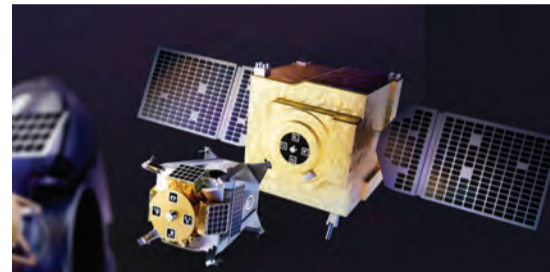


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Kuwait calls on UNSC to condemn Zionist crimes against Palestinians

Kuwait calls for limiting use of veto at UN Security Council



Abdulaziz Ammash



Fahad Hajji

NEW YORK: Kuwait has renewed calls for the international community, particularly the UN Security Council, to condemn the violence and crimes by Zionist occupation authorities and settlers against Palestinian civilians. Kuwait also underlined the need to bring perpetrators of such acts to accountability, in a statement delivered by Kuwaiti diplomat at the UN Abdulaziz Ammash at a special UN Security Council session on the situation in the Middle East.

He stressed the urgency of providing international protection to the Palestinian people in accordance with the UN Secretary-General's proposals which were approved by the UN General Assembly. Ammash noted that a just and comprehensive peace, security and stability in the Middle East region will not be achieved until the Palestinian people obtain their legitimate and inalienable rights, including their right to self-determination, the end of the illegal Zionist occupation and the independence of the State of Palestine with full sovereignty over the occupied Palestinian land of 1967 with Jerusalem as its capital.

Ammash recalled that the holy month of Ramadan witnessed an intensification of attacks by the occupation forces and extremist settlers. "They desecrated the sanctity of Al-Aqsa Mosque and attacked unarmed worshippers, including women and children, and arrested hundreds of them," he regretted. Ammash described such acts as a new episode of the bloody Zionist violence and provocation of the feelings of hundreds of millions of Muslims.

The Kuwaiti diplomat said the Zionist entity continues its disregard of calls of the international community, at the forefront of which are the Security Council states, for calm during Ramadan. "It has become an imperative for the Security Council to carry out its responsibilities by condemning these serious violations by the occupation forces, as well as the need to put pressure on the occupying authorities to prevent any attempt to change the legal and historical status quo of Al-Aqsa Mosque, including the respect of the status of the Haram Al-Sharif," he asserted.

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Iran seizes oil tanker off Oman, two crew missing

DUBAI: Iran seized a US-bound oil tanker off Oman on Thursday, saying it had crashed into an Iranian vessel leaving two crew missing — the latest disruptive incident in the crucial but troubled waterway. The US Navy demanded the immediate release of the Marshall Islands-flagged tanker, saying it was transiting international waters in the Gulf of Oman and slamming Iran's "continued harassment of vessels".

It is one of a spate of incidents since 2018, when then US president Donald Trump pulled out of a nuclear agreement and reimposed crippling sanctions on Iran, sending tensions soaring. "The Iranian government should immediately release the oil tanker," the Bahrain-based US Fifth Fleet said in a statement. "Iran's actions are contrary to international law and disruptive to regional security and stability," it added.

The latest flare-up comes only days after Tehran's Western rivals toughened sanctions on Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps. The Fifth Fleet initially blamed the Revolutionary Guards, but then said the capture was carried out by Iran's navy. It identified the vessel as the oil tanker Advantage Sweet and said it issued a distress call during the seizure.

Iran's navy said the "violation" ship was captured after a collision with an Iranian ship that left two missing and several injured. "Following the collision of an unknown ship with an Iranian vessel in the waters of the...Gulf two of the vessel's crew went missing and several others were injured," the Iranian navy said in a statement. "The navy of the army, by court order, seized the violator ship, that was fleeing with the flag of the Marshall Islands, and directed it to the coastal waters of the Islamic republic of Iran," it added.

Iran and the United States have traded barbs over the incidents in the sensitive waters of the Gulf that are a chokepoint for at least a third

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Assembly office delays decision on vote recount

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: The National Assembly office, headed by outgoing Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem, on Thursday decided to delay a decision on a motion submitted by outgoing MP Obaid Al-Wasmi calling to recount votes cast in the Sept 2022 parliamentary elections over suspected irregularities. Ghanem said after the meeting that the constitutional court called the Assembly secretary and informed him that they have some documents related to the ballot boxes. He said as a result, the office decided to discuss the

sue again on Sunday.

Ghanem also said the office decided to invite MPs for a regular session next Tuesday. The speaker also called on the prime minister to take all necessary measures to ensure that the decree that will dissolve the Assembly is in line with the constitution. HH the Amir decided last week to dissolve the 2020 Assembly that was reinstated by the constitutional court. The date of the new elections has not yet been set.

In his motion submitted to the Assembly office on Wednesday, Wasmi reiterated allegations that the Sept 2022 elections had been marred with irregularities and demanded that all votes must be recounted to establish whether the polls had been rigged or not. The entire 2022 election process was annulled by the constitutional court in a ruling on March 19, which said an Amiri decree dissolving the previous Assembly violated the Kuwaiti constitution.

Wasmi called on the Assembly office to invite all

those concerned with the issue in addition to foreign ambassadors and local and international media to attend the proposed recounting of votes. During the scrapped polls, the opposition scored a landslide victory and unanimously voted veteran opposition figure Ahmad Al-Saadoun to be the speaker of the house. Wasmi himself won a seat from the fourth constituency.

Wasmi reiterated claims that wide-scale irregularities were committed during the elections and during the counting of votes, alleging that some opposition MPs secured a huge number of votes that is impossible to obtain. He also claimed that during the polls, thousands of ineligible citizens were allowed to cast their votes, including some servicemen who are barred from voting by the election law, and some naturalized citizens who have not yet completed the required 20-year period of their citizenship to be able to vote.

Erdogan unveils nuclear plant in Putin video link

ISTANBUL: Turkey's ailing President Recep Tayyip Erdogan on Thursday re-emerged from a two-day absence and spoke by video link with Vladimir Putin at a virtual ceremony unveiling a Russian-built nuclear power plant. The 69-year-old leader suspended all campaigning for Turkey's pivotal May 14 election after getting sick while conducting a live TV interview on Tuesday evening. Erdogan said he had developed an upset stomach

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Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and Russian President Vladimir Putin speak over video link during the opening of Akkuyu nuclear power plant in Mersin. — AFP

Statue found in Egypt points to ancient India links

CAIRO: A statue of Buddha has been discovered in Egypt's ancient seaport of Berenice on the Red Sea, shedding light on trade ties with India under the Roman empire. A Polish-US mission discovered the statue "dating back to the Roman era while digging at the ancient temple in Berenice", an antiquities ministry statement said on Wednesday.

The find has "important indications over the presence of trade ties between Egypt and India during the

Roman era", the head of Egypt's supreme antiquities council Mostafa Al-Waziri said. The statue, with part of its right side and its right leg missing, measures 71 cm in height and portrays Buddha with a halo around his head and a lotus flower by his side.

Waziri said Berenice was one of the largest seaports in Roman-era Egypt, and was often the destination for ships from India laden with spices, semi-precious stones, textiles and ivory. Egypt has unveiled many major archaeological discoveries in recent years, amid attempts to revive its vital tourism industry after years of political unrest and the COVID pandemic. However, critics say the flurry of excavations has prioritized finds that grab media attention over hard academic research. The crown jewel in the government's plans is the long-delayed inauguration of the Grand Egyptian Museum at the foot of the pyramids in Giza. — AFP



A handout picture released on April 27, 2023 shows a statue of Buddha uncovered in Egypt's ancient seaport of Berenice. — AFP



Diwaniyas: The differences between hadhar and bedu

Understanding socio-cultural spaces in Kuwait



KUWAIT: File photos show Diwan Al-Bader and Diwan Al-Rawdan. The diwaniya is an important feature in most Kuwaiti households and throughout its history, people in Kuwait have defined diwaniyas as part of their identity.

By Khaled Al-Abdulhadi

KUWAIT: The diwaniya is an important feature in most Kuwaiti households, and throughout its history, people in Kuwait have defined diwaniyas as part of their identity. However, after the discovery of oil and Kuwait's modernization and urbanization, social groups developed their own understanding of the diwaniya, with its role differing largely between the hadhar (urbanites) and bedu (bedouins) in Kuwait.

In their study published in the International Journal of Architectural Research, Yousef Al-Haroun and Mohammed Al-Ajmi, in an article titled 'Understanding Socio-cultural Spaces Between Hadhar and Bedu Houses in Kuwait' examine the differences between the development of hadhar and bedu houses and found the main difference lies in the diwaniya.

The authors write: "In our survey, the most salient distinction between the two groups was the diwaniya, a gathering place inside Kuwaiti houses where men congregate and spend time together discussing various issues from business and politics to everyday life". They found 33 percent of bedu respondents visibly identified the diwaniya, while only 12 percent of hadhar respondents identified that space. "The diwaniya is seemingly an important space for both groups but even more so for the bedu."

Society and lifestyle changed in Kuwait after the discovery of oil. Despite this, most hadhar trace their origin to bedouin tribes of the Arabian Peninsula that immigrated to Kuwait to find better opportunities, making them exposed to other cultures that would lead them to become more tolerant.

As Kuwait gradually developed as an important trading center in the region, "Hadhar who used to live in mudbrick courtyard houses now live in modern villas. Bedouins also no longer need to live in tents and move around; so, they may in fact be considered as hadhar. They all live in the city and share similar lifestyles. After long transitional processes, all bedu have now been settled," the authors wrote. "They have all merged into the larger Kuwaiti society. Nonetheless, as part of the hadhar-bedu dichotomy, each group has a unique and distinct cultural and ethnic personality that is derived from their past identities," they added.

Although both hadhar and bedu now live in modern villas, each group has different requirements and internal spatial designs. "The courtyard was the heart of the traditional hadhar house... an exclusive space used by the entire family. However, after the 1950s and subsequent oil boom, the modern villa introduced a new house design to Kuwait. The courtyard has been replaced with the guest or family living room," they wrote.

"The bedu used to live in Arabian tents... before settling in Kuwait. There is a clear gender-based separation in a typical Arabian tent in which the distinction between male and female spaces is clearly defined by a dividing screen called a 'qata,' they explain. "As a patriarchal society, one would expect that the majority of space would be devoted to the men's domain; however, the women's side actually occupies two-thirds of the tent space while only one-third is for the men."

In the hadhar group of participants, the authors find 63 percent identified the guest living room as their main social gathering space followed by the family living room by 30 percent and the diwaniya by around 12 percent. However, 65 percent of bedu participants identified the family living room as the main social gathering space, followed by the diwaniya by 33 percent, the magalat (a small section within a diwaniya) by 10 percent and the guest living room by 8 percent.

Regarding gender differences between the two groups, they write: "The hadhar in both house types always shared the same entrance for males and females. The only strictly male space that survived the transformation was the diwaniya. The importance of the diwaniya is tightly linked to Kuwaitis' social

and cultural habits." The central Arabian tribal social system is the main root of the diwaniya in what was called a majlis, as they met in a "gathering of tribal men in the sheikh's tent or house to discuss relevant matters".

"For the hadhar, not every house had a diwaniya. There would usually be one diwaniya for a 'family name' (an extended family), many of whom represented the ruling family, merchants and other prominent members of society. The hadhar group may use the diwaniya once or more per week," they said, describing the hadhar's living conditions.

As for the bedu group, they wrote: "it is a place where most of the males spend a large amount of time and it consequently can be found in a majority of their houses today. This may be understood as how the gendered separation of living spaces in the Arabian tent manifested itself... Therefore, the diwaniya is a more significant space for males in the bedu group than the hadhar as it relates to daily gatherings."

The authors state the significance of their findings was that the differences between the groups has been a natural progression from their traditional dwellings, meaning that despite the impact of globalization and modernity, certain aspects of Kuwaitis' culture still survived and was adapted.

Experts highlight the importance of communicating with teenage kids

By Ghadeer Ghloom

KUWAIT: As soon as their children reach the teenage years, parents start worrying about the consequences of hormonal changes that affect their mood and character, which impact the nature of the relationship between them. However, with good communication and trust, parents can befriend their teenage kids and build a healthy bond with them. Due to the vulnerability of this phase in our lives, Kuwait Times interviewed Dr Safaa Al-Zaqqah, Educational and Family Consultant, and mothers of teenagers to share their perspectives and experiences on raising teenagers.

In order for parents to have a healthy bond with teenagers, Dr Zaqqah highlighted the importance of befriending teens, validating their emotions, reciprocating affection and attention, listening to them and giving them a chance to express themselves freely in order to earn their trust. She also necessitated spending quality time between parents and their teenage children and help them get accustomed to being with their parents.

Lulwa Al-Terkait, External Relations Officer – UNHCR, said being a mother of two teenagers, one 14 and the other 17, she has experienced a change in the nature of her relationship with her children. However, it is not a negative shift but rather a positive one. Terkait's teenage children now seek guidance and awareness while befriending their mother. They dislike being ordered to do things, yet they seek sensible advice.

According to her, teenagers seek valid reasons for the things they are commanded to do. They no longer accept rejection without justifications, because such rejections will be taken as competition by teenagers, which is natural for their age, as they are in the phase of building their character. Because Terkait has awareness of this phase and understands her teenage kids' emotions, her bond with them improved positively.



Lulwa Al-Terkait



Dr Safaa Al-Zaqqah



Om Abdullah

"To me, this phase is a positive experience because it has enhanced our relationship to another level. To reach this stage, parents need to understand their emotions, because at this age, teenagers become more sensitive. So, you should watch the way you say things to them and keep in mind the people who are present while talking to your teenagers," she explained.

She added at this phase of their life, teenagers are being prepared to become adults; therefore, they must be given a chance to face things and fix problems themselves, while monitoring them from a distance, where you can give advice accordingly. Thus, direct monitoring is no longer valid. Being teenagers, they start to seek their independence and try to do things their own way. Yet, they are still not ready to take the wisest decisions. This keeps parents' guidance necessary.

In terms of mistrust or distance between parents and their children, Terkait suggests seeking help from a specialist. She said it is totally fine to seek therapy in order to find a balanced solution that solidifies the ground between the two parties. Parents also should self-reflect and be honest with themselves in order to understand what were the reasons behind losing their children's trust.

Honest and clear communication are key to a solid relationship between the two parties and parents must make sure this exists since an early age,



so their children grow being used to communicating and opening up to their parents. Today, there are always ways to keep a relationship healthy between both parties, as you can search the Internet or reach out to experts for help.

Om Abdullah, a mother of three, said the change in relationship between parents and their children is based on the parents' communication skills with their kids during this phase. Concurring with Terkait, Om Abdullah said parents must try to get closer to their children and try to understand them to earn their trust, especially that during this phase they go through some hormonal changes that may affect their mood. Good listening and good communication are key to gaining their trust and helping them open up.

Parents may face some challenges while listening to their children when they go through this phase, in terms of the way their kids might be thinking, but to avoid any conflicts that may lead to mistrust and lack of communication, parents must have patience. In such situations, patience is key to provide love and keep the relationship sound. At some points, despite their dissatisfaction, parents must give love and attention to the teenagers so that they do not feel lonely and misunderstood, which would push them to become introverted and isolated.

Another important thing is respecting their personal space and giving it to them. Om Abdullah sees teenagers' search for their personal space away from their parents as a natural thing for every individual. Therefore, parents must start understanding that their kids have the right to have their personal space; however, they need to make sure to give advice and guidance that would raise their awareness and prepare them for interacting with different people.

Awqaf workers send requests to minister

KUWAIT: The workers union at the Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs has submitted its demands to the Minister of Justice and the Minister of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs, Dr Amer Al-Ratam, regarding the re-organization of working hours for morning and evening centers. The union announced: "The head of the union, Bandar Al-Nassafi, and its members submitted a memorandum explaining their working environment. There should be fingerprint machines that are similar to those in schools (Ministry of Education). This will show the resuming time and will solve a lot of problems." The union appealed to the minister to resolve these problems. The workers expressed their appreciation to the Minister of Awqaf for his understanding and his keenness on doing the best for the ministry.

Combating Corruption

In another development, the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Minister of State for Communications Affairs, Fahad Al-Shu'la has issued a ministerial circular for the year 2023, through which he called on all employees to abide by all provisions of the laws regarding the protection of public funds and establishing the Public Authority for Combating Corruption with provisions for financial disclosure.

The circular stressed the importance of reporting corruption crimes as per Law 1 of 1993 and following the procedures of the report - taking into account the sanctity of private life and the honor and dignity of individuals. Every person who notices corruption must take legal action by reporting it to the competent authority, providing all information necessary to ensure its seriousness, and taking legal action in this regard.

Interactive brochure highlights importance of media partnership

KUWAIT: The Ministry of Information, represented by the Department of Exhibitions and Media Publications, launched its interactive brochure on the concepts and importance of part-

nership between government media and civil society institutions in media projects on Thursday. Ahmed Al-Dhufairi, director of the exhibitions and media publications department and supervisor of the interactive book preparation, told KUNA that the role of partnership between government media and civil society institutions is an important and vital thing that contributes to the prosperity of societies and improves the quality of life.

Al-Dhufairi added that the government media

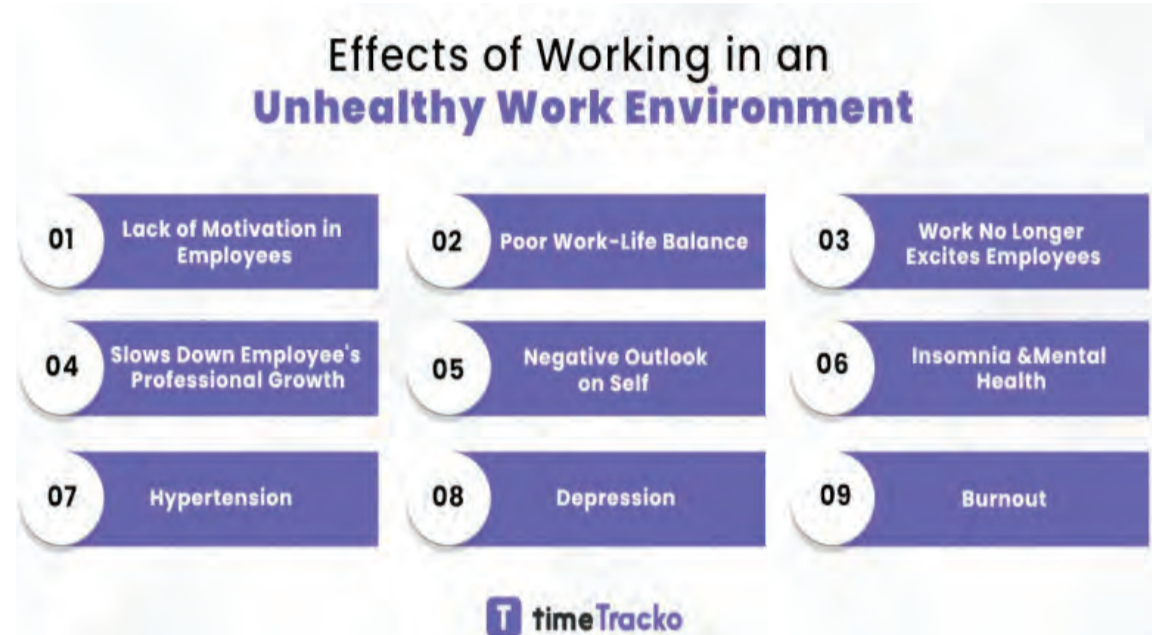
is working to convey the message of the state and implement its policies, while civil society contributes to the advancement of society through its work to enhance the social role and develop the skills and abilities of the individual and society in general. He explained that this partnership is necessary to provide distinguished media and information services to society in addition to providing accurate and periodically updated data and statistics on government and private events and activities.

He pointed out that the concept of mutual benefit between the two parties is a cooperative relationship aimed at achieving mutual benefit and raising awareness, while the civil societies play their role in criticizing its performance, monitoring it, and expressing their position and opinion freely and in a transparent manner. Al-Dhufairi pointed out that the interactive media brochure issued by the ministry is available to beneficiaries on its official website and all its social media accounts. — KUNA

Local

Negative work environment retards growth, productivity

Employees struggle with creativity - and survival mode



By Majid Othman

KUWAIT: Being productive at work depends on the environment the employees work in. A positive atmosphere is the main motivation that helps them invest their qualifications to be creative and give their best efforts to the company. Meanwhile, a negative work environment leads employees to struggle in giving their best experience. It may shift them to survival mode, with the sole aim of not losing their job. Several psychological reports have shown that creativity and survival mode cannot exist in one place, which also holds true for workplaces.

Kuwait Times discussed the effect of the work environment on employee productivity with human resources experts who spoke on the condition of anonymity. They all agreed that employee productivity depends on the company's level of transparency with them. The experts said absolute transparency from

the management toward their employees, especially in the matter of policies and procedures of the company related to governance matters, is key to helping employees understand their roles clearly. They stressed transparency is also highly related to the job the employee is responsible for. The job description also helps the employee to understand the opportunities to be promoted to a higher position, and this will motivate employees to give their best.

The role of the human resource department at companies is also important, who have to make sure all employees know their career development possibilities. The new generation is over-motivated to be managers or in a place of responsibility, which has been an obstacle for companies in the last couple of years. Regarding staff competitiveness, HR experts pointed out companies that want to give equal opportunities to their employees or at least be fair with

them should establish a clear system for staff evaluation that includes clear measurement criteria created by experts, stressing this system should be explained to employees by the beginning of each year.

The experts shed light on the "grievance complaint", which is one of the most common struggles employees face after it is submitted, due to the lack of the management's experience to deal with it, or when the environment is not healthy to correctly deal with it. They suggested that medium-sized companies that struggle with an inconvenient environment for their employees should follow in the steps of big companies that base their success on employee comfort, which is by creating a specialized department to address grievances and raise them to the upper management for adjudication.

Experts also said creating a healthy environment for employees to be productive also depends on the company's awareness of employees who try to steal

their colleagues' hard work, stressing companies that ignore this issue will face a loss of their good employees' interest in the company. They said teamwork will reveal the real work of each employee, and the level of their productivity, as well as cheer up and comfort employees that their work is being recognized and appreciated.

Meanwhile, they warned companies that do not give all their employees equal opportunities to talk about their motivations, ideas and plans are not creating a good environment for them to grow and improve the company. The experts concluded it's important not to forget to conduct a market study on an ongoing basis to evaluate the level of wages so that they match those in the company's field. Some companies give additional benefits to their employees to push them to the highest level of productivity despite it being optional.

Healthier alternatives can reduce chocolate cravings: Expert

By Ghadeer Ghloom

KUWAIT: Chocolate is known to improve people's mood as it contains cocoa that enhances serotonin production in one's brain. This makes it one of the most craved foods due to the feeling that comes with eating chocolate. Many people tend to crave chocolate in times of stress, discomfort, hunger, etc. However, such a craving may become an addiction as soon as one starts consuming chocolate more often despite being aware of its consequences on their health due to excessive sugar intake.

After reaching this level of intense craving of chocolate, people may find it difficult to control their consumption, which results in badly affecting the consumer both emotionally and physically, as it raises the feeling of guilt, in addition to putting the consumer at risk of obesity and other illnesses. Kuwait Times interviewed nutritionist Dr Manal Dashti, who said: "Any addiction can be avoided if we practice eating mindfully and be aware of the food one is about to consume. It is also helpful to listen to the body's natural signals of hunger and satiety."

According to Dashti, craving for chocolate might be simply because a person is hungry. Therefore, she recommends filling up on something else that is high in protein and fiber to subside one's craving for chocolate. "One important factor is planning balanced meals throughout the day, keeping in mind the amount of protein is 25-30 percent of every main meal. Eating high fiber food and good fats will help keep hunger level low and avoid snacking on large amounts of chocolate in between meals," she said.

In case of feeling hungry, one should avoid filling themselves up with chocolates as it does not keep one full for long periods. She added it will also help to look for healthier alternatives such as dark, low-sugar or organic chocolate. Dr Dashti said finding healthier alternatives can help reduce chocolate cravings and lower its disadvantages.

Moreover, Dashti shed light on the role people's lifestyle and way of grocery shopping impacts their craving for chocolate. "Another way is to reduce the amount of chocolate being purchased from grocery stores. Keeping chocolates available in your sight may enhance your craving for it," she said. Therefore, Dr Dashti recommends watching oneself while grocery shopping and limiting the amount of chocolate that is brought at home.

Acting Defense minister underlines importance of Kuwait security

KUWAIT: When it comes to Kuwait's security there is no room for complacency or laziness with regards to infiltration attempts or breaches that violate international regulations, laws, customs and conventions that regulate maritime navigations, First Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Interior and Acting Minister of Defense Sheikh Talal Khaled Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah said on Thursday.

In a Ministry of Defense press release, Sheikh Talal Al-Khaled made the remarks during a tour to Mohammad Al-Ahmad Naval Base, where he also reviewed the results of coordination meetings between Navy and the General Administration of the Coast Guard. The two branches organized and intensified surveillance and security operations to combat piracy in the territorial waters and the economic zone. The mission is also to support and reinforce the efforts made in this regard.

Sheikh Talal Al-Khaled praised high morale of all who work in the Navy and the General Administration of the Coast Guard, and exerted efforts to achieve the objectives in complete coherence with the implementation of various tasks and duties assigned to them. The minister was received during his tour by the Undersecretary of the Ministry of Interior, Lieutenant General Anwar Al-Barjas, Chief of the General Staff of the Army by authorization, Major General Ghazi Al-Shammari, Director of the General Administration of the Coast Guard, Major General Talal Al-Mowanis, Commander of the Naval Force, Brigadier General Hazzaa Al-Alati, and senior commanders of the Naval Force and Coast Guard. — KUNA



KUWAIT: First Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Interior and Acting Minister of Defense Sheikh Talal Khaled Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah visits Mohammad Al-Ahmad Naval Base. — KUNA photos



International Fair Company organizes perfume exhibition

KUWAIT: The "Perfume 2023" exhibition hosted and organized by the Kuwait International Fair Company (KIFR), kicked off at the international fairgrounds in Mishref on Thursday with the participation of more than 300 local and regional companies

and agents of the largest international brands, and will continue until the 9th of May.

Basima Al-Duhaim, Executive Director of Marketing and Sales at the company, said: "The perfume exhibition is one of the annual exhibitions that we are keen to host, as it presents everything new in the world of perfumes, watches, cosmetics, and incense. It attracts major international companies specialized in this field and hosts a selection of the finest and most famous perfumes in the world in order to meet the needs of the public from all over the region and Kuwait in particular."

"The exhibition provides visitors with an opportunity to get acquainted with the cultural outcome

about the history of the perfume industry, the most prominent and famous aromatic ingredients, their prices, and the latest models presented by the participants, who are all racing to present their various products," she said, adding that the exhibition provides a unique opportunity for perfume companies to present their products and services to industry professionals and consumers alike.

Al-Duhaim expects more than 250,000 visitors at the exhibition. The exhibition will be held in halls 5-7, with international participation also from companies from the Sultanate of Oman, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates, as well as agents of international companies. — KUNA



KUWAIT: Perfumes are displayed during an exhibition hosted and organized by the Kuwait International Fair Company (KIFR).

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Arabs welcome decision to ban Zionist imports

CAIRO: The Arab League welcomed on Thursday a decision by Norway to ban direct and in-direct imports from illegal Zionist settlements. In a press statement, Assistant Undersecretary for Palestine and occupied Arab Lands, Dr Saeed Abu-Ali said that the decision was a continuation of similar steps taken by Norway back in June and July of 2022. He affirmed that it came in line with international regulations and laws concerning the illegal activities throughout Zionist settlements. Abu-Ali renewed calls for boycotting products coming from illegal settlements, which violated human rights and UNSC resolution 2334 concerning the matter. He also reiterated the need to counter all of Zionist aggressive behavior and policies against the Palestinian people.

Meanwhile, Zionist forces killed a Palestinian man in the occupied West Bank, the Palestinian health ministry said, during what the army described as a "counterterrorism" operation. The health ministry said Suleiman Ayash, 20, was "killed by the occupation bullets, in Aqabat Jaber camp", the site of previous deadly raids this year, near the city of Jericho. The military said Zionist forces had arrested a "wanted suspect" during the raid, without elaborating on the accusations against them. — Agencies

Airport records 400 private flights in the first quarter

KUWAIT: The Directorate General of Civil Aviation said Kuwait International Airport recorded a large number of private flights during the first quarter of 2023. So far, the number has reached 400 flights with over 2,100 passengers. The number of private flights in 2022 was around 1,203 flights with 6,500 passengers. Requests for private flights varied between businessmen's trips, trips for a certain vacation, medical trips, and official visits, and there are expectations that demand for such flights will be on the rise in the coming period.

Photo of the day



KUWAIT: The waxing crescent moon sets behind the Al-Hamra tower in Kuwait City early on April 27, 2023. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

Revival of Islamic Heritage Society affirms commitment to charity work

KUWAIT: The Revival of Islamic Heritage Society (RIHS) recounted its charity projects across the world during a celebration it held on the occasion of Eid Al-Fitr holiday. A large number of citizens and residents attended the occasion, including a number of former ministers, deputies, in addition to diplomats and political and social personalities in Kuwait.

Head of the society's administrative board, Tareq Al-Eisa congratulated H.H. the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and H.H. the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah on the occasion of Eid Al-Fitr. He expressed his sincere thanks and gratitude to the generous donors, both citizens and residents, who gave away their money for the sake of Allah.

"The society put forward many projects in Ramadan, in which it focused on qualitative projects inside and outside Kuwait, especially caring for poor families by helping them pay their rent, contributing to paying the debts of some debtors and also contributing outside Kuwait through various projects, including health, advocacy and relief projects," Eisa said.

"The society cares about the Holy Quran and the Sunnah. This is evident by our printing of the Quran and its interpretations, translating them and then distributing these translated books around the world. We have translated the Holy Quran in more than seven languages among other Islamic books. Moreover, we paid interest to conducting memorization circles, as we have more than 250 memorization circles abroad," he added.

Eisa affirmed Kuwait's distinction in its humanitarian and relief work worldwide, saying: "Kuwait has always been a center for humanity with its love for doing good deeds and helping people in need since it was founded. It cares about the affairs of Muslims around the world, and follows up on people's needs. Kuwait has given great attention to the afflicted in Syria, Yemen and Turkey who have lost their homes and properties and have been living as refugees. We have been keen to help by constructing homes for them and sponsoring orphans and education."



KUWAIT: This file photo shows a girl receiving a Ramadan food basket during a 2022 RIHS heritage campaign. — KUNA

Eisa also touched on the humanitarian condition in Yemen, which suffers from famine, poverty and homelessness due to the civil war that exhausted the country for more than seven years. "Yemen is a dear neighboring country and Kuwait is keen on keeping up charitable work. In Yemen, we have focused on medical relief and food aid projects through distributing food baskets, as well as focusing on education and providing clean water."



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Deputy FM, KUNA Chief discuss ties

KUWAIT: Director-General of Kuwait News Agency (KUNA) Dr Fatma Al-Salem and Deputy Foreign

Minister Ambassador Mansour Ayyad Al-Otaibi met on Thursday and discussed ways to enhance media cooperation. During the reception at KUNA headquarters in Shuwaikh administrative area, Al-Otaibi praised the significant role played by KUNA in the media field and its coverage of the ministry's events and activities. — KUNA

Special assistance to be given to doctors

KUWAIT: Chairman of Kuwait Medical Association Dr Ibrahim Al-Tawalah said that special assistance will be given to doctors to subscribe to the medical up-to-date platform in cooperation with Al-Dhaman Hospitals Company, adding that this support is up to

85% of the original price and is given for the second consecutive year. He said that the specialized medical up-to-date platform is considered the most famous source of internationally recognized medical research and recommendations. It is overseen by 7,400 scientists and doctors around the world and has more than two million subscribers in the medical field. He said the number of doctors benefiting from this support is around 1,200 in Kuwait. Al-Tawalah thanked Al-Dhaman Hospitals Company for its continued support of doctors in Kuwait.



Renewed air strikes hit Sudan as clock ticks down on truce

Another Kenyan pastor accused of 'mass killing of his followers'

Biden, Yoon warn North Korea of nuclear response to any attack

Move 'aggravates tensions on Korean peninsula': Beijing

WASHINGTON: US President Joe Biden and his South Korean counterpart Yoon Suk Yeol warned North Korea it would face a nuclear response and see the "end" of its leadership if Pyongyang uses its own arsenal.

Speaking at the White House after Oval Office talks during only the second state visit so far in the Biden presidency, the two leaders said the US security shield for South Korea was being strengthened in the face of the nuclear-armed North's aggressive missile tests.

And they made clear that if the isolated, communist dictatorship in North Korea attacks the South or the United States, the response will be devastating.

"A nuclear attack by North Korea against the United States or its allies... will result in the end of whatever regime were to take such an action," Biden told reporters at a joint press conference with Yoon.

Yoon said his priority was to secure peace through "superiority of overwhelming forces and not a false peace based on the goodwill of the other side."

"In the event of a North Korean nuclear attack," he said, Washington and Seoul have agreed to "respond swiftly, overwhelmingly and decisively using the full force of the alliance including US nuclear weapons."

Yoon and Biden on Tuesday visited the Korean War Memorial, which features

life-sized steel statues of US soldiers. Yoon also laid a wreath at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier in Arlington National Cemetery and joined Harris for a tour of a NASA facility near Washington.

China responds

China warned Washington and Seoul against "provoking confrontation" with North Korea on Thursday. "All parties should face up to the crux of the (Korean) peninsula issue and play a constructive role in promoting a peaceful settlement of the issue," foreign ministry spokeswoman Mao Ning said. She urged against "deliberately stirring up tensions, provoking confrontation and playing up threats."

At the summit in Washington, Biden and Yoon agreed that the US security shield for South Korea would be strengthened in the face of the nuclear-armed North's missile tests. Beijing condemned that decision Thursday, saying Washington "ignores regional security and insists on exploiting the peninsula issue to create tension."

"What the US is doing ... provokes confrontation between camps, undermines the nuclear non-proliferation regime and the strategic interests of other countries," Mao said. US moves, she added, "aggravate tensions on the peninsula, undermine regional peace and stability, and run counter to the goal of denuclearization on the peninsula." —AFP



WASHINGTON: US President Joe Biden and South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol pose for pictures onstage during a State Dinner at the White House on April 26, 2023. —AFP

Yoon's 'American Pie' stuns Biden

WASHINGTON: From discussing nuclear war to belting out a beloved hit: South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol's White House visit ended on a high note when he sang Don McLean's "American Pie" to great applause.

Yoon is on a six-day state visit to Washington, where he discussed with US President Joe Biden on Wednesday "the end" of any North Korean regime that used nuclear weapons against the allies.

But the two leaders had more cheerful topics on the agenda at the White House state dinner in Yoon's honor later that day, with the South Korean leader — who is known at home to be something of a karaoke buff — sharing his love of American music.

"We know this is one of your favorite songs, 'American Pie,'" Biden said to Yoon, having pulled him up onto the stage at the end of the evening to listen to singers perform the classic.

"Yes, that's true," the 62-year-old Yoon admitted, saying that he had loved the Don McLean song, released in 1971, since he was at school. "We want to hear you sing it," said Biden.

"It's been a while but..." Yoon responded, offering only token resistance as he took the microphone. Yoon belted out the first few lines of the song a capella, triggering rapturous applause from the crowd and delighting Biden and the First Lady. "The next state dinner we're going to have, you're looking at the entertainment," Biden told the crowd, referring to Yoon. Then he turned to the South Korean president and said: "I had no damn idea you could sing."



WASHINGTON: US President Joe Biden (L) and South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol speak onstage during a State Dinner at the White House in Washington, DC, on April 26, 2023. —AFP

Biden told Yoon that McLean could not be at the White House to join them but had sent a signed guitar, which the US president gifted to the South Korean leader. "Yoon literally tore up the stage and White House!" one Twitter user wrote in Korean in reply to a video of the president singing.

"Yoon has revealed his hidden singing talent,"

another commenter wrote, also in Korean, resharing the video. It is not Yoon's first time singing in public.

On the campaign trail in 2021, he appeared on the famous South Korean TV show "All the Butlers", wowing its celebrity hosts with a sparkling rendition of the K-pop ballad "No one else" by Lee Seung-chul. —AFP

Ukraine receives 98% of promised combat vehicles

BRUSSELS: NATO allies and partners have provided Ukraine with 1,550 armored vehicles and 230 tanks to form units and help it retake territory from Russian forces, NATO chief Jens Stoltenberg said Thursday.

The deliveries, since the start of the war in February last year, represent "more than 98 percent of the combat vehicles promised to Ukraine", Stoltenberg told a news conference.

"In total we have trained and equipped more than nine new Ukrainian armored brigades. This will put Ukraine in a strong position to continue to retake occupied territory," he said.

NATO member countries have also provided anti-aircraft systems and artillery while Poland and the Czech Republic have given Soviet-built MiG-29 aircraft. Thousands of Ukrainian soldiers have been trained on weapons used by NATO.

Stoltenberg emphasized this "unprecedented military support to Ukraine" but cautioned that "we should never underestimate Russia". Moscow was mobilizing more ground forces and was "willing to send in thousands of troops with very high casualty rates," he said.

In the face of what appears will be a prolonged conflict, NATO countries "must stay the course and continue to provide Ukraine with what it needs to prevail", the alliance chief said.

Stoltenberg said that a NATO summit in July in Lithuania would set out plans for a "multi-year program of support" for Ukraine. He also welcomed a conversation Wednesday between Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky and Chinese President Xi Jinping — their first call since Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Beijing says it is neutral in the Ukraine conflict and Xi has never condemned the Russian invasion. The Chinese leader, who made a friendly visit to Moscow last month, has come under increased pressure from Western nations to step in and mediate.

"Maybe this war will end at the negotiating table," Stoltenberg said. But he stressed that "it is for Ukraine to decide what are the conditions for talks and what format any talks should have".

In any case, Stoltenberg said, "any possibility for meaningful negotiations requires that Ukraine has the necessary military strength to send a very clear message to President (Vladimir) Putin that he will not win on the battlefield".

Last week, representatives of NATO members gathered in Ramstein in Germany for talks hosted by the United States to review the defense systems and supplies Ukraine says it needs.

Zelensky has urged Western allies to send modern fighter aircraft and long-range missiles to help repel Russian troops, but NATO countries have so far stopped short of supplying Western-made jets. The Kremlin has sought to portray the involvement of NATO countries in bolstering Ukraine's defenses as the alliance being directly involved in the conflict, something the alliance denies. —AFP

Xi holds call with Zelensky

BEIJING: Chinese President Xi Jinping spoke with his Ukrainian counterpart Volodymyr Zelensky by phone on Wednesday, the first known call between the two leaders since the start of Russia's invasion.

The nearly one-hour discussion, which reportedly included Xi advocating for peace negotiations, was met by Russian accusations that Ukraine was undermining efforts to end the fighting.

Beijing says it is neutral in the Ukraine conflict and Xi has never condemned the Russian invasion, but the Chinese leader has come under increased pressure from Western nations to step in and mediate.

A 12-point "position paper" published by China in February was seen by many Western governments as skewed towards Russia, and a friendly Moscow visit in March by Xi to meet Russian President Vladimir Putin led to widespread criticism.

"I had a long and meaningful phone call with President Xi Jinping," Zelensky said on Twitter. "I believe that this call, as well as the appointment of Ukraine's ambassador to China, will give a powerful impetus to the development of our bilateral relations," he wrote.

Zelensky's spokesman Sergiy Nykyforov said on Facebook that the two leaders had "an almost one-hour-long telephone conversation". Chinese state broadcaster CCTV reported that during the call —



This combination of pictures created on April 26, 2023 shows Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky (left), China's President Xi Jinping (center) and Russian President Vladimir Putin (right). — AFP

which was initiated by Kyiv — Xi told Zelensky that "talks and negotiation" were the "only way out" of the war.

"On the issue of the Ukraine crisis, China has always stood on the side of peace and its core position is to promote peace talks," CCTV reported Xi as saying. According to a readout of the call, Xi said China "will neither watch the fire from the other side, nor add fuel to the fire, let alone take advantage of the crisis to profit".

"When dealing with the nuclear issue, all parties concerned should remain calm and restrained, truly focus on the future and destiny of themselves and all mankind, and jointly manage and control the crisis," Xi said.

China also said it would send a delegation and a "special representative" of its government to Ukraine with the aim of finding a "political settlement" to the conflict.

Open to talks

In reaction to Wednesday's call, the Russian foreign ministry said, "the Ukrainian authorities and their Western minders have already shown their ability to mess up any peace initiatives".

Moscow noted "the readiness of the Chinese side to make efforts to establish a negotiation process." Washington called the engagement a "good thing".

"Now, whether that's going to lead

to some sort of meaningful peace movement or plan or proposal, I just don't think we know that right now." White House national security spokesman John Kirby told reporters.

Brussels also welcomed the talks. "It is an important, long overdue first step by China in exercising its responsibilities as a member of the UN Security Council," said Commission spokesman Eric Mamer.

France said it "encourages all dialogue" that can "contribute to a resolution of the conflict" that is "in line with the fundamental interests of Kyiv" and international law, said a French presidential official, asking not to be named. —AFP

International

Another Kenyan pastor accused of 'mass killing of his followers'

Authorities shut down church, evacuate 100 people 'holed up' at premises

NAIROBI: Kenya on Thursday said that one of the country's highest-profile pastors would face charges over the "mass killing of his followers" just days after the discovery of dozens of bodies linked to another church.

Ezekiel Otero, the head of the New Life Prayer Centre and Church, "has been arrested and is being processed to face criminal charges related to the mass killing of his followers," Interior Minister Kithure Kindiki said in a statement.

"The said church has been shut down. The over 100 people who were holed up at the premises have been evacuated and will be required to record statements," he added.

Otero's arrest comes on the heels of an ongoing investigation into Paul Mackenzie Nthenge, the cult leader accused of the deaths of 98 people linked to his church.

Police have not linked the two cases, and authorities have not provided further details about the nature of the allegations against Otero or his church.

Otero, dressed in his signature all-white garb and clutching a Bible, was transferred from the coastal town of Malindi where his church is headquartered to the regional police headquarters in Mombasa for questioning. A wealthy televangelist who draws huge crowds — his church south of Malindi can seat 40,000 — Otero claims that "holy" scraps of cloth sold at his mega-rallies can heal sickness.

The government had promised a crackdown on fringe religious denominations after the discovery of

dozens of bodies over the past week on a property near Malindi belonging to Nthenge.

The taxi driver-turned-preacher is accused of urging his followers to starve themselves to death as a path to God in a case that shocked the nation. At least 22 people have been arrested over the gruesome saga so far. More than half the bodies unearthed by investigators were of children, and police fear the death toll could rise as their search widens. Kindiki had described the case as "the clearest abuse of the constitutionally enshrined human right to freedom of worship."

But efforts to regulate Kenya's dizzying array of churches and ministries have failed in the past, despite high-profile incidents of cults and rogue pastors being involved in crime. Questions have emerged about how Nthenge was able to preach despite attracting police attention six years ago.

He was arrested in 2017 on charges of "radicalization" after urging families not to send their children to school, saying education was not recognized by the Bible. Nthenge was arrested again last month, according to local media, after two children starved to death in the custody of their parents.

He was released on bail of 100,000 Kenyan shillings (\$700) but surrendered to police after a raid on his property in the Shakahola forest uncovered bodies. Nthenge is due to appear in court on May 2. — AFP



MALINDI: The local spiritual leaders from Kaya-Giriama ethnic group wait for the transport to visit the mass-grave site in the forest in Shakahola, outside the coastal town of Malindi, on April 24, 2023. — AFP

Thai woman charged with killing 13 people

BANGKOK: Thai police have widened their investigation into a woman accused of a spate of cyanide poisoning murders, with officers on Thursday raising the number of victims to 13 and charging her with premeditated murder.

Sarat Rangsiwuthaporn, who is married to a senior policeman, was arrested on Tuesday over nine alleged murders which took place over several years.

Police believe money was the motive in the killings but said that Sararat — who is four months pregnant — has previously been diagnosed with psychiatric issues.

Officers were now investigating at least 13 suspicious deaths dating back to 2020, deputy national police chief Surachate Hakpam said Thursday. "She has been charged with premeditated murder," he told reporters in Bangkok.

Police have not specified how many murders Sararat has been charged with, but they say she denies all the allegations against her. Police have also expanded the geographic area they are investigating to five provinces, most to the west of Bangkok.

Officers found a substance at the woman's home that authorities believe to be cyanide, and suspect she poisoned the victims' food and drink. Following routine health checks in prison, the Department of Corrections confirmed Thursday that Sararat is four months pregnant and experiencing stress, blurry eyes and headaches.

Investigators have interviewed her police officer husband and other witnesses. Police described how a fourteenth person narrowly escaped death after vomiting up poisoned food. — AFP

Finland's PM designate to seek far-right alliance

HELSINKI: Conservative politician Petteri Orpo, who won Finland's April general election, said Thursday he plans to form a coalition government that includes the far-right runner-up Finns Party.

The Finns' inclusion in negotiations raises the possibility of the anti-immigration party, which took just over 20 percent of the vote, could for the second time join a ruling coalition.

Formal talks open on May 2 between Orpo's National Coalition Party, the Finns Party, the Swedish People's Party and the Christian Democrats, Orpo told reporters.

The negotiations, which typically take around a month, are expected to be difficult, as the Finns Party's hard line on immigration and skepticism towards Finland's climate targets has caused friction among the right-wing parties.

If Orpo succeeds in drafting a government program supported by all four parties, the coalition would secure a majority of 108 seats out of 200 in parliament. In March, Swedish People's Party leader Anna-Maja Henriksson, said her party would not participate in a government that pursues the policies of the Finns Party, emphasizing the importance of attracting labor migrants to Finland.

While other political parties view immigration as a solution to Finland's ageing populace, the Finns Party has taken a more stringent stance. It attributes increasing juvenile crime to migrants and has actively campaigned against immigration.

Finns Party leader Rikka Purra said Thursday that immigration was "a threat to both security and the economy," but the party was open to "negotiation". "There are certainly things we can agree on in the area of labor immigration," she told reporters.



HELSINKI: Finland's National Coalition party chairman Petteri Orpo (second left) gives a press conference at the Parliament House in Helsinki, Finland on April 27, 2023. — AFP

The Finns Party served in a center-right government with the National Coalition from 2015 to 2017 but that collaboration ended when the Finns Party split into two groups — a moderate and a hardline faction.

Currently, only the hard-liners remain in parliament, having become the second-largest party in the 2019 election. The Finns Party's objectives include eventually exiting the EU and postponing Finland's aim of achieving carbon neutrality by 2035.

Political scientist Mikko Majander from the Magma thinktank told AFP that "a heated debate is expected" in the negotiations to hammer out a government program. "Purra must have a clear influence on immigration policy. In exchange for that, they can compromise on other issues," he said.

However, he noted that "it is not set in stone that a government can be formed" with these four parties. Despite their differences, Orpo said he believed the parties could reach an agreement. "There are of course differences between the parties. But following (preliminary) negotiations we collectively feel that the issues can be resolved," he said.

Orpo's alternative would have been cooperation with outgoing Prime Minister Sanna Marin's Social Democrats. A "blue-red" government with the Social Democrats and the National Coalition — not uncommon in Finland — would have also been easier for smaller parties to join.

But Orpo said the former government partners' differences on economic policy were "so great that the parties now selected are much closer to each other." Analysts also noted that a blue-red government excluding the Finns could have raised democracy issues, given their strong election showing.

Orpo's election campaign focused primarily on calls for budget austerity, and he now appears willing to compromise in other areas to secure support for his six-billion-euro (\$6.5 billion) savings plan. Marin had slammed his plan as "taking from the poor to give to the rich".

While the Social Democrats would have been a "tried and tested" partner, the Finns Party could prove "unpredictable," Majander said. He noted that its voter base could have a hard time accepting budget austerity. — AFP

Three aid workers abducted in Nigeria

ABUJA: Three humanitarian workers and two contractors have been abducted in northeast Nigeria where the military is fighting a jihadist insurgency, aid officials said Thursday. Both Boko Haram, which kidnapped hundreds of schoolgirls in Chibok in 2014, and ISWAP, linked to the Islamic State group, operate in the region.

The Nigerian aid workers were with FHI 360, a US non-profit organization.

"FHI 360 condemns in the strongest possible terms the abduction of three staff members and two contractors in Ngala, Nigeria," Christy Delafield, an FHI 360 spokesperson said in a statement.

Ngala is located in Borno State, near the border with Cameroon. "We are extremely concerned for our colleagues and call for their unconditional, immediate and safe return," she added.

Delafield said the staff members were working to provide life-saving medical care in the region. "We are not sure who is responsible," said another humanitarian official who asked to remain anonymous. — AFP

Kuwait calls on UNSC to condemn...

Continued from Page 1

Amash called for defending the sovereign right of the State of Palestine over the occupied city of East Jerusalem. The Zionist entity, the occupying power, has no right or sovereignty over the occupied city of Jerusalem and its sanctities, he emphasized. Condemning the illegal settlement activities, the demolishing of Palestinian homes and confiscating of lands, he said that the current Zionist government is one of the most extreme in the last decade. "How can we speak about peace with such an occupation government that adopts extremism and violence, discrimination and apartheid as a doctrine and means of governance?" he wondered.

Meanwhile, Kuwait affirmed the necessity of limiting the use of the right of veto, urging for using it responsibly rather than abusing it. A statement relayed by First Secretary Fahad Hajji to the UN's

General Assembly added Kuwait had joined a number of countries in what is called the veto initiative. The veto initiative, ratified a year ago on April 26, 2022, stipulates that "its president shall convene a formal meeting within 10 working days of the casting of a veto by one or more permanent members of the UNSC and hold a debate on the situation as to which the veto was cast".

As an Arab nation, clarified Hajji, Kuwait has suffered for decades the abuse of the veto right and its dimensions and ramifications. A year after its ratification, the initiative contributed significantly to bolstering accountability and transparency in the UN's bodies, Hajji said. This initiative, he illustrated, granted member states the opportunities to voice perspectives and engage in constructive debates.

He further added that this is but one of many initiatives Kuwait supports concerning the veto right as it is a signee of the code of conduct, which vows to guard draft resolutions countering crimes against humanity, genocide and war crimes from objections. The Kuwaiti representative asserted that the exceptional privilege of veto is a responsibility first and foremost. — KUNA

The Western measures add to ones already taken over Tehran's hardline response to protests that rocked Iran since the September death in custody of Mahsa Amini, 22, after her arrest for an alleged breach of strict dress rules for women. Iran later announced countermeasures, including financial sanctions and entry bans, targeting EU and UK individuals and entities for "imposing and exacerbating cruel sanctions".

Tensions have escalated since 2018 when the US withdrew from the multinational accord that froze Iran's nuclear program. Marathon talks to restart the accord have stalled. In July 2019, the Revolutionary Guards seized the British-flagged oil tanker Stena Impero in the same waterway for allegedly ramming a fishing boat, and released it two months later. In 2021, Iran released a South Korean oil tanker it had held for months amid a dispute over billions of dollars seized by Seoul. Last May, Iran also seized two Greek oil tankers. — AFP

Erdogan unveils nuclear plant in...

Continued from Page 1

while hopping between five cities for rallies and public project launches at the start of the week. Health Minister Fahrettin Koca said on Thursday that Erdogan had "infectious gastroenteritis" — a short-term illness caused by the inflammation of the digestive tract.

But the scare forced Erdogan to cancel events on Wednesday and then stay at home instead of traveling to the Mediterranean coast for Thursday's grand opening of Turkey's first nuclear power plant. The video appearance represented Erdogan's effort to project health and vigor at one of the more vulnerable moments of his two-decade rule.

But he looked wan and visibly frail as he addressed Putin and the nation from behind his presidential desk. "Our country has risen to the league of nations with nuclear power, albeit after a 60-year delay," Erdogan said in prepared remarks. Erdogan is known for his love of campaigning and embrace of political fights. Polls suggest either that he is running neck-and-neck or losing against opposition leader Kemal Kilicdaroglu in Turkey's most momentous election in decades.

His Islamic-rooted party's control of parliament through an alliance with a far-right group is also under threat. Erdogan had used his rallies to launch fierce attacks at the opposition and portray himself as a man who gets the job done. That image has been shaken — and his office is fighting back.

The president's powerful media director Fahrettin Altun posted screen shots on Twitter of Chinese state media and some popular accounts speculating about Erdogan's condition being more serious than officially reported. "We categorically reject such baseless claims regarding President Erdogan's health," Altun wrote. "No amount of disinformation can dispute the fact that the Turkish people stand with their leader and Erdogan and his AK Party are set to win the May 14 elections." — AFP



ANKARA: Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan delivers remarks to mark the delivery of nuclear fuel to the country's first nuclear power plant. — AFP

Rumors about Erdogan's health have been circulating since he underwent two gastrointestinal surgeries in 2011 and 2012. The operations left him with a slight hitch in his gait that appears to have fed some of the social media speculation. Turkey does not publicize the results of its leaders' health evaluations and it is illegal to "insult the president".

Thousands of people have been prosecuted for the offence — punishable by either a fine or a jail term of up to four years. Turkey's main opposition leaders all quickly tweeted messages wishing Erdogan a speedy recovery. Erdogan's video linkup with Putin unveiled a project that Russia began building during a chill in Ankara's relations with its Western allies in 2018. Construction of the Akkuyu plant was complicated by sanctions the West imposed on Russia for its invasion of Ukraine.

"Yes, we have certain logistical problems," Akkuyu plant director Sergei Butskikh told reporters on the eve of the launch. "The transportation routes are getting longer. Not all of the shipping companies are able to work with us. So here yes, we feel the sanctions," he added. "But this has not affected the quality of the plant's construction." Erdogan has been one of the few world leaders to maintain good relations with Putin by refusing to sign up to Western sanctions on Russia and trying to mediate an end to the war. — AFP

Iran seizes oil tanker off Oman...

Continued from Page 1

of the world's seaborne oil. Thursday's seizure is just the latest incident in the Strait of Hormuz where ships have been mysteriously attacked, drones downed and oil tankers seized since 2018. "In the past two years, Iran has unlawfully seized at least five commercial vessels sailing in the Middle East," the US Navy said.

The MarineTraffic tracking website last showed the Advantage Sweet, owned by Advantage Tankers, off the coast of Oman. The crude oil vessel had departed from Kuwait and was en route to Houston, it said. On Monday, the US, Britain and the European Union toughened sanctions against the Revolutionary Guards, citing alleged human rights violations.

International

Renewed air strikes hit Sudan as clock ticks down on truce

Fighting claims lives of at least 512 people, wounds nearly 4,200

KHARTOUM: The Sudanese army pounded paramilitaries in the capital Khartoum with air strikes Thursday while deadly fighting flared in Darfur, as the clock ticked down on a fragile US-brokered ceasefire now in its final full day.

Ahead of the expiry of a three-day truce at midnight (2200 GMT), the army said late Wednesday it had agreed to talks in Juba, capital of neighboring South Sudan, on extending it "at the initiative of IGAD", the East African regional bloc.

There have been multiple truce efforts since fighting broke out on April 15 between Sudan's regular army led by General Abdel Fattah Al-Burhan and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF) commanded by his deputy turned rival, Mohamed Hamdan Daglo. All have failed.

The fighting has continued despite the US-brokered ceasefire that took effect on Tuesday, with warplanes patrolling the skies over the capital's northern suburbs as fighters on the ground have exchanged artillery and heavy machinegun fire, witnesses said.

Burhan agreed on Wednesday to the IGAD proposal for talks on extending the truce by a further 72 hours, the army added. The RSF's response to the proposal remains unclear.

At least 512 people have been killed and 4,193 wounded in the fighting, according to health ministry figures, although the real death toll is likely much higher.

The doctors' union said at least eight civilians had been killed in Khartoum alone on Wednesday despite the truce. More than two thirds of hospitals in the country were out of service, the union said Thursday, including 14 that had been struck during the fighting. Beyond the capital, fighting has flared in the provinces, particularly in the war-torn western region of Darfur.

Violence beyond Khartoum

Clashes raged for a second day in the West Darfur capital Geneina, witnesses said, adding

civilians were seen fleeing to the nearby border with Chad. "We are locked up at home and too afraid to go out so we can't assess the scale of the damage," said a resident who asked to remain anonymous for his safety.

"The heavy fighting began from 24 April," he said, confirming severe damage to hospitals and public buildings and looting across the city. On Wednesday the United Nations humanitarian agency said the fighting in West Darfur had disrupted nutrition to "an estimated 50,000 acutely malnourished children".

The violence has trapped many civilians in their homes, where they have endured severe shortages of food, water and electricity. The UN has said as many as 270,000 people could flee into Sudan's poorer neighbours South Sudan and Chad.

Other Sudanese have sought refuge in Egypt to the north and Ethiopia to the east, but both entail long and potentially dangerous journeys overland. Speaking at the Egyptian border, 50-year-old refugee Ashraf called on the warring sides to "end the war ... because this is your own conflict, not that of the Sudanese people".

Cambridge University academic Sharath Srinivasan warned the mass movement of people across Sudan's borders threatened to destabilize already fragile governments in neighboring countries. "If the armed confrontation between these two forces protracts—or worse, if it draws in other armed rebel groups across the country — this could quickly become one of the worst humanitarian crises in the region and risk spilling over," he told US news outlet Politico.

War crimes suspect escapes

Foreign governments have taken advantage of the fragile truce to get thousands of their citizens out but some have warned their evacuation efforts are dependent on the lull in fighting holding. UK Foreign Secretary James Cleverly urged Britons and their relatives in Sudan to use evacuation flights while they are still available before the ceasefire ends.

"Its people are very kind and don't deserve what's happening to them," he said. Hadia Al-Adwani of Egypt spent 16 years in Sudan, where her husband ran a plastics factory, staying through previous periods of turmoil including the protests that led to the army toppling longtime strongman Omar al-Bashir in 2019. This week, however, they decided that trying to ride out the current crisis was untenable. "We left our houses, all our belongings, so for sure we feel as if we are in a nightmare," Al-Adwani said.

Sleepless journey

The fighting in Sudan pits forces loyal to army chief Abdel Fattah Al-Burhan against those backing his deputy turned rival Mohamed Hamdan Daglo, who commands the powerful paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF). At least 459 people have been killed and more than 4,000 wounded, according to UN agencies.

Evacuees began arriving in Saudi Arabia on Saturday, on naval ships that reached Jeddah carrying 150 people including foreign diplomats and officials. On Monday, a C-130 Hercules military plane flew dozens of South Korean civilians to Jeddah's King Abdullah Air Base, and a boat ferried nearly 200 people from 14 countries across the Red Sea from Port Sudan.

Another boat arrived in Jeddah on Wednesday evening carrying around 200 passengers from countries including China, the US, Russia and the United Kingdom, the Saudi foreign ministry said. But the operation completed on Wednesday morning was by far the largest to date, and some passengers were crammed into stairwells for the 10-hour sea voyage.

After what many described as a sleepless night,

ed labor in many areas — to rebuild devastated cities, work in shipyards, steelworks and car plants.

As well as Turkey, Berlin struck deals with other countries to bring in so-called "guest workers" on a temporary basis, including Italy, Tunisia and Greece.

About 870,000 Turks went to Germany under the agreement, which ran until 1973. Hundreds of thousands ended up staying, ushering in major social and demographic changes in Europe's most populous country.

The newcomers had few rights in the early days and faced poor treatment, according to Sargut, who got heavily involved in fighting to improve the lot of his compatriots. The situation improved over the years and many brought family to Germany, but the route to citizenship remained tough.

They had to learn German to a good standard, prove they had integrated into society — and, crucially, give up their Turkish nationality, heart-wrenching for many who still had strong ties to their homeland. Former chancellor Angela Merkel's conservatives have for decades been skeptical about lifting barriers on citizenship, arguing that lax rules would not bring about the integration of newcomers into society.

'Modern citizenship law'

But Germany's coalition government — which took power in 2021 and comprises the left-wing SPD, the Greens and the liberal FDP — has pledged to forge a new "modern citizenship law".

A draft bill under consideration would open up a path for most foreigners to become dual nationals, generally limited to EU and Swiss citizens at present. The planned reforms also include lowering the number of years of residency needed for naturalization to five from eight currently — and even three in some cases. To help integrate those from the "guest worker" generation, language requirements — a stumbling block for some older immigrants who mixed little outside their communities — would be



A handout picture released by the British Ministry of Defence (MOD) on April 27, 2023, and taken on April 25, shows British Nationals onboard an RAF aircraft during an evacuation flight from Sudan to Cyprus. — AFP

A Saudi evacuation ship docked in the Red Sea port of Jeddah Thursday carrying 187 Sudan evacuees from 25 countries, including the United States, Russia and Turkey, the Saudi foreign ministry said. It was the eighth such crossing organized by Saudi Arabia since the start of the fighting and took the total evacuated to the kingdom so far to 2,544, only 119 of them Saudis, the ministry said.

As lawlessness has gripped Sudan, there have been several jailbreaks, including from the high security Kober prison where top aides of ousted dictator Omar al-Bashir were held. Among those who have escaped is Ahmed Harun, wanted by the International Criminal Court for war crimes and crimes against humanity for his role in the 2003 Darfur conflict.

Harun's escape sparked fears of the involvement of Bashir loyalists in the ongoing fighting. The army said the ousted dictator was not among those who escaped but had been moved to a military hospital before the fighting erupted. Daglo's RSF emerged from the Janjaweed militia, accused of carrying out atrocities against civilians during Bashir's brutal suppression of ethnic minority rebels in Darfur in the mid-2000s.

Bashir was toppled by the military in April 2019 following civilian mass protests that raised hopes for a transition to democracy. The two generals had together seized power in a 2021 coup, but later fell out, most recently over the planned integration of the RSF into the regular army. — AFP

Sudan evacuees fear for those left behind

JEDDAH: Earlier this month, Wissam Moustafa travelled from the United States to Sudan to celebrate the Eid al-Fitr holiday with family, only to be caught up in fierce fighting between warring generals.

On Wednesday, after a harrowing overland journey and overnight boat trip across the Red Sea, she joined thousands of civilians who have fled to Saudi Arabia, grateful to have survived but wracked with guilt and worry for those she left behind.

"I had the chance to leave, not like my sisters," said a tearful Moustafa, who holds an American passport, as she disembarked a hulking commercial ship that transported more than 1,600 civilians to the coastal Saudi city of Jeddah. "I don't know whether they will be able to get out."

The arrivals on Wednesday represented more than 50 countries, ranging from the Philippines to Zimbabwe and from Ireland to Nicaragua, according to a Saudi foreign ministry statement.

Whether they had spent only a short time in Sudan or built lives there over many years, they all voiced concern for what would become of friends, family and colleagues who remain in the country.

Conditions are harsh, amid urban combat and acute shortages of food, water, fuel and medicine. Bilal Al-Ayoubi, a 37-year-old Lebanese national, had only been in Sudan for a short time before he had to flee. He said he felt "very close to it".

Turks in Germany hope for 'modern' citizenship law

FRANKFURT: Sener Sargut is from Turkey but has lived in Germany for over six decades, is married to a German woman and speaks the local language fluently. Yet the 80-year-old does not hold German nationality, as taking up citizenship of his adopted homeland would mean giving up his Turkish passport.

But that could be set to change. Reforms under consideration could end Germany's restrictive nationality laws and open the door for people from more countries to become dual citizens, including those from the large Turkish community.

"I often thought about getting German citizenship but then I always held off because I would have to give up Turkish citizenship," Sargut told AFP from his home in Frankfurt. "I did not want to do that."

The pensioner, a founder of TGD, a non-profit group that advocates for Germany's Turkish community, says he is "outraged" that change has been so slow — but is optimistic it could finally happen.

"It would be a good step, not just for us, but for the country itself," said the father of two, who spent years as head of department at an education center. German's coalition government is engaged in talks over the plans and there have been positive signals that an agreement could soon be reached.

'Guest worker' influx

Sargut arrived in Frankfurt in 1959 from Istanbul to study, two years before an agreement was signed paving the way for a huge number of Turks to move to work in Germany. Germany was still getting back on its feet after World War II and desperately need-



JEDDAH: Saudi Navy sailors assist an elderly woman who has been evacuated from Sudan to disembark off a ferry passenger ship after arrival at King Faisal navy base in Jeddah on April 26, 2023. — AFP

the haggard-looking group was called country by country to retrieve their bags and go ashore, where they were greeted by Saudi soldiers who handed them plastic-wrapped pink and red roses.

Syria said "hundreds" of its nationals had been evacuated from Sudan by Saudi Arabia, and some Syrians were among the passengers who arrived Wednesday morning.

Many had fled to Sudan after civil war erupted in their country in 2011. They described a sense of shock that they were fleeing conflict yet again.

"We left our country because of the war and we reached another country which is also facing war. This experience, which we have lived twice, is very difficult," said 35-year-old Batool, who gave only one name. — AFP



FRANKFURT: Sener Sargut shows his Turkish passport and his German resident ID card at his home in Frankfurt am Main, western Germany, on March 27, 2023. — AFP

ceased. The impact on the Turkish community could be potentially huge, affecting up to one million people, according to TGD.

Germany, with a population of around 84 million, is home to some 2.8 million people with a Turkish background, according to statistics. The planned citizenship overhaul was mentioned in a sweeping agreement signed when the coalition government was formed.

The changes, it said, are aimed at better reflecting the social make-up of modern Germany — a "diverse, immigrant society". There are also economic considerations. Europe's biggest economy is trying to attract foreign workers to plug acute labor shortages, and is keen to make itself a more attractive destination. The FDP had initially expressed reservations about the plans but recently there have been signs of progress. In a recent interview with RND media group, Justice Minister Marco Buschmann of the FDP outlined some of his party's demands — but also said he was "optimistic" a deal could be agreed soon. — AFP

Turkey border guards torture Syrians: HRW

BEIRUT: Human Rights Watch on Thursday accused Turkish border guards of shooting, torturing and using excessive force against Syrians seeking to flee their war-racked country into neighboring Turkey.

It urged Ankara to investigate border guards, hold those responsible for "grave human rights violations, including unlawful killings" to account, and end "longstanding impunity for these abuses".

"Turkish border guards are indiscriminately shooting at Syrian civilians on the border ... as well as torturing and using excessive force against asylum seekers and migrants trying to cross," the New York-based rights group said in a statement.

Syria's war since 2011 has killed more than half a million people and displaced millions. Syria shares a long border with Turkey, which hosts some 3.6 million registered Syrian refugees, according to the UN refugee agency. "Turkey's generous hosting of large numbers of Syrians does not absolve it of its obligations to respect the rights of others seeking protection at its borders," HRW said. It cited a March 11 incident in which border guards had "intercepted and tortured a group of eight Syrians who had attempted to cross into Turkey... killing a boy and one man" and returning the others to Syria.

"Turkish gendarmes and armed forces in charge of border control routinely abuse and indiscriminately shoot at Syrians along the Syrian-Turkish border, with hundreds of deaths and injuries recorded in recent years," said HRW's Hugh Williamson. — AFP

China forcing Tibetans into 'training' program

GENEVA: UN experts on Thursday accused China of forcing hundreds of thousands of Tibetans into programs that threaten their cultural identity and could lead to forced labor.

Six UN special rapporteurs voiced concern over claims that the so-called vocational training and labor transfer programs were being used as a pretext to undermine Tibetan religious, linguistic and cultural identity, and to monitor and indoctrinate Tibetans.

"Hundreds of thousands of Tibetans have reportedly been 'transferred' from their traditional rural lives to low-skilled and low-paid employment since 2015, through a program described as voluntary — but in practice their participation has reportedly been coerced," the experts said.

They said the labor transfer program was facilitated by a network of vocational training centers, "which focus less on developing professional skills and more on cultural and political indoctrination in a militarized environment". They found that Tibetans in the program were reportedly prevented from using the Tibetan language and discouraged from expressing their religious identity.

The statement was signed by the special rapporteurs on contemporary slavery, people trafficking, contemporary racism, cultural rights, minority issues and the right to development. Special rapporteurs are mandated by the UN Human Rights Council but are unpaid, independent experts who do not speak for the United Nations. — AFP

Business

FRIDAY, APRIL 28, 2023

US growth cools in first quarter as recession fears deepen

Recent banking sector turmoil and higher interest rates weigh on the outlook

WASHINGTON: US economic growth lost steam in the first quarter as gloomier business investment countered a rise in consumer spending, the Commerce Department said Thursday, while the possibility of a mild recession brews.

Consumption has provided a boost to the world's biggest economy, giving it a strong start to 2023, but recent banking sector turmoil and higher interest rates weigh on the outlook. US gross domestic product rose at an annual rate of 1.1 percent in the January to March period, markedly less than expected and down from 2.6 percent in the final three months last year.

"Compared to the fourth quarter, the deceleration in real GDP in the first quarter primarily reflected a downturn in private inventory investment and a slowdown in nonresidential fixed investment," the Commerce Department said. It added that this was partly offset by an acceleration in consumer spending and an uptick in exports.

The GDP growth figure "reflected increases in consumer spending, exports, federal government spending," along with some forms of investment, said the department in a statement. Economic activity has been easing as the US central bank rapidly hiked its benchmark lending rate to tackle stubborn inflation, while the full fallout from recent financial sector unrest—following the failures of three midsized lenders last month—is yet to be seen.

Next month, Federal Reserve policymakers are expected to unveil another quarter-point rate increase in their quest to bring inflation back in line with a lower target. "Looking ahead, the outlook is uncertain," said Rubeeela Farooqi, chief US

economist at High Frequency Economics. "Policymakers have taken aggressive action to slow down economic activity and lower inflation back towards target," she added.

'Dangerous' to extrapolate

Retail sales bounced in January, likely helped by mild weather, but Ian Shepherdson and Kieran Clancy of Pantheon Macroeconomics cautioned in a recent note that "it would be dangerous" to extrapolate from apparent strength in the first three months.

February and March figures "revealed a lack of momentum, which we expect to persist in the second quarter," they added. In a separate report Thursday, Shepherdson said that consumption could "fall outright" should people respond to a worsening labor market by choosing to save more.

Meanwhile, banking sector stress could bring tighter credit conditions, making it harder for households and businesses to get loans. "The economy barely grew in the first quarter, but it is likely to shrink outright in Q2 and Q3. Welcome to the recession," Shepherdson said, referring to the second and third quarters.

Recent unrest in the banking system and tighter lending standards is expected to result in a more severe recession than anticipated in the second quarter, though this will still be a mild downturn, Ryan Sweet of Oxford Economics told AFP ahead of the latest release.

"Our business cycle indicator shows the economy lost momentum in February and is close to turning negative," he said. While large American banks have



NEW YORK: Traders work on the floor of the New York Stock Exchange in New York City. The stock market opened up slightly high as investors respond to earnings reports from tech companies' after losses on Tuesday following rough economic data and earnings. — AFP

emerged relatively unscathed from recent pressures, "the turmoil may not yet be over and uncertainty is high," said Sweet.

"The economic costs have yet to be fully felt as banks are tightening lending standards and deposits at small banks have plunged," he said. — AFP

Meta surges as earnings beat expectations

SAN FRANCISCO: Shares in Facebook parent Meta surged Wednesday after the internet titan reported it made a profit of \$5.7 billion in the first quarter of this year, beating forecasts after a massive wave of cost-cutting and layoffs. The profit came on revenue of \$28.6 billion and as the number of people using Facebook every month grew to just shy of three billion, an earnings report showed.

"We had a good quarter and our community continues to grow," said Mark Zuckerberg, Meta founder and CEO. "We're also becoming more efficient so we can build better products faster and put ourselves in a stronger position to deliver our long-term vision."

Zuckerberg, who has called 2023 the "year of efficiency," added that artificial intelligence being used at Meta is "driving good results" across its business. Meta shares soared nearly 12 percent to \$233.94 in after-market trades that followed the release of the earnings figures.

The company said the number of advertisements shown across its "family of apps" that includes Instagram increased 26 percent from the same period a year earlier, but the average price per ad slipped. The tech titan ended March with its headcount of employees down to 77,114, with more staffing cuts in the works, Meta reported.

Tech companies across the United States have been laying off workers this year as a reckoning across the sector that started last year continues into 2023. Facebook has taken the most aggressive track among US big tech firms to downsize its staff and has slashed almost a quarter of its global workforce, more than 20,000 jobs in just a few months.

"The year of efficiency is off to a stronger-than-expected start for Meta," said Insider Intelligence principal analyst Debra Aho Williamson. "In this economic environment—and after the disaster that was 2022 -- three percent year-over-year revenue growth is an accomplishment," she added.

Meta had suffered a rough 2022 amid a souring economic climate, which forced advertisers to cut back on marketing, and Apple's data privacy changes, which have reduced leeway for ad personalization. Zuckerberg has referred to last year as "a humbling wake-up call" and said it would be wise to "prepare ourselves for the possibility that this new economic reality will continue for many years."

AI and metaverse

The company is also under pressure for making a huge gamble on the metaverse, the world of virtual reality that Meta believes will be the next frontier online. This to date has proved to be a bad bet with customers so far unenthused by the technology and artificial intelligence, as epitomized by Microsoft-backed ChatGPT, grabbing the attention. Meta's Reality Labs, the division underpinning its metaverse ambitions, reported an operating loss of nearly \$4 billion, a cash bleed that will rattle investors.

"Building the metaverse is a long-term project,"



TOULOUSE: File photo shows a tablet displaying the logo of the company Meta. — AFP

Zuckerberg said on an earnings call. "We remain committed to it." Meta will release a new model of its Quest virtual reality headset for consumers later this year, according to Zuckerberg.

"I'm really excited to show the world all of the improvements and new technology that we have developed," the Meta chief said on the earnings call. Zuckerberg said that along with the metaverse, artificial intelligence is another "major technological wave" being ridden by the tech titan.

AI is put to work handling content and security as well as in Meta's ad platform, and ChatGPT-style innovations are enabling whole new classes of products and experiences, according to the chief executive. "The work happening now is going to impact every single one of our apps and services," Zuckerberg said of AI. — AFP

Strong Microsoft results lift Nasdaq, global bourses fall

NEW YORK: Blockbuster tech earnings lifted the Nasdaq on Wednesday, but recession fears weighed on other major United States and European indices while pushing oil prices lower.

The main US indices, which had fallen sharply Tuesday, initially recovered a day later following results by Google parent Alphabet and Microsoft that topped expectations. While the tech-rich Nasdaq advanced 0.5 percent, both the Dow and S&P 500 finished the session lower. Shares in Microsoft jumped 7.2 percent after it reported quarterly profits of \$18.3 billion behind strong contributions from its cloud computing and artificial intelligence offerings.

The surge came despite UK regulators blocking Microsoft's \$69-billion takeover of US video game giant Activision Blizzard. Although Microsoft will appeal, the ruling could signal the deal is on the rocks as EU and US regulators have yet to sign off.

Microsoft on Thursday said the European Union was "more attractive" for businesses than post-Brexit Britain after the latter blocked its vast takeover of video game maker Activision Blizzard on competition fears. It comes also as the deal awaits approval from the EU and United States, with some analysts saying Britain's block could already signal "game over" for the proposed acquisition should Microsoft and Activision fail to win an appeal.

"There's a clear message here: The European Union is a more attractive place to start a business if you want some day to sell it, than the United Kingdom," Smith told BBC radio following the ruling by the UK Competition and Markets Authority.

Briefing.com analyst Patrick O'Hare said "the overall body of earnings reporting work for the March quarter since yesterday's close has been quite good, yet the overall reaction has been quite subdued." Investors kept an eye on the embattled First Republic Bank, which ended nearly 30 percent down after another bruising session. "The concerns about a hard landing (or recession) are deepening and the concerns are largely focused on the banking industry," said Hugh Johnson of Hugh Johnson Economics.

European markets fell while Asian markets turned in a mixed performance following Wall Street losses on Tuesday, with lackluster US consumer data raising concerns about the economic outlook. "Realization is dawning that more ominous clouds are gathering over the US economy, causing fresh nervousness for investors," noted Susannah Streeter, head of money and markets at Hargreaves Lansdown.

Also weighing on sentiment was the question of interest rates, with Sweden's Riksbank on Wednesday hiking its guiding rate by a half-point to 3.5 percent as it tried to rein in double-digit inflation.

Oil prices, meanwhile, tumbled on worries that an economic slowdown will pinch demand, even as weekly US data pointed to strong gasoline demand. The US benchmark West Texas Intermediate finished at \$74.30 a barrel, down 3.6 percent.

"The economy is weakening but it isn't falling off a cliff, so we shouldn't be seeing oil trade near the low \$70s," said Oanda's Edward Moya. "China's recovery is not materializing, and US demand is weaker, so \$100 oil won't be happening," he said. — AFP

Boeing reports another loss in first quarter

NEW YORK: Boeing reported a bigger-than-expected quarterly loss Wednesday due to persistent quality control problems with its jets, but shares rallied as it maintained key medium- and long-term targets. The company reported a loss of \$425 million, compared with a \$1.2 billion loss in the year-ago period, reflecting the continued drag from supply chain issues across its commercial and defense businesses.

Boeing's revenues came in at \$17.9 billion, up 28 percent from the year-ago period and topping analyst expectations, but under the level of the pre-pandemic 2019 first quarter. The planemaker affirmed its full-year outlook for operating cash flow, a key metric, and for 737 plane deliveries in 2023.

Boeing executives also expressed hope of a resumption of new plane deliveries to China after regulators in the huge market released an aircraft evaluation report for the 737 MAX. "We are progressing through recent supply

chain disruptions but remain confident in the goals we set for this year, as well as for the longer term," said Chief Executive Dave Calhoun.

Boeing's commercial plane program has been beset with various manufacturing and quality control issues that have limited deliveries for its top-selling jets, the 737 and 787. On defense, Boeing disclosed a new \$245 million charge of one-time costs connected to the KC-46A Air Force tanker, also related to supplier issues.

The most recent issue in the commercial business stems from a supplier part problem on the 737 that will affect near-term deliveries. However, Boeing still expects to increase production of the plane later in 2023 and again in the 2025/26 timeframe, the company said in a press release. The latest 737 issue will mean some planes won't reach airline customers in time for the summer travel season, Calhoun said. "It costs some real money, so apologies everyone," Calhoun said on CNBC, while adding that the company had anticipated some delays when it set earlier targets.

Calhoun said the cadence of the MAX production ramp-up is determined by supply chain challenges rather than demand. He said the current travel market is "in a demand-crazy moment." Costs have also been elevated due to rework needed on un-



ARLINGTON: File photo shows a Boeing 737-A during the presentation of Boeing's ecoDemonstrator program at Washington Reagan National Airport in Arlington. — AFP

delivered 737 planes that accumulated during the 20-month grounding of the jet following two fatal crashes.

Boeing had about 450 planes in storage at one point after the MAX was finally cleared to resume flights in November 2020. The number is currently in the low-200s, Calhoun said.

China deliveries ahead?

While the company's forecasts do not incorporate a resumption of new deliveries to China, "we are working very hard to regain China," Calhoun told analysts on a conference call. Chinese airlines have resumed flights on

the MAX after Beijing finally cleared the jets back for service much later than other regulators.

However, a hefty portion of the built 737 MAX planes still in inventory were originally intended for China. Those planes have been in limbo. Calhoun said he was encouraged by the recent publication of a 737 evaluation report by the Civil Aviation Administration of China. Calhoun has previously suggested that Boeing's prospects were tied to the brittle state of US-China relations, but said Wednesday that the planes will be needed to meet surging demand in the country. — AFP

Business

Out of gas in orbit? This US space company is here to help

Satellites' lives are limited by how much fuel they can carry along with them

COLORADO SPRINGS: The US company Orbit Fab is aiming to produce the go-to "gas stations" in space, its CEO tells AFP, hoping its refueling technology will make the surging satellite industry more sustainable—and profitable. The solar panels typically attached to satellites can generate energy for their onboard systems such as cameras and radios, but can't help the orbiting objects adjust their positions, explains Daniel Faber, who co-founded the company in 2018.

"Everything always drifts, and so very quickly, you're not where you needed to be — so you need to keep adjusting, which means you need to keep using up propellant," he tells AFP at the space industry's annual gathering in Colorado Springs, Colorado. Satellites' lives are therefore limited by how much fuel they can carry along with them — at least for now.

"If you can refuel satellites in orbit," Faber says, "you can stop them having to be thrown away" — a model he describes as "crazy" due to their high cost to manufacture and launch. His company envisions sending several large tanks into orbit, each containing up to several tons of fuel. Then smaller, more easily maneuverable vessels will shuttle back and forth between

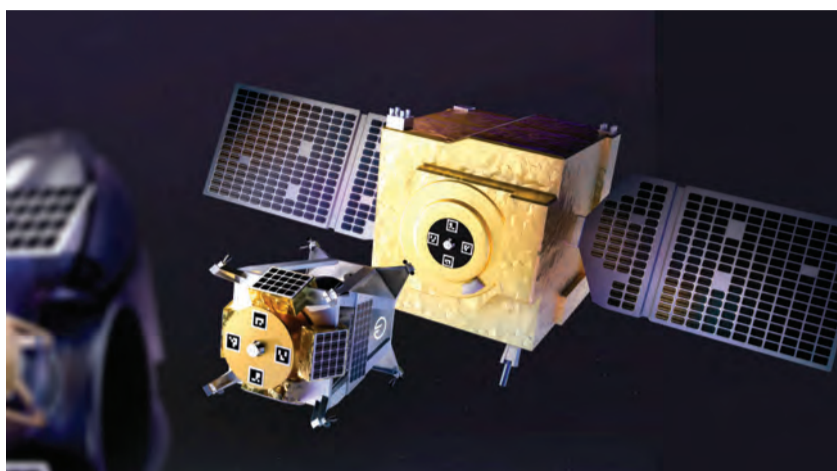
the tanks and satellites — like robotic pump attendants.

Asked what the risks associated with operating such a system in orbit are, Faber is candid: "Everything you might imagine." But he reassures that with lots of testing on the ground, and in orbit, "it's going to be safe." Like cars, satellites hoping to receive additional propellant from Orbit Fab will have to have compatible fuel ports.

Less weight, more profit

Faber says that between 200 and 250 satellites are already being designed to use his company's system. It's a market with room to grow: Some 24,500 satellites have been scheduled for launch between 2022 and 2031, according to the consultancy Euroconsult. Orbit Fab, which employs about 60 people and is looking to hire 25 more, has already launched one tank into orbit and next plans to conduct fuel transfer tests.

In 2019, it proved the feasibility of the system with water-transfer tests at the International Space Station. "Our first contract with the US government is to deliver them fuel in 2025" to Space Force satellites, Faber says. He says they are planning to launch only a couple fuel shuttles to geostationary



COLORADO SPRINGS: This undated image courtesy of Orbit Fab shows an artist's rendition of a "gas station" (L) in space refueling a satellite. — AFP

orbit, where satellites mostly lie in "a single plane around the equator" at a high altitude of about 22,000 miles (36,000 kilometers).

Satellites in low Earth orbit have much different trajectories, and more fuel shuttles will be needed. Another added benefit of in-orbit refueling is the possibility of freeing up the key metric in rocket launches: weight.

Projects which were previously deemed infeasible for being too heavy

might therefore see the light of day. But above all, extending the life of satellites makes them more profitable in the long run. Apart from refueling, companies are also looking at other ways of servicing satellites, with Faber saying that some 130 companies have recently popped up in the sector. These include in-orbit "tow trucks" that can approach satellites in trouble and make repairs, such as helping deploy a solar panel or reorienting an antenna. — AFP

BP faces angry shareholders over climate plans

LONDON: Energy giant BP on Thursday faces a shareholder revolt over its decision to slow its energy transition, with activist investors promising to block the re-election of the head of the board of directors. Some of Britain's biggest pension funds have warned that they will oppose the renewal of Helge Lund's mandate at the annual general meeting in London.

Activist shareholders' group Follow This, which

wants "Big Oil to go green", has also put forward a resolution calling for BP to be more ambitious in its climate objectives. BP in February announced that it expected to boost its profits between now and 2030 by investing more in both renewable energy and hydrocarbons, slowing the pace of its transition.

Environmental group Greenpeace, which only last year was calling BP "the most ambitious" of the global majors, criticised the plans, accusing them of bowing down to investors and governments. Five pension funds have announced that they will vote against Lund's re-election, according to British media.

Among them is Nest, which is also backing Follow This's resolution. "If BP continues on this path we have serious concerns about them reaching their net zero goal and the long-term success of the company," it said. "We want to see them investing more in low-carbon solutions and renewables, instead of new oil and gas sites." Brunel, another pension fund, said it would vote against Lund's re-election to underline its concern about BP's "changes in strategy".

Follow This believes that "a net-zero by 2050 aim is insufficient without a Paris-aligned aim for 2030", referring to the 2016 agreement to limit global warming to below 2C and if possible 1.5C above pre-industrial levels. "We recognise that some shareholders and other stakeholders may have different perspectives on the decisions we take," the BP board said in response to the resolution. "BP has already laid out a strategy, and a net-zero ambition and aims, that the board considers to be collectively consistent with the Paris goals." — AFP

Spain to vote on housing law ahead of polls

MADRID: Spanish lawmakers vote Thursday on a housing bill aimed at capping soaring rents and addressing dire social housing shortages as the government seeks to bolster the right to affordable housing. The bill would cap rent hikes, increase help in high-demand areas, offer more protection for those facing eviction and punish serial property investors who keep housing stock empty, ministers say.

Spain's left-wing government is hoping to fast-track the bill into law before regional and local polls on May 28, seen as a sounding board ahead of a general election expected to be tight. Flagged by Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez as the "first-ever housing law" since Spain's return to democracy in 1975, the bill is part of a reform promised to Brussels in exchange for EU recovery funds.

The government says the legislation aims to meet the needs of those struggling to afford housing while limiting property speculation. "Spain has a huge, very serious problem with housing," Sanchez told lawmakers last week, saying average rents had risen 45 percent between 2014 and 2021, making housing "unobtainable for many people, especially youngsters".

Soaring rents have sparked bitter debate in a country traumatised by the collapse of its housing sector following the 2008 financial crisis, when thousands of families were evicted after being unable to pay their mortgages. Ahead of Thursday's vote, Sanchez unveiled plans to add 113,000 homes to Spain's depleted social housing stock.

But the move was rubbished by the right-wing opposition Popular Party (PP) claiming it failed to address long-term housing problems and the issue of squatting. "A fantastic opportunity for squatters," the PP said, denouncing the bill as making the eviction process "harder and slower", claiming squatting had "risen by 50 percent in recent years" without any government response. — AFP



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KUWAIT BOURSA WEEKLY REPORT

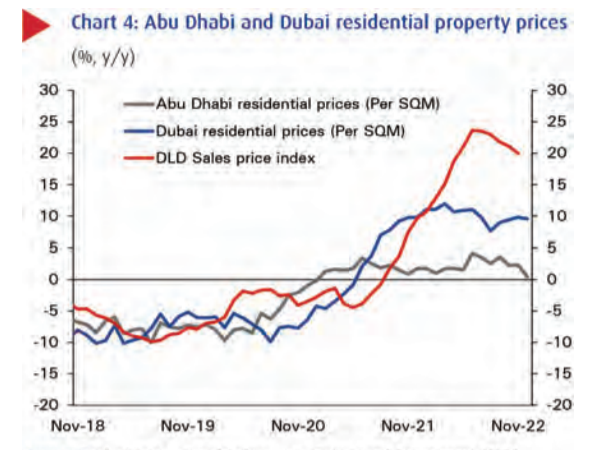
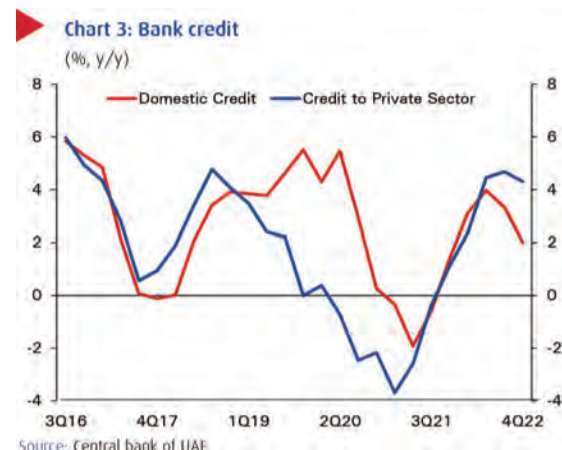
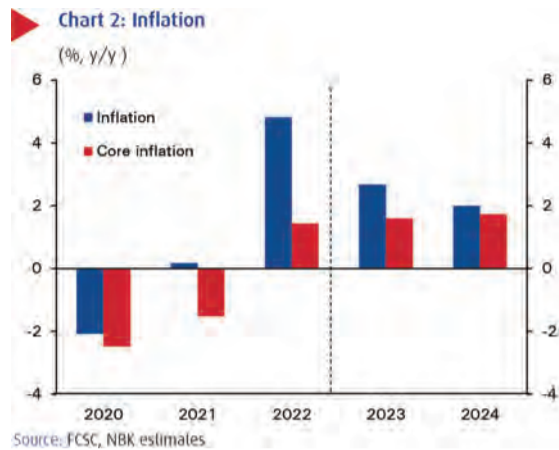
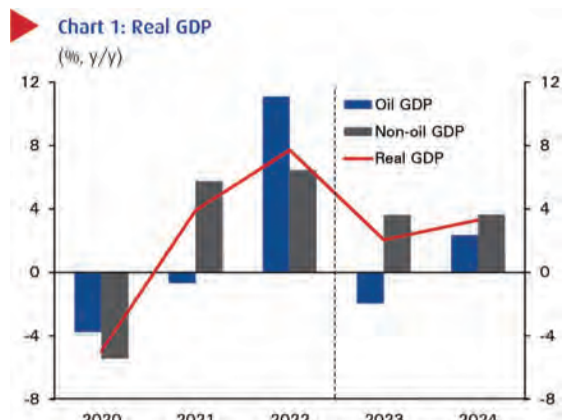
WEEK ENDED ON 27 APRIL 2023

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No.	Ticker	Sector	Price Movement & Performance										Valuation Multiples *				
			Open Price	Close Price	Week High	Week Low	Range	Volume	WTD Change	WTD %	YTD %	Support Level	Resistance Level	P/E	P/B	Yield	Beta
101	National Bank of Kuwait	Banking	994	1,003	1,006	992	14	6,491,894	8	0.80%	-2.31%	952	1,010	15.8	2.02	3.3%	1.02
102	Gulf Bank	Banking	280	281	284	278	6	10,008,476	-1	-0.35%	-6.04%	281	294	15.2	1.32	3.4%	1.30
106	Kuwait International Bank	Banking	185	185	187	184	3	3,178,249	-1	-0.54%	-1.84%	177	186	24.3	0.59	2.1%	1.17
107	Burgan Bank	Banking	220	216	220	215	5	2,191,255	-2	-0.92%	3.56%	212	217	18.0	0.83	3.5%	1.28
108	Kuwait Finance House	Banking	746	744	749	744	5	21,984,538	-1	-0.13%	-0.56%	715	744	25.2	1.86	1.8%	1.16
109	Boubyan Bank	Banking	690	674	695	673	22	5,771,707	-17	-2.46%	-10.47%	649	691	49.3	3.02	0.8%	1.18
201	Kuwait Investment	Financial Services	129	129	130	128	2	711,977	-1	-0.77%	-15.13%	123	129	114.0	0.60	3.8%	1.85
204	National Investments	Financial Services	260	254	262	254	8	3,151,426	-7	-2.68%	7.17%	248	257	23.4	1.03	17.6%	1.86
205	Kuwait Projects	Financial Services	134	130	136	130	6	16,194,232	-3	-2.26%	16.07%	126	132	22.7	0.80	0.0%	0.94
212	Arzan Financial Group	Financial Services	109	105	110	105	5	6,212,437	-4	-3.51%	-6.87%	101	106	10.9	0.77	3.6%	1.13
222	Aayan Leasing and Investment	Financial Services	133	138	139	133	6	12,808,679	4	2.99%	3.76%	128	138	10.3	1.00	5.5%	1.68
252	Al Imtiaz Investment	Financial Services	63.3	62.6	63.7	62	1.7	2,438,702	-0.7	-1.11%	-16.42%	62.0	63.4	-	0.39	14.4%	1.25
401	Kuwait Real Estate	Real Estate	111	115	117	111	6	16,979,582	3	2.68%	6.48%	113	119	14.7	0.84	2.6%	1.10
413	Mabaneeh	Real Estate	760	760	769	750	19	483,269	0	0.00%	-5.00%	755	764	16.5	1.76	1.7%	1.05
418	The Commercial Real Estate	Real Estate	102	102.0	104	100.2	4	8,634,105	1.5	1.49%	3.13%	99.0	104	14.5	0.62	2.9%	0.57
501	National Industries	Financial Services	209	216	218	207	11	4,675,715	7	3.35%	-0.46%	215	221	11.9	0.93	5.3%	1.57
505	Gulf Cable	Industrials	1,227	1,265	1,275	1,204	71	373,203	47	3.86%	4.12%	1,260	1,290	19.8	1.12	4.9%	1.02
506	HEISCO	Industrials	614	640	649	611	38	1,196,767	26	4.23%	4.40%	638	651	20.6	1.64	3.1%	1.00
514	Boubyan Petrochemical	Basic Materials	806	816	819	791	28	576,133	10	1.24%	2.00%	790	820	8.3	1.61	7.4%	0.98
603	Agility	Industrials	614	616	617	611	6	3,656,791	1	0.16%	-14.44%	598	618	23.7	0.98	2.7%	1.57
605	Zain	Telecommunications	564	569	569	559	10	8,540,056	4	0.71%	1.07%	557	571	12.4	1.98	6.2%	0.71
623	Human Soft Holding	Industrials	3,900	3,900	3,910	3,851	59	290,133	2	0.05%	10.80%	3,840	3,930	9.3	3.54	10.3%	0.63
642	ALAFCO	Industrials	185	190	193	185	8	3,471,099	5	2.70%	-6.40%	184	195	-	0.81	0.0%	1.20
654	JAZEERA	Consumer Discretionary	1,770	1,800	1,811	1,750	61	795,147	49	2.80%	-5.26%	1,780	1,820	19.6	10.78	4.5%	1.45
813	GFH Financial Group	Financial Services	78.0	77.2	78.6	75.8	2.8	16,846,257	-1.2	-1.53%	1.58%	76.6	79.5	9.5	0.89	6.3%	1.32
821	Warba Bank	Banking	229	228	230	226	4	2,693,392	-1	-0.44%	-0.07%	221	229	31.8	1.26	1.3%	1.12
823	Mezzan Holding	Consumer Staples	370	379	379	370	9	909,888	10	2.71%	-3.56%	375	380	-	1.12	4.2%	0.48
824	Integrated Holding	Industrials	397	396	405	390	15	2,654,875	0	0.00%	7.03%	390	400	31.8	1.61	2.5%	0.72
826	Shamal Az-Zour	Utilities	172	175	175	172	3	1,371,692	1	0.57%	-6.91%	173	176	13.2	1.64	9.8%	0.48
827	Bursa Kuwait	Financial Services	1,815	1,791	1,835	1,785	50	419,084	-6	-0.33%	-12.72%	1,785	1,820	20.0	5.51	4.7%	1.00
830	AL GHANIM	Consumer Discretionary	881	885	886	880	6	750,381	5	0.57%	9.94%	860	887	12.1	3.31	6.6%	0.29

* As of end of week closing

Dubai's property market booming amid strong economic growth, rising migration



DUBAI: The UAE's robust post-pandemic economic recovery will soften this year on oil production cuts, slightly lower oil prices, tighter financial conditions, a slowing global economy and the fading boosts from both pandemic-era pent-up demand and the Dubai Expo. Still, the country's competitive edge in the region, as well as progressive, pro-growth reforms under the 2050 Strategy and 2031 vision will continue to support fundamentals, while the authorities invest heavily in oil & gas output but also facilitate the energy transition (with a net-zero emissions target of 2050). Oil GDP will however barely increase overall in 2023-24, in line with OPEC+ production restraint. This will leave oil production at 3.1 mb/d by end-2024, well below a projected capacity of 4.3mb/d (and potentially 5 mb/d by 2027), offering plenty of scope for further output rises. Meanwhile, natural gas production is expected to rise 9% by mid-2025 from its current 5.5 bcf/d, as the government targets gas self-sufficiency for the country before 2030. Current gas consumption is around 6.7 bcf/d, though it is forecast to rise in the years ahead.

Non-oil GDP growth has been vibrant, reaching 7.8% y/y in 1H 22, the highest since 2013, benefiting from the tourism sector rebound and strong domestic demand, especially in the trade, transportation and

hospitality sectors. PMI readings pointed to a slowdown in activity in 2H22, albeit with the index still firmly in expansion territory at 54-55 (above 50=expansion) and domestic demand conditions holding up. Although some slowdown in non-oil growth is inevitable this year given the factors mentioned above, we expect a creditable expansion of 3.6-3.7% in 2023 and 2024, down from an estimated 11-year high of 6.5% in 2022. The UAE 2031 vision provides the government's underlying goals for the next decade, aiming to double the country's GDP (to AED3.0 trillion, implying an ambitious annual growth target of 7.2%) including targets for non-oil exports, industry and tourism.

Dubai's property market records another boom

Rising fuel and food prices and the recovery in housing rents pushed inflation to 4.8% in 2022. The central bank has increased policy interest rates, following the Fed, by 475 bps to 4.9% by mid-April 2023, and we expect this – combined with more stable or falling fuel prices – to contribute to lower average inflation of 2.7% this year. The upturn in housing rents – which turned the corner last year after a four-year downturn – is a modest upside risk to inflation. Meanwhile, rising borrowing costs could weigh on private sector credit, which grew by

a moderate 4% last year. Dubai's residential property market is booming with sales volumes reportedly hitting an all-time high in March 2023 and prices up 13% y/y according to CBRE, helped by the economic recovery and spiking foreign demand. Although growth may slow, we see demand in 2023 being sustained by high oil prices, rising migration and tourism, China's reopening supporting overseas buying and potentially easing regional geopolitical uncertainties. By next year, the property rally may run out of steam, though the high number of cash buyers in the recent boom suggests reduced vulnerability for banks and the economy if a downturn occurs.

Strong fiscal position

Overall, public finances remain in good shape, with a relatively small deficit in 2020 amid the pandemic giving way to large surpluses since then as oil prices and tax revenues recovered. Spending growth has also been kept under control averaging only around 1% per year in 2021-2022, reflecting cuts in capex but also the removal of pandemic-related support. The Federal budget (around 15% of consolidated government spending) outlines a 7% increase in outlays for 2023, potentially pointing to a more expansionary stance. However, even with

slightly lower oil prices for 2023, we expect a fiscal surplus of 6.9% of GDP. Revenue diversification will proceed with the introduction of a 9% corporate tax this June. The government has an estimated \$1.1 trillion in assets held in its sovereign wealth funds (ADIA & Mubadala), providing a huge additional fiscal cushion. We also see the external current account achieving large surpluses at 20% of GDP or more in 2023-24, benefitting from high oil prices and government efforts to increase non-oil exports and double re-exports by 2030.

Global economic conditions represent a risk

The UAE's developed infrastructure, the government's persistent reform drive and initiatives to attract direct investment, as well as high oil prices, support the economy's medium-term outlook. Downside risks would include – given Dubai's role as a trade and investment hub – a much weaker global economy, the impact of rising interest rates on GRE contingent liabilities, and a sharp downturn in the domestic property market. However, there is upside risk from higher-than-expected oil prices, more robust growth in the global economy linked to China's reopening, and improved regional diplomatic ties that boost trade.

News in Brief

Barclays profit up

LONDON: British bank Barclays said Thursday that net profit jumped 27 percent in the first quarter, boosted by rising interest rates and non-repetition of exceptional charges. Profit after tax increased to £1.8 billion (\$2.2 billion) compared with the first three months of 2022, when earnings were hit by litigation and bad debt costs, it said in a statement. Barclays was "supported by higher interest rates and the continued investment in our transformation into a next-generation, digitized consumer bank", the lender added. Pre-tax profit rallied 16 percent to £2.6 billion, comfortably beating market expectations and making Barclays the biggest gainer on London's top-tier shares index Thursday. The Bank of England and its global counterparts have ramped up interest rates to tackle sky-high inflation. It comes as Britain endures a cost-of-living crisis, with annual inflation holding stubbornly above 10 percent. Retail banks in turn have raised their own interest rates on loans, including mortgages, further fuelling the squeeze on living costs. — AFP

Volvo Cars revenue grows

STOCKHOLM: Sweden's Volvo Cars on Thursday reported a drop in its first-quarter profits, even as its revenue grew, with the automaker saying it was looking for areas to cut costs. Like other automakers, Volvo Cars has faced supply chain problems and higher costs amid soaring inflation. The Swedish carmaker, majority-owned by China's Geely, reported a 10-percent increase in sold cars to some 162,900 cars, and a 29-percent increase in revenue to 95.7 billion kronor (\$9.3 billion). Despite this, the company's net profit fell to 3.98 billion kronor, compared to 4.5 billion a year earlier. The company said its efforts to reduce costs had started to materialize in certain areas but said it might have to look to further cut expenditure. — AFP

AstraZeneca profit soars

LONDON: British drugmaker AstraZeneca on Thursday posted soaring net profit in the first quarter as significant one-off costs were not repeated. Robust sales of cancer treatments, offsetting a slump in demand for COVID-related treatments, helped also to boost profits after tax. Net earnings leapt almost five-fold to \$1.8 billion (1.6 billion euros) in the three months to the end of March compared with the first quarter of last year, helped also by emerging markets. AstraZeneca had been hit by vast restructuring and legal charges at the start of 2022, linked to its \$39-billion mega-takeover of US biotech firm Alexion. This time around, first-quarter turnover fell four percent to \$10.9 billion on tumbling sales of COVID treatments, in particular vaccine Vaxzevria which will create "minimal" revenue this year. Stripping out COVID-related sales, turnover leapt 10 percent to \$10.7 billion, with cancer treatment sales up 14 percent. "AstraZeneca had a strong start to 2023," group chief executive Pascal Soriot said in the earnings statement. — AFP

Deutsche Bank profit increase

FRANKFURT: German banking giant Deutsche Bank reported an increase in its first-quarter profits Thursday, as it announced new measures to reduce its costs. The lender booked a net profit of 1.3 billion euros (\$1.4 billion) over the first three months of 2023, it said in a statement, an eight-percent increase on the same period last year. Global revenues at the banking group rose by five percent to 7.7 billion euros as major central banks hiked interest rates. Deutsche Bank's non-interest costs rose by one percent over the same timeframe, while the group has said it aims to keep its expenditure essentially stable this year. — AFP

Samsung Electronics logs worst quarterly earnings in 14 years

SEOUL: Samsung Electronics on Thursday reported its worst quarterly profits in 14 years, blaming slowing consumer spending on electronics and a global microchip glut that hit its core memory business. The South Korean company — one of the world's largest makers of memory chips and smartphones — said in a statement that operating profit fell to 640 billion won (\$478.6 million) — down 95 percent from a year earlier.

Its first-quarter net income fell 86.1 percent to 1.57 trillion won, and sales dropped 18 percent to 63.75 trillion won. The company said that "overall consumer spending slowed amid the uncertain global macroeconomic environment".

Samsung also blamed weakening demand for memory chips — which usually generate about half of its profits — and falling chip prices. The firm's chip division reported 4.58 trillion won in losses, its first operating loss since 2009 — when the world was emerging from the

2008 financial crisis. It said this was due to "continued price declines and an increased valuation loss... amid weakening sentiment and continued impacts of inventory adjustments by customers caused by prolonged external uncertainties".

Demand for memory was "expected to gradually recover" in the second half of 2023, it added, "amid projections that customer inventory levels will have declined." The firm is the flagship subsidiary of the giant Samsung Group, by far the largest of the family-controlled conglomerates that dominate business in Asia's fourth-largest economy. The first-quarter drop is the third consecutive margin squeeze for Samsung, which saw a 70 percent fall in operating profits in the fourth quarter on-year. Samsung Electronics shares closed 0.78 percent higher on Thursday.

Scaling back production

Korean chipmakers — led by Samsung — enjoyed record profits in recent years as prices for their products soared, but the global economic slowdown has dealt a blow to memory sales. Demand swelled during the pandemic as consumers bought new computers and smartphones during lockdowns, prompting chip makers to ramp up production.

But demand quickly diminished as lockdowns lifted and ordered an investigation.

The peso stood at 227 to the dollar at the official exchange rate Tuesday, but reaching more than double that on the parallel "blue" market. The slide started last week after several days of pressure on the peso in a period of pre-election uncertainty in a country with exchange controls in place to limit the effects of a financial crisis and rampant inflation of more than 100 percent year-on-year.

Economist Maria Castiglioni told the TN broadcaster the devaluation was partly the result of Argentines seeking "refuge" in the US dollar to protect their purchasing power. Massa said the decision to pay in yuan "improves the perspective of Argentina's net reserves."

It also "allows us to maintain the level of activity, the volume of imports, the pace of trade between Argentina and China and the levels of economic functioning that Argentina needs" following a poor year for domestic agriculture, and thus exports, amid persistent drought. — AFP

Argentina to pay for Chinese imports in yuan

BUENOS AIRES: Argentina will pay for Chinese imports in yuan instead of US dollars in order to preserve its dwindling foreign reserves, Economy Minister Sergio Massa said on Wednesday. The South American country will be able to "program a volume of imports in yuan worth (the equivalent of) more than \$1 billion from next month," Massa said at a meeting in Buenos Aires with China's ambassador Zou Xiaoli.

This would "replace" the use of Argentina's US dollar reserves. Argentina's government on Tuesday accused the country's rightwing opposition of fueling a dramatic erosion of the peso against the dollar,

Baijiu 'godfather' launches year's largest IPO in HK

HONG KONG: China's "godfather of baijiu" launched Hong Kong's largest IPO of the year on Thursday, with the holding company for four of his liquor brands raising around HK\$4.5 billion despite a rocky start to trading.

Wu Xiangdong, founder and chairman of ZJLD Group, earned the godfather moniker after establishing an empire of 12 companies specializing in the fiery tipples. Ranging from around 35 to 55 percent alcohol, the clear liquor packs a searing punch and a flavor profile that has evolved to match the powerfully spicy cuisine of southwestern China, baijiu's heartland.

Its popularity in China has propelled demand, making it the most consumed spirit in the world — and, by extension, its major producers the most valuable distilleries. "As a leading Chinese company focusing mainly on manufacturing middle-to-high grade fragrant liquor, ZJLD will take the listing as a new opportunity to enhance its popularity, to expand production and to ensure quality," Wu said in his pre-listing speech.

He added that the demand for ZJLD's products currently outstripped supply, as the liquor takes a long time to brew. Backed by US investment firm KKR & Co, ZJLD had hoped to raise around HK\$5.5 billion (US\$700 million), but it fell well short of that figure after its share price dropped nearly two dollars, or 16 percent, below the offering price of HK\$10.82.

Even so, its nearly HK\$4.5 billion in proceeds still amounted to more than half of what the Hong Kong stock exchange generated from IPO offerings in the first quarter of 2023. Its total revenues have shown strong growth in the past few years and jumped by nearly 15 percent (US\$850 million) in 2022, making it the fourth-largest privately owned baijiu company, according to ZJLD's prospectus.

Wu will retain control of 69 percent of the company. After establishing in 1998 his flagship Jinliufu Baijiu company — which is not part of the ZJLD portfolio — Wu began acquiring historic distilleries from around the country in the 2000s. The Jinliufu brand shot to fame in China after signing football manager Bora Milutinovic as a brand ambassador during the 2002 World Cup. ZJLD focuses on premium baijiu offerings and is the first Chinese spirits company to successfully list since 2016.

It took ZJLD 70 days to complete the IPO procedure in Hong Kong, a process that normal-

ed and weakened further in the face of soaring inflation and rising interest rates. Samsung said this month it will scale back memory chip production to a "meaningful" level to address the oversupply, an unusual move by the firm, which previously said it would make only small adjustments.

South Korean chip maker SK Hynix and Micron Technology of the United States have also reduced production. Samsung's "active" efforts to get out of the inventory rut were "positively evaluated" considering its effect on market sentiment and demand for memory chips, said a report released by Eugene Investment & Futures.

"Even if the pace of recovery for demand remains slow, the semiconductor industry is highly likely to recover in the second half if cooperation among the chip makers on production cuts goes well," it added.

While solid sales of its new flagship Galaxy 23 smartphones helped offset deficits in the chip sector in the first quarter, analysts expect conditions in the April to July period to worsen and even lead to Samsung's first profit loss since 2008.

The recent drop in profits has not deterred Samsung from making bold investments — in March, it unveiled plans to contribute \$227 billion over the next two decades to building the world's largest chip centre in Yongin, south of Seoul. — AFP



BUENOS AIRES: Handout photo shows Argentine Economy Minister Sergio Massa (R) and Chinese Ambassador to Argentina Zou Xiaoli (L) shaking hands after signing an agreement to activate the swap between Argentina and China in Buenos Aires. — AFP



HONG KONG: ZJLD Group founder and chairman Wu Xiangdong (R) attends the company's listing ceremony at the Hong Kong Stock Exchange in Hong Kong on April 27, 2023. — AFP

ly stretches over three months. "Everything went very smooth here," Wu told AFP, adding Hong Kong was one of the best investment destinations in the world. "It's my favorite city and I have travelled to metropolises like New York and Paris," he said. — AFP

Lifestyle

NAFO

Global Kuwait presents musical spectacular Muze'23

By Sajeev K Peter

NAFO Global Kuwait presented Muze'23-Festival of Music - a musical spectacular on the second day of Eid in Kuwait, featuring Indian singing sensation Sanah Moidutty and her popular band. A pitch-perfect musical evening, the three-hour live concert was a real treat for the music connoisseurs at the packed American International School auditorium in Maidan Hawally.

The 12-member band, led by Sanah, presented an exciting line-up of songs in Carnatic and Hindustani as well as Indian classical, Western and pop music numbers. She was adequately supported by Yadu Krishnan, who delighted the audience with his brilliant rendering of a few popular Sufi and folk music numbers.

Keeping the audience entertained all along the concert, Sanah delivered in four languages — Malayalam, Hindi, Tamil and Telugu — at equal ease and dexterity, while Yadu rendered songs in Malayalam, Tamil and Hindi. The band also featured Bollywood Dhol King Iqbal Azad, who over the years has carved out a niche for himself as a leading percussionist in Bollywood.

A popular singer and songwriter, Sanah has been trained in Carnatic and Hindustani classical music as well as Western vocals and performs Indian classical and pop music. Both singers are hugely popular in the Indian music world as playback singers. A YouTube sensation with huge fan following, Sanah has performed across the world and has also given voice to some of the compositions of music legend AR Rahman. Yadu has travelled the globe with Rahman since 2017 to sing for his Sufi shows.

Hits like 'Tere Darbaar Mein', 'Khwaja Mere Khwaja', 'Kalbanee, Kalbanee' 'Munbe Vaa' and popular Rehman numbers like, 'Mukkala Mukkalla', 'Chol', 'Antha Arabikadoloram' and other numbers were greeted with thunderous applause. 'Arabic Kuthu' from the movie 'Beast' was another hit of



Sanah Moidutty performs during 'Muze'23'.



Sanah Moidutty and Yadu Krishnan during the musical show.



NAFO Global office-bearers and dignitaries during the inaugural ceremony.

the show. When the duo rendered some of the evergreen pop numbers and Malayalam folk songs, the audience turned on the flashlights on their smartphones and waved them to the beat of the music.

Sanah was awarded 'Best Singing Sensation' for the year 2017 at the Asia Vision Movie Awards 2017 for the song 'Afeemi' from 'Meri Pyaari Bindu'. As a part of Jammin, a digital music collaboration, Sanah has done a collabora-

tion called 'Ishq Abhi Bhi' with Bollywood composer Clinton Carejo and a collaboration called 'Yaara' composed by A R Rahman.

Muze'23 got off to glittering start with the lighting of the traditional lamp by NAFO President Rajiv Menon, Advisory Chief Vijayan Nair, Program Convener Jayaraj Nair Edathil, Vice President Naveen CP and Vice coordinator of NAFO ladies wing Sajitha Menon. Dignitaries who at-

tended the inaugural event included Mathews Varughese and Pradeep Menon. NAFO also launched its Muze'23 theme music on which a dance performance was choreographed and performed by Team Dillusions and released a souvenir marking the event.

Disney shows 'Indy,' 'Little Mermaid' as legal battle looms

Disney may be embroiled in legal battles and layoffs, but the Hollywood studio stuck strictly to the script Wednesday as it unveiled footage from new films including "Indiana



The Disney logo celebrating 100 years is displayed on stage during CinemaCon 2023 Disney studios presentation at Caesars Palace in Las Vegas, Nevada.

Jones" and "The Little Mermaid" at CinemaCon. Addressing movie theater bosses at the annual Las Vegas trade summit, executives made no mention of Disney's lawsuit against Florida Governor Ron DeSantis, filed earlier on Wednesday, nor of the thousands of jobs currently being axed.

Instead Tony Chambers, head of theatrical distribution, offered a "whip-cracking tour" of new titles, noting this will be the first year since pre-pandemic that every Disney division -- from Lucasfilm to Marvel -- has movies back in theaters.

Speaking via video to introduce footage of a thrilling car chase, Harrison Ford said "playing Indiana Jones all these years has meant the world to me."

"These films are full of adventure, heart and -- for some reason -- snakes. Why did it have to be snakes?" he joked, referencing the swashbuckling archaeologist's famous phobia.

"Indiana Jones and the Dial of Destiny," the franchise's fifth movie which premieres at the Cannes film festival next month before hitting the-

aters June 30, stars 80-year-old Ford, and Phoebe Waller-Bridge as his goddaughter Helena.

Footage shown at CinemaCon saw the pair racing in an auto-rickshaw through the labyrinthine streets of Tangiers, Morocco in hot pursuit of a villainous Mads Mikkelsen and the mysterious dial.

The duo bicker throughout the high-speed chase, with Indy telling Helena her father would be disappointed that she is "engaged to a mobster," and she hitting back that he is an "ageing graverobber." The movie, billed as the franchise's finale, is directed by James Mangold, who oversaw the Oscar-winning racing drama "Ford v Ferrari" ("Le Mans '66").

CinemaCon offers studios the chance to dazzle movie theater owners with their upcoming movies and stars, but Disney's pared-back presentation only featured one actress in-person.

Melissa McCarthy introduced a teaser scene from "The Little Mermaid," Disney's latest live-action remake, out May 26, in which she plays Ursula.

Dubbing the sea witch "one of Disney's most delicious and iconic villains," McCarthy presented footage of musical number "Poor Unfortunate Souls," in which Ursula manipulates Ariel into a risky deal to live as a human for three days. "She's dishy, she's a conniving broad. Maybe that's why I relate, I don't know," joked McCarthy.

'Very timely'

Disney announced that a "very timely" sci-fi thriller in which humans battle artificial intelligence in the distant, post-apocalyptic future has been renamed "The Creator," and will be released in September.

Other movies on show included Pixar's "Elemental," Kenneth Branagh's latest Poirot adventure "A Haunting in Venice," and new theme park ride adaptation "Haunted Mansion," starring Owen Wilson.

In the Marvel superhero series, "Guardians of the Galaxy Vol. 3" releases in May, and "The Marvels" in November. Sports comedy "Next Goal Wins," also set for November, follows the true story of American Samoa's disastrously poor international soccer team.

And finally that month, "Wish" will mark Disney's 100th year with "an original animated musical adventure that draws inspirations from the classics."

It stars Ariana DeBose as a young woman in a magical kingdom "just off the Iberian Peninsula," where "wishes actually do come true."

The presentation comes as Disney has laid off thousands of workers this week, under previously announced plans to seek savings by axing 7,000 roles, as streaming subscribers decline.

The studio is suing DeSantis for his administration's takeover of its theme park district, calling it "a targeted campaign of government retaliation." CinemaCon runs until Thursday. —AFP



Tony Chambers, Executive Vice President, Head of Theatrical Distribution of Disney Media and Entertainment Distribution, announces the movies to come on stage at Walt Disney Studios during CinemaCon, the official convention of the National Association of Theatre Owners, at The Colosseum at Caesars Palace. —AFP photos



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Lifestyle

Black cowgirls gallop on in face of US rodeo stereotypes



George Maxfield watches his team with Qur'an Harrod as Catch the Smoke rodeo team members Kaycha Harrod, Chymae Harrod, and Dnaysha Butler practice in Brandywine, Maryland.—AFP photos



Ryan Jackson rides after losing her hat while practicing rodeo events at the Jackson family's ranch in Upper Marlboro, Maryland.



Morissa Hall prepares her horse before a barrel race during a local competition, part of the National Barrel Horse Association.

Guiding her brown mare around the arena at breakneck speed, 16-year-old Morissa Hall is extremely focused as she takes on the barrel racing course in the eastern US state of Maryland. The African American cowgirl deftly zig-zags around three barrels, showing off why she is considered -- against the sport's stereotypical whiteness and masculinity -- a rising rodeo star.

"When I very first started, people used to stare at me because I was one of the only few cowgirls of color," Hall told AFP at the event, in which about 70 people are competing.

Spectators watch on from the sidelines, wrapped in blankets against a cold April morning breeze. "It used to make me feel uncomfortable," says the teen-

ager, who earned the title "Rodeo Queen" of the Maryland High School Rodeo Association. A week later in nearby Brandywine, Tempestt Martin practices rodeo events with members of the Black cowgirl group "Catch This Smoke," which she founded with three childhood friends.

Martin says she also faced suspicious glances in her early days competing in local rodeo events. "When you think of a cowboy period, you have the stereotype of a white man that ride horses," the 23-year-old says. The latest recruit to the group, 36-year-old Brittaney Logan, also wants to push back against a misconception that "Black girls don't ride." "We're out here. We've always been and I'm just glad that we can bring exposure to it," she adds.

\$50,000 a year

Historian Kenneth Wiggins Porter notes that after the Civil War, a quarter of cowboys driving cattle in the American West were Black.

Logan says that they'll even go to McDonald's on horseback to bring visibility to Black riders.

to bind three legs of a goat (goat tying). All this as fast as possible under the sharp eye of their coach, their father.

Corey Jackson, who also has two sons competing in rodeos, admits the sport is "not cheap." He estimates they spend about \$50,000 a year on rodeos, from entry fees to competitions to horse maintenance. "That may be part of the reason why there are not many African American families that compete in rodeo in the east coast," he says.

'Monumental'

Horses can cost anywhere from \$5,000 to \$50,000 to buy, depending on their age and level of training.

Hall's father and coach, Morse Hall, says he would "love to see her go on and do it professionally," but concedes there are financial barriers. "I can't necessarily afford to get her the kind of horse that will make her a champion," he says, adding: "We'll do the best we can." He says it would be "monumental" to see Morissa become the first young woman of color to qualify for the top US event, the National Finals Rodeo. The Jacksons' father explains that the sport, with such a steep learning curve, is one of the hard-



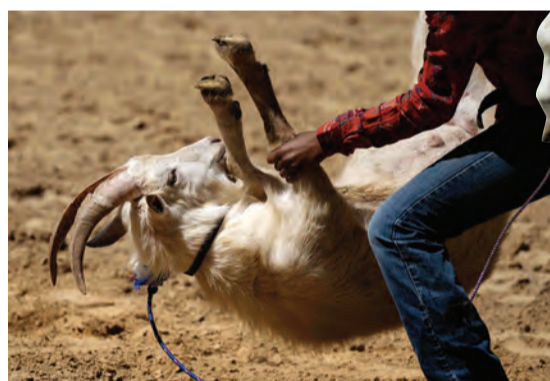
Dnaysha Butler talks about relay racing to Qur'an Harrod as members of Catch the Smoke rodeo team practice.



Reagan Jackson rests after practicing calf roping at the Jackson family's ranch in Upper Marlboro, Maryland.



Dylan Jackson pulls a fake calf while Morissa Hall practices calf roping at the Jackson family's ranch.



Ryan Jackson wrestles a goat while tying it at the Jackson family's ranch in Upper Marlboro, Maryland.



Qur'an Harrod rides a horse while members of Catch the Smoke rodeo team practice in Brandywine, Maryland.

"I want Black women, especially to see that this is here. It's available." The five women are training in intermittent rain to compete in September in a relay race at the Bill Pickett Invitational Rodeo, a touring all-Black rodeo that draws thousands of people each year. Also attending the Bill Pickett rodeo are Reagan and Ryan Jackson, 12-year-old twins who have already won several competitions in Maryland and neighboring Virginia.

The pair practice regularly with Hall on the Jackson family farm in Upper Marlboro, a small, leafy Maryland town less than an hour southeast of the nation's capital.

On their horses, they zigzag between six poles (known as pole bending), capture calves with a lasso (breakaway roping) or jump from off their horses

est to break into. "If you're not born into it... its almost impossible," he says. That gives white riders competing in rodeo "a head start," according to Logan.

"A lot of them grew up in show business," with parents who themselves are sponsored cowboys or cowgirls, she notes. "They had the money for the land and things like that, so we are slightly behind."

Nevertheless, she says confidently, "we're gonna be right there. We're getting sponsorship, we're getting recognition now." Martin is also sure of Black cowgirls' abilities to "beat or break records." "I believe that we can do it," says the "Catch This Smoke" founder, with a beaming smile.—AFP



Morissa Hall rides her horse during a local competition, part of the National Barrel Horse Association.



Brittaney Logan and Dnaysha Butler practice relay racing at members of Catch the Smoke rodeo team practice in Brandywine.



Morissa Hall competes a barrel race during a local competition, part of the National Barrel Horse Association, at Triple Creek Farm in Lothian, Maryland.

UK gallery and Getty museum acquire Reynolds masterpiece

Britain's National Portrait Gallery on Tuesday announced that it had raised tens of millions of pounds to help keep one of the country's most celebrated paintings on public display.

The central London gallery said it had garnered £25 million (\$31.2 million) of the £50 million required to jointly acquire Joshua Reynolds's 1776 masterpiece "Portrait of Mai (Omai)".

Additional funding has come from the National Heritage Memorial Fund, the Art Fund and the Getty arts organisation in the United States.

"Portrait of Mai (Omai)" will feature in the reopening of the National Portrait Gallery after a three-year refurbishment ends on June 22 and be shown around the country. It will also be exhibited "periodically" in the United States from 2026, the gallery and the J. Paul Getty Museum in Los Angeles said in a joint statement.

The life-sized study, which is regarded as one of Reynolds's greatest works, depicts a Polynesian youth

named Mai, also known as Omai. He travelled from Tahiti to England with the explorer Captain James Cook and spent three years in London, where he met royalty and the intellectual elite before returning home in 1777.

National Portrait Gallery director Nicholas Cullinan called the portrait "by far the most significant acquisition" it has ever made. The acquisition, after years in private ownership, is the first time it has been publicly owned. Reynolds, whose 300th birth anniversary is celebrated this year, kept the painting in his London studio until his death in 1792.

It was acquired by a member of the British aristocracy until it was sold to a private collector in 2001 for just over £10 million at auction. The British government had put an export bar on the painting to allow a UK buyer to match the price of buying it. In March, the culture ministry said the painting was "inextricably linked to the great voyages of discovery and exploration".

"It offers an important insight into the British recep-

tion, understanding, and representation of people from beyond Europe at that time in history," it added.

Mai, depicted barefoot in a white turban and flowing robes, was regarded as an archetypal "noble savage" in 18th-century Britain, which at the time was expanding its global empire. Modern Britain has in recent years been grappling with the legacy of its colonial history, in the wake of global anti-racism protests.

Reynolds, who inspired the French Impressionists of the 19th century, typically painted the 18th-century British elite. Leading historians argued last year that acquiring "Portrait of Mai" could help Britain "to examine our past and understand who we are as a nation".

Artist Antony Gormley said on Tuesday that Reynolds's work "may well be the first time that the English establishment represented a member of a tribal society with dignity and respect".—AFP



A handout picture made available by The National Portrait Gallery in London shows the painting entitled 'Portrait of Mai (Omai)' by English artist Joshua Reynolds.—AFP

Lifestyle



People dressed up in cosplay outfits posing for a photo as they attend the 10th Anime Japan, the Japanese animation industry's biggest event, at Tokyo Big Sight in Tokyo. —AFP photos

HIT JAPAN ANIME GENRE OFFERS ESCAPE, SECOND CHANCES

Getting hit by a truck doesn't sound like anyone's favorite fantasy, but it's an idea central to an escapist type of Japanese anime exploding in popularity. "Isekai" or "alternative world" anime covers a broad range of storylines in which a character is transported into a new life. But one form of isekai often starts with a bang: a struggling protagonist, sometimes depicted as a loser, dies a violent death but is reincarnated as a hero with unique powers. It's found new popularity in Japan and beyond, with US speciality streaming service Crunchyroll reporting "great appetite" for the genre that includes titles like "That Time I Got Reincarnated as a Slime".

"We've seen very strong performance of these titles worldwide," Asa Suehira, chief content officer for Crunchyroll, told AFP. In 2021, five of the top 10 most-watched Japanese anime on China's video platform Bilibili featured isekai storylines. And the genre is so popular that "isekaied" even features in the online lexicon guide Urban Dictionary, defined as "the act of being run over by a truck and reborn".



These photos show people attending the 10th Anime Japan, the Japanese animation industry's biggest event, at Tokyo Big Sight in Tokyo.

Experts and fans alike say the genre taps into the pent-up frustrations of people who feel undervalued and dissatisfied with modern life. While traditional anime franchises tend to showcase heroes navigating hostile worlds, isekai focuses instead on a chance at a do-over of life. "The prevailing mindset in isekai is that 'I'm better off just being transported into a world where I can excel,'" Satoshi Arima, an editor with publishing giant Kadokawa, told AFP.

Living vicariously

Over the years, the publishing house has released a plethora of isekai-themed light novels, many of which have then inspired manga and anime adaptations. The current iteration of isekai began to take off around 2012, and the rise of platforms from Crunchyroll to Netflix has helped make them a mainstay among today's anime fans. Arima said a core audience for Kadokawa's novels is "salarymen"—Japanese office workers—in their 30s and 40s. They may be dreaming of "just



switching to jobs that recognize them better," in defiance of Japan's ingrained lifetime employment system, he said.

"Since this kind of way of living is not always possible, they might be fulfilling that desire vicariously through these novels." The escapism has broad appeal, though, and is increasingly winning over female fans who recognize themselves in previously underappreciated heroines "living their lives the way they want to", he added. Popular series include "Mush-

oku Tensei: Jobless Reincarnation"—the tale of a 34-year-old "jobless male virgin" who is hit by a truck and reincarnated as an infant with magical powers.

At this year's AnimeJapan convention, a long line of mostly male fans of the series formed at a booth promoting the show and other works. "Japan isn't at its best anymore, so stories like this make me think people might be looking for ways to vent their stress and escape," one fan, 50-year-old Shinya Yamada, told AFP.

'Free from regrets'

Such escapism "serves a therapeutic purpose, although I think it's kind of sad," Yamada said. Still, isekai's popularity appears to be growing in Japan and abroad. A search on a major manga-curation site turns up more than 4,000 works with "isekai" in their titles. Over the years, the genre has spawned so many works it risked being "overcrowded," Suehira said, but the subgenres it has generated have helped keep it fresh.

While some isekai narratives start with protagonists escaping their current lives by dying, others are transported into alternate universes in a less violent fashion. Some iterations see heroes put through grueling battles for survival featuring outlandish transfigurations into a spider monster or slime. The increasingly popular "slow life" isekai, however, showcases characters whose new life is stress-free and tranquil. The variety means that isekai can tap into a broad fanbase—from those fantasizing about a more leisurely lifestyle to those imagining a bit more excitement, said Suehira. The genre offers a fresh start, "free from the regrets or mistakes every person experiences in life". —AFP

FREDDIE MERCURY'S PRIVATE COLLECTION TO BE SOLD AFTER EXHIBITION

More than 1,500 items from Freddie Mercury's private collection, including costumes, unique objects and previously unseen handwritten draft lyrics, will be auctioned later this year, Sotheby's announced on Wednesday. The Queen frontman's collection, which has been left largely untouched at his former west London home in the three decades since his death, will be exhibited publicly in the British capital for a month from August 4. Prior to that in June, highlights from the ensemble will go on tour to New York, Los Angeles and Hong Kong, as well as London. The vast array of items—spanning clothing, paintings, and objects from Mercury's everyday life—will then go under the hammer in six London sales expected to fetch at least £6 million (\$7.5 million).



Freddie Mercury

They are being sold by Mary Austin, one of the icon's closest friends, who has cared for them at his former home—Garden Lodge, in London's upmarket Kensington district—ever since he died in 1991. "I have had the joy and privilege of living surrounded by all the wonderful things that Freddie sought out and so loved," she said in a statement released by Sotheby's.

"But the years have passed, and the time has come for me to take the difficult decision to close this very special chapter in my life." Calling Mercury

"an incredible and intelligent collector who showed us that there is beauty and fun and conversation to be found in everything", Austin added the process would "celebrate his unique and beautiful spirit".

'Unerring eye'

The collection includes a replica of St Edward's Crown—the real version of which will be used by King Charles III at next week's coronation—worn by the star on stage in the 1980s. Its accompanying cloak—in fake fur, red velvet and rhinestones—was made by the singer's friend and costume designer Diana Moseley. Mercury performed in both at the world-famous Live Aid concert in 1985 and the final renditions of "God Save The Queen" during his last Queen tour in 1986. It is estimated to fetch up to £80,000.

Previously unseen handwritten lyrics to Queen's "We Are The Champions", one of the band's best-known anthems, will also go on sale. The draft lyrics, stretching over nine pages, are priced at £200,000 to £300,000. Artworks by Pablo Picasso and Henri Matisse, a century-old Faberge gem-set, nephrite and enamel desk clock, and an antique Japanese woodblock print are among other items to be offered.

"Freddie Mercury's collection is a manifestation of one extraordinary man's creativity, taste and unerring eye for beauty," Sotheby's David Macdonald said. Austin will be donating a portion of the auctions' proceeds to the Mercury Phoenix Trust—founded by fellow Queen members Brian May, Roger Taylor and their manager Jim Beach, to support HIV/Aids initiatives—and to the Elton John Aids Foundation. —AFP



Masao Maruyama, a Japanese anime producer, posing for photos after an interview with AFP in Tokyo. —AFP photos

ANIME LUMINARY MARUYAMA WARNS JAPAN'S TOP SPOT AT RISK

Japan's powerhouse anime business risks being overtaken by rising Chinese competition because a tilt towards commercialism has stifled creativity, industry heavyweight Masao Maruyama has warned. Maruyama, a protégé of manga great Osamu Tezuka, said he fears Japan is losing its edge. "In Japan, people are no longer trained in animation," he told AFP in an interview. "The only reason China hasn't quite caught up with Japan yet is because of a bunch of restrictions imposed on free expression there," he said. "If more freedom is unleashed, Japan will be overtaken in no time."

Maruyama doesn't draw or direct, but he has clout that few in Japan's anime industry can match because of the breadth of the behind-the-scenes roles he has played—from studio founder and recruiter to fixer. The 81-year-old acknowledged his career was in its twilight, and Maruyama was far from optimistic as he prepared to leave behind an industry he helped shape. He fears Japan is so hell-bent on cranking out money-spinning genres, such as those starring "kawaii" cute female characters, that its anime "doesn't necessarily outshine" America's Disney or France's arthouse productions in terms of creativity. He warned that occasional successes from this prolific approach have distracted Japan from systematically fostering next-generation talent, even as China invests aggressively in young animators.

'Godfather of manga'

Maruyama has risen from a protégé of the late Tezuka, the "Godfather of manga" known for the pioneering cartoon series "Astro Boy", to a force behind some of Japan's most acclaimed anime directors, overseeing three animation studios along the way. It was partly a desire to keep Tezuka's works alive that convinced Maruyama to take on his current project "Pluto", adapted from a manga with an "Astro Boy" arc. The upcoming series for Netflix, of which he is executive producer, is steeped in themes such as war and discrimination that some feel are particularly relevant today.

Maruyama is unapologetic about his view that he is "the most authentic inheritor of Tezuka's DNA", from his blithe ignorance of budgets to an uncompromising work



This photo shows (from left to right) voice actress Minoru Suzuki, voice actress Yoko Hikasa, "Pluto" author Naoki Urasawa and Makoto Tezuka, a film and anime director and son of manga great Osamu Tezuka.

ethic that he says borders on "selfish". Like Tezuka, "I flip-flop all the time, saying something totally different from what I said a day before", Maruyama said with a chuckle.

"But creating works is all about challenging yourself to do something new, regardless of what you said in the past. That makes you selfish in a way, and it's a trait I've inherited in its pure form." Maruyama has helped bring to life hundreds of anime shows and films in his nearly 60-year career, including boxing saga "Ashita no Joe", critically acclaimed "Ninja Scroll" and award-winning "In This Corner of the World". He is content to play second fiddle to directors, and is known for handling everything from pitching projects and raising funds to hand-picking animators.

'Cook and clean toilets'

His deep involvement in productions earned him a reputation as a shadow shogun, but eventually he began stepping into the limelight. His strategy was to use his credentials to promote and vouch for directors he felt deserved attention, animation history researcher Masahiro Haraguchi said. From Mamoru Hosoda ("The Girl Who Leapt Through Time") to Satoshi Kon ("Perfect Blue") and Sunao Katabuchi ("In This Corner of the World"), many of Japan's top-notch anime directors saw their careers take off after working under Maruyama, Haraguchi said.

"Maruyama's magic was to team up with these directors and cause their transmogrification," he said. Maruyama, however, jokes that all he does is "cook and clean toilets". "I have no special skills," he said. "I don't steer the directors but I just follow them and their talent." His work ethic is legendary and is seen in the names of his three studios Madhouse, MAPPA and M2, which he says all start with 'M' for a reason.

"It means I'm masochistic," he said, breaking into a wide grin. "The more challenging, painful and excruciating the project is, the more motivated I become." Maruyama said he is determined to remain active "as long as my body and mind permit". But that doesn't mean he is oblivious to his mortality. He organized a flamboyant living funeral for himself last year, painting his face white to appear as a ghost to the amusement of his friends and colleagues. "I thought then: 'well, I've had a good life'." —AFP

Meryl Streep wins top Spanish arts prize

Three-time Oscar winner Meryl Streep on Wednesday won Spain's top arts prize, the Princess of Asturias award, for her "unforgettable performances" in a career spanning over five decades. The prize jury praised the 73-year-old for "successive performances in which she brings life to richly complex female characters." "The honesty and responsibility she brings to her choice of roles, at the service of inspiring and exemplary narratives, reach out beyond the screen," it added in a statement.

Streep has performed in more than 60 movies, acquiring iconic status for roles from a Nazi concentration camp survivor to an ABBA-singing mother. She won her most recent Oscar in 2012 for her role as Margaret Thatcher in "The Iron Lady". Before that, she won in 1980 for "Kramer v. Kramer" and in 1983 for "Sophie's

Choice". The 50,000-euro (\$55,000) award is one of eight prizes covering the arts, science and other areas that are handed out annually by the foundation named for Spanish Crown Princess Leonor.

Past winners of the arts prize include US directors Martin Scorsese and Francis Ford Coppola, Austrian filmmaker Michael Haneke and American architect Frank Gehry. The awards will be handed out at a ceremony hosted by Spain's King Felipe VI and broadcast live on Spanish television in October. —AFP



Meryl Streep

Sports

Miami down Milwaukee in playoffs as Knicks advance

Butler conjures another magical performance

LOS ANGELES: Jimmy Butler conjured another magical performance as the Miami Heat sent the top-seeded Milwaukee Bucks sensation crashing out of the NBA playoffs on Wednesday with a nerve-jangling overtime victory. Butler, who scored 56 points in a dazzling game four win on Monday, once again led Miami's offense with 42 points as the eighth-seeded Heat won 128-126 to seal a 4-1 series triumph. It is only the sixth time in NBA history that an eighth-seeded team has eliminated a No. 1 seed from the playoffs.

The Bucks - who finished the regular season on top of the Eastern Conference with the best record in the NBA - were left reeling another fourth-quarter collapse as Miami celebrated before a shocked Milwaukee home crowd at the Fiserv Forum. Milwaukee, who had blown a double-digit lead in Monday's game four loss in Miami, were ahead by 16 points early in the fourth quarter on Wednesday. But with a victory beckoning that would have kept the series alive, the Bucks' fragility was exposed once more as Miami chipped away at the lead.

The Heat outscored Milwaukee 32-16 in the fourth quarter, with Butler grabbing a jaw-dropping alley-oop to tie the game at 118-118 with just 0.5 seconds left that forced overtime. "We were resilient, we were down late - it's seemed to be that way a lot during this series - but we stayed with it, got some stops, made some huge buckets," said Butler. The Miami star said his remarkable streak of form had been inspired by his teammates. "Whatever it takes to win - it could be 40 (points), it could be 50, I gotta be able to do it all," Butler said.

Miami teammate Gabe Vincent, whose sublime pass set up Butler's game-tying shot at the end of regulation, said the Miami plan had been simple: "Just get the ball to Jimmy...get the ball to Buckets and let him do what he do." Milwaukee's disintegration in the closing stages was underscored by a desperate attempt to level at the end of overtime when Grayson Allen failed to get a shot off as the buzzer sounded.

Milwaukee's off night was also reflected in their dismal free-throw shooting, where they shot just 28-of-45 from the foul line. Bucks star Giannis Antetokounmpo made only 10-of-23 free throws. Bucks coach Mike Budenholzer refused to point the finger, however. "There's a ton of disappointment when your season ends, no matter how it happens," Budenholzer said. "It's a hard feeling, it's a disappointing feeling. But I believe and trust those guys. We've all got to be better."

Grizzlies win

Miami will now face the New York Knicks in the Eastern Conference semi-finals. The Knicks defeated the Cleveland Cavaliers 106-95 to complete a 4-1 series victory earlier Wednesday. Jalen Brunson scored 23 points and RJ Barrett 21 as the Knicks produced a clinical wire-to-wire victory on the road to book their place in the next round. The win was New York's first playoff series victory since 2013. Needing a win to stay alive on their home court, Cleveland were left chasing the game after the Knicks surged into a 33-26 lead at the end of the first quarter.

The Cavs were never able to overcome that deficit as New York closed out a composed win. In the Western Conference, meanwhile, Ja Morant led a superb second-half rally as the Memphis Grizzlies kept their playoff campaign alive with a 116-99 victory over LeBron James and the Los Angeles Lakers. Morant led a devastating 19-2 run to close the third quarter that effectively sealed victory for the Grizzlies, who led 94-76 heading into the fourth.

Morant finished with 31 points and 10 assists on 13-of-26 shooting while Desmond Bane led the



MILWAUKEE, WISCONSIN: Brook Lopez #11 of the Milwaukee Bucks and Max Strus #31 of the Miami Heat work for a loose ball during the second half of Game 5 of the Eastern Conference First Round Playoffs at Fiserv Forum on April 26, 2023 in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. —AFP

Memphis scoring with 33 points as Memphis cut the Lakers' series lead to 3-2. Anthony Davis led the Lakers with 31 points, but James had a night to forget, shooting just 5-of-17 for 15 points. "It's not about what AD and myself are doing, it's about how we can win basketball games," James said afterward. "And tonight I was shit - I'll be better in game six."

In Wednesday's other Western Conference game,

the Golden State Warriors battled to a 123-116 win over the Sacramento Kings that leaves the NBA champions just one win away from clinching their series. The Warriors can book their place in the next round with a victory in game six on their home court in San Francisco on Friday. Stephen Curry scored 31 points while Klay Thompson added 25, including five three-pointers. Andrew Wiggins added 25 points. —AFP

Rodgers aim high after Jets move

NEW YORK: Aaron Rodgers was unveiled as the new quarterback for the New York Jets on Wednesday and quickly made clear his aim is to end the franchise's long wait for a second Super Bowl triumph. The 39-year-old formally completed his trade from the Green Bay Packers on Wednesday, ending his 18-year spell with the historic franchise. "That chapter is over now and I'm excited about the new adventure here in New York," Rodgers said in a press conference. The Jets' solitary Super Bowl triumph came in 1969, the first time the AFL-NFL championship game was known officially as the Super Bowl, although it is recognized as the third edition.

"That Super Bowl III trophy is looking a little lonely," Rodgers said, making clear he sees winning the big one as his goal. "I'm an old guy, so I want to be at a place that can win it all and I believe we can do that here," Rodgers said. The winning quarterback and MVP in 1969 was the Jets' legend Joe Namath, who wore the same number 12 jersey that Rodgers played in at Green Bay. The number 12 jersey was 'retired' by the Jets in tribute to Namath so Rodgers will be the Jets' number eight, his old college number.

Namath had said he would be happy if the Jets gave Rodgers his old number if that had helped seal a trade but the Californian said that would not be necessary. "There's some iconic names who have played here, probably none more iconic than No. 12, and I heard what he said about unretiring his number, but to me, 12 is Broadway Joe (Namath), and I didn't even want to go down that path, and I'm excited about going back to my college number," he said.

But Rodgers, a four-time NFL Most Valuable Player who won the Super Bowl with the Packers at the end of the 2010 season, said he would love to match Namath's success. "There's something special about playing in a city, for a team like this, with a storied franchise, and obviously we're going way, way back to Super Bowl III. To be a part of something special would definitely help you go down in the history of the organization," said Rodgers. "I already have 18 years in an incredibly iconic organization, and it'd be fun to be a part of the history of this one as well," he added.

Rodgers went into a four-day 'darkness retreat' before deciding to leave the Packers for the Jets. The trade, involving a series of draft picks sent from the Jets to Green Bay, was a long-running saga but Rodgers said he never worried the deal may fall through. "Not really. I believed it was gonna happen the entire time," Rodgers said. "Just a matter of, I think, waiting each other out. My intention coming out of the darkness was to pursue this opportunity," he said.

The Jets finished bottom of the AFC East last season with a 7-10 record but Rodgers believes the potential is there for a major turnaround in fortunes. "This is an opportunity to be a part of a city that's hungry, a team with an incredible fan base that's hungry to win again. Twelve years without playoffs, not a Super Bowl win since Super Bowl III - it's been a long time. So the opportunity to be a part of something special here, it's different," Rodgers said. "It's similar to Green Bay in that way. In a city like Green Bay and, I assume, for a team like the New York Jets, you can go down in history and there's something special about adding that to your legacy," he said. —AFP

Para-athlete urges better transport ahead of Olympics

PARIS: On the platform of a Paris suburb train station, 25-year-old para-athlete Manel Senni braced for another daily odyssey in her wheelchair to go to basketball practice. "It should take me 20 minutes to get to training, but... I always leave home an hour before," said the young Algerian student who was born with spina bifida, a spine condition that means she cannot walk. With less than 500 days to go until the Paris Olympic and Paralympic Games, the plight of para-athletes living in the French capital is shedding light on the limited accessibility of its public transport system. At the station of Noisy-le-Sec, a first train pulled up, but it was an old model with a 40-centimetre (15-inch) step into the carriage. "I'd have to call station workers to set up a ramp for me," she told AFP.

"What I do instead is wait for another train with

5 talking points at Azerbaijan GP

BAKU: Formula One returns this weekend after a one month break. AFP Sport takes a look at five talking points ahead of the Azerbaijan Grand Prix:

Red Bull winging it

Three races, three poles, three wins, two 1-2s, two fastest laps - Red Bull arrive in Azerbaijan on a magical roll. Double world champion Max Verstappen kept his cool in Melbourne to fend off Lewis Hamilton and steer clear of the triple red-flag drama, while Sergio Perez sliced through the field from last to claim fifth, and the fastest lap, in the latest display of the Red Bulls' speed supremacy over the rest of the grid.

Team boss Christian Horner praised Verstappen's "great patience" in not getting embroiled in a Mercedes' dog fight at the start, and was nonplussed at Mercedes' pace. With two wins to his teammate's one Verstappen leads Perez by 15 points, the rejuvenated Fernando Alonso is third, nine points behind the Mexican for Aston Martin, with Hamilton seven points further back approaching the fourth race of the season.

Mercedes revival?

Toto Wolff and his Mercedes men left the Australian Grand Prix with an unexpected spring in their step. Lewis Hamilton's second place gave the fallen F1 giant reason to believe they are finally getting to grips with their mercurial car. With only one win after a chastening 2022, this season began in Bahrain with "one of their worst days in racing". An uptick in performance in Saudi Arabia offered encouragement, while in Melbourne George Russell was also flying until his car caught fire. Team principal

World number 1 Swiatek calls for prize equality

MADRID: World number one Iga Swiatek on Wednesday called for prize money equality between WTA and ATP events. The reigning French Open and US Open champion is preparing to compete at the Madrid Open after retaining her Stuttgart title last weekend, defeating world number two Aryna Sabalenka in the final. Swiatek won a little more than 100,000 euros (\$111,000), which some contrasted to Carlos Alcaraz's 475,000 euros (\$526,000) haul for triumphing at the Barcelona Open. "I think (tennis) is better than most sports, but still there is a lot we can work on in terms of, you know,

a floor at the same level as the platform," though this can mean watching up to three trains come and go. Finally, a train with a lower carriage floor pulled up on the tracks, and Senni lifted her front wheels slightly to ease herself on board. "This is one of the easiest trips of my week," she said. On other days she is forced to circumvent the entire city, instead of crossing it, to get to another basketball court.

'Focus on transport'

Two stops later, Senni glided off and easily made her way out of the station. But outside, she discovered her tram had been cancelled due to public works. "This type of thing happens every day, I'm used to it," she said with a smile, before wheeling herself to the sports hall instead. Not far from practice, a stadium was under construction for the summer games next year. "You can tell that they're really making an effort to properly host the Paris Games," she said.

"But it would be great if they could also focus on transport so that disabled people can come to see them." Pierre Rabadan, a city official in charge of preparing Paris for the Olympics, said he was well-aware of the challenge. "We know our network isn't

pal Wolff was quick to insist there was "no magic bullet" to transform a car that has struggled since last year's shift in the technical landscape. But the Austrian did concede they are understanding their machine much better. "We have defined a clear direction where we need to go and I believe we are on the right trajectory."

Sprint time

Baku stages the first of 2023's six sprint races. Verstappen has the best sprint record, winning three of the six held since they were introduced in 2021. Baku is the first street circuit to hold a sprint race, with Horner not alone among the team principals wary of the prospect of prangs on a circuit that has a well-deserved reputation for producing the unexpected. "It's absolutely ludicrous to be doing the first sprint race of the year in a street race like Azerbaijan," Horner said in Australia.

Whilst acknowledging for the fans excitement was almost assured, from a team's perspective "all you can do is trash your car and it costs a lot of money around there." Under an all-new format agreed by teams in Melbourne and voted through by the FIA on Tuesday, Saturday's 100km dash will now be a stand alone fixture of the weekend, with its own qualifying. Unlike 2021 and 2022 the sprint result will no longer shape the grid for the main event on Sunday, qualifying for the grand prix to be held on Friday. After Baku, sprints will feature in Austria, Belgium, Qatar, Austin and Interlagos.

Tough times at Ferrari

New Ferrari boss Frederic Vasseur reckons there are "tonnes of room for improvement on the car" - Charles Leclerc and Carlos Sainz will certainly be hoping that's the case. Two retirements sandwiching seventh in Jeddah left Leclerc bemoaning "the worst start to the season ever", while Sainz seethed at a late time-penalty that dropped him from fourth to out of the points in Melbourne. That's left F1's most iconic team trailing behind Red Bull, Aston

getting equal prize money on some WTA tournaments compared to ATP on the same level." Swiatek told a news conference Wednesday. "Grand Slams are already even, as we know. That's nice, but for sure it would be good if WTA would focus on that, but I don't really want to get into that, because it's a lot of business and sometimes politics. "I don't think I have a lot of influence. I just can say that it would be nice for our sport if it was equal, especially because we kind of do the same work."

Consistency

The Polish top seed in Madrid says the women's game offers more consistency than the men's now and can create even higher emotions. "I also get people who are saying that men's tennis is nicer to watch and guys can do more because they are physically and biologically stronger," said Swiatek. "But I think there were a lot of people, for example a couple of years ago, who were saying that (the women's game is) not consistent and that's a shame and it should be better, but right now basically I think we are even more consistent than the guys with our game. —AFP

100-percent accessible," he said. "We know that, due to its age and complexity, even with the best will in the world, we'd struggle to make all stations accessible even in six or seven years."

Mazes of staircases

While 100 percent of Paris buses are equipped with ramps and most train stations in the suburbs are accessible to wheelchairs, there is still a lot of work to be done in inner-city metro stations. Inside the city walls, only one metro line—number 14 -- has lifts into every station and low-hanging trains speeding up and down the tracks.

In most of the rest of the Paris underground system, mazes of staircases block the way to platforms. According to the capital's transport authority, during the Games, passengers in wheelchairs will be able to book places in advance on buses to ferry them from main train stations to sports venues. Patrice Tripoteau, the director of the France Handicap rights group, says this was a good start. "It won't be able to respond to all situations, but it will cover a large part of them," he said. "But the measures should be up to the challenges, otherwise a sizeable amount of people will find themselves struggling," he added. —AFP



BAKU: A view of the city ahead of the Formula One Azerbaijan Grand Prix in Baku on April 27, 2023. —AFP

Martin and Mercedes in the constructors championship. With significant upgrades planned from Miami onwards Vasseur says he has the feeling "we are moving in the right direction". Baku though has not proved a happy hunting ground for the scuderia, with only three podiums and a double DNF last year since 2016.

Baku roulette

Baku boasts the longest straight in F1, the 2.2 kilometer Neftchilar Avenue alongside the Caspian Sea where cars break from speeds of 350kmh into the 90 degree turn one, the circuit then snaking its way through the sinuous medieval city gate section where even the slightest of mistakes can spell disaster. A different winner for each of the six races staged here is an indication of the drama that lies in store for Verstappen and company this weekend. The Dutch ace won last year but won't be taking anything for granted after his car packed up with the 2021 race at his mercy five laps from the chequered flag. —AFP



STUTTGART: Poland's Iga Swiatek jumps in the air as she celebrates with the trophy after the Women's Tennis Grand Prix WTA tournament final match against Belarus' Aryna Sabalenka (not in picture) in Stuttgart. —AFP

Sports

Sheffield United 'ready to party' after Premier League promotion

Sheffield blank West Bromwich 2-0

LONDON: Sheffield United were planning to party long into the night after clinching promotion back to the Premier League with a 2-0 win against West Bromwich Albion at jubilant Bramall Lane on Wednesday. Paul Heckingbottom's side saw off Albion thanks to goals from Sander Berge and Anel Ahmedhodzic, ensuring they earned the second automatic promotion spot behind Burnley in the Championship with three games to spare.

Second-placed United sprinted to the finish line, with six wins from their last seven games as they moved seven points clear of third-placed Luton, who have just two matches left. The Blades were relegated from the top flight in 2021 and lost in the Championship play-off semi-finals against Nottingham Forest last season. But Heckingbottom, in his second season as United boss, has astutely guided his club back into English football's elite.

"I don't think it will sink in for a while but I'm just determined to enjoy tonight and make sure everyone else enjoys tonight. It's a shame we've got three more

games left!" Heckingbottom said. "But we've got to enjoy it, you enjoy every win and when it's a win as special and significant as this, we are going to have a good time." Promotion will be worth up to £170 million (\$212 million) in increased revenues over the next three seasons for the Blades. It is a well-earned reward for United's consistency this season, with Heckingbottom's men in the top two for much of the campaign. They also reached the FA Cup semi-finals this term, enjoying a shock fifth round win over Tottenham before losing 3-0 to Manchester City at Wembley on Saturday.

'Good at partying'

It is the third time the Blades have been promoted to the Premier League, with each success coming via a second-placed finish. United have retained second position from November 13 despite challenges from Luton and Middlesbrough. "We wanted to give back to the club and the fans. This club should be in the Premier League and now we

are back to where we need to be," Berge said.

"There are a lot of players good at partying, maybe even better than on the pitch. I think we will go into town probably." Blades defender John Egan added: "Memories for life with this bunch of lads. There's not many places in football where you get such a tight-knit squad. "We really are mates off the pitch. I that helps and it shows on the pitch."

United's celebrations came 24 hours after Burnley wrapped up the Championship title with a 1-0 win at Blackburn. Burnley's Championship dominance this season is underlined by their 10-point lead over United. Two years and nine days after they were relegated, United can look forward to renewing acquaintances with Manchester City, Arsenal and the rest of the Premier League elite. They broke play-off chasing Albion's resistance in the 58th minute when Iliman Ndiaye squared to Berge and the Norwegian midfielder fired home. United's promotion was in sight by the 76th minute when George Baldock's volley was turned in brilliantly by Ahmedhodzic. — AFP

Al Hilal, Urawa face off for long-delayed Asian title

TOKYO: Al Hilal of Saudi Arabia and Urawa Red Diamonds finally meet in the Asian Champions League final on Saturday — almost nine months after the Japanese side booked their place in the two-legged showdown. The winter World Cup in Qatar and travel complications arising from the pandemic mean Asian football has yet to crown its 2022 champions more than a year after the competition began. The wait will soon be over, with defending champions and Club World Cup finalists Al Hilal hosting two-time winners Urawa in the first leg in Riyadh, before the title is decided in Saitama a week later.

"From my first working day in Urawa I have been thinking about the final," said Maciej Skorza, the Polish coach who has only been in charge of the Japanese side since January. "We were working very hard for this moment, to be ready for the challenge, to be ready for this very difficult game." Skorza said after Sunday's 1-1 draw with Kawasaki Frontale in the J-League.

It will be the third time that Urawa and Al Hilal have met in the final in six years in Asia's top club competition. Urawa came out on top in 2017, then the Saudis got revenge two years later to claim a record fourth Asian title. The form book is likely to go out of the window in this year's encounter, with Urawa reaching the final as long ago as August last year after a semi-final win over South Korea's Jeonbuk Motors.

Much has changed for the J-League team since then, with Spanish coach Ricardo Rodriguez making way for Skorza and a number of comings and goings in his squad. Winger Yusuke Matsuo, the club's top scorer in the Champions League with six goals, departed for Belgian side Westerlo at the end of last year and Danish striker Kasper Junker left for J-League rivals Nagoya Grampus. Skorza has still managed to hit the ground running since the new J-League season began in February and his men are just two points behind leaders Vissel Kobe.

Ighalo threat

Continental competition will be much fresher in Al Hilal's memory. They booked their place in the final in style in February, crushing Qatar's Al Duhail 7-0 with four goals from former Manchester United and Watford striker Odion Ighalo. The Nigerian forms a deadly partnership with Saudi winger Salem Al Dawsari, who scored a stunning goal in his country's historic World Cup win over eventual champions Argentina in Qatar.

His club showed they can also shine on the global stage, beating Brazil's Flamengo in February to reach the Club World Cup final, where they lost 5-3 to Real Madrid. Al Hilal sit a disappointing fourth in the Saudi Pro League, but they progressed to the domestic cup final on Sunday with a 1-0 win over league leaders Al Ittihad. "We have enough time to recover, six days before the final against Urawa," manager Ramon Diaz said after an energy-sapping semi-final that went to extra time. "Our players have time to catch their breath and return to full readiness." — AFP

Napoli's title march brings football glory back to south Italy

ROME: Napoli fans are counting down the days until their team finally ends a three-decade Serie A title drought and takes the crown back down south after decades of dominance from the big clubs of the country's richer north. The Scudetto will come to southern Italy's biggest club and city for the first time since 1990, when Serie A was widely considered the best league in the world and Diego Maradona was still strutting his stuff in Naples.

A 17-point lead at the top of the division with seven matches remaining means the question is when rather than if, and Napoli will be crowned champions this weekend if they beat regional rivals Salernitana and Lazio fail to win at Inter Milan. It has been 22 years since any team apart from the big three of Juventus, AC Milan and Inter Milan won Serie A, with Roma dethroning their local rivals Lazio in 2001.

Between them the 'strisciate', or striped teams from Turin and Milan, have won the league a total of 74 times, making a title for Napoli a massive event not just for the city of Naples but for the south as a whole. A huge party is expected to kick off in a chaotic, frequently derided one-club city which is often targeted by what in Italy is called "territorial discrimination", a sort of racism historically directed



TURIN: Napoli's players celebrate after winning in the Italian Serie A football match between Juventus and Napoli at the Juventus stadium. — AFP

at the south similar to the prejudice Irish immigrants faced in anglophone nations.

'An isolated case'

Italy's north-south divide is as stark as it has ever been. According to the country's official social economic indicators salaries, employment and access to education health services, education and culture are all significantly better in the north. GDP per capita in northern regions Lombardy and Emilia-Romagna is around double what it is in Calabria, Puglia or Campania, the region of which Naples is capital.

Lucio Lambertini, a professor at the Polytechnic University of Milan and an expert in economic strategy, says that Napoli's title is "an isolated case of success which Naples deserves but which won't

close the divide". "In the South there is a feeling of being children of a lesser God, and symbolic successes like the Scudetto can feel like a sort of revenge for the people," says Lambertini.

This season teams from the south and central regions of the country have also been having their day in the lower divisions, with Frosinone from Lazio set to be promoted to Serie A as soon as Monday. In the deep south, Bari, who are owned by Napoli owner and movie impresario Aurelio De Laurentiis could yet snatch Serie B's second automatic promotion place but are more likely to have to try their hand at the play-offs. Meanwhile Catanzaro, from Calabria, have been Serie C sensations after an incredible season in which they ensured promotion to the second tier in March. — AFP

Inter Milan see off Juve to book Italian Cup final

MILAN: Holders Inter Milan reached the Italian Cup final on Wednesday after beating Juventus 1-0 to go through to next month's showpiece 2-1 on aggregate. Federico Dimarco poked home the only goal of an underwhelming game at the San Siro, meeting Nicolò Barella's pass which was intended for Edin Dzeko and rolling past Mattia Perin. It was the Italian's fifth goal of the season for his boyhood club and one which continues Inter's strong campaign in cup competitions.

Simone Inzaghi's side have already won the Italian Super Cup and will have the chance to retain the Italian Cup in Rome on May 24, most likely against Fiorentina. They are also preparing for a blockbuster derby with AC Milan in the Champions League

semi-finals. On Thursday Fiorentina host Cremonese 2-0 ahead from their first leg and almost guaranteed passage to the final. "My team deserved the final over the course of the two legs," Inzaghi told Mediaset. "We've now got 10 games left in the season, let's hope that there's one more (final)."

Progress would have been more straight-forward for Inter had Lautaro Martinez managed to get his toe to an inviting Denzel Dumfries cross in the 67th minute. And Perin also pulled off a great save to deny Henrikh Mkhitaryan when he tipped aside the Armenian's stinging drive in the 73rd minute. Juve were surprisingly flat for a match against their arch-rivals which is usually a feisty affair full of controversy, and exit the competition with a whimper.

"We need to recharge our batteries, as we've lost four of the last five Serie A games and are out of the cup. We need to roll our sleeves up," said Juve coach Massimiliano Allegri. Allegri's team have lost their simplest route to European football next season and now have to earn a place in continental football via their Serie A placing or by winning the Europa League. Juventus are third in Serie A after having



MILAN: Juventus' Brazilian defender Danilo (left) fights for the ball with Inter Milan's Belgian forward Romelu Lukaku during the Italian Cup semi-final second leg football match between Inter Milan and Juventus on April 26, 2023. — AFP

their 15-point penalty for illicit transfer activity revoked but are awaiting a potential new punishment from the Italian Football Federation which could bump them back down the league. — AFP

Classifieds

Hospitals & Clinics

Hospitals

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

Clinics

Kaizen center	25716707
Rawda	22517733


Adaliya	22517144
Khaldiya	24848075
Kaifan	24849807
Shamiya	24848913
Shuwaikh	24814507
Abdullah Salem	22549134
Nuzha	22526804
Industrial Shuwaikh	24814764
Qadsiya	22515088
Dasmah	22532265
Bneid Al-Gar	22531908
Shaab	22518752
Qibla	22459381
Ayoun Al-Qibla	22451082
Mirqab	22456536
Sharq	22465401
Salmiya	25746401

Change of Name


I, **BURHUNUDDIN**, holder of Indian Passport No. S2350336, having permanent address 1st floor, room 11, Lehri Manzil, 26/42, S.V.P road, Null Bazar, Mumbai, Maharashtra 400003, residing in Kuwait at present hereby declare that henceforth my name will be read as given name **BURHANUDDIN** and surname **BADRI**. (#3511) 27/04/2023

I, **MOHAMMED**, holder of Indian Passport No. M8399055, having permanent address 1st floor, room 11, Lehri Manzil, 26/42, S.V.P road, Null Bazar, Mumbai, Maharashtra 400003, residing in Kuwait at present hereby declare that henceforth my name will be read as given name **MOHAMMED** and surname **BADRI**. (#3511) 27/04/2023

I, **AAMEER**, S/o IQBAL SARODAWALA (current name in passport), holder of Indian Passport No. M4838796, having permanent address WARD NO. 21, JUMATKHANA MOHALLAH, NAJAMPURA SAGWARA, RAJASTHAN, INDIAN, PINCODE NO. 314025 residing in Kuwait at present, hereby declare that henceforth my name will be read as under: Given name: **AAMIR** and Surname: **SARODA**. (#3510) 27/04/2023



NOTICE
April 17, 2023




Mr. Bikkey Tamang, son of Mr. Ratan Tamang, resident of Upper Sirisay Ambootia TE, Kurseong, Darjeeling -734203, West Bengal and Ms. Rosy Gurung, daughter of Mr. H B Gurung, resident of Upper Chatepani North Shiba Khola Tea Garden, Kurseong, Darjeeling -734220, West Bengal both Indian nationals presently residing in Kuwait, have given notice of intended marriage between them under the Foreign Marriage Act, 1969. If anyone has any objection to the proposed marriage, he/she may file the same with the undersigned according to the procedure laid down under the Act/Rule within thirty days from the date of publication of this notice. Communications in this regard can be made by Email (cw2.kuwait@mea.gov.in) / letters / telephonic calls (00965 -22550171, 00965 -22533125).

K. K. Raha
(Kamal Singh Rathore)
First Secretary (Community Affairs)
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City seize title momentum

Man City humiliate Arsenal 4-1; Chelsea crash again

LONDON: Manchester City seized control of the Premier League title race as Kevin De Bruyne inspired a crucial 4-1 rout of crumbling leaders Arsenal on Wednesday.

De Bruyne scored twice and set up John Stones' goal before Erling Haaland capped the demolition at the Etihad Stadium as City showed why they have been champions four times in the last five seasons. Pep Guardiola's side have trailed unexpected pace-setters Arsenal for much of the campaign, but the Gunners have choked over the last month while battle-hardened City show no signs of being affected by the pressure. Second placed City are now just two points behind Arsenal with two games in hand.

City will become champions for a third successive season if they win six of their last seven matches. Few would bet against them after a blistering run of seven consecutive league victories reeled in Arsenal. Unbeaten in their last 16 games in all competitions, City have won 13 of their past 14 games as they chase a remarkable treble. They booked an FA Cup final date with Manchester United last weekend and face Real Madrid in the Champions League semi-finals.

"The connection between Kevin and Erling is extraordinary, today we tried to use it as much as possible," Guardiola said. "I know the next three games are really important. The reality is today we are two points behind Arsenal, they are in front of us." While City eye a memorable end to the season, Arsenal, who were eight points clear at the start of April, have failed to win any of their last four league games. Arsenal's third defeat against City in 2023 could prove the final blow to their hopes of winning the title for the first time in 19 years.

Mikel Arteta's young team have lost their nerve at the worst possible time, with three successive draws, featuring a pair of blown two-goal leads, followed by their first loss in 11 league games. "The better team won. They were probably at their best in the first half and we weren't at our level. In terms of the basics we didn't do it," Arteta said. "There's still five games to go. I've been in this country 22 years and things change a lot."

De Bruyne started the demolition in the seventh minute when he took Haaland's deft pass and surged towards the Arsenal area before smashing a low strike past Aaron Ramsdale from 20 yards. Stones rewarded City's incessant pressure on the stroke of half-time when he headed in De Bruyne's free-kick,



MANCHESTER: Manchester City's Norwegian striker Erling Haaland (right) scores the team's fourth goal during the English Premier League football match between Manchester City and Arsenal on April 26, 2023. — AFP

with the goal awarded by VAR after initially being disallowed for offside.

Record-breaker Haaland

Imperious City were in complete control and De Bruyne put the result beyond doubt with another clinical finish from Haaland's pass in the 54th minute. Rob Holding smashed home in the 86th minute, but the defender's goal was no consolation for reeling Arsenal. With virtually the last kick of the game, Haaland slotted under Ramsdale for his 49th goal in all competitions this term and his 33rd in the league, beating Mohamed Salah's record for a single 38-game Premier League season.

"We knew that it was an important day for us, they say the giant-killers are back," said Fran Garcia. "The atmosphere can't be described ... we want to give it back in the best way possible." Lewandowski pulled one back for Barcelona after Franck Kessie's shot was blocked, ending a run of four games without a goal for the division's top scorer. Rayo held on for only their second win in their last 11 league matches-and third in four games against Barca for coach Andoni Iraola.

Atletico celebrations

Diego Simeone's Atletico Madrid, on the club's 120th anniversary, put on an entertaining display in their win over Mallorca with Antoine Griezmann at the heart of it once again. The forward produced two assists as Rodrigo de Paul, Alvaro Morata and Yannick Carrasco struck for the hosts at the Metropolitan. After Real Madrid were thumped 4-2 by Girona on Tuesday, Atletico capitalized to reel in their neighbors.

Atletico, wearing special blue and white kits at home to mark the occasion of their anniversary-the design was based on their first ever shirt-had their celebrations disrupted early on. "It's impossible not to get stuck in with this atmosphere," Simeone told DAZN. "After such a bad start (to the season), to get back on our feet fills me with pride, because it was not easy." Matija Nastasic put Mallorca ahead against the run of play after 20 minutes, heading in from a corner. De Paul equalized in first-half stoppage time after Predrag Rajkovic parried from Griezmann, but the Frenchman laid the rebound across for his team-mate to finish.

Atletico took the lead early in the second period when Nahuel Molina crossed for Morata to powerfully head home. Carrasco netted the third after 77 minutes on the break after Griezmann sent him through on goal with a fine lobbed pass and he rounded Rajkovic before finishing. Almeria climbed up to 15th with a 2-1 win at 10-man Getafe, which left the hosts 17th, one point above the bottom three, which they could sink into depending on other results Thursday. Celta Vigo earned a late win over bottom-of-the-table Elche thanks to defender Joseph Aidoo's diving header. — AFP

Chelsea crashed to a fifth successive defeat under Frank Lampard as their west London neighbors Brentford won 2-0 at Stamford Bridge. In his second spell as Chelsea boss after replacing the sacked Graham Potter until the end of the season, Lampard has failed to spark a revival from his troubled team, who were booed off at full-time.

With former Paris Saint Germain and Tottenham manager Mauricio Pochettino reportedly close to taking charge, Chelsea are enduring their worst run since 1993 after their winless streak extended to eight games. Cesar Azpilicueta's 37th minute own goal and Bryan Mbeumo's 78th minute strike left 11th placed Chelsea in danger of finishing in the bottom

half of the table for the first time since 1996. "The fans feel down because they are used to success. We have to take it on the chin," Lampard said.

Liverpool kept alive their slender hopes of a top four finish with a 2-1 win at West Ham. The Hammers took a 12th-minute lead through Lucas Paqueta's spectacular strike, only for Cody Gakpo to equalize from long-range five minutes later. Joel Matip's 67th minute header moved sixth placed Liverpool within six points of fourth placed Manchester United, who have two games in hand. Nottingham Forest climbed out of the relegation zone as they beat Brighton 3-1 at the City Ground to win for the first time in 12 games. — AFP

Rayo stun Liga leaders Barca

BARCELONA: Rayo Vallecano stunned impotent La Liga leaders Barcelona on Wednesday with a 2-1 win, outplaying the Catalans at a rowdy Vallecas. Atletico Madrid cut the gap on second-place rivals Real Madrid to two points with a 3-1 win over Real Mallorca, celebrating their 120th anniversary in style. Xavi Hernandez's Barcelona remain 11 points clear of second-placed Real Madrid with seven matches remaining.

After the champions lost at Girona on Tuesday their hopes of defending the title are virtually over, despite Barcelona following suit with a deserved defeat in the capital. Xavi's side have won just one of their last four league matches-a narrow triumph over Atletico on Sunday-as they limp towards the finish line and a first title since 2019. Barcelona's coach urged his players to be wary of Rayo's threat before the game, but they did not heed his warning. The Catalans have not beaten the Madrid club in their last four league meetings.

"The league is not finished, this is the problem-we have to deserve La Liga, today we deserved defeat," Xavi told reporters. "What annoys me is that today we did not compete how the game required us to. But we will get players back (from injury), there's another game on Saturday. "Here a lot of teams have lost, and others have had a lot of trouble winning. Luckily, there's another game on Saturday." The coach was without suspended captain Sergio Busquets but handed Pedri his first start since he was injured in February.

Rayo broke the deadlock early on when Alvaro Garcia drilled home across Marc-Andre ter Stegen and into the bottom corner. Robert Lewandowski should have equalized for Barcelona but Rayo goalkeeper Stole Dimitrievski denied the forward one-on-one, and then the Pole had a goal ruled out for offside. Rayo doubled their lead after the break when left-back Fran Garcia pressed Frenkie de Jong, collected the ball and drove on to score.



MADRID: Rayo Vallecano's Spanish forward Isi Palazon (center) fights for the ball with Barcelona's Ivorian midfielder Franck Kessie (left) and Barcelona's Spanish forward Ansu Fati during the Spanish league football match between Rayo Vallecano de Madrid and FC Barcelona on April 26, 2023. — AFP

Jon Stewart and the state of political discourse on television



By Abdulaziz Al-Anjeri
Founder & CEO
Reconnaissance Research

Is Jon Stewart's criticism of the state of political discourse on television still relevant in America today? The answer is a resounding yes. While it has been almost two decades since Stewart appeared on "Crossfire", the issues he raised have only gotten worse in recent years.

Political debate shows continue to be dominated by partisan bickering and sensationalism, with little emphasis on substantive policy discussions. Cable news networks in particular have become increasingly polarized, with hosts and pundits promoting extreme viewpoints and engaging in personal attacks.

For example, Fox News is often accused of promoting sensational stories that lack factual basis, while CNN is accused of sensationalizing stories in shows like "Anderson Cooper 360" to boost ratings. MSNBC have also been accused of promoting sensational stories that lack factual basis.

The rise of social media has also contributed to the problem, with people retreating into echo chambers and consuming news and information that reinforces their preexisting beliefs. This has led to a breakdown in civil discourse, with people on opposite sides of the political spectrum often demonizing one another and refusing to engage in constructive dialogue.

For example, Democrats and Republicans engaged in a bitter battle over how to address the country's mounting debt in 2011. In 2013, a government shutdown occurred due to Republicans' refusal to pass a budget unless it includ-

ed measures to defund or delay the Affordable Care Act. And both Democratic and Republican candidates resorted to personal attacks during the 2020 presidential election.

Moreover, the recent proliferation of so-called "fake news" has only further eroded trust in the media and made it harder for people to distinguish between fact and fiction. All of these trends have contributed to a toxic political climate that is harming America's democracy. As Stewart pointed out back in 2004, the media has a responsibility to inform and educate the public, but all too often they are failing to live up to that responsibility.

So why would someone from Kuwait talk about this issue? Because it undermines America's credibility and influence abroad, as other countries view the US as a divided and dysfunctional nation that is unable to effectively address its domestic problems let alone international affairs. To improve the state of political discourse in America and mitigate these negative effects, promoting media literacy and critical thinking skills among the public and encouraging higher standards of journalistic ethics in the media are crucial steps that need to be taken.

