explosions caused by a fire in a munitions cache in a Pakistan police station rose to 16 on Tuesday, police said. The explosions levelled the specialist counter-terrorism station in Kabal town of Swat Valley, in the northwestern region of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa which neighbours Afghanistan.

Swat police said a short-circuit in a basement storing "grenades and other explosives" was the cause of the blasts. "It was like hell let loose on me," said Abbas Khan, 21, who had parked his car near the police station.

He said a thick cloud of dust and smoke engulfed the entire area, making it difficult to breathe. The dead included policemen, five suspected terrorists being held for interrogation, and two brothers aged four and six who lived nearby, Akhtar Hayat Gandapur, the inspector general of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa police, told AFP.

More than 50 people are being treated in various hospitals for their wounds. Gandapur ruled out the possibility of any terrorist activity. "We have not yet found any material or visual evidence suggesting a suicide attack but we will look into all aspects during investigations," he said.

The intense explosion rained pieces of munition on nearby houses and streets. "Three hundred kilograms of explosives including anti-tank and anti-personnel mines, artillery shells, and mortars were stored in the basement in addition to improvised explosive devices and suicide vests which had been recovered from the custody of terrorists," Khalid



US vice president Kamala Harris

Already having served as California's first Black attorney general and the first woman of South Asian heritage elected to the US Senate, she sports a dizzying CV. Critics say she has been underwhelming in the White House.

The vice presidency has been known to flummox many office holders—perhaps most famously Franklin D. Roosevelt's deputy, John Garner, who summarized the job as "not worth a bucket of warm p...". A rare vice presidential task—acting as tie breaker for the president's party when the Senate is split 50-50 -- became a core part of Harris' existence in the two years where the upper chamber was evenly divided. So although her role was essentially a formality, all those 51st votes she cast put her at the center of what even opponents had to concede was Biden's startlingly productive first term.

Finding her feet

An unusually high staff turnover fed rumors of discontent in the vice presidential office. A December 2021 Washington Post article quoted anonymous sources complaining of a "soul destroying" atmosphere.

Harris was also struggling to win the public relations battle in her policy work. Tasked by Biden with getting to the roots of the illegal migration problem on the Mexico border, she visited Central America. However, she was powerless to address the immediate problem of what the administration conceded was a "broken" immigration system—something Congress would need to tackle.

As press coverage soured, supporters argued that Harris was being held to unfair standards as a woman and an ethnic minority member. It didn't help that she had a penchant for word salads and the occasional gaffe—including accidentally saying during a 2022 visit to the Korean peninsula's heavily fortified DMZ border that the United States valued its alliance with the communist North, instead of the South.

By the middle of Biden's first term, Harris was gradually finding her feet. A spate of high-profile foreign trips, including meeting Chinese leader Xi Jinping and representing the United States at a regional Asia-Pacific summit, gave her valuable exposure in case she should find herself in the main job one day.

In February this year, it was Harris whom the administration sent to the Munich Security Conference and for the first time declare that Russia had committed "crimes against humanity" in Ukraine. She got positive headlines for a March trip to Africa where she showed her emotional side while visiting a former slaving center in Ghana.

Back home, she also became a prominent voice in the administration's pushback after the Supreme Court scrapped federal protections for abortion rights. The issue ended up helping Democrats to stun the Republicans and keep losses to a minimum in the November 2022 midterm elections.

Win or lose in 2024, Harris will be remembered for having broken the second highest glass ceiling in US politics. There'll also be her husband, Doug Emhoff. He'll forever have the honor of being the first Second Gentleman of the United States—or as the slightly awkward acronym goes: SGOTUS. —AFP



Donald Trump

Rape allegation against Trump heads to civil trial

NEW YORK: Jury selection is scheduled to start Tuesday in a civil trial pitting Donald Trump against a prominent former American columnist, who says he raped her in the 1990s. E. Jean Carroll, 79, says Trump sexually assaulted her in a New York department store and then defamed her after she went public with the allegations years later.

Trump, who is facing a slew of legal woes that threaten to derail his 2024 run for a second term in the White House, denies the allegations. The start of the trial comes just weeks after his historic arraignment on criminal charges related to a hush-money payment made to a porn star just before the 2016 election.

Carroll, a former columnist for Elle magazine, says she was raped by Trump in the changing room at the luxury Bergdorf Goodman department store on Fifth Avenue in Manhattan in the mid-1990s. She said the attack came after Trump asked her for shopping advice. Carroll first made the allegation in an excerpt from her book published by New York Magazine in 2019.

Trump responded then by saying he never met Carroll, that she was "not my type" and that she was "totally lying." Carroll first sued Trump for defamation in 2019 but was unable to include the rape claim because the statute of limitations for the alleged offense had expired.

But a new law took effect in November last year in New York that gives redress to victims of sexual assault decades after attacks may have occurred. It gave sexual assault victims in the state a one-year window to sue their alleged abusers even when the abuse occurred long ago.

Lawyers for Carroll filed a new suit that accused Trump of battery, "when he forcibly raped and groped" her. It also included defamation for a post that Trump made on his Truth Social platform where he denied the alleged rape and referred to Carroll as a "complete con job."

The suit seeks unspecified compensatory and punitive damages for psychological harm, pain and suffering, loss of dignity, and damage to her reputation. Trump is not expected to testify as Carroll's lawyers have said they do not intend to call him to the witness stand.

The trial is likely to last between one to two weeks. Trump became the first sitting or former president to have ever been charged with a crime when he was arrested in the hush-money case earlier this month. He is also being investigated over his efforts to overturn his 2020 election loss in the southern state of Georgia, his alleged mishandling of classified documents taken from the White House, and his involvement in the storming of the US Capitol on January 6, 2021. — AFP



KABAL: Security personnel stand amid rubble and wrecked vehicles a day after multiple explosions caused by fire in a munitions cache levelled a specialist counter-terrorism police station in Kabal town of Swat Valley, in Pakistan. —AFP

Sohail, a senior officer in the local counter-terrorism department told AFP.

Funeral prayers of nine policemen were offered Tuesday morning with their coffins draped in the national flag. Since the start of the year, two attacks on large police bases have been linked to the Pakistani Taliban, known as Tehreek-e-Taleban Pakistan (TTP).

The TTP have long targeted law enforcement officials, who they accuse of conducting extrajudicial executions. Pakistan has witnessed a dramatic uptick in attacks since the Taliban seized control of Kabul, focused on its border regions with Afghanistan, and Islamabad says offensives are being launched from Afghan soil.

The TTP was founded in 2007, when Pakistani militants fighting alongside the Taliban in Afghanistan splintered off to focus attacks on Islamabad as payback for supporting the US invasion after the 9/11 attacks. — AFP

International

Guatemala vows to stand by 'solid' diplomatic ally Taiwan

'Let us be in solidarity with those who are under constant siege'

TAIPEI: Guatemalan President Alejandro Giammattei pledged support on Tuesday for "solid diplomatic ally" Taiwan during a visit to the self-ruled island that has been slammed by China. The Central American nation is one of the few remaining countries to recognise Taiwan, a list that has shrunk in recent years as Beijing moves to isolate Taipei on the international stage.

China considers democratic Taiwan a part of its territory to be taken one day, and does not allow nations to recognise both Beijing and Taipei. Giammattei, who arrived Monday for a four-day visit, vowed at a military welcome ceremony to "stand by the Republic of Taiwan as a solid diplomatic ally".

He addressed Taiwan's parliament hours later and called for an end to Chinese aggression toward the island, once again calling it the "Republic of Taiwan" instead of its official name, the Republic of China (Taiwan). "Let us be in solidarity with those who are under constant siege from the other side of the Taiwan Strait," Giammattei said. "Guatemala is a pacifist country. That is why I demand the immediate silence of the war drums." He also reiterated support for Taiwan's sovereignty: "Guatemala maintains its unalterable position in favour of the recognition of Taiwan as an independent nation".

Taiwan President Tsai Ing-wen thanked Giammattei. "I look forward to our countries deepening relations and exploring more opportunities for cooperation through this visit," she said at the welcoming event. The two lead-

ers also held bilateral talks later in the day.

China's foreign ministry issued a strongly worded rebuke to Giammattei's use of the "Republic of Taiwan". "There is no way out for those advocating for a so-called Taiwan independence," foreign ministry spokesperson Mao Ning said at a press briefing.

"If we may offer a bit of advice to the government of Alejandro Giammattei: don't take the side of the ill-intended, do not act for your own selfish interests and go against international affairs and the wishes of the Guatemalan people."

Diplomatic battleground

Giammattei is scheduled to visit a technology company in Taichung City and attend an event promoting Guatemalan coffee, according to Tsai's office. This month, Tsai travelled to Guatemala and Belize, the only other Central American country that recognises Taipei, to firm up diplomatic relations after Honduras switched allegiance to Beijing in March.

She stopped in the United States to meet Speaker of the House Kevin McCarthy on her way back to Taipei. In response, Beijing staged three days of military exercises simulating targeted strikes and a blockade of Taiwan. Taiwan's defence ministry said Tuesday it had detected nine Chinese aircraft and 11 warships around the island in the past 24 hours, the highest number of naval vessels since the war drills ended two weeks ago.

China, one of Guatemala's major trading partners, has emphasised that it would be in the Central Amer-

ican nation's interest to switch recognition to Beijing. Latin America has been a key diplomatic battleground for China and Taiwan since the two split in 1949 after a civil war. Beijing has spent decades convincing Taipei's diplomatic allies to switch sides,



TAIPEI: Guatemala President Alejandro Eduardo Giammattei (C) speaks next to Taiwanese President Tsai Ing-wen during a military welcome ceremony in front of the Presidential Office in Taipei. —AFP

gaining nine since Tsai took office in 2016. Taiwan's ties with Paraguay are also at risk, with opposition candidate Efraim Alegre reportedly saying he would switch recognition to Beijing if he wins the presidential election on April 30. —AFP

Ban Ki-moon urges Myanmar junta to end violence

BANGKOK: Former UN chief Ban Ki-moon on Tuesday urged the Myanmar military to halt violence in the conflict-racked country and engage with its opponents to end the bloody crisis. Myanmar has been in turmoil since the military ousted civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi's government in February 2021, sparking fighting across swathes of the country and tanking the economy.

Diplomatic efforts to resolve the crisis have stalled, with the junta ignoring international criticism of its brutal crackdown on dissent and refusing to engage with its opponents. The military "must take the first steps", Ban said following a two-day trip to Myanmar where he met junta chief Min Aung Hlaing and senior military officials.

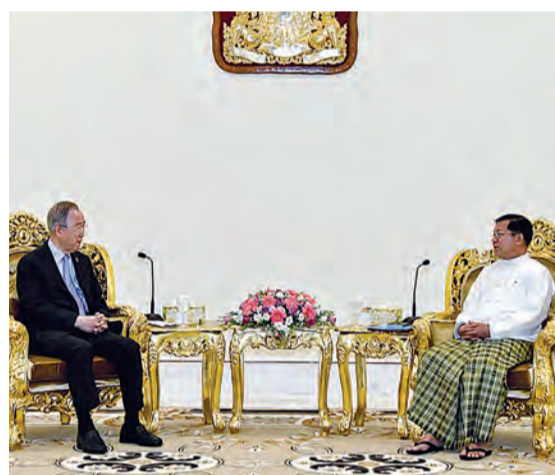
Ban also said the National Unity Government (NUG) -- a shadow administration dominated by lawmakers from Suu Kyi's party which is working to overturn the coup—

must be part of any "lasting solution". The military has shown no willingness to engage with its opponents, including the NUG, which it has designated as a "terrorist" organisation. Rights groups accuse the junta of massacres, torching villages and using air and artillery strikes to punish communities suspected of harbouring its opponents.

A military airstrike on a village in a resistance hotspot this month killed more than 170 people, according to media and locals. The junta justified its power grab with unproven allegations of fraud in 2020 polls won resoundingly by Suu Kyi's party, and has promised to hold fresh elections.

"Holding elections under current conditions risks further violence and division, and the results not being recognised by the people of Myanmar," Ban said. The statement made no mention of whether Ban had sought a meeting with Suu Kyi, who is currently serving a 33-year jail term following a series of closed-door trials that rights groups say were a sham.

Ban's visit made the front page of the state-backed Global New Light of Myanmar on Tuesday, which did not mention his calls for dialogue and a halt to violence. He and junta chief Min Aung Hlaing had "exchanged views on the latest progress of Myanmar and cordially discussed it with constructive atti-



NAYPYIDAW: Handout photograph shows Myanmar military chief Min Aung Hlaing (R) meeting with former United Nations secretary-general Ban Ki-moon (L) in Naypyidaw. —AFP

tudes", the paper said, without providing details. Ban visited Myanmar in his capacity as a member of "The Elders" group of world leaders founded by Nelson Mandela, which works to promote peace and defuse conflicts. —AFP

UN Rights urges Singapore to halt execution

SINGAPORE: The United Nations Human Rights Office pressed Singapore on Tuesday to "urgently reconsider" its scheduled execution of a man over one kilogram of cannabis. Singaporean Tangaraju Suppiah, 46, is set to be hanged on Wednesday after he was convicted of conspiracy to traffic 1,017.9 grams (35.9 ounces) of cannabis, twice the amount that merits the death sentence in the city-state.

It would be Singapore's first execution in six months and the 12th since last year. The Asian financial hub has some of the world's toughest anti-drug laws and insists the death penalty remains an effective deterrent against trafficking.

The UN's Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights disagrees. "The death penalty is still being used in a small number of countries, largely because of the myth that it deters crime," the OHCHR said in a statement. "We have concerns around due process and respect for fair trial guarantees. The UN Human Rights Office calls on the authorities not to proceed with his execution," it added. Earlier, British billionaire Richard Branson had also urged Singapore to halt Tangaraju's execution.

Branson, a member of the Geneva-based Global Commission on Drug Policy, wrote on his blog on Monday that Tangaraju was "not anywhere near" the drugs at the time of his arrest and that Singapore may be about to put an innocent man to death.

Singapore's Home Affairs Ministry said in response



SINGAPORE: Leelavathy Suppiah (C), sister of a convicted drug trafficker Tangaraju Suppiah, who is scheduled for execution, poses with family members as she holds a petition letter to seek clemency in Singapore. —AFP

on Tuesday that Tangaraju's guilt had been proven beyond a reasonable doubt. Branson showed "disrespect for Singapore's judges and our criminal justice system with such allegations", it added.

Cannabis has been decriminalised in many parts of the world, including in neighbouring Thailand, and rights groups have been calling for Singapore to abolish capital punishment. Tangaraju's family has requested a retrial.

Violence had started before dawn, when gang members burst into several residential areas of the capital, looting homes and attacking residents, according to witnesses.

"It was the sound of projectiles that woke us up this morning. It was 3:00 am, the gangs invaded us. There were shots, shots," a resident of the neighboring district of Turgeau told AFP. "If the gangs come to invade us, we will defend ourselves, we too have our own weapons, we have our machetes, we will take their weapons, we will not flee," said another resident.

"Mothers who want to protect their children can send them elsewhere," he added. In fact, dozens of families left the neighborhoods caught in the spiral of violence on Monday, AFP journalists confirmed.

Men, women and children fled the scene on foot, carrying a few personal belongings in bags or bundles. At least three other suspected gang members were killed and then burned midday, according to photos and videos that were shared online.

'Major humanitarian emergency'

The latest grisly killings came as the United Nations released a report highlighting the surge in murders and

kidnappings in the country. Armed gangs "continued to compete to expand their territorial control throughout the Port-au-Prince metropolitan area, spreading to previously unaffected neighborhoods," said the report, from Secretary-General Antonio Guterres.

"With the high number of fatalities and increasing areas under the control of armed gangs, insecurity in the capital has reached levels comparable to countries in armed conflict," it added. The number of reported homicides in Haiti rose in recent months by 21 percent, from 673 in the last quarter of 2022 to 815 between January 1 and March 31 this year. The number of reported kidnappings soared by 63 percent, from 391 to 637. "The people of Haiti continue to suffer one of the worst human rights crises in decades and a major humanitarian emergency," the report said.

Clashes among gangs and with police have "become more violent and more frequent," claiming many civilian lives, it added. The human rights situation of people living in gang-controlled areas "remains appallingly poor" and conditions in areas newly targeted by gangs have "worsened significantly," according to the report. —AFP

How ChatGPT could transform politics: Experts

PARIS: The AI bot ChatGPT has passed exams, written poetry, and deployed in newsrooms, and now politicians are seeking it out—but experts are warning against rapid uptake of a tool also famous for fabricating "facts".

The chatbot, released last November by US firm OpenAI, has quickly moved centre stage in politics—particularly as a way of scoring points. Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida recently took a direct hit from the bot when he answered some innocuous questions about healthcare reform from an opposition MP.

Unbeknownst to the PM, his adversary had generated the questions with ChatGPT. He also generated answers that he claimed were "more sincere" than Kishida's. The PM hit back that his own answers had been "more specific". French trade union boss Sophie Binet was on-trend when she drily assessed a recent speech by President Emmanuel Macron as one that "could have been done by ChatGPT". But the bot has also been used to write speeches and even help draft laws. "It's useful to think of ChatGPT and generative AI in general as a cliché generator," David Karpf of George Washington University in the US said during a recent online panel. "Most of what we do in politics is also cliché generation."

'Limited added value'

Nowhere has the enthusiasm for grandstanding with ChatGPT been keener than in the United States. Last month, Congresswoman Nancy Mace gave a five-minute speech at a Senate committee enumerating potential uses and harms of AI—before delivering the punchline that "every single word" had been generated by ChatGPT.

Local US politician Barry Finegold had already gone further though, pronouncing in January that his team had used ChatGPT to draft a bill for the Massachusetts Senate. The bot reportedly introduced original ideas to the bill, which is intended to rein in the power of chatbots and AI.

Anne Meuwese from Leiden University in the Netherlands wrote in a column for Dutch law journal RegelMaat last week that she had carried out a similar experiment with ChatGPT and also found that the bot introduced original ideas.

But while ChatGPT was to some extent capable of generating legal texts, she wrote that lawmakers should not fall over each other to use the tool. "Not only is much still unclear about important issues such as environmental impact, bias and the ethics at OpenAI... the added value also seems limited for now," she wrote.

The added value might be more obvious lower down the political food chain, though, where staffers on the campaign trail face a treadmill of repetitive tasks. Karpf suggested AI could be useful for generating emails asking for donations—necessary messages that were not intended to be masterpieces.

This raises an issue of whether the bots can be trained to represent a political point of view. ChatGPT has already provoked a storm of controversy over its apparent liberal bias—the bot initially refused to write a poem praising Donald Trump but happily churned out couplets for his successor as US President Joe Biden.

Billionaire magnate Elon Musk has spied an opportunity. Despite warning that AI systems could destroy civilization, he recently promised to develop TruthGPT, an AI text tool stripped of the perceived liberal bias. Perhaps he needn't have bothered. New Zealand researcher David Rozado already ran an experiment retooling ChatGPT as RightWingGPT—a bot on board with family values, liberal economics and other right-wing rallying cries. "Critically, the computational cost of trialling, training and testing the system was less than \$300," he wrote on his Substack blog in February. —AFP

Over a dozen gang members stoned, burned in Haiti

UNITED NATIONS: More than a dozen suspected gang members were stoned and burned alive on Monday by residents in Port-au-Prince, police and witnesses said, as the UN warned that insecurity in the Haitian capital has reached levels similar to countries at war.

"During a search of a minibus in which there were armed individuals, the police confiscated weapons and other equipment. In addition, more than a dozen individuals traveling in this vehicle were unfortunately lynched by members of the population," the police said in a statement.

The police did not specify the exact number of victims, nor expand upon the circumstances in which they lost custody of the suspects, who were murdered by residents of the district called Canape-Vert. The vio-

Business

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 26, 2023

US consumer confidence falls ahead of Fed decision

Debt limit action should be 'without conditions': Yellen

WASHINGTON: US consumer confidence fell more than many predicted in April, fueled by a deterioration in expectations among over-55s and households with annual incomes over \$50,000, according to survey data released Tuesday. The pessimistic results may ease some of the pressure on the Federal Reserve as it prepares to consider raising interest rates for the tenth time in a row next week in order to control rising prices.

The consumer confidence index fell in April to 101.3, down from a revised 104.0 in March, the Conference Board said in a statement. This was below the median forecast in a MarketWatch survey of economists. Consumers' expectations "fell and remain below the level which often signals a recession looming in the short term," Ataman Ozylidirim, senior director of economics at The Conference Board, said in a statement. "Compared to last month, fewer households expect business conditions to improve and more expect worsening of conditions in the next six months," he said.

"They also expect fewer jobs to be available over the short term," he added. Tuesday's data release comes a week before the Fed meets to decide interest rates amid inflation which remains above its long-term target of two percent. In recent weeks, a few members of the Fed's rate-setting committee have suggested that the US central bank should lift its benchmark lending rate next week.

The vast majority of futures traders expect the Fed will raise rates by a quarter point next week, according to data from CME Group. Consumer inflation expectations over the next 12 months remain "essentially unchanged" at 6.2 percent, Ozylidirim said.

Meanwhile, new home sales in the United States grew more than anticipated in March, the Commerce Department said Tuesday, as a lack of existing homes continued bolstering demand in the market for new properties. Sales of new single-family houses picked up 9.6 percent to an annual rate of 683,000 last month, seasonally adjusted, said the department.

The increase exceeded analyst forecasts, suggesting

the market remains hotter than expected, while February's rate was revised down to 623,000. The trend in new home sales has "massively outperformed" the level implied by mortgage demand since mid-2022, said Ian Shepherdson and Kieran Clancy of Pantheon Macroeconomics in a recent note.

"That, in turn, reflects the relative abundance of new home supply," the economists added.

The supply of new homes for sale could last a little over eight months, significantly more than trends in the existing home market, they said. New home sales in March remain 3.4 percent below than the same period a year ago, the Commerce Department said.

The median sales price of new houses sold in March was \$449,800, up from February. The property sector—which is sensitive to interest rates—has been reeling as the Federal Reserve rapidly raised the benchmark lending rate rapidly since early 2022 to tackle high inflation. The new homes market is much smaller than that of existing homes in the country.

A US debt default would trigger an "economic and financial catastrophe," Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen said in prepared remarks Tuesday, stressing that action to raise or suspend the debt limit should be "without conditions." Her comments at an event in Washington come as the top congressional Republican vowed Sunday to hold a vote this week on lifting the debt ceiling and curbing spending—despite President Joe Biden's calls to increase borrowing with no strings attached.

The United States hit its \$31.4 trillion borrowing limit in January, prompting the Treasury to take extraordinary measures that allow it to continue financing the government's activities. But if the debt ceiling is not raised or suspended by Congress before current tools are exhausted, the government risks defaulting on payment obligations as early as July, with profound implications for the economy. "In my assessment—and that of economists across the board—a default on our debt would produce an economic and financial catastrophe," Yellen said in remarks Tuesday.



MIAMI: Customers shop in a Bed Bath & Beyond store on April 24, 2023 in Miami, Florida. US consumer confidence fell more than many predicted in April, fueled by a deterioration in expectations among over-55s and households with annual incomes over \$50,000, according to survey data released Tuesday. —AFP

astrophic," Yellen said in remarks Tuesday.

Among the potential consequences she listed were higher payments on mortgages, auto loans and credit cards, while businesses could see credit markets worsen. The federal government could also become unable to issue payments to millions of Americans including those who rely on Social Security, she said. Moody's Analytics said in a note Monday that the plan proposed by Re-

publican House Speaker Kevin McCarthy to raise the debt ceiling in exchange for cuts in government spending would slow growth and cut employment. If the draft presented by McCarthy on April 17 passed as is, it would bring a drop of 0.6 percentage points in US potential growth for 2024, and the elimination of 780,000 jobs, according to the ratings agency's research arm. Unemployment would also be set to rise. —AFP

AL-SHALL ECONOMIC REPORT

IMF lowers GCC growth outlook

KUWAIT: The International Monetary Fund (IMF) issued its report for April 2023 on the potential performance of the global economy. IMF still rules out an era of recession, ie, negative growth. Not only that but it forecasts a growth by 0.2 percent above its expectation for October 2022 though it is lower by 0.7 percent. Most of the support for his expectations came from the two largest global economies: The United States whose economy constitutes about 25.5 percent of the world economy and China.

From October 2022 to April 2023, a barrel of Brent crude lost about 11.3 percent of its price level despite the reduction in production, and the oil-producing countries in the GCC region cut their production twice by 9.3 percent. Lower prices and less production yield fewer oil revenues.

Therefore, the reduction of the GCC countries' growth expectations remains logical and this reduction is directly proportional to the degree of dependence of each member state on oil. The highest absolute reduction in the expected growth rate is in Oman whose expected growth rate fell from 4.1 percent in the last October report to 1.7 percent in the current April report.

The highest expected relative decrease affected Kuwait whose growth expectations fell from 2.6 percent in the last October report to 0.9 percent in

UK targets big tech to boost online consumer rights

LONDON: Global tech giants could face fines of up to 10 percent of their annual turnover if a British government bill to protect consumers launched on Tuesday becomes law. The bill aims to strengthen competition in digital markets and crack down on subscription traps as well as prevent online scams such as fake reviews.

It envisages giving the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) regulator greater powers to tackle breaches of consumer rights law directly rather than through lengthy court proceedings. "The reforms will also heighten the consequences for wrongdoers as the CMA and the courts will have the power to impose penalties of up to 10 percent of global turnover for breaching consumer law," the government said in a statement.

"Today's bill will also enable the government to ban the practice of facilitating fake reviews or advertising consumer reviews without taking reasonable steps to check they are genuine. "New rules will ensure consumers can exit subscriptions in a straightforward, cost-effective, and timely way and require that busi-

nesses issue a reminder to consumers when a free trial or introductory offer is coming to an end." Other measures include handing the CMA new powers to tackle the "excessive dominance" of a small number of tech firms, which the government said had "stifled innovation and growth across the economy".

A new Digital Markets Unit within the CMA will be able to intervene to prevent businesses and consumers being "unfairly disadvantaged by the biggest players".

"If a firm is deemed to have strategic market status in key digital services, the DMU will be able to step in to set tailored rules on how they behave and operate," it added. A threshold for this will apply to firms with a global turnover above £25 billion or a UK turnover above £1 billion. That potentially puts global tech giants such as Meta, the parent company of Facebook, as well as Google, Amazon, Apple and Microsoft in the firing line. A Microsoft spokesperson told AFP: "We will be considering the content of the bill and look forward to engaging with policy makers during its passage through parliament."

Meta said it was not commenting for now, Google, Amazon and Apple did not respond immediately to requests for comment.

A second proposed law—the Online Safety Bill—is currently making its way through parliament. —AFP

Dollar jumps as Biden confirms re-election bid

LONDON: The dollar was largely higher Tuesday as Joe Biden confirmed his bid to run for re-election as US president next year. The announcement comes with the US economy still battered by high inflation and interest-rate rises, triggering concerns of a possible recession.

Worries that the global economy could enter a downturn this year continued to weigh heavily on stock markets Tuesday, however. "Equity markets are slightly under pressure on Tuesday following a wide array of earnings releases and as investors eye further US data later in the week," said Craig Erlam, senior market analyst at OANDA trading platform.

Wall Street opened lower, with the Dow dipping less than a tenth of a percentage point at the open. The broader S&P 500 shed 0.4 percent and the tech-heavy Nasdaq Composite shed 0.6 percent.

Briefing.com analyst Patrick O'Hare said there was plenty of good earnings news among US firms but that it did not seem to be enough to persuade investors. He said an earnings miss by UPS, which along with its rival parcel shipping companies are seen as

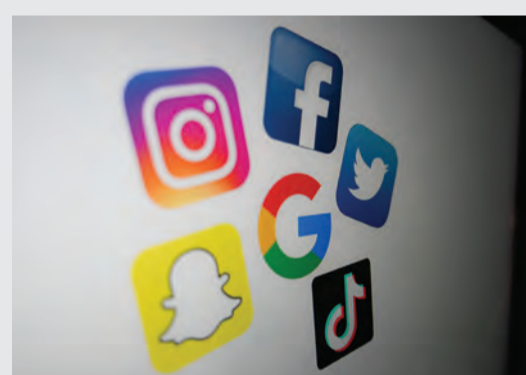
a bellwether for the overall economy, "was piquing concerns about the broader economic outlook and earnings prospects".

Shares of regional bank First Republic (FRC) fell 28 percent after the bank reported of a 40 drop in deposits, adding to worries about mid-size lenders in the US after three banks collapsed last month.

In Europe, London and Frankfurt were flat in afternoon trading, while Paris was lower. Following recent shocks in the banking sector, UBS on Tuesday posted an underwhelming first quarter net profit of \$1.0 billion but insisted it had seen strong client inflows as it prepared to integrate its stricken rival Credit Suisse.

Shares in UBS, Switzerland's biggest bank, fell around four percent in early trading following the announcement, but recovered much of that loss. Asian markets ended mostly lower, with Hong Kong falling sharply on the back of major losses in Chinese firms, as a lack of clear direction ahead of key announcements this week presented a challenge for global investors. It was the third straight day of losses on the Hang Seng Index, with Alibaba Group Holdings down more than three percent, internet giant Baidu down nearly four and pharmaceutical maker Wuxi Biologics dropping almost seven.

Investors seem to be having concerns about the sustainability of the recovery in China and the heightening of geopolitical tensions," Redmond Wong, of Saxo Capital Markets HK, told Bloomberg. —AFP



LILLE, France: A photo taken on October 21, 2020 shows the logo of multinational American Internet technology and service companies, Google, the American online social media and social networking service, clockwise: Facebook, Twitter, Tik Tok, Snapchat and Instagram on a computer screen in Lille. —AFP

EU designates TikTok, other online platforms for stricter rules

BRUSSELS: The European Union on Tuesday designated 19 online platforms, including Instagram, TikTok and Twitter, as having user numbers so big they will come under stricter regulatory rules for content. The list—on which services from Amazon, Google, Meta, Instagram and Microsoft also feature—all have more than 45 million monthly active users.

That puts them in a category under a new EU law, known as the Digital Services Act (DSA), imposing measures from August such as annual audits and a duty to effectively counter disinformation and hate content. In four months' time, "these platforms and search engines will not be able to act as if they were 'too big to care'," Thierry Breton, the EU's internal market commissioner, said in a statement.

"This new supervision system will cast a wide and tight net and catch all points of failure in a platform's compliance," he added. Platforms meeting the 45-million-plus threshold include Twitter, owned by US billionaire Elon Musk; Alphabet's Google Search, Google Maps, Google Shopping and Google Play units as well as its YouTube subsidiary; and Meta's Facebook and Instagram.

Others are Microsoft's LinkedIn, Apple's iOS App Store, online encyclopedia Wikipedia, messaging app Snapchat and creative image website Pinterest. Under the DSA, they are categorized as a "Very Large Online Platform" (VLOP) or a "Very Large Online Search Engine" (VLOSE). Most of the companies on the list are US-based, but Chinese-owned platforms TikTok and e-commerce site AliExpress also feature. The commission also listed German online fashion retailer Zalando.

Breton told journalists on Tuesday his team will hold "stress tests" to check Twitter's compliance readiness "at the end of June". He added that TikTok had also expressed an interest in cooperating to ensure compliance. Tuesday's announcement follows a deadline in February for online companies to publish user figures in Europe. —AFP

Business

Top Indian business delegation to visit Kuwait to bolster ties

Major India-Kuwait investment conference on May 8

By Sajeev K Peter

KUWAIT: A high-level business delegation from India is scheduled to visit Kuwait on May 8, 2023 with a view to fostering growing trade and business relations between Kuwait and India. The delegation's visit, to be organized by the Indian Embassy, Kuwait in association with the Indian Business and Professional Council (IBPC), Kuwait, is expected to help Indian businesses expand further into new markets in Kuwait and woo potential Kuwaiti investors into India.

The Indian Embassy will host an India-Kuwait investment conference titled 'Unleashing Synergies' on May 8, 2023 in Kuwait in association with IBPC. The conference will be held with the support of Kuwait Chamber of Commerce and Industry (KCCI) and Union of Investment Companies (UIC). More than 50 top Kuwaiti businessmen are expected to attend the conference, in addition to the participation of several Indian businessmen in Kuwait, as it

will be a major business event in Kuwait, a person familiar with the matter said.

India, one of the fastest growing economies in the world, offers a plethora of opportunities for Kuwaiti investors across various sectors and India's new foreign trade policy 2023 has been kept open-ended with a view to attracting more investors into the country, said an economic expert in New Delhi.

"India is currently looking for substantial investments from Kuwaiti investors in sectors other than oil and gas and healthcare," the expert said on condition of anonymity. Other sectors such as food processing, IT, pharmaceutical, renewable energy and tourism and hospitality, among others, could also be lucrative for Kuwaiti investors, he mentioned.

New opportunities

Already there is a significant Kuwaiti presence in India including by Alghanim Group of Kuwait; KAPICO group; National Aviation Services; Agility

Logistics, Hasibat Holding Co, KGA Group, KCIC, KIPCO, Global Investment House, Kuwait Finance House and Noor Investment, among others.

The visit in May will be a sequel to a similar visit by a 20-member business delegation from India last October. During the visit, the multi-product delegation comprising members from Federation of Indian Export Organizations (FIEO) held talks with officials of KCCI. While meeting with the delegation, KCCI member Talal Al-Kharafi said: "India is Kuwait's fourth commercial partner with the value of trade exchanges between the countries amounting to \$2.362 billion last year." He assured the support of the chamber to Indian businessmen.

The Kuwait Investment Authority (KIA) has invested \$5 billion in India, and according to reports, it has plans to double this. Kirby Building Systems India, owned by Alghanim Industries, Kuwait recently inaugurated its newest Kirby plant, a pre-engineered steel manufacturing facility in Halol, Gujarat. The lat-

est addition is the third Kirby Building Systems plant in India, and its seventh globally. Alghanim Industries Executive Chairman Kutayba Y Alghanim, along with Alghanim Industries and Kirby India executives, attended the inauguration of the new state-of-the-art plant, which took place on Feb 22, 2023.

Historically, India-Kuwait relations have always had an important trade dimension. India has consistently been among the top trading partners of Kuwait. During FY 2021-22, Kuwait was the 8th largest oil supplier to India and it met about 5.1 percent of India's total energy needs. Total bilateral trade with Kuwait during FY 2020-21 was \$6.268 billion, while trade recorded in FY 2021-22 was \$12.243 billion, a growth of almost 95 percent y-o-y.

Importantly, several India-related funds have also been launched in Kuwait in the past few years. Similarly, several Indian public and private sector companies in finance and insurance sector have substantial investments in Kuwait.

UK borrowing jumps, undercuts forecast: Data

LONDON: UK state borrowing jumped last year on vast energy market subsidies but undershot forecasts, data showed Monday, which analysts said was stoking hope of pre-election giveaways.

The government's public sector net borrowing expanded to £139.2 billion (\$174.0 billion) in its year to the end of March, the Office for National Statistics said. That was the fourth highest annual amount since records began and compared with £121.1 billion in the previous fiscal year, when the public purse was already under immense strain from COVID pandemic expenditure.

Yet annual borrowing significantly undershot an official state forecast of £152.4 billion given alongside the budget last month. Nevertheless, borrowing in March alone ballooned to £21.5 billion—the second-highest total on record for the month—due to energy support measures.

Prime Minister Rishi Sunak's Conservative government last year launched energy subsidies to ease a cost-of-living crisis and rampant inflation, sparked by soaring electricity and gas bills after Russia's invasion of Ukraine. "These numbers reflect the inevitable consequences of borrowing eye-watering sums to help families and businesses through a pandemic and (Russian President Vladimir Putin's) energy crisis," said finance minister Jeremy Hunt, whose official title is chancellor of the exchequer.

"We stepped up to support the British econ-



LONDON: Britain's Chancellor of the Exchequer Jeremy Hunt listens to the speech of Britain's Prime Minister during a Business Connect event in North London, on April 24, 2023. — AFP

omy in the face of two global shocks, but we cannot borrow forever." Sunak's Conservatives and the main opposition Labour party are meanwhile jockeying for position ahead of an election widely expected next year. Better-than-expected annual borrowing could potentially hand the government more room for

giveaways to woo voters. "The news that total borrowing was lower than... predicted only a month ago provides the Chancellor with more wiggle room to cut taxes/raise spending ahead of the next general election," said economist Ruth Gregory at research consultancy Capital Economics. —AFP

Santander profits up despite windfall tax on banks

MADRID: Spanish banking giant Santander saw its first quarter net profits rise thanks to strong business activity that offset a windfall tax imposed by Spain's leftwing government, results showed Tuesday. Spain's biggest lender, which has a strong presence in Europe and Latin America, posted a 2.57-billion-euro (\$2.83 billion) net profit in the first three months of the year.

The result outstripped the expectations of analysts at financial data firm Factset, who had expected a figure of 2.45 billion euros. "It has been a strong start for the year with income 13 percent higher than last year driven by growth in customers and volumes, with lending and deposits up 3 percent and 6 percent, respectively," said chief executive Ana Botin in a statement. The robust start offset the impact of a temporary windfall tax on big banks imposed by Spain's government in January to fund measures to help households cope with higher prices.

In February, Botin said the tax would likely cost Santander between 220 million euros and 230 million euros this year, with the bank mulling legal action to challenge the measure. Spain's banks have been fighting tooth and nail against the tax which will be in place throughout 2023-2024 and is ex-



pected to add 1.5 billion euros to the state coffers this year. Without the tax, which was accounted for in full during the first quarter, Santander would have posted profits of 2.795 billion euros, an increase of 10 percent, the bank said.

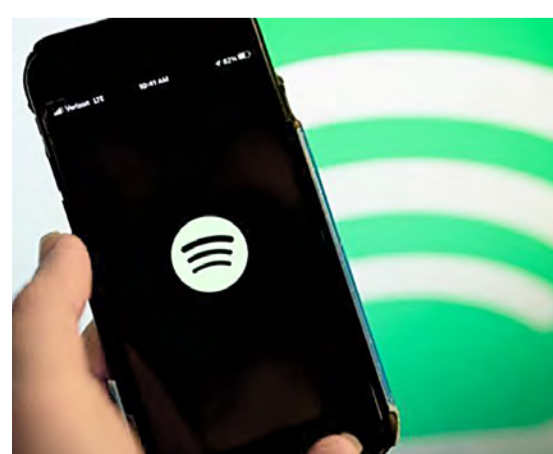
Santander said the results were due to strong commercial activity in its main markets, with profits in Spain up 28 percent year-on-year and

156 million euros (\$172 million), compared to an operating loss of six million euros a year earlier.

The widened loss was, according to the company, attributed to a higher headcount compared to a year earlier and changes in social charges. In January, following similar moves by other tech industry giants, the streaming giant announced it was cutting around 600 jobs out of around 10,000. Its operating expenses were also increased due to severance-related charges.

Boosted by the growing number of users, revenue—of which the majority comes from paying subscribers—grew 14 percent to three billion euros. But this fell short of analysts expectations of 3.4 billion euros. The platform has only occasionally posted a quarterly profit since its launch and has regularly posted annual losses, despite strong subscriber growth and having had a head start on its rivals such as Apple Music and Amazon Music.

For the whole of 2022, it posted a net loss of 430 million euros, compared to a loss of 34 million euros in 2021. Spotify has also invested more than one billion



euro into podcasting in recent years, but analysts say the company has yet to prove the investment is bearing fruit. Its venture into podcasts has also been a source of controversy, with US star Joe Rogan accused of spreading misinformation in his shows. —AFP

Homegrown fried chicken chain replaces KFC in Russia

MOSCOW: The Russian incarnation of KFC opened its first restaurant in Moscow on Tuesday after the American fast food chain exited the country amid the Kremlin's offensive in Ukraine. The new owners of the US giant's former restaurants across Russia are resuscitating Rostic's, a brand that appeared in the tumultuous early years of post-Soviet Russia.

At the launch in central Moscow, Colonel Harland Sanders, the founder of the KFC chain, was absent from the new logo, but the new color scheme still featured the US giant's signature red and white.

The Rostic's flagship venue would welcome its first customers at 5 pm (1400 GMT). Originally launched in 1993, Rostic's helped KFC expand in Russia over two decades. For many Russians, Rostic's brings back memories of the turbulent early years of transitioning to a free-market economy following the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991.

Last week, the US giant's parent company Yum Brands completed its withdrawal from Russia. The KFC business in the country has been sold to Smart Service, a local franchisee.

Neither company was immediately available for comment. As part of the deal, Smart Service agreed to retain the company's employees in Russia, the US parent company said in a statement last week.

"Smart Service will initially convert their more than 100 KFC restaurants in Russia to Rostic's," the statement said. "As master franchisor, Smart Service will also be responsible for working with other franchisees in Russia to rebrand to Rostic's."

With more than a thousand restaurants, KFC was the largest fast food chain in Russia.

Konstantin Kotov, who co-leads Smart Service, said that no major changes were planned to the menu or design of the new restaurants. "Our main goal is to create as little discomfort for people as possible in getting to know the brand," Kotov told Russian business newspaper RBK Daily.

"They should simply immerse themselves in the same world that they have always had."

Russian President Vladimir Putin's decision to send troops to Ukraine in February 2022 triggered unprecedented sanctions and an exodus of foreign corporations, including Starbucks and McDonald's.

Former McDonald's restaurants in Russia have been renamed "Vkusno i tochka" ("Delicious. Full Stop"). —AFP

3M to cut 6,000 jobs as it reports lower profits

NEW YORK: US industrial conglomerate 3M announced Tuesday it will cut 6,000 jobs as it reported lower profits, citing especially weak demand in consumer electronics. The job cuts would be implemented globally across its operations, said 3M, whose business runs across sectors including transportation and health care.

The company continued a "relentless focus on serving customers and aggressively managed costs" in the first quarter, said Chief Executive Mike Roman. "To strengthen 3M for the future, today we announced actions that will reduce cost at the corporate center, further simplify and strengthen our supply chain structure and streamline our go-to-market business models," he added. 3M's first quarter profits were \$979 million, down 25 percent on lower revenues of \$8.0 billion.

In an earnings presentation, 3M pointed to "significant weakness" in consumer electronics such as smartphones, tablets and televisions. However, 3M said it expects the consumer electronics market to stabilize in the second half of 2023.

The company also cited declines in sales of face masks, from their elevated levels in the 2022 quarter of the COVID-19 pandemic. 3M said it would focus on "high-growth" segments such as automotive electrification to offset these trends, adding that it planned to invest in climate technology, sustainable packaging and other "emerging areas." The job cuts are expected to bring annual savings of \$700 million to \$900 million, 3M said. Shares of 3M dipped 0.5 percent to \$104.50 in pre-market trading. —AFP

Spotify passes 500m active users, widens Q1 loss

STOCKHOLM: Music streaming giant Spotify on Tuesday reported that it had 515 million monthly active users as of the end of March, beating expectations, as its operating loss deepened. The Swedish company also saw the number of paying subscribers grow to 210 million.

Analysts queried by Factset had expected the total monthly active users to reach around 501 million on average, and paying subscribers to reach 207 million. Spotify said in a statement it had posted its "strongest" first quarter "since going public in 2018," with nearly all performance indicators "surpassing expectations." The company also posted a first quarter operating loss of

Business

UBS hopes to complete Credit Suisse takeover before July

Q1 net profit to tick in at \$1.7bn, down from \$2.1bn a year ago

ZURICH: UBS said Tuesday it would likely complete its takeover of stricken rival Credit Suisse before the end of June, as the bank posted an underwhelming first quarter net profit of \$1.0 billion. All eyes were on what shape Switzerland's biggest bank is in as it prepares to carry out its rescue merger with its closest domestic competitor. Analysts polled by the Swiss financial newswire AWP expected UBS's first quarter net profit to tick in at around \$1.7 billion, down from \$2.1 billion a year ago.

Net income for the first quarter was reduced by an increase in litigation provisions of \$665 million to settle an old dispute linked to the sub-prime crisis in the United States. The bank said it was in advanced discussions with the US Department of Justice and reported progress towards settling the case. UBS said it saw a net inflow of new money into its global wealth management division of \$28 billion, of which \$7 billion came in the last 10 days of March, following the takeover announcement.

And returning chief executive Sergio Ermotti said he would give clarity as soon as possible within the coming months on what the scene would look like for domestic banking within Switzerland.

He said any decisions would be "based on facts", saying public discussion at this stage was "totally based on emotions and in many cases, totally uninformed". "Whatever we do has to be sustainable and viable," he stressed, in a conference call with analysts. There are concerns within Switzerland about thousands of prospective job cuts, plus the vast size of the new bank squashing consumer and business choice—and potentially being too big for the state to rescue if it got itself into trouble. UBS

shares dropped in morning trade on the Swiss stock exchange Tuesday. Shares were down 3.9 percent at 17.48 Swiss francs each in mid-morning trading.

Q2 takeover target

On March 19, the Swiss government, central bank and financial regulator strongarmed UBS into a \$3.25-billion shotgun marriage to ensure its smaller, but still "too-big-to-fail" rival, did not go bankrupt. "We are focused on completing the acquisition of Credit Suisse, most likely in the second quarter of 2023," UBS said. "While acknowledging the magnitude of, and complexity associated with, the integration and restructuring of Credit Suisse, we believe that this combination presents a unique opportunity to bring significant, long-term value to all of our stakeholders."

Ermotti said the transaction would help to "reinforce the leading position of the Swiss financial centre and will be of benefit to the entire economy."

Analyst at Swiss investment managers Vontobel Andreas Venditti said UBS's investment case had "changed from a capital-generative firm with high returns of capital to shareholders, to a complex restructuring story". "At least UBS has secured a reasonable price and significant loss protections," he added.

Credit Suisse slump

Credit Suisse on Monday published perhaps its final quarterly results ahead of the merger, revealing the desperate situation it was in when the takeover deal was pushed through. The bank saw 61.2 billion Swiss francs (\$68.6 billion) withdrawn in the first quarter of 2023 alone—mostly made in



BASEL: A sign of Swiss bank giant UBS bank is seen next to a sign of Credit Suisse baking in Basel, on April 4, 2023. —AFP

panic around the takeover time—following 110.5 billion Swiss francs in withdrawals in the fourth quarter last year. While Credit Suisse said those outflows had "moderated", it acknowledged they "have not yet reversed".

Credit Suisse reported deceptively-bloated net

profits for the first quarter, which swelled to 12.4 billion Swiss francs (\$14 billion), up from a significant loss a year earlier. But that was largely attributed to holders of high-risk Credit Suisse debt being wiped out in the emergency takeover deal. It warned of "substantial" losses to come. —AFP

NBK warns against risks and consequences of money laundering

KUWAIT: National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) pursues its support of the "Let's Be Aware" banking awareness campaign launched by the Central Bank of Kuwait, in cooperation with Kuwait Banking Association (KBA), reflecting its commitment to raise financial culture and awareness among all segments of society and achieve financial inclusion.

During this campaign, NBK intensified publishing educational and promotional content on all its social media platforms, including posts and video clips warning against the risks of money laundering and financing of terrorism as well as showing their various evolving techniques. Recognizing its role as the leading financial institution in Kuwait, NBK frequently organizes different activities that help raise awareness about all topics related to the banking sector. It also organizes a wide range of activities and training courses to enhance employees' knowledge about combating fraud and financial crime, and combating money laundering and financing of terrorism.

NBK also employs various tools to promote fi-

ancial inclusion through all its banking products and services, training courses provided to graduates and students, in line with its commitment to deliver on its responsibilities towards society, and achieve sustainable development. Money laundering involves masking the sources of large illicit proceeds to make it look legitimate by integrating it into the financial system using many different ways such as shell companies having no business activity, physical transactions, assets or employees, which are seemingly legitimate business entities that are used to raise money, fund startup operations, or manage mergers or acquisitions.

NBK explained that the new common technique of money laundering is introducing money into the financial system by dividing it into many different deposits and investments. Afterwards, the money is mixed, integrated, and returned to criminals in the form of seemingly legitimate proceeds or clean money. Money launderers typically tend to invest in high-value, small-sized and easily movable commodities like precious stones and gold as well as in valuable assets like real estate properties and selling them cautiously.

NBK is committed to supporting all the Central Bank of Kuwait's endeavors to protect the reputation of Kuwait and its economy, and to improve the strength and integrity of the banking and financial sector. To this end, the bank makes consistent efforts to educate its customers as a fundamental part of its



strategy, using all its communication channels to familiarize them with the various emerging techniques used by fraudsters in money laundering and financing of terrorism.

It is worth mentioning that NBK is a key supporter and partner in all the initiatives and campaigns of the Central Bank of Kuwait. In this context, the bank harnesses its huge capabilities and all its digital channels, which the most popular among all Kuwaiti banks, to boost customers' trust, and familiarize them with their rights and ways to protect their data, accounts and money, through frequent publications and competitions.

Nestle sales grow on back of price increases

ZURICH: Swiss food group Nestle on Tuesday reported better-than-expected sales in the first three months of the year, helped by price increases to offset inflation and demand for its staple products. Nestle, which makes Nespresso capsules, Maggi bouillons, KitKat chocolate bars and Purina pet food, reported an increase in sales of 5.6 percent to 23.5 billion Swiss francs (23.9 billion euros).

Organic sales—excluding currency movements or mergers or acquisitions—rose 9.3 percent, higher than analyst expectations of 7.3 percent.

The group's pet food was the biggest contributor to organic growth, Nestle said, alongside double-digit growth in confectionary products including KitKat bars. Nestle CEO Mark Schneider said

Ex-Audi executive pleads guilty over 'dieselgate'

MUNICH: A former top executive at German carmaker Audi on Tuesday pleaded guilty over the "dieselgate" emissions-cheating scandal that rocked parent company Volkswagen, after a lengthy trial. Wolfgang Hatz and two other colleagues had arranged the installation of banned software to rig emissions in diesel vehicles, his lawyer told the Munich district court.

Hatz is expected to receive a reduced sentence for confessing. It is not yet clear whether former Audi CEO Rupert Stadler—the main defendant in the case, and the first auto boss in Germany to stand trial over the scandal—will also enter a guilty plea. German car giant VW—whose brands include Porsche, Audi, Skoda and Seat—admitted in September 2015 that it had installed software to rig emissions in 11 million diesel vehicles worldwide. The so-called defeat devices made the vehicles appear less polluting in lab tests than they were on the road. On Tuesday, Hatz's lawyer said the defendant "recognised and accepted" that in Germany the software would be considered an illegal defeat device and could also violate American laws.

The former executive—who was head of engine development at Audi, and later research and development chief at Porsche—regretted that he had not acted responsibly. After a trial that has already run two and a half years, Judge

the group had "delivered strong organic growth in the first quarter, as our teams worked diligently to protect volume and ensure resilient mix." "Portfolio optimization efforts and responsible pricing helped to offset the ongoing pressures from two years of cost inflation," he said.

Nestle is targeting a full-year sales increase of between six and eight percent. Jean-Philippe Bertschy, an analyst at investment manager Vontobel, said that quarterly report "once again demonstrates Nestle's strong pricing power and the attractiveness of its brands." Sales volumes, however, fell by 0.5 percent, due to "capacity constraints" and "portfolio optimization actions" the group said. This was still a smaller drop than analysts had forecast.

The group also said Tuesday it was setting up a joint venture for its frozen pizza business in Europe with private equity firm PAI Partners, subject to the approval of regulators. Nestle will retain a minority stake in the joint venture. It comes after Nestle last month suspended work at a French plant where frozen pizzas were suspected to be behind deadly food poisonings in children last year. —AFP



MUNICH, Germany: In this file photo taken on October 07, 2020 Rupert Stadler (left), former CEO of German car manufacturer Audi, sits next to former Audi engineer Wolfgang Hatz in a regional court room in Munich, southern Germany. —AFP

Stefan Weickert said his admission was a "turning point". Hatz's confession came after the court in March proposed suspended sentences if the defendants admit guilt.

If convicted, the accused had faced up to 10 years in jail. The court and defense now favor a suspended sentence of 18 to 24 months and a 400,000 euro (\$440,000) fine for Hatz, although the prosecution has objected. A hearing is expected to take place behind closed doors later Tuesday over the role of Stadler, the judge said. The Audi boss has so far denied the charges against him—fraud, falsifying certifications and false advertising. But a suspended sentence and fine are also being considered for Stadler if he confesses. —AFP

Gulf Bank: 'Mission 1200' gains 10 million views

KUWAIT: As part of its efforts to provide the best services and benefits to customers, Gulf Bank launched its Ramadan marketing campaign "Ready? Transfer!" which continues to garner millions of views daily – attracting customers who want to benefit from the "Get Cash in A Flash" offer, which includes a cash gift of up to KD 1,200.

Gulf Bank's Deputy General Manager of Consumer Banking, Najla Al-Essa, commented: "Gulf Bank has always been, and will continue to be part of the community, and this is the bank's promise and motto. This year's Ramadan TVC "Mission 1200" was a testament of the special relationship that the bank has with its customers—exceeding 10 million views throughout various social media channels, in addition to receiving over 30 million impressions and 234,000 competition engagements, following its launch on the second week of Ramadan."

Al-Essa added: "As usual, we are keen to annually achieve marketing excellence during the holy month of Ramadan, and for this reason, this year's marketing idea was no exception, and was launched to the moon. The idea was inspired by the sighting of the crescent during Ramadan, with the set representing a spacecraft on the moon, and a script that highlights the amazing salary transfer offer from Gulf Bank."

Al-Essa pointed that the remarkable success of "Mission 1200" is due to the great engagement and impressions received by the audience, in addition to its originality in terms of content and messaging. Not only did "Mission 1200" win the admiration of viewers due to its humorous and light approach, as it also consisted of a great line-up of well-known and beloved Kuwaiti actors of whom include: Bilal Al-Shami, Ahmed Al-Aounan, Imad Al-Akari, Hamoud Al-Failakawi, and Reem Al-Shammari. She added: "The surprises and gifts from Gulf Bank during the holy month of Ramadan did not stop there, as we also launched three competitions on Gulf Bank's Instagram account, so that followers can receive valuable prizes."

She continued: "We were keen to link the prizes to the "Mission 1200" marketing campaign, as well as the salary transfer offer, which includes receiving a cash gift of up to KD 1,200. Three winners received prizes worth KD 1,200, in addition to ten tickets to attend the theatrical play "To The Moon", that is set to launch in Eid Al-Fitr. The dreamy play consists of many surprises, with the participation of talented and renowned artists."

In addition to receiving a cash gift of KD 1,200, the "Get Cash in A Flash" offer includes many other benefits such as: Automatic enrollment in the best and fastest rewards program in Kuwait, discounts at leading car dealerships, a personal loan of up to KD 25,000 with a repayment period of 5 years, housing loans up to KD 70,000 with a repayment period of 15 years, as well as a free credit card and safety deposit box for one year. Women have the option to choose between several gifts, such as a cash gift up to KD 1,200, a health and beauty care package, or a prenatal care package from Hadi Hospital.

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

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



Najla Al-Essa

News in brief

Novartis raises year forecast

ZURICH: Pharmaceutical giant Novartis said Tuesday it was increasing its full-year sales and profits outlook after strong earnings in the first quarter on the back of a handful of new drugs. The Swiss drugmaker said that its medicines for heart disease, cancer and multiple sclerosis had buoyed earnings in the quarter. The group reported a three percent increase in net profit in the first three months of the year to nearly \$2.3 billion. Sales were also up three percent compared to the last three months of 2022 to almost \$13 billion. —AFP

Moody's against US debt ceiling plan

WASHINGTON: The plan proposed by Republican House Speaker Kevin McCarthy to raise the US debt ceiling in exchange for cuts in government spending would slow growth and cut employment, Moody's Analytics said in a note Monday. According to the ratings agency's research arm, if the draft presented by McCarthy on April 17 were passed as is, it would lead to a drop of 0.6 percentage points in US potential growth for 2024, as well as the elimination of 780,000 jobs. Unemployment would reach 4.6 percent, against 3.5 percent in March 2023, as compared to a scenario in which a new ceiling was approved without conditions. —AFP

Samsung SDI unveils \$3bn JV

SEOUL: South Korean battery maker Samsung SDI unveiled a plan on Tuesday to build a \$3 billion electric vehicle battery plant in the United States in a joint venture with General Motors. The plan was announced while South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol is on a six-day state visit to the United States, seeking to forge stronger security and business ties between the two long-time allies. The location of the facility has not yet been determined but it is expected to be in full gear and ready to start mass production in 2026, the South Korean firm said in a statement. —AFP

Lifestyle

Japan's 'cringeworthy' cartoon cars make image U-turn



This photo shows visitors looking at cars lined up during the Odaiba Itasha Heaven 2023 festival (Itasha Tengoku), where cars decorated with various images and characters from anime and manga, known as "itasha", are put on display in Tokyo. — AFP photos



A woman dressed up as anime character Daiwa Scarlet posing next to a car owned by Yosuke Takahata with the same design, during the Odaiba Itasha Heaven 2023 festival.



A decorated Cadillac car from the US during the Odaiba Itasha Heaven 2023 festival (Itasha Tengoku).



Car owner Yosuke Takahata (left) posing in front of his car with a woman dressed up as anime character Daiwa Scarlet, during the Odaiba Itasha Heaven 2023 festival (Itasha Tengoku).



Visitors walk past cars lined up during the Odaiba Itasha Heaven 2023 festival (Itasha Tengoku).

Yosuke Takahata doesn't care what people think of his "itasha" car, which has his favourite anime character -- a sexy, red-eyed horse-woman -- emblazoned across both sides. For him and other owners around Japan, plastering cartoon pictures all over their vehicles is just another way of paying homage to their two-dimensional true loves. "Itasha" means "cringeworthy car", reflecting the image the vehicles had when they first started appearing on roads around 20 years ago.

But perceptions have begun to change, with anime and other hobby subcultures gaining a new mainstream acceptance in Japan. It's all the same for Takahata, a 31-year-old car shop employee, for whom looking cool is not the point.

"It's the character that I like, and that's all that matters," he told AFP, holding an umbrella to keep



A doll (right) peeking out of a car during the Odaiba Itasha Heaven 2023 festival (Itasha Tengoku).



Visitors look at cars lined up during the Odaiba Itasha Heaven 2023 festival (Itasha Tengoku).



Participants in cosplay posing for a photo during the Odaiba Itasha Heaven 2023 festival (Itasha Tengoku).



Ryosuke Nakano poses in his Nissan Skyline wrapped with his favourite anime design at a car-wrapping workshop in Sugito, Saitama prefecture.



Visitors look at cars lined up during the Odaiba Itasha Heaven 2023 festival (Itasha Tengoku).



Ryosuke Nakano (right) looks at his Nissan Skyline with car wrapping specialist Shin Kudo (center) and car wrapping designer Naoya Imai (left) at a workshop in Sugito, Saitama prefecture.

the rain off his defiantly unfashionable mullet. Driving around with the buxom Daiwa Scarlet from the manga and anime series "Uma Musume Pretty Derby" on show means he can "always be with the character", he said.

After all, if he is worried about others judging his fully customized Jaguar XJ sedan, he "wouldn't be able to drive anywhere". Itasha owners can spend thousands of dollars pimping their rides with huge vinyl stickers, turning their cars, motorbikes or even caravans into a canvas.

Shota Sato, who works at another car shop, describes owning an itasha as "an extension of having a character's picture on your phone". The 26-year-old and his friends have all decorated their cars with different cute characters from the anime "Lucky Star", and they often go for drives together.

'No two are the same'

Owners also get together for events such as Itasha Tengoku, an annual show held in Tokyo that features up to 1,000 vehicles.

The cars on display are a riot of colour and imag-



Ryosuke Nakano poses with his Nissan Skyline wrapped with his favourite anime design at a car-wrapping workshop in Sugito, Saitama prefecture.

ination, upstaging even the neon wigs and outlandish costumes of the visitors who come dressed in cosplay. Many of the vehicles also have customized frames, wheels, engines and interiors that cost eye-watering sums even before adding the artwork.

The culture grew naturally among young people

interested in cars and anime, said event organizer Kenichi Kawahara, who also publishes a magazine for itasha enthusiasts. "More than 99 percent" of owners are men, who use itasha to "express their feelings for the things they like", he said.

"There are 1,000 itasha here today, and no two are the same." Having an itasha can be hard on the wallet though, and a full car wrap can cost up to 1 million yen (\$7,500). Some owners save money by sending their designs to a printing company and applying the stickers themselves, but most take their cars to a specialist shop.

Looking 'cool' to strangers

Naoya Imai runs a car-wrapping business in Tokyo that gets plenty of business from itasha owners. He draws up a design in consultation with the owner and checks if they are happy with it, then prints it onto vinyl stickers that he applies to the car.

Lining up the lettering and other intricate details makes it a painstaking process that can take up to 10 days. Imai said that simply slapping a character's picture on a car "doesn't look cool", and he uses his design sense to create something that exudes a particular ambience.

More owners nowadays are drawn to itasha because they "want to stand out", he said. "In the past, itasha owners put stickers on their cars just because they liked it," he added. "Now they want strangers to think their cars look cool."

Seeing the finished product can be an emotional moment for owners such as Ryosuke Nakano, who took his customized Nissan Skyline to Imai's shop for a full body wrap.

Nakano had dabbled in small window stickers before, but nothing approaching the scale of Imai's design, which splashes massive gun-toting "Lycoris Recoil" characters on the front and sides of the car.

"When I had window stickers, it would only be the people behind me who could see it, so I'm a bit scared of how people will react when they see this from the front," said the 29-year-old. "But I don't care. This is what I like." — AFP

Netflix to invest \$2.5bn in South Korean content

Netflix will invest \$2.5 billion in South Korean content over the next four years, the streaming giant's CEO Ted Sarandos announced after meeting with the country's President Yoon Suk Yeol in Washington.

South Korea has cemented its status as a global cultural powerhouse in recent years, thanks in part to the explosive success of the Oscar-winning film "Parasite" and the hit Netflix series "Squid Game".

"Netflix is delighted to confirm that we will invest \$2.5 billion in Korea including the creation of Korean series, films, and unscripted shows over the next four years," Sarandos said in a statement given to AFP on Tuesday.

"This investment plan is twice the total amount Netflix has invested in the Korean market since we started our service in Korea in 2016."

Sarandos said that Netflix had "great confidence" that South Korea's creative industry would continue to tell great stories, pointing to the recent success of global hits such as "The Glory" and the reality

show "Physical 100". "It is incredible that the love towards Korean shows has led to a wider interest in Korea, thanks to the Korean creators' compelling stories. Their stories are now at the heart of the global cultural zeitgeist," he added.

Over the last few years, South Korean content has taken the world by storm, with over 60 percent of Netflix viewers watching a show from the East Asian country in 2022, company data showed.

Netflix, which spent more than 1 trillion won (\$750 million) developing Korean content from 2015 to 2021, had previously said it would be expanding its South Korean show output, without giving details of spending plans.

Yoon, who is on a six-day state visit, hailed what he described as a "very meaningful" meeting with Sarandos, according to a transcript shared with AFP by the president's office. The president said the new investment "will be a great opportunity for the Korean content industry, creators, and Netflix. We sincerely welcome Netflix's exceptional investment decision."



Yoon will meet US President Joe Biden on Wednesday.

'Wise decision'

Many of Netflix's biggest global hits in recent years have been from South Korea, so the company is making a "wise decision" to double down

financially, Regina Kim, an entertainment writer and expert on K-content based in New York City, told AFP. "Netflix has played a huge role in disseminating K-culture and K-content around the world."

The firm's latest investment means viewers worldwide "will continue to witness Netflix's Korean contents change the landscape of global screen culture", Aream Jeong, a film expert and visiting scholar at Robert Morris University, told AFP.

But the move could raise concern over "how big Netflix is becoming in Korea as local streamers struggle to keep up", Jason Bechervaise, a Seoul-based film scholar, told AFP.

Netflix is also one of the companies embroiled in a "usage fee" debate in South Korea.

The country's internet companies are seeking to force major data users -- such as the streaming giant -- to pay more for bandwidth, something Netflix has strongly pushed back against. — AFP

Lifestyle

At a ballet in Lima shantytown, dancers - and self-esteem - soar

On a barren shantytown hill in Lima, a group of girls in white leggings gamely tiptoe around a rocky, dusty path. "And onnnne, twooooo, threee, fourrr", hums the ballet instructor whose day job is selling trash.

It's not likely any of her students will make it as a professional dancer, says Maria del Carmen Silva, or La Miss, as her students call her -- slang for teacher here.

Today, the teacher on the hill is more interested in healing than in the talent of her little "fairies."

Silva started classical dance at the age of 12, danced until she was 33 and today, at 58, she is leading an initiative to improve the lives of poor girls and teens through ballet -- long associated with a demanding (thin and white) aesthetic.

We had to be "thin, with long limbs, a small head and extremely flexible," recalls the former dancer with the national ballets of Peru and of neighboring Chile.

Silva, who is fair haired and has light eyes and a comfortable life, began volunteering in 2010 at a public school in the very poor coastal district of Chorrillos.

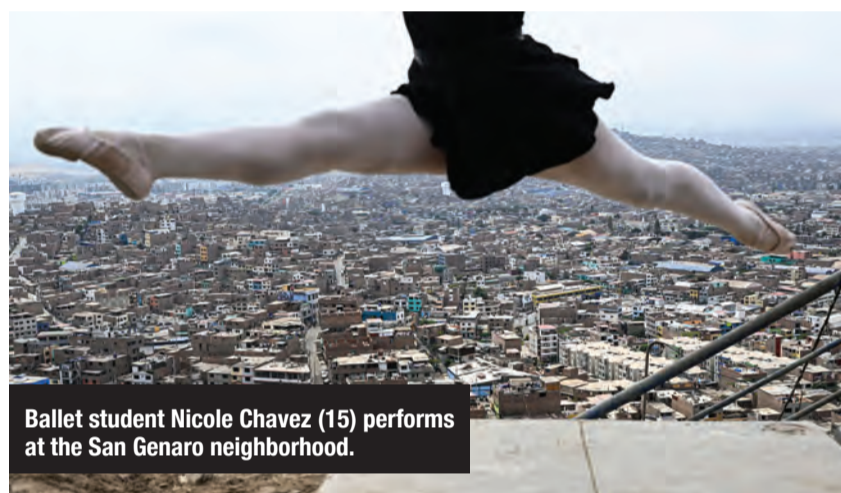
There she met the girls of San Genaro II, a settlement 300 meters above the level of the Pacific where in the last four decades some 500 families have settled in wooden houses with corrugated metal or zinc roofs.



Ballet student Nicole Chavez (15) performs at the San Genaro neighborhood in the Chorrillos district, south of Lima. —AFP photos



A ballet student performs at the San Genaro neighborhood.



Ballet student Nicole Chavez (15) performs at the San Genaro neighborhood.



Ballet students perform at the San Genaro neighborhood in the Chorrillos district, south of Lima.

Rehearsing on the hill

An endless number of stairs zigzag up the hills above Chorrillos, where the poor live.

Up here, there is no drinking water, and locals are supplied by tanker trucks or public wells.

Most people in the neighborhood eke out a living in the informal sector which in all of Peru reaches 75 percent of the working population, the highest rate after Bolivia, according to the International Labor Organization.

Silva confesses, half ashamed, that she came to school looking for a typical dancer, but she found girls with "short legs, flat feet or without much instep." Sadly, above all, so many could barely muster a smile, when their everyday con-

cerns were so pressing.

"Some of the girls have their dads in jail; others have been raped or mistreated by their parents; and some have told me: my dad beats my mom," she notes sadly.

"I am from a different economic class, so I didn't even realize that they were leaving because they couldn't afford the clothes; because they don't even have water and sometimes not even anything to eat," she says.

That's when she said she had a mental breakthrough. "I told myself: forget about that perfect dancer, that perfect prototype, and reach out to the human being."

Now she organizes some rehearsals on the hill, despite the fact that her knees already suffer from the bustle between San Genaro II, the school, and the small school that she runs in a-

lignous complex in Miraflores, one of Lima's more affluent districts.

'A different person'

In that place, girls from "both economic situations" sometimes mix and it is a collection point for donations and for the cardboard, paper and bottles that the Silva ballet recycles to raise funds for costumes.

But only a few of those who attend the Silva ballet, she points out, realize the world of dirt and poverty from which her "fairies and princesses" emerge. "Balance, balance, 'leap,' and up and two," she croons as she guides nine schoolgirls on a busy thoroughfare.

"I try to bring beauty where everything seems ugly, a drop of light where everything is black," says Silva pointing to the group with a grimace:

"Despite the dirt from home they already want to be clean, they have their hair well combed, now they don't walk with their eyes looking at the ground. She firmly believes that her ballet heals self-esteem.

"I didn't consider myself pretty. I was very shy, didn't say anything and now I can express myself," confirms 20-year-old Maria Cielo Cardenas. "In ballet I am a different person, I feel like a princess, especially when we have performances and we put on costumes and crowns," she says. In January she and her partner Kerly Vera, 19, won a scholarship to study dance in Barcelona. —AFP

Trial begins into whether Ed Sheeran stole Marvin Gaye classic

Jury selection began Monday in a trial to determine whether British pop star Ed Sheeran plagiarized American music legend Marvin Gaye's "Let's Get It On" in his 2014 hit "Thinking Out Loud." The plaintiffs are the heirs of Ed Townsend, a musician and producer who co-wrote Gaye's 1973 soul classic.

They allege that there are "striking similarities and overt common elements" between Gaye's sultry classic and Sheeran's "Thinking Out Loud."

It's not the first time Sheeran has been taken to court, as copyright lawsuits in the music industry flourish. Sheeran testified in a London court in April last year in a case centered around his song "Shape of You." He is among the potential witnesses to be called in this trial as well, in which opening arguments were due to begin Tuesday after a jury is selected, a lawyer working on the case told AFP.



English singer-songwriter Ed Sheeran performs on stage during the MTV Europe Music Awards at the Laszlo Papp Budapest Sports Arena in Budapest, Hungary. —AFP

Townsend's family has pointed out that the group Boyz II Men has performed mash-ups of the two songs, and that Sheeran has blended the songs together on stage as well.

Sheeran's team contests the allegations, saying "there are dozens if not hundreds of songs that predate and postdate" Gaye's song, "utilizing the same or similar chord progression."

in a show of praise for a streaming company that would have been almost unthinkable at CinemaCon previously.

The CinemaCon summit brings owners of theaters together with Hollywood studio bosses and A-list stars. Speakers typically make sure to praise the unique "magic" of the big screen -- and to throw a few barbs at streaming services.

But a recent report that Apple plans to spend \$1 billion per year on movies that will play in theaters before they move to its Apple TV+ streaming platform has been a major boon to cinemas still reeling from the pandemic.

Also this year, Apple's Martin Scorsese film "Killers of the Flower Moon" will be released in theaters by Paramount, while streaming rival Amazon recently put its Ben Affleck drama "Air" in theaters first. Analysts say both Apple and Amazon hope that such high-profile releases in theaters will ultimately boost awareness of their streaming platforms' offerings. The trend also offers a potential financial windfall to Hollywood studios willing to distribute the films to theaters.

Rothman said Monday he was "honored" Apple chose his studio "from among many suitors" to release "Napoleon."

He described the film as "uniquely significant for Sony" and for movie theaters more generally, promising to give the film "a full throttle marketing campaign." Tech giant Apple has previously only

"These medleys are irrelevant to any issue in the case and would be misleading [and] confuse the jury." Sheeran's "Thinking Out Loud" shot up America's Billboard Hot 100 charts when it was released, and won Sheeran a Grammy Award for "Song of the Year" in 2016.

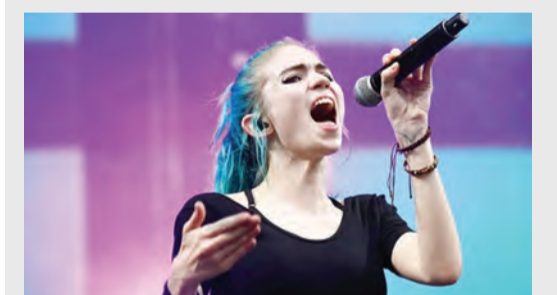
The lawsuit, filed in 2016 -- and refiled in 2017 after being rejected on procedural grounds -- also names Sony. In Sheeran's London trial, the singer called the lawsuit emblematic of copyright litigation that goes too far, potentially stifling creativity.

The judge agreed, declaring that Sheeran had "neither deliberately nor subconsciously copied" part of the melody in the song "Oh Why" by Sami Chokri and Ross O'Donoghue.

The judge acknowledged similarities between the two songs, but ultimately ruled there were large differences, and that Chokri's lawyers failed to prove Sheeran had ever heard the song.

Gaye's family is not part of the New York lawsuit against Sheeran, though his estate successfully sued the artists Robin Thicke, Pharrell Williams, and T.I. over similarities between the song "Blurred Lines" and Gaye's "Got to Give It Up." —AFP

Singer Grimes says AI can use her voice for songs



Canadian singer Grimes

Canadian singer Grimes put the word out Monday that she is fine with her voice being used for AI-generated songs, as long as she gets half the royalties. The 35-year-old songwriter, producer and performer said in an Instagram post that she would treat an artificial intelligence hit using her voice as she would a collaboration with any artist.

"Feel free to use my voice without penalty," Grimes said in a post on her verified Instagram account. "I'll split 50 percent royalties on any successful AI generated song that uses my voice." Grimes added that she has no obligations to a recording label so can uphold the offer.

The singer's post contained a reference to news about AI being used to imitate Canadian singers Drake and The Weeknd.

The viral song released last Friday, "Heart On My Sleeve" was briefly available on platforms including Spotify and Apple Music before Universal Music Group -- which publishes both artists through a subsidiary -- said it violated copyrights and asked for its removal.

The use of AI in music is the subject of debate in the industry, with some denouncing copyright abuses and others praising its prowess.

Steadily improving generative AI from OpenAI has fueled debate about whether the software respects intellectual property.

Grimes is a former partner of Tesla chief Elon Musk, with whom she had two children, including one by surrogate mother. Musk has called AI a threat to humanity while simultaneously investing in the technology. —AFP

Apple's 'Napoleon' wows movie theater bosses at CinemaCon

Ridley Scott's "Napoleon", a film originally created by Apple for its streaming platform, was the unlikely hero of the movie industry's CinemaCon gathering on its opening night Monday. The historical epic starring Joaquin Phoenix as Napoleon Bonaparte will first be shown exclusively in theaters this November, under Apple's recent and industry-shaking pivot toward worldwide big-screen releases for its films.

Sony Pictures, which is partnering with Apple to distribute the film to cinemas, dedicated the finale of its coveted CinemaCon opening night slot to the movie.

Footage of a brutal battle sequence, in which French forces led by Napoleon ambush an enemy army atop an icy lake, drew raucous cheers from the assembled audience of theater owners.

"Old school, big screen," Sony Pictures chairman Tom Rothman said. "Epic is the only proper description of that Apple Originals film," he said,



given very short theatrical releases to its films -- typically just long enough to meet the minimum requirements for a film to be eligible to compete at the Oscars.

The tactic earned Apple a best picture win last year with "CODA", the first for a streaming platform. "Napoleon" reunites Scott and Phoenix more than two decades after their previous historical epic "Gladiator."

It chronicles Napoleon's origins and his rise to become a military leader and emperor of France, as well as his volatile relationship with his wife Josephine, played by Vanessa Kirby. CinemaCon runs until Thursday. —AFP

Lifestyle

Staying zen with 'slow design' at Milan Furniture Fair



People chill at the installation by Divani & Divani, Piazza Duomo in Milan, as part of the Fuorisalone 2023 event, during Milan Design Week.—AFP photos

A woman visits the exhibition of Ukrainian-born designer and architect Victoria Yakusha, during the 2023 Milan Design Week.

"Slow design" was all the rage at this year's Milan Furniture Fair, featuring sustainable creations made with carefully selected and hand-crafted natural materials in sharp contrast to industrial manufacturing. Amid the frenzied buzz of visitors stood Atsuya Nakamura, quietly sewing a leather sheath to cover part of a side table, his movements calm and precise despite the comings and goings at his stand.

He is one of some 20 craftsmen who work in a factory opened by the Ritzwell design company on a bay surrounded by lush vegetation near Fukuoka in Japan, a site designed to be "in osmosis with nature". "We don't do mass production, all our furniture is finished by hand. Design and comfort are very important," Wataru Yano, Ritzwell's marketing director, told AFP.

"Our products are timeless, they last a lifetime and are passed on to the next generation. They are a synthesis of Japanese tradition and contemporary design," he said. Among the favourite materials of this high-end brand, which promises its customers "relaxation and calm", are solid walnut and oak, combined with thick leather and steel.

Lowering blood pressure

Nature and sustainability are also the watchwords of Finnish wooden furniture designer Nikari, located in Finland's oldest machinery workshop. Set in the village of Fiskars, west

of Helsinki, the workshop is powered entirely by water from a nearby river. "We want to lower our customers' blood pressure and create a comfortable home where harmony and calm prevail," says CEO Johanna Vuorio. The wood Nikari uses "comes from Finnish forests. The



A woman visits the exhibition of Ukrainian-born designer and architect Victoria Yakusha, during the 2023 Milan Design Week.

trees grow very slowly, some are over a thousand years old. Our tables and chairs can last for more than a century," Vuorio said.

One of the latest creations, a handmade "century-old" coffee table, sat at the entrance to the stand, its cracks a sign of its authenticity.

"We are not looking to make easy money with cheap solutions. We produce at our own pace with-

out rushing," she said. The "slow design" movement was launched in the early 2000s by the English academic Alastair Fuad-Luke. Like the equivalent "slow food" or "slow fashion" movements, it advocates the use of natural or recycled materials and campaigns against over-consumption.



'Beautiful, sustainable'

The concept is applied to the letter by independent designer Francesco Meda, who collaborates with several brands, including Alias and Acerbis, based in northern Italy. "Instead of presenting, like in fashion, 20 or 30 new collections every year, and putting so many objects on the world market, it is better

to make fewer, but beautiful and sustainable ones," he said.

Meda reinvents "iconic objects created by great masters who have marked the history of design" by giving them "a contemporary touch".

"A quality chair can last 150 years," he said. The iconic ash wood chair designed in 1996 by Riccardo Blumer, Laleggera, has been updated by Meda for Alias with new finishes and leather upholstery. Another requirement is "virtuous production processes", with everything Meda designs produced in Italy using materials sourced fewer than 150 kilometres away from the companies he works with.

Local production and artisanal heritage are also the leitmotif of Verdi, a family business from Bogota in Colombia which exhibited carpets, wall coverings and window dressings.

"Everything is made by hand. We create contemporary textiles while respecting ancestral techniques. Natural fibres are used in 95 percent of our products," said Verdi chief executive Tomas Vera. Fibres such as fique, which is native to the Andes, and plantain, mulberry silk or alpaca wool are combined with copper and stainless steel wires.

The decision to embrace virtuous rather than industrial production values is partly customer driven. "Consumers are much more aware, and constantly ask or check if our work is sustainable," Vera said.—AFP

'Dame Edna Everage' comedian Barry Humphries dies

Australian comedian Barry Humphries, whose "Dame Edna Everage" alter ego left audiences in stitches, died aged 89 in a Sydney hospital on Saturday.

Humphries, best known for his impersonation of a suburban housewife in the guise of Everage, "passed away peacefully" surrounded by family, said a statement by his publicist to Australian media. "He was completely himself until the very end, never losing his brilliant mind, his unique wit and generosity of spirit," it said.

"With over seventy years on the stage, he was an entertainer to his core, touring up until the last year of his life and planning more shows that will sadly never be." He leaves his wife Lizzie, four children and 10 grandchildren, it said. "The characters he created, which brought laughter to millions, will live on."

Humphries died in Sydney's St Vincent's Hospital after being treated for various ailments, Australian media said. The hospital declined to comment. Prime Minister Anthony Albanese paid homage to the actor, whose unforgettable characters included Everage, the lecherous and boorish Sir Les Patterson, and the dull, elderly man of the suburbs Sandy Stone.

'Brightest star'

"Barry Humphries entertained us through a galaxy of personas, from Dame Edna to Sandy Stone," the prime minister said on social media.

"But the brightest star in that galaxy



In this file photo Australian comedian, actor and author Barry Humphries, dressed as his alter ego Dame Edna Everage, attends the Royal Variety Performance at the London Palladium Theatre.—AFP photos

was always Barry. A great wit, satirist, writer and an absolute one-of-a-kind, he was both gifted and a gift. May he rest in peace."

Humphries was taken to hospital in February after falling and hurting his hip at home, requiring a hip replacement, the Sydney Morning Herald said. "I have to get back on my feet... I am going back on tour later this year," he was quoted as telling the paper last month. His turns as Everage and Patterson saw him achieve international renown, particularly in Britain where he was made a Commander of the Order of the British Empire in 2007 for services to entertainment.

Former UK prime minister Boris Johnson called Humphries "one of



In this file photo taken on November 25, 2013, Australian comedian, actor and author Barry Humphries, as his alter ego, Dame Edna Everage (right), speaks to the then Prince Charles, as he attends the Royal Variety Performance at the London Palladium Theatre.

the greatest ever Australians" and "a comic genius who used his exuberant alter egos, Dame Edna Everage and Sir Les Patterson, to say the otherwise unsayable. "What a loss," he tweeted. UK comic giant Ricky Gervais tweeted "farewell, Barry Humphries, you com-

edy genius". "Little Britain" actor and comic Matt Lucas wrote: "I wonder if all geniuses are as lovely as Barry Humphries."

'Hello Possums'

Everage was first conceived when Humphries toured southern Australia as a young actor in the 1950s and she evolved from drab housewife to a self-proclaimed "gigastar" parody of celebrity best known for her catchphrase "Hello Possums".

She went on to host her own 1980s talk show, "The Dame Edna Experience", which attracted an array of luminaries including Mel Gibson, the late Sean Connery, Charlton Heston, and Chubby Checker. Her 1990s talk shows, "Dr Dame Edna Kisses It Better" and "The Dame Edna Treatment", were just as star-studded, with guests ranging from actors Susan Sarandon, Alec Baldwin and Martin Sheen to the late cricketer Shane Warne.

Everage also starred in the closing ceremony of the 2006 Commonwealth Games, held in her home town of Melbourne. The coarse and vulgar Patterson came later, first appearing in a Humphries stage show in 1974 and evolving into a caricature of Australian diplomats abroad at a performance in Hong Kong.

Best known for his offensive behaviour, which included belching, flatulence and nose-picking, the buck-toothed, grubby "late cultural attache to the Court of St James" also won a devoted following.—AFP

Were other rights breached?

An AI-generated impersonator may be breaching other laws. If an artist has a distinctive voice or image, this is potentially protected under "publicity rights" in the United States or similar image rights in other countries. Bette Midler won a case against Ford in 1988 for using an impersonator of her in an advert. Tom Waits won a similar case in 1993 against the Frito-Lays potato chips company. The problem, said Guadamuz, is that enforcement of these rights is "very hit and miss" and taken much more seriously in some countries than others. And streaming platforms currently lack straightforward mechanisms for removing content seen as breaching image rights.

What comes next?

The big upcoming legal fight is over how AI programmes are trained. It may be argued that inputting existing Drake and Weeknd songs to train an AI programme may be a breach of copyright — but Guadamuz said this issue was far from settled. "You need to copy the music in order to train the AI and so that unauthorised copying could potentially be copyright infringement," he said. "But defendants will say it's fair use. They are using it to train a machine, teaching it to listen to music, and then removing the copies.—AFP



Drake and The Weeknd



'Super Mario' fights off 'Evil Dead' to stay on top in North America

"The Super Mario Bros. Movie" did an impressive \$58.2 million in ticket sales in North American movie theaters this weekend, easily fending off two new challengers, estimates showed Sunday. The joint effort of Universal, Nintendo and Illumination studios, now in its third week out, ranks as the year's top movie so far, taking in an accumulated \$434.3 million domestically and \$437 million internationally. Voice actors in the game-based animation include Chris Pratt, Anya Taylor-Joy, Jack Black and Keegan-Michael Key.

Second place for the Friday-through-Sunday period went to Warner Bros.' blood-soaked horror movie "Evil Dead Rise," at \$23.5 million — "an excellent opening" for a movie made for just \$17 million, said analyst David A. Gross. Lily Sullivan and Alyssa Sutherland star as sisters battling a crew of demonic creatures known, not so subtly, as Deadites.

Another new release, MGM's action war movie "Guy Ritchie's The Covenant," didn't fare quite as well, taking in an estimated \$6.3 million for third spot. Gross said that "weak start" fell well short of the average for the genre. Jake Gyllenhaal stars in the film's tale of a US army sergeant who, after returning to the United States, goes back to Afghanistan to rescue a friend (played by Iraq-born Dar Salim) who had once saved him from the Taliban.

In fourth place, still strong in its fifth week out, was Lionsgate's neo-noir thriller "John Wick: Chapter 4," at \$5.8 million. Keanu Reeves plays the titular hitman. And in fifth was Amazon Studios' "Air," a sports drama about the business deal surrounding Nike and the Michael Jordan basketball shoe of the title name, at \$5.5 million.—AFP

Did the AI Drake song breach copyright?

A viral AI-generated song imitating Drake and The Weeknd was pulled from streaming services this week, but did it actually breach copyright as claimed by record label Universal? Created by someone called @ghostwriter, "Heart On My Sleeve" racked up millions of listens before Universal Music Group asked for its removal from Spotify, Apple Music and other platforms. However, Andres Guadamuz, who teaches intellectual property law at Britain's University of Sussex, is not convinced that the song breached copyright. As similar cases look set to multiply — with an uncanny AI replication of Liam Gallagher from Oasis causing buzz — he spoke to AFP about some of the issues being raised.

Did the song breach copyright?

The underlying music on "Heart On My Sleeve" was new — only the sound of the voice was familiar — "and you can't copyright the sound of someone's voice," said Guadamuz. Perhaps the furor around AI impersonators may lead to copyright being expanded to include voice — rather than just melody, lyrics and other created elements — "but that would be problematic," Guadamuz added. "What you're protecting with copyright is the expression of an idea, and voice isn't

really that." He said Universal probably claimed copyright infringement because it is the simplest route to removing content, with established procedures already in place with streaming platforms. "Most of the time, these issues are not resolved by law, but just by record companies making a stink with the platforms. It's easier for the platform just to comply," said Guadamuz.

Chapman's century helps NZ end Pakistan series 2-2

28-year-old smashes a 57-ball 104 in a rearguard action

News in Brief

New football body launched

LAUSANNE: A new body, the Union of European Clubs (UEC), launched on Monday saying its aim was to represent "small and medium-sized" football clubs in a landscape dominated by a rich elite. The UEC was launched in Brussels, where it will be based, and said it intended "to give a voice" to around 1,400 professional clubs in Europe who, without being involved in any of UEFA's three club competitions, do not have any proper representation among the sport's governance. The exact structure of the organization remains vague as it is yet to appoint a management team or publish statutes. However, the UEC claimed at its unveiling that 40 clubs from 25 countries had already joined up, with Premier League side Crystal Palace, Belgian league high-fliers Union Saint-Gilloise and Lokomotiva Zagreb of Croatia all at the launch. — AFP

Luton beat Middlesbrough

LONDON: Luton got the better of Championship playoff rivals Middlesbrough on Monday with a 2-1 win that left Sheffield United still three points short of securing promotion. The Blades lead over third-placed Luton was cut to four points, but one win from United's remaining four games will see them join Burnley in the Premier League next season. Luton and Middlesbrough could meet again before the season is out in the Championship playoff final. Michael Carrick's men looked like they were going to lay down a marker before half-time as Aston Villa loanee Cameron Archer coolly slotted home the opening goal. But Luton bounced back after the break to extend their unbeaten run to 12 games. Tom Lockyer's header leveled early in the second half. — AFP

Hurts eyes Super Bowl crown

WASHINGTON: Jalen Hurts swears he still has the hunger to win a Super Bowl title even after becoming the highest-paid player in NFL history. The Philadelphia Eagles quarterback spoke Monday, a week after signing a five-year contract extension worth \$255 million, the NFL's richest deal in average annual value. "Money is nice," Hurts said. "Championships are better." The 24-year-old Texan led the Eagles into last February's Super Bowl, but he couldn't lead Philadelphia to a second crown in six seasons, losing to Kansas City 38-35. That defeat has kept Hurts yearning for more from himself even with a king's ransom in the bank. "I've just been on this constant quest to be the best player that I can be. With no limits," he said. — AFP

Pogacar counts his blessings

PARIS: Slovenian cycling star Tadej Pogacar said Monday he counted himself "lucky" to have only broken a wrist in a "crazy crash" in the Liege-Bastogne-Liege classic. His UAE team said recovery would take around six weeks which will curtail Pogacar's preparation for the Tour de France which starts on July 1. The 24-year-old suffered a fall after 85 kilometres on Sunday and underwent an operation later that day in Belgium. Team medical director Dr Adrian Rotunno, speaking Monday, said Pogacar had sustained a "scaphoid fracture which required a small screw to realign the bone fragments. The procedure was successful and he will begin his recovery period at home". — AFP

MLS' Jeahze suspended

WASHINGTON: DC United defender Mohamad Jeahze was suspended by Major League Soccer on Monday after being arrested in Sweden on allegations of assault, the league announced. The 26-year-old left-back, who was called up by the Iraq national team late last year, had been in Sweden—where he was born and raised—on an approved leave from the club. Jeahze's ban will be in force pending the results of an investigation by Swedish authorities and MLS, which will remain in contact with United and the MLS Players Association as well. Jeahze has played six matches this season for a team coached by Wayne Rooney after signing a three-year deal with United last December following two seasons with Swedish side Hammarby. — AFP

Packers, Rodgers, Jets seal deal

NEW YORK: Four-time NFL Most Valuable Player Aaron Rodgers will join the New York Jets in a trade deal reached on Monday with the Green Bay Packers, the Packers confirmed. The Packers will send 39-year-old signal caller Rodgers and their 15th overall first-round pick plus a fifth-round pick in Thursday's NFL Draft to the Jets, provided contracts are signed on the details that the clubs finalized. The Jets will send Green Bay their first-round pick Thursday, 13th overall, second- and sixth-round picks this year and a 2024 second-round pick that could become a first-round pick if Rodgers plays 65% of plays for the Jets this season. "I have so much respect for Aaron and the person he is. He has done so much for this organization," Packers general manager Brian Gutekunst said. — AFP

RAWALPINDI: Mark Chapman hit a maiden unbeaten hundred to anchor New Zealand's six-wicket win over Pakistan in the fifth and final Twenty20 in Rawalpindi on Monday, ending the five-match series level at 2-2. The 28-year-old smashed a 57-ball 104 in a rearguard action to lift New Zealand from a precarious 73-4 to chase down a stiff target of 194 with four balls to spare. "We are very happy with how we levelled the series tonight and finished the job," said Chapman. "It took a bit of adjusting in the first two games and it's great to see that it worked out well."

Mohammad Rizwan missed a century by two runs, but still guided Pakistan to a solid 193-5 in their 20 overs. Chapman led the fightback with a match-turning unbroken fifth wicket stand of 121 off 58 balls with James Neesham, who scored a punishing 25-ball 45 not out as the duo toyed with Pakistan's much-vaunted bowling attack. "I was pretty thankful that Jimmy came out all-guns-blazing and took some pressure off me as well," Chapman said.

Chapman, whose previous highest T20I score was 83 against Scotland at Edinburgh last year, completed his century off 54 balls with a brace off Shaheen Shah Afridi, waving his bat to an applauding dressing room. In all Chapman hit 11 fours and four sixes while Neesham's knock was studded with two sixes and four fours as the pair combined to help give New Zealand their 100th T20I win in 192 matches.

Shaheen had given Pakistan a superb start with the wicket of Tim Latham off the first ball on the innings and Will Young (four) off the fifth. Chad Bowes (19) and Daryl Mitchell (15) also fell cheaply before Chapman took charge, also benefitting from a dropped catch off Shaheen on 67 by Shadab Khan at long-on. Pakistan won the first T20 by 88 runs and the second by 38 while New Zealand took the third by four, all in Lahore.

The fourth match was abandoned due to a hailstorm in Rawalpindi. The victory and a 2-2 result is welcoming for New Zealand who were missing their top eight players including regular skipper Kane Williamson due to the ongoing Indian Premier League. Pakistan skipper Babar Azam was



RAWALPINDI: New Zealand's captain Tom Latham (left) and his Pakistan counterpart Babar Azam pose with trophy after their five-match series was leveled at 2-2 at the end of the fifth and final Twenty20 international cricket match between Pakistan and New Zealand on April 25, 2023. — AFP

disappointed with the result. "I think we were 10-15 runs short after Rizwan revived the innings for us through the middle phases," said Azam. "Congrats to Chapman, he played a special knock and took the game away from us."

Pakistan's innings was fashioned around Rizwan's brilliant knock after they were sent in to bat by New Zealand. The 30-year-old batter struck a 62-ball unbeaten 98 as he missed the last delivery of the innings and with it his second T20I hundred. Rizwan,

who struck four sixes and seven fours, added 71 for the fourth wicket with Ifthikhar Ahmed (36) and another 68 for the fifth with Imad Wasim who made 31.

Pakistan raced to 51 in the sixth over when pacer Blair Tackner removed Azam for 19 and Mohammad Haris off successive deliveries to derail a good start. Ahmed hit two sixes and three boundaries off 22 balls while Wasim's 14-ball knock had five boundaries and a six. For New Zealand Tackner was the best bowler with 3-33. — AFP

Axar helps Delhi choke Hyderabad

HYDERABAD: Axar Patel starred with bat and bowl and impact sub Mukesh Kumar held his nerve as Delhi Capitals edged Sunrisers Hyderabad by seven runs in a low-scoring Indian Premier League battle on Monday. The left-handed Axar (34) lifted Delhi from a precarious 62-5 to 144-9 in a gritty partnership of 69 with Manish Pandey (34) on Hyderabad's home turf. Axar then returned figures of 2-21 with his left-arm spin. Fast bowler Mukesh, who came in under the new impact player rule, defended 12 off the final over to keep Hyderabad down to 137-6.

It was Delhi's second successive victory after starting the season with five losses. The David Warner-led team stayed bottom of the 10-team heap. "I love it here. It's an amazing crowd. I haven't been here for a long time," Warner, after playing at his former franchise, which he led to victory in 2016, said. The Australian opener said, "To win tonight, hopefully we can make it three in a row. We've got another against Sunrisers next." Hyderabad, led by Aiden Markram, are one place above Delhi on ninth with four points and five losses.

Delhi's South African fast bowler Anrich Nortje dented the Hyderabad chase as he bowled Harry Brook bowled for seven. Axar soon joined in to cut short Mayank Agarwal's knock on 49. Pace spearhead Ishant Sharma and left-arm wrist spinner Kuldeep Yadav picked up a wicket each to rattle the opposition middle-order before Heinrich Klaassen and Washington Sundar attempted to revive the



HYDERABAD: Delhi Capitals' Axar Patel (right) plays a shot during the Indian Premier League (IPL) Twenty20 cricket match between Sunrisers Hyderabad and Delhi Capitals at the Rajiv Gandhi International Cricket Stadium on April 24, 2023. — AFP

chase. Klaassen fell to Nortje after a 19-ball 31 and Sundar, a left-hand batsman, made an unbeaten 24 but Mukesh and Delhi had the last laugh.

Delhi elected to bat first but lost half their side, including Warner who hit 21, in eight overs before Axar and Pandey turned the innings around. "I ordered for coffee and I left the glass like that, when three wick-

ets fell in one over," man of the match Axar said with a smile. "Pandey and I discussed we need to take it as deep as possible." Sundar returned figures of 3-28 with his mystery spin as he struck three times in one over including the wicket of Warner. Seam bowler Bhuvneshwar Kumar took two wickets and the innings witnessed three run outs. — AFP

Springboks captain could miss WCup

JOHANNESBURG: South Africa captain Siya Kolisi could miss the 2023 Rugby World Cup in France after injuring his knee in a United Rugby Championship match against Munster at the weekend. A South African Rugby Union insider told AFP on Monday that the 31-year-old World Cup-winning skipper had seen specialists and is set to meet another on Tuesday. "Should surgery be recommended and Siya agrees, he will almost certainly not be able to play again this year," the source said. "The alternate is to let the injury heal and that could take about four months—meaning he would be out of action until September."

That would rule him out of Rugby Championship matches against Australia, New Zealand and Argentina. The tournament has been reduced to a single round this year because of the World Cup. It would also prevent Kolisi facing Argentina, Wales and New Zealand in warm-up matches before the 20-nation global showpiece kicks off in Paris on September 8. The Springboks begin their World Cup defense against Scotland in Marseille on September 10 and also face Ireland, Romania and Tonga in Pool B.

South African media reports said the flanker suffered a partial tear to his anterior cruciate ligaments (ACL), forcing him to retire early in the first half in Durban. It was the last home match in Sharks' colors for Kolisi, who is scheduled to join French Top 14 club Racing 92 after the World Cup. Fly-half Handre Pollard is the Springboks' vice-captain while centre Lukhanyo Am might also be considered as a replacement for Kolisi. An Instagram message by Kolisi's wife on Monday asked friends and followers to pray with her family, but she did not mention the knee injury.

"Hey friends! Believing for a miracle. Would really appreciate if you could take a minute out (of) your day to pray with us," wrote Rachel Kolisi. Kolisi



South Africa's rugby player Siya Kolisi

became the first black captain of the Springboks—a team restricted to white players for decades—when he led the green and gold against England in 2018. It was a new era, with coach Rassie Erasmus having replaced Allister Coetzee after two disastrous seasons for the two-time world champions.

But it began disastrously with England racing to a 21-point lead before South Africa stormed back for a memorable 42-39 triumph in Johannesburg. The Springboks won the second Test a week later to clinch the series and the Erasmus and Kolisi partnership was off to a flying start. As South Africa flew to Japan for the 2019 World Cup, however, not even their most partisan supporters believed they would return with the Webb Ellis Cup.

An opening-match loss to New Zealand confirmed those reservations, but it was to prove no more than a bump on the road to glory. Convincing victories over Italy, Namibia, Canada and Japan took them to the semi-finals, where they edged Wales, before thumping England by 20 points in the final. Kolisi and his teammates returned home to heroes' welcomes with parades through many cities attracting huge, multiracial crowds. "This team represents all South Africans, rich and poor, young and old, black and white," said Kolisi. — AFP

Australia rediscovers 'football's Ashes' after 69 years

SYDNEY: A long-lost trophy crafted to celebrate matches between Australia and New Zealand has resurfaced, football officials said Tuesday, solving a sporting mystery that has puzzled historians for almost 70 years. Inside the ornate wooden trophy is a small silver razor case containing the ashes of cigars smoked by the Australian and New Zealand captains after the sides met in 1923. The case had belonged to a soldier during the treacherous Gallipoli landing of World War I. Reminiscent of the celebrated Ashes urn contested between the Australian and English cricket teams, the Anzac Soccer Trophy was last seen in 1954.

Football Australia announced the discovery as tens of thousands of people gathered at Anzac Day dawn services there and in New Zealand to honor their armed forces. "This is quite possibly the greatest domestic treasure there is in the game," football historian Trevor Thompson said. "It's packed with so much imagery about the unity of the two countries, and the razor case that had been to Gallipoli referenced the recent experience of fighting shoulder to shoulder during the First World War."

The trophy was found by the family of former Australian football chairman Sydney Storey. "This is not just a trophy, it's a symbol of Australia and New Zealand working together, playing together and looking after each other - it's really, really powerful," the family said in a statement. "Of course, how it is used again is up to Australia and New Zealand, but at least now it's available to them football organizations as a first step." The wooden trophy, or casket, was built from a mix of Australian maple wood and New Zealand honeysuckle, while the silver razor case was carried during the Gallipoli landing in 1915 by Private William Fisher - a football administrator. — AFP

Sports

City aim for knockout blow in Premier League title race

Arsenal on the ropes amid decisive date

MANCHESTER: Arsenal's trip to Manchester City on Wednesday has been circled for months as a potentially decisive date in the Premier League title race, but the Gunners must now wrestle back a huge swing in momentum towards the defending champions. Mikel Arteta's men travel to the Etihad five points clear at the top of the table, yet many see the title as City's to lose thanks to two games in hand and home advantage in midweek.

Arsenal could have amassed an 11-point advantage in recent weeks to pile the pressure on City, as they try to balance their effort in a bid to win a treble of Premier League, Champions League and FA Cup. Instead, Arteta's young guns have showed their inexperience of dealing with a title race in the run-in as three consecutive draws have gifted City back control of their own destiny. Twice Arsenal blew 2-0 leads to draw at Liverpool and West Ham. On Friday, it was the league leaders' turn to produce a late fightback from 3-1 down to draw 3-3 against Southampton.

But the silence that greeted the final whistle at the Emirates, accompanied by Arteta's head in his hands and Arsenal

bodies strewn across the turf illustrated that even salvaging a point felt like defeat against a side sitting bottom of the table. The consistent problem across all three games has been Arsenal's inability to defend. William Saliba's absence due to a back injury has proved a massive blow, with the Frenchman not expected back in time for Wednesday. Saliba had been an ever-present in the Premier League prior to suffering the issue in a Europa League clash against Sporting Lisbon in mid-March.

In five games since, Arsenal's number of goals conceded and big chances on offer to the opposition has doubled compared to the first 27 Saliba started. "We have to look in the mirror because we gave three really easy goals away and when you do that it's extremely difficult to win in this league," said Arteta after his side's struggles against Southampton. "The confidence is there, it's those moments that we need to cut back. At this level, we cannot give away the goals that we have given. It's as simple as that."

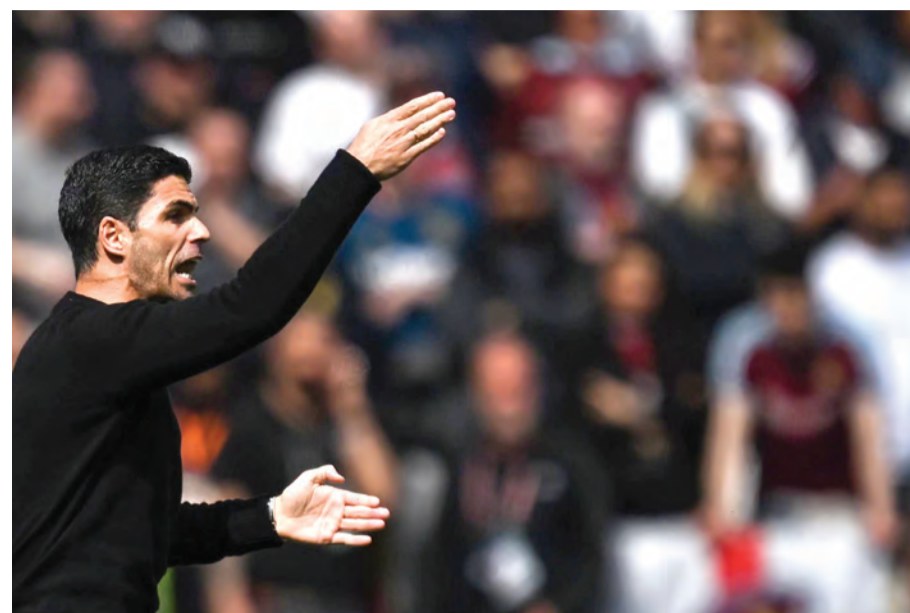
'It's a final'

Showing any weakness against Pep

Guardiola's men in a title race is likely to prove fatal, but Arsenal simply cannot afford a similar defensive display against City's array of attacking talent. The English champions have won all 11 of their games at the Etihad in 2023, scoring 43 goals in the process. Erling Haaland is just two goals away from matching the all-time Premier League record of 34 goals in a season and 50 in all competitions in his first year in English football.

Even when the Norwegian drew a blank in Saturday's 3-0 win over Sheffield United, Riyad Mahrez stepped up with the first FA Cup semi-final hat-trick since 1958. As an example of City's firepower, Mahrez is still likely to drop back to the bench with the in-form Jack Grealish, Kevin De Bruyne and Bernardo Silva supporting Haaland in attack. Haaland's arrival precipitated Gabriel Jesus' departure from City after winning four Premier League titles in the past five years.

The Brazilian is one of the few Arsenal players with experience of getting over the line to win trophies and issued a rallying cry for his side to bounce back on the biggest stage. "We have to manage ourselves to come back and be focused



Arsenal's Spanish manager Mikel Arteta

again and strong, because anything can happen from now until the end of the season," said Jesus. "Even if you don't drop the points we dropped in the last games,

nothing changes - it's a final. Each game is a final, we have to face them like a final. This is the most important game of the season for us." — AFP

Running, horse riding, biking among popular sports in Kuwait

By Ghadeer Ghloom

KUWAIT: Amid the wide spread of some sports in Kuwait, Kuwait Times focused on three popular sports in Kuwait — running, horse riding and biking. Dr Noor Esmaeil, an orthodontist and runner who has won various marathons, said her passion for sports started around three and a half years ago, after her post graduation from the United Kingdom.

Before that, Esmaeil spent most of her time mainly focusing on her studies and work, and did not pay enough attention to her physical and mental wellbeing. So she promised herself that as soon as she graduates, she will give more time for this purpose. This promise sparked Esmaeil's passion for sports. "Running is very special to me because I feel that it is very liberating. When I run, I feel like I'm flying. It's a sport that does not require a lot of equipment — all you need is a pair of running shoes and then off you go! It creates for me an incredible euphoria and a sense of peace. That is why I really love running," Esmaeil said.

She said she runs around five to six days a week, and has achieved a few successes. "Thankfully I got podium finishes in the full 42-kilometer Gulf marathons in 2021 and 2022. I have also podiumed in spartan races, which combine running and obstacle races and are a combination of both," Esmaeil said. Sponsored by Zain, Misk Al-Marshoud, a Kuwaiti equestrian and winner of the junior championship this year, shared her experience with Kuwait Times.

She said that she started riding when she was six, because she used to see her elder siblings ride since they were young. This motivated Marshoud to step into this sport.

According to her, horse riding is where she feels at peace. "I chose this sport because there is no discrimination and limits for a certain age or gender. It's just you and the horse," she said. However, Marshoud faces a few challenges, as she said that it is quite hard to balance between school and riding. It is hard to have good grades when she is riding every single time, she said, adding that being an equestrian is also quite expensive. But being an equestrian gives her a feeling of connection between herself and the horse.

Batoul Al-Abdullah, a Kuwaiti biker, spoke about her passion for bicycling. She said that she started riding bicycles in 2018 with encouragement from family and friends. It started as a hobby and entertainment activity before considering it as a sport. By time, Abdullah became a member of a team that brings together women who ride bicycles in Kuwait. She said bicycling is an entertaining sport that is enjoyable in the open air, and what makes it special is that it combines exercising and entertainment, besides the fact that it is an environmentally-friendly sport.

Abdullah's favorite part in practicing this sport is that she feels connected to nature, as it is an outdoor sport. In her opinion, the best time to ride a bicycle in Kuwait is at sunrise. She said she prefers going to the seaside, which adds to the enjoyment of this sport and the feeling of positive energy. It also encourages making friends, which improves the excitement of going for further distances.

Abdullah said what makes this sport special is that riding is a respite for women, whether she is a mother, student or an employee. Unlike other sports that are practiced indoors, this sport revitalizes one's energy. Another advantage is that this kind of sport is not very expensive, as it does not require

trust after a season to adjust to his methods. "He's playing really good this season. But at the same time, like he knows, we want more," said the ever-demanding Guardiola. "Now he believes he is part of it. Maybe when he arrived he thought: 'I'm not good enough after the team won the Premier League.' 'Sometimes players adapt immediately, sometimes they need more time. Jack didn't come here for just one season, he's here for a long time. He's an important player for us.'"

On the face of it, Guardiola and Grealish do not appear likely bedfellows. The Catalan coach is known for his scrupulous attention to detail, while Grealish is one of the game's few remaining colorful characters. The 27-year-old made headlines for his antics at City's title celebrations a year ago before embarking on a booze-filled trip to Ibiza that was splashed all over social media. More recently, Grealish confessed to ordering a five-course Chinese takeaway after every game.

Yet, Guardiola this week hailed his professionalism to ensure he is fit enough to cope with City's intense schedule. Grealish has started all of City's last 12 Premier League games as well as all four of their Champions League matches in the knockout stage so far.

"In the back of my mind the fact that Pep is trust-

club statement. "Cristian will leave his current role along with his coaching staff. Cristian stepped in at a difficult point in our season and I want to thank him for the professional manner in which he and his coaching staff have conducted themselves during such a challenging time."

However, the decision to replace Conte with a member of his backroom staff in the first place has opened Levy up to more criticism from fans. "We can look at many reasons why it happened and whilst myself, the board, the coaches and players must all take collective responsibility, ultimately the responsibility is mine," Levy added.

"I met with the player committee today - the squad is determined to pull together to ensure the strongest possible finish to the season. We are all clear we need to deliver performances which earn your amazing support." Mason, who also took charge towards the end of the 2020/21 season, will be in the dugout for Thursday's clash at home to Manchester United. After finishing fourth under Conte last season, hopes were high that Tottenham could go even better this



KUWAIT: (From left) Batoul Al-Abdullah, Misk Al-Marshoud and Noor Esmaeil pose for a photo. Amid the wide spread of some sports in Kuwait, Kuwait Times focused on three popular sports in Kuwait — running, horse riding and biking.

paying for membership or anything else. The only thing you need to pay for is to buy a bicycle, in addition to some safety equipment such as a helmet, gloves and a first aid kit.

In terms of challenges, Abdullah complained about a lack of bicycling lanes on streets and a lack of awareness by some drivers, which may put bikers at risk of car accidents while crossing the streets on their bicycles. With regards to achievements, Abdullah said that an achievement is not limited to earning some medals or trophies or winning races, but rather it is in breaking the record for long distance riding. She said that she has participated in several races with her team.



Manchester City's English midfielder Jack Grealish

ing me in big games helps the confidence," Grealish said last month on his more prominent role this season. "I do feel I have repaid him, played my part, done well. And I think that is why he is keeping me in the team." Grealish has started to deliver big moments, none more so than the crucial goal that put City back in front when they beat Arsenal 3-1 at the Emirates in February. He has also scored against Manchester United and Liverpool, but his return of five goals and 10 assists is still not outstanding for a £100 million player. — AFP

campaign as the former Chelsea boss was armed with over £100 million (\$124 million) of new signings.

But after just one defeat in their opening 10 league games, Spurs have lost 10 of their last 22. An astonishing rant by Conte, pointing the finger at his players' inability to perform under pressure, ended the Italian's time in charge. But things did not improve under Stellini as Spurs blew a goal and a man advantage at relegation-threatened Everton to draw 1-1 and lost 3-2 at home to Bournemouth before their collapse at Newcastle.

Tottenham's malaise has raised questions over the future of star striker Harry Kane. The England captain has just one year left on his contract and is attracting interest from Bayern Munich and Manchester United. The club's managing director of football Fabio Paratici also resigned last week after losing his appeal against a 30-month global ban from performing his role. Paratici was handed the suspension by the Italian football federation (FIGC) in January after his former club Juventus were found guilty of false accounting. — AFP

Today's Matches

Coppa Italia		
Inter Milan v Juventus	22:00	AD SPORTS Premium 1
English Premier League		
Nottingham Forest v Brighton	21:30	beIN Sports HD Xtra 1 beIN Sports Connect
Chelsea v Brentford	21:45	beIN Sports 3 HD Premium beIN Sports Connect
West Ham United v Liverpool	21:45	beIN Sports 2 HD Premium beIN Sports HD 2 English beIN Sports Connect
Manchester City v Arsenal	22:00	beIN Sports 1 HD Premium beIN Sports HD 1 English beIN Sports Connect
Spanish League		
Getafe v Almeria	20:30	beIN Sports HD 2 beIN Sports Fr 5 HD max beIN Sports Connect
Atletico de Madrid v Real Mallorca	20:30	beIN Sports HD 1 beIN Sports 1 FR beIN Sports Connect
Celta de Vigo v Elche	23:00	beIN Sports HD 2 beIN Sports Fr 5 HD max beIN Sports Connect
Rayo Vallecano v Barcelona	23:00	beIN Sports HD 1 beIN Sports 1 FR Premier Sports 2 HD beIN Sports Connect

Roma drop out of Serie A top 4

ROME: Roma slid out of the Serie A top four by the slimmest of margins as they lost 3-1 to Atalanta in Bergamo on Monday. Jose Mourinho's 100th game as Roma coach ended with a potentially costly loss. His club started the night two ahead of AC Milan on goal difference but ended it outside the Champions League spot on goals scored. Roma host Milan on Sunday.

Five days ago, Roma were comfortably third in Serie A, but then Juventus jumped to third after their 15-point penalty was suspended. On Sunday, Milan won at Lecce. Atalanta stayed in the top-four race. They remained in seventh but are four points behind Milan and Roma with seven games to play. Atalanta took the lead with a volley from Mario Pasalic after 31 minutes. Rafael Toloi fired the second following a corner in 74th minute.

Roma, who went to extra time and penalties before eliminating Feyenoord in the Europa League last Thursday, showed more fight in the second half after bringing on Paulo Dybala. Lorenzo Pellegrini scored off the post in the 83rd minute, but Roma's hopes lasted only a few seconds, however, before a handling error by Roma goalkeeper Rui Patrício presented Dutch midfielder Teun Koopmeiners with a goal. — AFP

Tottenham fire interim coach

LONDON: Tottenham sacked interim manager Cristian Stellini on Monday after chairman Daniel Levy branded Sunday's 6-1 defeat at Newcastle "wholly unacceptable". Stellini, who was only put in charge last month after his former boss Antonio Conte left the club, will be replaced by Ryan Mason with immediate effect. Conte's long-term assistant won only one of his four games in charge, dealing what appears a fatal blow to Spurs' chances of Champions League football next season.

Tottenham still sit fifth in the Premier League but are six points adrift of the top four and have played at least one game more than the sides directly above them. A difficult season hit a new low at St James' Park as Spurs were 5-0 down after just 21 minutes. "Sunday's performance against Newcastle was wholly unacceptable," said Levy in a

Heat overwhelm Bucks as Lakers sink Grizzlies

Butler conjures a dazzling 56-point performance



MIAMI: Duncan Robinson #55 of the Miami Heat competes for a rebound against Pat Connaughton #24 and Giannis Antetokounmpo #34 of the Milwaukee Bucks during the fourth quarter in Game Four of the Eastern Conference First Round Playoffs on April 24, 2023. — AFP

MIAMI: Jimmy Butler conjured a dazzling 56-point performance as the Miami Heat came from behind to shove the top-seeded Milwaukee Bucks to the brink of elimination from the NBA playoffs Monday, while LeBron James led an overtime rally to give the Los Angeles Lakers a commanding series lead over the Memphis Grizzlies. In an electrifying battle at Miami's Kaseya Center, Butler all but single-handedly led Miami to a 119-114 win that leaves the Bucks 3-1 down in the best-of-seven Eastern Conference first-round series.

In the Western Conference, the second-seeded Grizzlies are also staring down the barrel of an early playoff exit after the Lakers claimed a 117-111 victory to take a 3-1 series lead. James finished with 22 points, 20 rebounds and seven assists and grabbed a game-tying driving layup with 0.8 seconds remaining in the fourth quarter to force overtime. James then marshaled the Lakers superbly in overtime, scoring four points to put the Lakers in sight of the conference semi-finals.

But the performance of the day came in Miami, where Butler's 56-point haul was the joint fourth-highest individual scoring total in an NBA playoff game ever. Only Michael Jordan (63 points), Elgin Baylor (61) and

Donovan Mitchell (57) have scored more in a postseason game. Milwaukee, who welcomed Giannis Antetokounmpo back into their lineup after a two-game injury absence, had looked to be cruising towards victory after leading from the opening seconds and keeping Miami at arm's length throughout.

'Complete team effort'

Milwaukee led by 14 points early in the fourth quarter and seemed to be poised to square the series at two games apiece after a ruthless shooting performance from Brook Lopez, with Antetokounmpo providing scoring support. But Butler led an astonishing late 13-0 run to transform the contest and with the crowd roaring him on, scored 21 points in the fourth quarter to leave the Bucks shellshocked in defeat. Miami coach Erik Spoelstra saluted Butler's basketball intelligence. "He's one of the most intelligent basketball players in this association," said Spoelstra. "He understands what we're trying to do and he understands what they're trying to do—and they're a very good team."

Butler said his solo masterpiece was the result of a "complete team effort." "I know everybody sees the 56

points, but if my team-mates aren't looking to get me the ball, or setting great screens, where I can get to my right or my left or the free throw line, this game's a lot different," Butler said. "A lot of shots went in tonight. But my team-mates kept feeding me the ball and telling me to attack. When you've got team-mates like that, good things happen." Crucially, Butler's haul included 22 points in the first quarter, a burst of scoring that helped Miami stay just in touch.

Lakers leave it late

No other Miami player broke 20 points, with Bam Adebayo the next highest Miami scorer with 15 points. Only two other Miami players cracked double figures. Lopez finished with 36 points and 11 rebounds while Antetokounmpo made a triple double on his return with 26 points, 10 rebounds and 13 assists.

"We had our opportunities in the fourth quarter but we didn't make enough plays at either end, and they did," said Bucks coach Mike Budenholzer, whose team must now win game five in Milwaukee on Wednesday to stay alive. In Los Angeles, the Lakers also left it late before subduing a resurgent Grizzlies in overtime. Mem-

phis looked well-placed to level the series after opening up a seven-point lead with just over five minutes remaining in the fourth quarter. But the Lakers' D'Angelo Russell reeled off three straight three-pointers to turn the game around and give the hosts a 99-97 lead.

A frantic final few minutes saw Memphis take a 104-102 lead with just seconds left on the clock after a sensational behind-the-back pass from Ja Morant set up Desmond Bane for a running layup. But James conjured his game-tying drive to force overtime and the Lakers tightened up defensively to close out the win. "We had a next-play, refuse-to-quit mentality," Lakers coach Darvin Ham said. "I'm so proud of the way we fought. "We had moments in the game that weren't too pretty. But we just kept chipping away, didn't get discouraged and didn't fall apart."

Ham reserved special praise for the leadership of the 38-year-old James down the stretch. "All of his travels, all of the phenomenal things he's accomplished, he still has that passion, that grit to be on top," Ham said. "And that's what you saw... that's who he's been his entire career." Bane led the Memphis scoring with 36 points while Morant finished with 22. — AFP

Markkanen wins NBA Most Improved award

NEW YORK: Finnish forward Lauri Markkanen of the Utah Jazz was named the NBA's 2023 Most Improved Player on Monday after boosting his scoring average by nearly 11 points a game. The 25-year-old Finnish forward earned his first All-Star selection this season and finished with career highs of 25.6 points and 1.9 assists plus 8.6 rebounds a game.

Markkanen, who boosted his scoring average by an NBA-best 10.87 points a game this season, also had career-best shooting averages of 49.9% from the floor and 87.5% from the free throw line for the Jazz. "It feels amazing," Markkanen told NBA telecaster TNT from Helsinki, where he is fulfilling Finland military service requirements. "It's a huge privilege to be in this position."

The 7-footer (2.13m), whose parents were both pro basketball players, was selected seventh overall by Minnesota in the 2017 NBA Draft and played for Chicago and Cleveland before being traded to Utah last September in the deal that sent Donovan Mitchell to the Cavaliers. "Just being in the right place at the right time," Markkanen said of his campaign. "I really wasn't the isolation player this year. I always

give credit to guys finding me when I was open. I just tried to show up every night and be consistent. "I really tried to learn and step into that leadership role in the locker room. I'm still working on that."

When it came to the military, Markkanen said he had plenty of others who wanted to play him one-on-one, but none yet who outranked him. "Days are pretty long but it has been pretty fun," he said. "Made a lot of new friends. We have to go through it together." He's the first European player to capture the award since Greek star Giannis Antetokounmpo of Milwaukee in 2017 and the first Jazz player ever to win the award. Other finalists for the award were New York Knicks guard Jalen Brunson from the United States and Canadian guard Shai Gilgeous-Alexander of the Oklahoma City Thunder. — AFP



Lauri Markkanen of Utah Jazz

Ex-Celtics coach Udoka hired to guide Rockets

WASHINGTON: Former Boston Celtics coach Ime Udoka has agreed on a deal to be hired as coach of the NBA's Houston Rockets, according to multiple media reports on Monday. The Houston Chronicle and ESPN cited unnamed sources that said a deal had been struck for Udoka to take charge of a club that went 22-60 this past season, missing the playoffs for the third consecutive campaign.

Udoka, considered a top contender for the vacant Toronto Raptors job, was suspended by the Celtics for the 2022-23 season last September for an improper workplace relationship with a subordinate. Celtics assistant coach Joe Mazzulla was made Boston's interim head coach until handed the position on a permanent basis in February. The Rockets spoke with league and Celtics officials about the matter before making the offer to Udoka, ESPN reported. Udoka, 45, played seven seasons in the NBA before retiring in 2011. He served as an assistant coach at San Antonio, Philadelphia and Brooklyn before being hired by the Celtics in June 2021.

The Celtics went 51-31 last season and reached the NBA Finals, losing to the Golden State Warriors in Udoka's rookie head coaching campaign. Udoka knows Toronto Raptors president Masai Ujiri but decided against

seeking that job after the firing of Nick Nurse on Friday, ESPN reported, saying the Rockets sold Udoka on a young roster of talent, a huge amount of money to spend under the NBA salary cap and the team's high chance at winning next month's NBA Draft Lottery.

Taking the top pick from the lottery would put the Rockets in position to select French big man Victor Wembanyama, seen as one of the top prospects since LeBron James. The club will be trying to avoid suffering a fourth straight losing campaign next season, a drought it hasn't suffered since beginning its existence with seven in a row from 1967-74. Udoka, who is of Nigerian and American descent, was an assistant coach on the 2014 San Antonio Spurs NBA championship club and on the staff of Spurs coach Gregg Popovich for the Tokyo Olympic champion US squad. — AFP



Head coach Ime Udoka