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UN warns Sudan collapsing

Fighting enters third week • Truce repeatedly violated • Foreigners continue to flee

Sudan ambassador slams 'coup' against legitimacy

By Faten Omar

KUWAIT: On April 15, Sudan was plunged into a violent crisis as a bitter struggle for power broke out between the two main factions of the ruling military regime, and many were killed in clashes during heavy fighting between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the paramilitaries of the Rapid Support Force (RSF).

In an exclusive interview with Kuwait Times, Sudanese Ambassador to Kuwait Awadal-Karim Al-Rayah Balla affirmed what is happening in Sudan is a rebellion and a coup against legitimacy, with regional and international support targeting the unity and sovereignty of the country. He asserted that 90 percent of the camps, stores and communication networks controlled



Awadal-Karim Al-Rayah Balla

by RSF have been destroyed or recaptured by SAF, and it is just a matter of time before the conspiracy is brought to an end. (See Page 2)

KHARTOUM: Warplanes on bombing raids drew heavy anti-aircraft fire over Khartoum on Saturday as fierce fighting between Sudan's army and paramilitaries entered a third week, violating a renewed truce. More than 500 people have been killed since battles erupted on April 15 between the forces of army chief Abdel Fattah Al-Burhan and his number two Mohamed Hamdan Daglo, who commands the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF).

They have agreed to multiple truces but none has effectively taken hold as the number of dead civilians continues to rise and chaos and lawlessness grip Khartoum, a city of five million people where many have been cloistered in their homes lacking food, water, and electricity. Tens of thousands of people have been uprooted within Sudan and embarked on arduous trips to neighboring Chad, Egypt, South Sudan and Ethiopia to flee the battles.

"There is no right to go on fighting for power when the country is falling apart," UN chief Antonio Guterres told Saudi-owned Al Arabiya television. The lat-



JEDDAH: A ferry transports some 1,900 evacuees across the Red Sea from Port Sudan to the Saudi King Faisal navy base in Jeddah on April 29, 2023. — AFP

est three-day ceasefire — due to expire at midnight (2200 GMT) Sunday — was agreed Thursday after mediation led by the United States, Saudi Arabia, the African Union and the United Nations.

"We woke up once again to the sound of fighter jets and anti-aircraft weapons blast-

ing all over our neighborhood," a witness in south Khartoum told AFP. Another witness said fighting had continued since the early morning, especially around the state broadcaster's headquarters in the capital's twin city of Omdurman.

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NEWS IN BRIEF

11,000 illegals deported this year

KUWAIT: The interior ministry has deported 11,000 residency violators of both genders from Jan 1, 2023 until April 24, 2023. This comes as part of moves to adjust the population structure and arrest residency violators and loose laborers on the instructions of Interior Minister Sheikh Talal Al-Khaled Al-Sabah and Undersecretary Lt Gen Anwar Al-Barjas to intensify campaigns in all gov-

Dubai ruler appoints deputies

DUBAI: UAE Vice President and Prime Minister and Ruler of Dubai Sheikh Mohammad bin Rashid Al-Maktoum on Friday appointed Sheikh Maktoum bin Mohammad bin Rashid Al-Maktoum as First Deputy Ruler of Dubai and Sheikh Ahmad bin Mohammad bin Rashid Al-Maktoum as Second Deputy Ruler of Dubai. — KUNA



OSLO: A bronze sculpture created by artist Astri Tonoian in memory of Freya the walrus is unveiled on April 29, 2023. — AFP

Sculpture of walrus unveiled

OSLO: A bronze sculpture was unveiled Saturday in Norway of the walrus Freya who gained global attention last summer after playfully basking in the Oslo fjord until officials euthanized her. The life-size sculpture depicts Freya lying on her side on the rocky shore of Oslo's Kongen Marina, not far from where the real 600-kg mammal last summer drew large crowds chasing ducks and swans.

First Arab space walk by Emirati astronaut at ISS

DUBAI: Emirati astronaut Sultan Alneyadi stepped out of the International Space Station (ISS) Friday for the first space walk by an Arab astronaut, a moment touted by the UAE as a "milestone". Alneyadi, 41, dubbed the "Sultan of Space" by his alma mater, become the first Arab astronaut to embark on a six-month space mission when he blasted off for the ISS in early March aboard a SpaceX Falcon 9 rocket.

On Friday, he undertook "the first Arab spacewalk in history," wearing a

space suit that bears the Emirati flag, said the United Arab Emirates' Mohammed bin Rashid Space Centre (MBRSC), calling it "a new historic milestone". Footage livestreamed by NASA showed the UAE astronaut exiting an ISS hatch. "Sultan Alneyadi has egressed the hatch, the first ever space walk by an Arab astronaut," NASA said.

The spacewalk will last for around six hours and thirty minutes, according to MBRSC and NASA. Alongside NASA's Stephen Bowen, Alneyadi will "change the Radio Frequency Group unit and prepare for the installation of solar panels," the Emirati astronaut said in a Twitter post carried by the official WAM news agency. NASA said the two astronauts will "route

Continued on Page 6



This video grab shows Emirati astronaut Sultan Alneyadi on a space walk outside the International Space Station (ISS) on April 29, 2023. — MBRSC

24 Indian crew on oil tanker seized by Iran

DUBAI: A US-bound oil tanker seized by Iranian commandos had 24 Indian crew on board, its operator told AFP on Friday, adding it was working to secure their release. Footage aired by Iranian state television showed navy commandos dropping down from a helicopter onto the deck of the Advantage Sweet

which Tehran said it seized Thursday after an alleged collision with one of its vessels off the coast of Oman.

Past experience shows that crew caught up in similar incidents are in "no danger", the ship's operator, Advantage Tankers told AFP. The Marshall Islands-flagged vessel was being taken to port by Iran's navy because of an "international dispute", the operator said in a statement. "Similar experiences show that crew members of vessels taken under such circumstances are in no danger," it said, adding that the company was "in

Continued on Page 6



This grab taken from video released on April 28, 2023 shows Iranian naval soldiers boarding the Advantage Sweet oil tanker off the coast of Oman. — AFP

Erdogan appears in public after 3-day absence

ISTANBUL: Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan on Saturday appeared in public for the first time in three days after a stomach infection kept him off the campaign trail before key polls. Smiling and dressed in a red windbreaker, the 69-year-old leader walked out on the stage of an Istanbul aviation festival and tossed out flowers

to flag-waving supporters. He arrived together with his close ally, Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev, and Libyan prime minister Abdelhamid Dbeibah. Both countries have fought wars using Turkey's combat drones, which will feature prominently at the weekend aviation event. Erdogan had been lying low since getting sick live on television on Tuesday night.

Turkey's Health Minister Fahrettin Koca has said Erdogan is suffering from gastroenteritis. The digestive problem is easily treated and usually clears up in a few days. But it has disrupted Erdogan's attempts to seize

Continued on Page 6



ISTANBUL: Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan poses with Azeri President Ilham Aliyev and Libyan Prime Minister Abdul Hamid Dbeibeh as they attend a technology and aviation event on April 29, 2023. — AFP



Local

Sudan 'currently passing through very complicated circumstances'

An exclusive interview with Sudan's ambassador

By Faten Omar

KUWAIT: On April 15, Sudan was plunged into a violent crisis as a bitter struggle for power broke out between the two main factions of the ruling military regime, and many were killed in clashes during heavy fighting between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the paramilitaries of the Rapid Support Force (RSF).

In an exclusive interview with Kuwait Times, Sudanese Ambassador to Kuwait Awadal-Karim Al-Rayah Balla affirmed that what is happening in Sudan is a rebellion and a coup against legitimacy, with regional and international support targeting the unity and sovereignty of the country. He asserted that 90 percent of the camps, stores and communication networks controlled by RSF have been destroyed or recaptured by SAF, and it is just a matter of time before the conspiracy is brought to an end.

Kuwait Times: What is happening in Sudan?

Awadal-Karim Al-Rayah Balla: What has happened in Sudan can only be described as a rebellion against the state. It is not a conflict between two generals or fighting between two forces. It is a coup backed by some regional and international actors targeting the unity of the Sudanese territories and the sovereignty of the Sudanese state.

Sudan is currently passing through very complicated circumstances, which directly affect internal and external security and social situations. The main reason behind what is going on in Khartoum is due to repercussions and differences on how to organize and unify the institutions of state, especially the military forces, for proper management

of the transitional period, but the insistence and refusal of the commander of RSF for the required measures to reintegrate his troops within the army, as well as his plans to re-deploy RSF in several strategic locations without coordination with the SAF caused the armed conflict after his forces began to besiege SAF sites at Marawi Airport.

In the aftermath of the removal of Omar Al-Bashir and his successor General Ahmed Awad Ibn Auf, RSF chief Mohamed Hamdan Daglo, known as Hemedti, was nominated as the Deputy Vice President of the Transitional Sovereign Council. This status enabled him to increase his troops from 20,000 to more than 100,000, and establish regional and international relations and networks of trade and investment of his own, out of the control of the state. For this reason, many observers regarded RSF as a parallel and independent military force.

In December 2022, Hemedti, some politicians from the bloc of the Freedom and Change Alliance/Central Council Faction, the Quadripartite Mechanism and the representative of the UN Secretary-General to Sudan convinced SAF chief General Abdel Fattah Al-Burhan and SAF leaders to sign the framework agreement to pave the way for signing the final agreement on April 6, 2023, and constitute the transitional government on April 11, 2023. Some politicians from FCF released statements focusing on war as an alternative option or plan "B", in case of not signing the final agreement. Due to disagreements on the issue of the reintegration of RSF into SAF, the SAF leadership did not agree to sign the final agreement. So Hemedti and the FCF implemented their plan "B" on April 15, as they had promised.

Kuwait Times: What is the fate of Sudanese civilians and political forces?

Al-Rayah Balla: Since SAF is a professional army, it strictly follows the rules of warfare. The army does not want to attack civilian areas in which elements of RSF are hiding. Despite the fact that it is carrying out its constitutional duties to protect Sudan, its people, and national sovereignty, SAF does not want to cause massive destruction, especially as 90 percent of the solid power of RSF including camps, arms and ammunition stores and communication networks are totally destroyed.

Kuwait Times: What about the economy?

Al-Rayah Balla: Surely this crisis has negative impacts on the economy of Sudan. But let me tell you that in the budget of 2022, the export of gold was 19 tons. But the smuggled quantity of gold by the RSF leader is double the officially exported quantity. What I want to say is that the internal and external revenues and assets of RSF will be incorporated in the public budget and directed for reconstruction and economic development.

Kuwait Times: What about relations with neighboring countries? Does the crisis affect them?

Al-Rayah Balla: The crisis affects neighboring countries. The RSF is a militia that became a real threat to regional stability and security, especially if we put into consideration the highly volatile situation on the borders between Sudan and the Central African Republic, between Chad and CAR, the proximity of Darfur to these borders and the fragile security in many Sub-Saharan countries. Additionally the RSF's recruitment of minors and foreigners from some Sub-Saharan countries constitutes a



Sudanese Ambassador to Kuwait Awadal-Karim Al-Rayah Balla

hazardous threat that has to be confronted collectively.

Kuwait Times: What are the possible outcomes?

Al-Rayah Balla: SAF already managed to absorb the shock by repulsing the initial attack launched by RSF against the army headquarters, airport, Republican Palace and General Burhan personally. Later, it destroyed all the strategic sites of the rebellion. It is a matter of time for SAF to flush out the remaining pockets of rebels.

Kuwait Times: What is the role of regional and international powers? How can

countries support Sudan?

Al-Rayah Balla: We appreciate the contribution of neighboring countries and regional and international organizations. One day after the outbreak of the rebellion, a meeting of the Arab League Council was held, which reflects a spirit of solidarity with Sudan. Now the priority and focus is on enabling the legitimate army to carry out its constitutional duty, end the rebellion and restore peace and tranquility. Then the leaders of RSF should be brought to justice. Finally, an inclusive political way forward that puts the transition on the right track could be drawn.



Kuwait, China officials discuss cooperation

KUWAIT: Kuwaiti Assistant Foreign Minister for Asian Affairs Sameeh Hayat held talks with Chinese Vice Foreign Minister Deng Li and the minister's assistant for West Asia and North Africa Ambassador Wang Di and other officials from the Chinese Foreign Ministry in Beijing. The discussions, held as part of the third session for Kuwait-China cooperation, addressed issues of common concern, cooperation at the commercial, economic, cultural, educational, renewable energy and industry levels, Ambassador Hayat said in a phone call with KUNA.

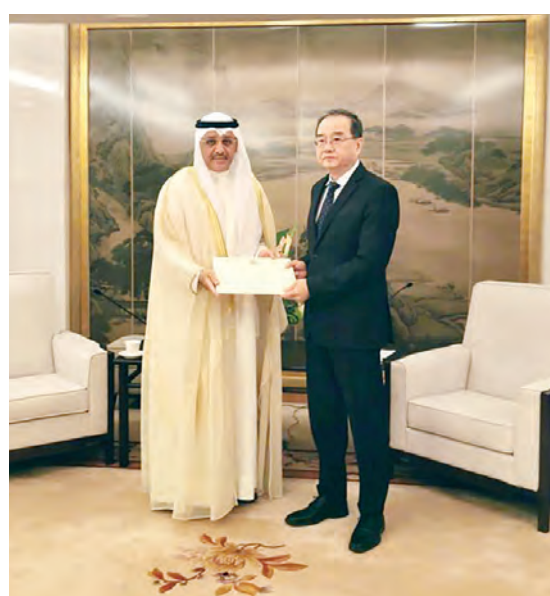
Voicing relief at the strategic and distinctive relations between the two friendly countries, Ambassador Hayat said these political consultations came in light of senior-level reciprocal visits for preserving the strategic relationship in various domains. The meetings were distinguished with a very amicable atmosphere and the two sides expressed harmonious views on the issues put on the table, he said, also noting that the meetings were held within the framework of the mutual cooperation between the Kuwaiti and Chinese foreign departments.



The meetings were attended by the acting Charge d'Affaires at the Kuwaiti Embassy and the minister plenipotentiary Musaed Sherida, the plenipotentiary minister Ali Hamada and the diplomatic attache Marzouq Al-Hasm. On Friday, Kuwaiti Foreign Minister Sheikh Salem Abdullah Al-Jaber Al-Sabah addressed a written letter to Chinese Foreign Minister Qin Gang on bolstering the strong strategic ties linking the two nations.

Meanwhile, Kuwaiti Foreign Minister Sheikh Salem Abdullah Al-Jaber Al-Sabah addressed a written letter to the Chinese Foreign Minister Qin Gang focusing on bolstering the strong strategic ties linking the two nations. Ambassador Hayat delivered the letter during a Beijing meeting with Vice Chinese Foreign Minister Deng Li.

At the meeting, the two officials touched on relations and ways to boost them on all possible



domains in addition to exchanging views on issues of mutual interest. Ambassador Hayat arrived to Beijing on an official visit, heading the Kuwaiti delegation at the third round of meetings on the cooperation mechanism between the Kuwaiti and Chinese Foreign Ministries. The Kuwaiti diplomat is also going to meet other senior Chinese officials during his visit. — KUNA

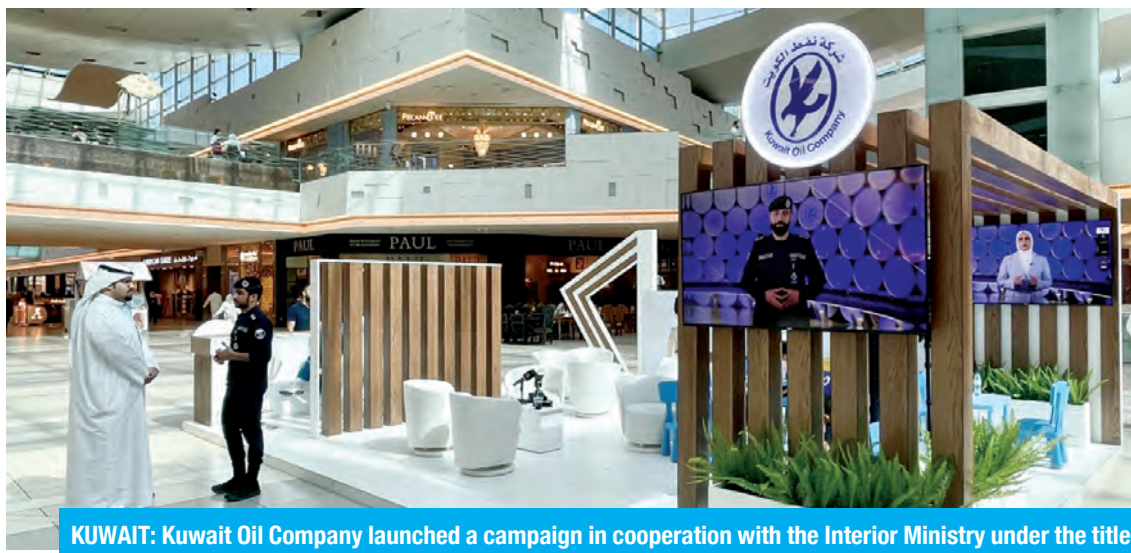
MoI warns against clicking unsafe and suspicious links

KUWAIT: The director general of the General Department of Security Relations and Media at the Ministry of Interior, Major General Tawheed Al-Kandari, warned everyone not to deal with links sent from strangers via social media or any suspicious and unsafe messages. This is to prevent hackers from stealing personal information.



Major General Tawheed Al-Kandari

Al-Kandari told the Kuwait News Agency (KUNA) on the sidelines of the launch of the Kuwait Oil Company campaign in cooperation and coordination with the interior ministry under the title "together for a safer cyberspace for our children" at the Avenues Complex that the campaign aims to educate parents about the dangers of cyber-



KUWAIT: Kuwait Oil Company launched a campaign in cooperation with the Interior Ministry under the title "together for a safer cyberspace for our children" at the Avenues Complex. — KUNA

space and how to safely use the network and its applications to prevent cybercrimes and when their children are subjected to cyberbullying or any cybercrime.

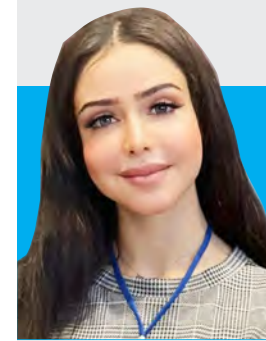
He added that cybercriminals promote malicious games, applications, and websites through which the victim can be accessed by logging into computers. He stressed the need to download the original antivirus programs. About phishing, he reported that the process is carried out by deceiving

children and teenagers - using email when clicking on links, attachments, text messages, etc.

Al-Kandari appealed to everyone to protect children from extortionists via the internet, whether through photos or personal information, in exchange for asking for money or doing immoral acts. He urged them to call the emergency number (112) if necessary or to contact the Department of Combating Electronic Crimes on the number (97283939) via the WhatsApp application service. — KUNA

In my view

Importance of diversity, inclusion in workplace



By Atyab Al-Shatti

Local@kuwaittimes.com

In recent years, there has been a growing awareness of the importance of diversity and inclusion in the workplace. While this has primarily focused on issues such as gender, race and ethnicity, there is also a need to consider age as a factor in building a more diverse and inclusive workforce. Unfortunately, ageism is a reality in many industries and can make it difficult for elderly people to find employment or advance in their careers. This is particularly true in industries that value youth and innovation, where older workers may be viewed as less able to adapt to change or learn new skills.

However, this is a flawed and shortsighted perspective that fails to recognize the value that elders can bring to the workplace. Many older workers have a wealth of knowledge and experience that they can draw upon to help solve problems and make strategic decisions. They may have worked in the industry for many years and developed valuable networks and connections that can be useful for the organization.

Furthermore, older workers may be more reliable and have a stronger work ethic than their younger counterparts. They may be less likely to take time off work due to illness or personal reasons and may have a stronger sense of loyalty to the organization. It's important for organizations to recognize the value of older workers and make an effort to include them in their hiring and retention strategies. This can involve things like offering training and development opportunities to help them keep their skills up to date, providing flexible work arrangements that allow them to balance work and other commitments and creating a culture that values and respects people of all ages.

One of the key challenges in including elders in the workforce is combating ageism. This can be a difficult issue to address, as it often involves changing deeply ingrained attitudes and biases. However, organizations can take steps to address ageism by promoting diversity and inclusion initiatives and creating a culture that values people of all ages.

Another important factor in including elderly people in the workforce is recognizing that their needs and preferences may be different from those of younger workers. For example, older workers may prefer more flexible work arrangements, such as part-time or remote work, to accommodate their other commitments. They may also have different expectations around compensation and benefits, such as healthcare and retirement plans.

Overall, there are many compelling reasons to include elders in the workforce. By tapping into their skills and experience, organizations can gain a competitive advantage and create a more vibrant and dynamic workplace culture. Furthermore, by promoting diversity and inclusion, organizations can help combat ageism and build a more equitable and just society.

In conclusion, there is a clear need for organizations to include elders in their workforce. By recognizing the value that older workers can bring to the table and making an effort to create an inclusive and diverse workplace culture, organizations can build a stronger and more resilient workforce that is better equipped to meet the challenges of the 21st century.

Local

Are people without a university degree dehumanized by society?

‘A degree is seen as a first impression’

By Ghadeer Ghloom

KUWAIT: Having a degree has become essential for many people to survive. Degrees are seen not only as a tool that paves the way to a secure life and future, but also a necessity for one's status and worth in society. This leaves people with no university degrees in a critical situation, struggling to succeed in today's workforce as well as fit in society. Kuwait Times interviewed three people without a university degree, who shared their experiences.

Bu Ali, a middle-aged stateless man in Kuwait, said not having a college degree keeps one stuck in a vicious circle of basic jobs and positions, especially since people nowadays only care about the facade. Where does a person work and what is their job title has become part of one's reputation and value. "A degree is seen as a first impression, as people judge you according to such things. So, if you are a teacher or a doctor, this means that you are more intelligent," Bu Ali said.

According to Bu Ali, the higher your status is, the worthier you become of marriage and friendship or any other kind of connection: "People judge, befriend and respect you according to how much they can benefit from their relationship with you," he noted. Sami, a middle-aged Lebanese expat, said not having a college degree not only affected his practical life in terms of job opportunities and salary, but also his social life.

"I am almost 40 years old but unable to get engaged to a suitable woman. I personally had to leave

a woman who I barely got to know because as soon as she learnt I do not have a college degree, she said that there cannot be any chance of getting engaged, not only from her side, but also from her family's side, because marrying someone without a college degree in unacceptable to her father," he said.

Holding a degree has become part of the necessities that make society consider one's humanity. "Without a college degree, people view you in a dehumanized manner. If not with disrespect, then it is through sympathy, knowing your chances of success and stability are lower than everyone else. Nowadays, the majority of people hold a degree, unlike the past, where having only a high school degree would be considered acceptable. This makes you feel like an outcast," Sami said.

Furthermore, Sami told Kuwait Times about his experience with not having a degree at work. He said after spending many years of his life working, he has started seeing people who are new to the company are getting raises and are paid better than he is, despite his experience in the company, because some higher positions necessitate possessing university degrees, otherwise the owners would be questioned and get in trouble with the government for placing someone in a certain position without a degree that proves their credibility. This pushed Sami to quit his job and start working as a freelancer. "I currently work as a videographer and am aiming to expand my work and start my own company," he added.

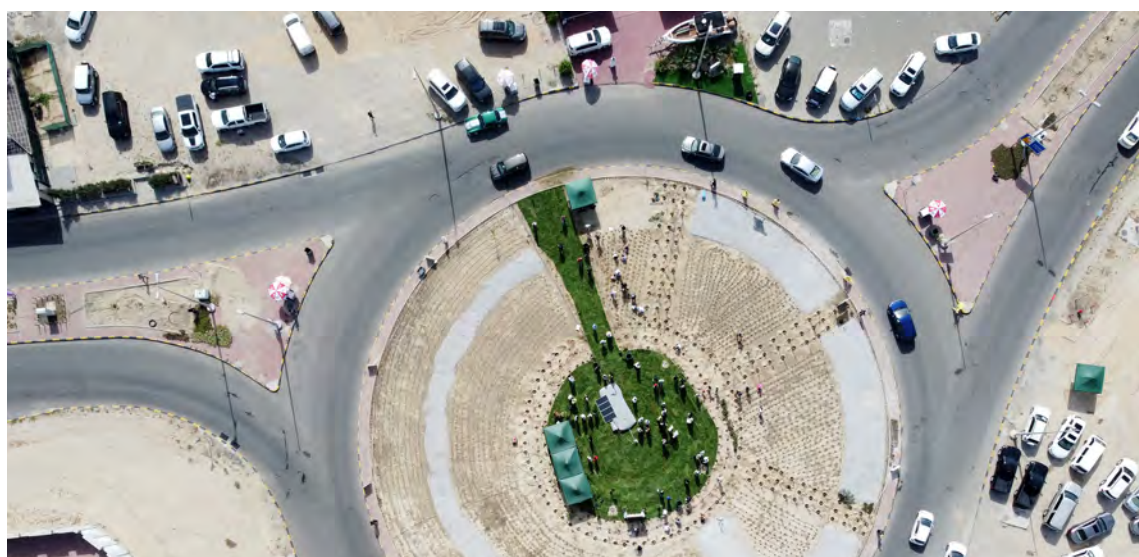
Another example is Olivia, a middle-aged Lebanese woman, who has worked for more than 10



years in the same position. She said that her chances of growth are very limited and her pay is too little, despite holding a diploma in business. "I continued my studies after graduating from high school, only to realize that it is not only a matter of earning a college degree. The university that you attend and the major that you study also make a great difference. Because I studied business at a weak college,

it did not benefit me much," she pointed out.

Job opportunities are not very diverse and not every company accepted Olivia's diploma. "During the pandemic, the company I worked for fired me along with other colleagues who like me either had no degree or weak qualifications. Therefore, this puts us at a higher risk of dehumanization and insecurity," she added.



KUWAIT: An aerial view shows people planting trees at a roundabout in Mesayel on April 29, 2023, as part of an afforestation campaign. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat

National initiative to make Kuwait a greener place

By Majd Othman

KUWAIT: As part of a national initiative that aims to beautify Kuwait and turn it into a greener place, a number of Kuwaiti youths launched a national awareness campaign under the title "With our hands, we change it" on Saturday at Mesayel Roundabout in the presence of the initiators of the idea — the Mobader Volunteer Team, Founder of Sidr Nature Reserve Obaid Al-Shemmari, environmental activists Mariam Jarkhi, Mahmoud Bugammaz and media volunteer Yousef Al-Omran.

Bugammaz said the campaign aims to support areas that suffer from a lack of greenery, pointing out Mesayel is one of the areas that needs to be beautified with several kinds of plants, not only on roundabouts, but inner streets as well. Bugammaz said this is the first campaign with such a large level of participation from the environmental sector, in cooperation with residents of the area.

Bugammaz added the campaign is financed by Hessah Al-Farsi, who is the main sponsor of this initiative, adding governmental cooperation with the initiative is excellent. The initiative was marked by the participation of a large number of residents



Founder of Sidr Nature Reserve Obaid Al-Shemmari

of the area, especially children who were very excited to be part of the tree-planting campaign in their area.

Head of Mobader Volunteer Team Reem Jassem Al-Shemmari said this initiative came about due to efforts by citizens and volunteers. "This campaign was launched because clearly, we live in a high temperature zone, and greening helps a lot in reducing the temperature. The most important

goal of this initiative is that youths must participate in improving the country," she said. "Despite the big role by the government to greenify the country, individuals should also play an essential part in taking care of their country," she added.

Founder of Sidr Nature Reserve Obaid Al-Shemmari told Kuwait Times the initiative aims to turn Mesayel into a model area with a beautiful environment like other areas in Kuwait. "As Kuwaiti initiators, our main goal is to take care of our country. We want to build a good legacy in all areas of the country," he said. Shemmari said it's important to choose the best trees that not only beautify the area, but also improve air purity. He added this initiative tried to use innovative means to water plants — through solar energy, hoping this could be implemented in all other areas of Kuwait.



Head of Mobader Volunteer Team Reem Jassem Al-Shemmari



Activist and Volunteer Mahmoud Bugammaz



KUWAIT: People plant trees at a roundabout in Mesayel.



Meetings of Arab financial institutions start in Morocco

RABAT: The annual meetings of the Arab financial institutions kicked off on Saturday, with the participation of Arab delegations, including Kuwait, representing the ministries of finance and economy, and governors of central banks as well as some senior officials. Addressing the participating delegations in a message, Morocco's King Mohammed VI said these gatherings are held at foggy and uncertain atmospheres regarding the global economy amid ongoing repercussions of Ukraine's crisis and geopolitical tensions.

"The annual meetings of our Arab financial institutions constitute an important opportunity for evaluating achievements and taking stock of the commendable development efforts exerted by these institutions," according to the King's message delivered by Moroccan Prime Minister Aziz Akhannouch. The gatherings also give the participants a chance to share views on ways to support Arab countries' efforts to address related issues, he noted in the message.

The King called for unifying Arab common efforts, and upgrading strategies and development programs to meet aspirations of Moroccan citizens, mainly youth. He

stressed the need of boosting Arab development institutions' capabilities towards international and regional changes, continuing working to support Arab development efforts by adopting modern development models based on fortifying and rehabilitating Arab economies and enabling them to effectively integrate into regional and international value chains.

The King underlined the importance of close connection between climate security and food security, mainly when it comes to supporting Arab countries' water security efforts and the adoption of a roadmap for Arab agricultural integration, in ways that reconcile current constraints with food self-sufficiency aspirations in the Arab world.

He called for taking measures to avoid possible obstacles in front of the desired development path, stressing the need of providing funds for the projects aimed at promoting the transition to a green and sustainable economy, as well as supporting research, sharing experiences and mobilizing capabilities in this field. Kuwait's delegation to the meetings is headed by Undersecretary of Finance Ministry Aseel Al-Munaifi and includes several senior officials.

The Arab financial institutions play an important role in financing development projects in the Arab region, sharing expertise in public financial policies, as well as coordinating positions in the financial and economic fields in regional and international forums to support the Arab presence in international financial institutions. — KUNA

Ministry of Awqaf sets official working hours

KUWAIT: The Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs has announced the setting of official working hours for employees at seven hours, distributed over four periods. The director of the information department at the Ministry, Dr Ahmed Al-Otaibi, said in a press statement that the ministry issued an administrative circular on setting official work timings for employees based on the decisions of the Civil Service Council.

Al-Otaibi stressed that the employee may attend at any of the specified dates and comply with timings depending on the date of attendance, provided that the minutes of delay are counted at the beginning of the employee's shift. He stated that the administration has the right to oblige some of its employees to a specific work schedule, whether at the level of management, certain organizational units, functional categories, or a group of



Dr Ahmed Al-Otaibi

employees, depending on the interest of the work and in a manner that does not exceed the specified deadlines.

He pointed out that in this case, the employee is restricted by the dates set by his employer to attend and leave and may not choose a date. Al-Otaibi added that this decision does not prejudice the employee's grace period of 30 minutes at the beginning of the work or the female's grace period of 15 minutes at the end of the work, the permission system, or other rules or provisions contained in the decision of the Civil Service Council. He stated that the Departments of Islamic Studies and the Sciences of the Holy Quran should adhere to the circular, taking into account the non-violation of the grace periods at the beginning of the work for 30 minutes and the grace period for females at the end of the work for 15 minutes. — KUNA

Kuwait crude oil exports to Japan up 4.4%

TOKYO: Kuwait's crude oil exports to Japan in March grew 4.4 percent from a year earlier to 6.55 million barrels, or 211,000 barrels per day (bpd), for the fourth straight monthly expansion, the Japanese government data showed Friday. Kuwait was Japan's number three oil-provider in March, supplying 8.4 percent of the Asian nation's total crude imports, compared with 7.1 percent in the same month of last year, the Japanese Natural Resources and Energy Agency said in a preliminary report.

Japan's overall imports of crude oil declined 12.7 percent year-on-year to 2.51 million bpd, down for the second month in a row. Shipments from the Middle East accounted for 96.6 percent of the total, up 3.3 percentage points from the year before. Saudi Arabia remained in the top spot, with imports from the kingdom increasing 7.6 percent from the year before to 1.06 million bpd, followed by the United Arab Emirates with 961,000 bpd, down 12.5 percent. Qatar ranked fourth with 156,000 bpd and the US fifth with 44,000 bpd, respectively. Japan is the world's-third biggest oil consumer after China and the US.



Kuwait oil price down

Meanwhile, the price of Kuwaiti oil went down by \$3.19 to \$79.43 per barrel on Thursday, as opposed to \$82.62 pb the day before, said the Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) Friday. At the global level, the price of the Brent crude went up by 68 cents to \$78.37 per barrel, the same case with the West Texas Intermediate, which increased by 46 cents to \$74.76 pb. — KUNA

Photo of the day



KUWAIT: In these images taken over three days, a village weaver builds a nest at Shaheed Park. The village weaver, also known as the spotted-backed weaver or black-headed weaver, is a species of bird in the family Ploceidae found in much of sub-Saharan Africa. — Photos by Tareeq Iqbal Mohammed (Instagram: imtareeq)

MENA region faces unprecedented water scarcity crisis: World Bank

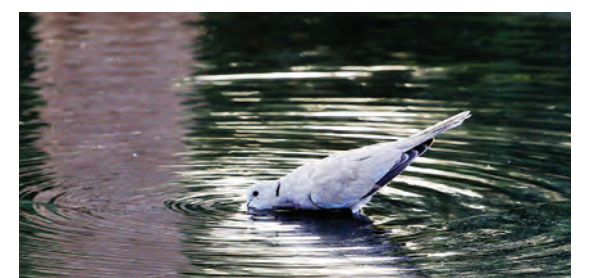
WASHINGTON: The World Bank has warned that people across the Middle East and North Africa region are facing "unprecedented water scarcity," warning of "negative consequences" on water quality as a result of this situation. According to the World Bank report titled "The Economics of Water Scarcity in the Middle East and North Africa - Institutional Solutions," the amount of water available per capita annually in the region will decrease by the end of the current decade from "the absolute limit of water scarcity, which is 500 cubic meters per person per year."

The World Bank predicted that "by 2050, an additional 25 billion cubic meters of water will be needed annually to meet the needs of the region. This is equivalent to establishing another 65 desalination plants, the size of the Ras Al-Khair plant in Saudi Arabia, which is the largest in the world in present time". The report proposes a series of resource management reforms, as well as institutional reforms to

mitigate water pressures in the region.

"Water shortages pose a serious challenge to life and livelihoods, as the agricultural sector and urban centers compete for this precious natural resource and its distribution systems," said Ferid Belhaj, World Bank Vice President for the Middle East and North Africa. "A new approach is needed to address this challenge, including delegating more control to local authorities over how water distribution is managed," Belhaj stated. According to the World Bank, the region's countries have already "made large investments in new infrastructure, in the past, such as storing water using dams, and have found ways to benefit from the large groundwater resources."

However, the World Bank notes that "the expansionist approach to the development of water resources is now facing limits that will require countries to make difficult choices," noting that the current time is witnessing "an overexploitation of groundwater, which will have negative consequen-



KUWAIT: A dove drinks water from a fountain in Kuwait City. The World Bank has warned that people across the Middle East and North Africa region are facing 'unprecedented water scarcity,' warning of 'negative consequences' on water quality as a result of this situation. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

es for water quality, and will lead to importing 'virtual water' has made countries vulnerable to global shocks." — KUNA

Youth Authority approves programs, projects, activities

KUWAIT: The Kuwait General Youth Authority approved its programs, projects, and development activities for the fiscal year (2023-2024), and the operational plan has to meet the aspirations and desires of young people in the areas of interest.

The director general of the authority Mishaal Al-Subaie said in a press statement on Saturday that these programs come in implementation of the directives of the chairman of the board of directors of the authority, the Minister of Information, and the Minister of State for Youth Affairs, Abdulrahman Al-Mutairi, to support and empower young people as future leaders and change makers.

Al-Subaie explained that the approved programs are characterized by diversity, inclusiveness, and partnership with young people to achieve leadership and give them room for excellence and creativity in various fields. He added that the authority will work in its plan to activate the role of youth centers to provide diverse and multiple activities and enhance interactive spaces.

He pointed to the variety of programs to

support young people, including the Youth Valley for Science and Technology, volunteer work, the Youth Creativity League, professional initiatives to promote entrepreneurship, job makers to encourage young people to work in the private sector, and our initiatives that adopt youth ideas and projects.

He noted the authority's keen interest in the creative industries through various craft activities and the launch of a package of activities for media, arts, cinema, and theater at the Academy of Arts and Media at the youth center. He stressed the keenness of the authority to shed light on the distinguished and creative Kuwaiti youth as well as enhance their participation in local and foreign meetings related to youth work.

Al-Subaie said that the authority is working to launch a variety of activities during this summer period at youth centers. He expressed his thanks and appreciation to the state institutions directly related to youth, civil society organizations, and the private sector interested in this aspect, as "their contributions and distinguished participation in the programs of the authority are important for its success and achievements". — KUNA



Mishaal Al-Subaie

GCC chief, Azerbaijan ambassador hold talks

RIYADH: GCC General Secretary Jassem Al-Budaiwi and Azerbaijan Ambassador to Saudi Arabia Shahin Abdullayev discussed bilateral relations and the GCC-Azerbaijan economic forum. In a statement, the GCC General Secretariat said that during the meeting, the two sides emphasized the importance of fostering cooperative relations between the GCC countries and Azerbaijan in all fields. The Secretariat added the two sides also exchanged views on various topics of common concern. The statement noted that Al-Budaiwi stressed the importance of activating the previously signed MoU and boosting cooperation in the energy, trade, investment, and other vital fields. — KUNA



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Thousands endure long wait for safety at Sudan-Ethiopia border

Foreigners and Sudanese flee to Ethiopia over Cairo for proximity to Khartoum

GALLABAT: An interminable row of minibuses lines the road that separates Sudan's southeastern city of Gedaref from the Ethiopian border, slowly bringing people fleeing Sudan's war closer to safety. There, families have been "sleeping on the ground out in the open", said Oktay Oglu, a Turkish engineer who worked at a factory in the capital Khartoum before escaping with his family.

Locals and foreigners alike have made this journey, fleeing more than two weeks of brutal fighting that pits forces loyal to rival generals against one other, with civilians caught in the crossfire. The war in the capital and other parts of Sudan has killed hundreds, injured thousands and uprooted tens of thousands, some of whom have fled to neighboring countries including Ethiopia.

The minibuses move at a snail's pace. At the end of the road to the border, Sudanese and Ethiopian flags flutter in the sky, a mere 10 meters between them. But there, another long wait lies in store. With his wife and three children, Oglu made the arduous trip from Khartoum to Gedaref after waiting days until a relative lull in fighting allowed them to escape.

They first reached the city of Wad Madani 200 kilometers (124 miles) south of the capital, where witnesses say life continues relatively normally. They spent the night there before continuing on to Gedaref another 250 kilometers east.

Finally, the road led them to the border with Ethiopia and the small community of Gallabat, with its bare-bones homes made out of wood and dried grass. Having arrived at the crossing after it closed at 5:00 pm, they had to wait out the night until it reopened at 8:00 am the next morning.

From Gondar to Dubai

At the crossing they found nationals from all over the world gathered, all hoping to make it to the other side in as little time as possible. An official at the



ABU DHABI: People fleeing conflict in Sudan are welcomed by Emirati officials at an airport in Abu Dhabi after an evacuation flight, on April 29, 2023. — AFP

crossing, speaking on condition of anonymity, said about "9,000 people crossed the border, the majority foreigners, including many Turkish".

Data from the United Nations' International Organization for Migration said about 3,500 people of 35 different nationalities had found refuge in Ethiopia as of Tuesday. More than 40 percent of those are Turkish, while 14 percent are Ethiopians who lived in Sudan and are returning home.

Many of the Sudanese crossing are Gulf workers like 35-year-old Diaeddin Mohammed, an accountant

with a Dubai-based company. Though many among Khartoum's five million residents chose to flee northwards towards Egypt or east to Port Sudan — where Saudi ships have been transporting foreigners across the Red Sea to Jeddah — Mohammed favored another route. "I chose Ethiopia because the distance from Khartoum to the Ethiopian city of Gondar, which has an airport ... is about 850 kilometers," he said.

By comparison, Cairo is a grueling 2,000-kilometer road trip north through the desert, with refugees often waiting days to be processed at the border.

Once in Gondar, Mohammed could easily book a direct flight to Dubai. Others have fled with no prospect of job security or a second home to return to.

Ahmed Hussein, 45, had to abandon his small business in Khartoum for a life in exile along with his wife and three daughters. "We want to cross to safety in Addis Ababa until we see where things are going in Sudan," he told AFP. Hussein added that he would try to start a small business in Ethiopia, "if that is possible". In the meantime, he said, they would try to survive "with whatever means I have". — AFP

India arms Hindu militias in Kashmir

DHANGRI, India: Brandishing a bolt-action rifle, civil servant Sanjeet Kumar is one of 5,000 Kashmir villagers who have joined all-Hindu militia units armed and trained by Indian forces to fight off rebel attacks.

India has more than half a million soldiers permanently stationed in the parts of Muslim-majority Kashmir it controls, as the Hindu nationalist government presses a bid to crush a decades-long insurgency. Authorities announced the new militias last year, and a deadly rebel assault in Kumar's frontier village in January prompted him to sign up.

"We were totally terrorized by the attack," the 32-year-old municipal worker in the electricity department told AFP. Wearing a saffron-colored tilak on his forehead to mark himself as a member of the Hindu faithful, Kumar said he was ready and able to defend his home. "Anyone who turns a traitor to our nation is my target," he told AFP.

'Only one community'

Kashmir has been disputed between India and

Pakistan since both countries achieved independence 75 years ago. Both sides claim the territory in full. India has fought against rebel groups demanding the territory's independence, or merger with Pakistan, in an insurgency that has claimed tens of thousands of lives. The new militia units, known as Village Defence Guards, were unveiled last year in the wake of a string of murders targeting police officers and Hindu residents of Kashmir. The scheme has been broadly popular among the region's Hindu residents but Muslim villagers are concerned the militia will only exacerbate Kashmir's woes.

"My worry is about the way weapons are now being distributed among only one community," said one elderly Muslim living in Dhangri, who asked not to be named. "Now weapons are being brandished around by young ones. This is not good for any one of us," he told AFP. "I sense a growing tension."

'I will fight back'

Many residents of Dhangri, the remote hamlet where Kumar lives, are still grief-stricken by the attack that claimed the lives of seven of their neighbors, which police blamed on Pakistan-based militants. "With or without the weapons, we're terrorized," said farmer Murari Lal Sharma, 55, as he cradled his loaded .303 caliber rifle. "But now I will fight back."

One Indian paramilitary officer said the newly armed villagers were on such a constant state of alert



DHANGRI, India: In this photograph taken on February 26, 2023, civil servant Sanjeet Kumar (right) listens to a retired Indian army soldier Abdul Qayoom at Dhangri village in India's administered Kashmir. — AFP

that his unit informed them beforehand of their night patrol, so that they were not accidentally mistaken for militants and fired upon. "The purpose is to create a line of defense, not a line of attack," Kanchan Gupta of India's information ministry told AFP.

India first created a civil militia force in Kashmir in mid-1990s as a first line of defense when the armed rebellion against Indian rule was at its peak. About 25,000 men and women, including teenagers and some Muslims, were given weapons and organized into village defense committees in Jammu region. — AFP

Crimea fuel depot on fire; towns shelled

KYIV: A huge fire erupted in Moscow-annexed Crimea after a suspected drone attack hit an oil depot on Saturday, as fighting intensified on the southern Ukrainian front and shelling deprived Russian border villages of power.

The attacks came one day after Kyiv said preparations for a long-awaited counteroffensive were nearly complete, having vowed to expel Russian forces from territory they seized in the east and south following their 2022 invasion.

On Friday, a Russian strike on a bloc of flats in the central Ukrainian city of Uman killed 23 people, including a baby boy. On Saturday, officials in Moscow-controlled Crimea, towns under Russian occupation in southern Ukraine and a governor of a border region reported attacks.

Fears of Ukrainian reprisals more than a year into Moscow's offensive have grown in Russia, where a range of cities have cancelled traditional May 9 celebrations to mark Soviet victory over the Nazis at the end of World War II in 1945.

In Sevastopol, home to Russia's Black Sea Fleet, clouds of smoke rose high into the sky as a fuel reserve burned. The port city has been hit by a series of drone attacks since Moscow's invasion of Ukraine began more than a year ago.

'God's punishment'

Russian-installed authorities said the fire was caused by a suspected drone but sought to downplay the incident, amid rising security fears on the peninsula. The Kremlin said nothing about the attack.

It came less than 24 hours after Russia struck a typical Soviet-era housing bloc in the historic city of Uman, killing more than two dozen of its residents. Kyiv on Saturday identified five children killed in the attack as an 18-month-old boy, three girls aged eight, 11 and 14, and a 16-year-old boy.

"One woman is considered missing. The search continues," Ukrainian Interior Minister Ihor Klymenko said. Ukraine did not claim the Crimea attack, but military intelligence implied it was revenge for Uman.

Andriy Yusov, from the defense ministry's intelligence unit, said it was "God's punishment, in particular for the civilians killed in Uman." He warned people in Crimea to "avoid being near military facilities and facilities providing the aggressor's army in the near future."

On the Russian-annexed peninsula, the governor of Sevastopol, Mikhail Razvozhayev, urged Crimeans to "remain calm" and said "nobody was hurt."

The shelling of Novaya Kakhovka came a day after Russian shelling killed a 57-year-old woman in a southern Ukrainian village, with Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky vowing a response.

Inside Russia, security fears have grown amid talk of a Ukrainian counteroffensive. The governor of the border Belgorod region — that has also been hit by a series of attacks throughout the war — said Saturday that five frontier villages were without power after Ukrainian shelling. — AFP

Zionists strike Syria, murder Palestinian teen

DAMASCUS: Three civilians were wounded Saturday on Zionist air strikes near the Syrian city of Homs, state media reported, with a war monitor saying a Hezbollah munitions depot was hit.

While the Zionist entity rarely comments on the strikes it carries out on Syria, it has repeatedly said it will not allow its arch-foe Iran to extend its footprint in the war-torn country.

"At around 00:50 (2150 GMT) ... the Zionist enemy carried out an air attack with a number of missiles, from the direction of north Lebanon, targeting

several positions in the vicinity of the city of Homs," state news agency SANA reported.

"Three civilians were wounded and a civilian petrol station caught fire and a number of fuel tanks and trucks were burned," it said, adding that Syrian air defenses had intercepted some of the missiles.

When contacted by AFP, the Zionist military did not comment on the incident.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, a Britain-based monitor, said four Syrian soldiers were wounded in the strike that caused "loud explosions as the munitions in the depot blew up".

The Zionist strike also destroyed "trucks carrying weapons belonging to Lebanese Hezbollah" at the Dabaa military airport in the countryside of Homs province, the Observatory added.

On April 2, the Zionists carried out similar strikes targeting a Hezbollah depot in the Dabaa airport area, the Observatory had said, killing two pro-Iran

Houston, described a horrifying scene when authorities went to the residence after receiving a call about "harassment" around 11:30pm Friday.

The victims, aged from eight to 40 years old, were strewn from the front door through the house to an inside bedroom, where two of them — both women — were found lying on top of two children who survived the massacre.

"In my opinion, they were actually trying to take care of the babies and keep them babies alive," Capers told ABC's Houston station KTRK. All the victims had been shot "from the neck up, almost execution style, basically in the head," he added.

Deputies found "several others in critical condition from multiple gunshot wounds," the sheriff's office said in a Facebook post. Three were hospitalized. The suspect "had been drinking, and he says, 'I'll do what I want to in my

front yard," the sheriff told KTRK.

"All the victims were from Honduras," Capers told reporters, adding that 10 people had been in the house at the time. The authorities said an arrest warrant had been issued for 39-year-old Francisco Oropeza, charging him with five counts of murder.

"We've got his Mexican consulate card," Capers said, adding that a security system at the victims' house "captured him coming up to the front door with a weapon." The shooter is believed to have left the county, but nearby residents were urged to stay home, the sheriff's office said on its Facebook page.

The Texas killings appeared to be the latest in a series of shootings spawned by ordinary interactions: a man mistakenly knocking on the wrong door, a cheerleader accidentally stepping into the wrong car, someone mistakenly driving into the wrong driveway, a ball rolling into a neighbor's yard. — AFP

Gunman on the run after 5 shot dead in Texas

HOUSTON: Police were searching for a gunman believed to have shot dead five Hondurans including an eight-year-old child at a house in Texas, the local sheriff said Saturday, in the latest mass shooting to hit the United States.

Investigators believe the gunman had been firing his AR-15-style gun in a neighboring yard when the victims asked him to stop, as they were trying to get a baby to sleep, US media reported. Sheriff Greg Capers of San Jacinto County, which is north of

International

'I'd rather die': Syrians in Lebanon fear deportation

Anti-Syrian sentiment soars in Lebanon amid crippling economic crisis

BEIRUT: Samer and his family thought they had found safety in Lebanon after fleeing Syria's war nearly a decade ago, but amid growing anti-refugee sentiment, Beirut handed his brother to the Syrian army.

Syrians poured into Lebanon after civil war broke out in 2011, with Damascus' brutal suppression of peaceful protests. With the regime now back in control of most of the country, calls have intensified in crisis-hit Lebanon for Syrians to go home.

Samer said Lebanon's army intelligence raided his brother's apartment in a Beirut suburb last week, detaining him, his wife and children and deporting them to Syria.

Like others AFP spoke to, Samer preferred to use an alias, citing security concerns. Syrian authorities released the wife and children but arrested his brother, who together with Samer had taken part in anti-government protests more than a decade ago. He has not heard from him since.

"Our biggest fear is for him to disappear (in regime prisons), never to be heard from again," said Samer, 26. "We fear we will meet the same fate: deported to Syria, where we could be arrested or disappeared." Authorities say Lebanon currently hosts around two million Syrians, while more than 800,000 are registered with the United Nations — the highest number of refugees per capita in the world. Lebanon has long pushed for Syrians to return home, and has made several repatriation efforts for Syrians that authorities describe as voluntary. In recent weeks the army has intensified a crackdown on undocumented Syrians, with some 450 arrested and at least 66 deported, a humanitarian source told AFP.

'Want a solution'

Lebanon has seen anti-Syrian sentiment soar recently as some officials seek to blame refugees for the country's woes. Lebanon has been in the throes

of a devastating economic crisis since 2019 that has plunged most of the population into poverty. The local currency has tanked, while the World Bank has blamed authorities for misusing and mispending people's deposits.

Social Affairs Minister Hector Hajjar recently claimed there were "dangerous demographic changes" under way, warning: "We will become refugees in our own country." Some municipalities over the years have imposed restrictions on Syrians' movement, while recent social media posts have painted refugees as criminals hungry for United Nations aid. "They say we receive UN aid in dollars, but it is not true," Samer said, adding he and his family had experienced years of poverty and intimidation. "We are tired and we want a solution. We don't need money or anything from Lebanon."

The UN refugee agency (UNHCR) told AFP it can only disburse assistance to roughly 43 percent of refugees, paid out in local currency. "The maximum a vulnerable family of five or more members receives for both cash and food assistance is 8,000,000 Lebanese pounds per month," UNHCR said — roughly \$80.

The agency said authorities had been cracking down on Syrian communities, with at least 13 raids in April alone. Some of those arrested or expelled were refugees registered with UNHCR, it said, while another humanitarian source said in some cases minors had been separated from their parents.

'I'd rather die'

Amnesty International this week urged Lebanon to "immediately stop deportations", describing them as forced and saying refugees risked "torture or persecution" upon return. The clampdown has left impoverished Syrians distraught, with many now too scared to go out.

Abu Salim, 32, told AFP he had been sleeping at



TRIPOLI: Members of Islamist movement "Hizb ut-Tahrir" protest in the northern Lebanese port city of Tripoli, on April 28, 2023, against the deportation of Syrian refugees. — AFP

a warehouse where he works with 20 other people "because we're afraid of getting arrested". He said he had spent six years in Syrian jails and his worst fear was deportation.

"If I go back to prison, I will never get out," he said. Ammar, an army deserter, told AFP he had been holed up at home, his eyes glued to the anti-Syrian vitriol spewed on social media.

"Why all this hate? What did we do to deserve this? We only fled to escape death," the 31-year-old said. In Lebanon since 2014, he said he feared not only for his own life but for his wife and two-

month-old child. "I live in fear that the army will break into my house and deport me," he said, adding that soon he will have to venture out "to work and buy baby milk". Desperate Lebanese, Syrians and Palestinians have been attempting to leave Lebanon for Europe on rickety boats, with some migration bids ending in tragedy.

The government has accused Syrians of entering Lebanon just to take the perilous sea journeys. Ammar said he would take a boat if he had to. "In Syria there is no longer any hope," Ammar said. "I'd rather die at sea than return." — AFP

Pro-Kurdish party backs Erdogan rival

ANKARA: Turkey's main pro-Kurdish party and its leftist allies called on voters Friday to back President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's main rival in the May 14 polls. The announcement pushes one of Turkey's largest blocs behind opposition candidate Kemal Kilicdaroglu and further complicates Erdogan's path to a third decade of rule.

The Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP) — the third-largest in Turkey's parliament — decided last month not to field a presidential candidate. It then strongly hinted that it would back Kilicdaroglu without officially endorsing his candidacy.

But both the party's co-leader and its leftist electoral alliance issued statements Friday calling on voters to rally around the most likely candidate to beat Erdogan. "In this historic election, we call on the people of Turkey to vote for the Labour and Freedom Alliance in the parliamentary elections and for Kemal Kilicdaroglu in the presidential elections," the HDP and its allies said in a statement.

HDP co-leader Mithat Sancar called the upcoming vote "the most crucial in Turkey's history". "That's why we've decided to support Kilicdaroglu," he told the Sozcu news site. The HDP won more than 10 percent of the vote in past national elections and represents a community accounting



KOCAELI: Supporters cheer during a rally in support of Republican People's Party (CHP) Chairman and Presidential candidate Kemal Kilicdaroglu in Kocaeli, on April 28, 2023. — AFP

for about a fifth of Turkey's population.

Kurds suffered repressions under successive secular governments and helped Erdogan and his Islamic-rooted party seize power two decades ago. Erdogan lifted linguistic and cultural restrictions on the community and tried to end a bloody Kurdish struggle for an independent state in Turkey's southeast through talks.

But a breakdown of those negotiations in 2015 was followed by a new wave of violence and a government clampdown on Kurdish groups. Erdogan's government jailed thousands of activists and replaced dozens of elected Kurdish mayors with state trustees. — AFP

The fighting has also triggered a mass exodus of foreigners and international staff. On Saturday, a ferry with around 1,900 evacuees arrived at a Saudi naval base in Jeddah, after crossing the Red Sea from Port Sudan, in the latest evacuation to the kingdom by sea. An Emirati evacuation plane arrived from Sudan carrying citizens and nationals from 16 countries, the United Arab Emirates said. They are among almost 4,880 people who have been brought to safety in the kingdom, the Saudi foreign ministry said.

Britain said it would end its evacuation flights on Saturday, after airlifting more than 1,500 people this week. The World Food Program has said the violence could plunge millions more into hunger in a country where 15 million people — one-third of the population — already need aid to stave off famine. About 70 percent of hospitals in areas near the fighting have been put out of service and many have been shelled, the doctors' union said.

In West Darfur state, at least 96 people were reported to have been killed in the city of El Geneina this week, the UN said. "What's happening in Darfur is terrible, the society is falling apart, we see tribes that now try to arm themselves," Guterres said. Doctors Without Borders (MSF) said there were reports of widespread looting, destruction, and burning of property, including at camps for displaced people.

MSF deputy operations manager for Sudan, Sylvain Perron, said the fighting had forced the agency to stop almost all its activities in West Darfur. "We are incredibly worried about the impact this violence is having on people who have already lived through waves of violence in the previous years." — AFP

a long-duration space mission. The UAE is a newcomer to the world of space exploration but quickly making its mark. It sent an unmanned spacecraft to Mars in 2021, in the Arab world's first interplanetary mission, and last year a rover to the Moon.

Earlier this week, the UAE-developed Rashid Moon rover was lost when Japanese start-up ispace's Hakuto-R lunar lander apparently crashed on the Moon's surface, ispace said on Wednesday. Dubai's ruler, Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al-Maktoum quickly directed the MBRSC to begin work on a second rover dubbed Rashid 2. — AFP

Book seized despite Saied hailing freedom

TUNIS: Tunisian President Kais Saied preached freedom of thought at a book fair on Friday, shortly before authorities confiscated a book comparing him to Frankenstein, its author and publisher said.

"It is important to liberate thinking because we cannot accomplish anything with rigid thoughts," Saied told reporters at the opening of the 37th Tunis International Book Fair. Shortly afterwards, security agents ordered the closure of Dar El-Kitab (The House of Books) stand and confiscated "The Tunisian Frankenstein", author Kamel Riahi and his publisher told AFP.

The recently published volume in Arabic depicts Saied as a local version of Frankenstein, created by a people looking to reject the new political system in Tunisia after the 2011 revolution that launched the Arab Spring. "I was told that my book had been confiscated and the publisher's stand shut down," Riahi told AFP from Canada where he lives.

He said the authorities had been "looking for a pretext to ban the book" since it came out. "Security agents from the culture ministry confiscated the book and closed our stand after Saied's visit," Dar El-Kitab chief Habib Zoghbi told AFP.

His publishing house is one of the most important in the North African country. Zoghbi said they cited



TUNIS: Publisher Habib Zoghbi holds a copy of a book titled "The Tunisian Frankenstein" by author Kamel Riahi at the Dar El-Kitab book shop in Tunis on April 29, 2023. — AFP

"possession of an unauthorized book" as justification for their actions.

He said the stand originally had 100 copies of the book on display. "We sold 80 and they confiscated the rest," he said. A video uploaded by the publisher showed his stand covered in a black cloth, and also the booths of at least five more publishers that had closed in solidarity.

Tunisian commentator "10 Million Politicians" posted on social networks: "Freedom of thought lasted exactly 45 minutes at the Book Fair under the reign of Kais Saied." The president won a landslide victory in a 2019 general election but assumed wide-reaching powers in a July 2021 power grab. — AFP

UN warns Sudan collapsing...

Continued from Page 1

Other witnesses reported exchanges of machine gun fire across the Blue Nile in Khartoum North, while the sound of gunfire rang out in Burri in the east of the city. Smoke drifted over the area around Khartoum airport.

UN head of mission Volker Perthes said Friday that tensions between the rival generals had been "clear" before the fighting broke out. But "there was no... early warning that battles will begin on the morning of" April 15, Perthes told Al Jazeera television, adding that efforts had been made to de-escalate the tensions. As battles raged, the rival generals — who seized power in a 2021 coup — took aim at each other in the media, with Burhan branding the RSF a militia that aims "to destroy Sudan" and Daglo calling the army chief "a traitor".

Guterres threw his support behind African-led mediation efforts. "My appeal is for everything to be done to support an African-led initiative for peace in Sudan," he told Al Arabiya. The violence has killed at least 528 people and wounded 4,599, the health ministry said Saturday, but those figures are likely to be incomplete. About 75,000 have been displaced by the fighting in Khartoum and the states of Blue Nile, North Kordofan, as well as the western region of Darfur, the UN said.

First Arab space walk by Emirati...

Continued from Page 1

power cables to prepare for future power system upgrades outside the ISS.

Alneyadi is the second man from the wealthy UAE to go to space, after Hazzaa Al-Mansoori's eight-day mission in 2019. He is the first Arab to embark on

24 Indian crew on oil tanker...

Continued from Page 1

close touch with all the appropriate authorities to obtain the release of the crew and vessel".

Iran said the tanker had crashed into one of its vessels, leaving two Iranian crewmembers missing and injuring several others. It said it tried to make contact with the tanker to ask it to stop but it did not respond, prompting the seizure. The US Navy demanded the ship's immediate release, slamming Iran's

Erdogan appears in public after...

Continued from Page 1

momentum in the run-up to Turkey's most important election in generations on May 14. Erdogan looked healthy addressing the crowd with a microphone in his hand, describing government efforts to help the victims of a massive February earthquake that claimed more than 50,000 lives.

But he refrained from addressing his absence or the health scare, instead proclaiming the launch of a new "century of Turkey". Erdogan's illness came at one of the more vulnerable moments of his two-decade rule. Most polls show Erdogan slightly behind his secular rival Kemal Kilicdaroglu in Turkey's most pivotal election of modern times. His Islamic-rooted party's control of parliament through an alliance with an ultra-nationalist group is also under threat.

Erdogan has a penchant for campaigning and most analysts thought he could reverse the dip in polls on the campaign trail. He appeared in five cities over two days before getting sick on late-night TV. Erdogan tried to compensate by appearing at events by video link, launching a nuclear power plant with Russia's Vladimir Putin on Thursday and inaugurating a bridge the next day.

"continued harassment" in Gulf waters.

The vessel had picked up oil from Kuwait and was chartered by Chevron Corp, an Advantage Tankers spokesman said. It was bound for Houston, Texas, according to the MarineTraffic tracking website. Thursday's seizure was the latest incident in the sensitive waters of the Gulf, which carry about a third of the world's seaborne oil. Such incidents have grown more frequent since 2018 when the US withdrew from a landmark nuclear agreement between Iran and major powers and reimposed crippling sanctions. Marathon efforts to restore the deal have stalled. The latest seizure came only days after Western governments toughened sanctions on Iran's Revolutionary Guards. — AFP

But the events lacked the electric atmosphere that Erdogan often generates when he speaks to adoring crowds at events aired live across the nation of 85 million people. The rock concert atmosphere of his past campaigns has also been muted by mourning over the death and destruction wrought by the 7.8-magnitude earthquake across swathes of Turkey's southeast. Erdogan has decided against playing music at his appearances out of respect for the victims.

He has instead focused on listing his achievements, including the construction of millions of new houses, and his push to resurrect Turkey's military might. The drones have played a central role in Turkey's projection of power, most recently helping Ukraine fend off Russia's advance on Kyiv at the start of the Kremlin's invasion last year.

But Erdogan is facing the toughest challenge of his rule. Kilicdaroglu has formed the type of broad-based coalition that Erdogan had mastered in crafting over 20 years. The opposition alliance includes some of Erdogan's former allies, liberals, Islamists and nationalists, as well as Kurds. Erdogan returned to his preferred theme on Saturday of portraying opposition members as Western "agents" bent on undermining Turkey. "With the scandalous statements they have made in recent days, they are revealing their hatred and grudges," Erdogan said of his opponents. "But no matter what they try to do, nothing will come of it." — AFP

International

Afghan women protest against foreign recognition of Taliban

Calls come ahead of a UN review of its Afghanistan operations

KABUL: Afghan women protested in Kabul on Saturday, defying a crackdown on dissent to urge foreign nations not to formally recognize the Taliban government ahead of a UN summit next week.

Since the Taliban surged back to power in 2021, protesters voicing opposition against creeping curbs on women's rights have been beaten or detained, and security forces have fired in the air to disperse some rallies. But small groups of women have continued to stage sporadic gatherings.

On Saturday, around 25 marched through a residential area in the Afghan capital ahead of a summit in Doha that the UN says will discuss a "durable way forward" for the country. "Recognition of Taliban — violation of women's rights," the women chanted during the march, which lasted no longer than 10 minutes and passed off without confrontation with security forces. Other chants included "Afghan people, hostages of Taliban" and "We will fight, we will die, we will take our rights". No nation has yet acknowledged the government as legitimate since the Taliban returned to power on the heels of a withdrawal from Afghanistan by US forces in 2021.

A previous Taliban government that ruled from 1996 to 2001 was only granted formal recognition by three nations — Pakistan, the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia. Diplomats, NGOs and aid agencies are currently deeply divided over the issue.

Some believe the international community might cajole the Taliban into reversing curbs on women's rights by dangling the prospect of recognition. Others say even discussing it grants the Taliban some legitimacy at a time when they are squeezing women out of public life.

Protester Shamail Tawana Nasiri, 26, told AFP that any discussion of formal recognition "will give the Taliban motivation". "For those of us who are oppressed, and our rights taken away, it increases our concerns." Since ousting the foreign-backed government and returning to power in August 2021, Taliban authorities have imposed what the United Nations has labelled "gender-based apartheid".

Women have been barred from most secondary

education and universities, prevented from working in most government jobs as well as NGOs and blocked from public spaces such as gyms and parks.

'Internal social matter'

The United Nations announced on April 4 that the Taliban authorities had banned Afghan women from working in its offices countrywide, several months after an edict was issued against Afghan women working for NGOs.

The move sparked wide contempt as well as a UN review of its Afghanistan operations, which is to last until May 5. The world body has stressed "the dire economic and humanitarian situation" in Afghanistan, as well as the "critical importance of a continued presence" of the UN mission in Afghanistan and other UN agencies. UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres has organized a meeting in Doha next week with envoys from various countries to "reinvigorate the international engagement around the common objectives for a durable way forward on the situation in Afghanistan".

Last week UN Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohammed said the Doha meeting could see envoys discuss "baby steps" on a path to recognition, albeit with conditions. "There are some who believe this can never happen. There are others that say, well, it has to happen," Mohammed said in a talk at Princeton University. "The Taliban clearly want recognition ... and that's the leverage we have." The UN has announced that the "de facto authorities" of Afghanistan have not been invited to the Doha conference. "Recognition is not an issue," a spokesman for the world body said Friday.

The UN Security Council adopted a resolution Thursday calling on Taliban authorities to "swiftly reverse" all restrictive measures against women, condemning in particular its ban on Afghan women working for the United Nations. The resolution, unanimously adopted by all 15 Council members, said the ban announced in early April "undermines human rights and humanitarian principles."

On Friday, however, the Afghan Foreign Ministry



KABUL: Afghan women hold placards as they march to protest for their rights, in Kabul on April 29, 2023. — AFP

issued a statement saying the resolution failed to respect the country's "sovereign choices".

"We remain committed to ensuring all rights of Afghan women while emphasizing that diversity must be respected and not politicized," it said.

"This is an internal social matter of Afghanistan that does not impact outside states."

'Collective punishment'

The foreign ministry statement said the government welcomed parts of the resolution — including "the principle of Afghan-led and Afghan-owned right to self-determination".

But it insisted that the humanitarian crisis was man-made and driven by economic restrictions. "The reality is that this ongoing crisis can only be resolved by the removal of restrictions on the country," the statement said. At the UN on Thursday, Russian am-

bassador Vasily Nebenzia criticized the text of the resolution despite signing it. "We seriously regret and are disappointed that steps and a more ambitious approach and texts were blocked by Western colleagues," he said.

"If you're so sincere, why not return the assets you've stolen from the country and without any pre-conditions," he said, referring to the \$7 billion in Afghan central bank assets frozen by the United States after the Taliban government seized power.

The United States announced in September the creation of a fund based in Switzerland to manage half the money. Amnesty International welcomed the Security Council resolution but said on Friday it "fell short of setting out concrete steps" that member states should take to help restore the rights of women and girls — and to hold Afghanistan's rulers accountable. — AFP

Lula decrees 6 Indigenous reserves

BRASÍLIA: Brazil's President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva on Friday decreed six new Indigenous reserves, including a vast Amazon territory, after a freeze in such expansion under his far-right predecessor Jair Bolsonaro.

Under the decrees, Indigenous people are guaranteed exclusive use of natural resources on these lands, viewed by scientists as a bulwark against Amazon deforestation — a major challenge in the fight against climate change. They also commit the Brazilian state to protecting reserve land from intrusions of timber traffickers or illegal miners — the main contributors to forest destruction.

Lula signed the official decrees covering 620,000 hectares of land on the final day of a gathering of Indigenous people from around the country in the capital Brasilia. "It is a time-consuming process, but we are going to make sure that as many Indigenous reserves as possible are legalized," the president said. "If we want to achieve zero deforestation by 2030, we need registered Indigenous reserves." Under four years of Bolsonaro, who had vowed to not cede "one more centimeter" of land to Brazil's Indigenous communities, average annual deforestation had increased by 75 percent compared to the previous decade.

Bolsonaro instigated policies that favored the agriculture and logging industries, which are mostly responsible for deforestation. Two of the six new reserves are in the Amazon.

The largest, named Unieuxi, was allocated to 249 members of the Maku and Tukano peoples on more



BRASÍLIA: Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva (right) delivers a speech during a visit to the Terra Livre Indigenous Camp in Brasilia on April 28, 2023. — AFP

than 550,000 hectares in the northern state of Amazonas. Two others are in the country's northeast, one in the south, and one in central Brazil.

Friday's announcement was made at a closing ceremony for the 19th edition of "Terra Livre" (Free Land), a gathering of thousands of Indigenous peoples from across the vast country. "This lifts a weight from our shoulders," 44-year-old Unieuxi resident Claudia Tomas told AFP-TV. "It's the best news we could have gotten, that our lands have been legalized. It fills us with hope."

Tebe Pataxo, 29, is still waiting for news on demarcation of his traditional land in the northeastern state of Bahia, but said the move "reassures us about the future of our children." Lula signed the decrees next to prominent Indigenous leaders such as chief

Raoni Metuktire, who presented him with a traditional headdress of blue and red feathers.

According to the latest census, dating from 2010, Brazil is home to about 800,000 Indigenous people. Most of them live on reserves that take up 13.75 percent of the national territory.

The last declaration of a new Indigenous reserve in Brazil dates to five years ago, when then-president Michel Temer granted the Guato people rights to 20,000 hectares (some 49,400 acres) of ancestral land in the western Mato Grosso state. Lula vowed to approve new reserves "as soon as possible" after taking office for a third term on January 1. He had previously served as president from 2003 to 2010. He created the country's first-ever ministry for Indigenous affairs, under Minister Sonia Guajajara. — AFP

'I had nothing'

More than 50 former prisoners have retrained as morticians under the scheme since it was set up five years ago, according to organizers. It pairs them with other inmates and supplies vocational training as well as an initial cash injection to get their businesses off the ground.

The work is frequently intense, with undertakers often called in the middle of the night to visit bereaved families, wash and dress the deceased, and transport them to the crematorium — the final resting place for most people in China. Participants say they are just happy to have a steady job.

Sun Fengjun said he had a hard time after his release in 2013. In jail for two decades for assault, he emerged blinking into a society transformed by a rapid economic boom. "I couldn't even work a phone," the 52-year-old said in his cramped funeral home outside a major hospital. "I had no family, nothing — and no confidence."

That was compounded when many prospective employers demanded proof he had never broken the law. Background checks are common in many industries in China, where convictions are listed permanently on criminal records, and effectively put him out of the running. "In this society ... we can't do most jobs. We need the right certificate, but how are we supposed to get it?" said Sun.

Chinese law says jails should remold offenders into law-abiding citizens through "a combination of punishment and reform, education and labor". Inmates are commonly put to work in manufacturing and other sectors but seldom learn skills necessary for life back on the outside, campaigners say. — AFP

Chinese initiative makes morticians of former prisoners

SHENYANG, China: Once jailed for murder, Cao Yongsheng now makes a living caring for the dead, benefiting from a bold rehabilitation scheme that's giving some of China's most serious criminals a second life as funeral workers.

It is a rare campaign to help former prisoners, many of whom say a lack of reform programs, a resultant skills shortage and deep-seated discrimination push them towards reoffending. Cao served 17 years behind bars for killing one person and severely injuring two others. He said working as a mortician allows him to "give comfort to the deceased ... and atone for my crimes".

"It's a kind of spiritual absolution for me," the 56-year-old told AFP, glancing around his funeral home in the northeastern city of Shenyang. Its shelves bulged with caskets, incense and stacks of paper money burned at Chinese funerals.

China is home to about 1.7 million prisoners, according to data compiled by the University of London's World Prison Brief — the most of any country apart from the United States — but Beijing does not regularly disclose how many of them commit more crimes after leaving jail.

The volunteer-run project offers training and financial support so former prisoners can start new careers as undertakers, a novel way to keep them on



SHENYANG: This photo taken on March 29, 2023 shows Fu Guangrong (third right) visiting one of the "Mama Waves You Off to Heaven" funeral services shops, owned by mortician Cao Yongsheng (right) and another reformed criminal in Shenyang city, in China's northeastern Liaoning province. — AFP

the straight and narrow. The group, known as "Mama Waves You Off to Heaven", says it is the only such initiative in China focused on reforming serious offenders, usually defined as those who have served a decade or more in jail.

Cao, one of the earliest participants, said the scheme helped him trade unstable work and bleak prospects for a stable income, a happy marriage and deep roots in his community. "It was a great turning point in my life," he said as his business partner — another ex-convict — bustled around the store. "Without this platform, perhaps I wouldn't be here today."

Libya green group battles to save forests

QASR AL-QARAHULLI, Libya: War-ravaged Libya is better known for its oil wealth than its forests, but environmentalists hope to save its remaining green spaces from logging, development and the impacts of climate change.

The "Friends of the Tree" group works to raise awareness about green areas around the capital Tripoli that are quickly disappearing because of drought, human activity and desertification. "Man has destroyed forests" and much of the vegetation, said the group's leader Khalifa Ramadan, who has been working in agriculture and gardening for 40 years. At his farm in Tajura, an eastern suburb of Tripoli, Ramadan has planted eucalyptus, palm and laurel trees, which the group plans to replant around the capital. The group meets weekly to launch media campaigns and carry out activities to confront "the dangers facing Tripoli and other coastal cities", said Ramadan.

Rainfall is scarce in the largely desert country, which is only starting to recover from the years of bloody conflict that followed the 2011 uprising which toppled dictator Muammar Gaddafi. The group, which includes dozens of agronomists, horticulturists and volunteers, ultimately would like to revive a "green belt" project from the 1950s and '60s that has withered during decades of dictatorship, war and turmoil.

Back then, Libyan authorities dipped into the country's wealth to plant forests across an area stretching from Tripoli to the port city of Misrata, 200 kilometers (125 miles) to the east. Strict laws at the time aimed to control urban expansion and soil erosion and to stop the desert from sweeping into Tripoli, while also opening new areas for agriculture.

Today Libyan state institutions, weakened by rivalries and continued insecurity, have struggled to bring stable governance, including on protecting the environment. In recent years, at least 1,700 criminal cases have been identified involving activities such as unauthorized logging and illegal construction, says the agricultural police.

In Garabulli, a coastal area east of Tripoli — famed for its pristine white sands and its centuries-old eucalyptus trees, acacias and wild mimosas — tree trunks litter the ground next to some illegal constructions, recently demolished on judicial instruction. "The green belt has become the target of numerous violations over the past few years," said General Fawzi Abugualia, spokesman for the agricultural police. — AFP



TAJURA: In this picture taken on March 18, 2023, Khalifa Ramadan, the leader of the "Friends of the Tree" group who work to raise awareness about green areas around Tripoli, plants a tree at his farm in Tajura, an eastern suburb of the capital. — AFP

Business

SUNDAY, APRIL 30, 2023

Sudanese struggle to survive as cash sources dry up amid war

Two weeks of fighting pushes country's financial system to the brink

CAIRO: In Sudan's battle-hit capital, residents desperately count their last banknotes as nearly two weeks of fighting has frozen cash sources and pushed an already faltering financial system to the brink. Banks have been closed since battles broke out on April 15 between forces loyal to rival generals, and Khartoum's five million residents, running low on food and basic supplies, are now almost out of cash as well.

"Even if you have money in the bank, it means nothing," researcher Hamid Khalafallah told AFP. "Your money is trapped in the bank." The fighting that has killed hundreds of people has also taken its toll on basic services such as water supply and electricity. With intermittent internet and communications, even banking apps are no longer accessible, and shuttered airports mean liquidity that had previously arrived from abroad has been cut off.

"People were not prepared for what happened," said Khaled Al-Tijani, editor of local newspaper Elaf, referring to the escalating clashes between the forces of army chief Abdel Fattah Al-Burhan and his deputy-turned-rival Mohamed Hamdan Daglo. Tijani predicted that "in the next few weeks there will be a serious problem" as many in Sudan "were surprised by the developments and the escalation".

At least 512 people have been killed and 4,193 wounded in the fighting between army forces loyal to Burhan and Daglo's powerful paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF), according to health ministry figures, although the real death toll is probably much higher. When the sound of heavy shelling woke Khartoum residents on April 15 on the first day of the fighting, people "had to use cash to buy food supplies as the war erupted", Khalafallah said. "They must have consumed most of their cash."

UAE's first gaming resort to cost \$3.9bn: Operator

DUBAI: The United Arab Emirates' first gaming resort will open in four years and cost \$3.9 billion to build, US casino operator Wynn has said, unveiling new details of the project. The resort in Ras Al-Khaimah, one of the UAE's seven emirates, will feature "exceptional entertainment and gaming amenities", Wynn Resorts said on its website.

Gambling is generally prohibited under Islamic laws in the oil-rich Gulf state. But Ras Al-Khaimah's tourism development authority last year announced a new body to regulate "integrated resorts", including gaming facilities. Preliminary construction work has begun on Wynn Al-Marjan Island, set on a man-made and hotel-studded promontory, Wynn Resorts said Thursday in a statement.

The resort, with 1,500 rooms, 24 dining and lounge areas, spa facilities, "high end" shopping and nightly laser and light shows, will open in early 2027, Wynn said, revising an earlier schedule of 2026.

Artists' impressions of the site, about an hour's drive from the commercial hub of Dubai, showed a brown-gold high rise towering above a beach

'Goodwill' forex

That liquidity is crucial, not only to survive the wartime conditions but also to escape, with transport costs skyrocketing since mid-April. "Fleeing Khartoum or the country requires a lot of money, mostly in cash, that people do not have at the moment," Khalafallah said.

Ashraf, who has been caught for days at the border crossing to Egypt, told AFP getting his family out of Sudan meant complying with the demands of bus drivers. "I only had (US) dollars and he wanted Sudanese pounds because that's how he buys gas," Ashraf said.

"He accepted my dollars, but at 400 pounds to the dollar, when the official exchange rate is 600."

Amid the soaring demand for local currency, Tijani said "the value of dollars is now subject to the goodwill of whoever agrees to exchange them". Fluctuations in the exchange rate will probably continue, with one foreign businessman saying that "demand for the pound has exploded".

Khalafallah noted that people on monthly wages had not yet been paid when the fighting began.

Kholood Khair, founder of the Khartoum-based Confluence Advisory think tank, said "those who work in the informal sector and earn a daily wage... haven't been able to get any more cash".

'Closed until further notice'

With most workplaces in Khartoum having closed, people have been unable to earn a living. Many have "restored to bartering, in the hopes that the war will end soon", Tijani said. Others cling to the hope that their pay will come via online payment platforms — a tenuous prospect as



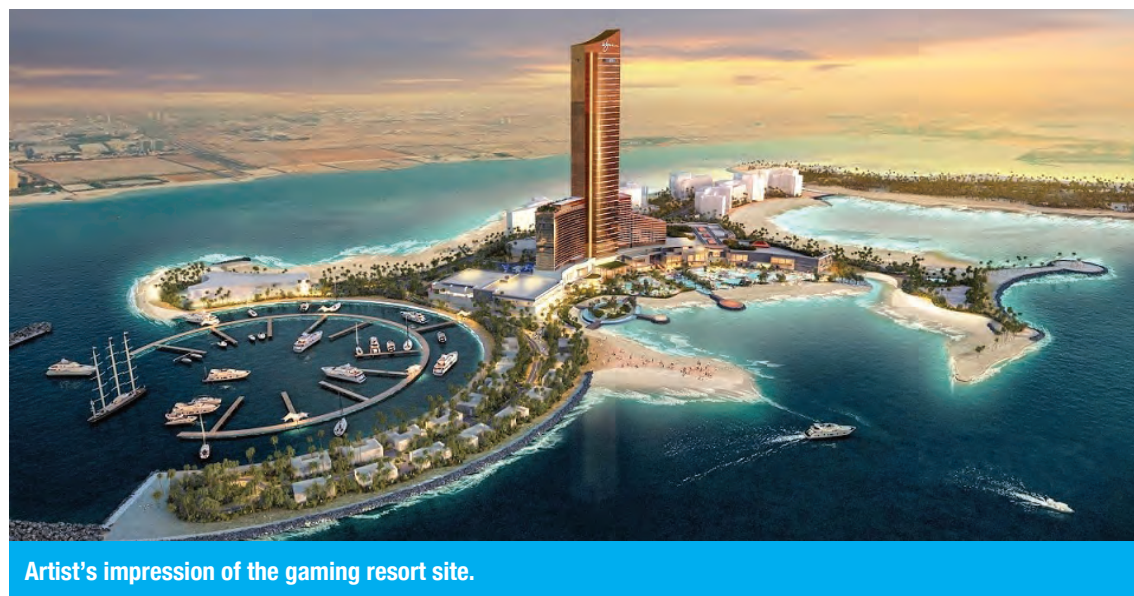
KHARTOUM: People travel on a horse-drawn wagon along a street as fighting continues in Khartoum on April 28, 2023. Residents desperately count their last banknotes as nearly two weeks of fighting has frozen cash sources and pushed an already faltering financial system to the brink. — AFP

this requires both power and internet services.

The situation is even worse outside Khartoum in a country where only 31 percent of Sudanese have internet access, according to monitoring service Data Reportal. Even overseas remittances have no way of landing as foreign exchange transfer firm Western Union told AFP it had "closed until further notice". Sudan's banks have long been cut off from global networks during more than two decades of

international sanctions under former dictator Omar al-Bashir, and many in the 45-million-strong population prefer to keep their cash close at hand.

But now they run the risk of money and valuables being confiscated at checkpoints, particularly for those attempting the trip out of the country on their own. "If you take your own personal car... it will be taken from you by the RSF," Khair said. "People have had experiences of that." — AFP



Artist's impression of the gaming resort site.

area and circular marina, as well as a luxuriously appointed lobby. "We have spent the past year meticulously programming and conceptualizing Wynn Al Marjan Island, carefully considering its unique location," Wynn Resorts CEO Craig Billings said in the statement.

Wynn operates casinos in Las Vegas and Boston as well as Macau, a Chinese territory close to Hong

"In eight petrochemical projects of this region, a number of seasonal workers went on strike due to livelihood problems, and after the end of the legal deadline, 4,000 of them will be replaced by new workers," Sekhavat Assadi, CEO of the Pars Special Economic Energy Zone said. PSEZ extracts oil and gas from the offshore South Pars field in the Gulf, the world's largest known gas reserve which Iran shares with Qatar. About 40,000 people work at South Pars. Assadi added that "all manufacturing companies are operating, and production is at full capacity".

In 2022, Iran witnessed several waves of strikes by teachers and bus drivers who protested low wages and high living costs. On Saturday Iran's supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, who has the final say in major state policies, said some labor protests have been helpful to the country.

warned that customers were remaining watchful of their budgets. Amazon reported a profit of \$3.2 billion on revenue that climbed 9 percent to \$127.4 billion in the quarter. The net income was about a billion dollars more than analysts had forecast.

"There's a lot to like about how our teams are delivering for customers, particularly amidst an uncertain economy," said Amazon chief executive said Andy Jassy. "Our Stores business is continuing to improve the cost to serve in our fulfillment network while increasing the speed with which we get products into the hands of customers." Jassy in March laid out a plan to cut 9,000 more jobs from the online retail giant's workforce, following the 18,000 that were axed in January. The layoffs account for a smaller percentage of Amazon's total workforce, which ran up to 1.5 million people in December 2022, than the cuts seen at some other tech giants.

Jassy told workers that the extra layoffs were

Kong. The UAE, whose population is 90 percent foreign, has made a series of liberalizing moves as it faces increased regional competition for talent and tourism, notably from neighboring Saudi Arabia and Qatar. As well as lifting a ban on unmarried couples living together, loosening restrictions on alcohol and offering long-term residencies, last year it introduced a Saturday-Sunday weekend. — AFP

"These protests are actually helping the government and the system and making them understand, and in these cases, wherever the responsible institutions such as the judiciary entered, they saw that the workers were right," Khamenei said in a meeting with workers. "Fortunately, in all the protest cases, the labor society... has not allowed ill-wishers to abuse the protests and the gatherings." In October, security forces made a number of arrests during a protest by workers over the failure to pay their wages in Asalouyeh, the port in Bushehr province where the South Pars complex is based.

Since 2018, Iran's economy has been hit by US-led sanctions and spiraling inflation, along with record depreciation of its national currency, the rial, against the dollar, after Washington withdrew from a landmark nuclear deal with Tehran. — AFP

necessary as the company seeks to downsize after years of hiring, particularly during the coronavirus pandemic when people turned to the internet for shopping. Amazon said that the number of packages handled by a "Robin" robotic system used across its operations in North America and Europe eclipsed a billion during the quarter.

Robin uses computer vision and artificial intelligence to help workers sort and handle packages being shipped to Amazon customers, according to the company. Amazon's AWS cloud computing unit saw revenue climb 16 percent to \$21.4 billion, but costs ate into operating income, which tallied \$5.1 billion as compared to \$6.5 billion in the same quarter a year earlier, according to the earnings report. "Amazon's stronger-than-expected performance for its key profit centers of AWS and advertising indicate that the enterprise and the digital ad sectors may be turning the corner," analyst Lipsman said. — AFP

GCC economies to grow at slower pace in 2023: Survey

KUWAIT: Kuwait has dropped in the ranking of the richest countries in the world in terms of per capita GDP as it ranked 36th in the world out of 193 countries, compared to 31st in last year's ranking, according to a Reuters survey released on Thursday. According to the survey, Kuwait's economic growth was forecast at a much slower pace of 1.5 percent. Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) economies will grow at a much slower pace in 2023 than last year as expectations for muted gains in crude prices and oil production cuts take a toll on revenues, the survey further said.

Oil prices have spiked nearly 20 percent since they hit this year's low of about \$70 a barrel on March 20, largely driven by the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC+) decision to reduce oil output by about 1.16 million barrels per day and China's reopening. But further gains will largely be subdued over the coming months on slower global demand - not good news for the bloc which is heavily dependent on oil.

Saudi Arabia, the world's largest oil producer, will expand 3.2 percent this year, less than half 2022's decade-high pace of 8.7 percent, according to the April 6-25 poll of 16 economists. The growth rate was expected to be the same next year.

The United Arab Emirates (UAE), the second biggest economy among GCC members, will grow 3.7 percent in 2023 and 4.0 percent next year, significantly lower than 7.6 percent last year.

Both Qatar and Bahrain were expected to grow at a slower pace of 2.7 percent this year. While Oman was seen growing 2.6 percent in 2023, Kuwait's economic growth was forecast at a much slower pace of 1.5 percent. They are not the exception as growth in most major economies was also expected to slow this year as dual threats of aggressive rate hikes seep into economic activity and persistently high inflation affects consumer demand.

Thousands of Iran energy workers to be sacked, replaced

TEHRAN: Four thousand Iranian petrochemical workers on strike over pay and conditions in an energy-producing region of the country's south will be sacked and replaced, state media reported. The employees in Bushehr province have demanded salary increases and improved conditions for accommodation and transport, an official in charge of the Islamic republic's oil and gas sector in the region was quoted Friday by state news agency IRNA.

Amazon cloud and ad revenue grows in Q1

SAN FRANCISCO: Online retail titan Amazon on Thursday reported that its cloud and ads units helped it beat earnings expectations in the first quarter of this year despite shoppers and businesses being more careful about spending.

"For the first time in several quarters, Amazon may finally have a bit of wind at its back," said Insider Intelligence principal analyst Andrew Lipsman.

Amazon shares spiked more than 10 percent shortly after release of the earnings figures, only to sink slightly below the day's closing price as it



ANNAPOLIS, US: In this file photo taken on February 02, 2023 the Amazon logo on a locker in Annapolis, Maryland, ahead of earnings report. — AFP



A group photo.



A group photo of the general administration of the Coast Guard.

Gulf Bank concludes its Ramadan events and initiatives with remarkable success

Charitable initiatives to help the needy and debtors, in addition to sports and health activities

KUWAIT: Gulf Bank has concluded its community and charitable activities during the holy month of Ramadan, with remarkable success – with a variety of sports and health activities, in addition to charitable and community projects to help revive Kuwait's authentic traditions, support debtors, the needy, and their families.

On this occasion, Gulf Bank's Deputy General Manager of Corporate Communications, Ahmed Al-Amir, said: "These events are part of Gulf Bank's strong commitment to social sustainability programs. The initiatives are carefully selected to benefit society and fall in line with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, Kuwait Vision 2035 and the Bank's 2025 strategy." Al-Amir noted that social sustainability is one of the main pillars of Gulf Bank's strategy, hence, the bank is keen to harness all its capabilities to serve the community, participate in all community events and work hard to communicate directly with the various segments of society.

He indicated that the various initiatives launched by Gulf Bank during the holy month of Ramadan, aim to enhance the bank's communication with the public, and to consolidate its closeness to the community. This is a reflection of the bank's involvement with the community over the last sixty years, and its integral part in Kuwait's economic and social history. The following are some of the prominent initiatives and events that occurred throughout the month:

GB Fit sports activities

As part of its ongoing initiatives to establish the principles of social sustainability, Gulf Bank concluded its annual "GB Fit" sports week, which was held at Al-Shaheed Park, from March 27 to April 1, 2023. The Ramadan event witnessed a remarkable turnout from the public and provided participants with the opportunity to practice several exercises and participate in a variety of sports competitions under the supervision of specialized trainers.

As part of Gulf Bank's keenness to communicate with the public and customers, and to encourage them to stay active throughout Ramadan, the virtual "GB Fit" competition continued until the end of the month through Technogym's app – encouraging people to adopt a healthier lifestyle that can be carried with them throughout the year.

And to add a sense of excitement and healthy competition to the sport events, valuable prizes were distributed to 16 winners who participated in the live competitions at Al-Shaheed Park, and three winners will be selected from the virtual competitions. The virtual competitions are based on Technogym's calorie burning and activity metrics. The participants expressed their thanks to Gulf Bank for its keenness to launch initiatives that encourage the public to stay active and change their lifestyles in positive ways.

Ramadan food baskets (Majlat Ramadan)

As part of its various community events and initiatives during the holy month of Ramadan, Gulf Bank



Ahmed Al-Amir

- These events are part of Gulf Bank's strong commitment to social sustainability programs
- We are keen to communicate with the community annually during Ramadan, through charitable programs and initiatives
- We aim to consolidate Gulf Bank's closeness to the community through a diversified program



Distribution of water and juices to worshippers during the last ten days of Ramadan.

distributed food baskets "Majlat Ramadan" to needy families in Kuwait. This is part of its strategic partnership with Kuwait Food and Relief Bank, which reflects the bank's distinguished role in social responsibility and its pioneering role in instilling the principles of sustainability in society.

This initiative aims to distribute food baskets (Majlat Ramadan) to needy families to contribute towards alleviating some of the burdens for those families during this time of the year. The baskets would contain different types of food that would suffice those families for several days.

Iftar meals distribution

As part of its strategic partnership with Kuwait Food and Relief Bank, Gulf Bank distributed Iftar meals to the needy around Kuwait, with the aim of bringing joy and happiness to the hearts of those in need, especially during the holy month of Ramadan.

Many of the bank's employees volunteered to distribute the meals – consolidating Gulf Bank's in-

tegral part in Kuwait's economic, and social history – and its keenness to harness all its capabilities to support the needy in society.

Electrical appliances distribution

Gulf Bank participated in the humanitarian campaign led by the Red Crescent Society, to distribute electrical appliances to needy families in Kuwait – as part of its commitment towards social sustainability and to support the efforts of civil society organizations.

This is part of Gulf Bank's annual partake in Red Crescent Society's generous initiatives, to extend a helping hand to needy families in Kuwait, and to bring joy to their homes during the holy month of Ramadan. This initiative is part of the community initiatives that Gulf Bank organizes and participates in, especially during the holy month of Ramadan. A number of employees from the bank, volunteered to support the efforts of the Red Crescent team in distributing the electrical appliances.

Alleviating debt distress from debtors

As part of its continuous efforts to consolidate the principles of social sustainability, and as part of its various charitable initiatives during the holy month of Ramadan, Gulf Bank announced its participation in the "Charity Begins at Home" campaign for the second consecutive year, organized by the local organization, Altkafal. The campaign aimed to alleviate debt distress from debtors who are defaulted on their debts due to their economic circumstances.

Every year, Gulf Bank takes part in helping debtors to reduce the distress of many families, especially those without breadwinners or children. The campaign is particularly noteworthy during Ramadan, as it is a month that exemplifies spiritual and human values. Gulf Bank was keen to support and relieve the distress of these families, and to help reunify debtors with their families and society; in addition to preserving the cohesion of the family unit.

Nuqsat Al-Khamees

For the third consecutive year, and as part of its various community events and initiatives during the holy month of Ramadan, Gulf Bank organized "Nuqsat Al-Khamees", in collaboration with several Kuwaiti restaurants and bakeries, to revive this authentic Kuwaiti tradition, and to enhance the bank's communication with the community. This campaign also helps to support local SMEs by marketing their products.

Gulf Bank developed the concept of "Nuqsat Al-Khamees" using its simple, original form, which is based on distributing simple home-food dishes to family, neighbors, and friends – spreading the spirit of connection, love, and cooperation within the community. This also helps SMEs to distribute their products to the public, which enables their restaurants and bakeries to reach new segments of customers and help increase their growth and expansion.

GB Masterclass

As part of its continuous efforts to interact with the community, Gulf Bank welcomed the holy month of Ramadan by organizing a new GB Masterclass series that offers a special course about hospitality during Ramadan. The masterclass was in collaboration with the certified Hospitality Trainer, Alia Madouh, who gave two lectures to 30 female participants in each lecture.

The course dealt with many aspects and tips on preparing and assembling for the month of Ramadan, of which included: Arranging the living room, preparing the prayer corner, arranging flowers, and ways to prepare the Iftar table, sweets, and drinks after Iftar.

Refreshments distribution during the last ten days

Gulf Bank took part in distributing cold water bottles and refreshments to worshippers in a number of mosques in Kuwait, following the prayers and "Qiyam", during the last ten days of Ramadan.



GB FIT sports activities.



Distribution of electrical appliances to the needy families.



Fahd Al-Sharrah (right), president of the Solidarity Association for the Care of Prisoners.



Distributing iftar meals for fasting people in cooperation with the Food and Relief Bank.



Distribution of Ramadan magazine to the needy families.

NBK ECONOMIC REPORT

Fiscal reforms crucial for Bahrain, Oman growth; Qatar GDP eases

Non-oil sector boosts growth as oil GDP expected to drop

KUWAIT: Bahrain's economic growth reached 4.9 percent in 2022, boosted by higher oil and aluminum prices and an upturn in hospitality-oriented sectors, though the pace is seen lower this year (2.6 percent) and next (3.2 percent). Oil and gas output — now worth less than one-fifth of GDP — will likely stagnate further in 2023 (-0.5 percent) as OPEC+ keeps quotas unchanged.

Meanwhile, activity in the non-oil sector, which surged 6.2 percent last year on a strong HI, should see further albeit more modest growth given the government's commitment to the \$30 billion Economic Recovery Plan, which focuses on growing vital sectors such as hospitality and financial services and launching strategic projects.

Bahrain also stands to benefit from the economic transformation in Saudi Arabia, with the Saudi sovereign wealth fund announcing plans to invest in Bahrain's key sectors while we also see positive spillover effects on trade from strong growth in Bahrain's larger neighbor. We expect non-oil GDP growth of around 3.1 percent per year in 2023-24. Meanwhile, inflation could fall to 1.8 percent on average in 2023 as the impact of last year's doubling of VAT to 10 percent unwinds.

Despite higher oil and aluminum prices in 2022, the government recorded a 14th consecutive although much-reduced budget deficit of 1.1 percent of GDP, with spending overshooting the budget. We see a wider deficit of 3.6 percent of GDP this year given lower oil prices, and fiscal consolidation remains an important theme (the Fiscal Balance Program commits to balancing the budget by 2024).

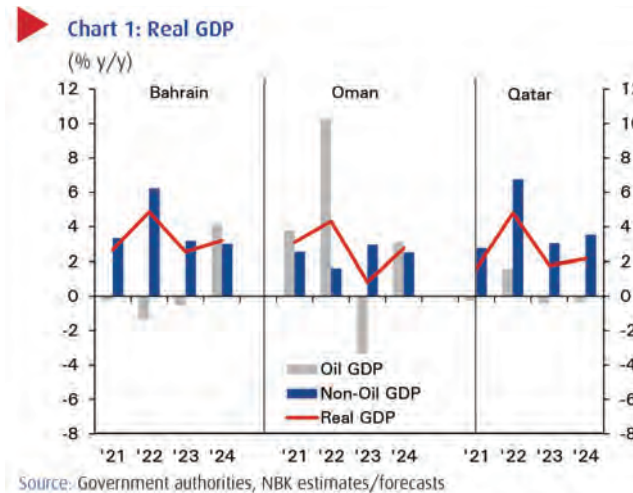
Risks to the outlook in 2023 seem tilted to the downside, with higher interest rates potentially pressuring economic activity and high public debt levels (113 percent of GDP in 2023 on the government definition), while a drop in oil prices could pressure already-low FX reserves.

Reforms crucial for Oman

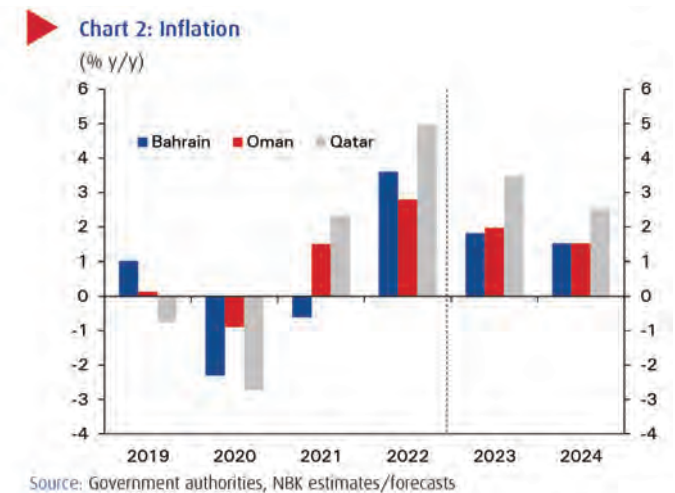
After a strong 2022 (+4.3 percent), growth in Oman is expected to ease in 2023 (+0.8 percent), with the non-oil sector replacing the oil sector as the main driver. Although a relatively minor producer, Oman was included in the voluntary production cuts announced by the OPEC+ group in March, and this will contribute to a 3.3 percent drop in oil GDP this year. Meanwhile, non-oil growth came in at a subdued 1.6 percent in 2022 held back by a 23 percent plunge in the construction sector (10 percent of non-oil GDP); excluding this, non-oil growth was a robust 5 percent+.

Absent a similar drop in construction this year, non-oil growth should increase, helped also by improving manufacturing and tourism (driven by objectives set in the 2040 National Tourism Strategy) and despite headwinds from softer global growth, lower oil prices and higher interest rates.

Higher oil prices and hydrocarbon output helped the government earn its first fiscal surplus in nearly a decade in 2022 — but consolidation remains a key theme. The budget targets a 6 percent cut in spending in 2023, albeit with some oil & gas investment spending seemingly moved off balance sheet. But with oil prices likely to come in much higher than



Source: Government authorities, NBK estimates/forecasts



Source: Government authorities, NBK estimates/forecasts

the budgeted \$55/bbl, we think there is headroom for a small spending increase this year while limiting the deterioration in the fiscal balance. Reforms under the Medium-Term Fiscal Plan (2020-24) — including spending rationalization and the introduction of VAT in 2021 — have already yielded improvements, with public debt levels cut to about 40 percent of GDP in 2022 (61 percent in 2021). Also, S&P raised the outlook for the government's BB credit rating to positive from stable in April (signaling a possible future rating upgrade), citing reduced public debt and the economy's improved resilience to oil shocks due to reforms.

Qatar growth to ease

Qatar's economy grew by 4.8 percent in 2022, lifted by a strong 6.8 percent expansion in the non-oil sector boosted by hosting the FIFA World Cup in Q4. The event drew some 1.2 million visitors, de-

living a striking 65 percent y/y expansion in hospitality sector output in Q4. We expect non-oil growth to decelerate this year as the World Cup boost fades, budgeted government capex is trimmed (-12 percent capex), and as higher interest rates dampen the demand for credit. On the plus side, higher than average visitor numbers so far this year and a 7 percent increase in the budget wage allocation could support consumption. The PMI activity gauge's move further into expansion territory in March (53.8) is also a positive, following puzzling softness last year. On the fiscal front, last year's large surplus of 10 percent of GDP on the back of higher LNG and non-oil revenues should decline slightly over the forecast period to about 8 percent of GDP in 2024.

(Most of Qatar's gas is sold on long-term oil-linked contracts.) Last year's strong performance resulted in a sharp

reduction in the government debt-to-GDP ratio from 55 percent to 37 percent (excluding GREs) and a recent outlook upgrade by Fitch to AA- positive. Inflation should ease to 3.5 percent as the economy cools and global inflationary pressures ease.

The medium-term economic outlook looks solid supported by \$30 billion of North Field gas expansion megaprojects still in the pipeline, mostly due for completion by 2026, as well as other vision 2030 linked investments, especially in the health and education sectors. Improved neighborly ties and a stronger tourism industry are also supportive. Upside risks to the outlook include higher gas prices possibly from a renewed shortage or a stronger global economic and oil demand outlook. Downside risks stem from a flare-up in geopolitical tensions or a deeper than expected recession leading to weaker gas demand and prices.

ExxonMobil, Chevron report higher profits despite oil price dip

NEW YORK: US oil giants ExxonMobil and Chevron reported another quarter of heady profits Friday as both companies continued to direct large cash payments to shareholders. Strong refining results offset the effect of lower crude prices in the first quarter compared with the year-ago period, lifting profits and enabling ExxonMobil to return \$8.1 billion to shareholders and Chevron \$6.6 billion in dividends and share repurchases.

"We're delivering strong financial results and increasing cash return to shareholders," said Chevron Executive Mike Wirth, pointing to a 65 percent jump in shareholder repayments compared with the year-ago period. The results extend a bountiful period for the US oil giants in the wake of a global energy market roiled by Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Both companies pointed to a hit from recent windfall profit taxes that deprived them of even bigger earnings.

Results in the 2022 period were lifted by spiking oil prices following Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

In the most recent period, crude prices traded in the \$70-a-barrel range for most of the quarter. While that's down from the spike in the 2022 period

after Russia's invasion of Ukraine, crude prices remain at a fairly high level.

At ExxonMobil, first-quarter profits more than doubled to \$11.4 billion, while revenues declined 4.3 percent to \$86.6 billion. Results in the year-ago period were dented by \$3.4 billion in one-time costs connected to ExxonMobil's withdrawal from the Sakhalin offshore oilfield following the invasion of Ukraine. But while crude prices were down 23 percent compared with the 2022 quarter, production volumes of oil and natural gas rose 4.1 percent.

Tightness ahead?

The oil giant's integrated model — which makes it a consumer of crude at its network of petroleum refineries — meant it also benefited from lower oil prices in ExxonMobil's energy products division. Chief Executive Darren Woods said the company "is growing value by increasing production from our advantaged assets to meet global demand."

Woods, in an interview on CNBC, described current market conditions as "fairly mixed," noting that the industry is emerging from a seasonally moderate period as far as demand. A key question will be the extent that demand rises in China as it reopens its economy. In a "tight" market, "there's not a lot of levers to pull on production," Woods told the network.

At Chevron, profits rose five percent to \$6.5 billion, while revenues fell 6.6 percent to \$50.8 billion.

Chevron's oil and gas production volumes fell due to asset sales and the end of a concession in Thai-

land. The streak of massive profits by US oil giants has sparked criticism from President Joe Biden and others, who have urged petroleum producers to boost volumes rather than in a period of elevated inflation rather than spend extra cash on dividends and share repurchases. The first quarter included a negative \$200 million hit for additional European taxes on the energy sector, ExxonMobil said. Chevron, in turn, pointed to a \$130 million tax hit due to an energy profits levy in Britain. Shares of ExxonMobil rose 2.1 percent to \$119.21, while Chevron dipped 0.7 percent to \$165.71. — AFP

three percent in post-session trading. "Intel is heavily dependent on the PC market and as we still seem to be seeing a slowdown in the PC market, consumer PCs especially, I would expect Intel to be having challenges," said Alan Priestley, an analyst at Gartner.

Intel is one of the world's leading semiconductor makers that makes a wide range of products, including the latest generation chips along with Taiwan's TSMC and South Korea's Samsung.

It was also affected by falling demand for chips that power data centers and is struggling to compete with Nvidia for the semiconductors that undergird ChatGPT-style generative AI, a major new and chips-hungry sector for the industry. In South Korea, Samsung Electronics' chip division reported 4.58 trillion won (\$746 million) in losses, its first operating loss since 2009 — when the world was emerging from the 2008 financial crisis. The chips industry — which also serves the military or increasingly connected household appliances — is well-known for its volatility, with demand and supply see-sawing with the dips and rises in the world economy.

Its central role in the global supply chain became clear during the height of the Covid pandemic.

Monetary Fund released the first instalment of a \$3 billion loan spread over four years. The rate of price increases peaked at 69.8 percent in September as Sri Lanka struggled to finance imports of essential goods after declaring a sovereign default on its \$46 billion foreign debt in April last year. April's inflation of 35.3 percent is the lowest since the 29.8 percent recorded a year earlier.

President Ranil Wickremesinghe warned his 22 million people soon after the IMF bailout in late March that they may have to endure more hardships due to austerity measures. The South Asian nation went through months of food and fuel shortages, along with runaway inflation and prolonged blackouts, due to an unprecedented foreign exchange shortage.

The economic crisis led to months of protests



PARIS: This file photo taken on June 2, 2015 shows the logo of US oil and gas giant ExxonMobil during the World Gas Conference exhibition in Paris. — AFP

land. The streak of massive profits by US oil giants has sparked criticism from President Joe Biden and others, who have urged petroleum producers to boost volumes rather than in a period of elevated inflation rather than spend extra cash on dividends and share repurchases. The first quarter included a negative \$200 million hit for additional European taxes on the energy sector, ExxonMobil said. Chevron, in turn, pointed to a \$130 million tax hit due to an energy profits levy in Britain. Shares of ExxonMobil rose 2.1 percent to \$119.21, while Chevron dipped 0.7 percent to \$165.71. — AFP



Lockdowns and health restrictions diminished production out of Asia, leaving surging demand for chips unmet just as everyone turned online for work, shopping and entertainment.

Semiconductors have also become a political pawn between the US and China, with Washington urging allies to stop supplying China with cutting edge chips or other supplies, further destabilizing the sector. — AFP

that eventually forced then-president Gotabaya Rajapaksa to flee the country and step down in July. Wickremesinghe has doubled income taxes, increased electricity tariffs and removed fuel subsidies as part of moves to shore up state revenue since replacing Rajapaksa.

He has also cracked down on trade unions protesting against high taxes and the government has warned it will confiscate the property of anyone staging work stoppages. In its latest annual report, released on Thursday, the Central Bank of Sri Lanka expected an economic revival next year after a record 7.8 percent GDP contraction in 2022. The bank forecast the economy to shrink by 2.0 percent this year but said it could grow at 3.3 percent in 2024. — AFP

US regulators admit mistakes were made ahead of bank failures

WASHINGTON: The US Federal Reserve called for greater banking oversight while admitting to its own failures in a widely-anticipated report published Friday into the collapse of Silicon Valley Bank (SVB) last month. The report was one of two published Friday by Federal regulators highlighting recent issues with US oversight of the banking sector.

SVB's failure on March 10 after taking on too much interest-rate risk caused shock waves throughout the banking sector, and led to the failure of New York-based Signature Bank and the merger under pressure of Swiss investment banking giant Credit Suisse with regional rival UBS.

"Following Silicon Valley Bank's failure, we must strengthen the Federal Reserve's supervision and regulation based on what we have learned," Federal Reserve vice chair for supervision Michael Barr wrote in a statement accompanying the report. SVB's management failed to adequately manage risk prior to the bank's swift collapse, while Fed supervisors "failed to take forceful enough action" after identifying issues at the California high-tech lender, he said.

Concerted efforts by regulators on both sides of the Atlantic in the days that followed SVB's collapse appear to have reduced the banking turmoil and lowered volatility in the financial markets.

Tougher rules

Barr's report found that the Fed "did not appreciate the seriousness of critical deficiencies in the firm's governance, liquidity, and interest rate risk management," as SVB's assets more than doubled in size between 2019-2021 in the middle of a high-tech boom. The report was also critical of a Trump-era law that rolled back some banking regulation. "For Silicon Valley Bank, this resulted in lower supervisory and regulatory requirements, including lower capital and liquidity requirements," the report said, adding that "higher supervisory and regulatory requirements" would likely have bolstered the bank's resilience.

Barr said the Fed will look at strengthening banking supervision to ensure it can more quickly identify risks and vulnerabilities like those that arose at SVB. The Fed will also look to strengthen the regulatory framework for banks, and consider toughening the rules around interest-rate risk, liquidity and capital requirements, and stress-testing. The review will be far-reaching and look more broadly at the Fed's liquidity and capital rules, a senior Fed official told reporters prior to the report's release.

Lawmaker Patrick McHenry, who chairs the Republican-controlled House Financial Services Committee, welcomed some aspects of Barr's report, while criticizing its calls for greater regulation. "While there are areas identified by Vice Chair Barr on which we agree — including enhancing attention to liquidity issues, especially when a firm is rapidly growing — the bulk of the report appears to be a justification of Democrats' long-held priorities," he said in a statement.

"Politicizing bank failures does not serve our economy, financial system, or the American people well," he said. Following the release of Barr's report, Fed chair Jerome Powell said he welcomed the "self-critical" look at SVB's collapse. — AFP

Intel and Samsung hammered as chips demand plummets

SAN FRANCISCO: The crucial semiconductor industry, that powers everything from personal computers, smartphones to fighter jets, suffered a dismal first quarter as demand plummeted for chips. Intel on Thursday posted a massive fall in sales for the first quarter of 2023 because of a steep drop in the demand for semiconductors, especially those for PCs.

Rising prices, a global chip glut and poor demand for hardware also punished Intel's rival Samsung Electronics, which earlier on Thursday reported its worst quarterly profits in 14 years. Intel's revenue fell 36 percent to \$11.7 billion in the three-month period and the semiconductor giant posted a loss of \$2.8 billion, its biggest ever for a quarter.

The loss and sales collapse were slightly less catastrophic than expectations, and the stock rallied

Sri Lanka inflation dips as IMF bailout kicks in

COLOMBO: Cash-strapped Sri Lanka's inflation eased to 35.3 percent, the lowest in a year, the statistics office said Friday as the country pressed ahead with austerity measures under an IMF bailout. Fuel and food prices coming off their record highs helped inflation moderate in April, the Department of Census and Statistics said.

April is the first full month since the International

Business

ECB, IMF welcome EU's plan to revamp its spending rules

IMF urges European CBs to kill inflation 'beast' with rate hikes

STOCKHOLM: The European Central Bank and the International Monetary Fund on Friday welcomed the EU's proposals to overhaul its fiscal rules to boost growth, but the IMF called for more action.

The EU's executive arm unveiled the plans on Wednesday but they have sparked a rift between member states over how to encourage investment in key areas, such as defence, while keeping a strong watch over government spending. The "frugal" northern countries including Germany want the rules to remain strict, while southern states like Italy say they constrain their ability to invest.

ECB President Christine Lagarde said the bank appreciated the "commission's effort to reach a compromise with member states because that is already unsure given the balancing act that you see in the documents". Lagarde also pointed to the "differences and disagreements between countries because they face different challenges".

"(It) is a good proposal," IMF's European department director Alfred Kammer told reporters in Stockholm, but he said there was a need for "further action". He called for an independent European fiscal council "that could look at methodology and can intervene on methodology, for instance, outside of the commission".

The EU's current spending rules say states' public deficits should not go above three percent of gross domestic product, and debt should stay below 60 percent of GDP. Those targets will stay, but there will be more flexibility through individual plans for debt reduction that are country-specific.

The EU aims to conclude an agreement by the end of this year and EU officials were optimistic that this could be reached despite the divisions. European Commission Vice President Valdis Dombrovskis said the 27 member states had a set a "very ambitious" timeline.

"At this stage it is difficult to predict how long the legislative process will take," he said ahead of a meeting of finance ministers in Stockholm. The rules, known as the Stability and Growth Pact, have been suspended since the COVID pandemic. The suspen-

sion was extended following the war in Ukraine but will not apply next year. German Finance Minister Christian Lindner was not concerned having agreement on the new proposals the end of 2023 because the current rules would continue to apply next year.

"While we don't have new rules, the existing rules apply and in this respect we aren't in a vacuum," he said. The reform will be one of the critical subjects dominating the ministers' agenda alongside the EU economy, and inflation, which remains high in the eurozone.

The EU's economy commissioner, Paolo Gentiloni, said he was "optimistic" the bloc would achieve "good results". "All member states, despite different points of view, are aware of the need to reach an agreement," he said.

Rate hike

"You need to go and kill that beast" Kammer told reporters in Stockholm. He said "history is littered" with examples of policymakers who pause rate hikes only to "need to have a second attempt" at bringing down inflation, inflicting even more pain on the economy.

The European Central Bank along with the other central banks in the region have followed the US Federal Reserve since last year in hiking interest rates sharply to rein in inflation. But with economic growth and inflation slowing, and several bank failures under the weight of higher interest rates, there has been widespread speculation that central banks may pause their hikes to let the impact of the measures work through the economy.

The collapse of SVB bank last month in the United States forced regulators to step in to avoid disruption in the tech sector which it served, while Swiss authorities arranged a hasty takeover of Credit Suisse as confidence eroded, raising worries about the banking sector.

The IMF believes that central banks should still raise interest rates as it fears that increases in energy prices are feeding through to price increases throughout the economy. For the ECB, which is



STOCKHOLM: (Left to right) Paolo Gentiloni, European Commissioner for Economy, Paschal Donohoe, Minister for Public Expenditure, National Development Plan Delivery and Reform of Ireland, Christine Lagarde, President of the ECB and Pierre Gramegna, Managing Director of the ESM address a press conference in Marsta outside Stockholm on April 28, 2023. — AFP

meeting next week on interest rates, "that means tightening for longer, and we are estimating until mid-2024 in order to bring inflation down to target sometime in 2025", said Kammer.

For the IMF, bringing down inflation trumps concerns over the banking system. "And there's no question about it," said Kammer, especially in Europe where the banking system is well capitalized.

"So our assessment is that this banking system should actually be able to deal with stress coming from" higher interest rates, he added.

The IMF also called on European countries to

reduce their budget deficits. Spending swelled to counter the effect of the pandemic and then to support consumers and industries hit by a jump in energy prices following Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

When asked about the risks to economic growth, Kammer said European economies were already operating at "full productive capacity" and labour markets are "super tight".

Regarding wages, he said that in the eurozone the increases have been modest while profits have risen.

"So there's a bit of room for wages to increase," said Kammer. — AFP

News in Brief

Mexican economy grows 3.8%

MEXICO CITY: Mexico's economy, the second-largest in Latin America after Brazil, grew by 3.8 percent in the first quarter of 2023 from the year-earlier period, preliminary official figures showed Friday. Compared with the previous quarter, gross domestic product (GDP) increased by 1.1 percent, lifted by growth in services and exports, the national statistics agency INEGI reported. Gabriela Siller, head of economic analysis for the financial group BASE, sounded a note of caution despite the solid performance so far this year. "Risks to growth persist due to the increased probability of recession in the United States, which could affect Mexico's growth through remittances and exports," she said in a note to clients.

Italian GDP grows 0.5% in Q1

MILAN: Italy's gross domestic product (GDP) grew by 0.5 percent in the first quarter of 2023 compared to the previous three months, the national statistics agency said Friday in a preliminary estimate. The eurozone's third-largest economy had contracted by 0.1 percent in the fourth quarter of 2022, but the growth this year means it escapes a recession. National statistics agency Istat said the first quarter figures reflected growth in the industrial and service sectors, while agriculture, forestry and fishing have stagnated. For 2023 as a whole, Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni's government revised its growth forecast upwards in mid-April to 1.0 percent, compared to the 0.6 percent estimated in November. — AFP

Remy Cointreau shares shaken

PARIS: Shares in Remy Cointreau fell Friday after the French spirits group forecast sales would stall this year, with the United States taking a hit before bouncing back. The group, which includes Remy Martin cognac and Cointreau liqueur, saw sales rise by 17.9 percent in its 2022-2023 financial year that ended in March, as it was able to raise prices while volumes remained steady. But it warned that sales would only remain stable this year, excluding currency effects and other exceptional changes, with a sharp drop in the United States in the first half before rebounding later. Higher interest rates, strains in the banking sector and downbeat consumer confidence surveys have raised worries that the US economy may tip into recession. — AFP

French economic reforms to continue

STOCKHOLM: France will go ahead with structural reforms to overhaul its economy after credit ratings agency Fitch downgraded the country's debt worthiness, Finance Minister Bruno Le Maire told AFP on Saturday. Fitch downgraded France's debt worthiness a notch to "AA-" from "AA" on Friday, claiming the country's "fiscal metrics are weaker than peers". "I believe that the facts invalidate Fitch's assessment. We are able to implement structural reforms and we will continue to implement structural reforms for the country," Le Maire said in Stockholm where he is for an EU finance ministers' meeting. "Public finances, and in particular the high level of government debt, are a rating weakness," Fitch said in a commentary on its rating action which said the country's outlook was stable. — AFP

Eurozone GDP grows 0.1% in Q1 2023

BRUSSELS: The eurozone economy lumbered forward in the first quarter, official data showed Friday, expanding just 0.1 percent over the previous quarter as high inflation and interest rates weigh on activity. Germany, the EU's biggest economy, saw growth stagnate at zero percent over the previous quarter.

Year-on-year, Germany was the only country in the single-currency zone to record a contraction, of 0.1 percent. For the European Union overall, GDP expanded 0.3 percent over the previous quarter, according to the figures from Eurostat, the EU's statistics office.

EU economy commissioner Paolo Gentiloni said the first-quarter data "is encouraging news, which shows a European economy that continues to show resilience against a challenging global backdrop". The

weak-but-positive figure for the eurozone mirrored the reading for the last quarter of 2022, which was also 0.1-percent growth, confirming it had so far escaped recession but that high inflation was still a dampener.

Although eurozone inflation has eased somewhat, it is still 6.9 percent on an annualized basis, more than three times the European Central Bank's target of two percent. The ECB holds its next monetary policy meeting on Thursday, and all eyes are on it to see if it raises rates yet again, and if so by how much. The central bank has raised rates by 3.5 percent since July last year and its chief economist, Philip Lane, said this week that "this is still not the right time to stop".

Eurostat's preliminary data suggested Germany was still struggling from the fallout of Russia's war in Ukraine, especially the shift away from Russian gas that has powered much of its industry.

The strongest quarter-on-quarter GDP performer was Portugal, with growth of 1.6 percent, followed by Spain, Italy and Latvia all on 0.5 percent. France, the second-biggest EU economy, showed growth of 0.2 percent. Quarter-on-quarter declines were recorded for Ireland, at 2.7 percent, and Austria, at 0.3 percent. Economic analysis firm Oxford Economics said the

BoJ maintains monetary easing but plans review

TOKYO: The Bank of Japan announced a review of its longstanding monetary easing measures on Friday, but said it would maintain them for the time being in the first policy decision under new governor Kazuo Ueda. Analysts say the central bank's stimulus measures, which were supposed to deliver a vital boost to the Japanese economy, are looking increasingly unsustainable.

"The bank has decided to conduct a broad-perspective review of monetary policy, with a planned time frame of around one to one-and-a-half years," a BoJ statement issued after a two-day meeting said.

In the immediate term, the institution left its negative interest rate in place and did not adjust the band in which rates for 10-year government bonds fluctuate, as expected.

Australia closes oldest coal plant, pivots to renewables

SYDNEY: Australia's oldest coal-fired power plant was shuttered Friday, as the country — a once-notorious climate straggler — prepares for a seismic shift towards renewable energy. The Liddell power station, a three-hour drive north of Sydney, was one in a series of ageing coal-fired plants slated to close in the coming years.

Built in 1971, Liddell provided about 10 percent of the electricity used in New South Wales, Australia's most populous state. Liddell's owner AGL said it would take about two years to demolish the hulking facility, which would free up the site for new clean energy projects such as a hydrogen power plant.

"More than 90 percent of the materials in the power

station will be recycled, including 70,000 tons of steel — which is more steel than there is in the Sydney Harbour Bridge," the company said.

For decades, coal has provided the bulk of Australia's electricity, but University of New South Wales renewable energy expert Mark Diesendorf told AFP that stations such as Liddell were fast becoming unreliable "clunkers". Besides being inefficient, highly polluting and expensive to repair, the continued widespread use of coal-fired power plants would make Australia's climate targets almost impossible to meet.

Australia has long been one of the world's largest coal producers and exporters, and a series of governments have resisted pressure to scale back the industry. But the centre-left Labor Party elected last year on the promise of climate action has pledged that 82 percent of the country's electricity will come from renewable sources by 2030.

This demands a drastic overhaul — while world leaders such as Norway produce more than 90 percent of their power through renewables, Australia currently sits around 30 percent. — AFP

has previously called the BoJ's current stance "appropriate" and warned of the risk of sudden moves, given global economic uncertainty.

After Friday's BoJ announcement, the yen fell to 135.65 yen against the dollar, from 133.83 in morning trade.



COPENHAGEN: Denmark's Finance Minister Nicolai Wammen and European Commissioner for Economy Paolo Gentiloni (right) talk in the Ministry of Finance in Copenhagen, Denmark, on April 27, 2023. — AFP

Eurostat data for the eurozone was slightly lower than its estimate of 0.2 percent. "We don't expect growth to pick up meaningfully over the course of 2023," it said. It added that a strong start for eurozone industry early this year "will likely be short lived" as inflation and a tougher financial climate weigh on growth. — AFP



TOKYO: Bank of Japan Governor Kazuo Ueda (center) attends a monetary policy meeting at the BOJ headquarters in Tokyo on April 28, 2023. — AFP



SINGLETON: This file picture taken on November 4, 2021 shows steam rising from the cooling towers of the Liddell Power Station next to Lake Liddell in the town of Singleton, some 70km (43 miles) from Newcastle, the world's largest coal exporting port. — AFP

Lifestyle

Deadly invader devastating Venezuelan coral reefs

An ominous shadow in the turquoise Caribbean waters off Venezuela comes from a deadly intruder — a soft coral that experts say has caused one of the most destructive habitat invasions on record anywhere. The *Unomia stolonifera*, native to Indonesia and the Indo-Pacific, is a pinkish type of pulse coral so called for its dance-like movements in the ocean currents. It is a popular aquarium ornament — pretty to look at and hardy — with a single polyp fetching as much as \$80 to \$120. But it is also a killer — settling on native hard corals, rocks and even seagrass which it suffocates and replaces, ul-



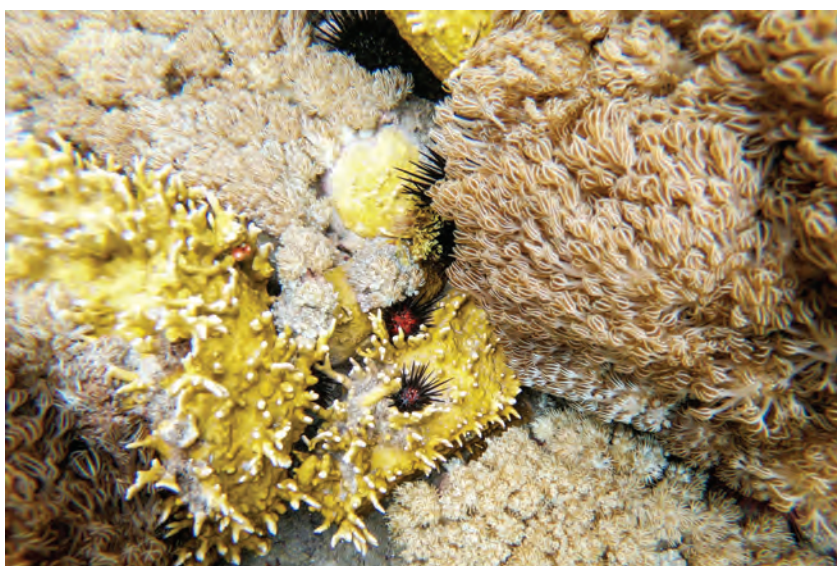
Underwater view shows the invasive coral *Unomia Stolonifera* surrounding other coral species in the coral reefs at Valle Seco beach.



Underwater view of the director of the Azul Ambientalista foundation Gustavo Carrasquel collecting samples of the invasive coral *Unomia Stolonifera* threatening other coral species, in the coral reefs at Valle Seco beach in Choroni, Aragua state, Venezuela. — AFP photos



The director of the Azul Ambientalista foundation Gustavo Carrasquel collects samples of the invasive coral *Unomia Stolonifera* that proliferates and threatens other coral species in the coral reefs at Valle Seco beach.



Underwater view of the invasive coral *Unomia Stolonifera* (right) proliferating and threatening other coral species surrounding them and where sea urchin species inhabit the coral reefs at Valle Seco beach in Choroni, Aragua state, Venezuela.



Underwater view of the invasive coral *Unomia Stolonifera* proliferating and threatening other coral species on coral reefs at Valle Seco beach in Choroni, Aragua state, Venezuela.



Underwater view of corals threatened by the invasive coral *Unomia Stolonifera* proliferating on coral reefs at Valle Seco beach.

timately destroying entire ecosystems. Off Venezuela's north coast, *Unomia* dominates the ocean floor landscape after being introduced through the illegal aquarium trade around 20 years ago. "This is an ecological catastrophe," said marine biologist Juan Pedro Ruiz-Allais, director of Project *Unomia*, named after the invader he has spent years investigating.

Fish stocks are drastically decreasing in the waters off Venezuela as native reefs, which serve as nurseries and feeding grounds, die off, he told AFP. "When the reef dies, when it is covered by the *Unomia stolonifera*, a disruption of the food chain occurs," said the biologist. "It is a social, food security, and economic problem because the livelihood of fishermen is compromised."

'Nobody knew'

When Ruiz-Allais first came across the invader in 2007, it was an unknown species in the Caribbean

and even the Atlantic, he recalled. "Nobody knew what it was." It was first spotted in the Mochima National Park, a gorgeous archipelago covering more than 94,000 hectares, and has since been found to have colonized most of those islands.

The first scientific report was published in 2014, and the coral was initially classified as a member of the broad *Xeniidae* family before it was finally categorized in 2021 as *Unomia stolonifera*. From Mochima, it has spread west and east in the Caribbean Sea. Off the northern state of Anzoategui, it has taken over the equivalent of 300 football stadiums. The coral is spread by fishing nets, anchors, and ship ballast water. "It is a great colonizer," Gustavo Carrasquel, director of the Azul Ambientalistas, an environmental NGO, told AFP.

'Unprecedented'

The threat extends beyond Venezuela's borders: officials say *Unomia* traces have been found near the islands of Aruba and Curacao, and in waters off Colombia and Brazil — where it became attached to an oil rig but was controlled. "It is a problem that will affect the rest of the Caribbean," said Ruiz-Allais. But nowhere has it been more destructive than in Venezuela. "It is an unprecedented case," said Project *Unomia* coordinator Mariano Onoro.

Fishermen and tour operators, concerned about the invasive coral's rapid propagation, have resorted



Aerial view showing the dark spot of the invasive coral *Unomia Stolonifera* proliferating on coral reefs at Valle Seco beach in Choroni, Aragua state, Venezuela.

to manual extraction.

But experts say this is not advised, because broken-off fragments are transported by the tides, settling to create yet more colonies. The privately funded Project *Unomia* has developed an extraction machine with a group of engineers that is awaiting government approval for testing. Venezuela's In-

stitute for Scientific Research and the ministry of eco-socialism have launched an investigation into the coral's rapid spread but have yet to come up with a solution. For now, the magnitude of the problem is such that the invader's elimination appears impossible. "What we can do is recover some areas and control it," said Onoro. — AFP

Tiffany reopens flagship New York store under French management

New Yorkers and tourists will once again stroll between the rings and diamonds of jeweler Tiffany & Co. on Fifth Avenue, which officially reopened for business Wednesday after extensive renovations under new owners, French luxury giant LVMH. The iconic Manhattan jewelry store — immortalized by the 1961 film "Breakfast at Tiffany's" — reopened its doors following the remodeling, which the luxury jeweler hopes will help fuel the brand's momentum under its new ownership.

It took "a bit longer than what we had in mind," Tiffany CEO Anthony Ledru said during the ribbon-cutting ceremony Wednesday, two days before the store reopens to the public. But the result "goes well beyond our wildest dreams," he said. The renovation of the Manhattan landmark began under previous management in 2019, and continued after Tiffany's takeover by LVMH.

The goal of the makeover, Ledru told AFP by email ahead of the reopening, is to offer "a unique client experience," with a blend of "art, craftsmanship, heritage and lifestyle." Tiffany is looking to stay true to its origins while remaining culturally "relevant," and the company wants to make the brand "approachable to all generations," he said.

Tiffany was founded in New York in 1837, and has become best known for its diamonds, silver jewelry and engagement rings sold in the brand's iconic robin's egg blue boxes. The company, which employs 14,000 people and operates some 300 retail outlets worldwide, was acquired by LVMH in early 2021 for just under \$16 billion. At LVMH's annual earnings presentation in January, CEO Bernard Arnault noted Tiffany was on track to "exceed \$1 billion in current operating income" this year. "We were barely halfway there when we



(From left to right) Tiffany Executive Vice President of Products and Communication, Alexandre Arnault; actress Gal Gadot; and Tiffany CEO Anthony Ledru, attend the Tiffany & Co ribbon-cutting ceremony for Tiffany's flagship store in New York. — AFP photos

acquired this business," he said.

With help from Arnault's son, Alexandre, Ledru has embarked on a refresh of the brand, calling on America's hottest show business couple Jay-Z and Beyoncé to promote its products, and launching a campaign around the provocative slogan, "Not your mother's Tiffany." The brand has also forged a partnership with US footwear giant Nike to go along with the revamp.

"Tiffany was a sleeping beauty," says Erwan Rambourg, a specialist in the luxury sector at HSBC. The company long relied on a "very strong reputation," but was also "very conservative in its choices, very slow and quite obsessed with the short term" to

satisfy shareholders, he told AFP.

The new management, spurred on by "the spirit of conquest specific to Bernard Arnault," repositioned the image of the brand by putting less emphasis on products related to marriage and silver jewelry and by raising some prices, he said. "When it was managed by American executives, there was a huge emphasis in communication on entry price, which is not a good approach" to take in luxury, according to Luca Solca of Bernstein, saying it is more prudent for such brands to focus on high-end products. The current management's marketing and communication strategy are "more modern," which is necessary "to re-



People walk past the headquarters of luxury jewelry and specialty retailer Tiffany & Co on 5th Avenue in the Manhattan borough of New York City.

cruit younger consumers," he said.

The jeweler has also launched a range of new products such as the "T by Tiffany" ring and, more recently, its "Lock" line of bracelets. "It is quite difficult to put a big logo on a ring, a bracelet or a pendant, but the shape of some so-called iconic products can, at 20 meters in a restaurant or a bar, identify that it is a Tiffany, Cartier or Van Cleef jewel," Rambourg said. The group has also developed a new approach for its stores, opting for a "more feminine, warm and welcoming" concept, he added. — AFP

Lifestyle



Snakes rest in their enclosure at the Buddhist monastery in Twantay Township in Yangon.



A man holds a snake at the Buddhist monastery in Twantay Township in Yangon.



Snake catcher Shwe Lei with a snake at the Buddhist monastery in Mingalardon Township in Yangon.



A snake bites a man at the Buddhist monastery in Twantay Township in Yangon. — AFP photos

PYTHONS ON YOUR PORCH? Call Myanmar's 'Snake Princess'

At four in the morning outside a Yangon monastery, Shwe Lei and her team were wrestling 30 writhing pythons into old rice sacks and loading them into a van. It was just another day in the life of Myanmar's premier snake removal squad, prizing pythons and cajoling cobras from dangerous entanglements with the human world before returning them to their natural habitat.

Stuffed into the sacks were three months' worth of work, rescued from homes and apartments around Yangon and cared for at the monastery until they are fit for release to the wild. "I love snakes because they are not deceitful," Shwe Lei told AFP at the snake shelter run by the group, a python entwined around her body. "If you acknowledge their nature, they are lovely."

Her mentor Ko Toe Aung, a burly 40-year-old who said he has been hospitalized seven times since he started catching snakes in 2016, was more prosaic. Anyone in the snake-catching game has to be "fast and agile," he said. "Wherever we catch a venomous snake, it is 90/10... It's a 90 per cent chance the snake will bite me."

Their team — called Shwe Metta, or "Golden Love" in Burmese — has around a dozen members and rescued around 200 snakes last year from around Yangon. Social media videos of the pair pulling snakes out of sink plugholes and extricating them from roof eaves have earned them the moniker "prince and princess of snakes" from local media.

On the scent

The team all have day-jobs and rely on donations for everything from their protective gear to petrol to run their purple-colored snake "ambulances". They mostly catch Burmese pythons — non-venomous snakes that typically grow to around five meters (16 feet) long and squeeze their prey of rats and other



Snake catcher Shwe Lei with a snake at the Buddhist monastery in Mingalardon Township in Yangon.

small mammals to death. Cobras and banded krait also make homes in Yangon's apartments and are a trickier prospect — their venom can be fatal. More than 15,000 people were bitten by snakes in Myanmar in 2014, according to the latest available figures from the World Health Organization. Of those, 1,250 died, a fatality rate higher than many other countries, largely due to Myanmar's creaking healthcare system and patchy access to antivenoms. It is a danger never far from the team's work.

In March, they spent two days trying to remove several cobras nesting underneath a Yangon house. Tunneling into the foundations as neighbors watched, their digging was frequently interrupted by the snakes inside spitting venom towards them.

"It stinks," said Ko Ye Min, 31, a tattooed member of the team, as he took a break from trying to reach the nest. Recognizing exactly which kind of stink is another skill a snake-catcher must hone, according to Ko Toe Aung. "We have to be familiar with their smells... to identify the species of snakes be-



Snake catcher Shwe Lei giving first aid to an injured boy at the Kyauktaga Township in Bago region.

fore removing them," he said. Cobras smell "rotten," he said. "But the smell of a python is much stronger. Sometimes we even vomit when we bring it into the ambulance."

'Compassion'

Through their online videos and growing fame, the Shwe Metta team hope to encourage people to be more compassionate towards the slithering reptiles — especially if one turns up in their house. "In the past people... used to kill snakes whenever they found them," said Shwe Lei. "But they have more knowledge and they know we can release snakes back into the wild. So they call us to capture and remove them."

The rescued snakes are kept under observation in a nearby monastery until there are enough of them to justify a journey into the bush to release them. In late March, the team walked into the sweltering backwoods of the Bago Yoma hills, 150 kilometers (90 miles) north of Yangon, on such a journey.

Each member carried a python in a bag slung over their shoulder until they reached a suitable spot to release it. A few



A man and his son look at snakes in an enclosure at the Buddhist monastery in Twantay Township in Yangon.



A Buddhist monk stands near a snake at the Buddhist monastery in Mingalardon Township in Yangon.

of the dazed reptiles needed gentle prods to get going, but after weeks in a cage and a five-hour car journey, Shwe Lei sympathized. "Nobody likes the feeling of being locked up," she said after the last one had slithered off — hopefully not to return to the hu-

man world for a long time. "I feel happy releasing the snakes... from the point of view of compassion for each other, it is satisfying." — AFP



In this file photo TV host Jerry Springer celebrates the taping of "The Jerry Springer Show" 20th anniversary show at Military Island at Times Square in New York. — AFP photos

Legendary US talk show host Jerry Springer dies aged 79

Longtime US talk show host Jerry Springer, whose program became a symbol of low brow television with its on-air fights, swearing and infidelity revelations, has died at the age of 79, US media reported Thursday. Springer, whose show became an international hit that ran for 27 years, died peacefully at his home in Chicago after "a brief illness," TMZ cited a family spokesperson as saying.

The spokesperson did not give further details. TMZ reported that Springer had been diagnosed

with pancreatic cancer a few months ago, citing anonymous sources. Launched in 1991, "The Jerry Springer Show" began life as an ordinary talk show focusing on social issues and US politics, led by the then mild mannered lawyer and former politician Springer, who briefly served as the mayor of Cincinnati in 1977.

But in an effort to boost ratings, the son of Jewish German immigrants switched things up dramatically after a few years, focusing on salacious and outrageous content. In most episodes, guests came to talk about family problems and expose adultery and other transgressions. Springer would supposedly try to mediate but the encounters often ended up in fisticuffs, with guests being held back by security guards. In the late 1990s the show topped the daytime television ratings in the US, beating out even Oprah. It ended its run in 2018. — AFP



In this file photo TV host Jerry Springer celebrates the taping of "The Jerry Springer Show" 20th anniversary show at Military Island at Times Square in New York.

Sports

News in Brief

JUA's Al-Enezi re-elected

KUWAIT: Kuwaiti Obaid Al-Enezi has been re-elected as president of the Judo Union of Asia (JUA) for a fifth, four-year term in a row. Al-Enezi re-elected by the JUA general assembly held in Kuwait on Saturday in the presence of the International Judo Federation IJF President Marius Vizer. In a statement to reporters following his election, Al-Enezi thanked members of the JUA general assembly for voting for him and vowed to continue his efforts to serve the Asian sport of judo. — KUNA

Qatar to host Basketball WCup

MANILA: Qatar was named host of the 2027 men's Basketball World Cup on Friday, burgeoning its reputation for staging major global sports events. Germany will hold the women's version in 2026, basketball's governing body FIBA said. Qatar hosted the men's football World Cup in November-December and will now stage basketball's showpiece tournament for the first time. All matches will be held at existing venues in the capital Doha. "We are very happy to be able to award the Basketball World Cup 2027 to Qatar," said FIBA president Hamane Niang. The draw for the 2023 men's Basketball World Cup takes place on Saturday in the Philippine capital Manila. The Philippines, Indonesia and Japan will host this year's World Cup from August 25 to September 10. Qatar were not among the 32 teams who qualified. Spain are the reigning world champions. — AFP

Leclerc grabs sprint pole

BAKU: Charles Leclerc will start on pole for the Azerbaijan Grand Prix Sprint race despite crashing on his final flying lap in qualifying on Saturday. The Ferrari driver is joined by Sergio Perez's Red Bull on the front row for the first of Formula One's six sprints this season. The Mexican's teammate Max Verstappen finished third with George Russell of Mercedes in fourth. Leclerc is a master of qualifying on the streets of Baku, adding this to his pole from qualifying on Friday for Sunday's main event, for which he has now headed the grid for the past three years. The sprint, introduced in 2021, has undergone a revamp this year. The 100 kilometer dash now stands alone from Sunday's main race with its own new shorter form of qualifying called the 'Sprint Shootout'. Leclerc created a footnote in F1 history by claiming the honors of the inaugural edition in entertaining style. — AFP

Medvedev sees off Vavassori

MADRID: World number three Daniil Medvedev saw off Andrea Vavassori 6-4, 6-3 on Saturday to reach the third round of the Madrid Open. Vavassori battled his way past Andy Murray in the first round but could not oust another former world number one in the Spanish capital. The Italian, ranked 164th, held his own against the second seed but eventually succumbed, even though his serve and volley game troubled Medvedev. "I think I played a very good match, solid, and saved some break points," said Medvedev after his first match at the tournament. "I managed to use my opportunities. I felt good and I'm looking forward to my next matches." The Italian forced two break points in the first game but Medvedev held and the players stayed on serve until the 2021 US Open winner broke for 6-4 to take the first set. There was a brief rain delay before the second set, in which Medvedev broke to love for 5-3, sealing a fine return game with a drop shot which left Vavassori scrambling. — AFP

Espargaro grabs MotoGP pole

JEREZ DE LA FRONTERA: Spaniard Aleix Espargaro dodged the showers on Saturday to grab pole position in the Spanish motorcycle Grand Prix at Jerez. The Aprilia rider, who set the best time in the heat in Friday's qualifying, edged Australian Jack Miller (KTM) and fellow Spaniard Jorge Martin on a Ducati-Pramac. South African Brad Binder (KTM) and reigning Italian world champion Francesco Bagnaia (Ducati), who had to go through the repechages, set the fourth and fifth fastest times and will start on the second row, with the surprising Spaniard Daniel Pedrosa, entered as a wild card by KTM. Yamaha's Fabio Quartararo, the 2021 world champion, qualified only 16th and championship leader Marco Bezzecchi will start 13th. — AFP

Getafe appoint Bordalas as coach

MADRID: Getafe reappointed coach Jose Bordalas on Saturday to try and help the team escape relegation from La Liga. The Madrid minnows had announced Friday that sporting director Ruben Reyes was going to take charge of the team after local media reported Bordalas had rejected the job. Later reports said president Angel Torres had convinced Bordalas to return. "The coach from Alicante returns to what is his home," said Getafe in a statement. "As Azulon coach, he took charge of 212 games between 2016 and 2021, in that time achieving promotion to the top flight and qualifying for the Europa League." The Spanish side sacked coach Quique Sanchez Flores on Thursday following a home loss to Almeria and are without a win in five league games. They fell into the bottom three when Valencia won on Thursday evening. Getafe visit Espanyol on Sunday in a key clash at the bottom of the table, with the Catalan side three points behind in 19th. — AFP

Lakers punch their ticket to NBA Western Conference semi-finals

LOS ANGELES: The Los Angeles Lakers punched their ticket to the NBA Western Conference semi-finals in emphatic style Friday, mauling the Memphis Grizzlies 125-85 to win their first-round series 4-2. LeBron James and the Lakers will have to wait to see who they'll face in the Western Conference semi-finals after the Sacramento Kings fended off elimination, beating the NBA champion Golden State Warriors 118-99 to force a game seven in their series. The Lakers, who earned the Western Conference seventh seed via the play-in tournament, rebounded with a vengeance after failing to lock up the series in Memphis on Wednesday.

They dominated in every facet in one of their best performances of an often rocky season, thrilling a crowd at Crypto.com Arena that included 86-year-old Oscar-winning actor Jack Nicholson. Nicholson, a Lakers fan for decades, was in his courtside seat for the first time since last season's opener in October 2021. D'Angelo Russell led the Lakers with 31 points. James finished with 22 points and six assists, and Anthony Davis had 16 points and 14 rebounds. After they "let one go" in Memphis, Davis said, the Lakers weren't about to miss another chance on their home floor.

"We came out with energy," Davis told ESPN in an on-court interview. "Our crowd was into it. We came out with a sense of urgency that we're not going to let them guys come in here and force a game seven. "We just came out with that mindset of ending it today." The Lakers dominated every facet. They outscored the Grizzlies 52-32 in the paint and 24-14 on the fast break. They out-rebounded the Grizzlies 52-45 and had 20 second-chance points to Memphis' nine. They held Morant to 10 points on three-of-16 shooting, with Santi Aldama leading the Grizzlies with 16 points off the bench. Grizzlies guard Desmond Bane added 15. The Lakers won a playoff series for the first time since winning the club's 17th NBA title in 2020, in the Covid-protective bubble in Florida. They fell to Phoenix in the first round in 2021 and didn't make it to the playoffs last season. They hadn't won a playoff series outside the bubble since 2012. It was a far different story for the home team in San Francisco, where the Kings rebounded from three straight defeats with a comprehensive victory that knotted their series with the Warriors at three games apiece.

Force and energy

"I thought the Kings were the aggressor from the

Suleiman wins Kuwait Riding Championship

KUWAIT: Kuwait Riding Club Rider Saad Al-Suleiman won the Kuwait Riding Center Championship on Friday. Riders from local clubs competed in the event. Saad Al-Suleiman won the main and fifth round at 130 cm height in 63.74 seconds without faults, followed by rider Madhi Al-Khamis in 67.19 seconds while Ahmad Al-Ansari won third and fourth; Bandar Jumaa took the fifth position. This is the fifth edition of the current season (2022-2023) that is organized by Kuwait Riding Center. The first was won by Fawaz Al-Subaie, the second was won by Bandar Jumaa, the third by Italian Antonio Morozo and the fourth was won by Abdallah Al-Awadhi.

Stoinis, Mayers star as Lucknow smash Punjab in IPL

MOHALI: Marcus Stoinis and Kyle Mayers smashed 11 boundaries apiece to bring Lucknow Super Giants the second-highest team total in Indian Premier League history during Friday's 56-run demolition of Punjab Kings. Lucknow finished on 257-5 after being sent in to bat with Mayers giving the visitors a racing start, putting on 41 runs from 21 balls with skipper KL Rahul. Kagiso Rabada sent back the openers, with Mayers caught at mid-on for 54, but Stoinis kept up the charge with a statement knock that delivered 72 from 40.

"This wicket was so much better to bat on than the one at home," said the Australian afterwards. "We were even joking about it in the middle." Stoinis took 22 runs off the last nine balls he faced to finish in the 19th over with six fours and five sixes. Wrist spinner Rahul Chahar was the only Punjab bowler who managed to slow down the batting charge, conceding 29 runs in his wicketless four overs.

Punjab rode 23-year-old Atharav Taide's 66 off 36 balls to finish at 201 runs in a brave but improbable chase. Stoinis put an early dent in the fightback by dismissing returning captain Shikhar Dhawan (I), who was caught in the deep after miscueing with an uppercut in the first over. The Australian's night came to a premature end after he was hit on the hand while bowling and retired hurt, grimacing

Waikato Chiefs topple Canterbury Crusaders

HAMILTON: Damian McKenzie's push for an All Blacks fly-half berth was amplified as his unbeaten Waikato Chiefs beat the Canterbury Crusaders 34-24 in a pivotal Super Rugby Pacific match on Saturday. McKenzie cemented his status as the most influential player in the competition as he kicked 19 points and set up two of his team's three tries in front of home supporters in Hamilton. A ninth straight win equaled the Chiefs' record winning streak - set in 2012 when they won their first title - and propelled them eight points clear atop the standings.

Defending champions the Crusaders are fifth after their third defeat, including their second loss to the Chiefs, following a 21-point humbling in the opening round. The visitors edged in front with nine minutes remaining through a penalty to Richie Mo'unga but the Chiefs powered home with two late tries to Shaun Ste-



LOS ANGELES: Ziaire Williams #8 of the Memphis Grizzlies drives to the basket during Round 1 Game 6 of the 2023 NBA Playoffs on April 28, 2023 at Crypto.Com Arena. — AFP

start, putting a lot of pressure on us defensively," Warriors coach Steve Kerr admitted. "We just never got into our game, but I give Sacramento credit for that. "They came out with more force and more energy. The right team won tonight, that's for sure. Now we've got to regroup and get ready for game seven."

The Kings were undaunted by the knowledge that the Warriors were 33-8 at home in the regular season, and had won two home games to claw back into this series after dropping the first two games in Sacramento. They seized a quick 8-0 lead to set an early tone and after a string of lead changes pushed the advantage to double digits in the second quarter. Stephen Curry, Klay Thompson and the rest of the star-studded Warriors couldn't get the deficit below five points the rest of the way.

Malik Monk scored 28 off the bench and point guard De'Aaron Fox added 26 for the Kings, who are back

in the playoffs for the first time since 2006 and have a chance to take the series on Sunday. "We wanted to hit first, hit second, and hit last, and I think we did a good job of that tonight," said Fox, who again excelled despite playing with a broken left index finger. Rookie Keegan Murray scored 15 points and pulled down 12 rebounds for Sacramento. Kevin Hueter and Trey Lyles added 12 apiece as the Kings withstood every Warriors attempt to rally.

Center Domantas Sabonis finished with seven points and 11 rebounds before fouling out with five minutes remaining — sporting a black eye from taking an elbow on a jump ball in the second period. Curry led the Warriors with 29 points and five assists, and Thompson added 22, but they got little support. Andrewiggins chipped in 13 for Golden State, but Kevon Looney and Jordan Poole had just seven apiece and the Kings' bench outscored Golden State's reserves 52-21. — AFP

Today's matches

English Premier League	
Fulham v Manchester City	16:00
beIN Sports HD 1 English beIN Sports Connect	
Man United v Aston Villa	16:00
beIN Sports 1 HD Premium beIN Sports Connect	
Newcastle v Southampton	16:00
beIN Sports 2 HD Premium beIN Sports Connect	
Bournemouth v Leeds United	16:00
beIN Sports 3 HD Premium beIN Sports Connect	
Liverpool v Tottenham	18:30
beIN Sports HD 1 English beIN Sports Connect	
beIN Sports 1 HD Premium	
Spanish League	
Cadix v Valencia	15:00
beIN Sports HD 1 beIN Sports HD 3 English beIN Sports Connect	
Villarreal v Celta de Vigo	17:15
beIN Sports HD 1 beIN Sports Fr 9 HD max beIN Sports Connect	
Espanyol v Getafe	9:30
beIN Sports HD 1 beIN Sports Connect	
Real Valladolid v Atletico de Madrid	22:00
beIN Sports HD 1 beIN Sports 1 HD Premium beIN Sports HD 1 English beIN Sports Connect	
Italian League Serie A	
Inter Milan v Lazio	13:30
AD SPORTS Premium 1 beIN Sports Fr 4 HD max	
US Sassuolo v Empoli	16:00
beIN Sports Fr 7 HD max AD SPORTS Premium 2	
Cremonese v Hellas Verona	16:00
AD SPORTS Premium 1 beIN Sports 2 FR	
Fiorentina v Sampdoria	19:00
AD SPORTS Premium 1 beIN Sports Fr 6 HD max	
Bologna v Juventus	21:45
AD SPORTS Premium 1	
German Bundesliga 1st Div	
Bayern Munich v Hertha	16:30
beIN Sports HD 3 beIN Sports HD 2 English beIN Sports Fr 5 HD max beIN SPORTS	
Wolfsburg v Mainz	18:30
beIN Sports HD 3 beIN Sports HD 3 English beIN SPORTS	
French League 1st Div	
AS Monaco v Montpellier	14:00
beIN Sports Connect Clermont Foot 63 v Stade de Reims	16:00
beIN Sports Connect ES Troyes v OGC Nice	16:00
beIN Sports Connect Stade Rennais v Angers	6:00
beIN Sports Connect Paris Saint-Germain v Lorient	18:05
beIN Sports Connect Olympique de Marseille v Auxerre	21:45
beIN Sports Connect	



MOHALI: Lucknow Super Giants' Marcus Stoinis bowls during the Indian Premier League (IPL) Twenty20 cricket match between Punjab Kings and Lucknow Super Giants on April 28, 2023. — AFP



MOHALI: Lucknow Super Giants' Marcus Stoinis bowls during the Indian Premier League (IPL) Twenty20 cricket match between Punjab Kings and Lucknow Super Giants on April 28, 2023. — AFP

in pain, though he was unfazed after the match. "My finger is alright. We will get scans done," he said.

Taide was out in the 13th over becoming leg spinner Ravi Bishnoi's first wicket of the evening. He also trapped Liam Livingstone lbw for 23 effectively ending Punjab's already scant hopes. Sikander Raza was the only other Punjab batsman to cross the 30-run mark with the hosts all out on the second-last ball. Lucknow's score was six shy of the tournament record by Royal Challengers Bangalore, who scored 263-5 in a 2013 match against the now-defunct Pune Warriors. The game also recorded the second-highest boundary count - 45 fours and 22 sixes - in IPL history, second only to the 69 between Chennai and Rajasthan Royals in 2010. — AFP

venson and Tyrone Thompson.

Mo'unga, the incumbent All Blacks fly-half, was eclipsed by McKenzie, whose attacking form and game management this season was acknowledged by national coach Ian Foster this week. Chiefs co-captain Sam Cane, who is likely to lead the All Blacks at this year's World Cup, said McKenzie's versatility and the try-scoring prowess of fullback Stevenson had been essential. "It's not the first time they've done it this season, they've been outstanding for us," Cane said. "Damian's ability to be in at 10 and then switch out to fullback, look, we're really pleased with how our outsiders are going. They're going well."

McKenzie has 40 Test caps but nearly half of them have been off the reserves bench and his starts have been primarily at fullback. Having stated his desire to play fly-half, the 28-year-old is applying pressure on Mo'unga and veteran Auckland Blues playmaker Beauden Barrett to wear New Zealand's No.10 jersey when the World Cup starts in France in September. Despite struggling for possession in the first half, the Chiefs led 12-7 at the break thanks to four McKenzie penalty goals. — AFP

Sports

'Extremely bitter': Dortmund hand Bayern title advantage

Dortmund held 1-1 by lowly Bochum

BERLIN: Borussia Dortmund handed the advantage in the Bundesliga title race back to Bayern Munich on Friday after being held to a 1-1 draw at lowly Bochum. Bochum, who sit one spot and just two points above the relegation zone, scored after just five minutes, Anthony Losilla unleashing a screamer from outside the box. Dortmund hit back immediately, Germany forward Karim Adeyemi tapping in after a length-of-the-field team move to make it 1-1.

With the match winding down, Adeyemi looked to have won a penalty for the visiting side when brought down in the box by Danilo Soares, but the referee waved the incident away. Dortmund were camped in the Bochum penalty area in the final minutes and had the ball in the net through Mats Hummels, but the linesman's flag went up immediately, with the defender standing half a meter offside. Bayern can go one point

clear in their bid for an 11th straight title by winning at home against last-placed Hertha Berlin on Sunday.

Dortmund manager Edin Terzic lamented the "extremely bitter" result as his side had a "rare chance to be so close to the championship." Terzic said the referee's failure to check the Adeyemi penalty incident was "a key scene" in the draw, revealing to broadcaster DAZN "I begged him to look at it." His Bochum counterpart Thomas Letsch toasted "the style and manner the team fought" saying "that's what we need in a relegation battle." Disappointed Dortmund goalkeeper Gregor Kobel said his side "had the title in our own hands, but couldn't make the most of it."

"We need to look forward, keep fighting and win our next game." Dortmund came into the match knowing a win would send them four points clear. But they arrived winless in their last five away matches in

all competitions and faced a Bochum side kept out of the relegation places due to their strong home form. Bochum made the most of a nervy start from the visitors, Losilla latching onto a poor Dortmund clearance to rocket the ball across Gregor Kobel and into the top left of the net.

Terzic booked

Dortmund hit back 90 seconds later, Hummels curling a long pass to winger Donyell Malen on the right flank, who slipped his defender and sent the ball across. Striker Sebastien Haller got a toe to the pass, guiding it into the path of Adeyemi, who tapped it in to level the scores.

Midway through the second half, Adeyemi went down in the box under heavy attention from Soares, but the referee waved the incident away without

checking the VAR monitor. With time winding down, Edin Terzic brought on fresh legs, including captain Marco Reus and teenage striker Youssoufa Moukoko. Moukoko, who scored a brace when the two sides met earlier in the season, almost had an immediate impact, forcing a reflex save from Manuel Riemann.

Riemann saved Bochum again less than a minute later, getting an outstretched hand to a curling shot from English teenager Jude Bellingham. With one minute remaining, Hummels sent the visiting fans into raptures when he headed the ball into the goal, but his effort was chalked out for offside, a decision which will be celebrated in the Bavarian capital. Terzic remonstrated with the referee, who went over to the sideline to explain the decision to the Dortmund boss, giving the protesting coach a yellow card in the process. — AFP



Kuwait delegation lauds 19th Asian Games preparation

KUWAIT: Kuwait Olympic Committee Delegation headed by board Member Fatima Hayat and Najat Al-Sayegh as member lauded the final preparations by the organizing committee of the 19th Asian Games to be held in Hangzhou city, China from Sept 23rd until October 8th. The statement was made at the end of the meeting of directors of participating sports delegations that was held last week.

The 19th games were delayed from their original date on Sept 25th, 2022 due to a new wave of Corona virus pandemic, and the organizing committee said it will take the necessary precautions to guarantee the participants' safety. Head of Kuwait delegation to Hangzhou 2022 Games Fatima Hayat said Kuwait delegation inspected the facilities and fields where competitions will take place as well as the sports village where Kuwait delegation will stay.

She said "we were pleased with the organizing committee and its interest in paying attention to all technical details of the games as well as hosting the delegations". Hangzhou city is located 200 kilometers away from Shanghai and is the third host of Asian Games following Beijing 1990 and Guangzhou 2010.



Fatima Hayat (right) and Najat Al-Sayegh pose for a photo.

Tennis Federation to take game to a new level

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: Kuwait Tennis Federation treasurer Fuad Al-Mushari said there will be major efforts in the coming period by the federation's board of

directors in order to take the game to a new level. Al-Mushari congratulated members of the new board of directors who were elected by acclamation by the general assembly, adding that this confidence is a strong incentive and motivation towards a new era for the tennis game in Kuwait.

Al-Mushari thanked the general assembly and all representatives of the clubs, adding that the acclamation is something members are proud of and a strong motivation in the coming future as a joint committee between the federation and clubs will be formed to decide the type of support the clubs need, in addition to opening the federation's

courts for their players to broaden the juniors base according to an integrated work plan that includes unprecedented financial support. He said local competitions will start in June with KD 50,000 allocated prizes which is the biggest in the history of the game in Kuwait. This will help the game restore its status and rankings.



Fuad Al-Mushari

Wydad squeeze into semi-finals

JOHANNESBURG: Stand-in Wydad Casablanca goalkeeper Youssef El Motie starred as the CAF Champions League title-holders scraped into the semi-finals with a 4-3 victory on penalties over Simba of Tanzania. Backed by a passionate 45,000 sell-out crowd at the Stade Mohammed V, the Moroccan outfit won the quarter-final second leg 1-0 thanks to a 24th-minute goal from Senegalese Bouly Sambou.

The result in Casablanca levelled the aggregate score at 1-1 after Simba had built a 1-0 lead following the first leg in Dar es Salaam last weekend. El Motie, deputizing for injured Ahmed Tagnaouti, saved the third and fifth Simba spot kicks taken by Shomari Kapombe and Zambian Clatous Chama while Wydad converted the four they took.

It was a heartbreaking exit for Simba, who had been given little chance of success after being paired with the three-time African champions. Victory for Wydad means a seventh semi-finals appearance since 2016 in the premier African club competition — a remarkable record of consistency. They will face Mamelodi Sundowns of South Africa or Chabab Belouiz-

dad of Algeria in the semi-finals during May with the Pretoria outfit their likely opponents. Sundowns hold a 4-1 lead when they host Belouizdad in one of three quarter-final second legs scheduled for Saturday.

Great rivalries

A Wydad-Sundowns showdown over two legs would rekindle one of the great Champions League rivalries of the modern era. Wydad have won four and drawn two of eight previous meetings between the clubs in the group and knockout stages. The Moroccans forced two corners in quick succession midway through the first half and the only goal of the return match stemmed from the second set-piece. — AFP

Indian athletes lend support to wrestler protest

NEW DELHI: Some of India's most famous athletes on Friday voiced their support for top wrestlers demanding the arrest of the sport's federation chief over allegations of sexual harassment and intimidation. The wrestlers have protested on the streets of New Delhi against Wrestling Federation of India (WFI) president Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh, also a ruling party lawmaker, since Monday.

The Indian Olympic Association (IOA) formed a panel in January to investigate the claims against Singh, but the athletes say there has been insufficient action since then. Retired tennis great Sania Mirza said it had been difficult to watch her fellow athletes in distress. "It's time to now stand with them in this difficult time too," she wrote on Twitter. "I hope whatever the truth is justice is served... sooner rather than later."

Former Test cricketer Virender Sehwag said it was a matter of "great sadness" that the wrestlers had been compelled to return to the streets, following a similar public rally for action against Singh in January. "It is a very sensitive matter and it should be investigated impartially," he tweeted. "Hope the players get justice." Olympic gold medalist Neeraj Chopra also called on authorities to launch a speedy investigation to "ensure that justice is served". Police in New Delhi said Friday they would register a case against Singh after being asked to account for the slow pace of the investigation in India's Supreme Court.

Sakshi Malik and Bajrang Punia, two Olympic bronze medalist wrestlers, have said their protest will continue until Singh is arrested. "We do not have faith in Delhi police. There should be a fair investigation before the Supreme Court and he should be removed from all posts," Malik told reporters at the protest site on Friday. Singh has denied the allegations, claiming a conspiracy to smear his reputation and force him out of India's parliament. He was asked to step down as WFI president in January but remained in the position as of this week.

He continued his duties "after the government said the committee did not find anything against him", WFI senior vice president ID Nanavati told AFP. Broadcaster NDTV has reported that the government was to disband the WFI and hand its affairs to a new panel to hold board elections, where Singh would not be allowed to stand. India is a deeply hierarchical society, and some wrestlers say they were earlier intimidated into not coming forward because of their humble origins. Last year India's national cycling team coach was sacked following sexual harassment charges. — 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

Change of Name

I, BURHUNUDDIN, holder of Indian Passport No. S2350336, having permanent address 1st floor, room 11, Lehari 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 MOHAL-LAH, 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**

I, MOHAMMED, holder of Indian Passport No. M8399055, having permanent address 1st floor, room 11, Lehari Manzil, 26/42, S.V.P road, Null Bazar, Mumbai, Maharashtra 400003, residing in Kuwait at present hereby

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Brighton demolish Wolves 6-0

Crystal Palace beat West Ham in a thriller



LONDON: West Ham United's Moroccan defender Nayef Aguerd (center) fails to connect with the ball during the English Premier League football match between Crystal Palace and West Ham United on April 29, 2023. — AFP

LONDON: Brighton crushed Wolves 6-0 to improve their prospects of qualifying for Europe, while Crystal Palace effectively sealed their Premier League survival with a 4-3 win against struggling West Ham on Saturday. Beaten on penalties by Manchester United in the FA Cup semi-finals last weekend, Brighton can erase that painful loss if they make it into the Europa League or Europa Conference League. The eighth placed Seagulls remain in contention to do just that after recording their biggest win of an impressive season that already includes victories over Manchester United, Liverpool and Chelsea.

Roberto De Zerbi's side went ahead in the sixth minute at the Amex Stadium through Deniz Undav's close-range effort for his first Premier League goal. Pascal Gross struck in the 13th and 26th minutes, the second of his goals a spectacular volley that arched into the top corner. Danny Welbeck's header gave Brighton four first half goals for the first time since

2016. The former Manchester United forced scored again shortly after the restart and Undav's second was dinked finish in the 66th minute.

At Selhurst Park, Palace moved 11 points clear of the bottom three thanks to goals from Jordan Ayew, Wilfried Zaha, Jeff Schlupp and Eberechi Eze. Roy Hodgson's team have won four of their six matches since Hodgson returned for a second spell at the club in place of the sacked Patrick Vieira. Tomas Soucek, Michail Antonio and Nayef Aguerd were on the scoresheet for West Ham. But a second successive defeat leaves David Moyes' men five points above the relegation zone with daunting fixtures against Manchester City and Manchester United looming next week.

Palace power

West Ham were in front after just nine minutes when Michael Olise headed his attempted clear-

ance of Jarrod Bowen's corner straight to Soucek and the midfielder fired home from close-range. Olise made amends for his blunder as Palace equalized six minutes later. Cheick Doucoure found Olise and the forward's superb pass picked out Ghana forward Ayew, whose first-time finish beat Lukasz Fabianski at the near post.

Zaha was back in the Palace starting line-up for the first time in four games since Hodgson's return as manager at the start of April. The Ivory Coast forward rewarded Hodgson's decision as he netted Palace's second goal in the 20th minute with a composed strike from another dangerous Olise cross. West Ham's porous defense was breached again after half an hour, with Soucek carelessly losing possession on the edge of the area to Schlupp, who accepted the gift with a simple finish under the exposed Fabianski.

There was no end to the first half goal spree

as Antonio reduced the deficit with a close-range header after Soucek flicked on a corner in the 36th minute. Eze restored Palace's two-goal advantage in the 66th minute, converting a controversial penalty awarded for Aguerd's tug on his arm. Aguerd got one back for the Hammers in the 73rd minute, helping Soucek's header into the net from virtually on the line, but it was too late to rescue a point.

Fourth bottom Nottingham Forest suffered a late collapse in a 2-1 defeat at Brentford. Danilo marked his 22nd birthday by lashing Forest ahead from close-range in first half stoppage-time. But Brentford equalized in the 82nd minute when Ivan Toney's free-kick bounced past a weak attempted save from Keylor Navas. Toney's 20th top-flight goal this season was followed by Josh Dasilva's lethal finish four minutes into stoppage-time, leaving Forest just one point above the relegation zone. — AFP

Ratcliffe, Sheikh Jassim make final bids for Man Utd

LONDON: Qatari banker Sheikh Jassim bin Hamad Al Thani and British billionaire Jim Ratcliffe made their third and final offers to buy Manchester United on Friday. Sheikh Jassim is in a bidding war with Ratcliffe after the pair emerged as the main contenders to buy the Premier League club from the Glazer family. While Sheikh Jassim's latest offer is reported to be over £5 billion (\$6.2 billion), the size of Ratcliffe's improved bid was yet to be made public when Friday's deadline for the third round of bidding passed at 2100 GMT.

Sources said Sheikh Jassim's bid for 100 percent control of the club comes with the promise of significant additional funding for transfers and infrastructure. The spending would include either redeveloping United's out-dated Old Trafford stadium or build a new ground, along with overhauling the club's training facilities.

Sheikh Jassim's bid also promises to erase United's \$620 million debt. INEOS chemical company founder Ratcliffe, a boyhood United fan who failed in his attempt to buy Chelsea last year, reportedly wants to purchase a controlling stake in United of more than 50 per cent. That would allow United's executive co-chairmen Joel and Avram Glazer to remain as shareholders with a 20 percent stake, which has raised concerns among a fanbase tired of the Americans' controversial reign.

The Glazers reportedly want a world record £6 billion fee for a sports club before they agree to sell the Old Trafford outfit, raising the possibility they might not accept either Sheikh Jassim's offer or Ratcliffe's approach. Deeply unpopular with supporters since they saddled the club with debt in a £790 million leveraged takeover in 2005, the Glazers appeared ready to cash out at an enormous profit when they first invited external investment in November.

However, Elliot Investment Management and The Carlyle Group are among the private equity firms in the mar-

ket for a minority stake that could allow the Glazers to retain control and provide the funding for investment in the club's infrastructure. Avram and Joel Glazer are reportedly keen to hold on to their stakes in United, while siblings and fellow directors Kevin, Bryan and Edward Glazer and Darcie Glazer Kassewitz are open to offloading their shares.

Offers from the last round of bidding, a process run for the Glazers by New York merchant bank the Raine Group, were believed to have been worth a maximum of £5 billion. That would have smashed the Premier League record of £2.5 billion paid for Chelsea last year by a consortium led by Los Angeles Dodgers co-owner Todd Boehly and private equity firm Clearlake Capital, with a further £1.75 billion promised in investment in infrastructure and players.

'Dire need'

The Manchester United Supporters' Trust (MUST) has called for a swift conclusion to the process to allow new owners to be in place for the summer transfer window. "We are in dire need of new investment, which undoubtedly requires new ownership. MUST, along with United fans all around the world, are calling for this process to be concluded without further delay," the fans' group said in a statement. United fans are believed to be planning a protest against the Glazers ahead of Sunday's match with Aston Villa at Old Trafford.

Decade of decline

Under the Glazers' ownership, United have been in a steady decline on and off the field over the past decade. The Red Devils have not won the Premier League title since former manager Alex Ferguson retired in 2013, while the club's revenue has fallen behind local rivals Manchester City and Liverpool due to a lack of regular Champions League football and a failure to modernize Old Trafford.

But they are enjoying a renaissance under Erik ten Hag's management this season, having ended a six-year trophy drought by lifting the League Cup in February. They also face Manchester City in the FA Cup final on June 3. Just months after hosting the 2022 World Cup, a successful Qatari bid would give the Gulf state pride of place in the Premier League - the world's most-watched domestic competition. — AFP



BAKU: Red Bull Racing's Mexican driver Sergio Perez steers his car during the sprint race ahead of the Formula One Azerbaijan Grand Prix at the Baku City Circuit in Baku on April 29, 2023. — AFP

Perez wins Baku sprint as Verstappen sees red

BAKU: Sergio Perez won Saturday's sprint race in Baku to maintain Red Bull's perfect start to the season, but teammate Max Verstappen was in no mood to celebrate. Red Bull's double world champion was seething over a first lap incident when he was muscled out of third place by the Mercedes of George Russell.

Perez won from pole-sitter Charles Leclerc of Ferrari with Verstappen, whose car picked up some damage, eventually getting his third place back off Russell. The British driver apologized to Verstappen, saying his car had no grip but the Dutch driver snapped back: "Mate, we all have no grip, we all need to leave space!" Verstappen added later: "I just don't understand why you need to take so much risk in lap 1, understeer in my side pod and create a hole, we all have cold tyres, it's always easy to lock up."

"But in this beautiful way of explaining mate, locked up, or look at the onboard, it doesn't make sense. We still got into P3, got some good points, but it is what it is." Russell stood his corner, remarking: "I was surprised why he was

so angry to be honest, he still finished the race in P3. "I was still quite surprised he was trying to hold it round the outside, you know we're on a street circuit, he's got a lot more to lose than I have. None of the contact was intentional." That mini storm on the banks of the Caspian Sea took some of the gloss off Perez's win.

The Mexican was adding this first of six sprint races in 2023 to his win in the Saudi Arabian Grand Prix, with Verstappen taking the season-opener in Bahrain and last time out in Melbourne. Leclerc is on pole again on Sunday for the fourth round of the season but judged on this display he will have his work cut out again to clip the Red Bulls' wings. In the drivers' championship Verstappen leads on 75 points from Perez on 62 with Leclerc picking up seven points - more than he's earned in the three races run so far.

Leclerc fended off Perez in the short run to the first corner as Russell overtook Verstappen at turns two and three. Yuki Tsunoda's AlphaTauri then lost a rear tyre which nonchalantly rolled its way down the straight, coming to a stop eventually at turn 16 as the safety car came out. The safety car came in on lap six of 17, Leclerc keeping his lead on the restart, with Verstappen taking back third from Russell. With 10 laps to go Perez picked off Leclerc, Red Bull's straight line speed helping the Mexican sweep past the Ferrari. — AFP