



3 Kuwaiti veteran recalls fighting oil fires set during Iraqi invasion

16 Real Madrid roar back to thrash sorry Liverpool



Kuwait Times Special Supplement Inside
KUWAIT NATIONAL & LIBERATION DAYS



Crown Prince continues talks on govt formation

Discussions with outgoing and former premiers held before naming new PM



KUWAIT: HH the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah receives former Prime Ministers HH Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah (left) and HH Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah (center), in addition to HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Al-Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah (right) at Bayan Palace on Wednesday. — KUNA photos

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: HH the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah held talks on Wednesday with four former prime ministers as part of customary consultations to name a premier to form a new Cabinet. He received former premiers HH Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah, HH Sheikh Sabah

Al-Khaled Al-Sabah and caretaker Prime Minister HH Sheikh Ahmad Al-Nawaf Al-Sabah. He also spoke over the phone with former prime minister Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah, who is outside the country.

HH the Crown Prince met on Tuesday with National Assembly Speaker Ahmad Al-Saadoun and former speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem over the same topic. HH the Crown Prince can rename the outgoing

Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad or ask a new figure to form the new Cabinet.

The government resigned last month after just three months in office in protest against the insistence of MPs to debate costly populist draft legislation, especially a draft law calling for the purchase of billions of dinars of bank loans owed by Kuwaiti citizens. The government demanded that the draft laws be sent

back to Assembly committees for rediscussing them to hear the government's views, but MPs voted to debate them immediately.

On Tuesday, Saadoun adjourned regular Assembly sessions for Tuesday and Wednesday over a lack of quorum and the government's failure to attend, amid protests by several MPs over obstructing the work of the Assembly.

MoH has no plans to cancel expat med fees

KUWAIT: The health ministry has no intention of backing away from the decision to impose fees on expats for receiving medicines, as it sees it is necessary to regulate mechanisms behind dispensing medicine and supervising it.

"There are other decisions regarding expatriate patients that will be taken soon, including designating health assurance hospital for expatriates and not receiving them in government hospitals by next year for workers in the private sector.

Continued on Page 6

Green Island Season full of surprises

By Faten Omar

KUWAIT: Touristic Enterprises Company (TEC) has succeeded in boosting leisure tourism spending and promoting Kuwait as a tourist destination by coordinating and developing several entertainment venues that contribute to the happiness of citizens and residents, which is an essential factor for any society to thrive. TEC is celebrating Kuwait's National and Liberation Days along with the start of the Green Island Season, which opened on Feb 12.

Green Island is the first fully artificial island that was established as part of the green waterfront project in Kuwait in 1988. It occupies an area of more than 161,000 square meters. The island has an artificial lake fed by seawater from the Arabian Gulf and a 35-meter-high tower. (See Page 11)



KUWAIT: Green Island shimmers off Arabian Gulf St in this aerial photo. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

Airfares jump 200% during national days

KUWAIT: Travel agencies in Kuwait have witnessed great turnout by citizens and residents in the past few days to book flights during the national holidays, which has led to an over 200 percent increase in ticket prices to several destinations. Several specialists in the tourism sector told KUNA on Wednesday that the most desired destinations to go to during the holiday are GCC countries, Turkey, London, Cairo and Beirut.

Continued on Page 6

10 Palestinians killed in Zionist West Bank raid

NABLUS: Zionist troops killed 10 Palestinians Wednesday in a raid on the occupied West Bank city of Nablus, while more than 80 suffered gunshot wounds, the Palestinian health ministry said. Top Palestinian official Hussein Al Sheikh decried the incursion as a "massacre" and called for "international protection for our people". The death toll is equal to that of a Zionist army raid last month in Jenin, further north, which was the deadliest West Bank operation since at least 2005.

The Palestinian health ministry said those killed "as a result of the occupation's aggression on Nablus" were aged between 16 and 72. A further 82 people were admitted to multiple hospitals with gunshot wounds, Palestinian health officials said. Huge crowds gathered outside Nablus' Rafidia hospital, waiting for news of dozens of casualties being treated at the facility.

The wounded include Palestine TV journalist Mohammed Al-Khatib, who was shot in the hand, his colleague told AFP. The Islamic Jihad militant group said one of its commanders was killed "in a heroic battle against the (Zionist) occupation army and its special forces". The Lions' Den, a local band of fighters, said six of those killed were militants from various factions.

Continued on Page 6



NABLUS: A Palestinian man flashes the victory sign as he faces a Zionist military vehicle during a raid in this occupied West Bank city on Feb 22, 2023. — AFP



9 780202 223841

Local

Quake-hit Turkey thanks Amir, Kuwaitis for their generosity

'We appreciate the support of Kuwait and the search teams'

By Faten Omar

KUWAIT: The Turkish Embassy held a press conference on Wednesday on the recent devastating earthquake in Turkey. Turkish Ambassador to Kuwait Tuba Nur Sonmez praised the support of HH the Amir of Kuwait Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, HH the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and the ministry of foreign affairs, saying Turkey is grateful for the copious amounts of Kuwaiti aid that has flowed into the regions affected by the quake.

The Turkish ambassador thanked Kuwait for the humanitarian and timely response to the earthquake that struck Turkey and Syria. "We have appreciated the support of Kuwait and the search teams, who were one of the first teams to help the victims of the earthquake," noting that more than 20 Kuwaiti NGOs donated to Turkey.

The ambassador praised the "Kuwait by Your Side" campaign that was livestreamed on Kuwait TV and collected more than KD 20 million for the victims of the earthquake, pointing out that a similar campaign was organized in Turkey. Sonmez revealed Kuwait sent several planes carrying tons of relief, adding one was heading to Turkey on Wednesday. Turkish Airlines cargo is helping in transferring aid from all over the world amid ongoing efforts to ensure the aid effectively reaches those most in need, she said.

Sonmez said the earthquakes have affected a vast area with a total population of 13.5 million people in 10 provinces. The Turkish parliament has declared a three-month state of emergency in those provinces.



Turkish Ambassador to Kuwait Tuba Nur Sonmez

According to the latest information received from the ministry of health, a total of 42,310 citizens lost their lives and 105,505 are injured.

"The Turkish state mobilized all its emergency response capabilities. These ongoing rescue efforts in quake-stricken areas have been complemented by international support. Many governments, including Kuwait, dispatched medical/rescue personnel, funds and equipment. We are coordinating incoming international aid," she said.

The total number of personnel working in the field in affected areas is over 250,000, including volunteers. As of today, 102 countries have offered assistance, and 3,200 foreign search and rescue personnel from many countries are on the ground. Except for Kahramanmaraş and Hatay, search and rescue efforts have been completed, and foreign search and rescue



Turkish Ambassador to Kuwait Tuba Nur Sonmez addresses Kuwaiti media. —Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat

personnel have started to leave. As for the ministry of foreign affairs, the ambassador said they activated the coordination and support center, which has four coordinating ambassadors and 20 staff. "We have assigned four ambassadors and two staff to the disaster and emergency management authority coordination center. We have 13 coordinating ambassadors and 17 ministry staff in the disaster region (Hatay, Gaziantep, Adana, Adiyaman, Kahramanmaraş, Kilis and Sanliurfa). Our Istanbul, Antalya, Gaziantep and Edirne representation

offices are also involved. Our staff at Istanbul Airport work on a 24/7 basis," she said.

"We have activated emergency response mechanisms of NATO, EU and UN. Our missions abroad coordinate in-kind and in-cash assistance and donations. The flags at our missions were at half-mast and condolence books were open until February 12. We received messages of condolences and support from all over the world. Our president spoke with many world leaders," Sonmez added.

US views on liberation

By Colonel Martin Wohlgemuth
Base Commander of Camp Arifjan and Camp Buehring

32 years ago, Saddam Hussein's Iraq unjustly invaded Kuwait, imposing the horrors of war upon the peace-loving state of Kuwait. International outrage and action followed, reflected in the seminal comment by American President George HW Bush declaring that "this aggression will not stand." People everywhere saw Kuwaitis suffering under the authoritarian regime Saddam Hussein created in this proud, prosperous country - echoes that we see today in Russia's unjust invasion of Ukraine.

The world reacted, first through diplomatic means, the UN Security Council and the Arab League passed resolutions condemning the invasion, setting withdrawal deadlines, and authorizing "all necessary means to uphold and implement" a pre-invasion peace. In the United States, our President George HW Bush spoke to Congress and across the airwaves to all Americans, urging us to see that our nation must "stand up for what's right and condemn what's wrong, all in the cause of peace."

From around the world, a coalition of 38 nations heard the cry of Kuwaitis and united in cause to end the invasion and restore your rightful independence as a people and as a nation. President Bush was clear when deploying forces - we do not seek conflict, but we will stand by our friends in the Arab Gulf. For six months, the people of Kuwait struggled under the authoritarian rule of Saddam Hussein - limits on free expression and assembly, and tens of thousands in detention.

Over 42 days of fierce fighting by brave coal-

ition forces across the land, air and sea, Hussein's military was expelled from Kuwait. But all throughout the occupation, Kuwaiti soldiers and civilians alike resisted. These men and women of incredible valor fought with all available means against a tyrant and his regime. It has been a particular honor to meet members of the resistance, and former prisoners of war during our time in Kuwait. Ultimately, independence was restored, and the 700 fires lit in Kuwaiti oil wells by those retreating forces were soon extinguished.

The 1991 invasion of Kuwait feels like generations ago, and over the decades the world has changed immensely, particularly Kuwait, providing a remarkable lens through which to reflect on the Kuwaiti and US partnership. Since the war, there is a tangible sense of appreciation for the service of Kuwaiti security and military service members. US Service Members fortunate to serve as guests in your country see a strong and independent nation: a nation of high international standing that honors the foundations of Kuwaiti society - Justice, Freedom, and Equality.

Now, in supporting those foundations, women have joined the ranks. Here, we regularly see female Kuwaitis serving alongside male counterparts across the government, reshaping national conversations and bringing diverse perspectives and experiences forward. In this and countless ways, Kuwait has risen high from 1991's liberation. I see in Kuwait a strong sense of cohesive identity, ministries coordinate with each other, each invested in the other's success. Politics and economics, lifestyles and culture have all changed. But what has not changed is the need for stability and security within Kuwait as well as across the wider region.

The lessons that the US and Kuwait learned side-by-side 32 years ago echo through time to today and tomorrow. It is obvious in the work we do at US Military bases every day as implementor of the Defense Cooperation Agreement between our two nations. When our soldiers coordinate and train together from large scale maneuvers and training events to physical fitness competitions - we enjoy working, training, and learning from each other, reinforcing the fact that we are better, together.

From handshakes to a shared meal, we continue to reinforce a sincere trust forged by our predecessors first in war and now as partners. The Kuwait Military plays a critical role in ensuring



Brig Gen Fahad Alotaibi, commander of Office of Military Cooperation, honoring Colonel Martin Wohlgemuth.

that stability. The US trusts in its partner in defense to help uphold this stability, ensuring a prosperity we enjoy today, decades after the 1991 invasion. Every day, I see the American flag flying outside my window. Right next to it, not above it, not below it, but side by side, stands the flag of Kuwait. In it, I see a proud nation I have the pleasure to call home. In the same way, every day I see Kuwaiti soldiers and civilians alike working side by side with American Service Members.

There is an unsaid, yet certain understanding that we are stronger together. It reminds me of strength in unity, a lesson forged in war and reinforced in peace. Day in day out, seeing our flags waving together outside our offices, and our people working together, I know that our relationship will only grow stronger day by day, month by month, year by year. Through whatever trials and tribulations may come, our relationship will stand proudly, resolute, like these two flags in the wind.

We are reminded of Kuwait's struggle for liberty 32 years ago this week, reaffirmed by the US presence here every year since. Echoes of the 1991 war are seen today in headlines around the world as Ukraine fights for its own survival where an aggressor makes claims to land, its people, to an entire nation. Once again, people stand up as one and shout back, "Not today." Freedom will survive because good people, men and women, young and old, of any nationality fight for it. On the anniversary of Liberation Day, Camp Arifjan and Camp Buehring, American soldiers and the United States government offers its sincere congratulations in our everlasting bond of friendship and partnership.

The road between Moscow and Kyiv

By Yousuf Awadh Al-Azmi

local@kuwaittimes.net

"War makes thieves and peace hangs them." - George Herbert. It seems things are not easy in the war Russia launched against Ukraine for both sides, yet it seems that the Ukrainians found some air to breathe despite the Russian military pressure and striking force. "The task of the government is not only to pour honey into a cup, but sometimes to give bitter medicine," Russian President Vladimir Putin said.

I think here about the meaning of bitter medicine Putin means. Is, for example, the war in Ukraine a bitter medicine? Are the Ukrainians like those who are disobedient or lagged behind the flock? There are those who spoke and confirmed according to their analysis that the war in Ukraine is only the first step on the road of reuniting the Soviet Union republics, which became part of contemporary history.

Here we pause and wonder - is there any failure (I could not find a clearer word than this) so far to have decisive control, as he could not even take over the capital Kyiv. Does he have the ability to go far and expand more comprehensively? The situation on the ground gives a decisive answer, that the Russian ability to decide matters is not clear so far, and also it is clear that the decision making strategy was not correct in organizing the war or the steps of invasion.

The West's stand of applying pressure on Russia is still effective, at least economically, and the game of using Russian gas and taking advantage of winter has not shown its benefits so far. I am speaking about the more comprehensive shape of this direction. It seems that the alternatives are playing an integral role in meeting winter gas needs and the influence of Russian gas became much lesser than expected.

The Budapest memo was signed in 1994, in which the Russian Federation pledged to respect Ukrainian borders in exchange of Kyiv giving up its nuclear arsenal that was inherited from the Soviet Union in favor of Russia. The action of the Ukrainian leadership then lacked strategic vision, which allowed for Ukraine to be invaded by that state with which it signed an agreement. In politics, your good intentions should not lead you all the time, as the smart politician should see with 10 eyes and hear with 20 ears.

Be generous, as generosity is one of the appreciated ethical virtues, but to voluntarily give up your strategic power to another country? Because here we are facing something that has nothing to do with the virtue of generosity.

Anyhow, indirect Western involvement in the war on the side of Ukraine made it difficult for the ruler of Moscow to win the war. I believe the matter may need a longer time than what we imagine, and may bring several items that were not mentioned so far, even if they are still in the books of political analyses. War is not easy to get into, and very difficult to get out of without blood and fire and possibly disturbing concessions. The road from the Caesar's capital Moscow to Kyiv, which is one of the four cities that were described as "heroic" during the Soviet era, is still bloodied and crowded with the bodies of those killed in an unwinnable war.

Global women's summit highlights key role in society

ABU DHABI: The Global Summit of Women continued Wednesday shedding light on the key role of women in their societies. Today's program includes several sessions in which some female figures took part and spoke about their role and experiences in their societies. Of those sessions was the 'role of women on boosting economy and sustainability'. The conferees spoke about the importance of circular economy as an innovative approach to international development and a system on the effectiveness of addressing global challenges.

Some other figures stressed the significant role of women in several fields during the other sessions. Meanwhile, Sheikha Naeema Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah represented Kuwaiti Women in the summit where she lauded Tuesday Kuwaiti women's role and their participation in varied domains in order to achieve sustainable growth and keep pace with the economic, social and political variations.

The summit kicked off in Abu Dhabi on Tuesday under the patronage of Sheikha Fatima bint Mubarak, Chairwoman of Society of the General Women's Union (GWU), President of the Supreme



Sheikha Fatima Bint Mubarak speaks during the summit.

Council for Motherhood and Childhood and Supreme Chairwoman of the Family Development Foundation (FDF).

Sheikha Naeema praised Kuwaiti women's role through their participation in different fields, achieving sustainable growth and to keep pace with the economic, social and political variations. This came in a statement by Sheikha Naeema to KUNA, on the sidelines of the inauguration of Women

Global Summit 2023 in Abu Dhabi, where she represented Kuwaiti women.

It is not strange that Sheikha Fatima bint Mubarak sponsored this summit, noted Sheikha Naeema, adding that she is the main supporter of Emirati women. The summit, which is being run under the theme "Role of Female Leaders in Peace Building, Social Integration and Driving Prosperity", will continue until Wednesday. — KUNA

Local

Cyberbullying a new technique for bullies

Why do bullies prefer cyberbullying? Experts weigh in

By Ghadeer Ghloum

KUWAIT: Cyberbullying is a widespread bullying technique that bullies use to harm others. Bullies of different ages, genders and backgrounds can easily target any person due to the easy access different applications provide through messages and comments. They tend to pick on certain aspects about their target's personality and try to mock them, which lowers their victim's self-esteem.

Cyberbullying stems from different motives, such as a lack of education, previous trauma and personal insecurities and problems. On the other hand, bullies head towards cyberbullying specifically because the bully believes that hiding behind a screen would protect them from direct reaction and from revealing their real identity.

To further elaborate on the factors that produce bullies, Dr Ali Al-Baghlani, a specialist in psychiatry, told Kuwait Times: "The environment that gives birth to a bully is deprived of care and attention. Hence, compensating the emptiness within comes through seeking attention by bullying others." Bullying is an unnatural result that grows due to one's upbringing in an unhealthy environment that lacks affection, compassion and other emotions that human beings need to develop maturity and inner peace. Baghlani relates bullies' usage of cyberbullying technique to inner chaos and fear. He sees that such issues need to be monitored by a specialist in order to help the bully overcome these issues.

"Using fake usernames and anonymous accounts reflects character and psychological damage, which can be fixed gradually by attending



Dr Ali Al-Baghlani



Mohammad Al-Ansari



Ghadeer Ghafour



Samia Ibrahim



therapy sessions that help the bully get over whatever troubles they have had in the past or still have in the present, which is leading them to such unlawful actions," Baghlani said. Thus, it is necessary for bullies to attend therapy sessions that provide assistance and teaches them a healthy way to cope with their problems, rather than taking them out on innocent victims.

In addition to psychological factors, education plays an essential role in teaching people the necessity of adhering to human ethics, good behavior and respect of oneself and others despite their differences. Such values represent the core of humanity that improve one's mentality and behavior. In this regard, Mohammad Al-Ansari, a boys' high school teacher said: "It is our obligation as teachers to identify and address bullying whenever we encounter it in order to ensure that our children feel secured and supported in their learning environment."

Amid competition and comparison between students, the risk of bullying can rise. Therefore, teachers focus on putting effort into teaching students human values. Another high school teacher, Ghadeer Ghafour, added on the major role that education plays in preventing people from becoming bullies. "Poor education can result in unethical and immature actions such as bullying and insulting other people. Education is not only about solving math problems and memorizing facts, but also allowing people to understand how to respect others," she said.

Ghafour added bullying is most likely to occur from people who were bullied before. "It goes in circles from one person to another. A significant outcome of being bullied is not wanting to attend school, which badly affects that person's educational experience. Hence, this takes an essential part in creating a bully," she pointed out.

According to Ghafour, despite the fact that schools prepare people to become civilized and well-mannered, reckless students are more likely to bully other students because they do not give themselves the chance to learn enough from their teachers. "Such incidents mostly happen in schools with students who do not take education seriously," she said.

Samia Ibrahim, vice principal at an American private school in Kuwait, said students who experience cyberbullying struggle with socializing with their friends at school, especially since the bully can use fake accounts and usernames. The anonymity of cyberbullies keeps the targeted student in doubt and unable to be comfortable around other students at school. This keeps the cycle going. Therefore, whoever finds themselves facing problems with their life must seek help from a specialist to help reduce the effects of all types of bullying, whether anonymous through cyberbullying or face to face.



KUWAIT: Late Amir Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad, Al-Sabah presses the button to cap the last burning oil well (Burgan 118) in 1991. —KUNA photos



KUWAIT: The Iraqi invaders set around 737 oil wells on fire before retreating from Kuwait in 1991, leaving behind one of the worst environmental disasters in recent memory.

Kuwait veteran recalls oil fires during invasion

KUWAIT: Sara Akbar was the only female member of a team that joined efforts to extinguish oil wells set on fire during the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait. Composed of 30 Kuwaiti personnel, along with thousands of firemen from sisterly and friendly countries, the team set a great example for self-sacrifice, loyalty and patriotism, said Akbar, who is a petroleum engineer.

The Iraqi invaders set around 737 oil wells on fire before retreating from Kuwait in 1991, leaving behind one of the worst environmental disasters in recent memory. Kuwait incurred daily losses amounting to nearly \$120 million as 1.5-2 billion barrels of Kuwaiti crude oil had been burnt during the Iraqi invasion.

The fire extinguishing operation was a heroic endeavor by people who had sacrificed themselves to protect Kuwait, said Akbar. Experts had estimated that it would take at least five years to get all oil fires under control, but the squad, to everyone's surprise, managed to accomplish the



mission in a record time of just eight months, she said with pride.

Twenty-seven teams composed of more than 10,000 firemen from 10 countries had joined the operation, she said, pointing out that the mission had officially started on March 16, 1991. She estimated that Kuwait had spent approximately \$1.5 billion on the efforts of extinguishing the fires.

Kuwait Oil Company prepared a plan to resume production and signed contracts with the purpose of eliminating the impacts of the environmental catastrophe created by the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, she said. They had focused their efforts on the rehabilitation of 18 assembly centers and the recovery

and treatment of nearly 20 million barrels of crude oil assembled out of 240 petroleum seeps, she said.

Akbar regretted that the oil fires had created some 300 petroleum seeps with mixed coverage and depth based on terrain, covering roughly 50 km, with leakage of around 23 million barrels of oil. Akbar added that the country's refineries and storage, transport and shipping facilities had also been seriously damaged due to the oil fires. On Nov 6, 1991, in the presence of the late Amir Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, Kuwait announced that the last burning oil well had been put out, ending eight months of accomplishment that remain engraved in Kuwait's memory. —KUNA

Indian embassy holds 'Millets Week in Kuwait'

KUWAIT: The Embassy of India, Kuwait held a finale event titled "Millets for Sustainable Development" on Feb 21 at the embassy auditorium to mark the conclusion of the "Millets Week in Kuwait" (IYOM 2023) which was held from Feb 15 - 21, 2023. Amiri Diwan Undersecretary Maazen Essa Al-Essa was the chief guest of the event which was attended by a large number of resident ambassadors, their spouses, businessmen, students and Indian community members.

Indian Ambassador-designate Dr Adarsh Swaika extended his warm greetings to the people and government of State of Kuwait on the occasion of the National and Liberation Days of Kuwait. Referring to the significance of millets on achieving sustainable development goals (SDGs) and India's emphasis on popularizing millets for their benefits, the ambassador said: "millets are good for our planet, our people and our plate." The International Year of Millets (IYM 2023) was announced by the United Nations General Assembly on a proposal by the government of India.

A millets exhibition, displaying the diversity of millets grown in different parts of India, was held on the sidelines of the event. 'The Art with Millets Exhibition' displayed more than 70 artworks prepared by students of Indian schools on



KUWAIT: Indian Ambassador Dr Adarsh Swaika poses for a group photo with the participants of the 'Millets Week in Kuwait' during the event.

the themes of millets for sustainable development, millets for taste and nutrition and India-Kuwait friendship.

A live demonstration on regional diversity of millets cuisine by renowned Indian chef Chhaya Thakkar was also held. A display of various millets from Indian states and their benefits, by Lulu Hypermarkets, Kuwait and Al-Hakimi Supermarket, Kuwait was also held during this event. A cultural program, involving a skit on millets culture in India performed by Indian Doctors Forum (IDF) members as well as harvest dances by Indian community members and students was presented as part of the event.

During the event, the chief guest and the Ambassador-designate gave away prizes to the

winners of various competitions held during the "Millets Week in Kuwait". The week also included several activities, such as "Art with Millets" poster competition, an online quiz and an awareness campaign titled "Millets in My Tiffin" aimed at generating awareness of Indian millets and the rich diversity of millets cuisine of India as well as the nutrition and health benefits of millets.

As part of the promotion of the millets campaign, First Secretary Smita Patil participated in the "Good Morning Kuwait Live Show" on KTV2 for spreading awareness about millets in Kuwait.

A large number of Indian students participated in the educational drive conducted by the embassy under hashtags #MilletsWeekInKuwait and #MilletsInMyTiffin campaigns.

Volunteer Women's Association marks national holidays

KUWAIT: Kuwait Volunteer Women's Association for Community Services held a celebration at the Red Palace in Al-Jahra on the occasion of National Day and Liberation Day. The Chairwoman of the Association Sheikhha Fadia Saad Al-Abdullah Al-Salem Al-Sabah said in a press statement Wednesday that the association chose the palace to hold the celebration because it's a historical symbol that stands witness of Kuwait's rich history. It also represents the heroic sacrifice of our fathers and grandfathers in the Battle of Jahra, which embodies the steadfastness that Kuwaitis have in defense of their homeland. The celebration was attended by the Kuwaiti Scout Association. It included singing performances, in addition to many competitions for children. A heritage exhibition was also held in cooperation with the Kuwaiti Heritage Society, the 965 Expo Group and the Project Leaders Team. —KUNA

PAFN to make school nutrition more healthy

KUWAIT: The Public Authority for Food and Nutrition has launched an initiative to make schools more nutrition-friendly in cooperation with the education ministry to combat obesity in children, as the initiative aims to intensify cultural and awareness activities for elementary and middle school stages on the best balanced nutritional practices.

"The idea of the initiative came to provide a mechanism that is able to connect different school programs based on health and nutrition using ideas and principles of the WHO and UNICEF as part of the children-friendly hospitals initiative," PAFN announced. "This initiative was launched by WHO, UNICEF, UNESCO and FAO in 2004 as a way to deter or decrease problems related to malnutrition, whether it is the decrease or increase of food intake in students," it said.

"A certain number of schools will be accepted, which will be directed by nutrition specialists to activate the initiative in the school. Then the school will undergo self-evaluation, and when all items are met, an external evaluation can be requested through a team from the Public Authority for Food and Nutrition. The school will be eligible for the title of a nutrition-friendly school if it passes the evaluation process," the authority added.

This will benefit schools, parents and society as a whole. "Providing an appropriate school environment to support the nutrition of students will improve educational attainment, enhance the ability of schools to address health problems related to nutrition among students, as well as enhance communication between the school community and parents by participating in resolving health and nutritional problems of students," it said. The authority announced that schools wishing to join the nutrition-friendly schools program can contact the nutrition-friendly schools coordination team, form an internal working group and nominate a head or coordinator.

Kuwait Times
Established 1961THE LEADING INDEPENDENT
DAILY IN THE ARABIAN GULF
ESTABLISHED 1961Founder and Publisher
YOUSUF S. AL-ALYANEditor-in-Chief
ABD AL-RAHMAN AL-ALYANEDITORIAL : 24833199-24833358-24833432
ADVERTISING : 24835616/7
FAX : 24835620/1
CIRCULATION : 24833199 Extn. 353/3561
ACCOUNTS : 24833199 Extn. 125
COMMERCIAL : 24835618P.O.Box 1301 Safat, 13014 Kuwait.
Email: info@kuwaittimes.com
Website: www.kuwaittimes.com

Japanese envoy congratulates Kuwait

By Yasunari Morino
Ambassador of Japan to Kuwait

On the occasion of the 62nd National Day of the State of Kuwait and the 32nd Anniversary of its liberation, I wish to express my sincere congratulations and best wishes for the further development and prosperity of the country and its people.



Japan was one of the first countries to recognize the independence of Kuwait in 1961. Moreover, the relationship between the two countries started even before the independence, in the middle of 1950s when the Arabian Oil Company (AOC) of Japan was granted with an oil concession in Kuwait. Since then, over the past six decades, the Japan-Kuwait relations have continued to develop and expand in all fields and at all levels, including the friendship between the Japanese Imperial family and Kuwaiti Ruling family.

The relation between our two countries could be described as "friends in need and friends indeed". Japan and Kuwait have always exchanged support at crucial moments in their history. Supporting Kuwait resolutely in face of the Iraqi invasion, Japan provided financial contribution for Kuwait's liberation. Furthermore, Japan dispatched a mine-sweeping unit of the Japanese Maritime Self-Defense Forces to clean the Gulf waters and Kuwaiti territorial waters from mines.

On the other hand, about 10 years ago when Japan was devastated by horrible earthquakes and a tsunami, Kuwait donated five million barrels of crude oil and additional five million USD assistance for the reconstruction which the people of Japan will never forget. Based on such historical friendship between the two countries, I would like to develop bilateral cooperation beyond the traditional oil trade and expand it to further various fields, including development of sustainable infrastructure and people-to-people exchanges in the areas of education and tourism.

Photo of the day



KUWAIT: Workers clean the window panels of a building in Kuwait City on Feb 22, 2023. —Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

Kuwait charities send aid To Turkey, Syria, Jordan



KUWAIT: KRCS volunteers will supervise the distribution of aid from 12 trucks in cooperation with the Turkish Red Crescent. —KUNA



KUWAIT: Kuwait Red Crescent Society (KRCS) dispatched 12 aid trucks loaded with medical supplies to Turkey and North Syria following the earthquake which left thousands dead and many more injured. The convoy - loaded with blankets, tents, and electrical appliances - is one of many initiatives taken by the

Kuwaiti government and people to help those affected in some of the worst-hit areas by the quake. KRCS General Secretary Maha Al-Barjas said in a press statement.

She added that Kuwait stands heart and soul with Turkey and Syria and that it will not hold back on helping as needed. KRCS volunteers will supervise the distribution of aid in cooperation with the Turkish Red Crescent, said Barjas. Barjas stressed the importance of the international organizations in responding to the disaster in Turkey and Syria, pointing to KRCS's keenness on increasing its efforts to provide support.

She said she was thankful for the continuous partnership between KRCS and its Turkish counterpart in providing relief and humanitarian aid, praising the efforts of Kuwait's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Kuwait Embassy in Ankara in faci-

lating the tasks of the Kuwaiti mission and supervising the distribution process.

Kuwait is also working to meet the needs of impoverished Jordanian families as well as Palestinian and Syrian refugees in Jordan. On Wednesday, Kuwait's Mercy International, part of the Association of Social Reform, kick-started an aid campaign worth \$210,000 for that purpose.

Head of the Mercy International delegation Abdullah Al-Ajmi told KUNA that the campaign provided food baskets and necessities to the needy for a period of three weeks. The money for the campaign would also fund medical procedures and treatment expenses, he added. Al-Ajmi affirmed that Mercy International was eager to provide assistance to those in need in line with the Kuwaiti leadership's guidelines. —KUNA



Scan & Subscribe KD 20 a year

For Individuals Only



Scan Now

Kuwait Times
Established 1961
The First English Daily in the Arabian Gulf

Tel: 24833199 Ext:220



KUWAIT: The Women's Physiotherapy Department holds an awareness event to help families support their loved ones.

Physiotherapy event helps families

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: The Women's Physiotherapy Department organized an awareness day to help families understand their role in treating patients who need rehabilitation. The day coincides with Kuwait's celebration of its national days.

Director of Physiotherapy Hospital Dr Salah Al-Shayji said the psychological factor is very important, followed by the family that must support the patient. He said the patient's self-confidence speeds up the process of his recovery, adding that the hospital's achievements are many, including receiving of the safety star at the prosthetics

center, and another star at the outpatient clinics.

He said there will be a plan to have a day service for men which will take place by bringing the treatment teams together and examining the patient by the three teams: treatment at work, physiotherapy and swallowing and speaking. Head of the Women's Physiotherapy Department Dr Nafisa Kamal said the in-hospital neurology department has weekly activities, and each week patients interact with specialists during the activity.

She said the family guidance team was selected this week to remove the feeling of fear by the patient's family and to educate them on how to deal with their patient without fear and that they can refer to the specialist when they need help. Physiotherapy specialist at the hospital's inpatient clinic Dr Jamila Al-Rashidi said this awareness day is an annual event the department organizes to inform the family about its role and effectiveness in the treatment of the patient.

Kuwaiti diplomats need visa for Japan

KUWAIT: Special and diplomatic passport holders are still required to obtain the entry visa in advance for traveling to Japan, said a spokesper-

son with the Embassy of Japan in a press statement. The remarks come following news articles regarding visa application for the Kuwaiti special and diplomatic passport holders to enter Japan, which were published last week.

"The Embassy and Ambassador Yasunari Morino will continue to exert utmost efforts to increase people-to-people exchanges between the two friendly countries," said the statement.



US 'committed' to joint sea patrols with Philippines

Seattle, first US city to ban caste discrimination

Page 6

Page 7

Ukraine, allies seek votes for 'peace'

UN calls for an immediate cessation of hostilities



KYIV: A wounded Ukrainian serviceman and his girlfriend walk past national flags each of which symbolizing the dead serviceman set at Independence Square in Kyiv on February 22, 2023, two days before the first anniversary of the Russian invasion to Ukraine. —AFP

UNITED NATIONS: The UN General Assembly meets Wednesday, two days ahead of the anniversary of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, with Kyiv and its allies hoping to garner broad support for a resolution calling for a "just and lasting peace."

The draft resolution, sponsored by some 60 countries, is to be voted on after the close of debate-not expected until at least Thursday. The text "underscores the need to reach, as soon as possible, a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in Ukraine in line with the principles of the Charter of the United Nations."

Like previous resolutions, it reaffirms the UN's "commitment to the sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity of Ukraine" and calls for an immediate cessation of hostilities. The text, which unlike a Security Council resolution would not create a binding law, demands Russia "immediately, completely and unconditionally withdraw all of its military forces from the territory of Ukraine."

Kyiv hopes to garner the support of at least as many nations as in October, when 143 countries voted for a resolution condemning the annexation of several Ukrainian territories by Russia. To that end, Ukraine stopped pushing for the immediate inclusion of President Volodymyr Zelensky's 10-point peace plan which he presented in November, according to diplomatic sources.

"I think we have come up with a text which really tries to gather the international community, tries to be as cohesive and as positive as possible," said one European diplomat. A year after the invasion of Ukraine, it will also be a message to Russia that "it cannot achieve its objectives through force", the diplomat added, hoping that if Moscow "feels isolated, at a certain point the pressure will be too strong to be resisted."

'Symbolic'

The days-long debate on the resolution, which will feature a host of ministers visiting New York, including US Secretary of State Antony Blinken, is set to begin Wednesday at 3:00 pm local time (2000 GMT). On Tuesday, Russian President Vladimir Putin vowed to "systematically" continue his offensive in Ukraine, in an anti-Western speech reminiscent of the Cold War.

As some countries in the global South express weariness that the North is overly focused on the conflict, US ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield argued that supporting peace in Ukraine "is not somehow about choosing between the United States and Russia," but "defending the charter" of the UN. China is also growing worried that the conflict may spiral out of control, and has indicated that it wants to present a proposal soon to find a

"political solution" to the war. China and others, notably India, have abstained during the series of UN votes on Ukraine.

"If Kyiv won't talk about peace, there is a risk that the BRICS countries will start to say Ukraine is the real obstacle to peace," said International Crisis Group analyst Richard Gowan, referring to Brazil, India, China and South Africa.

"That is why the US and EU were keen to get references to a cessation of hostilities in this week's text," he told AFP. That "cessation of hostilities" is accompanied by a stipulation that Russia withdraw its troops, since a simple ceasefire could be just a lull allowing Russia to regroup, diplomats noted.

If the resolution is mainly "symbolic," Gowan said, it will have the merit of underlining Russia's isolation, and "undermines Putin's pretensions to be leading some grand anti-Western coalition." The General Assembly has voted on three resolutions voicing opposition to the Russian invasion over the past year, with each receiving between 140 and 143 votes in favor. Five countries have systematically voted against-Russia, Belarus, Syria, North Korea and Eritrea, with fewer than 40 abstaining. A fourth resolution in April sought to suspend Russia from the UN Human Rights Council, and while successful, it received less support. Only 93 votes were in favor, 24 against and 58 abstentions. —AFP

Germany expels Iran diplomats over dual citizen death penalty

BERLIN: Germany said Wednesday that it was expelling two diplomats from the Iranian embassy in Berlin in response to the death sentence an Iranian court handed down against an Iranian-German national.

After the death penalty verdict Tuesday against Jamshid Sharmahd, German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock said in a statement that Berlin was "declaring two Iranian embassy staff members to be persona non grata" and "ordering them to leave Germany".

A ministry spokesman said later the Iranians would have "a few days" to quit the country. Chancellor Olaf Scholz condemned "in the strongest terms" the verdict against Sharmahd, who supporters say was abducted abroad and forcibly returned to Iran for a show trial.

"The Iranian regime is fighting its own people in every way possible and shows no respect for human rights," he tweeted, calling on Tehran to reverse the "unacceptable" death penalty ruling. Baerbock summoned Iran's charge d'affaires over the case and called for Sharmahd to be given "a fair appeal based on the rule of law".

The German foreign minister has been at the forefront of Western voices condemning Tehran's bloody crackdown on demonstrations and its executions of anti-government protesters. The Tehran Revolutionary Court convicted Sharmahd, 67, in connection with the deadly bombing of a mosque in 2008, the judiciary's Mizan Online website reported.

Iranian authorities announced in August 2020 that Sharmahd, who is also a US resident, was arrested in what they described as a "complex operation" without specifying how, where or when he was seized. His family says he was kidnapped by the Iranian security services while in transit in Dubai and then brought to Iran.

His daughter Gazelle Sharmahd insisted Wednesday on his innocence and called on EU countries to ratchet up the pressure to save him. European governments "should use all the means in their political arsenal-each and every one of them," she told AFP. "It needs heroic measures right now. It needs extreme measures." Baerbock had condemned the ruling on Tuesday as "absolutely unacceptable" and promised a "strong reaction" to the decision, resulting in Wednesday's expulsion order. "Not only is the death penalty cruel, inhuman and degrading, but Jamshid Sharmahd has never had anything approaching a fair trial," she said. — AFP

'IS bride' loses bid to restore UK citizenship

LONDON: A woman stripped of her British citizenship after travelling to Syria as a teenager to marry an Islamic State group fighter on Wednesday lost her legal battle to reverse the decision. The ruling from Judge Robert Jay means that Shamima Begum, 23, cannot return to the UK from her current home in a refugee camp in northern Syria.

While the court determined that it was for the minister to make the decision, it also said that some of Begum's arguments had merit. Begum was aged 15 when she left her east London home for Syria with two school friends in 2015. While there, she married an IS fighter and had three children, none of whom survived. In February 2019, she said she was left stateless when Britain's then interior minister Sajid Javid revoked her British citizenship on national security grounds after she was found in the Syrian camp. A UK tribunal ruled in 2020 that she was not stateless because she was "a citizen of Bangladesh by descent" at the time the decision was made by virtue of her Bangladeshi mother.

'No protection'

The UK Supreme Court last year refused Begum permission to enter the UK to fight her citizenship case. She subsequently took her case to the Special Immigration Appeals Commission (SIAC), which ruled on Wednesday.

In rejecting her appeal, Jay said "under our constitutional settlement these sensitive issues are for the secretary of state to evaluate and not for the commission". There was, however, "considerable force" in Begum's

arguments and that Javid's conclusion that she had travelled voluntarily to Syria "is as stark as it is unsympathetic", he added.

"Further, there is some merit in the argument that those advising the secretary of state see this as a black and white issue, when many would say that there are shades of grey," he added. Gareth Peirce and Daniel Furer, lawyers representing Begum, said the ruling meant "there is now no protection for a British child trafficked out of the UK".

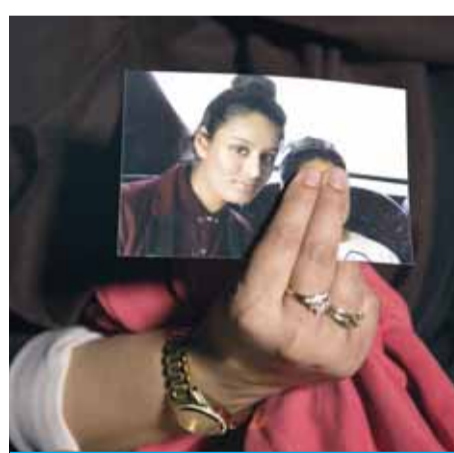
They added that "every possible avenue to challenge this decision will be urgently pursued". The interior ministry said it was "pleased that the court has found in favour of the government's position". Begum could now appeal the decision by the Special Immigration Appeals Commission in the Court of Appeal.

Trafficking claims

The 23-year-old is one of hundreds of Europeans whose fate has challenged governments following the 2019 collapse of the Islamist extremists' self-styled caliphate. Lawyer Samantha Knights, representing Begum, told the five-day SIAC hearing last November that her client had been "influenced" along with her friends by a "determined and effective" IS group "propaganda machine". There was "overwhelming" evidence she had been "recruited, transported, transferred, harboured and received in Syria for the purposes of 'sexual exploitation' and 'marriage' to an adult male", she added in written submissions.

James Eadie, representing the government, said Javid had "properly considered" all the factors before making his decision. The case was about "national security", not trafficking, he argued. Amnesty International called the ruling "very disappointing".

"The power to banish a citizen like this simply shouldn't exist in the modern world," said Amnesty International UK's refugee and migrant rights director Steve Valdez-



LONDON: File photo shows Renu, eldest sister of missing British girl Shamima Begum, holding a picture of her sister Shamima, while being interviewed by the media in central London. —AFP

Symonds. "Shamima Begum had lived all her life in the UK right up to the point she was lured to Syria as an impressionable 15-year-old," he added.

The UK has government successfully argued that under Bangladeshi law, a UK national born to a Bangladeshi parent is automatically a Bangladeshi citizen, but Dhaka said that was not the case for Begum.

Under the Bangladeshi "blood line" law, nationality and citizenship lapse when a person reaches the age of 21 unless they make efforts to retain it, which Begum has not done. She was aged 19 when the decision was made.

Begum's apparent lack of remorse in initial interviews drew outrage, but she has since expressed regret for her actions and sympathy for IS victims. In a documentary last year, she said that on arrival in Syria she quickly realised that IS was "trapping people" to boost the caliphate's numbers and "look good". —AFP

Ministry of Commerce and Industry

RECALL INFORMATION

C-Class (C 203)

CLK-Class

E-Class

CLS-Class

CLC (203)

Mercedes-Benz
Model: C-Class, CLK-Class, E-Class, CLS-Class, CLC (203)
Model year: from 2001 to 2011

RECALL REASON

In certain affected vehicles, the bonding between the glass panel and the sliding roof frame might not meet specifications. In this case, the adhesion of this bonding might deteriorate gradually over time. In consequence, a separation of the glass panel from the vehicle cannot be excluded. This would increase the risk of a potential accident and/or injury for other road users.

REMEDY

To check the bonding of the sliding roof panel on the affected vehicles as a precautionary measure and replace if necessary. The required work will certainly be carried out free of charge.

CONTACT

Please contact Al Mulla Automobiles Co.
Phone 1-887-888
Mercedes-Benz Service Centre - Al Showaikh Industrial Area - 9 Street
Mercedes-Benz Service Centre - Al Showaikh Industrial Area - 13 Street
Mercedes-Benz Service Centre for Passenger Cars - Al Ahmadi - 29 Street

This Recall is run pursuant to articles (42,43,44,45,46 and 47) of no. (27/2017) issuing the executive by laws of law no. (39/2014) on Consumer Protection.

International

Syrian quake survivors shelter in crumbling Aleppo homes

'We are people of glory and wealth, but the war changed everything'

ALEPPO: Sitting by a bed strewn with rubble in Syria's second biggest city, Umm Mounir refuses to leave her home even though the deadly earthquake has torn a gaping hole into the room. Aleppo, once a major commercial hub, had already been battered by over a decade of war when the 7.8-magnitude quake struck in early February, killing more than 45,000 people across Turkey and Syria and flattening entire neighbourhoods.

The building adjacent to Umm Mounir's collapsed, ripping the rear facade off her own home, but she told AFP that neither natural disasters nor conflict can make her leave. "Nothing will make me move out of my house except death," said the 55-year-old, who lives by herself on the fourth floor of the heavily damaged seven-storey building.

"I will only leave for the grave." Her city suffered great losses in the February 6 quake that flattened 54 of its buildings and damaged historic sites. With at least 432 fatalities, Aleppo accounts for nearly a third of all deaths in government-held parts of Syria, according to state media. Officials and medics across the war-ravaged country, including in rebel-controlled areas, put the overall Syrian death toll at more than 3,600 people.

'Used to danger'

The city witnessed brutal battles between rebels based in eastern Aleppo and Russian-backed regime forces from 2012 to 2016. After a suffocating siege on rebel-held areas and a crushing offensive involving barrel bombs, rockets and shells, the army declared in December 2016 that it was in full control of the city.

"We are people of glory and wealth, but the war changed everything," said Umm Mounir, glancing

at the wreckage of her wooden furniture. "Even in the harshest years of the war we were not displaced," added the woman, whose home in the Masharika neighbourhood was near the frontline. "We will not be displaced now."

More than 30 people died in Masharika after the pre-dawn quake brought down two building over sleeping residents. Seemingly incessant aftershocks spooked traumatised survivors, and a 6.4-magnitude tremor on Monday rocked the same areas of Turkey and Syria. When the new quake hit, Umm Mounir grabbed her 85-year-old neighbour Amina Raslan, who lives on the first floor, and they rushed out. "She can't run, so I held her hand and we walked as fast as we could," Umm Mounir said.

Raslan's son, who lives with his mother, said they "got used to the danger because our home used to be on the frontline" where rockets and missiles had rained down. Puffing a cigarette, 55-year-old Ali al-Bash said he wished they could leave their damaged home, but that "we have nowhere else to go".

'Everything collapsed'

Raslan's eyes welled with tears as she recalled the destruction of the home she said her family had lived in for 50 years. "Everything collapsed," she told AFP as her grandchildren were playing around her.

The family, like many others, did not want to move to a shelter but could not afford to rent a new home, Raslan said. "I lost two of my children during the war. I don't want to leave my house... I don't want to lose anything else." Some Aleppo residents, however, have left ravaged homes for tents.

Mohammed Jawish, 63, now lives in a makeshift camp with dozens of families after his building



ALEPPO: Ali al-Bash and his mother Amina Raslan drink coffee at home, in a building damaged by the 7.8-magnitude quake, in Aleppo city's al-Masharqa neighbourhood. Aleppo, once a major commercial hub, had already been battered by over a decade of war when the 7.8-magnitude quake struck in early February. —AFP

partially collapsed. "If I still had a house I wouldn't be here," he said, watching his grandchildren—some of them barefoot in the winter cold—play with a worn-out football.

Jawish told AFP the quake cost him his belongings and sent him "back to square one". "My chest feels tight when I'm in this small tent," he said. "I feel I could die from sorrow." —AFP

Iran foreign minister in Iraq for security talks

BAGHDAD: Iran's top diplomat Hossein Amir-Abdollahian held talks with neighbouring ally Iraq Wednesday to discuss stalled talks with arch-rival Saudi Arabia to ease regional tensions, as well as on border security. Iraq has taken a key role as a mediator between Iran and Saudi Arabia since 2021, after Riyadh broke off diplomatic relations in 2016, but efforts have been deadlocked for several months.

Amir-Abdollahian, speaking to reporters in Baghdad alongside his Iraqi counterpart Fuad Hussein, hailed the efforts "to strengthen talks and cooperation between Iran and Saudi Arabia and Iraq". Since April 2021, Iraq has hosted a series of meetings between the two sides, but no talks have been publicly announced since April 2022.

"As part of the strengthening of cooperation with... the countries of the region, we welcome a resumption of relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia," he said. Iran and Saudi

Arabia have backed opposing sides in various conflicts in the region, including in Yemen.

Amir-Abdollahian also spoke to similar mediation efforts carried out between Iran and Egypt. He also mentioned slow progress in talks in Vienna with world powers aimed at reviving the 2015 Iran nuclear accord, which promised Tehran sanctions relief in exchange for cutting back its nuclear activities. The United States unilaterally withdrew from the deal in 2018 and reimposed sanctions, prompting Iran to begin walking back on its commitments under the accord. Negotiations to return to the deal started in 2021 but stalled last year.

Iran is ready "to take steps to conclude the negotiations... on the basis of previous discussions and respecting the red lines" defined by Tehran, Amir-Abdollahian said. "But if the American side chooses another path... all options are on the table", he added, without elaborating. His Iraqi counterpart pleaded for a resumption of talks. "It is important for Iraq that the Iranian and American parties reach an agreement", Hussein said. The two ministers also discussed security on their border, after Iran last year bombed Iranian Kurdish opposition



BAGHDAD: Iraqi Foreign Minister Fuad Hussein (R) and his Iranian counterpart Hossein Amir-Abdollahian hold a joint press conference in Baghdad on February 22, 2023. —AFP

groups sheltering in northern Iraq.

Tehran accuses Iraq-based Kurdish groups of carrying out attacks in Iran, and of encouraging the months-long protests that erupted after the September 16 death in custody of 22-year-old Kurdish-Iranian woman Mahsa Amini, following her

arrest for an alleged breach of dress rules. Iraq later redeployed border guards to limit tensions. "The Iraqi government has taken a series of measures to protect the frontier, and we agree that certain groups should not be allowed to cross this border," Hussein said. —AFP

MoH has no plans to cancel...

Continued from Page 1

As for workers in the public sector, they will be treated in public hospitals temporarily according to the fees they are also transferred for treatment at private hospitals," the ministry said.

The health ministry has also announced it has overcome the crisis over shortages of medicine that citizens and residents have been suffering from in the last two months, as the most critical medicines have been secured and new batches will arrive next month. "There is no shortage of vital medicines. They are currently being dispensed to a wide range of patients daily, as the necessary financial budget has been allocated to purchase the required medicines through direct contracts with manufacturers as well as through agents, with the knowledge of the Audit

10 Palestinians killed in Zionist...

Continued from Page 1

Troops withdrew from the city after three hours, an AFP journalist said.

The Palestinian Red Crescent Society said its medics had treated 250 cases of tear gas inhalation and dozens of gunshot wounds. The Arab League said the raid amounted to a "heinous crime". "The occupation authorities and the far-right (Zionist) government are responsible for this horrible massacre," said Saeed Abu Ali, the Arab League's assistant secretary-general for Palestinian affairs.

The latest deadly Zionist incursion follows an appeal by the United Nations Middle East peace envoy, Tor Wennesland, for the violence to be halted as an "urgent priority". "We have seen omi-

Bureau, Bureau of Financial Controllers and the regulatory authorities in Kuwait," it said.

"The medicine shortage crisis will not be repeated. The ministry was not the cause of the crisis, which was related to problems facing international companies and local situations, as companies could not fulfill the needs of the market. The budget has increased from KD 490 million last year to KD 520 million this year," sources revealed to Kuwait Times.

"The ministry has provided new medical stores to support the current medical warehouses. It is heading to establish a medical warehouse for medicines in each governorate. Moreover, the ministry has granted licenses to companies to establish medicine factories in Kuwait in cooperation with competent ministries, but these companies have not yet taken the executive steps to establish these factories," sources said. "Licenses were granted to international companies to start producing medicines through their factories in Kuwait," they added, expecting these steps will contribute significantly to providing medicines throughout the year at reasonable prices.

nous signs of what awaits if we fail to address the current instability," he told the UN Security Council on Monday.

Meanwhile, United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres on Wednesday called for an end to Zionist settlements in occupied Palestinian lands. The Zionist entity's rightwing government has in recent weeks faced intense international criticism, including from the United States, over a decision to give retroactive permission to multiple settlement outposts in the occupied West Bank and to build new homes.

And on Monday, the UN Security Council's 15 members expressed "dismay" over the plans. "Each new settlement is another roadblock on the path to peace," the UN chief told the body's Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People. "All settlement activity is illegal under international law. It must stop," Guterres said, adding that "incitement to violence is a dead end. Nothing justifies terrorism. Our immediate priority must be to prevent further escalation, reduce tensions and restore calm," he said. He noted, "the situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory is at

Student stabs teacher to death at French school

SAINT-JEAN-DE-LUZ, France: A teenage pupil stabbed to death a teacher in the middle of a lesson at a school in southwest France on Wednesday, the regional prosecutor said. The teacher of Spanish, 52, was teaching a class at the school in the seaside town of Saint-Jean-de-Luz when the 16-year-old attacked her with a knife, the prosecutor said.

"I didn't see him get up but I saw him in front of the teacher," fellow classmate Ines, 16, told reporters. "He was very calm. He got closer to her and plunged a big knife into her chest without saying anything," she added. The teacher was given emergency aid at the scene, but Bayonne prosecutor Jerome Bourrier told AFP she died of her wounds. The pupil was arrested and a murder investigation has been opened, he added.

A source close to the case said that, by the time the police arrived on the scene at around 9:50 am, the attacker had been disarmed and other pupils isolated. He had been carrying a blade some 10 cm long, they added. The pupil seemed to have acted in a "moment of madness", rather than on any "terrorist motive" or "resentment", the source said. Ines, who witnessed the attack, said she did not really

Airfares jump 200% during...

Continued from Page 1

Director of the Operational Lines Network Planning and Distribution Department at Kuwait Airways Shoroq Al-Awadhi told KUNA prices of flight tickets of all airlines are in demand locally and internationally. The most demanded destinations currently on Kuwait Airways are Turkey, GCC countries and relatively close countries to Kuwait due to the

Seattle, first US city to ban caste discrimination

WASHINGTON: Seattle has become the first city in the United States to ban discrimination based on caste, following a city council vote on Tuesday. "It's official: Our movement has won a historic, first-in-the-nation ban on caste discrimination in Seattle!" tweeted Indian American council member Kshama Sawant, who introduced the legislation.

"Now we need to build a movement to spread this victory around the country." The city council of Seattle, in the northwest state of Washington, voted 6-1 in favor of the ban, which applies to employment, housing, public transport and retail establishments.

India's Hindu caste system, which dates back thousands of years, divides society into a rigid hereditary hierarchy based on a belief in so-called upper-caste purity, with Dalits on the lowest rung facing discrimination and even violence. Activists say caste-based discrimination has followed the South Asian diaspora to the United States.

"Caste discrimination doesn't only take place in other countries. It is faced by South Asian American and other immigrant working people in their workplaces, including in the tech sector, in Seattle and in cities around the country," said Sawant, when her office introduced the legislation in January. "With over 167,000 people from South Asia living in Washington, largely concentrated in the Greater Seattle area, the region must address caste discrimination, and not allow it to remain invisible and unaddressed," she said. —AFP

know the teenager. "We're just in Spanish class together. But there had never been a problem between him and the teacher in class," she said.

The school, Saint-Thomas d'Aquin, is a private and Catholic-based establishment close to the centre of Saint-Jean-de-Luz, which in summer is one of France's best loved resorts on the sandy Basque country coast. The teacher had long taught at the school and was "conscientious", a representative from the FEP-CFDT teachers' union said.

By lunchtime, pupils had started to leave the premises after being confined to their classrooms for around two hours after the incident. Anxious parents were waiting for them but only those parents of the class where the stabbing happened were allowed to enter the school, an AFP reporter said. France's Education Minister Pap Ndiaye said he was "extremely upset" by the death of the teacher. All schools would observe a minute of silence for her on Thursday afternoon at 3:00 pm, he told the press outside the school.

Government spokesman Olivier Veran said he could "barely imagine the trauma that this represents at a local level and more generally on a national scale". The BFM television channel said that the attacker had locked the classroom door and stabbed the teacher in the chest. The channel quoted a source as saying that the boy then told another teacher that a "voice" had told him to carry out the action. The investigation was to seek to determine his psychological state and motives. No details have been released concerning his background. —AFP

short holiday, added Awadhi, noting passengers flying on Kuwait Airways have increased since the addition of new destinations and increasing its flights.

In a similar statement to KUNA, Director of Al-Maktab travel agency Nassib Adnan said the number of people desiring to travel during the national holidays have increased to reach 90 percent, alongside a significant increase in aifares to several destinations. Tourism specialist Kamal Kabsha told KUNA demand for tickets to London, Cairo, Riyadh, Jeddah and Dubai during the national holidays have exceeded expectations, noting that the demand for Istanbul has declined after the recent earthquake. —KUNA

International

Powerful cyclone Freddy hits Madagascar, four killed

Around 16,600 people affected and more than 6,750 homes damaged

ANTANANARIVO: A powerful cyclone tracked across Madagascar on Wednesday, killing four people, as it headed towards Mozambique, disaster management authorities said. A 27-year-old man drowned in rising sea waters just before Cyclone Freddy made landfall on the Indian Ocean island on Tuesday evening, packing winds of around 130 kilometres (80 miles) per hour. The authorities on Wednesday morning said the toll had risen to four. Around 16,600 people were affected and more than 6,750 homes damaged, the National Risk Management Office (BNGRC) said, also giving a provisional assessment.

France's weather service Meteo-France said Freddy weakened as it began its path across the island, and now had an average wind speed of 55 kph, gusting to 75 kph. Risk management senior official Faly Aritiana Fabien described Freddy as "one of the strongest cyclones" in recent times to hit the island, which is typically lashed several times during the annual November-April storm season.

The storm brought less rain than feared but still ripped roofs off buildings and flattened rice fields and fruit trees. It made landfall north of Mananjary, a coastal town of 25,000 people that remains devastated by last year's Cyclone Batsirai, which killed more than 130 people across Madagascar. "It's a dry cyclone compared to Batsirai, so it brought less rains, but the winds were stronger, this is why infrastructure was badly affected," Fabien told AFP. "The recorded damage is almost only related to the wind."

'Can't take this'

As Freddy closed in after brushing Mauritius and the French island of La Reunion to the north without causing major damage, the authorities put in place an array of



MAHEBOURG: Waves are seen crashing on the Pointe Jeome jetty in Mahebourg, Mauritius, on February 20, 2023 as Cyclone Freddy approaches. The Mauritius Meteorological Services (MMS) has issued a Class 3 cyclone warning, saying estimated gusts in the centre of Cyclone Freddy could reach around 275 kilometres (170 miles) an hour. — AFP

measures. Several regions on Tuesday suspended school classes for the rest of the week and at least 8,000 people were evacuated as a precaution in Mananjary. By daybreak, residents there were out on the streets to assess the damage. Despite thousands of sandbags used to reinforce roofs, metal sheets and electric cables were strewn on the ground by the force of the wind.

Pascal Salle sobbed as he assessed the damage after hardly recovering from last year's Cyclone Batsirai. "I didn't think there was a more powerful cyclone than Batsirai," he said. "My fence is down, my

show loose rocks cascading down a slope, kicking up clouds of brown dust that engulfed several vehicles.

"The whole slope has collapsed ... How many people must be dead from that?" a male voice can be heard saying in the background. "If I'd lined up over there today, I'd have died in there, too," he said. CCTV reported earlier on Wednesday that the incident had affected a "wide area" of an open-pit mine operated by the Xinjing Coal Mining Company.

"A number of working staff and vehicles have been buried," the broadcaster said at the time, adding that rescue personnel have been sent to the scene. Chinese President Xi Jinping has instructed authorities to "do everything possible to search for and rescue the missing people", CCTV reported.

Officials must "use all their strength to rescue and treat the injured, protect the security of people's lives and property as well as overall social stability", Xi said, according to the broadcaster. Eight rescue teams comprising more than 330 personnel have been sent to

1,000-litre (250-gallon) plastic water tank was smashed against the neighbour's wall". A window was ripped off his house and the garden transformed into "a sandy field", he said. "I can't take this every year, it's not possible," he said.

Mozambique next

Freddy is the first cyclone and the second tropical weather system to hit during Madagascar's current season, the UN's Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) said. The storm began to

brew in the first week of February off the northwest of Australia and south of Indonesia and is now in its third week trekking across the Indian Ocean.

The UN's World Food Programme (WFP) had estimated more than 2.3 million people in Madagascar could be affected. The cyclone coincides with a months-long drought in the southern part of the island that has inflicted widespread hunger. Freddy is expected to make landfall on Mozambique on Friday as a likely tropical storm, bringing the risk of heavy rain, according to forecasts. — AFP

Two dead, 50 missing in China mine collapse

BEIJING: At least two people were killed and more than 50 are missing, Chinese state media reported, after an apparent collapse at a coal mine in northern China's Inner Mongolia region on Wednesday. State broadcaster CCTV said a collapse occurred at a mine in the western part of the Alxa League region at around 1 pm (0500 GMT). Other outlets and government agencies described it as a "landslide".

"Currently, the incident has caused the deaths of two people and injured six, with 53 missing," CCTV said in a social media post. A social media video, purportedly posted by a coal truck driver, appeared to

the site in the Luanjingtan ecological zone, along with more than 100 pieces of rescue equipment, the government of Alxa League said in a statement. Phone calls to the mining company by AFP went unanswered on Wednesday evening.

Frequent accidents

Located in China's arid north, Alxa League is a sparsely populated region whose economy runs largely on mining and other extractive industries. Mine safety in China has improved in recent decades as well as media coverage of major incidents, many of which were once overlooked. However, accidents still occur frequently in an industry where safety protocols are often lax, especially at the most rudimentary sites. Some 40 people were working underground when a gold mine in the northwestern Xinjiang region collapsed in December. In 2021, 20 miners were rescued from a flooded coal mine in northern Shanxi province while two others died. — AFP

US 'committed' to joint sea patrols with Philippines

MANILA: The United States is "committed" to conducting joint maritime patrols with the Philippines in the disputed South China Sea, the US navy chief said Wednesday, as the countries seek to deter Chinese aggression. US naval operations chief Admiral Michael Gilday made the remarks during a visit to the Southeast Asian nation, as part of US efforts to strengthen military alliances across the region and beyond. Beijing's growing assertiveness on Taiwan and its building of bases in the contested South China Sea have given fresh impetus to Washington and Manila to repair their partnership.

Previous Philippine president Rodrigo Duterte favoured China over his country's former colonial master, but the new administration of Ferdinand Marcos has been keen to reverse that. The longtime treaty allies agreed this month to resume joint patrols in the sea, and also struck a deal to give US troops access to another four military bases in the Philippines.

Gilday said the countries were "in the beginning of the planning stages" for combined maritime activities, but he insisted the United States was "committed and focused". China claims sovereignty over almost the entire South China Sea, through which trillions of dollars in trade passes annually, and has ignored an international court ruling that its claims have no legal basis.

In Manila, Gilday held talks with Philippine navy chief Vice Admiral Toribio Adaci and military chief of staff General Andres Centino. They agreed "in principle that we need to move forward, focused and with speed, in order to improve our interoperability together in the South China Sea and across the region", Gilday told reporters. Given its proximity to Taiwan and its surrounding waters, cooperation from the Philippines would be key in the event of a conflict with China, which a four-star US Air Force general has warned could happen as early as 2025.

But Gilday told a US think-tank in October that the US military must be ready to respond to a potential invasion of Taiwan much sooner. "I think my responsibilities as a navy chief are to make sure that we can field the most capable, ready and lethal force that we can around the world, including, obviously, the Indo-Pacific," Gilday said Wednesday, using an American term for the Asia-Pacific region.

Meanwhile, Chinese Foreign Minister Qin Gang said Wednesday in Indonesia that Beijing would work with Southeast Asian countries to protect peace and stability in the South China Sea. While China claims nearly all of the sea, the Philippines, Vietnam, Malaysia and Brunei also have overlapping claims to parts of it.

Qin's remarks came less than two weeks after the Philippines accused a Chinese security vessel of using a military-grade laser light against a Philippine patrol boat. Beijing has defended its actions, saying the Philippine boat "intruded" into China's sovereign waters without permission. President Marcos insisted Saturday that the Philippines "will not lose one inch" of territory following the latest maritime incident between the two countries. — AFP

Pakistan officials to meet Taliban after deadly attacks

KABUL: Pakistan's defence minister and spy chief were in Kabul Wednesday for talks with the Taliban government, days after Islamabad blamed Afghanistan-based militants for deadly recent attacks.

The main border crossing between the two countries has been closed since late Sunday, with a gun battle erupting the next morning that each side blamed the other for starting. Pakistan accuses the Afghan Taliban of harbouring militants from its own home-grown version of the Islamist group, a charge Kabul denies.

Afghan officials said Wednesday deputy Prime Minister Abdul Ghani Baradar met Pakistan Defence Minister Khawaja Muhammad Asif and Nadeem Anjum, head of the Inter-Services Intelligence agency. They discussed "bilateral relations, trade, regional connectivity and economic cooperation between the two countries", Baradar's office said.

Pakistan's foreign ministry confirmed the visit, saying "security related matters including counter-terrorism measures" would be discussed. Pakistan has seen a dramatic increase in militant attacks, mainly in border regions, in the year-and-a-half of Taliban rule in Afghanistan.

However, a suicide squad also stormed a police compound in the southern port city of Karachi last Friday, killing five people. A suicide bomber killed more than 80 police officers at a mosque in Peshawar, the provincial capital of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, in January.

Both attacks were linked to Tehreek-e-Taleban Pakistan (TTP), which has deep ties with the Afghan Taliban. The border crossing at Torkham, a key crossing point for goods and people, remained closed Wednesday.

Officials on both sides said Afghan authorities closed the border late Sunday after Pakistan imposed new rules preventing entry to those accompanying medical patients without the right documentation. Gunfire erupted the next morning, with both sides blaming the other for the violence.

Also at the weekend, Pakistan Foreign Minister Bilawal Bhutto Zardari told the Munich Security Conference that Afghanistan had to deliver on promises not to harbour militants. "There's a whole alphabet soup of terrorist organisations that have and still do base themselves out of Afghanistan," he said. Kabul's foreign ministry spokesman Abdul Qahar Balkhi said in response Zardari's remarks "are untrue". — AFP



LAGOS: Nigerian police officers patrol during a rally for the All Progressives Congress (APC) presidential candidate Bola Ahmed Tinubu at Teslim Balogun Stadium in Lagos. — AFP

Tinubu: Nigeria's political godfather

LAGOS: Bola Tinubu, a political "godfather" famed for his strategic deftness and clout, has never hidden his ambition to be president of Nigeria. Last year, when he announced his plans to champion the ruling All Progressives Congress (APC) party in this weekend's election, Tinubu said he would be fulfilling a "lifelong" goal. "It's my turn," he later told supporters in his Yoruba language, upsetting APC rivals with a phrase that has become his campaign slogan. Now the 70-year-old gets to test his mettle against two other main rivals in the ballot to succeed President Muhammadu Buhari, a man Tinubu brags he helped put into power.

He will run against opposition Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) flagbearer Atiku Abubakar and surprise third party candidate Peter Obi from the Labour Party. Often referred to as "Jagaban," a chieftain's title, Tinubu has spent years building his Lagos powerbase into a nationwide network of contacts from Lagos market cooperatives and transport unions to political chieftains. He is seen as an astute and influential political strategist as well as a tenacious survivor. He co-founded and financed the Alliance for Democracy (AD), which later became the Action Congress of Nigeria, then helped make the All Progressives Congress (APC).

He was seen as instrumental in helping bring the APC's factions together to push Buhari to victory in 2015, ending 16 years in power for the rival PDP. When the PDP chose their candidate for next year's race, fellow longtime political stalwart Abubakar, Tinubu was

quick to present himself as the man to take him on. "I look forward to squaring up with him as a worthy opponent in the coming election," he said.

Staying power

A Muslim born in Nigeria's Yoruba-speaking southwest, Tinubu trained as an accountant in the United States and worked for several US companies, including as a treasurer in oil giant ExxonMobil. He was first a political activist before becoming a senator and then governor of Lagos State from 1999 to 2007.

During his activist days, he was hounded into exile by military dictator Sani Abacha along with scores of others for campaigning for a return to democratic government in 1999. The election of Buhari, the first opposition victory in the country, and his 2019 re-election were partly attributed to Tinubu's political influence. As APC national leader, Tinubu's hand is seen in all party decisions and winning his support was vital for any candidate's ambitions.

In a mark of his staying power, Tinubu kept a tight grip over the governorship of Lagos state from 1999, holding the post until 2007 and then having a hand in choosing his successors since leaving office. As governor, his relations soured with the federal government, then led by president Olusegun Obasanjo, while he has frequently fallen out with his own deputies.

But at the end of his two terms in Lagos, Tinubu hand-picked one of his close aides, Babatunde Fashola, to take over. Tinubu's influence in the southwest has irked some would-be candidates who missed out on top jobs and he has been criticised as dictatorial and undemocratic in style. "Tinubu has a very aggressive, very solid political machine," said Dapo Thomas, a political science lecturer at Lagos University. — AFP



MANILA: US Admiral Michael Gilday, chief of US naval operations, speaks during an interview with the media at a private hangar in Manila on February 22, 2023. — AFP

Business

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 23, 2023

Hong Kong unveils \$97bn budget

City-state plunges into coffers to pay for post-COVID recovery

HONG KONG: Hong Kong's finance chief unveiled a HK\$761 billion (\$97 billion) budget on Wednesday, plunging into the coffers to pay for the recession-hit city's post-COVID recovery. Hoping to kickstart the finance centre's economy, Finance Secretary Paul Chan announced tax cuts and more consumer spending vouchers. Hong Kong's leaders are keen to resuscitate its fortunes after posting recessions in three of the past four years—a tumultuous period that saw the economy battered by protests, virus controls and Beijing's authoritarian crackdown.

While rival financial hubs reopened to the world long ago, Hong Kong only fully emerged from pandemic isolation earlier this month when it restored its border with mainland China, its main economic pipeline. "Our economy is at the early recovery stage, and members of the public as well as a large number of enterprises are still weighed down by tremendous pressure and require support," Chan told legislators while announcing his 2023/24 budget.

The latest blueprint for reversing the downturn allocates HK\$5,000 (US\$637) handouts for more than six million people, half last year's amount as Chan is under pressure to rein in fiscal spending.

Other measures include salary tax breaks, welfare allowances and a "Happy Hong Kong" campaign aimed at making the city more enjoyable with food fairs. The budget will push the city's books into the red for a second consecutive year, but by less than some forecasters initially feared, with an estimated deficit of HK\$5.4 billion. Over the past three years, Hong Kong splashed out more than HK\$600 billion on pandemic relief efforts.

The upcoming expenditures would bring one of the world's largest fiscal reserves down to around HK\$763 billion (\$97 billion), about half of what it was before the pandemic.

Betting on a rebound

On its path to recovery, Hong Kong has made restoring its business-friendly reputation and reversing an exodus of both expatriate and local workers top priorities. In three years, the city's workforce has lost more than 200,000 people. Andy Kwan, of the ACE Centre for Business and Economic Research, warned that Hong Kong might spiral into a structural deficit if it fails to correct course. "Medium- to long-term government revenue will be affected because both the economic growth and salaries tax will be undermined when quantity and quality of young labor worsens," Kwan told AFP.

To pull in more talent, Chan announced a capital investment scheme and reiterated measures first proposed by city leader John Lee in his maiden policy address last year, including relaxed visa rules for high-earners and elite university graduates. Desperate for crowds to return and inject cash into the moribund economy, Chan unveiled a new loan pool of HK\$2.7 billion for passenger transport operators and licensed travel agents.

The move builds on a charm offensive launched this month, with the government offering half a million free flights and ramping up publicity. Hong Kong welcomed about 600,000 visitors last year as it rolled back quarantine restrictions, compared with 56 million arrivals in 2019. The econ-



HONG KONG: This photo taken on February 21, 2023 shows shops having a sale in Central district of Hong Kong. Hong Kong's finance chief unveiled a HK\$761 billion (\$97 billion) budget on February 22, plunging into the coffers to foot the bill for the recession-hit city's post-COVID recovery. —AFP

my shrank by 3.5 percent last year as the city reeled under its worst-ever coronavirus outbreak, with GDP dropping in every quarter. But Chan

appeared confident of a rebound. "I believe that Hong Kong's economy will visibly recover this year," he said. —AFP

Thai farmers tap into sustainable rubber industry

SURAT THANI, Thailand: By the light of a head torch, Wanida Hityim deftly strips bark from a rubber tree, collecting the milky latex as she explains why she's among a small number of Thai farmers trying to work more sustainably. As the world's largest producer of natural rubber—supplying more than a third of global stocks in 2021—Thailand's policies have stimulated massive deforestation, plummeting biodiversity and soaring soil erosion.

The vast majority of the kingdom's plantations are still worked conventionally, but a few farmers like Wanida are abandoning pesticides to try and lessen their impact on the environment.

And while money is her bottom line, Wanida also sees the small-scale benefits of turning to greener methods. "This place even has worms in the soil," she said of her 1.5-hectare (3.7-acre) plot in the southern province of Surat Thani, home to about 500 trees. "Plantations that use pesticides wouldn't have nature like this because the chemicals they use would just ruin the soil," the 41-year-old told AFP.

Wanida is one of a few Thai farmers to have received the international non-profit Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) certificate, which encourages the sustainable use of forests. FSC is not without its critics. Grant Rosoman, a senior advisor to Greenpeace International, warned it is vulnerable to industry pressure and manipulation. "All certification schemes have problems with auditors which are paid by clients, the companies," Rosoman told AFP. "There is a financial conflict of interest between who is paying and the auditor."

'Right time, right message'

Adopting more sustainable methods has enabled Wanida to sell her rubber at a higher price, earning her around \$650 a month instead of \$550. Thailand exported nearly \$6 billion of rubber in 2021, the vast majority of it produced by small-scale farmers who sell to middlemen—so financial incentives are key to changing methods. "When I talk about sustainable development for the first time, people look at me with a smile and a big question mark on their face," said Maiprae Loyen, co-founder of Agriac, a rubber intermediary set up in 2019 to promote good practices among farmers in southern Thailand.

The firm works with roughly 1,000 small farmers—60 percent of them women—many of whom previously thought environmentally friendly methods were a "burden", said Maiprae. But they were con-



SURAT THANI, Thailand: In this file photo taken on January 16, 2023 workers cut down rubber trees at a plantation in Thailand's southern Surat Thani province. Thailand is the world's largest producer of natural rubber—supplying almost 40 percent of global stocks in 2021. —AFP photos

vinced by both the financial returns—Agriac offers a three baht (\$0.09) bonus per FSC-approved kilogram (2.2 pounds) sold—and also the ecological benefits, she said. Later she pointed to the cracked soil of another rubber plantation in Surat Thani, the result of unsustainable "chemical products".

"It's time that people start to understand that the value of things is not defined by price tag," she said. "It's the right time, the right message."

China drag

But Agriac farmers are just a few leaves in the forest of Thailand's rubber industry: only two percent of the nation's roughly 3.2 million hectares of plantations are worked under FSC guidelines. In December the European Union agreed to ban the import of rubber deemed to contribute to deforestation, a move hailed as a milestone by green groups. But the impact of this change on Thailand will be limited, said Krungsri Bank analyst Chaiwat Sowcharoensuk, because China—which accounts for almost half of the kingdom's market—does not prioritize sustainability. While medium and large firms do cater to Western consumers, he said, the shift was yet to trickle down to smallholders.

"But if one day China announces a plan about sustainable rubber, then local farmers would pay attention," he said. "If they can't sell their rubber, then they would take action."

Rosoman of Greenpeace said that with question



TRANG, Thailand: Factory workers sort and pack natural rubber sheets at the Klongpan rubber cooperative in Thailand's southern Trang province.

marks hanging over certification schemes such as FSC, tougher regulation like that imposed by the EU will be key to sustainability.

The future of natural rubber should be "very bright" he said, as the alternative—synthetic rubber produced from oil—is highly polluting. For Wanida, out tapping her trees at 3:00 am with her faithful dogs yapping at her heels, rubber is in her blood.

Passed down from her grandfather to her father, the plantation might be taking a new direction under her care. But, she says, "I'm still a rubber farmer through and through". —AFP

Lebanon inflation soared 124% in January: Data

BEIRUT: Inflation in Lebanon hit an annual rate of about 124 percent in January as the country's worst economic and financial crises in decades continued amid a political deadlock that has blocked the formation of a new government and the enactment of reforms required to unlock billions of dollars in aid.

Hyperinflation continued for the 31st consecutive month, led by the soaring communication, education, health, restaurant and hotel prices, as well as rising food, water and energy costs, the Central Administration of Statistics' Consumer Price Index showed.

The CPI increased by about 8.43 percent from December 2022. "Lebanon's persistent economic and financial crises have kept price growth in triple digits since mid-2020 and, with the Lebanese pound still losing value both on the parallel market and on the official exchange rate since a 90 percent devaluation at the start of February, inflation is likely to remain elevated for some time," Emirates NBD said in a research note on Wednesday.

After hitting 155 percent in 2021, inflation in the country surged to 171.2 percent in 2022, the highest in about four decades. Communication costs soared 331 percent in January from the same month in 2022, while education, health and restaurant and hotel prices rose leapt 191 percent, 176 percent and 174 percent, respectively.

The costs of water, electricity, gas and other fuels increased 163 percent annually, while the prices of clothing and footwear, and food and alcoholic beverages rose 161 percent and 138 percent, respectively. Compared with December 2022, the costs of miscellaneous goods and services increased 20 percent while restaurant and hotel prices climbed 18 percent. — Agencies

KEPS holds its regular annual general meeting

By Majd Othman

KUWAIT: Kuwait Environment Protection Society (KEPS) held its regular general assembly meeting to consider the items of the 45th annual report of the board of directors and the financial statements for the year ending on Dec 31, 2021. The meeting also considered the auditor's report and the draft estimate of the budget for 2022, in addition to the selection of the auditor and determining their remuneration. The meeting also called for suggestions and opinions from members of the general assembly.

KEPS Chairperson Wejdan Al-Oqab said in a press statement the meeting witnessed the active participation of general assembly members who were keen on enthusiastically engaging themselves in discussions and asking queries about the terms of the society's contract. The meeting was characterized by transparency in presenting the items by announcing the numerical vote on each of them separately.

Oqab said the meeting ended with the approval of the items, noting the voting process was smooth through an organizational procedure provided by the society. She praised the keenness of the members of the general assembly to attend the session in a friendly atmosphere, reflecting the exemplary national duty to enhance the social responsibility of the society and support values of volunteer work.

Applauding the leaders of the ministry of social affairs and the officials of the department of NGOs that formed a specialized committee of cadres to supervise the management of the general assembly, Oqab said the efforts of the representatives of the ministry in cooperation with the society helped the society conduct the general assembly in an honorable manner. She also lauded the efforts of the members of the committee headed by legal researcher Prof Nawal Al-Rashidi and members Prof Bodour Bonachi, Prof Abdul Hadi Al-Hajri and Prof Hadi Al-Ajmi.



KUWAIT: Kuwait Environment Protection Society holds general assembly meeting.

Business

Amazon pollution: Stain on Ecuador oil boom

Region's forests are receding as pollution spreads

LAGO AGRIO, Ecuador: Lago Agrio is where it began in February 1967: Ecuador's first oil well drilled by the US Texaco-Gulf consortium to ring in an era of black gold for the Ecuadorian Amazon. "On that day, ministers and officials bathed in oil. Then they threw it in the river... a good start," Donald Moncayo, coordinator of the Union of People Affected by Chevron-Texaco (Udapt), told AFP, ironically.

Fifty-six years later, the oil continues to flow, some 500,000 barrels per day that President Guillermo Lasso has vowed to double. Oil is the South American country's top export-generating some \$13 billion per year. That first well at Lago Agrio in Ecuador's northeast closed in 2006 after generating nearly 10 million barrels. But millions of hectares have been transformed-for better or worse-into Ecuador's oil capital.

The region's forests are receding as pollution spreads, activists claim-the landscape increasingly dominated by wells, pipelines, tanker trucks, oil flares and processing plants. The government says oil income is essential for the country's development, and that of its people. But for Moncayo, who says he was born "200 meters from an oil well" 49 years ago, it is an industry synonymous with poverty and large-scale pollution. He has led a long and difficult legal fight against Texaco since the 1990s.

The losing side

In 30 years of operation, the company dug 356 wells around Lago Agrio, each with retention ponds — 880 of them in total-holding a toxic sludge of oil waste and contaminated water. Some 60 million liters of this liquid were discharged into the environment, according to Udapt, contaminating water used for fishing, bathing and drinking. The open pits remain scattered throughout the forest today. In 1993, some 30,000 residents of the Lago Agrio region sued Texaco, since bought by Chevron, in a New York Court. The case was dismissed over misplaced jurisdiction, and the plaintiffs turned to the courts closer to home.

In 2011, Ecuador's Supreme Court found in favor of the community and ordered the company to pay \$9.5 billion in compensation for pollution of native lands. But seven years later, the Permanent Court of Arbitration in The Hague ruled in favor of Chevron and Texaco. It found the Ecuador court's judgment was in part "corruptly ghostwritten" by plaintiffs' representatives who had promised a judge a bribe.

The residents have also failed in other court bids. Chevron has said that Texaco spent \$40 million on environmental cleanup in the area in the 1990, before selling its operations to state company Petroecuador. And it argues that Petroecuador and the government are responsible for any remaining cleanup under the terms of the agreement of sale.



SHUSHUFINDI, Ecuador: Ecuadorean activist Donald Moncayo Jimenez (49) chief coordinator of the Union of People Affected by Texaco (UDAPT) stands next to a "mechero" (gas flare) from the refinery operated by Petroecuador in Shushufindi, in the Sucumbios Province, Ecuador, on January 14, 2023. Flames flicker through the thick green trees of the Ecuadorian Amazon rainforest, where gas flares, oil wells and refineries darken the landscape and poison the environment. — AFP

'Mere crumbs'

Abandoned in 1994, the well "Agua-Rico 4" lies at the end of a narrow path through the jungle. Nearby, a retention pond is covered in a thick layer of organic material which yields readily to a stick wielded by Moncayo to reveal a thick, black liquid. A stream running past the pond is visibly soiled, and cows graze in places where black sludge oozes from the ground. "It is like this everywhere," said Moncayo, wearing stained surgical gloves.

Leaks also come from crude oil from pipelines-some 10 to 15 per month, according to a recent University of Quito study. Petroecuador did not respond to requests from AFP for comment.

Lago Agrio residents complain of the noise and heat emitted from oil wells erected near their homes — they say without consultation or compensation-and the black smoke from oil flares that shoot several meters into the sky. An Ecuador court recently ordered the closure of all 447 flare pits in the area by March, though few have been dismantled so far.

Conflicts between residents and Petroecuador are mainly resolved by ad hoc compensation payments or government undertakings to build infra-

structure or expand services. It is not always enough. At the tiny settlement of Rio Doche 2, home to some 133 families, residents erected a metal barrier and dug holes in the road to block oil trucks from the well there. "My chickens and ducks began to die. The well water darkened: it was impossible to drink or to use even for laundry. The girls had skin problems," said Francesca Woodman, the owner of a small farm she said she was forced to leave with her eight children due to oil pollution.

"We, here, suffer the pollution, the leaks, the smoke of the chimneys, we inhale the dust of the (tanker) trucks, while they collect the dollars in Quito!" lamented another resident, Patricia Quinaloa. But Rio Doche 2 also stands as a testament to the inherent rivalry between oil windfalls on the one hand, and pollution on the other. "While we have a bit of work and money, even if it's mere crumbs... people accept" the conditions, said Wilmer Pacheco, a driver for a local NGO.

Official data show that poverty rates in Ecuador's three Amazonian petrol-producing provinces range from 44 percent to 68 percent-above the national average of 25 percent. — AFP

News in brief

Rio Tinto profits plunge 41%

SYDNEY: Anglo-Australian mining corporation Rio Tinto reported a 41 percent drop in net earnings Wednesday, citing a dip in commodity prices and higher energy costs. After posting a record 2021, profit after tax fell to US\$12.4 billion last year, the multinational said in its annual report. Earnings from iron ore, aluminum and copper all sank. The loss "reflected the movement in commodity prices, the impact of higher energy and raw materials prices on our operations and higher rates of inflation" the company said. Sales to China-by far Rio's largest market-fell slightly as a proportion of the company's business. — AFP

Iberdrola posts record profit

MADRID: Spanish energy giant Iberdrola posted Wednesday a record profit for 2022 as growth in the United States and Brazil offset weakness in Spain. The company said its net profit came in at 4.34 billion euros (\$4.63 billion), up from 3.9 billion the previous year. The results are higher than the 4.23 billion euros forecast by analysts, according to the financial data firm FactSet, and the 4.0-4.2 billion euros predicted by Iberdrola itself. The energy sector has reaped gigantic profits as gas and crude oil prices spiked higher in the wake of Russia's invasion of Ukraine one year ago. — AFP

Heineken still plans to quit Russia

THE HAGUE: Dutch giant brewer Heineken said Wednesday that it still planned to exit Russia, after a media report accusing it of "breaking a promise" to leave over Moscow's invasion of Ukraine. A Dutch investigative website, Follow the Money, said the Amsterdam-based brewer was still operating in Russia despite a promise last year to stop investing. Although Heineken stopped selling its namesake beer, it had launched 61 new products on the Russian market, including at least three types of beer under its Amstel brand, the report said. — AFP

Crescent Petroleum signs contracts to develop Iraqi gas fields

SHARJAH: Crescent Petroleum, the Middle East's oldest privately-owned upstream oil and gas company, has signed three twenty-year agreements with Iraq's Ministry of Oil to appraise, develop, and produce oil and gas from two blocks in Diyala governorate and one in Basra governorate. The agreements will deliver

much needed natural gas to fuel nearby power plants and improve government services, creating thousands of new jobs in Diyala and Basra. The contracts follow Crescent Petroleum's successful award in the Oil Ministry's Fifth Bid Round.

Crescent Petroleum will develop the Gilabat-Qumar and Khashim Ahmer-Injana fields in Diyala Province, to initially produce 250 million standard cubic feet per day (MMscfd) of natural gas. A third exploration block, the Khider Al-Mai block in Basra province, will be explored and developed to add further supplies of oil and gas.

The contracts were signed at a ceremony today held at the Oil Ministry in Baghdad attended by Iraqi

Prime Minister Mohammed Shia Al-Sudani and Deputy Prime Minister for Energy Affairs and Minister of Oil, Hayan Abdul Ghani, as well as Crescent Group Chairman Hamid Jafar, and Crescent Petroleum CEO Majid Jafar.

They were signed by Abdulla Al Qadi, Crescent Petroleum Executive Director of Exploration and Production, along with Midland Oil Company Director-General Qadouri Abed Salim, and Basra Oil Company Director-General Basim Abdulkarim. First gas from the Diyala operations is expected within 18 months to supply nearby power plants. The company will build a processing plant on site as well as pipelines and infrastructure to supply gas. Crescent Petroleum is

committed to achieving 90 percent local employment at its operations and will lead a variety of social performance projects to deliver training and capacity building, education, and social services support to benefit the residents of Diyala and Basra provinces.

Abdulla Al Qadi, Executive Director of Exploration and Production at Crescent Petroleum said, "We are pleased to commence this long-term partnership with the Government of Iraq. Our new planned investments and operations will create thousands of new jobs and support the local and national economy. Gas and oil supplies from these operations will help improve services and local economic development for the people of Iraq." — Agencies

World's 10 busiest airports in 2022

NEW YORK: Airports are gateways to the world, connecting people and cultures through international and domestic flights. Every year, millions of passengers pass through the world's largest airports, making them crucial hubs for global air travel. In 2022, despite the COVID-19 pandemic having a significant impact on the aviation industry, some airports still managed to maintain their status as major hubs. Here are the world's 10 busiest airports in 2022 as ranked by CAPA - Centre for Aviation.

1) Atlanta-Hartsfield-Jackson International Airport, USA

Hartsfield-Jackson International Airport is an airport located a few kilometers from Atlanta. It is the busiest airport in the world by number of passengers: 85,775,000.



2) Dallas-Fort Worth International Airport, USA

Dallas-Fort Worth International Airport is located between the cities of Dallas and Fort Worth in Texas, in the United States of America. It is the second busiest airport in the world by number of passengers: 67,060,000.

3) Istanbul, Turkey

Istanbul Airport is the main as well as one of the two open to passenger traffic along with the airport Sabiha Gokcen, serving the city of Istanbul, Turkey. It is the third busiest airport in the world by number of passengers: 64,486,000.

4) Dubai International Airport, United Arab Emirates

Dubai International Airport in the United Arab Emirates is the largest and most important airport in

the Middle East and is located in Garhoud, 4 km northeast of the city. It is the fourth busiest airport in the world by number of passengers: 64,300,000.

5) Denver International Airport, USA

Denver International Airport is located at the northeast end of Denver in Colorado, USA. Characteristic of the building that houses the terminals is the peaked roof, which is supposed to represent the snowy peaks of the Rocky Mountains. It is the fifth busiest airport in the world by number of passengers: 63,613,000.

6) International Airport Chicago-O'Hare, USA

The international airport Chicago-O'Hare is located northwest of Chicago, Illinois, in the United States of America. The airport is located about 27 km from the center of Chicago. It is the sixth busiest airport in the world by number of passengers: 62,629,000.

7) London-Heathrow, United Kingdom

London-Heathrow airport is London's main airport, of the nine total serving the British capital, including five in close proximity: Gatwick, Luton, Southend, Stansted and London City Airport. It is the seventh busiest airport in the world by number of passengers: 61,599,000.

8) International Airport of Los Angeles, USA

The international airport is the main airport in Los Angeles, in California, in the United States of America. This facility is referred as LAX, its IATA code. The airport is located southwest of Los Angeles, in the district of Westchester, 26 km from the city center. With its 60,146,000 passengers in 2022 it is the eighth busiest airport in the world and destinations on all five continents are served.

9) Amsterdam-Schiphol, Netherlands

Amsterdam-Schiphol airport is the main airport in the Netherlands. It is located south of Amsterdam, in the municipality of Haarlemmermeer. Schiphol is one of the world's top airports by number of runways (6 runways) and the ninth busiest airport in the world by number of passengers: 52,742,000.

10) Paris Charles de Gaulle, France

Paris Airport Charles de Gaulle is a French airport located in the vicinity of the capital, Paris. It is the largest and busiest airport in France; since March 8, 1974, it has been named after General and President of the French Republic Charles de Gaulle. It is the tenth busiest airport in the world by number of passengers: 52,389,000.



BEIJING: This file photo taken on September 6, 2022 shows an employee walking past the company logo at Baidu's headquarters in Beijing. — AFP

China's Baidu says 2022 revenue fell 1%

BEIJING: Chinese search giant Baidu reported Wednesday that revenue fell by one percent in 2022 but also said it will include its artificial intelligence chatbot Ernie in its search services from March.

The firm posted revenue of 123.7 billion yuan (\$17.9 billion) for the latest fiscal year, down from 124.5 billion in 2021. Baidu CEO Robin Li said the company plans to launch its AI chatbot Ernie in March and integrate it into several services, including search, its smart speaker Xiaodu, and its operating system for self-driving cars. "We will integrate Ernie bot into our search (operation) and open it to the public in March," Li said during a call with analysts on Wednesday.

"We plan to fully integrate Ernie bot across all our products," Baidu said this month it was testing an AI-powered chatbot as tech giants rush to match the success of ChatGPT, a hugely popular language app that has sparked a gold rush in AI technology. The company, which operates China's biggest online

search engine, identified long-term investments in artificial intelligence (AI) as part of its growth plans.

"2022 was a challenging year, but we used this period to prepare the company for better times," Li said in a separate statement. "In 2023, we believe we have a clear path to reaccelerate our revenue growth and we are now well positioned to make use of the opportunities that China's economic recovery offers us," he said. Baidu has diversified in recent years into artificial intelligence, cloud computing and autonomous driving technologies as advertising revenue remained sluggish.

It is one of several Chinese tech titans, including Alibaba, Tencent and Netease, racing to expand after Beijing abruptly dropped its strict Covid rules in December and began easing a bruising crackdown on the sector. Beijing had gotten tough on the tech industry since late 2020 as part of an effort to curb monopolistic practices and promote competition between internet platforms.

The strategy of record fines, torched IPOs and probes into major firms hit revenues and placed further strain on the ailing economy. Combined revenue at China's internet companies shrank by just over one percent to 1.46 trillion yuan in 2022, the first contraction in almost a decade, according to data from the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology. — AFP

Business

Russian oligarchs close to Putin still swerving Western sanctions

Authorities have frozen about \$22.2bn of Russian assets in UK, and \$18bn in EU

LONDON: Oligarchs reportedly close to Russian President Vladimir Putin who have had bank accounts frozen or property seized after Moscow's invasion of Ukraine are pushing back against the Western sanctions-or finding ways around them. Authorities have frozen about £18.4 billion (\$22.2 billion) of Russian assets in Britain, and 17 billion euros' worth (\$18 billion) in the European Union.

The elite businessmen are mostly keeping a low profile, but some have launched costly legal counter-offensives while many others seek sanctuary in sanctions-free nations. Russian banker Petr Aven, who insists he has "no financial or political relationship" with the Kremlin, is asking the UK government to unlock £60,000 per month from his frozen accounts for his family's essential needs.

Aven, who co-founded private equity firm LetterOne with fellow oligarchs Mikhail Fridman and German Khan, has taken up residency in Latvia. A large number of oligarchs, including Aven, Fridman and Khan as well as Roman Abramovich and Alisher Usmanov, are using their deep pockets to file lawsuits against sanctions in Britain and the EU.

Aluminium billionaire Oleg Deripaska, whose personal fortune halved in the past year to \$1.7 billion according to Forbes magazine, is taking legal action against Washington over the sanctions.

Deripaska has spent much of his time in Russia, where a hotel he owned was reportedly seized by authorities after he described Moscow's invasion of Ukraine as a "war"-the Kremlin refers to it only as a "special operation".

Chelsea football club

Abramovich, perhaps the best-known oligarch,

initially sought to broker peace talks between Moscow and Kyiv while promoting good relations with the West, but was nevertheless forced to sell his beloved Chelsea football club. He has since been seen multiple times in Zionist entity, where he also has citizenship, as well as in the United Arab Emirates and Turkey-nations that have not imposed penalties on Russia's elite. Dubai has in fact opened its arms and now has a district that has been renamed "Little Moscow".

Abramovich, who is the largest shareholder in Russian steel giant Evraz, has seen his fortune halve to about \$7 billion according to reports.

Ukraine-born Fridman chose to stay in London, his lawyer confirmed to AFP. According to newspaper reports, he has been seen sipping champagne in a theatre.

'Sitting tight'

These elite businessmen still possess substantial amounts of money. "It's hard to say how much their wealth has suffered because we don't know how much they had," Georgetown University professor Jodi Vittori, who has studied state corruption and illicit financing, told AFP.

And the freezing of property in London is not a straightforward task, with assets often held in tax havens via anonymous trusts, shell companies or relatives. Around 52,000 UK properties are owned by unknown investors, including some close to the Kremlin, Transparency International UK said in a recent report. "There seems to be still too many ways to avoid" sanctions, concluded Duncan Hames, policy head at the anti-corruption campaign group. "Our assumption is that they are sitting tight, waiting for a better day."

Russian oligarchs' superyachts on sanctions radar

LONDON: Luxurious superyachts owned by Russian oligarchs reportedly close to the Kremlin have proved difficult to seize under Western sanctions imposed over Moscow's war in Ukraine. Russian President Vladimir Putin ordered the invasion one year ago, sparking a raft of economic penalties to punish his government and associates, both at home and abroad.

They included targeting the eye-catching and opulent marine status symbols of Russia's elite that are still dotted around the world. Experts say many of those yachts disappeared after the assault on Ukraine, before resurfacing in waters of countries that have not joined the unprecedented sanctions.

Former CIA agent and author Alex Finley has spearheaded an online hunt for Russian-registered mega-yachts under the Twitter hashtag #YachtWatch. "People were very interested because... it really is a visual symbol of what was happening," Finley told AFP. "It became a little bit of a game, as the sanctions came and we started seeing the yachts disappear," she said.

But such vessels are equipped with cutting-edge tracking systems that can be turned off only for safety reasons like piracy risks, meaning they can be traced online.

"The majority of them are in Turkey," Finley said.

UK's Lloyds bank profits dip on bad debt charge

LONDON: Britain's Lloyds Banking Group on Wednesday logged a drop in net profit last year as a large charge to cover loan defaults offset the impact of rising interest rates. Profit after tax slid six percent to £5.0 billion (\$6.0 billion) last year from 2021, Lloyds said in a statement.

The lender set aside £1.5 billion in provisions for borrowers defaulting on loans amid a cost-of-living crisis that was sparked by rampant inflation. That was not as severe as the £4.2 billion bad debt charge it took in 2020 during the COVID crisis, although £1.4 billion of this was reversed in 2021 as the economy emerged from the pandemic. Total income, net of accounting effects linked to insurance

S Africa offers tax breaks to boost green power

CAPE TOWN: South Africa unveiled Wednesday new tax incentives to encourage investment in the production of clean energy to help the country battle an energy crisis that has sparked worsening blackouts. Starting March 1, "businesses will be able to reduce their taxable income by 125 percent of the cost of an investment in renewables," Finance Minister Enoch Godongwana said in presenting his annual budget to parliament.

"We will also introduce a new tax incentive for individuals to install rooftop solar panels to reduce pressure on the grid and help ease" the scheduled blackouts, also known as load-shedding, he said.

The continent's most industrialized country has been labouring under a devastating energy shortfall for months, largely due to under-investment in Eskom's ageing and poorly maintained power plants. Earlier this month, President Cyril Ramaphosa announced a national state of disaster and the appointment of an electricity minister to help intensify the response to the crisis.

South Africa has suffered blackouts over the past decade but more recently they have become "more persistent and prolonged" and are wreaking havoc on the economy, in particular the country's freight and logistics network, Godongwana said. The government had already said last year that it was taking over half of Eskom's debt pile of 400 billion rand (\$22 billion).

That bailout for the firm that provides almost all of South Africa's electricity will send national debt soaring



HONOLULU, US: In this file photo taken on June 16, 2022 shows a harbor pilot boat cruising past the yacht Amadea of sanctioned Russian Oligarch Suleiman Kerimov, seized by the Fiji government at the request of the US, arrives at the Honolulu Harbor, Hawaii. —AFP

Sanctions 'still important'

The ultra-rich executives might not exert direct influence on the Kremlin and the way it carries out the Ukraine war-but their indirect role is to provide vital help, Vittori said. That includes the provision of mercenaries like those of the Wagner group, controlled by the Putin

associate CEO Yevgeny Prigozhin. "The importance (of oligarchs) is not to just have influence, but to do certain things on behalf of the Russian regime: provide mercenaries, key minerals for the war machine, launder money for the regime or for Putin himself," Vittori said. "So having sanctions on them is still important." —AFP

"A few of them have been spotted in the United Arab Emirates, so you have quite a few near Dubai. A few occasionally have shown up in the Maldives and in the Seychelles," she added. However, authorities have so far detained or seized only a handful of these opulent ships measuring up to 100 meters in length and featuring top-end facilities. Too often they are floating in ports of countries that have not sanctioned Russia.

Covering tracks

Among the few ships seized is the superyacht Amore Vero, which is linked to the chief executive of Russian state oil giant Rosneft Igor Sechin. The vast white vessel worth over 100 million euros, with a swimming pool that can be transformed into a helipad, was seized by French customs in the port of La Ciotat outside Marseille last March.

Industry newspaper SuperYacht Times confirmed other seizures including Amadea, a \$300 million ship owned by oligarch Suleiman Kerimov and seized in May by authorities in Fiji on behalf of the United States. It has been impounded in San Diego, California. Another big catch was Russian oligarch Viktor Vekselberg's \$90 million superyacht Tango in Mallorca, Spain, last April.

The US last month unveiled criminal charges against two men who it said sought to protect Vekselberg's vessel from seizure. And British authorities in March detained a Russian-owned \$50 million superyacht, the Phi, docked at London's Canary Wharf. The situation is further complicated because many yachts avoid the Russian flag, while oligarchs often hide behind front companies to cover their tracks.

The Phi, for example, is registered to a company

based in the Caribbean nation of Saint Kitts and Nevis and sails under a Maltese flag. But Britain's National Crime Agency anti-leptocracy unit said its ultimate owner was a Russian businessman. The Financial Times reported last March that it belonged to Vitaly Vasilievich Kochetkov, a telecom oligarch.

'Hypocrisy of oligarchs'

The Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project, a journalist consortium, recently claimed that according to leaked documents, Russian billionaire Roman Abramovich owned at least ten more yachts in addition to the six that are publicly known. Abramovich has been hit with sanctions by Britain and the EU, though not the US, for his close ties to Putin.

And once a yacht is seized, authorities are left with the huge costs for maintaining them-sparking questions about who foots the bill. "The rule of thumb for maintenance costs is about ten percent of the vessel's value per year, but on some of the bigger yachts it can easily be more," said Ralph Dazert, head of intelligence at SuperYacht Times.

"Keep in mind that this is not just about maintaining the yacht in working order, keeping it safe and compliant with regulations and looking nice, but the whole running cost of the yacht: so also crew, food and beverages, fuel (and) yacht management."

For Finley, however, such expenses are the price to pay for penalizing oligarchs who support Putin while enjoying the "benefits of democracy" elsewhere. "As it became clear that Putin was going to invade, I started highlighting the Russian yachts that are here, just to point out this hypocrisy of the oligarchs," she said. "They support Putin in destabilizing democracy, but at the same time they come here." —AFP



SCUNTHORPE, UK: Vapor rises from chimneys at British Steel's Scunthorpe plant, pictured in north Lincolnshire, north east England on February 22, 2023. British Steel plans to cut up to 260 jobs in Britain after being hit by soaring energy costs, the Chinese-owned group announced Wednesday. —AFP

Chinese-owned British Steel says plans 260 job cuts

LONDON: British Steel plans to cut up to 260 jobs in Britain after being hit by soaring energy costs, the Chinese-owned group announced Wednesday. The company said its energy costs last year increased by £190 million (\$230 million). "Decisive action is required because of the unprecedented rise in operating costs, surging inflation and the need to improve environmental performance," it said in a statement.

British Steel said it plans to shut coke ovens at its Scunthorpe plant, northern England, which would help the group to also "build a green and sustainable future". The announcement comes as British Steel, owned by Chinese group Jingye since 2020, seeks financial support from the UK government. Responding to the planned job cuts, the Conservative government expressed its disappointment.

"It is very disappointing British Steel has chosen to take this step for its employees while our negotiations with the sector are ongoing," it said. "We stand ready to support employees impacted... and will continue to work with the company to try and find a decarbonized, sustainable and competitive solution for the business and the wider sector, which plays a vital role in the UK economy."

Britain reportedly plans to offer grants totaling £600 million to help British Steel and Indian-owned Tata Steel UK replace highly polluting blast furnaces with less carbon-intensive technology. "It's important we have the correct policies and frameworks in place to back our drive to become a clean, green and successful company and we're continuing to discuss this with the government," British Steel chief executive Xifeng Han said in the statement.

The company employs about 4,000 workers in the UK. The Unite union said it would "fight to defend every job under threat". "The proposed job losses are a direct result of" Jingye's "failure to make good on its commitment to make major investments in the plant", it said.

The union also denounced the "government's abject inability to produce a coherent industrial strategy to protect the UK's steel making capability". —AFP



including mortgages, which has lifted income.

At the same time, however, that has fuelled fears that customers will struggle to keep up with higher repayments as annual inflation in Britain remains above 10 percent. The Bank of England has lifted its key rate from a record low of 0.1 percent in December 2021 to the current level of 4.0 percent in a bid to bring down elevated consumer prices. —AFP



to 5.84 trillion rand, or 73.6 percent of GDP in the next three years, according to the treasury.

Servicing this debt will cost around 336 billion rand this year, Godongwana said, meaning the country now spends more money on debt than it does on healthcare, peace and security or social development. "These are resources that

could otherwise be used to address pressing social needs or to invest in our future," he said. "Government debt is high... our economy is facing significant risks," he added. The power outages have weighed on South Africa's growth prospects, with growth this year expected to reach just 0.9 percent after 2.5 percent in 2022. —AFP

Green Island Season full of surprises



TEC, Zain show includes 2,000 drones showcasing Kuwait's past, present

By Faten Omar

Touristic Enterprises Company (TEC) has succeeded in boosting leisure tourism spending and promoting Kuwait as a tourist destination by coordinating and developing several entertainment venues that contribute to the happiness of citizens and residents, which is an essential factor for any society to thrive.



Green Island is the first fully artificial island that was established as part of the green waterfront project in Kuwait in 1988. It occupies an area of more than 161,000 square meters. The island has an artificial lake fed by seawater from the Arabian Gulf and a 35-meter-high tower. It has been equipped with many services and entertainment facilities, such as playgrounds, restaurants, cafes, sales outlets and shops, as well as a wide variety of activities for children and families.



Lama Jammal, Head of the Project Management Office for Zain Tech.



Faisal Duwaihees, Corporate Communication and Relationship at Zain.

On the occasion of Kuwait's 62nd National Day and 32nd Liberation Day, TEC, in cooperation with Zain, held spectacular aerial drone shows at Green Island. Speaking to Kuwait Times, Faisal Duwaihees from the Corporate Communication and Relations Department at Zain, said Zain has a strategic partnership with TEC, which started with Winter Wonderland and continued at Green Island.

"From our belief in social responsibility, Zain along with TEC provided shows that are distinctive to the Kuwaiti people, on the occasion of the celebration of national days. We are participating in the drone shows, the largest show in Kuwait, as 2,000 drones make artistic displays in the beautiful sky of Kuwait that simulate the past, present and future of Kuwait, in addition to displaying images of HH the Amir and HH the Crown Prince," Duwaihees said.



Lama Jammal, Head of the Project Management Office for Zain Tech, told Kuwait Times the show is the first of its kind in Kuwait, noting that this is the second drone show, while the first was conducted by Zain five years

side of the work. It starts with the main element - the Kuwaiti flag moving - then the 'Glory and Pride' slogan and the Kuwaiti desert in the past. It then moves onto Kuwait's present with the skylines and a display of the

them in sequence to make sure the batteries are charged. Jammal revealed the shows will continue until Feb 26, calling on citizens and residents to see the show that will include a surprise on Feb 25-26. TEC held the ceremony to celebrate Kuwait's National and Liberation Days along with the start of the Green Island Season, that opened on Feb 12.

The Green Island Season opens during weekdays from Sunday to Wednesday from 3 pm to 11 pm and on weekends from Thursday to Saturday from 10 am to 11 pm. All visitors should obtain a ticket to enter through the website of Green Island (www.greenisland.com.kw). Entrance is free for children aged 4 years and under and KD 2.5 for visitors aged 5 years and over.



Duweihees revealed these drone shows are the first of their kind in the Middle East in terms of the number - 2,000 drones in eight consecutive shows - and this is what distinguishes Zain's participation in cooperation with TEC.



ago. "The project is very interesting and we are extremely happy to see everyone's feedback, where it has been done at a very professional and remarkable level," she said. "We are responsible mainly for the creative



famous Al-Sour Gate, and ending with images of the Amir and Crown Prince," said Jammal.

She indicated the Zain team comes to the site five to six hours before the show to prepare the drones by testing



Photos show visitors enjoying activities at the Green Island. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat



Lifestyle | Fashion

Ukrainian designers send out defiant message from **London Fashion Week**

Ukrainian designers sent out a defiant message at London Fashion Week Tuesday with clothes made from the neck ties their menfolk no longer wear and butterfly motifs to symbolize the "fragility of life". The three collections by fashion labels Kseniaschnaider, Paskal and Frolov were put together in Ukraine despite constant interruptions from missile attacks and air raid sirens. "I think it's really important not to stop," said Ksenia Schnaider, one half of the husband and wife team behind the Kseniaschnaider label.

The designer has been travelling back and forth from Ukraine and her new base in the UK, where her daughter is at school, since taking the decision to carry on with fashion despite the war. Schnaider feared she might "never be able to create again" after being forced to leave Kyiv last March. But after travelling to Hungary, then Germany and finally Britain, she decided she had to continue for the sake of herself and her team.

"You can't stop even if reality is terrible, you should continue doing what you do best, still be creative, try to bring beauty to this world of tragedy," she told AFP backstage. "There's a lot of new mean-



(From left) Ukrainian fashion designers Ksenia Schnaider, Ivan Frolov and Julie Paskal wave a Ukrainian flag as they walk down the catwalk prior to the Autumn/Winter 2023 Ukrainian fashion show collection on the fifth day of the London Fashion Week, in London. — AFP

ings in this, it's not just being a fashion designer like it used to be, I need to save my culture and my traditions."

Kseniaschnaider's Autumn Winter 2023 collection featured plenty of the brand's trademark denim along with blazers and skirts made out of surplus stocks of neck ties now that Ukrainian men have swapped them for military fatigues. "It's really meaningful because Ukrainian men

don't need ties now because they are fighting," she said.

'You can't sit and cry'

Julie Paskal said all four of the designers behind the three labels had been conflicted over whether it was right to carry on with fashion as the war unleashed by Russian President Vladimir Putin still rages. But she felt they made the right

decision and was "incredibly grateful" to London Fashion Week for hosting them while their own annual event in Kyiv is displaced. Her laser-cut applied "butterfly" creations were inspired by the "fragility of life and death", Paskal said.

The war had brought "dark times in our country" but "this is a balance we need to have," added the designer, who is now based in Germany but regularly travels to Ukraine to keep her label going. "I think that for all of us it was a kind of will to go forward because... you can't just sit and cry, you need to move, to do whatever you can," she said.

Frolov designer Ivan Frolov—originally inspired by drag and transgender culture—looked to Ukraine's "cultural heritage" in his creations with hand-knitted sweaters with the Ukrainian wheat ear fertility symbol and corset dresses embroidered with Swarovski crystals. The fashion extravaganza came on the day Putin blamed "Western elites" for fuelling and escalating the conflict. In a statement, Ukrainian Fashion Week said: "Creating collections is our resistance to war... and a reflection of the courage of all Ukrainians." London Fashion Week wraps up later Tuesday. — AFP



DANIEL LEE MAKES HIS MARK AS BURBERRY RETURNS TO LONDON

British designer Daniel Lee presented his first collection for Burberry in a closely watched show in London late Monday, returning to the luxury brand's roots for inspiration. Burberry's was the most anticipated of the roughly 50 shows at London Fashion Week, as fashionistas got a glimpse of the brand's new direction following the September departure of creative director Riccardo Tisci. For Lee's first collection, the 37-year-old designer from Bradford in northern England revived the brand's classics, which Tisci had largely shunned.

bottles in hand and rubber boots on their feet. The brand's iconic chequerboard print came in all colors on jumpers, trench coats, trousers and skirts. The rose, symbol of England and Lee's home county of Yorkshire, appeared on several outfits.

One model wore a white, plaid and blue jumper, emblazoned with the brand's iconic logo that Lee has updated in what Burberry called his "first creative expression". The horseman, a symbol of Burberry since the early 20th century, was abandoned by Tisci when he took over the reins in 2018. After years at Givenchy, the Italian attempted to rejuvenate the ageing image of the London house, founded in 1856.

Unlike his predecessor, Lee presented few extravagant evening outfits, with the exception of two dresses with bare shoulders. Lee was feted at the end of the show by an audience that included model Naomi Campbell, Vogue magazine doyenne Anna Wintour and British singers Damon Albarn and Stormzy.

Also among the guests were Australian movie director Baz Luhrmann, whose film "Elvis" won four BAFTA awards on Sunday, and Syrian swimmer Yusra Mardini, whose life story has been adapted into a film. It was Burberry's first physical show at London Fashion Week since 2019, with the COVID pandemic and Queen Elizabeth II's death hampering previous plans.—AFP

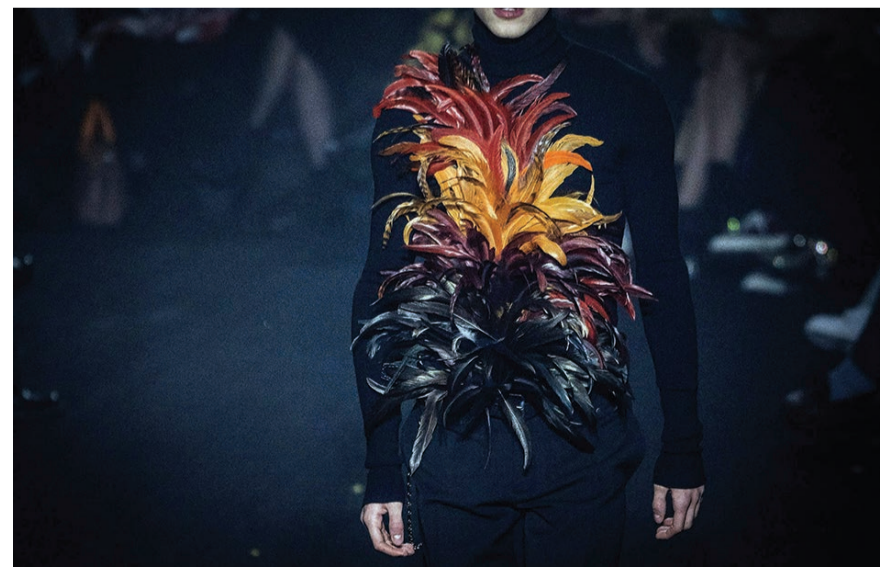
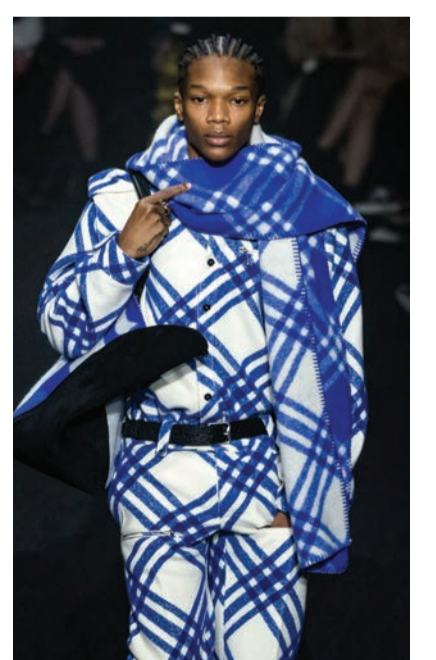


Around 500 guests filled a marquee in Kennington Park, south London, where tea, tartan blankets and hot-water bottles generated an intimate atmosphere. The venue was "inspired by Burberry tents from the late 19th and early 20th century", evoking "a cosiness that provides warmth and protection from the elements", Burberry said in a statement.

In the mountain chalet atmosphere, models paraded with hot water



Models present creations for British fashion house Burberry during the Autumn/Winter 2023 fashion show collection on the fourth day of the London Fashion Week, in London. — AFP photos

French fashion house **Carven** picks British designer **Trotter**

Carven, the French fashion label seeking to regain its luster, said Wednesday that it had named the British designer Louise Trotter as its new creative designer, four years after the house was acquired by China's Icicle group. Trotter had been at the helm of Lacoste until last month, and has also had stints at Gap, Calvin Klein and the

British label Joseph. She will present in September her first collection for the storied brand founded in 1945 by Marie-Louise Carven, who injected a fresh and joyous style into young women's wardrobes in its postwar prime. The brand fell out of favor in later decades before a revival in the late 2000s, but falling sales forced it into liquidation in

2018, prompting the sale later that year to what is now Icicle Carven China France (ICCF).

"I feel honored to write a new chapter for Carven: a youthful French house that to me embodies a spirit of freedom, joy and a confident femininity," Trotter said in a statement. Shawna Tao, chief executive of ICCF, called the Sunderland-

born designer the "perfect candidate," saying she has "the conviction and know-how to create meaningful clothes with a unique understanding of what luxury and sportswear mean today." Carven, born Carmen de Tommaso, died in 2015 aged 105. — AFP



Lifestyle | Features



A chef decorates a dish at the Sikwa restaurant, which bases its menu on the traditional cuisine of the native peoples of the country to keep the indigenous gastronomic culture alive in San Jose.



View of a dish at the Sikwa restaurant.— AFP photos

Never look back:
Actor Vincent
Cassel, France's
scary star

Actor Vincent Cassel is set to dominate big and small screens this year, appearing in two blockbuster French films and a new spy thriller on Apple TV. "Liaison" pairs Cassel with another major French export, Eva Green, as former lovers forced to work together to stop a series of major cyber-attacks. The 56-year-old star of "Black Swan" is not coy about why he chose to work with the tech giant.

"It's very simple. There are not many opportunities for a French actor to get an international audience," he told AFP. "The power of a company like Apple is that they can press a button and 150 million people know about it. It isn't negligible," he added with a grin. Cassel is already a big name internationally, of course, thanks largely to two landmark French films where he deployed his scary energy to the hilt — 1995's gritty urban tale "La Haine" and 2002's infamous rape drama "Irreversible".



French actress Eva Green and French actor Vincent Cassel pose upon their arrival for the avant-premiere of the British-French television series developed for Apple TV+ "Liaison" at the Publicis Drugstore in Paris. — AFP

They catapulted him to Hollywood, where he has starred in the 2014 remake of "Beauty and the Beast", and had celebrated supporting roles in "Black Swan", "Jason Bourne" and "Ocean's Twelve"—as well as a major part in the third season of "Westworld". But 2023 is special, with his face all over French billboards as part of two homegrown blockbusters: "The Three Musketeers" (as Athos) and "Asterix and Obelix: The Middle Kingdom" (playing Julius Caesar).

"When we choose to do this for a living, it can all stop from one day to the next, but then suddenly two days later—and this has happened to me—you can find yourself in China, in Korea or Hollywood. Everything is possible," he said.

'Electricity'

Cassel said he was over the moon to have an extended partnership with Green, his co-star in both "Liaison" and "The Three Musketeers". "Eva is a really unique actress with a very instinctive side," he said. "I had the impression of her as a female version of the type of actor I can be. So we immediately had this electricity between us." More is in the pipeline—not least the intriguing prospect of Cassel playing a version of David Cronenberg in the Canadian director's semi-autobiographical film "The Shrouds".

He is also due to star in a biopic of famed French aviator and author of "The Little Prince", Antoine de Saint-Exupery. Cassel likes to keep things moving forward. "I don't have a rearview mirror really," he said. "I'm incapable of comprehending what I've done and it doesn't really interest me."

"In any case, I have more and more trouble staying in front of a screen so I'm not a big consumer of cinema or series. More and more I realise that I'm concentrating on what matters most to me—my mental health, my physical health, my family, my children, my wife, my friends—and possibly the upcoming projects because they are the most interesting." He makes little distinction between film and TV, not least because the budgets are no longer distinguishable.

"It was around \$8-10 million per episode (for 'Liaison')," he said. "I can assure you I've done films that were one million for the whole thing. "Cinema will be obliged to renew itself and find the means to continue to exist. "But it won't be replaced by TV because the cinematic experience is different—it's an experience we share, while often with TV we're alone with our screen as we are so often these days, obsessed with these little things that make us lower our heads." — AFP

COSTA RICAN CHEF
SHOWCASING INDIGENOUS CUISINE

The recipes are not written down, the ingredients local. At Sikwa restaurant in the Costa Rican capital, a deep-rooted respect for Indigenous culture is what determines the menu. The establishment in San Jose is the brainchild of Chef Pablo Bonilla, who ten years ago decided to leave behind everything he had learned in his culinary studies. For years, he immersed himself in the Indigenous cultures of his native country, living with eight different Indigenous groups in turn: the bribri, cabecar, nogue, maleku, brunca, teribe, huetar and chorotega.

"It was a realization that gastronomy means many things" other than just food—an experience Bonilla told AFP he now wants to share with others. "I think we still have a lot to learn from Indigenous communities," said the chef who is also inspired by preserving native cuisine.

'Something different'

Bonilla and his team create generous dishes meant for sharing between diners, with ingredients from all over the Central American country. They seek to replicate the original way of cooking, with a modern twist. "It tastes like home cooking, it



A chef finishes a dish at the Sikwa restaurant.

use only preservative-free food sourced directly from producers.

Bonilla buys Pacific fish almost daily, cocoa from the Caribbean coast, corn from the highlands of the northern border, and plantains from the southern jungle. On the day AFP visited, the menu inspired by the available produce included a dish of eel cooked in banana leaves, a shrimp bisque and a ceviche of mangrove clam.

While one cook prepared a dish of corn, plantain, potatoes, pumpkin and carrots, another made a roasted plantain ice cream with cocoa. Sourcing rare ingredients like these is "much more

expensive," said Bonilla. "Depending on the process and the product it can cost me up to four times more." But it also means that as a chef, he has "something different" to offer his clientele. A main course on the menu costs between \$10 and \$14.

Bonilla's bet has paid off: in 2018, the year it opened, Sikwa was included on the New Yorker culinary site's list of best new restaurants. In November, it made the World's 50 Best's list of top 100 restaurants in Latin America and the sixth best in Central America. — AFP



View of food at the Sikwa restaurant.

He learned everything he could about the ingredients they use and how to harvest and cook them. The process, he said, meant "wiping my memory of everything I learnt, everything I studied about gastronomy and about Costa Rican cuisine."



Chef Pablo Bonilla, owner of the Sikwa restaurant, which bases its menu on the traditional cuisine of the native peoples of the country to keep the indigenous gastronomic culture alive, poses for a picture.

tastes like smoke, it tastes like firewood, it really tastes like what the ingredient should taste like," said the chef. The pantry is sparse, as the restaurant tries to



People are served at the Sikwa restaurant, which bases its menu on the traditional cuisine of the native peoples of the country to keep the indigenous gastronomic culture alive.

BTS agency
becomes biggest
shareholder of K-pop
industry rival SM

K-pop supergroup BTS' management agency HYBE said Wednesday it had become the biggest shareholder of embattled rival SM Entertainment, whose founder has been mired in an ugly power struggle within his company. SM was founded by Lee Soo-man, who is widely referred to as "the godfather of K-pop" and credited for producing key figures in an earlier generation of artists such as BoA, Girls' Generation and TVXQ, which paved the way for the industry's current success.

But hints of a power struggle eked out when SM's co-CEOs—including Lee's nephew Lee Sung-soo—announced new plans for the company that notably

excluded him. In a regulatory filing on Wednesday, HYBE said it had purchased a 14.8 percent stake in SM Entertainment for 422.8 billion won (\$324 million), a move it said aimed at "strengthening competitiveness and creating synergy in the K-pop market".

The 14.8 percent stake is part of

founder Lee's holdings of 18.5 percent in SM. HYBE's purchase on Wednesday comes after an attempt by South Korea's internet giant Kakao to buy a nine percent stake earlier this month—a move that was quickly challenged by the elder Lee who filed for a court injunction. HYBE had also offered to purchase a further 25 per-

cent of the company from other shareholders—an announcement met with fierce opposition from SM's co-CEOs and executives, who accused the entertainment giant of a "hostile takeover".

In a statement to SM fans, artists, employees and shareholders following the acquisition, HYBE's CEO Park Ji-won promised full support for SM artists and urged top executives to refrain from making "hasty judgments". "We express our regret for causing concern to SM artists," Park said, adding: "As HYBE respects and cares for our own artists, we will respect and care for SM artists."

"HYBE and SM Entertainment will work together to create the best company that can stand shoulder to shoulder with the world's top three major music companies," he said. The purchase was made nearly two weeks earlier than its initial schedule of March 6, which Yonhap news agency said likely was an attempt to end the acquisition process smoothly ahead of a SM shareholders' meeting next month. — AFP



Sports

Asian Shooting Confederation officials vow to promote sports

Farwaniya governor inaugurates Amir Grand Prix

News in brief

Haiti reach Women's WCup

AUCKLAND: Haiti qualified for football's Women's World Cup for the first time in their history with a 2-1 win over Chile on Wednesday at a play-off tournament in New Zealand. They join England, Denmark and China in Group D of the World Cup, co-hosted by New Zealand and Australia. Haiti, ranked 55th in the world, will face European champions England in their opening match in Brisbane on July 22. Teenage midfielder Melchie Dumornay, who plays for French club Stade de Reims, gave Haiti the lead just before half time in Auckland. There was drama in the closing stages. Haiti had a penalty saved with 90 minutes approaching when captain Nerilia Mondesir saw her weak penalty palmed away. However, the 19-year-old Dumornay doubled Haiti's lead when she calmly slotted past Chile goalkeeper Christiane Enderl in added time. —AFP

Serin replaces Le Garrec

PARIS: Experienced scrum-half Baptiste Serin has been added to France's Six Nations squad instead of Nolann Le Garrec, the French Rugby Federation (FFR) announced on Tuesday. The reason for uncapped Le Garrec's withdrawal was not given by the FFR, with tournament holders Les Bleus preparing to host Scotland on Sunday. Serin, 28, won the last of his 42 Test appearances against Scotland in March 2021 and has impressed with club Toulon this season. Captain Antoine Dupont and centre Gael Fickou are the only France squad members with more caps than former Bordeaux-Begles half-back Serin. On Monday, Serin told Canal+ television he still wanted to play international rugby, especially with the Rugby World Cup on home soil starting in September. "It's an objective, I've never hidden that, I obviously want to return," Serin said. "There's a World Cup to experience in France, there are loads of things to experience." —AFP

Neymar has 'ligament damage'

PARIS: Brazil forward Neymar has suffered ligament damage to his injured ankle, Paris Saint-Germain said on Tuesday, two weeks before the French club's Champions League last 16, second leg with Bayern Munich. Neymar, 31, was taken off on a stretcher with an ankle injury in the second half of PSG's extraordinary 4-3 Ligue 1 win over Lille on Sunday. "New examinations taken today confirm a sprained ankle for Neymar with ligament damage," PSG said in a statement. PSG confirmed after the victory a scan had shown no fracture, but said further tests would need to be carried out on the damage to the ligaments in the coming days. His injury immediately built fears he could miss the return leg with Bayern on March 8. The French champions will head to Germany looking to overturn a 1-0 deficit from the first leg, when Kylian Mbappe was restricted to a second-half cameo as a substitute on his return from a thigh injury. —AFP

MLS revamps playoffs

NEW YORK: Major League Soccer unveiled a revamped playoff format on Tuesday that includes a best-of-three first round before knockout stages to the MLS Cup Final on December 9. The top seven clubs in both the Eastern and Western Conferences will qualify for the best-of-three opening round while the clubs finishing eighth and ninth will meet in a one-game wildcard showdown to determine the eighth qualifier in each conference. The MLS regular season will conclude on October 21 before setting up the October 25-26 wildcard games-with those winners facing the conference top seeds-and the October 28-November 12 first round, where all games will have a winner. No extra time will be played if a match is level after 90 minutes, with penalty kicks used to decide a winner. —AFP

Germany, Sweden draw

BERLIN: Germany and Sweden played out a 0-0 draw in their women's World Cup warm-up in Duisburg on Tuesday. The match, played in front of German chancellor Olaf Scholz and a crowd of more than 20,000, was Germany's first hitout of 2023. Scholz has previously promised equal pay including bonuses for the men's and women's German national sides, saying before the match "I'm staying on the ball on this issue and I will continue to do so." The home side were notably rusty, conceding several chances and were kept in the game thanks to some excellent saves from keeper Merle Frohms. Sweden forward Stina Blackstenius had the ball in the back of the net after 22 minutes, but the goal was chalked off for offside. With scores still locked, Frohms made two crucial late saves from Blackstenius and Rytting Kaneyrd in the 79th and 81st minute. —AFP



By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: Asian Shooting Confederation (ASC) Board of Directors held a meeting that was chaired by ASC President Sheikh Salman Sabah Al-Salem Al-Humoud Al-Sabah, in the presence of ISSF President Luciano Rossi and Asian Federations representatives. ASC Secretary General, President of Kuwait and Arab Shooting Federations Duajj Khalaf Al-Otaibi said the meeting came out with several decisions in favor of developing the Asian Shooting.

The officials agreed to organize the Asian Championship in October in South Korea, while Kuwait and Indonesia will organize two other championships. The three countries are gearing for Paris 2024 Olympics. Al-Otaibi said ISSF President Rossi lauded the efforts of the ASC and Kuwait in developing the sport, adding that ISSF President and its Secretary General were honored during the meeting. Participants thanked HH the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and HH the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah for hosting the championships and meetings.

Meanwhile, Farwaniya Governor Sheikh Mishal Jaber Al-Abdallah Al-Sabah, representing HH the Amir inaugurated HH the Amir Grand Prix in the

NZ to 'throw some punches' at England

WELLINGTON: New Zealand will "throw some punches" when they face an attacking England in the second Test starting on Friday in Wellington, as the hosts bid to rescue the two-match series. Bowling greats James Anderson and Stuart Broad, combined with some aggressive batting, propelled England to a thumping 267-run first Test win in a day-night encounter in Mount Maunganui.

It was England's 10th win in 11 Tests under head coach Brendon McCullum and further evidence of the success of the New Zealander's "Bazball" attacking cricket revolution. In contrast, New Zealand are struggling for form and confidence going into the clash at Wellington's Basin Reserve, where rain could play a part on the first two days.

The hosts are winless in their last seven Tests since beating South Africa a year ago in Christchurch, including suffering a 3-0 whitewash in England last June. "I don't think it's unfair to say we are lacking a bit of that confidence at the moment," said head coach Gary Stead, whose side were dismissed for 126 in their second innings of the first Test to lose in a little over three days. "But I can assure you the faith is still with this group of guys. "We're going to put everything behind them to make sure we go out there in Wellington and really throw some punches back at England."

New Zealand will be buoyed by the return of experienced seam bowler Matt Henry, who was unavailable for the opener because of the birth of his child. But they will again be missing fast bowler Kyle Jamieson, who is expected to be on the sidelines for several months because of back surgery. Jamieson has taken 72 wickets in 16 Test appearances and his loss was keenly felt in the pink-ball Test as New Zealand struggled to contain England's aggressive batting.

Stokes 'blessed'

Daryl Mitchell, one of the few to offer resistance

NBA Hawks fire McMillan, name Prunty as coach

WASHINGTON: Nate McMillan was fired as coach of the Atlanta Hawks after guiding the NBA club to a 29-30 start to the 2022-23 campaign, the team announced Tuesday. Hawks general manager Landry Fields said assistant coach Joe Prunty would serve as the interim head coach. "Decisions like these, especially in-season, are always extremely difficult, but we believe it's in the best interest of our team to move forward with another voice leading the way," Fields said.

McMillan finished with a 99-80 record as coach of the Hawks, having started as an interim coach after a mid-season firing in 2021 and guiding Atlanta to the Eastern Conference finals. "I would like to thank Nate for his leadership and professionalism during his time with the Hawks," Fields said. "He's truly a class act and we appreciate the graciousness and work ethic he brought." McMillan, who played 12 NBA seasons as a guard for the



KUWAIT: Asian Shooting Confederation (ASC) Board of Directors held a meeting that was chaired by ASC President Sheikh Salman Sabah Al-Salem Al-Humoud Al-Sabah.



KUWAIT: Officials take a group photo during the opening ceremony.

presence of several dignitaries including Sheikh Salman Al-Humoud, President of ISSF Luciano Rossi, President of Kuwait and Arab Shooting Federations Eng Duajj Khalaf Al-Otaibi and heads of delegations.

During the opening ceremony, participants appreciated the gesture by the organizing commit-

tee to cut the events short in solidarity with the earthquake victims in Syria and Turkey. Competitions began on Wednesday with the skeet qualifiers for men and women. Chairman of Saudi Arabian Shooting Federation Prince Khalid bin Bandar Al Saud said Kuwait is a leader in hosting major events which deserves to be praised.

to England's bowlers by making an unbeaten 57 during New Zealand's second innings, is relishing another crack at the visitors. "We're excited for the next opportunity in Wellington and looking forward to taking on England again on home turf with the red ball," said Mitchell. Captain Tim Southee said that he didn't think the margin between the sides had been reflected in the result and welcomed the return to traditional red-ball Test cricket at the Basin Reserve. England's emphatic victory in Mount Maunganui was their first Test win in New Zealand since 2008 and more evidence of their thrilling upturn under McCullum.

Skipper Ben Stokes, who was born in New Zealand, said that he felt "pretty blessed" to have bowlers of the ilk of veteran seamers Anderson and Broad, plus Ollie Robinson. England will wait to see how the trio fare in the nets before selecting their side with all suffering some soreness after the first Test. "I've also got a seriously skilled and very brave batting line-up to watch," added Stokes, who already has one eye on the Ashes in this year's English summer. "They've got to take a lot of credit for the sort of record I have as a captain."

Harry Brook again caught the eye in the first Test with the bat, after making hundreds in all three Tests of England's recent 3-0 series win in Pakistan. The 23-year-old smacked 89 off 81 balls in England's first innings to set the tone and then made another rapid-fire half-century. "He is a fantastic talent. I think he will go on to be a global superstar," said Stokes. After a cyclone disrupted the preparations of both teams for the first Test, the weather could play a part in Wellington with rain and showers forecast for Friday and Saturday.

New Zealand (from): Tim Southee (capt), Tom Blundell, Michael Bracewell, Devon Conway, Matt Henry, Scott Kuggeleijn, Tom Latham, Daryl Mitchell, Henry Nicholls, Blair Tickner, Neil Wagner, Kane Williamson, Will Young. England (from): Ben Stokes (capt), James Anderson, Stuart Broad, Harry Brook, Zak Crawley, Ben Duckett, Ben Foakes, Will Jacks, Dan Lawrence, Jack Leach, Ollie Pope, Matthew Potts, Ollie Robinson, Joe Root, Ollie Stone. —AFP

Seattle SuperSonics, was in his 19th season as an NBA head coach after stops in Seattle, Portland, Indiana and Atlanta from 2001.

McMillan, an assistant coach on the US 2008 and 2012 Olympic gold medal teams of NBA stars, has compiled a career NBA coaching record of 760-668. McMillan was an assistant coach for the Hawks when Lloyd Pierce was fired and McMillan was named an interim head coach in March 2021. The Hawks finished the campaign 27-11 under McMillan and advanced past the second round of the NBA playoffs for only the second time in 54 years, ousting New York and Philadelphia before falling to eventual champion Milwaukee in the Eastern Conference finals.

It was his deepest career playoff run as a coach. MacMillan was rewarded by being named the new head coach in July but the Hawks lost to Miami in last year's first round of the playoffs and had only struggled to eighth in the Eastern Conference standings at the All-Star Game break. Prunty, 54, joined the Hawks as an assistant coach in July 2021. He had been an assistant NBA coach since 1996 except for two stints as an interim head coach for Milwaukee in which he went 29-25. He was an assistant coach on three NBA championship clubs at San Antonio from 1999-2005. —AFP



KUWAIT: Kuwait Rhythmic Gymnastics team is participating in the "Miss Valentine" International Championship in Estonia. 500 of the best athletes who were born in 2012 are participating. Sarah Al-Bannai is representing Kuwait. Maha Al-Saqer could not leave due to visa issues. Valentine Championship is one of the strongest event with 34 countries participating. Sarah will participate in the Pro Junior. The games federation is keen on having players participate in such tournaments to gain experience and improve their levels.

England, S Africa set up World T20 semi-final clash

CAPE TOWN: England and South Africa qualified to meet in the Women's T20 World Cup semi-finals after both teams won their final group matches at Newlands in Cape Town on Tuesday. England - who were already assured of a place in the last four - clinched top place in Group Two with a crushing 114-run win over Pakistan.

South Africa beat Bangladesh by ten wickets in the second match of a double-header but despite the margin of victory were not entirely convincing. Group One winners Australia will play Group Two runners-up India on Thursday, with England and South Africa meeting on Friday. Both semi-finals and Sunday's final will be played at Newlands. Nat Sciver-Brunt articulated England's attacking approach under new coach Jon Lewis after picking up her third player of the match award in four outings.

Sciver-Brunt hit 81 not out off 40 balls as England powered their way to 213 for five, a Women's T20 World Cup record. "We agreed in our planning to put the pressure back on the other team," said Sciver-Brunt. "That means we take it to the bowlers, not so much to knock it around and put a partnership together but try to put the bowlers under pressure and play to your strengths." She said the policy was similarly aggressive with the ball. "We really focus on taking wickets," she said. —AFP

Sports

Foord on target; Australian women win Cup of Nations

Australia thrash Jamaica 3-0, stretch win streak to seven

NEWCASTLE: Arsenal striker Caitlin Foord got on the scoresheet as Australia beat Jamaica 3-0 Wednesday to stretch their win streak to seven in an ideal build-up to the women's World Cup on home soil this year. The victory at Newcastle, north of Sydney, ensured they won the four-team Cup of Nations—a dress rehearsal for the showpiece tournament in Australia and New Zealand in July-August.

Sam Kerr's side—who face Ireland, Nigeria and Canada in World Cup Group B—also beat Spain 3-2 and the Czech Republic 4-0. "It's massive. We said we needed to come out strong today and finish this tournament off and that's what we did," said midfielder Katrina Gorry, who scored the first goal. "Three from three, we're pretty happy to start 2023 like that." Jamaica depart Australia with three defeats, reinforcing the challenges they face at the World Cup in a tough Group F alongside France, Brazil and either Paraguay or Panama.

The Spaniards earlier overcame the Czechs 3-0 at the same stadium to get their preparations back on track. They are in World Cup Group C with Costa Rica, Zambia and Japan. The Czechs did not qualify. Gorry put Australia in front on 28 minutes with a clinical long-range strike that gave goalkeeper Becky Spencer no chance. Jamaica created opportunities, but

couldn't convert and Alex Chidiac drilled home from close range to double the lead 11 minutes into the second half before Foord grabbed the third with a 25-yard rocket.

"We need to play against the best teams in the world and the last three games have really pushed us in the right direction," said Jamaica's Tottenham Hotspur midfielder Drew Spence. "We've had not so much positive results, but positive performances." Earlier, Real Madrid's Esther Gonzalez scored twice and Athenea del Castillo converted a penalty as Spain eased past the Czechs despite missing 15 top players who are embroiled in a row with coach Jorge Vilda. The Euro 2022 quarter-finalists applied all the early pressure with the breakthrough coming on 28 minutes after a neat series of passes ended with Gonzalez tapping in.

The experienced striker doubled the lead 10 minutes later with a header, before Del Castillo made it 3-0 from the penalty spot. All the teams have two more international windows left to tune up for the World Cup, with the 15 Spanish players needing to decide whether they want to play under Vilda again. None have featured since September when they made themselves unavailable for selection, reportedly unhappy at the locker-room atmosphere and his training methods. The Spanish FA backed the coach. —AFP



NEWCASTLE: (Left) Australia's Caitlin Foord and Jamaica's Atlanta Primus (right) and Chantel Swaby compete for the ball during the 2023 Cup of Nations women's football match between Australia and Jamaica in Newcastle on February 22, 2023. — AFP

De Jong's Barcelona decision vindicated

BARCELONA: Frenkie de Jong was heavily linked with a move to Manchester United last summer but the Barcelona midfielder resisted, despite pressure on him from all angles to make the switch. On Thursday he will lead Barca's midfield against the Red Devils and his former Ajax coach Erik ten Hag at Old Trafford, where he might have played this season-safe in the knowledge his decision has been vindicated. Ten Hag was keen on reuniting with the 25-year-old, while Barcelona's financial situation meant they would have been happy to get De Jong's wages off the books and bank a significant transfer fee.

However De Jong was at home in the Catalan capital, even though his compatriot Ronald Koeman had been replaced in Barcelona's dugout by Xavi Hernandez, less convinced by the midfielder, signed in 2019 from Ajax for 75 million euros (\$80 million). De Jong arrived at his dream club, as revealed by his partner Mikky Kiemeny on social media, where she posted a picture of the player back in 2015 at Camp Nou, visiting as a fan.

However the move turned into a nightmare as Barcelona suffered sporting, financial and institutional crises, with coaches Ernesto Valverde, Quique Setien and Koeman all sacked. Xavi arrived and many hoped that one of the all-time greatest midfielders would be able to help De Jong improve. However, frequently hauling him off early, Xavi seemed frustrated the midfielder could not slot into his 'positional play' gameplan. De Jong wanted to operate as the deepest midfielder, a role which Xavi reserved for veteran Sergio Busquets, leaving the Dutchman no choice but to play higher up.

Yet despite the "95 percent" completion of his switch to United, per one Spanish report in the summer, he dug his heels in, determined to convince the Barcelona coach and establish himself where he always hoped to reach. De Jong blamed Barcelona for



BARCELONA: Barcelona's Dutch midfielder Frenkie de Jong controls the ball during the UEFA Europa League round of 32 first-leg football match between FC Barcelona and Manchester United in this file photo. —AFP

leaking his contract details to the media, and was frustrated questions were raised over the validity of his deal, signed in the disastrous Josep Maria Bartomeu era as president. "I found it really annoying that the club did this," De Jong said last November.

Xavi's switch in 2023 to a system with four midfielders, instead of the traditional 4-3-3, has helped unlock the enigma of De Jong. Able to play alongside Busquets at the base of the midfield instead of ahead of him, De Jong is able to see the game in front of him and influence it. He is also able to drive forward at the right moments, without fear of leaving a gap at the base of the midfield. No longer is De Jong expected to become the next Busquets—instead he is seen as a complimentary player. The Spaniard was injured in the Europa League play-off first leg, but Xavi says he is fit to return for the second. With Pedri injured and Gavi suspended at Old Trafford, De Jong's importance to Barcelona this week is higher than ever. "The key is the confidence we give him, how he feels, he is happy and very important in the team," said Xavi recently. "He is a total player." —AFP

Rashford hot streak sustains Man Utd's quadruple dream

MANCHESTER: Manchester United are riding the crest of a wave thanks to the scintillating form of Marcus Rashford, which is keeping Erik ten Hag's men in the hunt for trophies on four fronts. The Red Devils could end a six-year wait for any silverware on Sunday when they face Newcastle in the League Cup final.

But first comes the chance to land the scalp of Barcelona in a heavyweight Europa League clash on Thursday. After an enthralling first leg at the Camp Nou, the sides are level at 2-2 as Rashford carried his carve-up of Premier League defenses onto the European stage. The England international turned a 1-0 deficit into a 2-1 lead for United in a seven-minute spell in Catalonia as he smashed home at Marc-Andre ter Stegen's near post then drilled in a cross that forced Jules Kounde to turn into his own net.

Another two goals in a 3-0 win over Leicester on Sunday that pulled United into Premier League title contention took his tally for the season to an already career-best 24. But his explosion since the World Cup break is even more remarkable. No player in Europe's top five leagues comes close to the 25-year-old's 20 goal involvements, with 16 goals and four assists since returning from Qatar. "I don't feel like slowing down," said Rashford after leaving Leicester defenders trailing in his wake. "I'm always looking to push and improve."

There is also a sense of a player making up for lost time. After missing a penalty in England's Euro 2020 final heartache against Italy, Rashford badly struggled for fitness and form last season. He was not the only one to disappoint in a disastrous campaign for United. Ten Hag has transformed the mood

around Old Trafford in his first season in charge—but Rashford's return to form has been pivotal in a squad otherwise short on goals. It is also hard to ignore that his hot streak has coincided with Cristiano Ronaldo's departure from the club during the World Cup. —AFP

Today's matches on TV

UEFA Europa League	
Nantes v Juventus	20:45
beIN Sports 1 HD Premium	
FC Midtjylland v Sporting	20:45
beIN Sports HD Xtra 1	
Monaco v Bayer 04 Leverkusen	20:45
beIN Sports 3 HD Premium	
PSV Eindhoven v Sevilla	20:45
beIN Sports 2 HD Premium	
Man United v Barcelona	23:00
beIN Sports 1 HD Premium	
Stade Rennais v Shakhtar Donetsk	23:00
beIN Sports 3 HD Premium	
Union Berlin v Ajax Amsterdam	23:00
beIN Sports HD	
Roma v Red Bull Salzburg	23:00
beIN Sports 2 HD Premium	
AFC Champions League	
Al Duhail SC v Al Shabab	18:00
Abu Dhabi Sports Asia 1	
beIN Sports AFC HD	
Foolad Khuzestan v Al Hilal	21:00
Alkass Five HD	
Abu Dhabi Sports Asia 1	
beIN Sports AFC HD	

Classifieds

Change of Name

I, Syed Mahaboob Basha holder of Indian Passport number T2417304 S/o Shaik Khasimsab resident of Dno. 2-361, Sastrinagar Akkayapalli, Kadapa City YSR. District. Have changed my name as Given Name MAHABOOB BASHA surname Shaik. (C#3169)

I, Rayamarakkar Salma Muhamed Hashim father of Abdul Razak rayamarakkar Muhamed hashim Passport no. T4486251 Rayamarakkar house Elavally, Kakkassery po, Thrissur, pin:680511, Kerala have changed my son's name to Salmaan hashim Abdul Razak for all purposes. (C#3170)

I, AMATULLAH holder of Passport No. M5451208 do hereby change my name to AMATULLAH (as Given name) BURHAN VOHRA (as Surname) for all purposes. I will henceforth be known in the name AMATULLAH BURHAN VOHRA and I also undertake to carry out this name change in all my documents. (C#3171)

I, BABUDIN, holder of Indian Passport No. P3551947 having permanent address Uttar Pradesh, India, pin code 245206 residing in Kuwait at present hereby declare that henceforth my name will be read as under Given name BABUDIN and Surname SHABUDIN. (C#3172) - 23-02-2023

I HAVE CHANGE MY NAME FROM QUTBUDDIN PASSPORT NO. Z2690395 IN FUTURE I AM KNOW FROM THIS NAME QUTBUDDIN HAKANI V/P NAJAMPURA SAGWARA. (C#3166)

I, ABDUL KHADER holder of Indian Passport No. Z3284430 having permanent address Telangana India 500005, residing in Kuwait at present, hereby declare that henceforth my name will be read as under: Given name: Abdul Khader Omer and Surname: Bawazeer (C#3167) - 22-02-2023.

I, Syed Karimunnisa (old name), R/O D.No. 9-376/c/b/b/4 Jandrapeta, Rajampet (T), (M), Annamayya (DT), A.P., hereby changed my name as

Shaik Karimunnisa (new name) W/O. Shaik Mohammad Fayaz. (C#3162)

I, Mohammadi, holder of Passport No. V1970256, do hereby change my name to Mohammadi (as given name) Yusuf Ali (as Surname) for all purposes. I will henceforth be known in the name Mohammadi Yusuf Ali and I also undertake to carry out this name change in all my documents. (C#3164)

I, Burhanuddin S/o Sefuddin Kanbawala, holder of Indian Passport No. Z2816264 issued at Kuwait on 07/09/2014 & Civil ID No. 268051502446 presently residing at block no. 10, street no. 10, bldg. no. 07, flat no. 15, AlSalmiya, Kuwait has changed my name from Burhanuddin to Burhanuddin Sefuddin Kanbawala in all my dealings and documents, I will be known by name of Burhanuddin Sefuddin (given name) and Kanbawala (surname). (C#3163)

I, Taikhum Burhanuddin s/o Burhanuddin, holder of Indian Passport No. 15938801 issued at

Kuwait on 09/04/2014 & Civil ID No. 299011701039 presently residing at block no. 10, street no. 10, bldg. no. 07, flat no. 15, AlSalmiya, Kuwait has changed my name from Taikhum Burhanuddin to Taikhum Burhanuddin Kanbawala in all my dealings and documents, I will be known by name of Taikhum Burhanuddin (given name) and Kanbawala (surname). (C#3163)

I, Rizwan Muzhiml S/o Muzhiml holder of Indian Passport No. M8471852 issued at Chennai, India on 27/04/2015 and Kuwait Civil ID No. 278020704941, have changed my name, address from Rizwan S/o Muzhiml No. 8, Kottai Labbai Street, Thimiri, Arcot Vellore pin-632512, Tamil Nadu - India to as per Aadhar card No. 732351842662, Riswan Shariff s/o Muzhiml Shariff, No. 23/15, Narasoji Street walajapet Ranipet - 632513 Tamil Nadu, India in all my dealings and documents. I will be known by name of Riswan Shariff (given name) and Muzhiml Shariff (Surname). (C#3165) 21-02-2023

Villas For Rent
Exceptional villas for rent in Abu Al-Hasani & Dayia For Foreigners only...
Contact 50 66 55 77

WANTED
A home tutor to teach English to students in second and third grades (American system)
Contact 97554010

Hospitals & Clinics

Sabah Hospital	24812000
Amiri Hospital	22450005
Maternity Hospital	24843100
Mubarak Al-Kabir Hospital	25312700
Chest Hospital	24849400
Farwaniya Hospital	24892010
Adan Hospital	23940620
Ibn Sina Hospital	24840300
Al-Razi Hospital	24846000
Physiotherapy Hospital	248743309

Clinics

Kaizen center	25716707
Rawda	22517733
Adaliya	22517144
Khaldiya	24848075
Kaifan	24849807

Automated enquiry about the Civil ID card is 1889988

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



LIVERPOOL: Real Madrid's French forward Karim Benzema is mobbed by teammates after scoring the team's fifth goal during the UEFA Champions League last 16 first leg football match between Liverpool and Real Madrid on February 21, 2023. —AFP

Madrid overpower sorry Liverpool

Junior, Benzema score twice as Real produce stunning fightback

LIVERPOOL: Vinicius Junior and Karim Benzema scored twice as Real Madrid produced another stunning Champions League fightback from 2-0 down to thrash Liverpool 5-2 in the first leg of their last 16 tie at Anfield on Tuesday. Darwin Nunez and Mohamed Salah had given the hosts a perfect start in a repeat of last season's Champions League final.

But Vinicius struck twice to level by half-time and, after Eder Militao had given Carlo Ancelotti's men the lead, Benzema's double put the holders well on the way to the quarter-finals. "We suffered a lot early on, you can't start games like that, but fortunately the team had a cool head," said Madrid boss Carlo Ancelotti. "Up front today we were very efficient. Every time we broke the press of Liverpool we were able to create chances."

Defeat compounds a disastrous season for Liverpool after coming so close to an unprecedented quadruple of trophies last year. Jurgen Klopp's men are languishing in eighth in the Premier League and now appear to have no realistic chance of silverware this season. "I think Carlo thinks the tie is over and I think it is too in the moment," said Klopp. "In three weeks we will get to the game and take our chances. "We go there and try to win the game. Whether it is possible, I don't know, but we will try."

Osimhen lifts Napoli over E Frankfurt 2-0

FRANKFURT: Napoli's Nigeria striker Victor Osimhen got on the scoresheet again as the Serie A leaders beat Eintracht Frankfurt 2-0 in their Champions League last 16, first leg on Tuesday. Osimhen scored before the break as Giovanni Di Lorenzo doubled their lead after the interval before the second leg in southern Italy on March 15. Frankfurt were reduced to ten men early in the second half after a nasty challenge from striker Randal Kolo Muani found the shin of Napoli's Frank Anguissa.

The visitors doubled their lead soon afterwards when Khvicha Kvaratskhelia set up Giovanni Di Lorenzo with a superb back heel, putting Napoli on course for what would be their first ever Champions League quarter final appearance. Lozano told Sky Sport after the game that Napoli "did well against a strong side. It was tough at first, but we had a great game." Napoli manager Luciano Spalletti told Sky "we did well from the start, especially against a team that tactically know what to do. "It was an end-to-end game, which we want and thrive in... There's still the second leg - our biggest enemy is to think it's done."

Buoyed on by a home crowd celebrating the club's first venture into the Champions League knockout rounds, Frankfurt started stronger, with in-form striker Randal Kolo Muani creating a goal chance out of nothing after four minutes. With his back to goal inside the Napoli penalty area, the France forward chipped the ball over his head, turning to fire just wide of the right upright. As the opening half wore on the visitors' quality began to show, with the runaway Serie A leaders dominating possession and field position.

Mexico winger Lozano unleashed a rocket which hit the post after 34 minutes, but Frankfurt defender

start like we did but at 2-0 down I thought about the City game in last year's semi-final in the hope that we could do the same," added Ancelotti. "It turned out even better."

UEFA protest
Madrid's 1-0 victory when the sides met in Paris last May was overshadowed by chaotic scenes outside the Stade de France that put the lives of fans at risk. The Liverpool support responded by drowning out the Champions League anthem with a chorus of boos, while a series of banners in the Kop stand took aim at UEFA and the French authorities.

Once the action got underway, the players produced the spectacle expected of a clash between two clubs with a combined 20 European Cups. Liverpool briefly turned back the clock to some of their best nights under Klopp to explode out of the blocks. Nunez produced a magical finish to flick home Salah's pass inside four minutes. Madrid overcame two-goal deficits to Paris Saint-Germain and Manchester City on their road to a 14th European Cup last season and were forced to do so again by their normally solid goalkeeper Thibaut Courtois.

A loose touch from the Belgian handed Salah Liverpool's second on a plate as the Egyptian became the Reds' all-time top goalscorer in European competition with 42. But the defending champions again showed remarkable powers of recovery to turn the tie around in little over 30 minutes of play. "Obviously we didn't expect to

start like we did but at 2-0 down I thought about the City game in last year's semi-final in the hope that we could do the same," added Ancelotti. "It turned out even better."

Vinicius was the match-winner in last season's final and now has five goals in four appearances against Liverpool. The Brazilian flashed a shot into the far corner to get the comeback started on 21 minutes. Another calamitous error from one of the world's leading goalkeepers gifted Madrid an equalizer when Alisson Becker's attempted clearance bounced off Vinicius and into an unguarded net. Liverpool's leaky defence was breached again at the start of the second period as Militao was afforded a free header to turn in Luka Modric's free-kick.

Fortune was also on the side of the Spanish giants for the fourth goal as Benzema's shot deflected off Joe Gomez to leave Alisson stranded. There was nothing lucky about the visitors' fifth as a clinical team move cut Liverpool to pieces. Modric burst through midfield and fed Vinicius, who teed up Benzema to coolly round Alisson and slot into the top corner. The sides meet again on March 15, but the second leg now appears little more than a formality on a night Madrid showed why they remain the kings of Europe. —AFP



LIVERPOOL: Liverpool's Egyptian striker Mohamed Salah eyes the ball during the UEFA Champions League last 16 first leg football match between Liverpool and Real Madrid on February 21, 2023. —AFP

Liverpool trying to rebuild after Real humiliation

LIVERPOOL: A night that began with a Liverpool rebellion on and off the field ended with a chorus of "Oles" from the visiting support as Real Madrid ran riot to win the first leg of their Champions League last 16 tie 5-2. A repeat of last season's final offered the Reds the chance for revenge and to save a season to forget. Instead Liverpool's frailties were brutally exposed by the Spanish giants despite conceding twice inside the first 15 minutes.

There was an extra edge to Anfield's normal noise on a big European night. An independent investigation into the chaotic scenes surrounding the Champions League final in Paris last May has laid the blame clearly at UEFA's door for endangering the safety of supporters. The Liverpool fans were in no mood to forgive European football's governing body as the competition's anthem was booed and banners aimed at UEFA and the French authorities sprinkled over the Kop.

Jurgen Klopp's players were charged by the electric atmosphere that rocked Madrid back on their heels. The decision to invest the vast majority of Liverpool's summer transfer budget in Darwin Nunez rather than refreshing a tired midfield has been consistently questioned as the Reds have rapidly gone backwards this season.

But the £67 million (\$80 million) striker showed a flash of what he is capable of with a brilliant backheel to open the scoring before Mohamed Salah pounced on an uncharacteristic error from Thibaut Courtois to make it 2-0. There was a time when a 2-0 deficit to Klopp's Liverpool would have seemed insurmountable to even the European champions. But in 2023 alone they have shipped three goals to Brighton, Brentford and Wolves and suffered even greater punishment when faced with the razor sharp quality of Madrid in the final third.

Vinicius Junior's strike to bring Real back into the tie and Karim Benzema's cool finish to round off the scoring were moments of individual and collective brilliance from the Spanish champions. But in between times there was plenty of self-inflicted damage from Liverpool. Not for the first time this season, Alisson Becker's distribution cost his side as Vinicius charged down his Brazil teammate's clearance to equalize. —AFP



FRANKFURT: Frankfurt's German defender Philipp Max vies for the ball with Napoli's Slovakian midfielder Stanislav Lobotka and Napoli's Macedonian midfielder Eljif Elmas during the UEFA Champions League round of 16 first leg football match on February 21, 2023. —AFP

Aurelio Buta swept Osimhen's legs out from under him while trying to clear the ball inside the box. Kvaratskhelia stepped up to take the penalty but despite hitting the shot well, Frankfurt keeper Kevin Trapp leapt to his left to deflect the ball out for a corner. Frankfurt's relief was short lived however, with Napoli scoring the opener just three minutes later through Osimhen.

'Little mistakes'

The move started deep inside Napoli's own territory, when Stanislav Lobotka intercepted a tame

pass from Mario Goetze and sent the ball vertically up the right flank to a sprinting Lozano. Lozano, back in the starting XI after being rested in Serie A on the weekend, pummeled a low cross goalwards, perfectly cutting a line between Trapp and the Frankfurt defense into the feet for Osimhen to score. The Nigerian striker looked to have another just a minute later when he converted another superb Lozano pass, but the goal was ruled out for offside. After the game, Frankfurt manager Oliver Glasner lamented the "little mistakes we made that Napoli used" to take a lead into the second leg. —AFP

Kuwait economy: Resilient and buoyant

Growth momentum continues in tune with 'New Kuwait' vision

By Sajeev K Peter

Kuwait's economy has remained resilient in the face of a global slowdown following two years of the COVID-19 pandemic. Riding a wave of strong growth, it bounced back to pre-pandemic levels immediately after the country eased coronavirus-related restrictions on May 1, 2022. The government's swift and decisive responses to the COVID-19 crisis and strong vaccination efforts have helped the economy recover sharply from the pandemic-induced slowdown.

This acceleration in growth momentum is in tandem with Kuwait's 2035 vision that aims at transforming Kuwait into a financial and trade hub regionally and internationally, making it more attractive to investors. The development plan, formulated under the guidance and patronage of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, also envisages a more crucial role for Kuwait's private sector in driving growth, creating competition and promoting production efficiency.

According to the International Monetary Fund, Kuwait's overall real GDP growth is estimated to have rebounded from -8.9 percent in 2020 to 1.3 percent in 2021. It was projected to further climb to above 8 percent in 2022, supported by rising oil production, high oil prices and sustained improvement in domestic demand. Although IMF estimated that growth is likely to moderate in 2023, in view of slowing external demand and oil production cuts under the OPEC+ agreement, the country's economy is forecast to maintain its growth momentum through 2023.

The authorities have successfully contained inflation and checked the direct adverse spillovers from supply chain disruptions resulting from Russia's war in Ukraine. The country's overall fis-



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah



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

cal and current account surpluses also have improved significantly from last year, thanks to higher oil prices and increased oil output.

The IMF said in a recent report that in 2023, Kuwait's production will increase more modestly. It has estimated a 2 percent GDP growth in the oil and gas sector, leaving the non-oil sector to drive headline GDP growth. Kuwait currently produces more than 2.8 million barrels of oil per day. Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) has announced its plan to increase oil production capacity to 4.75 million barrels per day (mmb/d) by 2040. In addition, KPC has announced intentions to increase natural gas production to 4 billion cubic feet per day by 2030. However, future production increases will depend on actual implementation of several upstream projects, including the development of heavy oil capacity of 60,000 barrels per day.

CBK's prudent policies

The Central Bank of Kuwait's prudent oversight and proactive monitoring of

financial risks have helped Kuwait's banking system weather the pandemic shock. Kuwaiti banks remain well-capitalized and liquid while their financial soundness indicators are healthy and private sector credit growth remains strong. According to KPMG, Kuwait's banking industry bounced back to growth in 2021 after the COVID-19-induced slowdown, reaching record highs in terms of net profit and return on equity (RoE). Propelling this remarkable comeback was a combination of support from the government and well-timed enterprising measures that helped the sector brave the odds and come out robust and resilient.

Infrastructure projects

Overhauling infrastructure is a key pillar of 'New Kuwait' 2035 vision. Kuwait, currently seeking to secure a position in the top 35 countries in the world by 2035 in all development indicators, has resumed work on key infrastructure projects after a lull of over two years. Rising oil prices have also added much-needed impetus to the country's drive to put

infrastructure projects back on track. According to recent reports, these major projects include 14 public sector developments with a total value of approximately \$59 billion and four partnership projects worth nearly \$3.2 billion.

The projects comprise mainly the airport expansion, Silk City, island development, trans-Kuwait rail network and rail link with nearby Gulf countries, Mutlaa City and the Clean Fuel Project. The country has currently over 700 active projects with a combined value of \$230 billion. Once completed, these mega projects - 20 percent of them are near completion - will catapult the country into a modern city-state, bringing about a radical transition to its information and communication technology (ICT), transportation, logistics, trade and power generation and transmission sectors.

Aviation sector

Kuwait International Airport is currently witnessing a series of path-breaking developments, in addition to a number of future projects to modernize the infrastructure of the aviation sector in the country. With the opening of Terminal 4 at Kuwait International Airport as part of the first phase, Kuwait's aviation industry marked a significant milestone in its history. Today, in the post-COVID era, Kuwait has the top priority to speed up its 'New Kuwait' development projects, focusing on diversification and structural reforms.

Digital transformation

Digital transformation is another key pillar for Kuwait's 2035 vision, and the country is focusing on adopting smart and digital technologies to innovate services, drive the economy and improve quality of life. According to GlobalData, the country's ICT market is expected to reach \$10 billion by 2024 and the country's digital information strategy is pushing greater investment in Kuwait's ICT market and enhancing operational effi-

ciency and performance of key sectors.

The ICT goal also aims to push the country's plan to transform it into a digital society and economy by improving government performance through digital transformation and building a robust cyber security infrastructure to prevent attacks and protect digital assets.

Renewable energy

Kuwait is on track to meet 15 percent of its energy requirements from renewable energy sources by 2030 as part of its New Kuwait 2035 strategy. Realizing the fact that renewable energy is the way forward, Kuwait like its GCC counterparts is also executing a number of green projects like Shagaya Renewable Energy Park and Al-Dibdibah photovoltaic (PV) solar project, among others. "Many other sectors have also been contributing to the 'New Kuwait' vision 2035 to use renewable energy while producing energy, and solar and wind power have become a tangible reality," an official working for Shagaya project points out.

Currently, the country is reliant on fossil fuels for energy generation and water desalination. According to the ministry of electricity and water, by 2030 Kuwait's energy demand will triple and the ministry estimates that the amount of fossil fuel available to generate energy in Kuwait is not enough to maintain the country's current rate of social and economic growth.

Importantly, Kuwait Institute for Scientific Research (KISR) has initiated energy efficiency and energy management programs to help alleviate Kuwait's mounting energy challenge. Since 1980s, KISR has explored the potential of capturing energy by alternative means, pioneering research in concentrated solar thermal technologies as well as photovoltaic panels. The RET Program is continuing this tradition, leading the nation's efforts to find the renewable energy solutions most appropriate for the unique climate conditions of Kuwait.

Love beyond borders: Kuwaitis abroad join national celebrations

By Nebal Snan

Growing up, Abdulaziz Hamad didn't fully grasp the meaning behind celebrating Kuwait's national days beyond the festive family gatherings and the decorations adorning the streets. But that soon changed when he moved abroad to study. "It means so much to me now. It's a way for me to reconnect with my roots. It's also obviously very important for us to remember Kuwait's history and what our ancestors went through to build the country," he told Kuwait Times.

Since then, Hamad, who is based in Canada, makes it a point to mark the National and Liberation Days with friends every year. But it can be difficult to enjoy the holidays, which fall on Feb 25-26, away from home. While the occasion is widely celebrated with a variety of events that span the month of February in Kuwait, Hamad and his friends don't have many options. Still, they go all out - from dressing in traditional clothes to decorating with flags and Kuwait's national colors.

Authentic cuisines

"It's a lot about community, really. My friends and I come together on this day and share a national dish. This year, I'm making machboos for everyone," he said. "Sometimes, we invite our non-Kuwaiti friends over and share our food, and usually they're really impressed. It's interesting because we grew up with this food: I feel we really don't appreciate the depth of flavor that's in our cuisine. Something as simple as the taste of cardamom and saffron could really blow some people's minds away."

Fatmah Taqi, a pharmacy student at the Royal College of Surgeons in Dublin, also shares the holiday with her Irish friends and other international students whenever possible. She tells them about the history and culture of Kuwait and offers them traditional food and souvenirs. Although she hasn't been able to celebrate the holidays in Kuwait since 2018, Taqi tries her best to participate with other Kuwaiti students in the celebratory event held by the Kuwaiti Medical Sciences Students Association in Ireland (KMSSAI).

"Although these festivities can relieve some of the homesickness feelings, they are certainly not enough for me," she said. Through the sadness and longing, Taqi reminisces about the happy memories of celebrating with friends and family. "I really feel nostalgic, (and) my feelings are mixed up. I remembered the way I was celebrating with my family; that we used to gather and watch the fireworks (and) parade beside the sea," she said. "I really miss being in Kuwait during this special day surrounded by my loved ones, but I will get over it and make my country proud of me one day."

For Zainab Abbas, who is based in the United States, the national holidays are one of her favorite celebrations in Kuwait. "I love seeing people every-



Fatmah Taqi



Zainab Abbas, who is based in the US, said she's dressing up with clothes representing Kuwait and calling her family on the occasion.



Abdulaziz Hamad gathers with his friends over food to mark the national holidays. Pictured is the Machboos he prepared for the occasion.

where we go celebrating, kids having fun even through the chaos they bring with their water balloons and how the people who have lived through the liberation start reminiscing on the events of that time and retell us the stories," she told Kuwait Times.

Music and festivities

While she's heartbroken to be missing the festivities at home for the second year in a row, she plans to celebrate big this year. Abbas and her friends will "dress up with anything that represents Kuwait, call (their) families and put on Kuwaiti national songs". A favorite of hers is "Ya Bilady" by Nabeel Shuail.

The songs are a must-have for Hamad as well. While Hamad is always on the lookout for new releases, Abdul Kareem Abdul Qader's Watan Al-Nahar is the closest to his heart. "It really conveys the emotions people felt at the time," he said. "In February if you're riding in my car, you're definitely listening to national songs."

Taqi, Hamad and Abbas wished Kuwait prosperity and peace on the occasion. "I wish that Kuwait will rise from all the darkness it's under (and) undergo a liberation of everything that is wrong with the country. Kuwait has so much potential and this new generation can help it fulfil this potential to the largest extent, but we need to set our priorities straight and fight for our country," said Abbas.

25 & 26 February

عيد وطني وتحرير سعيد الكويت

HAPPY NATIONAL AND LIBERATION DAY KUWAIT





الأصاري للصرافة

AL ANSARI EXCHANGE

Call Center +965 22260433 www.alansariexchange.com.kw

Follow     

Diwaniyas: A fascinating cultural tradition

Unique custom maintains its identity despite social media impacts

By Ghadeer Ghloom

Gathering at diwaniyas is a remarkable tradition that continues to occupy an essential part of the lifestyle and culture in Kuwait. A diwaniya is a reception area that is either near or inside the owner's house, where patriarchs gather to discuss various issues such as politics, economy and society. Such issues are mostly discussed in formal diwaniyas, which open in the middle of the week, usually on Mondays and Tuesdays. During the weekends, patriarchs gather at informal diwaniyas for entertainment and light communication.

Unlike any other local gathering, an invitation is not necessary for guests to visit the diwaniya. Anyone is welcomed to visit the diwaniya as long as they adhere to the norms of Kuwaiti culture in terms of dressing and behavior that shows respect to all the attendees. Through such traditions, the Kuwaiti culture maintains its unique identity despite the onset of social media and other manifestations of modernization that might have an effect on such old traditions.

A brief history of diwaniyas

Chairman of Kuwait Heritage Society Fahad Ghazi Al-Abduljaleel said diwaniyas have been connected to Kuwait's culture and society ever since Kuwait was founded in the 17th century. In the past, rulers of the state, notables and locals used to exchange visits to each other's diwaniyas and discuss political issues of the state. The economy used to be discussed too. The al-nokhatha (sea captain) went to the diwaniya whenever he needed to pick a boat or a team to sail with, especially since the sea was the main source of the state's finances. Businessmen also used to meet at the diwaniya for finalizing business deals.

In addition, diwaniyas had an impact on culture and arts, as they used to gather poets and writers, which resulted in building the first formal school in Kuwait. "Al-Mubarakiya School was founded in December 1911. The idea of creating this school was born in Yousef Eissa Al-Qinae's diwaniya during the commemoration of the Prophet's (PBUH) birthday, where Sayed Yaseen Al-Tabtabaei was talking about the importance of education. Consequently, Yousef bin Eissa decided to build this school with the support of businessmen in Kuwait," Abduljaleel told Kuwait Times.

Like in the past, the diwaniya remains an essential



The diwaniya...center for Kuwaiti social life.— KUNA



Host of formal diwaniya Dr Fahad Al-Basri (left)

part of Kuwaitis' social life today. According to Abduljaleel, during Ramadan and Eid and also during marriage and death ceremonies, Kuwaitis still visit each other's diwaniyas. "Compared to other traditions that have been negatively affected by social media, diwaniyas are the least impacted. I see social media attracts more people to the diwaniya today, because circulating an announcement about events at diwaniyas has become easier, while in the past, it was slower and limited," Abduljaleel said.

Depending on the preference of the host, each diwaniya has a system. Some diwaniyas are open daily, while others weekly. The host announces the date and time his diwaniya is open and everyone is welcomed accordingly. Dr Fahad Al-Basri is a Kuwaiti who has been hosting guests at his weekly formal diwaniya since the early 2000s in Jabriya. Diwaniyas are usually named after the host's surname; however, some hosts name their diwaniyas differently. For instance, Basri's diwaniya is called "Mujamaa Abnaa Al-Jabriya" meaning "gathering of Jabriya residents." It is also known as Diwan Al-Basri among locals.

This type of diwaniya is usually visited by politi-



Chairman of Kuwait Heritage Society Fahad Ghazi Al-Abduljaleel

cal figures, such as the National Assembly speaker and other members of parliament to discuss political affairs involving Kuwait, and giving them an opportunity to nominate themselves among the residents of the area during elections. According to Abduljaleel, such important meetings used to be announced in the past through newspapers, since they were the only source of information for people in the past. Today, hosts like Basri no longer need to go through the previous slow process and send an announcement ahead of time with regards to events or opening times of the diwaniya. Not only politics are the focus of such diwaniyas, as entertainment is also part of this tradition. Basri said: "Multiple activities are organized for residents and regular guests, such as planting saplings, playing games and other activities that are specific to the holy month of Ramadan." He also highlighted the diwaniyas' role in emergency situations. Basri said during the pandemic, diwaniyas took part in distributing essential medical equipment to locals, which highlights citizens' role in uniting and participating for the sake of supporting Kuwait at various levels. Again, social media continues to ease the speed of announcing such activities, which helps both the host and the guests to communicate.

Pros and cons

Mohammad Al-Ansari, a Kuwaiti youth who follows the tradition of visiting diwaniyas on a regular basis, sees the impact of social media as a double-edged sword. On one hand, Ansari said social media

has allowed for greater exchange of ideas and diverse perspectives. People can now connect with others outside of their immediate social circles and engage with a wider range of opinions and experiences. However, social media often causes the spread of misinformation. This can negatively impact the quality of discussions at diwaniyas and can undermine the credibility of the gatherings.

"It's great that we have access to all these different perspectives and opinions, but we need to be mindful of the role that social media plays in these gatherings to ensure that diwaniyas continue to provide a valuable space for discussion, debate, social connection, and most importantly, having fun," he said.

Hasan Mohammad, an elder Kuwaiti, has experienced attending diwaniyas before and after the spread of social media. He said the diwaniya is no longer limited to discussing local news and community events. It is now discussing wider concepts, because social media has introduced people to the entire world. Despite that, verbal communication has reduced due to social media, because people no longer elaborate a lot about the topic or news that is being discussed.

Nowadays, guests only mention headlines of whatever topic they want to point out, because all the news is available on everyone's devices. People basically send the news to each other via social media apps rather than explaining verbally, which reduces the quality of socializing and communicating, which is the main reason behind attending diwaniyas.

Ramadan traditions of Kuwait

By Shakir Reshamwala

Around the world, Ramadan is a time of piety and prayers, fasting and feasting, and spending time with family and friends. But as is often the case, every nation and community develops a set of traditions and customs over the ages that come to symbolize the culture of the land. Kuwait too has its own unique Ramadan traditions that have been observed by generations of locals and residents of this country, and are a source of comfort and belonging.

But Kuwait's rapid transformation from a sleepy fishing and pearl diving backwater to an affluent, modern state also turned many local traditions on their head, while some quietly disappeared. Daq al-harees (crushing of wheat) was a pre-Ramadan tradition in old Kuwait, where a family bought large amounts of wheat that was crushed by skilled women accompanied by folk singing, but the custom now has waned.

The Abu Tubailah no longer walks the streets of the neighborhood with his drum to wake people up for suhoor (predawn meal), and has retired to become a cultural figure. And after iftar (breaking of the fast), people nowadays prefer to spend their time watching big-budget soap operas on TV or head to malls and coffee shops rather than stay at home with the family.

Nevertheless, a few of Kuwait's rich traditions of Ramadan have stood the passage of time, continuously evolving to reflect changing social, financial and familial developments.

Graish

Graish is the traditional pre-Ramadan feast when family members and even neighbors gather before the onset of the fasting month. In the olden days, the women of the house would empty the larders of their homes of foods that are not usually eaten in Ramadan, and extended families would gather to partake in the pollock. These days the food is usually ordered from restaurants and the gatherings are smaller, but the tradition continues.

Girgian

Among Kuwaiti Ramadan traditions, Girgian is one that is the most popular, and the most evolved. Girgian is marked on the 13th, 14th and 15th of Ramadan, when children go 'trick or treating' to collect candies and nuts door to door. There's a reason why Girgian is celebrated in the middle of the lunar month. In pre-oil - and pre-electricity Kuwait - the full moon would provide illumination for the children to trudge across the neighborhood.

According to late Kuwaiti historian and astronomer Saleh Al-Ojairi, the word Girgian is derived from the word garga, which refers to the loud clanging sound heard when a household pot made of metal is struck. Today, Girgian has become thoroughly commercialized, with the simple confectionery of yore replaced by gourmet chocolates and exotic nuts housed in brand-name bags and pouches that are often more expensive than their contents. Parents also make separate bags with the names of their children printed on them, and try to outdo other families in coming up with the most exclusive presentations.

Ghabqa

A ghabqa is a gathering of family and friends in the evenings of Ramadan. Like Girgian, ghabqas today are lavish corporate affairs where companies invite clients and employees along with their families for a night of fun and feasting, with the media in attendance too.

Iftar cannon

In this modern, technological era of precision time-keeping, astronomical calculations and even mobile apps, the iftar cannon is an unlikely survivor of the bygone era, when the sound of the blast signaled to the faithful it was time to break their fast. The 'midfa al iftar' takes place every day at the beautifully restored Naif Palace in Kuwait City. The firing of the cannon attracts dozens of families and children daily, and is broadcast live on Kuwait TV and radio. The open yard in the palace where the ceremony takes place is set up to resemble pre-oil Kuwait, complete with vintage cars, artisans and children in traditional garb. The firing is conducted by three uniformed guards in red livery.

Qiyam al-layl

In line with the trend across the Arab and Islamic world, the Kuwaiti society has become more conservative and religious. Though not a social tradition, congregation tahajjud prayers during the last ten nights of Ramadan are observed in most mosques across the state.

But the popularity of qiyam al-layl prayers has skyrocketed, with the Grand Mosque leading the renaissance. Thousands attend the nightly prayers daily, with well over 100,000 worshippers converging on Kuwait's largest mosque on the night of 27th Ramadan. The best reciters of the Holy Quran lead the prayers.

As they say, the only thing constant in this world is change, and Ramadan traditions are no exception. Some customs may have died, but the spirit of this holy month is alive and thriving.

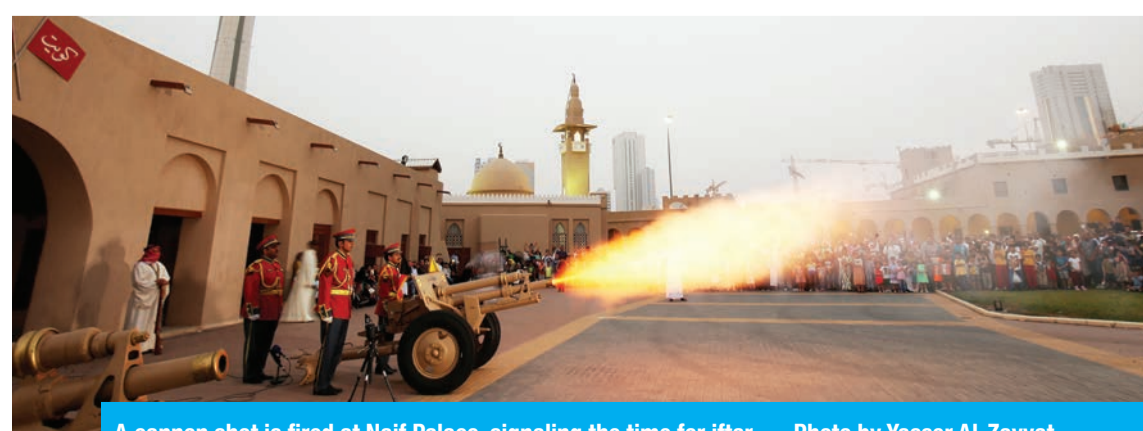
TOYO TIRES

HAPPY NATIONAL DAY & LIBERATION DAY KUWAIT

At TOYO TIRES we just love tires. If you love the ride, come with us... Open Roads Await

ALMAILEM TIRES  اطرارات المييم

Tel.: 188 4737 - www.almailemgroup.com - Follow us    @almailemgroup



A cannon shot is fired at Naif Palace, signaling the time for iftar. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

'We lived in pain': Kuwaiti POW narrates his harrowing ordeal



Life of Kuwaiti prisoners of war in Iraqi jail. — Photographs provided by Colonel Nasser Salmeen.



Kuwaiti POWs hang clothes in captivity.

By Faten Omar

The liberation of Kuwait from the Iraqi invasion in 1991 was a significant event for citizens and the Middle East. It was seen as a major victory for the coalition and a decisive defeat for Iraq. While everyone was celebrating, Kuwaiti prisoners of war in Iraq were waiting to leave the nightmare of the invasion behind. Kuwait Times spoke with former Kuwaiti POW Retired Staff Colonel Nasser Salmeen, who shared his experience as a prisoner during the Iraqi invasion.



Retired Colonel Nasser Salmeen

Kuwait Times: How long were you in captivity?

Salmeen: I was captured on the first day of the Iraqi invasion, and was imprisoned for 238 days. The prisoners reached the Iraqi prison on Aug 3, 1990 and were released on March 27, 1991.

KT: Were you hopeful to return to Kuwait when you were in prison?

Salmeen: Hope was always with us. We believed that God will not abandon us. But of course, the pain and strength vary from person to person. But I think everyone was united in their belief that Kuwait will be liberated.

KT: What was it like in the Iraqi prison?

Salmeen: The period of imprisonment was very painful. We lived in pain and in a bad psychological state, which changed us in many ways. The most important thing for many of us was holding on until we returned home. With everything we did at the



detention centers and prisons, we got closer to God because we were moving from prison to prison, but we were patient and endured severe psychological pain until we reached the liberation day of Kuwait.

KT: Tell us more about Kuwait's liberation period.

Salmeen: We received the news of the liberation of Kuwait when we were in Baquba jail. We heard the news on the radio we smuggled into the jail during family visits. It was very difficult to hide it from Iraqi soldiers during inspection and counting. On Feb 26, we heard US President George Bush's speech announcing that Kuwait was liberated with the words

"Free Kuwait". It was a historic moment and an indescribable feeling.

KT: When did you return to Kuwait?

Salmeen: We returned to Kuwait with the Red Cross on March 27, 1991. We heard on the night of the 26th that we would be transferred to the Iraqi-Saudi border. At the border, we were received by a delegation of senior army and police officers headed by Sheikh Ahmad Al-Hamoud. I felt for the first time that I was really free when I saw the Saudi flag flying over the center. I was reborn. The prisoner is born twice, on the day of actual birth and the day of his freedom.

KT: How did your family receive you?

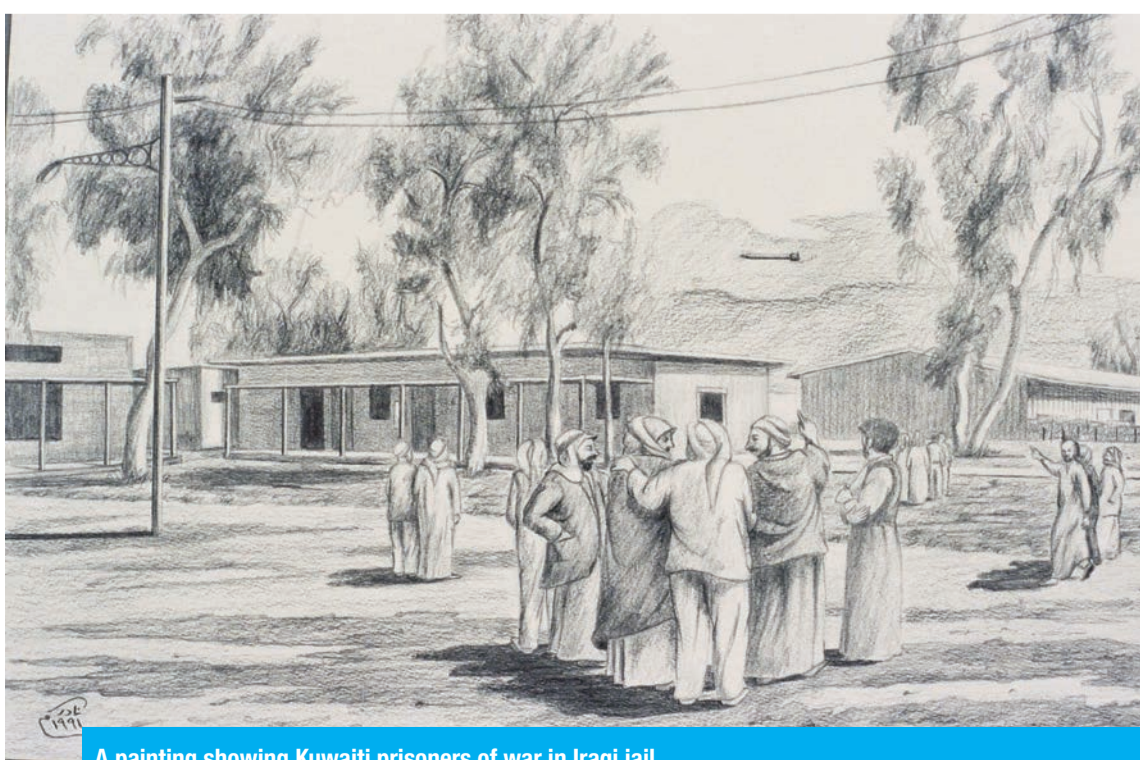
Salmeen: My family, like all families, was waiting for me at Shaikhan Al-Farsi Hall in Surra. They were waiting for the fifth batch of liberated officers. My wife, Um Badr, came with my children and her



brother to welcome me. I was on the last plane from Saudi Arabia to Kuwait. During the landing, we saw Kuwait covered in black due to the burning oilwells. When the plane landed, I was so thankful that I prayed and kissed the ground. I went home to Qadsiya and knocked on the door, but no one answered. I wondered where my wife and children were, and was worried something might have happened to my family. I was so tired that I sat on the stairs of the house and fell asleep. I woke up to the voice of my children. (It was a) feeling that I cannot forget - happiness mixed with tears of joy.

KT: Did spending time in Iraqi prison affect your mental health?

Salmeen: The period in which I was detained was a harsh period for all of us, especially for the prisoners. We had nightmares and were in a bad psychological state, even after being released. When I was sleeping at home with my family, I was afraid to open my eyes. My children would think that I was asleep but I was actually too afraid to open my eyes. I was afraid that I would open my eyes and find myself in prison in Iraq again and that everything that's happened since had been a dream. Having my children around helped me through my painful psychological state. But sometimes when I sit with myself, memories come back to me and I remember the days of torture and interrogations as a prisoner of war in Iraq.



A painting showing Kuwaiti prisoners of war in Iraqi jail.

مصنع القرين
 HAPPY NATIONAL DAY
KUWAIT
 FEBRUARY 25

With the advent of The National and Liberation day
 We're honored to congratulate the leadership and citizen of
 State of Kuwait

Wishing more prosperity and success for this
 blessed Country

AlQurain Factory
 For Alternative of Marble and Wood

عز وفخر



Liberation bolstered US-Kuwait ties

US Army official recalls crucial role of 'Operation Desert Storm' to liberate Kuwait

By Majd Othman

On August 2, 1990, Kuwait woke up to a terrifying invasion by Iraq, which caused a major shock on the international and local levels. In a couple of hours, the country was under brutal occupation. While the invasion aimed to annex Kuwait to Iraq, with Saddam Hussein claiming it as one of Iraq's governorates, the main reason behind this invasion was the important resources Kuwait has - oil or so-called black gold.



Claudia LaMantia

For seven months, Kuwaitis and residents lived in severe conditions, and only with a great resistance, in addition to the role of allied countries, most importantly the United States, Kuwait was liberated on February 26, 1991. Kuwait Times spoke to Public Affairs Officer of the US Army (ASG-Kuwait) Claudia LaMantia to discuss with her the role of the US military during 'Operation Desert Storm' to liberate Kuwait, which strengthened the relationship between the US and Kuwait since that day.

"The mission was simple - it was about pushing the Iraqis back to their country and repel them from Kuwait. That looked very easy, it wasn't. Great cooperative work was done between all allied countries. The US military's cooperative work to support Kuwait started from the army, marine corps, navy and the air force. The coordination was filled with a lot of planning, as we divided back then into two groups, Desert Shield and Desert Storm. Operation Desert Shield's main role was to build up; bringing everyone here and making sure everybody had lanes they were going to," LaMantia said.

She explained the US navy played an important role in providing logistical support, which was "a lot", pointing out that it was "the biggest movement of forces we had in US since the Second World War". "This was due to former US president George HW Bush, who stressed on the importance of our mission to succeed and repel the Iraqi army back to their country," she said.



In this Feb 27, 1991 file photo, members of Task Force Ripper of the First Marine Division ride a Humvee under a "Welcome to Kuwait" sign at the entrance to Kuwait City's International Airport.



In this Feb 27, 1991 file photo, an American Special Forces soldier is mobbed by jubilant Kuwait City residents as the city was liberated from Iraqi forces.



In this Nov 22, 1990 file photo, US President George Bush poses with soldiers during a stop at an airbase in Dhahran, Saudi Arabia.

Brutal invasion

LaMantia said despite the short period of the occupation of Kuwait from a military point of view, it was a brutal invasion. "Several witnesses stories revealed the violence against citizens back then, starting from killing them indiscriminately and very cruelly, hanging some people, chopping them, hanging them in the streets and even taking them away

from their families to Iraq and killing them there," she said, "not to mention stealing household items and causing people a huge financial crisis as a result."

LaMantia explained the Iraqi army's retreat. "The Iraqi army was considered back then among the top seven armies, and the US mission wasn't that easy to push them back to their country. But the Iraqi army struggled with challenges - their logistical support

was not strong enough, as the army could not fight more than three days without drinking or eating, and it wasn't surprising they did not put up more of a fight and decided to retreat," she told Kuwait Times. "In addition, it is hard to fight for something you don't believe in. It is also hard to believe and fight for something if you are not provided with basic needs, such as food and water in this case."

After the invasion

LaMantia spoke about the time people started to visit Kuwait after the invasion, and explained her experience at that time. "When I arrived in Kuwait, I remember I visited the National Museum and was amazed with the artwork done by Kuwaiti prisoners in Iraq who came back to Kuwait, as they described what they had witnessed and gone through during the invasion and being tortured in prison. They were sad paintings, calling on other prisoners to come back to Kuwait. I also visited houses where fighting and resistance happened, not to mention Kuwaitis who were killed there. Despite the overwhelming forces, they fought for their country," she recalled.

"After the invasion and Desert Storm, the relationship between both countries developed and there was more cooperative work, as well as the establishment of Doha Military Camp that played an important role during the invasion of Kuwait" LaMantia said.

Regional Player with Global Vision

HAPPY

NATIONAL & LIBERATION DAY

KUWAIT

25-26

National Day
Liberation Day

Services We Offer

Shipping Services
Port Agents, Liner Agents, NVOCC, Oil Tankers, Offshore Agency, Survey Ship/Store Supplies & Crew changes

Logistics Services
Air Freight, Sea Freight, Overland Trucking, De-consolidation, Customs Brokerage & Project Logistics

Warehousing & Distribution
Complete 3PL Solutions, SCM & Distribution Services Across Kuwait

Why Choose Us?

One Stop Solution for all your Shipping & Logistics requirements

With a brand name synonymous with best quality shipping services, Al-Rashed International Shipping Co. is Kuwait's premier shipping company specialized in shipping, LCL, FCL, breakbulk, freight forwarding, RORO, projects, with a worldwide network and proven expertise in delivering the client requirements

IAS IAS IAS IAS

+965 2291 2800 / 2291 2801
kuwait@al-rashedgroup.com
Al-Rashed Complex, 9th Floor, Fahad Al Salem Street
Kuwait City, P.O. Box 20241, Safat 13063, Kuwait

Get In Touch
www.al-rashedgroup.com

GLOBAL FOR ADVERTISING

25th 26th February

On those special days let us take a moment to appreciate our beloved country and the opportunities we have to shape its destiny

May Kuwait's future be full of success, peace and prosperity

Happy National & Liberation Day to State of Kuwait

Ad Zone Global for Advertising Co

عز و فخر