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Kuwait enters election silence ahead of crucial Assembly polls

Prosecution detains several candidates, voters over vote buying

By B Izzak & Agencies

KUWAIT: As Kuwait prepares for its third parliamentary elections in less than 30 months as a result of a high level of political divisions, campaigns enter into election silence on Monday, a day before the crucial June 6 snap polls. Under regulations by the information ministry, interviews, statements or campaigns by candidates are totally banned until ballots close late in the evening on Tuesday and counting of votes starts.

The public prosecution has been extremely busy in the past few days after the interior ministry busted several vote-buying networks including brokers, candidates and voters who agreed to receive a sum of money to vote for a certain candidate. In a series of decisions, the public prosecution has ordered the arrest of a former MP who is contesting the election in the second constituency after a female citizen was caught trying to buy votes in his favor.

The prosecution also ordered the arrest of four more candidates, including two former MPs, on suspicion of

buying votes. The candidates are running for seats in the first, second and fourth constituencies. In a third decision, the public prosecution ordered the detention of a candidate and five voters and ordered the arrest of a number of former MPs and dozens of voters on charges of buying votes.

Earlier, the prosecution freed on KD 1,000 bail two candidates, including a former MP, running in the fifth constituency, in addition to four voters, but detained a Pakistani for 21 days for vote-buying activities. The prosecution had in the past few days made similar decisions regarding other candidates accused of being involved in vote buying.

Meanwhile, the nationality department at the interior ministry said on Sunday that producing the original citizenship ID is essential to be able to vote. It said it will remain open on election day to issue new citizenship IDs to voters who have lost their IDs. Campaigning continued to focus on a lack of political stability in the country as voters head to express their second franchise in just eight months.

Fearing that widespread skepticism will discourage many people from voting, the authorities have festooned the capital with posters in an attempt to encourage a better turnout. "We have to wake up and face up to this great frustration," activist and university professor Sheikha Al-Jassem told AFP of the political crisis.

In Tuesday's vote, 207 candidates, including 13 women, are standing, the lowest number of candidates in a legislative election since 1996. Jassem has herself stood for election in the past, but will no longer do so under a current stalemate she attributes to the lack of voter lists and political parties being banned. "Political life needs to be better organized," she said. "Everyone acts too individually. Our commitment is superficial and our democracy incomplete."

Kuwaiti analyst Ayed Al-Manaa told AFP the people have a "lack of confidence" in the political class. "Kuwaitis are tired" by the situation, he said, adding that he feared the latest election would again result in a scenario in which the government resigns and parliament is dissolved.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Taikonauts return to Earth

BEIJING: Three Chinese astronauts working at the country's space station have returned safely to Earth, state media reported Sunday, hailing the mission as a "complete success". The return capsule of the Shenzhou-15 spaceship touched down at a landing site in northern China's Inner Mongolia region. Taikonauts Fei Junlong, Deng Qingming and Zhang Lu emerged from the capsule in "good physical condition", Xinhua reported. The trio had spent six months at the Tiangong space station. Footage showed medical officials in white jumpsuits and face masks swaddling the astronauts in blue blankets and carrying them away from the arid landing site, where the copper-colored capsule lay flanked by red flags. — AFP

Kerry meets head of COP28

DUBAI: US special climate envoy John Kerry has met senior Emirati officials in Abu Dhabi, including the head of the United Nations' upcoming COP28 climate change conference, official media reported Sunday. Kerry met Sultan Al-Jaber and the UAE Foreign Minister Abdullah bin Zayed on Saturday, discussing "the existing partnership across various fronts with a special emphasis on climate-related issues", the official WAM news agency said. — AFP

Suez Canal traffic resumes

ISMAILIA, Egypt: Egypt deployed three tugboats Sunday to tow away an oil tanker that had broken down and caused brief delays in the Suez Canal, authorities in charge of the vital waterway said. Traffic in both directions returned to normal after a brief disruption when the Malta-flagged Seavigour experienced a "machinery malfunction" while en route from Russia to China, the Suez Canal Authority said. Three tugboats "successfully towed and moored the ship" at a shipyard where the technical fault will be fixed before the tanker "resumes its crossing", according to a statement. — AFP

Kuwait, Manila seek to resolve labor issues

KUWAIT: Informed sources said the Philippine visa ban issue will be resolved before the end of the year, adding that recent communications took place between

the two countries and it was agreed that a meeting will be held between the two sides to sign a new labor agreement that satisfies both sides.

Sources said Philippines will not object to Kuwait conditions to not open new shelters for absconding workers, cancel the high financial deposits imposed on Kuwaiti labor offices and undertake to respect Kuwaiti laws, provided that Kuwait will have a clear workplan on how to guarantee

Philippine domestic workers' rights in case disputes occur between them and their employers and how to protect them in case they refuse to work for their sponsors.

The sources said Manila wants to decide on certain points that must be agreed on, on how to provide Filipino domestic workers their rights, working hours and salaries, adding Kuwait does not see these matters as obstacles, provided salaries are not inflated. The

sources said Kuwait and Philippines may hold a meeting within two months to reach a new labor agreement.

Kuwait suspended all types of work and entry visas for Filipinos in May after the country allegedly violated a bilateral labor agreement with the state. In February, the Philippines halted the deployment of first-time workers, especially domestic helpers, to Kuwait following the gruesome murder of a 35-year-old Filipina maid by a Kuwaiti teenager.

Saudi announces fresh output cut to boost oil price

VIENNA: Riyadh on Sunday announced it would slash output further by one million barrels per day in a bid to prop up prices, despite fears of a recession. The announcement came following a meeting of the 13-member Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) headed by Saudi Arabia and its 10 partners, led by Russia. The cut is for July but "can be extended", Saudi Energy Minister Prince

Abdulaziz bin Salman told reporters.

It is a "voluntary" cut announced after the in-person hours-long OPEC+ meeting at the group's headquarters in Vienna, which saw some tough negotiations. Analysts had largely expected OPEC+ producers to maintain their current policy, but signs emerged this weekend that the 23 countries may make deeper cuts. Kuwait will continue its voluntary oil output reduction by 128,000 bpd until the end of 2024, Finance Minister Manaf Al-Hajeri said.

In April, several OPEC+ members agreed to cut production voluntarily by more than one million bpd — a surprise move that briefly buttressed prices but failed to bring about lasting recovery. Bloomberg news agency reported a fight with the grouping's

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VIENNA: Kuwaiti Finance Minister Manaf Al-Hajeri arrives for the 35th OPEC and non-OPEC ministerial meeting on June 4, 2023. — AFP

Sudan battles rage as US, Saudi urge new truce

KHARTOUM: The United States and Saudi Arabia on Sunday made a renewed push for truce talks between Sudan's warring generals as deadly fighting has raged into its eighth week.

Multiple ceasefires have been agreed and broken, and Washington slapped sanctions on the two warring generals last week, blaming both sides for the "appalling" bloodshed.

Envoys of Sudan's regular army and paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF) have remained in the Saudi coastal city of Jeddah despite the earlier collapse of ceasefire talks, the kingdom's foreign ministry said. The foreign mediators called for "the parties to agree to and effectively imple-

ment a new ceasefire, with the aim of building to a permanent cessation of hostilities", Riyadh said.

A five-day extension of a US- and Saudi-brokered truce formally expired on Saturday with no signs of the conflict abating and fears that the rival sides were poised for an escalation. Upwards of 1,800 people have been killed, according to the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project, and the UN says 1.2 million have been displaced with more than

425,000 fleeing abroad. The RSF on Sunday claimed it had shot down a fighter jet after the army "launched an audacious airborne assault upon our forces' positions" in northern Khartoum. A military source told AFP a Chinese-made jet crashed near Wadi Seidna base north of Khartoum because of a "technical malfunction". Witnesses said they saw an aircraft travelling from the south to the north of the capital with flames

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Syria FM talks aid on visit to key ally Iraq

BAGHDAD: Syria's foreign minister on Sunday discussed humanitarian aid and combating the illegal drugs trade with key ally Iraq during a visit to Baghdad as Damascus emerges from years of diplomatic isolation. The visit by Faisal Mekdad comes weeks after the Arab League agreed to end Syria's suspension from the 22-member bloc, bringing President Bashar Al-Assad's regime back into the regional fold after years of civil war.

Iraq remained an ally of Damascus throughout the wider Arab boycott, never severing relations and maintaining close cooperation during Syria's civil war, particularly over the fight against the Islamic State group. During the visit, Mekdad met with Prime Minister Mohamed Shia al-Sudani and conveyed "an invitation to visit Damascus" on an unspecified date, a statement from the Iraqi premier's office said.

Baghdad was "one of the initiators" of Syria's return to the Arab League, Iraqi Foreign Minister Fuad Hussein said in a joint press conference with Mekdad. The two also discussed the issue of Syrian refugees who fled the country after war erupted, many of whom now live in Iraq as well as Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey.

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BAGHDAD: Iraqi Foreign Minister Fuad Hussein receives his Syrian counterpart Faisal Mekdad on June 4, 2023. — AFP



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End-of-year exams conclude for middle, high school students

Ministry of Education continues work towards full digitization



Hamad Al-Adwani



Mohammed Al-Ajmi

KUWAIT: Students in the sixth till eleventh grades have taken their last 2022-2023 end-of-year exams on Sunday. Sources said cheating has decreased significantly this year, as evident in the small number of students caught trying to cheat through headphones and the few exam papers found with identical answers. Several school principals speculated that results will be posted on the ministry site no later than Wednesday, while end-of-year report cards will be issued next Sunday. The date the results will be posted might be affected by the coming June 6 election, they said.

While school students celebrated the end of exam season by taking photos and gathering to say goodbye in front of schools, students at the higher institute of dramatic arts held its graduation ceremony Sunday. During a speech at the ceremony, Minister of Education and Higher Education Dr Hamad Al-Adwani spoke of the ministry's keenness on developing higher art institutes as well as its interest in fostering scientific research as this will positively reflect on the students' education.

The Minister congratulated the graduates and their parents, and extended his thanks and appreciation to the institute's management and faculty. Institute Director Dr Hussain Abdullah said in his speech that the pursuit of knowledge is the sole way towards the development of nations, and commended Kuwait's keenness on improving its educational establishments. The director mentioned that the institute

carries the responsibility of initiating creatives in various artistic fields.

Going digital

Minister Al-Adwani was also present at the opening of a new customer service hall for people looking to do paper work at the Ministry of Education in Farwaniya Educational Zone.

He emphasized that the new hall was a translation of the instructions of the political leadership in order to provide the electronic and administrative services needed by citizens easily and conveniently.

Adwani added that the education ministry is seeking to fully implement digital services and transition away from paper transactions. The ministry, he said, takes the comments of citizens seriously and continuously works towards simplifying procedures accordingly, especially for the benefit of the elderly and people with disabilities.

Director General of the Farwaniya Educational Zone Mohammed Al-Ajmi said in a statement to KUNA that the ministry is ready to streamline and simplify procedures with the purpose of raising the level of services provided to employees, administrators, students and teaching staff.

Ajmi said that the hall serves about 1,430 employees within the educational zone, 75,240 students in different grades in 161 schools and 23,000 employees in the administrative, supervisory and educational departments. — Agencies



KUWAIT: Officials inspect the new customer service hall in Farwaniya Education Zone. —KUNA photos



KUWAIT: The National Guard celebrated the graduation of a new batch of officers. — KUNA

National Guard celebrates officers' graduation

KUWAIT: Kuwait National Guard celebrated on Sunday the graduation of a new batch of cadets studying to become medical officers, medical assistants, engineering officers and field officers with a university degree.

According to a press release, the Undersecretary of the National Guard Lieutenant General Engineer Hashim Al-Rifai conveyed to cadets the greetings of His Highness Sheikh Salem Al-Ali Al-Sabah, Chief of the National Guard, and Sheikh Faisal Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, Deputy Chief of the National Guard.

He said he was pleased that a new group of officers

are joining the National Guard to support their brothers in arms.

Rifai stressed that loyalty and belonging to the homeland is the most precious thing that a person possesses, pointing out that their goal should be to defend their precious land and achieve security and safety for its citizens under wise leadership.

Director of the Training Directorate Brigadier General Rashid Fahd confirmed the keenness of the Guard leadership to translate the objectives of the guidance document 2025 titled "protection and support", by upgrading the guard in various military, administrative and technical fields and qualifying its cadres scientifically and militarily to perform their duties efficiently and ably.

He called on graduates to gain experience from their predecessors and comply with the orders and instructions issued by their superiors, stressing commitment to the principles and values of Islam. — KUNA



Conference completes 10 successful colon and rectal surgeries

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: Kuwait Society of Colon and Rectal Surgery of Kuwait Medical Association held its first conference in cooperation with the health ministry and participation of several world experts from USA and Ireland.

Head of the Society Abdallah Ahmad Al-Haddad said the first conference of the Colon and Rectal Surgery Society was held over three consecutive

days and had a surgical workshop during which 10 surgeries were carried out. The surgeries were all related to the colon and return tumors and all were highly successful.

He said the surgeries and lectures were held mornings from 8:00 am to 1:00 pm, followed by scientific lectures from 4:30 pm until 9:00 pm. He said the conference activities and operations were aimed at educating trainees. Complicated operations were done to manage colon and rectum diseases.

Haddad said that there was a lecture for Kuwait University in regards to the development of medical education in USA and the current changes. Haddad added that such workshops host world experts and they improve the quality level in the surgical field, adding that this happens through transfer of expertise, information exchange and training doctors.

NBK launches Eighth Cohort of 'High-Fliers'

KUWAIT: Reflecting its firm belief in investing in human capital and continuous development of its employees, National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) has launched the Eighth Cohort of its "High-Fliers" program for qualifying young banking leaders, in cooperation with IE Business School, Madrid.

The training program, which expands over a period of six months, and engages NBK's international branches, covers various modules and topics including: technological trends, design thinking, change management, strategy, negotiation skills, positive leadership and digital transformation. The participants will work within teams to introduce innovative ideas and solutions. Concluding the program, the winning team will be selected by a panel of NBK executives and representatives of IE Business School.

On this occasion, Najla Al-Sager, Head of Talent Management, Group Human Resources at National Bank of Kuwait, said: "The program is primarily focused on enabling trainees to unlock their full potential and encouraging them to combine technical and leadership skills to cultivate strategic thinking in



Najla Al-Sager

leadership upon successful completion."

"NBK places human capital development as a top priority, harnessing all capabilities to develop its employees by providing them with training and development programs in partnership with the most reputable educational institutions worldwide, in order to keep pace with the key development in

the banking industry," she noted.

Al-Sager emphasized that NBK always seeks to unlock the creative energies of its employees, which is positively reflected on their performance, ultimately placing the bank at a leading position, both locally and regionally.

The "High-Fliers" Program is part of NBK's consistent endeavors for human capital and talent development to prepare qualified future leaders who are able to sustain the bank's long-standing success.

Founded in 1973, IE Business School, Madrid is one of the top leading business schools in the world. It is consistently recognized as one of the world's top centers of learning by international magazines and publications including Forbes, the Economist, The Financial Times and Bloomberg.



Local

Kuwait Municipality dispatches 1,230 sanitation workers during election week

Media should cement national unity during election coverage: Information minister

In my view

'Clarks Party' candidate

By Yousuf Awadh Al-Azmi

Local@kuwaittimes.com



The National Party, which was unable to provide fish to citizens, succeeded in providing citizens to fish." — Galal Amer

Kuwait is currently going through a hot political trough due to the gradual movement of election campaigns by candidates seeking a seat in the 2023 National Assembly, and there is no doubt that the public is preoccupied with the candidates' performances and their dynamic tours that do not spare any effort in order to fulfil the dream of reaching the parliament.

Kuwait does not have licensed parties, only political movements or factions that are not kept together by a strict organization, with commitment to legal items, because as I mentioned, there are no licenses for parties. The existence of parties, even if their legal organizational status is absent, cannot be mistaken, so we can consider each faction as a party, maybe of the same orientation — religious, or of the same sect or tribe. But these "parties" have no legal rules, and there is no doubt that this is considered a broad loophole through which anyone with an attitude or interest could leave because of the absence of licensed legal commitment!

I do not claim that I am for licensed parties or even unlicensed — I believe that we in the Arab world, and not only in Kuwait, do not understand what the philosophy of political parties is so far. We are still at the point of arguing about leadership, with many going after unsuitable labels such as "symbolic leader" or "historical leader" or some comical labels such as "honor leader". Parties are not good in countries that hold their leaders sacred.

The party should be built on a political and ideological orientation that is not linked to a person's name and is joined by those who believe in the idea on which the party is established. It should have a politburo and a secretariat general, and its finances must be known and operate in the open, with its leadership changing every now and then. This is in short the principle of parties. But in some places the idea of a party leader remains a leader until death, or if he becomes sick, appoints his son or relative in his place. Here allow me to say that this is not a respected political party; rather it is closer to being a private establishment with a bad reputation too.

I remember a few years earlier, one of the candidates in an election, which I cannot remember due to their frequency lately, noticed the public were going for candidates affiliated with political movements. But his problem was that his link to politics did not exist, and he did not understand politics. Most of his knowledge was about the latest brands of shoes, so he decided to create new political movement so those like him could join. But he did not find anyone, with regret, to support his ideas to establish a party on the basis of "anything and everything". I remember at the time one of his friends advised him to name the party "Clarks Party"!

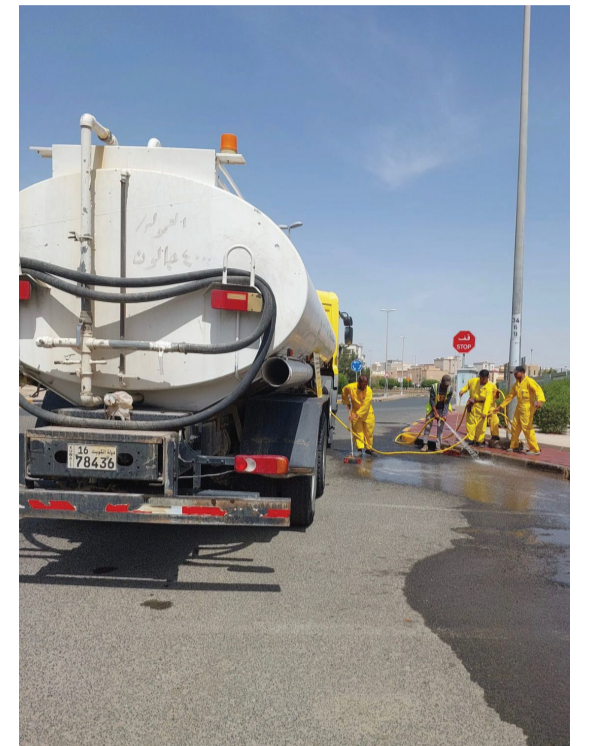
Any election, if not politically organized, before getting involved in its organizational aspects, becomes difficult to convince the public in them. Elections became a cover for personal prominence, such as an ambition for an esteemed social status or influence or even to achieve illegal interests, and for sure in the presence of laxity in implementing the law, the road is paved to achieve these by a corrupt candidate. Imagine many important transactions of citizens cannot be processed without wasta!

It was interesting when the Municipal Council passed a decision to impose fees on car shades for private residences, in a country where shade is a necessity due to the scorching heat, especially during the summer. The decision was taken in a short period before summer, and the worst thing is that the elected members voted for the decision, while those appointed by the government voted against it. The appointed women members also voted against this decision, and this was a striking stand that left many questions in need of answers.

Elections are round the corner, and it is clear that the general situation will not change much, and hope remains with voter awareness and their choice for public interest. Kuwait is in need of competent, educated and honest persons to lead the political scene, competent people who are not connected with unsuitable parties and do not have ambitions of becoming influential, and who only seek to serve the country and its people.



Minister of Information Abdulrahman Al-Mutairi is seen with officials during his tour of the media center and studios set for covering the vote counting process. — KUNA photos



KUWAIT: Kuwait Municipality said Sunday that preparations were underway ahead of the coming parliamentary election.

The municipality is getting equipment and sanitation workers ready to "show Kuwait in the best possible way during its democratic wedding," they said in a statement to KUNA.

Sanitation teams will be distributed across all governorates starting Sunday and until Wednesday to ensure cleaning work is completed at the schools designated as polling stations before students are back following the Tuesday election. About 1,230 sanitation workers will be working across the country.

Director of the Department of Public Hygiene and Road Works in Assima Governorate Saad Al-Khrinej said there is great coordination between government agencies, headed by the Ministry of Interior, the Fire Force Department, the Ministry of Justice and others, with the municipality to ensure the success of the election.

He stressed the keenness of the municipality to facilitate the process for citizens and ensure the

smooth flow of traffic as they enter and exit the polling stations.

The municipality has designated 360 workers, 144 containers and 22 machines at polling stations in the Assima Governorate, he added. Director of the Department of Public Hygiene and Road Works in Jahra Governorate, Mohammed Al-Jaba'a said according to his department he has sent 10 workers to each polling station, removed 45 abandoned cars and placed 100 warnings on others.

In Hawally, Director of the Department of Public Hygiene and Road Works Faisal Al-Otaibi said 200 workers, 30 vehicles and 60 containers will be distributed to the polling stations. Director of the Department of Public Hygiene and Road Works in Mubarak Al-Kabeer governorate, Fahd Al-Quraifa, said that 100 workers will be distributed to the stations.

Deputy Director General for Services Affairs and Director of the Department of Public Hygiene and Road Works in Farwaniya governorate Mishaal Al-Azmi said 200 workers will be distributed to the areas surrounding the polling stations to carry out cleaning

work and remove abandoned cars. In Ahmadi, Director of the Department of Public Hygiene and Road Works Nawaf Al-Mutairi, said that 360 workers will be distributed to polling stations.

Studios for vote count coverage

Minister of Information and Minister of State for Youth Affairs Abdulrahman Al-Mutairi made on Saturday an inspection tour of the main media center designated to cover the election and Studios 800 and Studio 300 set for covering the vote counting operations. During the trip, he lauded the professional preparations for elections, Spokesman of the Ministry of Information Anwar Murad said in a press release.

Mutairi stressed the need of media coverage meeting the expectations of the public in terms of professionalism, objectivity and impartiality in keeping with the noble values of Kuwait's democracy. He noted that his trip aimed to encourage staff to abide by the strategy of the ministry for cementing national unity and serving society based on transparency and professionalism, the spokesman added. — KUNA

Foreign Minister attends Erdogan's inauguration



KUWAIT: Foreign Minister Sheikh Salem Abdullah Al-Jaber Al-Sabah (right) is seen with President Recep Tayyip Erdogan in Ankara during the inauguration ceremony. — KUNA

KUWAIT: Representing HH the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, Foreign Minister Sheikh Salem Al-Abdullah Al-Jaber Al-Sabah attended the inauguration ceremony of Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan in Ankara on Saturday. He conveyed the greetings and best wishes of HH the Amir Sheikh Nawaf, HH the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Al-Nawaf Al-Sabah to the Turkish people and government. On behalf of the Kuwaiti people and government, Sheikh Salem congratulated President Erdogan on his recent re-election, wishing him everlasting wellbeing and friendly Turkey more progress and prosperity. — KUNA

Foreign minister, UN official discuss Ukraine grain export deal



KUWAIT: Foreign Minister Sheikh Salem Abdullah Al-Jaber Al-Sabah (right) is seen with UN official Abdullah Abdulsamad Dashti. — KUNA

KUWAIT: Foreign Minister Sheikh Salem Abdullah Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received on Sunday the United Nations' (UN) coordinator for the Black Sea Grain Initiative, Abdullah Abdulsamad Dashti, discussing the latest on the deal that allows the safe export of grain from Ukrainian ports. Kuwait firmly supports any measure that seeks to protect global food security, in addition to efforts aiming to find a definitive solution to the Russia-Ukraine conflict, the foreign minister underlined. — KUNA

American United School of Kuwait Celebrates Class of 2023



AUS Class of 2023



Ebtisam El-Harbi, Salutatorian



Leena Lee, Valedictorian

The American United School of Kuwait (AUS) proudly commemorated its 5th Graduation Ceremony for the Class of 2023. A total of 64 exceptional graduates were honored, including 6 with honors diplomas and 10 with distinguished diplomas.

Esteemed guests, including Shaikha Dana Nasser Al-Sabah, Mr. Meshal Ali, and Sir James Holtsnider, joined the ceremony to deliver warm greetings.

Mr. Abdulaziz Al Loughani, CEO of Floward, inspired the graduates to make a lasting impact and pursue their passions. Valedictorian Lina Lee and salutatorian Ebtisam

AlHarbi shared profound messages on unity and embracing change.

Mr. Michael Winger, Director of AUS, congratulated the graduates, encouraging them to believe in themselves and chase their dreams.

The AUS graduates will pursue higher education in renowned institutions and countries worldwide. Established in 2013, AUS provides an exceptional American education, nurturing responsible global citizens.

The graduation ceremony celebrated the collective efforts of the graduates, their families, faculty, and the AUS community, reflecting the school's commitment to excellence.

News in Brief

Pharmacies to be at least 200m apart

KUWAIT: Minister of Health Ahmad Al-Awadhi issued a ministerial decision stipulating that the distance between a pharmacy applying for a license and any pharmacy in its vicinity should be no less than 200 meters in all directions. The ministry's drug control system will calculate the distance and establish the necessary controls. The decision exempted pharmacies located in cooperative societies, community hospitals, community medical centers, shopping centers and markets.

Jahra collision kills one person

KUWAIT: A collision between two vehicles on Jahra Road has resulted in the death of one person, the Public Relations and Media Department at the Kuwait Fire Force said in a statement. Eight people have been rescued and are in good condition. The collision was between a passenger bus and a dump truck.

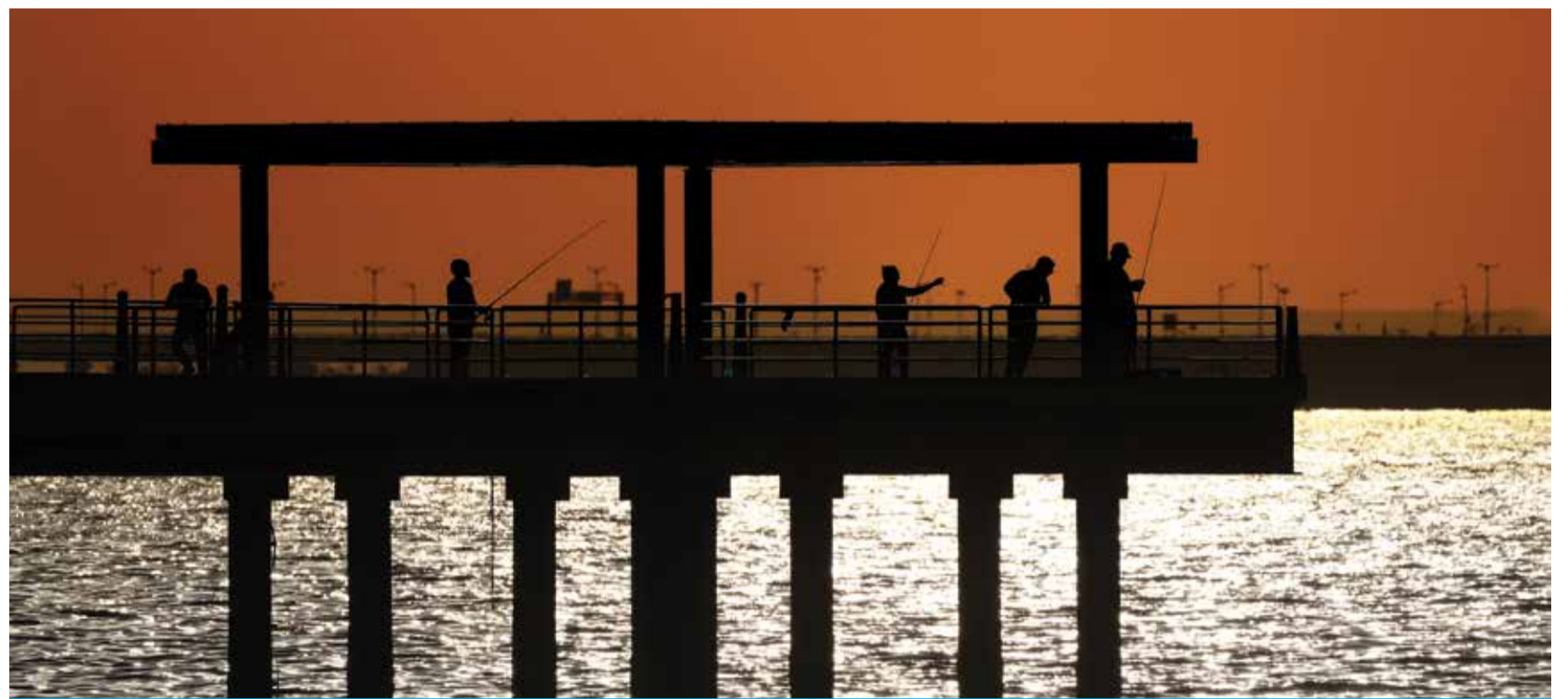
Timber fire controlled in Subhan

KUWAIT: A fire erupted in a dirt yard in Subhan on Sunday morning, said the Public Relations and Media Department at the Kuwait Fire Force in a statement. Firefighting teams from Subhan and Al-Buraq fire stations were dispatched to the site. Upon investigation, the teams found that garbage and timber had caught fire. The fire was extinguished without any injuries.

Expat sent to prison for sexual assault

KUWAIT: The Criminal Court on Sunday sentenced to life imprisonment an Egyptian expatriate who works as a Mu'athin, the person who calls for prayer, at a mosque in Jahra for sexually assaulting a child in the Jahra area. Police moved to arrest the perpetrator following a complaint filed by the child's parents against him. When they didn't find him at his place of residence, his name was circulated to all police stations. Officials at the airport and border crossings were also alerted to turn him in if he tries to exit the country. The man was eventually caught trying to escape the country through the Salmi border crossing. He confessed to his crime upon investigation.

Photo of the day



KUWAIT: People are seen fishing on a pier overlooking the glistening Arabian Gulf at sunset. The pier is located near Souq Sharq, a shopping center in Kuwait City. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

Kuwait to bring added value to CICA economic dimension

By Majd Othman

KUWAIT: In October 2022, Kuwait joined the Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measure in Asia (CICA) to maintain its continuous and effective role in supporting development globally. Secretary General of CICA Ambassador Kairat Sarybay visited Kuwait for practical implementation of plans through discussing the main areas of joint work, identifying further steps, stages and areas of interaction and understanding the unique contributions Kuwait can make to CICA.

Kuwait Times met Ambassador Sarybay to discuss with him the main role of Kuwait in joining this body and learn more about CICA's main principles, goals and future vision. Sarybay said in October, Kuwait became the 28th member state at the Astana CICA Summit. He added he met Kuwait's Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Salem Al-Abdullah Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

Kuwait role in CICA

Sarybay explained CICA focuses on development of priority areas within five confidence-building dimensions — military-political, new challenges and threats, economic, environment and human. He clarified Kuwait probably will consider taking over coordination or co-ordination in one of the priority areas of trade and investment (under the economic dimension), due the vast experience and significant

investment potential that Kuwait enjoys, which will bring added value to the implementation of this confidence-building measure.

"We expect that Kuwait, as part of its fresh outlook, will make a significant contribution to the implementation of how to most effectively make the necessary changes so that CICA becomes a full-fledged international organization without dragging this process out for many years," he said. Sarybay pointed out CICA already has a number of subsidiary bodies and institutions, such as the Youth Council, Business Council and Think Tank Forum.

CICA principles

Sarybay explained the main principles of CICA, headed by Kazakhstan. He said CICA, with its 28 member states covering over 90 percent of the largest and most populated continent of the planet, is a unique multilateral dialogue platform that offers equal opportunity for its members with varying political, economic and sociocultural backgrounds to collaborate on beneficial initiatives and take decisions based on mutual agreement.

CICA's basic principles are sovereign equality, refraining from threat or use of force, territorial integrity, peaceful settlement of disputes, non-interference in internal affairs, disarmament and arms controls, economic, social and cultural cooperation and human rights and fundamental freedoms.

CICA future goals

Sarybay clarified that in 2023-2024, the work of the CICA chairmanship and secretariat will aim to



Kairat Sarybay

promote constructive dialogue and multifaceted cooperation among member states. "During this period, our focus will be on practical steps in CICA's transformation and various initiatives to enhance connectivity, boost the transport and logistics potential of Asia and promote sustainable development. We will work towards economic recovery, inclusive development and regional financial cooperation within CICA," he said.

Sarybay added CICA will also be more committed to protecting the environment, achieving carbon neutrality and promoting food security cooperation. Not to mention increasing the strength of exchange and cooperation through volunteer movements of CICA member states and enhancing cooperation in education, science and technology through the partnership network of leading universities of CICA member states. "Cooperation in digitalization, trade and investment, tourism, sports and gender equality remains a priority for us," he concluded.

LuLu Hypermarket honors winners of Food Fest with prizes

KUWAIT: LuLu Hypermarket, the leading hypermarket chain in Kuwait and the region, wrapped up its exciting 'LuLu Food Fest' promotion with a grand prize distribution ceremony at the hypermarket's Al-Rai outlet. The event, which was held on 3 June, celebrated the success of the festival and acknowledged winners of various contests and competitions held during the promotion period.

The LuLu Food Fest, which commenced on 24 May, captivated food enthusiasts across all outlets of the hypermarket in Kuwait, by showcasing an array of high quality food products at amazing prices, and organizing exciting contests and competitions as part of the food festival. Among the competitions were cooking contests in Arabic, Indian, Italian, Philippine and Continental cuisines, as well as in preparing desserts, that allowed participants to exhibit their culinary talents. The event also featured other thrilling competitions such as 'Wow the Master Chef', 'Cake Challenge', 'Junior Chef', and a 'Barista Contest'.

Winners of the first, second and third places in each category were presented with generous gift vouchers worth KD 100, KD 75, and KD 50 respectively. Furthermore, in line with the International Year of Millets 2023, a special Healthy Food Contest using millets was organized on 28 May. The competition aimed to promote the significance of millets and encourage the adoption of healthy eating habits. An exhibition on the range and versatility of millets that was held on the occasion was inaugurated by Indian Ambassador Adarsh Swaika.

The Ambassador also presented prizes to the win-



ners of the various cookery contests, including the Millets Healthy Food Contest. In his speech, he highlighted the successful completion of Millets related activities in all Indian schools across Kuwait.

Furthermore, he officially inaugurated the International Year of Millets promotion that will be held across all LuLu Hypermarkets, emphasizing the collective effort of the Indian embassy in promoting and celebrating this significant event.

The Ambassador also expressed excitement about the upcoming months, promising a range of engaging activities and programs related to millets. Millets, being highly nutritious and versatile grains, hold immense importance in promoting healthy lifestyles and sustainable food choices. LuLu Hypermarket continues to uphold its commitment to nurturing culinary talent and promoting healthy food choices in the country, and with its successful Food Fest, the hypermarket once again reinforced its position as the leading destination for food enthusiasts in Kuwait.



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China warns 'NATO-like' alliances could lead to conflict in Asia-Pacific

Austin calls for top-level defence talks with Beijing



SINGAPORE: (L-R) John Chipman, CEO of the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), Estonian Prime Minister Kaja Kallas, and Germany's Defence Minister Boris Pistorius attend the 20th Shangri-La Dialogue summit in Singapore on June 4, 2023. — AFP

SINGAPORE: China's defence minister warned Sunday against establishing NATO-like military alliances in the Asia-Pacific, saying they would plunge the region into a "whirlpool" of conflict. Li Shangfu's comments came a day after US and Chinese military vessels sailed close to each other in the flashpoint Taiwan Strait, an incident that provoked anger from both sides.

"Attempts to push for NATO-like (alliances) in the Asia-Pacific is a way of kidnapping regional countries and exaggerating conflicts and confrontations," Li told a security conference in Singapore also attended by US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin.

Li warned that these alliances would "plunge the Asia-Pacific into a whirlpool of disputes and conflicts". Li's comments echoed long-held Chinese criticism of the United States' efforts to shore up alliances in the region and counter China's rise.

The United States is a member of

AUKUS, which groups it with Australia and Britain. Washington is also a member of the QUAD group, which includes Australia, India and Japan. "Today's Asia-Pacific needs open and inclusive cooperation, not buddy-ing up into small cliques," Li said at the Shangri-La Dialogue security summit.

Li sought to paint the United States as the trigger of regional instability, and China as seeking to ease tensions. "It cannot be denied that if a fierce conflict or confrontation occurs between China and the United States, it would bring unbearable pain for the world," he said.

Miscalculations

On Saturday, Austin called for top-level defence talks with Beijing to prevent miscalculations. "The more that we talk, the more that we can avoid the misunderstandings and miscalculations that could lead to crisis or conflict," Austin said.

Also on Saturday, the United States deployed a destroyer from its 7th Fleet along with a Canadian naval vessel through the Taiwan Strait. China responded by sending one of its naval ships close to the US destroyer, the USS Chung-Hoon, according to the Pentagon.

The strait is one of the world's most tense potential military flashpoints. China claims Taiwan as its territory — vowing to take it one day, by force if necessary — and has in recent years ramped up military and political pressure on the island.

Austin on Sunday described the incident as "extremely dangerous", saying the Chinese vessel crossed "probably 150 feet (46 metres)" in front of the Chung-Hoon. "I call upon the (Chinese) leadership to really do the right things to rein in that kind of conduct, because I think accidents can happen that could cause things to spiral out of control," Austin told reporters in Singapore.

Saturday's Taiwan Strait encounter followed what the US military said was an "unnecessarily aggressive maneuver" by one of Beijing's fighter's near a US surveillance plane in the South China Sea last week.

Li told the Singapore audience on Sunday that the onus was on the United States to pull its military presence away from areas near China. "Our Chinese military aircraft and warships won't ever go near the airspace and territorial waters of other countries to engage in so-called navigational hegemony," Li said.

"The best thing would be if all countries, and especially their warplanes and warships, refrained from wandering through other country's territorial airspace and waters. What are you hanging around here for?"

Austin and Li shook hands and spoke briefly at the Singapore event's opening dinner on Friday, but there was no substantive exchange. The United States had invit-

ed Li to meet with Austin on the sidelines of the conference, but China declined.

A senior US defense official told journalists Sunday that the US had also offered lower level meetings but that China didn't respond. A member of China's delegation told AFP that the removal of US sanctions on Li was a precondition for talks.

However, there have been some signs of improved dialogue between the two nations. CIA Director William Burns made a secret trip to China last month, a US official announced on Friday. Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs Daniel Kritenbrink will also travel to China on Sunday for a rare visit.

In his speech in Singapore on Saturday, Lloyd outlined Washington's extensive partnerships in the region. "America's partnerships are bringing the region closer together to help keep it free, open, and secure," he said. — AFP

NATO chief urges Turkey not to veto Sweden's bid

ISTANBUL: NATO chief Jens Stoltenberg on Sunday called on Ankara to drop its opposition to Sweden's bid to join the US-led defence alliance, hoping Stockholm's accession would be finalised "as soon as possible".

Pressure is building on Erdogan to greenlight Sweden's NATO membership ahead of a summit planned for July in the Lithuanian capital Vilnius. "Membership will make Sweden safer but also make NATO and Turkey stronger," Stoltenberg told journalists after meeting with President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and newly appointed foreign minister Hakan Fidan, who was head of the intelligence agency, in Istanbul.

"I look forward to finalising Sweden's accession as soon as possible," he said. On Saturday Stoltenberg attended the inauguration of Erdogan, who was re-elected to serve another five years, in a lavish ceremony joined by dozens of world leaders in the capital Ankara.

NATO member Turkey has dragged its feet over admitting Sweden to the military alliance. It and Hungary are the only two NATO countries yet to ratify the membership bid. Sweden and Finland dropped decades of military non-alignment and applied to join the alliance in response to Russia's



ISTANBUL: Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan meets NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg at the Dolmabahce Palace on June 4, 2023. — AFP

invasion of Ukraine. Finland formally joined NATO in April.

Anti-Turkey protests

Erdogan has accused Sweden of being a haven for "terrorists", especially members of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), a group blacklisted by Turkey and its Western allies. "Sweden has taken significant concrete steps to meet Turkey's concerns," Stoltenberg said.

"This includes amending the Swedish constitution, ending arms embargo, stepping up counter-terrorism operations including against the PKK," he said. "Sweden has fulfilled its obligations." Swedish Foreign Minister Tobias Billstrom also said Stockholm had fulfilled "all the commit-

ments" to join NATO and urged Turkey and Hungary to allow his country into the alliance. Ankara is especially displeased with anti-Turkey and anti-Erdogan protests in Stockholm. Swedish authorities allowed a "No to NATO, No Erdogan Laws in Sweden" demonstration to go ahead in the city centre on Sunday.

"Freedom of assembly and expression are core values in democratic societies. But we should remember why these are taking place," Stoltenberg said. "Organisers of these demonstrations want to block Sweden's accession to NATO and undermine its collaboration with Turkey against terrorism and weaken NATO," he added. "We should not allow them to succeed." — AFP

Moscow strike kills toddler in Dnipro

KYIV: Ukrainian rescuers outside the city of Dnipro on Sunday recovered the body of a two-year-old girl from the rubble left by a Russian strike on a residential area. On the other side of the border, Russian authorities asked villagers living in a heavily shelled district on the Ukraine border to leave their homes after deadly strikes prompted thousands to flee.

The Russian attack that hit the Pidhorodnenska suburb of the central city of Dnipro on Saturday came as Moscow has this week intensified aerial assaults on Ukraine. "At night, a girl's body was retrieved from under the rubble of a house in the Pidhorodnenska community" outside Dnipro, Serhiy Lysak, governor of Dnipropetrovsk region, said on Sunday.

"She just turned two." Officials said the strike killed the toddler, born in 2021, and wounded at least 22 others. Five children were in hospital, including three boys who were in a critical condition, they added.

Kyiv also said a Russian strike had hit an airfield in central Ukraine overnight, which Moscow appeared to confirm on Sunday, saying it had struck military air bases with long-range weapons overnight. The attacks came at the end of a day that saw Russia launch a series of air assaults on Kyiv, including rare day-time strikes.

The conflict, which has dragged on for more than 15 months, has escalated this week with increased attacks on both sides of the border. Kyiv has for months said it is preparing for a major counterof-

fensive against Moscow's forces.

President Volodymyr Zelensky has said the country is "ready" but pleaded for more Western weapons to counter Russia's air superiority. In a video published Sunday, the Ukrainian army appeared to call on soldiers to stay silent and said there will be no announcement on the start of the long-awaited offensive.

"Plans love silence," Deputy Defence Minister Ganna Malayr said on Telegram. "The start will not be announced," she added, accompanying the video showing soldiers placing fingers on their mouths.

'Bombed and bombed'

Russian authorities asked residents of villages of a heavily shelled district in the Belgorod region that borders Ukraine to leave their homes. Intensified Ukrainian shelling of the Shebekino district this week has left several people dead and forced thousands to leave the area for Belgorod city.

Belgorod governor Vyacheslav Gladkov said Sunday some 4,000 people left border villages and were placed in temporary housing. He urged residents of several villages on the border to leave their homes. "I ask that in the villages of, first of all, the Shebekino district that has been shelled, to listen to the position of authorities and leave — temporarily leave — their homes," Gladkov said on Telegram.

He said the goal was "to safeguard what is most important: your life and the lives of your close ones". He said it was another "not calm night" in the district with "a lot of damage". Tatiana Kozheleva, a 64-year-old pensioner who left Shebekino and was receiving humanitarian aid in Belgorod, told AFP there was almost "nothing left" of the small city. "Our city Shebekino was bombed and bombed," she said.—AFP

International

Zionist entity buries three soldiers killed near Egypt border

Netanyahu promises a 'full investigation' into the deaths

JERUSALEM: Zionist entity on Sunday buried three soldiers killed in a firefight at its usually secure border with Egypt and announced an "exhaustive and thorough" investigation into the deaths. Egypt has blamed the fatal clash in the Negev desert on a member of its security forces who was also killed, saying he had crossed the border in pursuit of drug traffickers when he encountered the Zionist troops.

The Zionist army said an Egyptian "assailant" shot dead two soldiers at a post on the border. The discovery of their bodies triggered a manhunt during which the third soldier was killed as well as the suspected attacker. Zionist entity's border area with Egypt has not often been marred by violence since Egypt became the first Arab country to make peace with Zionist entity following the Camp David accords of 1978.

As Zionist entity mourned those killed the previous day, Prime Minister Netanyahu said it had sent Egypt a "clear message", speaking at the opening of a cabinet meeting on Sunday. "We expect that the joint investigation will be exhaustive and thorough," he said. "This is part of the important security cooperation between us, which has benefited both countries over the years." Egypt's army said a member of its security forces had crossed the border "chasing drug traffickers" before he was killed in an "exchange of fire which left three dead on the Zionist side".

The two Zionist soldiers whose bodies were found early Saturday at a guard post close to the Harif military base were identified as Lia Ben Nun, 19, and Ori Izhak Iluz, 20. Ohad Dahan, also 20, was killed during the manhunt later on Saturday, the army said.

A fourth Zionist soldier, a non-commissioned officer, was lightly wounded, it added. Ben Nun was laid to rest on Sunday in the central Zionist city of Rishon LeZion. "I love you and miss you already," her sister Ofir said in her eulogy. "I don't know what I'll do now." Iluz's funeral was held in the northern city Safed, and Dahan was being buried in southern town of Ofakim.



OFAKIM: The mother (R) of Ohad Dahan, one of three Zionist soldiers killed in the cross-border incident with Egypt, is comforted as she mourns during the funeral at the military cemetery in the city of Ofakim. — AFP

'Full investigation'

Zionist media have raised questions over the shootings, particularly on how the assailant - who has not been identified - managed to cross the high barrier running along the border. Netanyahu on Saturday promised a "full investigation" into the deaths, and Zionist senior government figures stressed the importance of cooperation with Egypt. The Zionist army was conducting "a thorough investigation... in collaboration with the Egyptian Armed Forces", said the military chief of staff Herzli Halevi.

Defence Minister Yoav Gallant highlighted "the importance of the ties between the two countries"

following a telephone call with his Egyptian counterpart Mohamed Ahmed Zaki.

Zaki meanwhile underlined "the joint coordination to take the necessary measures to avoid the repetition of incidents of this kind in the future", according to a spokesman for the Egyptian army.

The border between the two countries is generally calm but has been the scene of regular smuggling attempts. In recent years, there have been exchanges of fire between smugglers and Zionist soldiers stationed along the border. In 2014, two Zionist soldiers on patrol were wounded by unidentified men who fired an anti-tank weapon from the Sinai during an attempt to smuggle drugs. — AFP

Greece to rescue asylum seekers on border river: Police

ATHENS: Greece on Sunday said it would rescue dozens of asylum seekers claiming to be stranded on the country's river border with Turkey for days. "We will rescue them as there is no response from the Turkish authorities to our calls to take them back," a source in the ministry of citizen's police protection told AFP.

A video sent to media, allegedly from the Evros River region, said the group of about 80 were Yazidis, a mostly Iraq-based Kurdish-speaking religious minority. A man speaking Kurdish on the video said the group had been stuck on one of the river islets for about six days and that several of its members required medical assistance.

Thousands of migrants, mainly from Syria, Afghanistan and Pakistan, have in recent years crossed into Greece from Turkey in the hope of making it to western Europe. With the stepping up of patrols in the Aegean Sea making it harder for migrants to reach Greek islands, more are taking their chances by crossing the river, Greece's natural border with Turkey, and having traffickers take them from there by road. Greece is currently under a caretaker government ahead of June 25 national elections. The office of interim prime minister Ioannis Sarmas, a senior judge, earlier Sunday noted that it had appealed to the Turkish government "to coordinate with border authorities and prevent illegal crossings." "In recent days, the low water level of the river Evros favors the illegal crossing of migrants, using islets that constitute both Greek and Turkish territory," the interim prime minister's statement said. — AFP

Polish opposition stages major anti-govt protest

WARSAW: Half a million protesters packed the streets of central Warsaw on Sunday. Poland's opposition organizers said, claiming one of the biggest anti-government demonstrations in the 30 years since the end of communism. Lech Walesa, a former Polish president, Nobel Peace Prize winner and leader of the fight against communism, joined opposition figures at the head of the march ahead of legislative elections in the autumn.

People travelled from across the country after former prime minister Donald Tusk, head of the centrist opposition party Civic Platform (PO), called for the protest against "the high cost of living, swindling and lying, and for democracy, free elections and the EU".

The leaders of most opposition parties encouraged their supporters to join the march against the nationalist Law and Justice party (PiS) led by Jaroslaw Kaczynski, which has been in power for almost eight years. Smaller gatherings also took place in other cities and towns across Poland.

"City Hall estimates (the number of protesters) at 500,000 now," the organizers' spokesman Jan Grabiec told AFP. Decked out in the red and white colors of the nation, demonstrators carried EU flags and placards proclaiming "Enough's enough", "No to authoritarian Poland" and blaming the ruling PiS party for exorbitant prices.

Once the head of the European Council, Tusk addressed the crowds in Warsaw's historic old town, saying the opposition's role was "of comparable importance" to that in the 1980s and the fight against communism. "Democracy dies in silence. From today, there will be no more silence... despite the daily attacks by Kaczynski's PiS against its very foundations," Tusk said. Walesa, who led the Solidarity union in a successful battle against communism, has long been absent from politics.

He told the marchers he had been "patiently" waiting for the day when the nationalist party and Kaczynski will be forced out. "Mr. Kaczynski, we have come to get you. The day has finally arrived," Walesa said. Piotr Mroz, a 62-year-old construction worker, feared "if it doesn't change now, we will have

Hungary and Turkey here", referring to countries frequently accused of flouting democratic standards. "Our government is authoritarian. They want to make Poland a country that resembles Russia," Karolina Sieminska, a 22-year-old French student, told AFP.

'Circus'

Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki compared the protests to a "circus". "It makes me laugh a little when the old foxes who have been in politics for years organize an anti-government march and present it as a spontaneous civic protest," he was quoted as saying by news agency PAP.

Most polling suggests the PiS party will win the upcoming elections with around 30 percent of the vote but without obtaining a majority. That could open the way for the opposition parties to take power if they maintain their current support levels and manage to agree among themselves.

The June 4 protest march day is the 34th anniversary of the first partly free elections held in Poland which were followed by the defeat of communism in Europe. Walesa became the nation's first democratically elected president in 1990, after becoming the leader of the communist world's first free trade union in the 1980s. — AFP



WARSAW: Donald Tusk, leader of the Polish Civic Platform (Platforma Obywatelska (PO) party (C) gestures as he marches during an anti-government demonstration organized by the opposition in Warsaw on June 4, 2023. — AFP

Syria FM talks aid on visit to key...

Continued from Page 1

"We received about 250,000 refugees," said Hussein, who added that the majority of them live in camps in Iraq's autonomous Kurdistan region.

He said the next step would be getting humanitarian aid into Syria, which has been devastated by the war and by a February 6 earthquake that also hit Turkey and killed tens of thousands in both countries. The quake triggered a flurry of aid efforts and diplomatic moves that help spur Syria's reintegration back into the wider Arab region.

Mekdad on Sunday thanked Iraq for its "solidarity" after the quake, also hailing the "progression" of bilateral relations. "We will continue to cooperate to combat terrorism and eliminate the danger posed by drugs," he added in a reference to the illegal trade in the stimulant Captagon.

The Arab League voted on May 7 to readmit

Syria after its suspension in 2011 over Assad's brutal repression of pro-democracy protests that later devolved into an all-out war. At the time, Iraq had abstained from the vote that resulted in Damascus' suspension. The two countries share a 600-km porous desert border that has continued to see militant activity even years after the defeat of IS.

The militant group took over large swathes of both countries in 2014, declaring its "caliphate" before it was defeated in 2017 in Iraq and in 2019 in Syria. Drug trafficking has also proliferated in past years, with the trade of the amphetamine-like drug Captagon exploding in the region, much of it across the Syria-Iraq border. Iraqi guards in March seized over three million Captagon pills at the border with Syria.

In addition to security coordination, Baghdad and Damascus continue to coordinate on other key issues including water as both countries face dangerous shortages. Dam-building in neighboring countries and climate change impacts have dramatically reduced water flows in both countries, disrupting agriculture and threatening livelihoods amid persistent economic challenges. — AFP

ing the matter "for a long time". Russia is dependent on oil revenues with its war in Ukraine dragging on and Western sanctions hitting its economy.

Novak "sees no need for OPEC+ to change course" because it would hardly benefit from higher prices. Commerzbank commodity analysts said in a research note ahead of the meeting. Since Western sanctions hit Moscow over Ukraine, Russia has been shipping oil to India and China as the Asian giants soak up the cheap crude. Saudi Arabia, on the other hand, "does need higher prices to balance its budget", Commerzbank analysts said, adding that the kingdom's break-even price is currently "at a good 80 dollars per barrel".

Despite the tensions, both of the top OPEC+ producers "will no doubt be keen to keep the cartel together, as it has more power thanks to the united front it is showing", they said. In March 2020 the alliance was pushed to the brink of collapse when Moscow refused to cut oil production even as the Covid pandemic sent prices into freefall. After negotiations broke down, Riyadh flooded the market by boosting exports to record levels before the two countries came to an agreement. Asked if there were disagreement with Saudi Arabia this weekend, Novak said "No, we had no disagreements, it is a common decision." OPEC+ countries produce about 60 percent of the world's oil. — AFP

Sudan battles rage as US, Saudi...

Continued from Page 1

erupting from it. Other witnesses spoke of air strikes on RSF positions in the east of the city, with some civilian casualties reported.

The fighting erupted on April 15 in the Sudanese capital between the army led by de facto leader Abdel Fattah Al-Burhan and the RSF commanded by his deputy-turned-rival Mohamed Hamdan Daglo. Deadly battles have since gripped Khartoum and the war-scarred Darfur region in the west, forcing residents to flee or camp out for weeks as supplies of food and other vital goods have been depleted.

The governor of West Darfur, Khamis Abakar, said Sunday there was "complete lawlessness" in the state. "Armed men have taken over everything, and the situation is completely out of control," he said. Darfur governor Mini Minawi, a former rebel leader now close to the army, on Twitter denounced "looting" by armed groups, declared Darfur a "disaster zone" and

appealed for help from the community international.

Sunday's Saudi statement comes two days before US Secretary of State Antony Blinken is due to arrive in the Gulf kingdom, with discussions on Sudan expected to be on the agenda. The last truce was agreed to allow desperately needed humanitarian aid into areas of Sudan ravaged by the fighting, but like all those that preceded, the accord was routinely violated by both sides. The Sudanese army on Wednesday withdrew from the talks in Jeddah.

A day later, the US-Saudi mediators declared the talks officially suspended, with Washington saying it was ready to resume the talks once the parties were "serious" about a ceasefire. Both Burhan and Daglo have pledged repeatedly to protect civilians and secure humanitarian corridors.

But civilians reported escalated fighting after the army quit the Jeddah talks, including one army bombardment Thursday that a committee of human rights lawyers said killed 18 civilians in a Khartoum market. Some 25 million people — more than half of Sudan's population — are now in need of aid and protection in what was already one of the world's poorest countries before the conflict, according to the UN. — AFP



KHARTOUM: Smoke billows behind buildings on June 4, 2023 as fighting between Sudan's warring generals intensified. — AFP

Saudi announces fresh output cut...

Continued from Page 1

African members threatened to derail the gathering. While the United Arab Emirates was pushing for a change to the way its output cuts are measured, African countries were reluctant to give up some of their unused quotas — a politically unpalatable option, it said, citing delegates.

Several OPEC+ nations — including Angola and Nigeria, already seeming to be at maximum capacity — have struggled to meet their quotas. Oil producers are grappling with falling prices and high market volatility amid the Russian invasion of Ukraine, which has upended economies worldwide. Oil prices have plummeted about 10 percent since the April cuts were announced, with Brent crude falling close to \$70 a barrel, a level it has not traded below since December 2021.

Traders worry that demand will slump, with concerns about the health of the global economy as the United States battles inflation and higher interest rates while China's post-COVID rebound stutters. Russia's Deputy Prime Minister Alexander Novak said the current output cuts were being extended until the end of 2024 after examin-

International

Official links deadly Indian train crash to signal system

Families scoured hospitals and morgues for missing relatives and friends

BALASORE: The cause of India's deadliest train disaster in decades was linked to the signal system, the railway minister said Sunday, as families scoured hospitals and morgues for missing relatives and deaths were expected to top 288.

Mounds of debris were piled high at the site of Friday night's crash near Balasore, in the eastern state of Odisha, as workers repairing the tracks cleared the smashed carriages and blood-stained wreckage where hundreds were also injured. Hospitals have been overwhelmed by the number of casualties.

"We have identified the cause of the accident and the people responsible for it," India's Railway Minister Ashwini Vaishnav told news agency ANI. He said it was "not appropriate" to give details before a final investigation report.

There was confusion about the exact sequence of events but reports cited railway officials saying a signaling error had sent the Coromandal Express running south from Kolkata to Chennai onto a side track.

It slammed into a freight train and the wreckage derailed an express running north from India's tech hub Bengaluru to Kolkata that was also passing the site. Sudhanshu Sarangi, director general of Odisha Fire Services, said the death toll stood at 288 but was expected to rise further, potentially approaching 380. Odisha's chief secretary Pradeep Jena confirmed that about 900 injured people had been hospitalized.

'Someone should be punished'

Vaishnav said the "change that occurred during electronic interlocking, the accident happened due to that", referring to a technical term for a complex signal system designed to stop trains colliding by arranging their movement on the tracks.

"Whoever did it, and how it happened, will be found out after proper investigation," he said. Local media have quoted a preliminary investigation report, with the Times of India reporting on Sunday that "human error in signaling may have caused the collision between three trains".

Prime Minister Narendra Modi visited the crash site and injured passengers in hospital on Saturday and said "no one responsible" would be spared. "I pray that we get out of this sad moment as soon as possible," he told state broadcaster Doordarshan.

The rescue effort was declared over on Saturday evening after emergency personnel had combed the mangled wreckage for survivors and laid scores of bodies beside the tracks. A high school close to the crash site was turned into a makeshift morgue, but officials said many of the bodies were so disfigured that several distraught families could only identify their loved ones by pieces of jewellery.

"There were bodies with only a torso, an entirely burnt face, disfigured skull and no other visible identity markers left," said Ranajit Nayak, the police officer in charge of releasing the bodies at the school.

In sweltering heat, unidentified bodies were being transferred to bigger centres and officials suggested some would only be identified by DNA testing. Mohammad Abid, 35, said his 18-year-old son had somehow survived the crash without injuries but he was looking for his cousin, who had been travelling with him. "I want to know how two trains were allowed on the same track... someone should be punished for this," Abid said.

Search for loved ones

Grief-stricken Vishwanath Sahni, 47, was searching for his 26-year-old son Manoj Kumar, who had been travelling to Chennai for work in the textile industry. He was waiting at a morgue after touring every hospital that he could. "I don't know if I'll find my son," he said. Beside him waited his friend Mahender Yadav, 60, whose two sons travelling with Kumar were recovering in hospital. "One of them has serious injuries but I know that they are in a hospital and doctors will do their best," Yadav said. "I just wanted to be with Sahni and hope that he finds his son."

Authorities said every hospital between the crash site and the state capital Bhubaneswar, around 200 kilometres



BALASORE: Victims' family members look at photographs to identify bodies at a business park used as temporary morgue for the dead recovered from the carriage wreckage of a three-train collision near Balasore, in India's eastern state of Odisha. — AFP

(125 miles) away, had received victims. India has one of the world's largest rail networks and has seen several disasters over the years, the worst of them in 1981 when a train derailed while crossing a bridge in Bihar and plunged into the river below, killing between 800 and 1,000 people.

Friday's crash ranks as its third worst and the deadliest since 1995, when two express trains collided in Firozabad,

near Agra, killing more than 300 people. The disaster comes despite new investments and upgrades in technology that have significantly improved railway safety in recent years.

Condolences have poured in from around the world, including from Pope Francis, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken and French President Emmanuel Macron. — AFP

HK police detain eight on Tiananmen anniversary

HONG KONG: Hong Kong police detained a prominent pro-democracy activist and at least seven others on Sunday, the 34th anniversary of the bloody Tiananmen Square crackdown in China. For years, Hong Kongers would converge on the city's Victoria Park and its surrounding neighborhood to commemorate the events of June 4, 1989 — taking part in candlelight vigils.

This weekend, scores of police were deployed in the area, stopping people to search their belongings and question them. By late afternoon, AFP reporters witnessed at least eight people taken away by police in vans — including Alexandra Wong, a well-known pro-democracy activist better known as "Grandma Wong".

The 67-year-old was carrying flowers as police surrounded her and escorted her away. Another woman who shouted "Raise candles! Mourn 64!" — a shorthand for the sensitive date — was also detained, along with a young man dressed in black carrying a book.

The book title was "35th of May", a likely reference to June 4. One woman who was briefly questioned, searched and then released, shrugged and told AFP: "Everyone knows what day is today." Police arrested four people on Saturday for "seditious" acts and "disorderly conduct", and another four were detained on suspicion of breaching the peace. By late afternoon Sunday, police had set up a tent in the middle of the busy shopping district where they questioned people out of direct sight of the public.

Forbidden commemoration

Discussion of the Tiananmen crackdown is highly sensitive for China's communist leadership and commemoration is forbidden on the mainland. The government sent troops and tanks to Beijing's Tiananmen Square in 1989 to break up peaceful protests, brutally crushing a weeks-long wave of demonstrations calling for political change. Hundreds — by some estimates, more than 1,000 — were killed. For decades, Hong Kong was the only Chinese city with a large-scale commemoration — a key index of the liberties and political pluralism afforded by its semi-autonomous status.

But the annual vigil at Victoria Park has been banned since 2020, when Beijing imposed a sweeping national security law to quell dissent after massive, and at times violent, pro-democracy protests. The park was transformed for a "hometown carnival fair" organized by pro-Beijing groups this weekend to celebrate the up-



HONG KONG: League of Social Democrats leader Chan Po Ying (C) argues with police officers before being taken away in the Causeway Bay shopping district of Hong Kong on June 4, 2023, close to the venue where Hong Kong people traditionally gather annually to mourn the victims of China's Tiananmen Square crackdown in 1989. — AFP

coming 26th anniversary of Hong Kong's handover from Britain to China. Wong, a 53-year-old fairgoer, said the Tiananmen vigil was an event of the past. "Hong Kong is a different place now."

Erase memories

Beijing has gone to exhaustive lengths to erase the 1989 event from public memory in the mainland. All mention of the crackdown is scrubbed from China's internet. On Sunday, officers were posted around Tiananmen Square, at times stopping cyclists. Over the weekend, sites of more recent protests — a bridge in Beijing where a "freedom" banner was unfurled, and Wulumuqi Street in Shanghai where demonstrations happened in November — also saw heightened security.

The British Embassy in Beijing posted the June 4, 1989, front page of China's mouthpiece People's Daily that showed a small report about how hospitals were inundated with casualties. Within 20 minutes, censors removed the news, the embassy tweeted on Sunday.

Hong Kong authorities were vigilant in the weeks before June 4, with police seizing a commemorative "Pillar of Shame" statue for a security trial and books on the Tiananmen crackdown removed from public libraries.

Fourteen killed in southwest China landslide

BEIJING: Fourteen people were killed and five are missing following a landslide in southwestern China's Sichuan province on Sunday, the local government said. The "collapse took place high on a mountain" at 6 am (2200 GMT Saturday) at a state-owned forestry station in Jinkouhe, near the city of Leshan, the local government said in an online statement.

"As of 3:30 pm, the remains of 14 victims have been recovered, while five people remain missing," it said. Authorities sent more than 180 people and a dozen pieces of rescue and recovery equipment to the site, according to the statement.

"Currently, search and rescue work is urgently underway," it said. The site is in a mountainous region about 240 kilometres (150 miles) south of the provincial capital Chengdu. Landslides are a frequent danger in rural and

mountainous parts of China, particularly during the rainy summer months.

Contacted by AFP, an official in Jinkouhe's publicity department declined to give further comment on Sunday's landslide. The settlement of around 40,000 people lies between verdant mountains and a wide river and its economy largely runs on forestry, power generation, agriculture and other industries.

Remote and densely forested, much of Sichuan is particularly prone to disasters. Extreme weather triggered a series of landslides in the province in 2017, including one that completely buried the mountain village of Xinmo, entombing more than 60 homes. In 2019, massive rains again caused a slew of landslides, including one that buried a section of railway under repair and those working on it. The province is also seismically active and periodically experiences deadly earthquakes.

A 7.9-magnitude quake in 2008 left more than 87,000 people dead or missing, including 5,335 school pupils. Although China has strengthened safety protocols in its extractive industries in recent years, accidents still frequently occur. — AFP

Uganda reports 54 peacekeepers killed in attack

KAMPALA: Some 54 Ugandan peacekeepers died when militants besieged an African Union base in Somalia last week, Uganda's President Yoweri Museveni said, in one of the worst recent attacks by Al-Shabaab jihadists in the war-torn country.

"We discovered the lifeless bodies of 54 fallen soldiers, including a commander," Museveni said in a Twitter post late Saturday. The veteran leader was speaking during a meeting with members of his governing National Resistance Movement party, the presidency told AFP on Sunday.

The toll is one of the heaviest yet since pro-government forces backed by the AU force known as ATMIS launched an offensive against Al-Shabaab last August. It was also a rare admission of a major military death toll by African Union members.

Al-Shabaab, which has been waging a deadly insurgency against Somalia's fragile central government for more than a decade, claimed responsibility for the May 26 attack, saying it had overrun the base and killed 137 soldiers.

Al-Shabaab is known to exaggerate claims of battlefield gains for propaganda purposes, and the governments of nations contributing troops to the AU force rarely confirm casualties. The militants drove a car laden with explosives into the base in Bulo Marer, 120 kilometres (75 miles) southwest of the capital Mogadishu, leading to a gunfight, local residents and a Somali military commander told AFP.

Museveni had already said last week that "some of the soldiers there did not perform as expected and panicked" as some 800 assailants attacked. That forced a withdrawal to a nearby base some nine kilometres (6 miles) away, he said, deploring "a missed opportunity to annihilate" the Qaeda-linked insurgents.

"The mistake was made by two commanders, Maj. Oluka and Maj. Obbo, who ordered the soldiers to retreat," Museveni said on Saturday, adding that they would face charges in a court martial. However, "our soldiers demonstrated remarkable resilience and reorganized themselves, resulting in the recapture of the base."

ATMIS has so far not disclosed how many people died, but said it sent in helicopter gunships as reinforcement after the pre-dawn raid. The United States also said it conducted an airstrike near the base a day after it was attacked. — AFP

Nepali guide rescues climber from Everest death zone

KATHMANDU: A Nepali guide abandoned his client's Everest summit bid to rescue a Malaysian climber in a deadly mountaineering season that has seen at least twelve deaths. Gelje Sherpa was guiding a Chinese client to the 8,849-metre (29,032-feet) peak and planned to assist him to paraglide down.

Instead, only a few hundred metres from the summit, they came across a lone man clinging to a rope and shivering in the area known as the "death zone". The area above 8,000 metres has earned its name because of its thin air, freezing temperatures and low oxygen levels that heighten the risk of altitude sickness. It is also notorious for its difficult terrain. "When I found him in that state, my heart did not let me leave him there," Sherpa told AFP.

Many other climbers had walked past the man that day, but he declined to criticize them. "It is a place where you have to think of your survival first," he said. Sherpa told his client — who will have paid at least \$45,000 to attempt Everest, including a permit fee of \$11,000 — to return without a summit. "When I decided to go down, my client did not agree at first. Of course, he was there after spending a lot of money, it must have been his dream for years and he had to find time to come here to climb."

"He got angry and said he wanted to go to the summit. 'I had to scold him and tell him that he has to descend because he was my responsibility and I couldn't send him to the summit on his own. He got upset.' He explained that he wanted to take the sick man down the mountain. 'Then he realized that by 'rescue' I meant that I wanted to save him. He understood and then he apologized later."

'You saved my life'

Sherpa, 30, fitted the ailing climber with his supplemental oxygen supply, improving some of his symptoms, but he was still unable to walk.

The rocky uneven terrain meant that Sherpa, who is about 1.6 metres tall (five feet and three inches) and weighs 55 kilograms, had to carry the Malaysian in some sections.

"It is a very difficult task to carry someone and bring them down from there. But some sections are very rocky, I couldn't drag him," said Sherpa. "If I did that, he could have broken his bones, he was already not doing well." Sherpa hauled the man down nearly 700 metres for almost six hours to Camp 4 by himself. "I've been a part of many search and rescue missions, but this was very challenging," he said.

Joined by another guide, the pair wrapped the climber in sleeping mats and secured him with ropes, dragging him on snowy slopes and carrying him on their backs when necessary.

Finally, they arrived at Camp 3 at 7,162 metres (23,500 feet) and a helicopter using a long line lifted the stricken climber down to the base camp. Sherpa was not able to meet the Malaysian climber again but received a message thanking him. "He wrote me 'You saved my life, you are god to me'," Sherpa said. — AFP



KATHMANDU: Nepali guide Gelje Sherpa speaks during an interview with AFP in Kathmandu. Gelje abandoned his client's Everest summit bid to rescue a Malaysian climber in a deadly season that has seen at least twelve deaths. — AFP

Business

MONDAY, JUNE 5, 2023

France avoids S&P credit downgrade

Tighter financial conditions would restrain France's economic activity this year

PARIS: France managed to avoid a fresh credit downgrade from a leading rating agency, despite mounting concern over the country's surging national debt. Leading ratings agency Fitch in April lowered its rating on France's debt, which is approaching three trillion euros (\$3.2 trillion). It pointed to the country's hung parliament and public protests as risks to plans by President Emmanuel Macron to cut government spending.

But influential rival S&P Global late Friday maintained its "AA" rating when it updated its advice, dispelling fears France could face another downgrade over its chronic overspending that last saw a government run a budget surplus in the 1970s. The agency said the decision to maintain the rating level was "mainly due to the government's revised budgetary consolidation strategy", as well as recently implemented labor market and pension reforms.

"I take note of Standard & Poor's decision to leave France's debt rating unchanged", French Finance Minister Bruno Le Maire said in an interview

with Le Journal du dimanche weekly. "It's a positive signal. Our public finance strategy is clear. It is ambitious. And it is credible."

Macron pushed through a pension reform this year in the face of the biggest demonstrations in a generation, although the proposed savings will be lower than first expected because of concessions made to trade unions and opponents.

S&P warned that the outlook still remained "negative", saying that "tighter financial conditions and still-high core inflation" would restrain France's economic activity this year and next. It also flagged concerns over the lack of a parliamentary majority, making it harder to implement policies.

Macron came to power in 2017 promising to balance France's books and his first prime minister, Edouard Philippe, memorably told parliament that the country was "dancing on a volcano that is rumbling ever louder".

But unbudgeted tax cuts during Macron's first term following the so-called "Yellow Vest" anti-gov-

ernment revolt and the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 have led to a sharp deterioration in the public finances since.

Credibility questioned

The country's debt currently stands at around 111 percent of gross national product (GDP), from just shy of 100 percent before COVID-19 when Macron put in place one of Europe's most generous social safety nets. The government has brought the annual public deficit down from a whopping 9.0 percent of GDP in 2020 to a forecast 4.9 percent this year. Its projections show it falling to below 3.0 percent by 2027 when Macron will leave office.

But ratings agencies and investors are increasingly concerned about the credibility of the 45-year-old centrist leader whose successful prior career in investment banking once saw him dubbed the "Mozart of finance".

On top of multi-billion-euro subsidies packages and price controls last year aimed at easing a cost-

of-living crisis sparked by the war in Ukraine, Macron has since promised further tax cuts of two billion euros for the middle classes. Increased defence spending — set to rise 400 billion euros over the next seven years — is a further drag on the public purse.

The public finances "were already in a degraded state before the COVID-19 pandemic, but to our eyes they now call for urgent measures", the head of the national auditing office, Pierre Moscovici, said in March. "Reforming the public finances... has to be a national priority," he argued.

The French central bank has issued similar warnings in milder language. France has the highest level of public spending relative to the size of its economy of all countries monitored by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, a Paris-based economic institute.

Fitch lowered its rating by one notch on April 28 to "AA-". Macron said the agency "was making a profound mistake in its political analysis" in comments to the L'Opinion magazine afterwards. — AFP

Fast food chain at center of US culture wars

WASHINGTON: The "Lord's chicken" no more: US fast food chain Chick-fil-A — beloved among Americans for its sandwiches, nuggets and milkshakes — found itself on the receiving end of right-wing ire this week, accused of succumbing to "woke" ideology.

After conservative customers realized the company employs a "diversity, equity and inclusion" representative, it has joined the ranks of other seemingly innocuous brands now facing calls for boycotts, such as mega supermarket Target and Bud Light beer.

Until recently, conservatives had seen the restaurant as one of their own, with its website explaining that its locations are closed on Sundays so the Baptist founder "and his employees could set aside one day to rest and worship if they choose."

And in 2012, it was progressives who spurned Chick-fil-A's offerings for supporting anti-gay marriage efforts. But the tables have turned, as right-wing influencers complain on social media about a statement from its vice president of diversity, equity and inclusion who says the company is committed "to ensuring mutual respect, understanding and dignity everywhere we do business."

Though that position has already been filled for a few years, angry social media commentators seem to have only just noticed this week. "Disappointing. Et tu Chick-fil-A?" asked former Trump-era Justice Department official Jeff Clark on Twitter, quoting Julius Caesar's realization in Latin that his friend Brutus was among his killers.

And contributor to conservative organization Turning Point USA, Morgonn McMichael, accused the chain in a viral video of deciding to "bow down to the woke lords."

"Chick-fil-A you are no longer the Lord's chicken. You're actually the woke chicken, and I'm really upset about it as a Christian woman," she says. McMichael and her friend then complain about having to visit a rival chain instead — even though they do not seem as enthused about the fried poultry options at the new place. McMichael later claimed the video "was only about 30 percent serious."

War hits sowing season in Sudan fuelling famine fears

GEDAREF: In past years Mohammed Haroun readily found work on Sudanese farms but this year he is left empty-handed as agribusinesses, starved of cash by fighting in Sudan, leave their land fallow. Like hundreds of farm laborers from across Sudan, Haroun made his way to Gedaref state, the country's breadbasket, at the first sign of rain, which heralds the start of the growing season.

But this year — with the country embroiled in brutal fighting between warring generals — no one was expecting them. The state's large, mechanized farms are not taking on workers, as a cash crunch hits their finances, jeopardizing a harvest that normally meets 40 percent of Sudan's grain needs and fuelling fears of famine.

Haroun makes the annual journey for work from his home region of Kordofan, hundreds of kilometres to the west. "In the past, I would never be waiting for more than a day," he told AFP, lying on the untilled soil with his possessions around him. "I've been here for five days now with no job offer and I've run out of money. I don't know where my next meal is coming from." Around him, the rain has already started falling on the fallow fields — meaning that it is now probably already too late to sow a crop this year.

Saddled with debt

One bad season could spell disaster in a country



MIDDLETOWN: Chick-fil-A chain restaurant in Middletown, Delaware. The "Lord's chicken" no more: US fast food chain Chick-fil-A - beloved among Americans for its sandwiches, nuggets and milkshakes - found itself on the receiving end of right-wing ire this week, accused of succumbing to "woke" ideology. — AFP

'Toxic'

Chick-fil-A is only the latest US company to take center stage in the "culture wars" — the often sudden and intense controversies over issues like LGBTQ rights, guns and education, many of which involve everyday aspects of American life.

Giant supermarket chain Target last week announced it would remove some LGBTQ pride merchandise from its shelves after receiving intense backlash from conservative media personalities — and even facing threats against employees.

The company had launched a line of items marking June's LGBTQ Pride Month, including rainbow-adorned T-shirts, party decorations and cooking supplies. Earlier this year, it was iconic American beer Bud Light in the anti-woke spotlight, for partnering with a popular transgender social media influencer.

Many social media users now say they've totally given up the brand, and Florida Governor Ron DeSantis, a Republican presidential candidate, has

vowed to never drink Bud Light again, loathe to support anything "woke" — a somewhat amorphous term used by conservatives to describe progressive cultural values.

The slogan "Go woke, go broke" has circulated on social media to encourage such boycotts. "The goal is to make 'pride' toxic for brands," conservative commentator Matt Walsh said on Twitter. "If they decide to shove this garbage in our face, they should know that they'll pay a price. It won't be worth whatever they think they'll gain," he added. "First Bud Light and now Target. Our campaign is making progress. Let's keep it going."

With the 2024 election campaign looming, the culture wars don't seem poised to run out of steam any time soon, and their next targets may be just as unpredictable as their last. "If you would've told me a year ago that a meal of Chick-fil-A washed down by Bud Light would trigger the (conservatives) I would've asked what you were smoking," independent journalist Aaron Rupar observed. — AFP

where one in three inhabitants were in need of aid even before a power struggle between rival generals erupted into all-out fighting on April 15. More than 80 percent of Sudan's workforce is employed in agriculture, which generates 35 to 40 percent of gross domestic product, according to the United Nations.

Mirghani Ali sells farm supplies including seedlings, fertilizers and pesticides, and has never seen anything like this season. "We should be overwhelmed with orders right now, but here we are at the end of May, and demand is incredibly low," he said.

For Mohammed Abdelkarim, who cultivates 10,000 acres (over 4,000 hectares) of corn, cotton and sunflowers, the cause is clear: financing has been cut off. "Banks headquartered in Khartoum have not responded to requests since mid-April," when the fighting began.

"And even if financing does come through, we'll need time to get seedlings, and we don't know if we'll have access to fuel to power our machines," Abdelkarim said some farms in the state were already in debt after being forced to leave last year's wheat crop to rot in the fields as the cash-strapped government failed to honor promises to purchase their harvest.

The central bank announced in May it would open lines of credit for farmers associated with local co-operatives, and government ministers — who still hold press conferences despite the fighting — assured the public that the sowing season is not at risk.

Although Sudan's production of staple crops — sorghum, millet and wheat — rose 45 percent in 2022 compared with the previous year, it still met less than half of domestic needs, according to the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO).

In the past, the balance has been covered largely by imports from Russia and Ukraine, but supplies have been hit since Moscow launched a full-scale invasion of its neighbor in February last year. Many Sudanese have been left unable to afford even basic staples, as world food prices have soared.

Unprepared

"Transportation disruptions, market devastation and the absence of financing... will have catastrophic impacts on the food security of the people of Sudan and the surrounding region," said the head of the Khartoum-based Arab Organization for Agriculture Development, Ibrahim al-Dakhiri.

"Severed supply lines have led to the complete destruction of poultry production, which is mostly concentrated in Khartoum," he said. Although some farmers have sown crops like maize, millet or oilseeds in areas spared by the fighting, they are doing so "with an unpreparedness never before seen in Sudan," he added. Preparing for the rainy season is essential in a country where 95 percent of cultivated land is rain-fed, according to the FAO. Farmers in Gedaref found themselves facing the first rains "with no seeds or fuel, and now they can't work their land", farmer Hussein Ibrahim told AFP.

With roads cut off by crossfire, trade at a standstill and processing factories razed or looted, agribusinesses face an uphill battle, prompting some heavyweight investors to walk away. One of the largest actors in the Sudanese economy, Haggard Group, which used to provide work for thousands of farm laborers, recently threw in the towel. In a letter dated May 29, employees were notified that the company was "suspending operations" and letting all of them go. — AFP

In distorted Buenos Aires rental market, it's dollar vs peso

BUENOS AIRES: Dollar-wielding foreigners living it up in Buenos Aires while locals scrape by; Argentina's sky-high inflation and weakening currency has yielded a schizophrenic rental market — a bargain for some, a curse for others.

Ordinarily, a middle-class couple like anthropologist Martina Campos Lopez, 33 and her computer technician husband Bruno Suarez, 43, would top rental agents' lists of eligible tenants.

But they earn in pesos — a currency trading at 488 to the dollar on the black market, where most people do their trading. More than a year ago, the couple had to give up their apartment in anticipation of a price hike. They have been unable to find another, and were forced to move in with Lopez's mother. With their toddler.

"The most difficult is this feeling of being like a child again, without independence," Lopez said as she showed AFP around the small house. "Our life is on pause. A temporary measure has become permanent. It is discouraging," she said.

A room the couple uses as a bedroom is packed to the brim with household items from a former life: a coffee maker, microwave, a fan, a fridge. Boxes are stacked high in the bathroom. People such as Lopez are falling ever further behind as Argentina contends with inflation topping 100 percent year-on-year, and a fast-devaluing peso.

Previously, Lopez and her husband spent half their income on rent. But today, "even with 70 percent, we



BUENOS AIRES: Sebastian Resguardo (L) and Chiara Pollini (R), real estate advisors, work in Buenos Aires. Renting housing in pesos and on a long-term basis is a titanic task in Buenos Aires, where temporary and dollar-denominated supply dominates the market due to three-digit annual inflation that has caused the real estate market to explode. — AFP

cannot find anything." Property owners are not interested in receiving rent in pesos, never knowing what the rate will be in just a week, never mind a year. Property agent Fernanda Ledesma says her company has no peso-based property rentals on the books. "And when a new property comes in, it is snatched up in just hours. People are desperate, they don't even ask to see (the property)" in person, she told AFP.

A law passed in 2020 with the aim of protecting tenants, may have inadvertently made matters worse. Adopted at a time inflation was 36 percent, it limited rent increases to one per year and determined a minimum period of three years per contract.

Alejandro Bannazar, president of the Argentine Real Estate Chamber, said leases that expire at the end of the first three-year period, in mid-2023, "will jump 100 percent" based on a formula in the law that takes into account wage adjustments and inflation.

This would cut off many more potential tenants. "It is a time bomb," said Bannazar. In such circumstances, many owners are opting to leave their properties standing empty. One of them is German Matienzo, who blames the price freeze.

"The fact that over the course of a year you cannot make adjustments when you have inflation of around 130 percent... this means the monthly income is depreciating abysmally from one month to the next." Others rent informally to acquaintances, often with exorbitant conditions attached. — AFP

NBK WEEKLY MONEY MARKET REPORT

US House and Senate reach agreement to raise debt ceiling

KUWAIT: The US dollar index fell on the week, last trading around 104.01. EUR/USD decreased to close at 1.0706, while GBP/USD increased by 0.91% ending the week at 1.2448. USD/JPY fell below the 140.00 threshold this week, last trading at 139.91. Meanwhile, equities closed mixed this week. The S&P 500 gained 3.04% while the Nikkei 225 also increased 0.43%. Finally, the Euro Stoxx 50 edged lower by 0.40%.

United States

US consumer confidence reaches 6 month low

Consumer confidence in the United States fell to a 6-month low, after the Conference Board index came in at 102.3 in May, slightly below the previous print of 103.7. The report revealed growing uncertainty around the economy, specifically as it relates to employment and future expectations. Ataman Ozyildirim, Senior Director of Economics at The Conference Board stated, "Consumers' view of current conditions became somewhat less upbeat while their expectations remained gloomy." The assessment of employment conditions saw the biggest drop, with consumers reporting that jobs are 'plentiful' falling 4% from 47.5% in April to 43.5% in May. Finally, Ozyildirim added, "consumers also became more downbeat about future business conditions, weighing on the expectations index."

US labor market tight & robust

Job openings in April surprised to the upside, with openings at their highest level since January. The JOLTs job openings report revealed 10.1 million job openings versus 9.8 million in March and 9.4 million as an expected figure. The non-farm employment report further supported the idea of a robust labor market, after 339K jobs were added to the US economy versus an expectation of 193K and previous figure of 294K. This was driven by gains in sectors such as professional business (64K), government (56K), healthcare (52K), and hospitality (48K). Despite this, the unemployment rate ticked up to 3.7% from 3.4% previously as more people started to look for work. Average hourly earnings dropped to 0.3% monthly from 0.4% previously, representing a drop to 4.3% from 4.4% previously on an annual basis. The strong labor market data is not enough to alter market expectations, which overwhelmingly favors a pause in rate hikes at the upcoming FOMC meeting.

Fed official signals pause
The latest remarks from Federal Reserve governor Philip Jefferson show that he supports a pause in rate hikes for the upcoming FOMC meeting. Commenting on interest rates, Jefferson said, "skipping a rate hike at a coming meeting would allow the [FOMC] to see more data before making decisions about the extent of additional policy firming." However, he did warn that a pause to assess the effects of rate hikes does not necessarily mean that they "have reached the peak rate for this cycle."

US leaders reach debt ceiling agreement

Following a period of intense negotiations, President Joe Biden and the Republicans led by Kevin McCarthy have reached a debt ceiling deal prior to the deadline. The agreement would see the debt limit suspended until January 2025, meaning President Biden would not have to deal with a deadlock and the politics surrounding it in a pivotal election year for 2024. Furthermore, the agreement sees Biden and democrats retain all the clauses in the Inflation Reduction Act, a victory for them in an economic and climate sense as Republicans have long tried to alter or repeal the act. Despite this, the Republicans have also gained major traction. The deal ensures that

non-defense spending will remain flat for 2024, and will increase by a capped 1% in 2025 and for the next six years. Additionally, the agreement involves an expedited gas pipeline in West Virginia that Democrats have long opposed. There will also be cuts to the IRS, COVID relief funds, and an expansion in work requirements, which could see millions lose access to food stamps. Instead, House Republicans ensured that the deal would see full funding for military veteran's health care and would expand the PACT Act's toxic exposure fund. Finally, the deal would guarantee that student loan repayment would re-

sume at the end of the summer following Biden's decision to pause it during the height of the COVID pandemic in 2020. However, Republicans were not able to repeal Biden's plan to provide up to \$20,000 in debt relief for qualified student borrowers and his income-driven repayment plan that benefits lower-socioeconomic households.

Rates - 4th June, 2023

Currencies	Previous Week Levels				This Week's Expected Range		3-Month Forward
	Open	Low	High	Close	Minimum	Maximum	
EUR	1.0724	1.0633	1.0778	1.0706	1.0500	1.0900	1.0764
GBP	1.2342	1.2325	1.2544	1.2448	1.2300	1.2600	1.2472
JPY	140.68	138.45	140.93	139.94	138.00	141.00	137.97
CHF	0.9049	0.9012	0.9148	0.9089	0.8900	0.9200	0.8998

Europe

Euro zone Inflation Cools

Annual CPI inflation in the Eurozone fell to 6.1% in May from 7.0% previously, beating market expectations of 6.3%. Furthermore, annual core CPI dropped to 5.3% in May from 5.6% in April, again beating expectations of 5.5%. The bloc's largest economies, Germany and France, saw noticeable slowdowns in regards to the pace of price growth. Despite this,

in at 48.8 versus the previous print of 49.2. This is the second time in a row China faced a sub 50 print, indicating a contraction in the manufacturing sector. Furthermore, the reading is the weakest since December when China started lifting COVID restrictions. Meanwhile, non-manufacturing PMI came in at 54.5 from 56.4 previously, slightly lower than forecasts yet following the trend of their peers in the United States, Europe, and the UK with services in expansion territory while manufacturing contracts. The recent lower than anticipated prints are feeding the narrative and worries of a weakening global economy in the face of elevated inflation and interest rates. Markets will keep an eye on further economic data to gauge the direction of the global economy, with signs of weakness indicating that global tightening cycles are closer to the end.

Australia inflation accelerates in April

Consumer prices in Australia rose more than expected, with annual CPI for April coming in at 6.8% from 6.3% previously, noticeably higher than the forecasted figure of 6.4%. Core inflation meanwhile was up 6.5% in the year for April, down from the previous print of 6.9%. The increase in the headline figure was driven mainly by increases in housing as well as a jump in fuel prices. The surprise in inflation figures raised pressure on the Reserve Bank of Australia to deliver a rate hike. Markets are slightly favoring a pause by the RBA, however the odds of a rate hike increased to 45% following the report. The AUD/USD currency pair managed to close the week higher at 0.6611.

Asia Pacific

China Manufacturing PMI Ignites Fears of Global Slowdown in Growth

China's disappointing recovery from lifting COVID restrictions continues, as factory activity falls more than expected with the manufacturing PMI coming

Kuwait

Kuwaiti Dinar
USD/KWD closed last week at 0.30735.
Rates - 4th June, 2023



شركة الصفاة للاستثمار
AL SAFAT INVESTMENT COMPANY

KUWAIT BOURSA WEEKLY REPORT

WEEK ENDED ON 1 JUNE 2023

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Market	M. Cap (KD ml)	Last Close	WTD %	MTD %	YTD %	Quantity Traded	Value Traded	No. of Trades	P/E	P/B	% of Total M. Cap
Premier Market	32,146	7,480.23	0.2%	-0.2%	-7.8%	527,934,436	192,053,197	31,614	15.5	1.1	78.3%
Main Market	8,911	5,443.77	0.7%	0.1%	-2.7%	309,804,671	62,569,091	13,582	13.9	0.7	21.7%
All Share	41,057	6,787.14	0.3%	-0.1%	-6.9%	837,739,107	254,622,288	45,196	14.6	0.8	100%

Sector	M. Cap (KD ml)	Last Close	WTD %	MTD %	YTD %	Quantity Traded	Value Traded	No. of Trades	P/E	P/B	% of Total M. Cap
Banking	24,536	1,648.95	-0.3%	-0.1%	-8.1%	322,343,155	156,287,166	15,151	19.8	1.2	59.76%
Basic Materials	523	926.35	2.9%	0.8%	7.1%	2,545,596	1,805,754	932	6.2	1.5	1.27%
Consumer Discretionary	1,018	1,518.46	2.1%	-1.4%	2.1%	35,349,334	5,575,988	2,034	13.9	0.9	2.48%
Consumer Staples	155	508.49	-2.1%	1.1%	5.9%	3,120,366	1,333,495	340	NM	0.9	0.38%
Energy	209	1,001.74	0.4%	1.2%	-12.0%	3,530,495	296,967	381	9.1	0.7	0.51%
Financial Services	4,222	1,182.96	1.0%	-0.1%	-5.9%	288,552,221	37,094,801	12,324	21.1	0.7	10.28%
Health Care	224	451.56	-1.6%	-1.6%	-2.2%	9,313	4,348.57	13	10.0	0.9	0.55%
Industrials	3,339	962.39	0.2%	-0.5%	-10.8%	39,586,947	19,943,718	5,028	16.7	0.8	8.13%
Insurance	886	2,150.80	0.3%	0.7%	38.7%	831,982	202,439	136	10.0	0.8	2.16%
Real Estate	2,384	1,110.32	0.8%	-0.4%	-8.1%	98,177,957	10,833,901	4,576	11.4	0.5	5.81%
Technology	9	675.85	16.3%	-2.1%	-2.9%	555,942	47,233	125	NM	0.8	0.02%
Telecommunications	3,354	1,097.52	2.9%	0.1%	-7.1%	40,709,801	20,754,260	3,884	11.0	1.3	8.17%
Utilities	199	476.32	-0.5%	-1.6%	-3.7%	2,425,998	442,218	272	14.8	1.8	0.48%

Top Gainers

Stock	Last Close	Change %	Volume	Value	Trades
HAYATCOMM	83	27.69%	969,131	75,269	91
ALKOUT	600	27.39%	175	94	3
IFAHR	24.1	20.50%	8,416,196	194,439	364
BAYANINV	33.9	19.34%	2,162,010	67,499	125
ENERGYH	61.7	17.52%	96,617	5,700	48

Top Losers

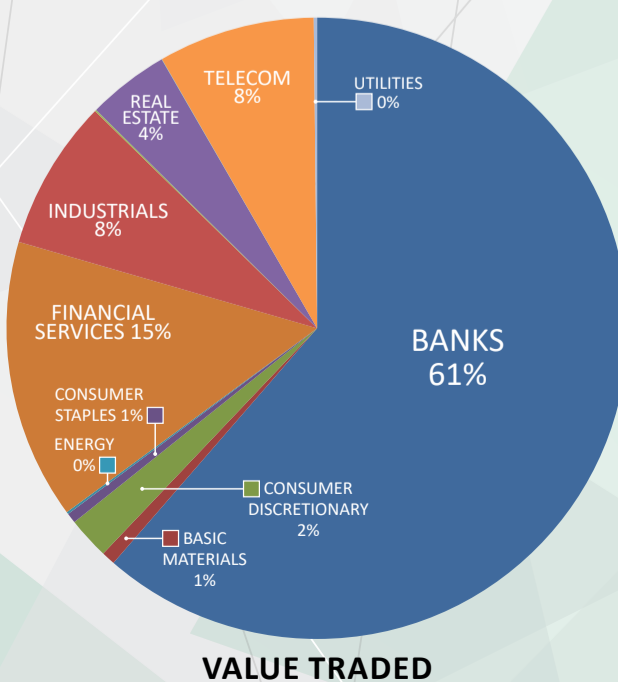
Stock	Last Close	Change %	Volume	Value	Trades
ALAQARIA	28.3	-19.60%	267,250	7,698	44
KFIC	62	-10.01%	224,855	13,961	24
COAST	72.9	-8.88%	2,562,446	193,166	115
KMEFIC	84	-7.69%	23,643	2,014	12
CATTL	91.9	-7.17%	86,433	8,164	27

Top Volume

Stock	Last	Change %	Volume	Value	Trades
GFH	80.3	0.00%	69,011,617	5,626,537	1,761
CBK	500	-0.60%	67,956,168	33,977,630	39
KFH	710	0.14%	61,553,776	43,924,292	4,989
GBK	254	-1.17%	60,866,787	15,633,185	1,833
ZAIN	515	1.78%	37,952,548	19,610,618	3,017

Top Value

Stock	Last	Change %	Volume	Value	Trades
KFH	710	0.14%	61,553,776	43,924,292	4,989
CBK	500	-0.60%	67,956,168	33,977,630	39
NBK	917	-0.65%	33,988,410	31,431,383	2,909
ZAIN	515	1.78%	37,952,548	19,610,618	3,017
BOUBYAN	600	0.67%	29,358,502	17,647,830	2,214



Market Summary:

- Premier market volume increased by 1% while value dropped by 1%. Main Market volume and value grew by 30% and 49%, respectively.
- Premier and Main indexes reach resistance levels that both couldn't overcome. Currently trading at support levels.
- Technically, the All Share index closed at 6787, with support levels at 6787 and 6759, and resistance at 6805. The Premier index closed at 7480, with support levels at 7454 and 7411, while resistance at 7512. The Main index closed at 5443, with support levels at 5424 & 5393, while resistance was at 5447.

Global Finance: Boubyan is the world's best Islamic retail bank

Adding a new award to its achievements

KUWAIT: In a new achievement that reinforces its domestic and international leadership, Global Finance has named Boubyan Bank the "World's Best Islamic Retail Bank" for 2023 upon announcing its awards for banks in Kuwait, the region, and globally. This highlights the constant efforts of the bank towards improving its banking services.

On this occasion, Abdullah Al-Mejhem, Boubyan Bank's Chief Private Banking and Chief Consumer Banking expressed that he took pride in such international recognitions of the bank, which crowned the bank's efforts to move forward, and its ceaseless efforts to invest in what ensured the best banking services, especially digital services.

"Receiving this award was no coincidence; rather, it was the fruit of exerted efforts over the past years, and ongoing follow-up to offer more products and services that meet customers' needs and make their lives easier", he added.

Al-Mejhem went on to elaborate: "Boubyan Bank always endeavors to offer creative and innovative services and products that meet the demands of customers; this reflects the bank's commitment to building exceptional partnerships and strong and long-term relationships with customers based on mutual trust."

• Laying the Foundations of Digital Transformation

Al-Mejhem added: "During the past period, we witnessed improved expansion plans based on a group of basic el-

ements: digital transformation is one of the most important elements towards the launch of the growth and rapid improvement that we will be seeing over the upcoming years to improve the Islamic banking industry."

He went on to add: "We have succeeded over the past period in offering a group of outstanding digital and conventional banking solutions to a large segment of customers, which meet their expectations and needs across various aspects of life, and we hope to maintain sustained digital growth in a manner that promotes the change of the concept of conventional banking services in addition to maintaining the highest levels of customers' trust."

Al-Mejhem elaborated: "Boubyan Bank is a pioneer in laying the foundations of digital transformation and offering digital solutions which left its mark on the Islamic digital banking sector. The bank now enjoys a clear banking and digital influence in shaping a promising future in Kuwait and the region as a whole amid the tough competition in



Abdullah Al-Mejhem

business sectors."

"The past years witnessed an unprecedented increase in the number of Boubyan Bank's customers using banking solutions; the digital ones in particular. This led to the great growth in the number of customers and number of banking transactions performed using all channels.", he added.

Global Finance's awards are particularly important owing to the international institution that awards them, which is renowned for its impartiality, strict and

accurate selection criteria, coupled with the fact that the award received by the bank reinforces its status globally.

1st Highlight

• Why is Boubyan always the best?

Global Finance has recognized Boubyan with this award in light of the below criteria:

- Strength of strategy set by the bank for attracting and servicing retail customers.
- Success in getting clients to use retail offerings.
- Innovation and creativity in providing outstanding banking and non-banking services via all channels.

2nd Highlight

This year witnessed the launch of the bank's new brand identity titled "Imagine the possibilities". The launch is aligned with the bank's success and achievements over the past years as well as its ambitions for the future. The rebranding process aimed to keep up with our growth, while expressing the bank's ambition and passion to build a strong relationship with customers, and to refresh our messages to various segments of customers and stakeholders and, thus, we updated our logo, our mission, vision, and Boubyan core values.

3rd Highlight

Boubyan Bank launched its new Premium Account, which keeps up with the improvements at the bank to make it a one-stop shop of banking services



offered to its affluent customers, while bringing them unique services and products that meet their needs inside and outside Kuwait.

4th Highlight

During this year, Boubyan Bank inaugurated a number of new branches (Al-Daiyea Branch, Al Khiran Outlet Mall Branch, and Abu Fatera Branch). This increased the number of branches across Kuwait to 48 branches, which comes as a part of the strategy of geographic presence, and expansion in offering banking services and solutions using the latest technologies, thus offering a unique experience and service level to maintain Boubyan Bank's leadership and ability to keep up with the ongoing developments in the Islamic banking industry.

- **Al-Mejhem: The award highlights Boubyan's leading role in changing the retail banking scene**
- **Boubyan focuses on offering value-added services with record-breaking performance levels**
- **Our retail banking services witnessed a quantum leap, reinforcing Boubyan's image as a "lifestyle"**



Members of the Board of Directors of Al Mulla and Behbehani with ambassadors.



The all-new Jeep Grand Wagoneer

Al Mulla & Behbehani unveils the all-new Grand Wagoneer

KUWAIT: Al Mulla & Behbehani Motor Company, the authorized distributor of Alfa Romeo, Chrysler, Dodge, Jeep, Ram, Fiat, Abarth and the Mopar brands, announces the launch of the all-new Grand Wagoneer by Jeep, the most luxurious and technologically advanced SUV in the brand's history. The reveal took place at the Al Mulla Auto Show at the 360 Kuwait in the presence of His Excellency James Holtsnider, Deputy Chief of Mission of the US Embassy in the State of Kuwait accompanied by Talal Behbehani and Imad Flayhan – Board Members of Al Mulla & Behbehani Motor Company.

Commenting on the event, Imad Flayhan said: "We are delighted to announce the launch of the all-new Grand Wagoneer by Jeep, the most luxurious and technologically advanced SUV in the Jeep brand's legendary 80-year history, during the Al Mulla Auto Show, and to celebrate this magnificent occasion in the presence of James Holtsnider, Deputy Chief of Mission of the US Embassy in the State of Kuwait. Adding, "At Al Mulla and Behbehani, we pride ourselves on being the catalysts of presenting innovative new automobiles for the car enthusiasts in Kuwait. Our partnership with American auto manufacturers goes back to many decades, and has consistently seen us deliver

Al Mulla and Behbehani's promise of Excellence, Professionalism and Innovation across our diverse portfolio of brands and taking them to new heights in the automotive industry."

With the launch of the the-all-new Grand Wagoneer by Jeep in Kuwait customers now have the opportunity to experience the car's renowned capability courtesy of three available 4x4 systems, exceptional driving dynamics, powerful performance, advanced technology, safety and a new level of comfort for up to eight passengers – all wrapped in a sophisticated and authentic new design.

Featuring three 4x4 systems and an all-new architecture that delivers exemplary on-road driving performance, the 2023 Grand Wagoneer epitomizes luxury and adventure. The bold and distinctive exterior is complemented with artisan levels of craftsmanship in the interior with opulent Palermo leather trimmed seating and a fully digital cockpit with leading-edge technologies that are exquisitely presented for ease of use.

The most technologically advanced Grand Wagoneer ever, also features next-generation innovations, including the new advanced Uconnect 5 system and 75 inches of total digital display screen area. This consists of 45 inches of screen across the front dashboard, Fire TV integration, digital rearview mirror and exclusive Rear Seat Monitoring Camera. Over 120 leading-edge safety and security features are also a part of the 2023 Grand Wagoneer inventory including innovative applications of technologies that connect the drive, vehicle and road. These include segment-leading features that enhance a driv-

er's field of vision, help make instrumentation easier to see and enable driver-assist capabilities that support collision avoidance. Autonomous vehicle capabilities, hand-free active driving assist, night vision with pedestrian and animal detection, intersection collision assist, drowsy driver detection, digital rearview mirror and 360-degree surround view camera are just some of the many attributes of the cutting-edge, large segment SUV.

The 2023 Grand Wagoneer has also collaborated with distinguished audio brand, McIntosh, to bring an exclusive, high-fidelity audio system to a vehicle for the very first time. For more than 70 years, McIntosh has created high-quality, handcrafted, American-made audio products and systems for homes, concert venues and iconic moments in music history across the globe. Now its signature audio performance has been perfectly tailored to the Grand Wagoneer with patented technology that gives a sense of space and recreates a realistic ambience of a musical venue – concert or recording studio. In conjunction with the outstanding audio quality, the McIntosh logos appearing on the door-speaker grills are backlit in the brand's signature blue color, adding to the ambience created by the interior's custom ambient lighting.

In another industry leading innovation, the 2023 Grand Wagoneer features the new 3.0-liter Hurricane twin-turbo, inline, six-cylinder engine, that delivers better fuel economy and fewer emissions than larger engines while at the same time generates more horsepower and torque than many competitors' naturally aspirated V-8 engines.



Launch of the all-new Jeep Grand Wagoneer

Gulf Bank announces 10 winners of AlDanah monthly draw

KUWAIT: The last chance to deposit and qualify for the KD 2 million grand draw is September 30, 2023. As part of its ongoing commitment to reward its customers and account holders, Gulf Bank has announced the 10 monthly winners of the AlDanah account draw for the month of May 2023. The lucky winners who will be taking home a prize of KD 1,000 each, are:

1. Mahmoud Yousef Al- Ebraheim
2. Reem Abdullateef Shukhair Roudhan
3. Hashem Fayroz Dalwai
4. Naser Saeed Ali Al-Ajmi
5. Hamida Ghuloom Hasan Al-Yousefi
6. Mohammad Lafi Ali Al-Ghawass Al-Rashidi
7. Abdullah Nayef Merdhi Al-Ajmi
8. Huda Salman Mohammad Ali Boflamad
9. Makiya Yousuf Hasan Mohammed Ali
10. Eman Husain Abdulredda Al-Mail

The last opportunity to deposit and qualify for the grand draw prize of KD 2 million, is September 30, 2023, which is set to happen on January 18, 2024, in the presence of representatives from both the Ministry of Commerce and Industry and Ernst & Young.

The AlDanah account is one of the most rewarding



savings accounts in Kuwait, with its periodic draws that award valuable prizes and multiple benefits for account holders. Gulf Bank's AlDanah account offers monthly opportunities to win KD 1,000 to ten lucky winners, in addition to two quarterly draws with KD 100,000 prizes each, a semi-annual draw prize of KD 1,000,000 and a grand draw prize of KD 2,000,000.

Gulf Bank is the only bank in Kuwait that proudly creates two millionaires a year. AlDanah customers stand to win the semi-annual draw prize of KD 1 million, whose winner Gulf Bank announced last July, and an upcoming grand draw prize of KD 2 million. The annual grand draw is currently scheduled to take place next year on January 18, 2024, in the presence of representatives from both the Ministry of Commerce and Ernst & Young.

The AlDanah account is the only account in Kuwait that transfers the customers' chances of winning from the previous year to the next year, as part of a program that rewards customers for their loyalty to Gulf Bank.

In order to increase one's chances of winning, customers must maintain a minimum of KD 200 in their accounts, or deposit continuously to increase their chances of winning. AlDanah account holders are eligible to win Gulf Bank's upcoming monthly, quarterly, and annual AlDanah draws.

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

Lifestyle



An employee of the company "Circular Carbon" shows shredded cocoa shells in Hamburg. — AFP photos



Peik Stenlund, CEO of the company "Circular Carbon" stands beside transport bags for cocoa shells in Hamburg.



Peik Stenlund, CEO of the company "Circular Carbon" is pictured at the production plant in Hamburg.

How chocolate could counter climate change

At a red-brick factory in the German port city of Hamburg, cocoa bean shells go in one end, and out the other comes an amazing black powder with the potential to counter climate change. The substance, dubbed biochar, is produced by heating the cocoa husks in an oxygen-free room to 600 degrees Celsius (1,112 Fahrenheit). The process locks in greenhouse gases and the final product can be used as a fertilizer, or as an ingredient in the production of "green" concrete.

While the biochar industry is still in its infancy, the technology offers a novel way to remove carbon from the Earth's atmosphere, experts say. According to the UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), biochar could potentially be used to capture 2.6 billion of the 40 billion tons of CO₂ currently produced by humanity each year. But scaling up its use remains a challenge.

Amazonia

"We are reversing the carbon cycle," Peik Stenlund, CEO of Circular Carbon, told AFP at the biochar factory in Hamburg. The plant, one of the largest in Europe, takes delivery of the used cocoa shells via a network of grey pipes from a neighboring chocolate factory. The biochar traps the CO₂ contained in the husks — in a process that could be used for any other plant. If the cocoa shells were disposed of as normal, the carbon inside the unused byproduct would be released into the atmosphere as it decomposed.

Instead, the carbon is sequestered in the biochar "for centuries", according to David Houben, an environmental scientist at the UniLaSalle institute in France. One ton of biochar — or bio coal — can stock "the equivalent of 2.5 to three tons of CO₂", Houben told AFP.

Biochar was already used by indigenous populations in the Americas as a fertilizer before

being rediscovered in the 20th century by scientists researching extremely fecund soils in the Amazon basin. The surprising substance's sponge-like structure boosts crops by increasing the absorption of water and nutrients by the soil. In Hamburg, the factory is wrapped in the faint smell of chocolate and warmed by the heat given off by the installation's pipework.

The final product is poured into white sacks to be sold to local farmers in granule form. One of those farmers is Silvio Schmidt, 45, who grows potatoes near Bremen, west of Hamburg. Schmidt hopes the biochar will help "give more nutrients and water" to his sandy soils.

Carbon cost

The production process, called pyrolysis, also produces a certain volume of biogas, which is resold to the neighboring factory. In all, 3,500 tons of biochar and "up to 20 megawatt



An employee of the company "Circular Carbon" shows shredded cocoa shells in Hamburg.

hours" of gas are produced by the plant each year from 10,000 tons of cocoa shells. The production method nonetheless remains difficult to scale up to the level imagined by the IPCC.

"To ensure the system stores more carbon than it produces, everything needs to be done locally, with little or no transport. Otherwise it makes no sense,"

Houben said. And not all types of soil are well adapted to biochar. The fertilizer is "more effective in tropical climates", while the raw materials for its production are not available everywhere, Houben said. The cost can also be prohibitive at "around 1,000 euros (\$1,070) a ton — that's too much for a farmer", he added.

To make better use of the powerful black powder, Houben said other applications would need to be found. The construction sector, for example, could use biochar in the production of "green" concrete. But to turn a profit, the biochar business has come up with another idea: selling carbon certificates. The idea is to sell certificates to companies looking to balance out their carbon emissions by producing a given amount of biochar.

With the inclusion of biochar in the highly regulated European carbon certificates system, "we are seeing strong growth in (the) sector", CEO Stenlund said. His company is looking to open three new sites to produce more biochar in the coming months. Across Europe, biochar projects have begun to multiply. According to the biochar industry federation, production is set to almost double to 90,000 tons this year compared with 2022. — AFP



A handout picture shows Scottish actor Brian Cox appearing on the BBC's "Sunday Morning" political television show with journalist Laura Kuenssberg. — AFP

Brian Cox hasn't found time for 'Succession' finale

Veteran Scottish actor Brian Cox on Sunday praised striking Hollywood writers as entertainment's "prime forces" — and revealed he has yet to watch the gripping finale of "Succession". Cox, who has grumbled about the early demise of his tyrannical character Logan Roy in the HBO drama's last series, told BBC television he preferred not to go back over past projects. The fictional media tycoon's children were all "hateful people", and Roy was justified in refusing to hand power to them, Cox said as he prepares to return to the theatre stage in London.

"I gather — I haven't seen the end of the show — but I gather... my character's been proven right because he knew this was all going to happen," the actor said. Cox, a lifelong socialist, has been following more closely the industrial unrest now roiling the US entertainment industry.

The strike kicked off on May 3 after talks broke down between the Writers Guild of America and major US studios. The writers want better compensation after the industry disruption caused by streaming and fears over the increasing use of artificial intelligence. "They are... very clearly the prime forces of what we do," Cox said, praising Succession's British creator Jesse Armstrong as a "genius".

"And they should get their just rewards for it," he added. "Unfortunately, producers are the ones who behave rather badly. You know, they're the ones who are kind of the manipulators and sometimes the writers get pushed to the tap end of the bath." — AFP

Kyiv culture war leaves famous Russian writer red-faced

A defaced plaque on a picturesque Kyiv street has become the latest sign of the culture war simmering in Ukraine as the country battles Russia's invasion. The monument to Russian author Mikhail Bulgakov, author of the classic novel "The Master and Margarita", was recently sprayed with red paint. The plaque is on the facade of the 19th-century house in Kyiv where Bulgakov grew up, which became a museum in the early 1990s.

The museum's director, Lyudmyla Gubianuri, told AFP there was no plan to remove the red paint from the plaque. "We aren't taking it off because for us, this is also a kind of communication," she said. "The fact that they threw paint on it, for us it's also a sign that we as a museum haven't done enough work."

She has drawn up a sign to hang under the defaced plaque, saying: "history should be studied, not rejected". She also linked the protest to the war. "It's all of course connected with the war with Russia. It's absolutely obvious and clear why it happened." "It's a very difficult time for the country, and people in wartime now think in the categories 'black and white'".

'Decolonization' movement

The museum had recently changed the inscription on the plaque. Originally, it was written in Russian and called Bulgakov a "Russian, Soviet writer". A new inscription was put up last month calling him simply a "prominent Kyiv resident, doctor and writer". Bulgakov was born in Kyiv in 1891 when it was part of the Russian empire. He wrote in Russian and spent the last two decades of his life in Soviet-era Moscow, writing novels, plays and newspaper columns.



This photograph shows the plaque depicting Mikhail Bulgakov, the author of "The Master and Margarita", covered in red paint as sign of protest. — AFP

In his work, he made disparaging comments about Ukraine's language and culture and its struggle for independence. The start of full-scale war last year has led to new laws and dismantling of more and more monuments linked to Russian culture. As part of this movement, Ukraine in April passed a law on "decolonization" of street signs, monuments, memorials and inscriptions.

'Hater of Ukraine'

A schoolboy, Mykhailo Soboliev, 16, later told AFP he was the one who had sprayed on the paint as "an act of public protest" with the goal of "de-Russification and decolonization of Kyiv". He and his parents consented to the publication of his name. Soboliev said that he had taken part in protest actions over other Soviet-era monuments in the city, including a graffiti-covered statue of Russian national poet, Alexander Pushkin. In September, protesters sprayed slogans on the Pushkin statue calling for its demolition.

Soboliev accused the Bulgakov museum of a kind of "manipulation" to get round decolonization rules, by removing the inscription saying that Bulgakov was a Russian writer. Bulgakov saw Kyiv as a "province of Moscow," he said. "We believe that the problem is that Bulgakov was against Ukrainian statehood. He was against the Ukrainian language. He ridiculed people who changed their surname in the Ukrainian way." "I don't understand why the Bulgakov Museum is in Kyiv," Soboliev said. The National Union of Writers of Ukraine has also urged the museum's closure. In a statement, it called Bulgakov a "hater of sovereign Ukraine". — AFP



This handout image provided by the Manhattan District Attorney's Office on May 30, 2023, shows the Zoroastrian Funerary Platform. — AFP photos

NEW YORK, A HUB FOR ILLICIT ART TRAFFICKING

From an ancient Middle Eastern limestone elephant to seventh century Chinese sculptures, New York prosecutors have seized hundreds of priceless artefacts looted from around the globe that have earned it the reputation as a key global hub for art trafficking. The Metropolitan Museum of Art is among major institutions and collectors who have been forced to hand over works that the city has returned to more than a dozen countries in Asia, Europe and Africa.

The scale of the seizures and repatriations "leaves no shadow of a doubt," said Christos Tsirogiannis, a forensic archaeologist and art historian specializing in stolen art works. "New York is one of the world's hub cities for the illicit trafficking of antiquities," he told AFP.

Tsirogiannis of the University of Aarhus in Denmark, and David Gill, a professor at Britain's Kent Law School, have been helping the Manhattan district attorney's campaign to return stolen art to their country of origin. Since 2017, prosecutors have repatriated pieces that were looted from around 20 countries between the 1970s and 1990s. They have included works from ancient Greece, the Roman and Byzantine empires, Iraq, China, India and Southeast Asia.

Collectors

The pace has quickened in the last two years. Under Alvin Bragg, who became district attorney in January 2022, more than 950 pieces worth \$165 million have been returned to several countries including Cambodia, Pakistan, Egypt, Turkey and Italy. At a ceremony at the Chinese consulate in New York last month, Bragg handed back to Beijing two 7th century stone sculptures valued at \$3.5 million.

The works had been seen from tombs in the 1990s, exported and then sold illegally. Well-known Manhattan-based collec-

tor Shelby White loaned them to the Met from 1998 until their seizure this year, Bragg's office said. White, 85, is a billionaire philanthropist and Met trustee. Her home was subject to searches by Bragg's team in June 2021 and April 2022.

Bragg announced last month that 89 works with a total value of \$69 million had been seized from White, who prosecutors do not accuse of wrongdoing. He thanked her "for her cooperation." Art Newspaper reported in December that White had returned pieces to Italy and Turkey, with the businesswoman telling the website: "I really don't have anything to say." AFP has not been able to contact her.

Tsirogiannis and Gill believe that White's acquisitions made with her late husband Leon Levy "may have been unwise," especially those amassed after the 1970 UNESCO Convention to prevent the illicit trafficking of cultural property. Tsirogiannis points out that White returned ten works to Italy and two to Greece prior to 2008.

"So she should definitely have at least (had) serious doubts on the origin and the status of the rest and should have checked them all these years before the recent confiscations that took place," he said. Gill cited White's only known public statement on the issue in an interview she gave in 2007 when she said: "If you go to Sotheby's or Christie's and buy

something at a public auction, you don't think you are doing anything inappropriate."

The most recent restitution took place on May 19, when prosecutors returned to Iraq a limestone elephant and an alabaster bull from the Sumerian civilization "stolen during the Gulf War and smuggled into New York in the late 1990s." The bull was found in Shelby's private collection and Bragg pledged he will not allow New York to be "safe harbor for stolen cultural artifacts."

Louvre

Other art dealers have been forced to return works. Collector Michael Steinhardt, who had a room named after him at the Met, handed back 180 antiquities worth \$70 million following an out-of-court settlement in 2021. Manhattan-based art dealer Subhash Kapoor was sentenced to ten years in prison in India in November following a decade-long international investigation.

In September, Bragg returned 16 pieces to Egypt, including five seized from the Met, as part of a twin investigation between New York and Paris authorities in which the former president of the Louvre, Jean-Luc Martinez, was charged. Martinez denies ignoring warnings about false certificates that faked the origin of the works.

Without commenting on the case, Louvre president Laurence des Cars told AFP during a visit to New York in May that "major museums should know the history of their collections" and that "the history of the Met's collections was not that of the Louvre." Last month the Met announced it would examine the provenance of "several hundred or more" objects that were possibly stolen from their country of origin, and then return them where necessary. — AFP



This handout image provided by the Manhattan District Attorney's Office on May 30, 2023, shows a Sumerian alabaster bull, which the office said was being returned to Iraq.

Lifestyle



Syrian-Kurdish refugees and musicians Norshean Salih (right), 23, and her sister Perwin Salih, 20, pose for a photograph in Arbil, the capital of the autonomous Kurdish region of northern Iraq. — AFP photos



Syrian-Kurdish refugees and musicians Norshean Salih and her sister Perwin Salih perform in Arbil, the capital of the autonomous Kurdish region of northern Iraq.



After IS and bombs, refugee sisters sing of Kurdish sorrow

When the Syrian Kurdish sisters Perwin and Norshean Salih sing about loss, it comes from the heart. Aged in their early 20s, they have twice been driven from their family home in the northern Syrian town of Kobane — once by the Islamic State group, and again by the threat of Turkish bombs. Now they have found a safe haven in northern Iraq's Kurdish region, where they carve out a living by performing the often melancholy music of their people in a restaurant.

"Kurdish folk songs are our favorite type of music," said Perwin Salih, 20, who plays the santoor, tambourine and Armenian flute. "They tell the plight of the Kurds, the wars, the tragedy of displacement and the killings." The Kurds, a non-Arab ethnic group of between 25 million and 35 million people, are spread mainly across Turkey, Syria, Iraq and Iran, with no state of their own.

They have long complained of oppression but endured special horrors during Syria's 12-year civil war, especially the



Syrian-Kurdish refugees and musicians Norshean Salih and her sister Perwin Salih perform in Arbil.

onslaught of IS. When the jihadists attacked Kobane in late 2014, and heavy fighting turned the town into a symbol of Kurdish resistance, the sisters fled across the border to Turkey.

After several unhappy months in Istanbul, they moved to the mainly Kurdish city of Diyarbakir in Turkey's southeast where they continued their mu-

sic studies. They moved back home in 2019, after Syrian Kurdish-led forces drove IS out of their last territorial stronghold, with US backing. Turkey has kept targeting parts of northern Syria in what Ankara says is a fight against Kurdish militants. Once, the sisters say, mortar shells hit their family home, thankfully without exploding.

'IS still haunts my dreams'

Late last year, when Turkey launched major air and artillery strikes, the Salih sisters fled once more, this time to Iraq, where they and two more siblings now rent a modest two-room house in Arbil. The two women said they grew up in a household of music lovers, with their mother singing to them before bedtime while their father played the tambourine. But the trauma they have endured since has left deep scars. "A vision of IS still haunts me," said Perwin. "Men in black clothes, holding black flags, on a quest to turn life itself black." At a recent concert, Perwin played the flute while Norshean, 23, captivated the audience with a Kurdish folk tune about displacement.

"I am a stranger," she sang softly. "Without you, mother, my wings are broken. I am a stranger, and life abroad is like a prison." Norshean, a classical music aficionado, also plays the piano, guitar and kamanja, an ancient Persian string instrument, and dreams of making it as a violinist. But for now she



Syrian-Kurdish refugee and musician Norshean Salih performs at a restaurant in Arbil.



has recurring nightmares of the jihadists. "The IS still haunts my dreams," she told AFP.

'We cried while we played'

On their latest escape from Kobane, the sisters faced another nightmare. At the border, Syrian soldiers demanded that they would confiscate the instruments if they didn't like the music. "We cried while we played, and when we were done they smiled and said: now you can pass," recounted Norshean.

The sisters now mainly perform at a restaurant called Beroea, an ancient name for

the once-vibrant Syrian city of Aleppo. Co-owner Riyadh Othman said he was not surprised by the dangers the women have had to face. A Syrian Kurd himself, he said his people "spend their entire life fleeing, estranged and suffering". The wandering sisters dream of one day returning home. "I hope ... the war will end, so we can be free, so we can return to our homes to play music and teach music to the children," said Norshean. "This will be good to revive people's souls." — AFP

Hong Kong artists mark Tiananmen quietly

Avant garde street performance, politically charged theatre, pro-democracy music and poetry — powerful works of art dealing with China's bloody Tiananmen Square crackdown that were once commonplace in Hong Kong have all but disappeared in recent years. For decades, tens of thousands of people gathered annually in Hong Kong's Victoria Park for a candlelight vigil marking June 4, 1989, when Chinese troops moved into Beijing's Tiananmen Square to quell peaceful protests calling for reforms. Hundreds, by some estimates more than 1,000, were killed in the crackdown.

Any mention of the day — let alone commemoration — has long been forbidden in mainland China, but the massive turnout every year in Victoria Park stood as an enduring symbol of the special freedoms Hong Kong enjoyed, even after its return to Chinese rule. But since Beijing imposed a national security law on the city in 2020 to quash dissent, authorities have suppressed public events mourning the Tiananmen crackdown, and artistic output commemorating the pivotal day has shrivelled.

Hong Kong artist Luk Ming remembers how more than a dozen people took part in interpretive performances in the bustling district of Causeway Bay on the anniversary's eve in 2009. "The performers were not artists, but the everyman — there was a taxi driver, a teacher, and so on," Luk told AFP, using a pseudonym due to fear of repercussions. As part of the "Our Generation's June 4" art project, some performers had covered their bodies with yellow paint — a color associated with the city's pro-democracy camp — as a representation of

"freedom and hope", Luk said.

"People were proactive then... with many trying to tell others about the crackdown lest we forget." Though a few hardcore artists might try to sustain the tradition, he added, "will they continue to put it out there under so much uncertainty?" Just last year, on the day before the anniversary, artist Chan Mei-tung was bundled into a police van mid-performance for "misconduct in public places" and detained overnight. The offending piece had seen her whittle a potato into the shape of a candle — once distributed by the thousands at the annual Tiananmen vigil — and hold a lighter to it.

'Safeguard a memory'

In 2019, Hong Kong was rocked by massive, and at times violent, protests over an unpopular bill that morphed into a months-long movement calling for broader democratic change. The ensuing crackdown saw more than 10,000 people arrested, though more than 6,000 have yet to be formally charged. Meanwhile, three organizers of the annual Tiananmen vigil have been charged with "incitement to subversion" under



An artist takes part in a performance art in the Causeway Bay district of Hong Kong to mourn the victims of China's deadly Tiananmen Square crackdown after authorities banned an annual vigil and vowed to stamp out any protests come the anniversary on June 4. — AFP photos

the national security law — an offence punishable by up to 10 years in prison.

There has also been what amounts to an erasure of Hong Kong's public memorials to Tiananmen: a museum run by the vigil's organizers was shuttered, monuments were removed from universities and dozens of books about the 1989 crackdown were pulled from libraries. For the fourth year running, June 4 is expected to be a neutered affair. City

leader John Lee has issued vague warnings that "any act that is in breach of the law" will see police enforcement.

Given the climate in Hong Kong, some artists have transplanted their works to more receptive soil. For the past three years, Lenny Kwok, a Hong Kong musician who has organized commemorative concerts since 1990, has hosted an operetta marking the anniversary in Taiwan. A mixture of music, poetry and storytelling, the



An artist takes part in a performance art in the Causeway Bay district of Hong Kong.

show will open this year in a Taipei park with the reading of a poem by Nobel laureate Nelly Sachs, who fled Nazi rule during World War II.

"All the nations are ready to rise up from the map," the poem begins. Kwok said he believes the desire for freedom and democracy in both Hong Kong and Taiwan is closely connected to the Tiananmen incident. "We are here to safeguard a memory that is being gradually erased, rewritten and re-interpreted," he said.

'Connect with art'

Taiwan will also see a performance of "35th of May", a stage drama by Hong Kong playwright Candace Chong, on the anniversary weekend. The play — its name a coded reference to June 4, mentions of which are censored on the mainland — follows an elderly couple's decision to openly mourn their son who died in Tiananmen Square after decades of grieving silently.

It debuted in Hong Kong in 2019, but the troupe that originally produced it, Stage 64, disbanded two years later. Stage 64's founder Lit Ming-wai translated the script from Cantonese — Hong Kong's native tongue — into Mandarin and English for Taiwanese audiences. She told AFP she still felt the "boundary-less power" of Hong Kong's security law, even when publishing the script in Taiwan. For example, the play's original tagline — "Unveil the memories once displaced; confront the abnormal red line" — was changed due to legal concerns from the publishing house. It is now "On the 35th of May, let's meet in the open". The six showings have been booked out by more than 1,000 people.

Taiwanese director Chung Po-yuan said he hoped the play would push the audience to reflect on the island's authoritarian past, while thinking about their future in the face of China's claim over the self-ruled democracy. "If we lose our guard, it may recur in the future," Chung said. — AFP



People hold candles during a vigil in Hong Kong.

Lifestyle

It's complicated: NY exhibit offers feminist reassessment of Picasso

Genius or misogynist — or both? Fifty years after art icon Pablo Picasso's death, his legacy is reassessed by comedian Hannah Gadsby in a Brooklyn Museum exhibition in New York, this time through a contemporary, feminist lens. In her 2018 Netflix special "Nanette," Gadsby expressed "hate" for the Spanish master of Cubism and the creator of works like "Guernica" and "Les Femmes d'Alger."

But in "It's Pablo-matic: Picasso according to Hannah Gadsby" (June 2 through September 24) — one of the many eagerly awaited shows under the aegis of France and Spain marking the 50th anniversary of his death — the approach is more nuanced. Picasso (1881-1973) remains one of the most influential artists of the modern world, often hailed as a dynamic and creative genius.

But in the wake of the #MeToo movement, the reputation of this workaholic with a vast output of paintings, sketches and sculpture has been tarnished by accusations he exerted a violent hold over the women who shared his life and inspired his art. In Gadsby's written and audio commentaries accompanying the pieces in the Brooklyn Museum, the

Australian humorist refuses to separate the man from the artist, unearthing symbols of misogyny in Picasso's paintings and drawings. She points to the penis in the center of his 1931 painting "The Sculptor," proof in her view that Picasso "couldn't even separate himself from his art in his art."

'Admiration and anger'

Catherine Morris, chief curator of the museum's Center for Feminist Art and a co-curator of "Pablo-matic," offers a more measured assessment. "You're dealing with a really complex and nuanced situation of an artist who is undeniably a genius, but also a less-than-perfect human," Morris told AFP at a media preview of the exhibit. Gadsby herself was not present. "Admiration and anger can co-exist," warns a preface of the exhibition, which has been organized in collaboration with the Musee National Picasso-Paris in France.

Picasso is surrounded by women in the exhibition — not just his muses, but rather artists of his time, some of whom struggled to counter the prevailing masculine narrative of the modernist movement. They "often didn't have the same support or access to the institutional



People walk past a work of art by Pablo Picasso titled 'Woman in Grey' on display at an exhibition titled 'It's Pablo-matic: Picasso According to Hannah Gadsby' at the Brooklyn Museum in the Brooklyn borough of New York City. — AFP

structures that helped foster Picasso's genius," observed Lisa Small, senior curator of European Art at the Brooklyn. Visitors can study nude drawings from the 1930s by American Louise

Nevelson (1899-1988). Such images were "revolutionary at the time because at that stage (it was) quite difficult for women to even be allowed into figure drawing classes," Morris said.

Works by others in America's feminist art movement are on display, including by African-American painter Faith Ringgold and the Guerrilla Girls. Also included are drawings by

Kathe Kollwitz (1867-1945), a German expressionist who was "incredibly skilled, both technically and emotionally," Small added. — AFP



Meta unveils new VR headset as Apple eyes market

Meta on Thursday ramped up its Quest virtual reality headset line, just days before Apple is expected to put its spin on the headset market. The new-generation Quest 3 with improved performance and slimmed design will be available later this year at a starting price of \$500, Meta chief Mark Zuckerberg said in an Instagram post. Zuckerberg described the coming model as Meta's "most powerful headset yet" and promised it would provide the best wireless way to experience mixed and virtual reality.

He added that more details would be shared at an annual Meta Connect developers conference on September 27. Meanwhile, the starting price of Quest 2 headsets currently available will drop to \$300, according to Meta. Zuckerberg said during a Meta shareholders meeting this week that the tech

titan remains devoted to building for a future in which internet life plays out in virtual worlds referred to as the metaverse.

Apple is expected to provide a look at its long-rumored VR or augmented reality (AR) headset Monday at an annual Worldwide Developers Conference, enticing programmers and software companies to get a jump start on providing content. "From all reports, Apple hoped to release a product that felt more like designer glasses than a gaming headset, but it's releasing something much bulkier," said Insider Intelligence principal analyst Yory Wurmser. The idea is to get the device into the hands of early adopters and developers and lay the groundwork for more innovative mixed reality headsets to be released over the next couple of years, said Wurmser. — AFP

Fans bereft after film piracy site RARBG shuts

Movie fans filled social media with dismayed messages on Thursday after one of the most prolific websites devoted to distributing pirated films and other content announced its closure. The team behind the 15-year-old RARBG website said in a message that they could no longer afford to operate because of rising costs and health issues. The site was at the centre of an internet subculture where tens of millions of people use files known as torrents to share pirated movies and TV shows as well as music and video games.



The US government's trade office has repeatedly included RARBG in its annual list of the world's "notorious markets for

counterfeiting and piracy". Governments in several countries had banned the site, thought to be run from Bulgaria. Yet the team behind RARBG has so far avoided the fate of other notorious sites like The Pirate Bay and Kick*** Torrents, whose founders ended up serving jail time.

Visitors to the RARBG website are now met with a message bemoaning inflation and soaring electricity costs, and claiming that some of their team had died from COVID and others were too sick to work. "Some are also fighting the war in Europe — ON BOTH SIDES," the message added in an apparent reference to the war in Ukraine, leading some web users to suggest the message must be a hoax.

The secretive team has no contact details but the specialist website Torrent Freak, which called the shutdown "one of the largest in the history of torrent sites", said a source had confirmed the site had closed for good. Fans of the site flooded Twitter and Reddit with alarmed messages and memes.

"Never realized how much I relied on this site until now," said a Reddit user known as Femketwitch. "I feel like I just lost a friend." However, many others suggested it would not be long before another site arrived to provide the same service. — AFP

Not dead yet: Abstract art alive and kicking at London's Gagosian

London's Gagosian gallery is hosting a major new exhibition of abstract art, bringing together the playful use of textures by young artists and traditional work of veterans in the field. "Abstract painting is a term that we've been trying to define for over 100 years and there is no consensus," curator Gary Garrels told AFP on Thursday at the opening of the show, which runs until August 25.

"For me, abstract painting is painting that is having an internal conversation where the issues of the painting itself — color, surface, texture, materials, scale — are the primary parts of the conversation that's not referring to something outside the painting, that's somehow descriptive," Garrels spent 18 months visiting the studios of "three generations" of artists to bring together 41 recent paintings for the exhibition — "To Bend the Ear of the Outer World"

Some are from well-known artists, others are by virtual unknowns. The overall aim is to take the pulse of a movement that has sometimes been seen as a dying art form. But Garrels insisted: "It's far from being dead. It's very much alive. We have another good century ahead of us. Incredible range, richness and diversity."

To demonstrate that abstract

art is very much alive, the show opens with contrasting paintings by two European artists of the same age. One — "It's not yesterday anymore" (2022) — is by British painter Cecily Brown's explosion of harsh brushstrokes and colors. The other — "Emko" (2023) — by Germany's Tomma Abts, is small, precise, monochromatic and geometrical. Each painting is displayed on its own, on a large white wall, to highlight each artist's individuality.

'No movement'

The rooms of the Gagosian gallery are organized according to links between the painters, whether temporal, geographical or stylistic. Veteran German painter Gerhard Richter's richly variegated "Abstraktes Bild" (2017) is coupled with the minimalist "Rivers (2020-21)" by American artist Brice Marden and the organic fluidity of Pat Steir's "Rainbow Waterfall #6". "They began their serious, mature work and were recognized in the 1960s but have continued to make great painting," said Garrels. At the other end of the scale, Columbia's Oscar Murillo's "Manifestation" (2020-22) combines conventional oil paint with oil stick, graphite and spray paint on canvas and linen.

Its dramatic thick dark strokes contrast with the lightness and

luminosity of "Untitled" (2022) by the young American Ryan Sullivan. With Sullivan's use of moulded cast urethane resin, fibreglass and epoxy, both have free reign in their use of textures. Garrels says "there's no movement" in abstract painting.

"It's not like we have abstract expressionism or color field painting. We have individual artists pursuing their own visions," he added.

For some, the medium is all about the expressiveness of the stroke, while others focus on "quiet" art based on pure, almost homogeneous surfaces, with few tonal nuances. Many of these artists have friendships that, according to Garrels, are reflected in the dialogue between their works. American artist Jacqueline Humphries and US-based German artist Charline von Heyl for example share a taste for indirect painting, mediated by screens or other tools. That gives their work an elusive character that is difficult to take in. The exhibition mainly features German, American and British artists. Murillo, who was born in the city of La Paila, has dual Colombian-British nationality. He emigrated to the UK with his family, and trained and now lives in London. — AFP



British-Canadian actress Kim Cattrall attends the "Queer as Folk" premiere at Outfest at Ace Hotel in Los Angeles, California. — AFP

And just like that...Cattrall to appear in 'Sex and the City' sequel

Samantha Jones, Kim Cattrall's beloved character from "Sex and the City," will make a shock (and very brief) return in the sequel to the cult series, streaming platform Max has confirmed, to the delight of fans. The glamorous and sexually liberated Jones was one of the four heroines of the original "Sex and the City" HBO series and films, but has been absent so far in follow-up series "And Just Like That."

Cattrall has publicly clashed in the past with co-star Sarah Jessica Parker, who plays the series' central character Carrie Bradshaw, and she previously said she would never return to the role. But a representative for Max confirmed to AFP that Cattrall, 66, will make an appearance in the sequel's second season, which debuts later this month on the streaming platform previously known as HBO Max.

According to multiple reports, Cattrall filmed her short cameo scene for the season's final episode back in March in New York, without seeing the other lead actors. Jones' absence from the first season of "And Just Like That" was explained in a text message exchange from London, where the character now lives.

Cattrall's Instagram account was flooded with messages from ecstatic fans thanking her for reprising the role. The actress posted a screenshot of an article in trade magazine Variety announcing her appearance. The original "Sex and the City," following the trials and tribulations of single women in their 30s in New York, premiered in 1998 and ran for six seasons, becoming a global phenomenon.

The series was named after Carrie's weekly column for the fictional "New York Star," which debated the pleasures and conundrums of single life in the Big Apple. The storyline itself was based upon the semi-autobiographical columns written by Candace Bushnell for the New York Observer. — AFP



A gallery visitor takes a picture with a mobile phone of "Abstraktes Bild 1971" by German artist Gerhard Richter during a press preview of the exhibition "To Bend the Ear of the Outer World: Conversations on contemporary abstract painting" at Gagosian Grosvenor Hill gallery in central London. — AFP

Sports

Djokovic into quarterfinals as Alcaraz faces Musetti

PARIS: Novak Djokovic swept into the French Open quarterfinals for the 14th straight year on Sunday as world number one Carlos Alcaraz prepared for a tricky test against Italy's Lorenzo Musetti. Third seed Djokovic, who is chasing a record 23rd men's Grand Slam singles title at Roland Garros, ended the surprise run of Peruvian outsider Juan Pablo Varillas in straight sets.

Djokovic, a two-time champion in Paris, won 6-3, 6-2, 6-2 against the 94th-ranked Varillas to book a meeting with Russia's Karen Khachanov, the 11th seed who overcame Lorenzo Sonego in four sets. "I had never played my opponent before. I knew he was a clay court specialist and that I had to earn the victory. It was the best I played this week," said Djokovic.

The 36-year-old Djokovic has yet to drop a set through four rounds. He is into a record 17th French Open quarterfinal after making the last eight at a major for the 55th time. "I am very proud of this record. I have put a lot of effort into my game and I am very motivated to continue," added Djokovic. Varillas, 27, was the first player from Peru to reach the second week of a Grand Slam since Jaime Yzaga made the US Open quarterfinals 29 years ago.

Djokovic raced 4-0 ahead in the opening set only for Varillas to break in the next game and then have a chance to get back on serve in the seventh game. But once Djokovic held for a 5-2 lead it was plain sailing for him as he closed out victory in just under two hours. He holds an 8-1 record against his next opponent Khachanov, who recovered from a bad start to down Sonego 1-6, 6-4, 7-6 (9/7), 6-1 to reach his third straight Slam quarterfinal.

Alcaraz is trying to return to the French Open last year for the second year running. He has looked every part the tournament favorite so far, but Musetti

beat the Spaniard in their only previous meeting in the 2022 Hamburg final. "I remember the match in Hamburg," said Alcaraz. "It was really, really tough. This is a match that I was really looking for, really want to play that match."

Musetti, the 17th seed, beat Djokovic en route to the Monte Carlo Masters quarterfinals earlier this year and is one of four men left yet to drop a set at the French Open. Stefanos Tsitsipas takes on Austrian qualifier Sebastian Ofner in the last 16. The Greek fifth seed, who blew a two-set lead to Djokovic in the 2021 final, is into the second week for a fifth straight year.

Pavlyuchenkova fights back

Anastasia Pavlyuchenkova, the 2021 runner-up, became the first woman through to the quarterfinals after rallying from a set and a break down to dump out Belgian 28th seed Elise Mertens 3-6, 7-6 (7/3), 6-3. The Russian, whose ranking has plunged to 333 after a serious knee injury, is the lowest-ranked Grand Slam quarterfinalist since the 2017 US Open.

Pavlyuchenkova will take on Karolina Muchova for a place in the last four after the Czech saw off lucky loser Elna Avanesyan 6-4, 6-3. Australian Open champion Aryna Sabalenka plays 2018 finalist Sloane Stephens in the night session — the first women's match to feature in the primetime slot this year at the seventh time of asking.

The French Open is the only major where Sabalenka, who has a chance this fortnight to overtake Iga Swiatek as world number one, has not reached the semifinals. Elna Svitolina has enjoyed a dream run in her first Grand Slam tournament since the 2022 Australian Open, following maternity leave and a break due to mental exhaustion after Russia's inva-



PARIS: Serbia's Novak Djokovic sends kisses as he celebrates his victory over Peru's Juan Pablo Varillas on day eight of the Roland-Garros Open tennis tournament at the Court Philippe-Chatrier on June 4, 2023. — AFP

sion of Ukraine. She has refused to shake the hands of Russian opponents on the WTA Tour, but the former world number three has called her upcoming opponent Daria Kasatkina "brave" for being more outspoken regarding the conflict than her Russian compatriots.

"I'm thankful to Dasha for taking this position. That's what you expect from others, as well. It's really brave from her," said Svitolina. Svitolina has won all six previous meetings and is eyeing a fourth French Open quarterfinal against a player who made the last four in 2022. — AFP



MONTMELO, Spain: Red Bull's Dutch driver Max Verstappen celebrates winning the Spanish Formula One Grand Prix race at the Circuit de Catalunya on June 4, 2023. — AFP

Verstappen extends title lead with Spanish win

MONTMELO, Spain: Defending double world champion Max Verstappen extended his lead in this year's title race to 53 points on Sunday when he completed a hat-trick by driving his Red Bull to a masterful victory in the Spanish Grand Prix. The 25-year-old Dutchman led from lights to flag to come home 24 seconds ahead of revitalized seven-time champion Lewis Hamilton and George Russell, in their much-improved Mercedes' cars.

It was Verstappen's third consecutive win, his third in Spain, his fifth in seven races this season and the 40th of his career, achieved despite receiving three official warnings for exceeding track limits. "It's such a big pleasure to drive a car like this," said Verstappen. "And it showed again today. We were on different tyre strategies out there today and mostly I was on the right one! And to win here is incredible."

Hamilton's second place provided him with his 11th podium finish in Spain, where he has won six times. "Oh, man, what an awesome crowd and result," said Hamilton. "And I didn't expect that so hats off to the team and our factory for pushing us so close to the 'Bulls. We are chasing them down — and George did a great job too today." Russell said he was surprised to finish third after starting 12th. "Kudos to the team for that," he said. "I had a great car today."

Verstappen's Red Bull team-mate Sergio Perez battled through the field, after starting 11th, to finish fourth ahead of Ferrari's home hero Carlos Sainz. Lance Stroll and his Aston Martin team-mate two-time champion Fernando Alonso, who was unable to extend his streak of podiums on home ground. The race began in hot conditions with an air temperature of 25 degrees and the track at 42, but gathering clouds threatened. The risk of rain was 40 percent.

Verstappen made a clean start and resisted Sainz into the first corner before, behind him, Hamilton swept round Norris, only for the McLaren to make contact under braking at Turn Two. Norris's front wing was damaged, requiring a pit-stop, but Hamilton escaped serious damage. The collision gifted Stroll third place, but this was not to be Aston Martin's day. Russell also left the track on the opening lap, at the first chicane. He was not penalized, despite gaining five places from the start.

Verstappen stamped his authority on proceedings and by lap 11 led Sainz by 5.3 seconds with Hamilton, thanks to a sweeping pass on Stroll on lap eight, in third. By mid-distance, Verstappen led by 13.7 seconds ahead of Hamilton, who was six clear of Sainz and pulling away. Russell, fourth, passed the Spaniard under braking at Turn One on lap 35, confirming the 'silver arrows' outright speed in the sunshine.

Verstappen, who had complained of sliding on his worn hards, came in for his final stop on lap 53, taking softs to reach the finish. He was more than 16 seconds clear of Hamilton when he re-joined for his cruise to the flag. With six laps remaining, he was shown a third black-and-white warning flag. "We can't afford anything," his team warned him as he enquired about his fastest lap. Verstappen responded with a lap in 1:16.330, the fastest. "OK, now can you bring it home within the white lines," came race engineer Gianpiero Lambiase's response. — AFP

Golden Knights beat Panthers in final game one

LOS ANGELES: Zach Whitecloud scored the first of three third-period goals for the Vegas Golden Knights in a 5-2 victory over the Florida Panthers in game one of the NHL Stanley Cup final in Las Vegas. Whitecloud muscled a long-range shot past Panthers goalie Sergei Bobrovsky at 6:59 of the third period to put Vegas ahead 3-2, his shot through traffic finding its way under Bobrovsky's glove.

Captain Mark Stone added an insurance goal at 13:41, the goal standing up after a review for a high stick on Stone, who had knocked the puck out of the air. "Obviously the first one's huge," Whitecloud said. "But you take a little bit to enjoy it, then move on to tomorrow." Former Panthers Jonathan Marchessault and Reilly Smith both scored for the Knights and defenseman Shea Theodore had a goal and an assist.

Vegas goalie Adin Hill made 33 saves — including a spectacular full-stretch stick save of a shot from Nick

Cousins early in the second period that kept the score level at 1-1. "I guess that's kind of the stuff you dream of when you're growing up, making that big save or if you're a forward making that big shot in overtime to get the game winner," Hill said. "It was nice — just kind of desperation there, reached out my stick and got a piece of it."

Whitecloud said he couldn't tell at first from the bench if Hill had made the save, but he wasn't surprised. "That incident right there is what Adin Hill is," Whitecloud said. Center Eric Staal and right wing Anthony Duclair scored for the Panthers and Sergei Bobrovsky made 29 saves, but Florida saw their streak of eight road wins end.

They had also been 8-0 when scoring the first goal this post-season, but this time the Panthers couldn't make their early advantage hold up and the Knights will have a chance to double their advantage when they host game two of the best-of-seven series on Monday. Each team is seeking a first Stanley Cup crown, and both are in the final for the second time. The Panthers were swept by Colorado in 1996 and the Golden Knights fell to Washington in their 2018 inaugural campaign.

Florida, back on the ice for the first



LAS VEGAS: Chandler Stephenson of the Vegas Golden Knights controls the puck against Aleksander Barkov of the Florida Panthers at T-Mobile Arena on June 3, 2023. — AFP

time in 10 days after their sweep of the Carolina Hurricanes in the Eastern Conference final, saw their streak of eight road victories end. Staal gave the Panthers a 1-0 lead at 9:40 of the first period with a short-handed wraparound goal. Marchessault made it 1-1 at 17:18 with a power-play goal and Theodore

put the Knights up 2-1 at 10:54 of the second with a wrist shot — his first goal of the playoffs. Duclair knotted it at 2-2 with 11 seconds left in the second period with a shot off Aleksander Barkov's face-off win. Smith capped the scoring with an empty netter with less than two minutes to play. — AFP

Table tennis team returns with 5 medals

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: Kuwait national table tennis disabled team arrived from Amman after participating in the National Club 14th International Championship for the Disabled, which saw 132 players from 20 countries competing. Kuwait's team won five medals as Khalifa Al-Khalifa and Ali Al-Sane won two gold medals in the mixed doubles and Ahad Al-Rashidi won the singles' bronze, with two medals in the men's doubles for Hassan Al-Ibrahim and Mohammad bin Jabal.

Kuwait's Charge d'Affaires in Jordan Dr Mubarak Al-Hajeri lauded the results Kuwait athletes achieved, adding "it was another honorable achievement by Kuwait youth in an international championship that had strong competition, and this confirms the ability of Kuwait youth to be winners and hoist Kuwait's flag high at various regional and international events".

Head of the delegation Duaij Al-Hajeri said

Lanka square series with 132-run win over Afghanistan

HAMBANTOTA, Sri Lanka: Quick bowler Dushmantha Chameera stormed back into the Sri Lankan team to power their 132-run win over Afghanistan at Hambantota on Sunday and square the three-match one-day international series. Having amassed a target of 324, the Sri Lankan bowlers skittled out the tourists for 191 inside 43 overs for their biggest win in ODIs over Afghanistan.

Chameera, returning to the side after a seven-month layoff after ankle surgery, bowled a couple of hostile spells to finish with two for 18. Sri Lanka will be buoyed by the return of their main strike bowler, as they head to Zimbabwe straight after the series to play World Cup qualifiers. "We are very happy that Chameera is back; injury kept him out for a while but I am glad he is firing on all cylinders," skipper Dasun Shanaka said.

"Dimuth Karunaratne is back as well, and he adds more stability to the batting — and obviously he's very experienced. These are good signs looking forward for the World



the participation in the championship in Jordan achieved the sought-after results, adding that participation was after a training camp in Cairo,

adding the team will continue its preparations for the championship to be held in Saudi Arabia in August.

Cup qualifiers." There are no such problems for Afghanistan, who have already qualified for the World Cup later this year in India. Chameera was well backed up by part-time off-spinner Dhananjaya de Silva, who finished with three wickets, including first-match hero Ibrahim Zardan. Leg-spinner Wanindu Hasaranga polished up the tail claiming three for 42. Zardan, who had top scored in the first ODI with 98, was again amongst the runs with 54. But the scoreboard pressure got to him as he edged an attempted cut shot that was well taken by Kusal Mendis behind the stumps.

'Bounce back'

Captain Hashmatullah Shahidi top scored with 57 runs, before being trapped leg before by de Silva. After that, there was a little resistance by the Afghan batters as they lost six wickets for 23 runs. "I don't think that was our best performance, we were bit sloppy on the field," Shahidi said after the match. "We have got one more game, and we will try and bounce back".

Sri Lanka came into the game making four changes, having lost the first ODI by six wickets on Friday. Openers Dimuth Karunaratne and Pathum Nissanka added 82 runs for the first wicket, with Karunaratne on a comeback trial doing well to post 52 off 62 balls. Kusal Mendis then upped the tempo with a superb counterattack, smashing 78 off 75 balls with seven fours and one six.

The third-wicket stand between Mendis and Sadeera



HAMBANTOTA, Sri Lanka: Sri Lanka's Wanindu Hasaranga throws the ball as Afghanistan's Ibrahim Zardan runs between the wickets at Mahinda Rajapaksa International Cricket Stadium on June 4, 2023. — AFP

Samarawickrama, who was playing his first ODI in more than three years, gave the innings much-needed impetus. The pair added 88 runs in 86 balls. Sri Lanka's lower middle order was the driving force behind their total of 323, with the hosts scoring 109 runs in the last ten overs. Faeed Ahmad and Mohammad Nabi were the pick of the bowlers for Afghanistan finishing with two wickets apiece. The third and final ODI will take place on June 7 also at Hambantota. — AFP

Sports

Messi's final game for PSG ends in defeat as Auxerre relegated

PARIS: Lionel Messi's final game for Paris Saint-Germain ended in defeat on Saturday, while Monaco missed out on European qualification and Auxerre were relegated on the last night of the Ligue 1 season. Messi's expected departure from the French giants after two seasons was officially confirmed by PSG in a statement shortly before Saturday's match against Clermont.

"His contribution to Paris Saint-Germain and Ligue 1 cannot be underestimated and we wish Leo and his family all the best for the future," said PSG president Nasser Al-Khelaifi. Yet Messi, who ends his PSG career with 32 goals in 75 appearances, was jeered by some fans during the match, which the champions lost 3-2. There was little riding on the game itself after PSG wrapped up a record 11th French title last weekend, and Christophe Galtier's side contrived to throw away a two-goal lead. Sergio Ramos, whose own departure from PSG was confirmed on Friday, marked his final appearance by heading in a Vitinha cross for the opener in the 16th minute.

Rico tribute

Mbappe, looking to end a fifth consecutive campaign as Ligue 1's top scorer, then scored a penalty to make it 2-0 with his 29th league goal this season, which he marked by holding up Sergio Rico's number 16 jersey. Spaniard Rico, PSG's back-up goalkeeper, is in a serious condition in hospital in Seville after being injured in a horse-riding accident last weekend.

Johan Gastien pounced on a Marco Verratti mistake to pull a goal back for Clermont, who then saw Grejohn Kyei miss a penalty. The visitors equalized in first-half stoppage time through Mehdi Zeffane, and Kyei secured a famous win in the

second half as they end the season in eighth place. "The most important thing was the tribute to Sergio," Mbappe told broadcaster Canal Plus after PSG suffered a seventh league defeat in 2023.

"There are more important things than football, and on the pitch we were already champions. We could have lost 2-0 and that would not have changed anything for us. We had to pay tribute to Sergio. I think we have all been affected by what is an extremely serious situation. We have been worried about that all week and so we tried to pay tribute in the best possible way."

Mbappe's goals tally left him two ahead of Lyon's Alexandre Lacazette in the final standings. Asked about his own future in Paris, France star Mbappe said: "I am just here to play. I am still under contract. The club is doing what it can and I will be happy with whatever the club does."

Rennes go into Europa League

PSG end the season a point clear of runners-up Lens, who completed a fine campaign with a 3-1 win away at Auxerre in which Alexis Claude-Maurice scored twice and Lois Openda got his 21st goal in Ligue 1. That result allowed Nantes to climb out of the relegation zone and above Auxerre with a 1-0 win over Angers, as Auxerre return to the second tier after just one season back in the elite.

Angers, Troyes and Ajaccio had already been condemned to the drop with four teams going down and only two coming up as France's top flight is reduced from 20 clubs to 18 for next season. Marseille, who were already guaranteed third and a place in the Champions League qualifying rounds, lost 1-0 at Ajaccio in their first game after coach Igor Tudor announced his departure.



PARIS: Paris Saint-Germain players celebrate their French L1 championship during the 2022-2023 Ligue 1 trophy ceremony at the Parc des Princes Stadium on June 3, 2023. — AFP

In the battle for the remaining European places, Lille began the day in fourth, a point above Rennes and Monaco. However, Lille were held to a 1-1 draw at Troyes, allowing Rennes to climb above them thanks to a 2-1 victory at Brest in which Benjamin Bourigeaud scored both their goals.

Rennes therefore go into next season's Europa League group stage, while Lille will enter

the Europa Conference League in the play-off round. Monaco, beaten 2-1 at home by Toulouse, finish sixth and miss out on European qualification altogether. Elsewhere on Saturday, Nice beat Lyon 3-1, while Lorient were 2-1 winners against Strasbourg and Folarin Balogun scored his 21st goal this season as Reims lost 3-1 to Montpellier. — AFP

Gundogan takes Manchester City to brink of treble

LONDON: Ilkay Gundogan produced when it mattered most for Manchester City once more as the German's double downed Manchester United 2-1 in the FA Cup final on Saturday in what could be fitting parting gift. Gundogan will be central to City's quest to complete the treble next weekend against Inter Milan in the Champions League final.

But his future beyond this season remains in doubt with the 32-year-old's contract expiring at the end of the month. After seven seasons in Manchester, Gundogan has reportedly been tempted by the change of scene and lifestyle offered by Barcelona. But manager Pep Guardiola admitted he is still trying to convince the man who was his first signing for City back in 2016 to prolong his stay.

"He knows what I think (of him). There is no doubt," said Guardiola. "We are neighbors, we live on the same floor for many years, he is a close friend of mine but hopefully we can finish in a good way. (City sporting director) Txiki (Begiristain) is working. The season he has done is exceptional."

Gundogan's first stunning strike after just 12 seconds will live long in the memory and not just for becoming the fastest goal in FA Cup final history. He then became the first player on record to score twice in a FA Cup final from outside the box as his volleyed winner caught out David De Gea six minutes into the second-half. A brace took his

tally for the season to 11, but he has a knack of producing when the pressure is cranked up towards the business end of the season.

Six of Gundogan's goals this campaign have come in the last month as he also scored twice against Leeds and Everton to get Guardiola's men over the line in the Premier League title race. "He can do everything," said Guardiola recently. "He shows leadership every training session. Arriving on time, living the job 24 hours a day. He is a guy who handles the pressure really, really well."

Despite his manager's fulsome praise, Gundogan personifies Guardiola's glorious reign as a star player who has not always been guaranteed a starting role. He came off the bench to inspire a stunning comeback from 2-0 down to beat Aston Villa 3-2 on the final day of last season's Premier League to snatch the title away from Liverpool.

"I don't need these kind of days to feel appreciated and feel special in this club," said Gundogan. "I know that and that is why I have been here seven years." But he remained non-committal on his future, adding: "Nothing is decided yet." Instead, the City captain's more pressing concern is ending the club's wait to become European champions for the first time next weekend and his own personal quest to lift the Champions League.

Gundogan has experienced the heartbreak of losing finals at both Borussia Dortmund and City in the past. "We have a chance to do something special and win the treble and we do not want to let this opportunity pass us by," said Gundogan. City have craved Champions League glory ever since an Abu Dhabi-backed takeover transformed the club's fortunes 15 years ago. Going out on such a high would be a fitting farewell for a player who



LONDON: Manchester City's German midfielder Ilkay Gundogan celebrates with the English FA Cup trophy at Wembley stadium on June 3, 2023. — AFP

has now won 11 major trophies at the Etihad. But City will hope Istanbul is not the final stop on his journey with the club. — AFP

Inter win at Torino, Lazio finish second

TURIN: Inter warmed up for the Champions League final with Saturday's 1-0 win at Torino which ensured that they would finish the Serie A season in third place. Marcelo Brozovic struck the only goal of the game in the 37th minute in Turin when he turned on the edge of the area and lashed in his third of the season, earning Inter their 11th win from their last 12 matches.

Simone Inzaghi's side, who face Manchester City in Istanbul next weekend, moved into second with the win but were immediately bumped down a spot by Lazio who won 2-0 at Empoli. Inter were already sure of competing in next season's edition of Europe's top club competition and are now 11 points above fifth-placed Atalanta. "Tomorrow we'll have some time off before an

intense week," Inzaghi told DAZN. "It's going to be our 57th match of the season, and we earned our chance to play this last one thanks to the 56 that came before it."

Brozovic staked a claim for a place in Inter's starting line-up for the final ahead of Henrikh Mkhitaryan. They would have won more convincingly had Edin Dzeko not clipped the wrong side of the post with a late effort following good play from Romelu Lukaku, the Bosnian's rival for a place in Inzaghi's XI.

With a full week to go until their showdown with English champions City in Turkey, Inzaghi picked a strong side to take on Torino, a tough team who were hoping for European football. Ivan Juric's Torino sit ninth and three points behind Fiorentina who will finish eighth, which could offer a spot in Europe if seventh-placed Juventus are barred from continental competition by UEFA for financial irregularities.

Lazio comfortably came through at Empoli through Alessio Romagnoli's header and a beautiful finish from Luis Alberto in stoppage time. The win for



TURIN: Torino's Nigerian defender Ola Aina (L) tackles Inter Milan's Italian defender Raoul Bellanova during the Italian Serie A football match between Torino and Inter on June 3, 2023 at the Olympic stadium in Turin. — AFP

Maurizio Sarri's side secured their best league placing since they last won the Scudetto 23 years ago. Relegated Cremonese bowed out of Serie A in a pos-

itive fashion thanks to a 2-0 win over Salernitana thanks to Cristian Buonaiuto's first half penalty and a thumping late strike from Frank Tsadjout. — AFP

Cincy and Philly extend winning streaks in MLS

MIAMI: Eastern Conference leaders FC Cincinnati made it five wins in a row with a 1-0 win over the Chicago Fire in Major League Soccer on Saturday while Julian Carranza scored twice as the Philadelphia Union beat Montreal 3-0. Wayne Rooney's DC United ruined Javier Morales' debut as Inter Miami coach with a 2-1 win in South Florida while the New York Red Bulls suffered a 3-0 loss at home to Orlando.

Cincinnati are the form team in MLS at the moment with 12 wins and just one defeat from their opening 16 games, but they had to graft for the three points against Chicago. It took a moment of individual skill from Luciano Acosta to decide the game, seven minutes from the end, when the Argentine brought down a deep ball into the box from Santiago Arias and

squeezed a shot under Fire keeper Spencer Richey.

Cincy are the first team in MLS history to take 39 points in their first 16 games of a season, since the end of match-deciding shoot-outs in 1999 and are eight points clear of second placed Nashville. Nashville, unbeaten in eight, beat Dallas 2-1 thanks to Hany Mukhtar's 77th minute winner in Texas. Philadelphia's Argentine striker Carranza took his tally for the season to nine goals as the Union, last season's beaten finalists, begin to look like contenders again with their fourth straight win.

Carranza opened the scoring, cutting in from the left and firing a right-foot effort from outside the box into the far, bottom corner. The forward then had a hand in Philly's second, his shot from a tight angle parried by Montreal keeper James Pantemis only for Mikael Ubre to pounce to double the lead. Carranza wrapped up the win in the 61st minute when his shot took two deflections and looped into the net to make it 3-0.

Morales took over as Miami's interim coach on Thursday following the dismissal of Phil Neville, but his debut took a swift turn for the worst when defender Kamal Miller was sent off in the eighth minute. Miller brought down DC striker Christian Benteke as he bore down on goal and although he was initially shown the

yellow card, the red was produced by the referee after a VAR review.

Morales' team battled well with 10 men, with three injuries hardly helping the cause, but their defense was finally breached in the 76th minute when Donovan Pines hit the post from close range and after a tussle with keeper Drake Callender bundled the ball home. Belgium international Benteke made it 2-0, with a left-foot finish after he broke free of the Miami back line but the home side restored some late hope when substitute Ian Fray scored his first league goal in stoppage time. The 11th loss of the campaign leaves Inter still rooted to the bottom of the East.

St Louis go top

The Pacific North West derby between the Seattle Sounders and the Portland Timbers ended goalless which allowed St Louis City to take over at the top of the West. St Louis beat Houston 3-0 thanks to an Eduard Loewen penalty a goal from Tomas Ostrak and another spot-kick from Nicholas Gioacchini. Facundo Torres scored twice, his second from the penalty spot, as Orlando ran to a 3-0 win at New York Red Bulls after Ivan Angulo had opened the scoring in the 18th minute. — AFP

Growing character takes champions Barca to next level

EINDHOVEN: Barcelona displayed their mental growth as they conquered Europe for the second time with a stunning comeback victory over Wolfsburg in the women's Champions League final. After suffering a defeat labelled "traumatic" by captain Alexia Putellas against Lyon in last season's final, Jonatan Giraldez's side seemed to be collapsing again in the season's showpiece event in Eindhoven.

However Patri Guijarro's brace and Fridolina Rolfö's winner helped the Catalans triumph 3-2 at the PSV Stadium, with a remarkable second-half turnaround showing they have progressed to the next level. Coach Giraldez said that kind of steely mentality was something which the team had been working on attaining this season. "In football there are sometimes more important things, it's not enough just to play well," Giraldez told reporters.

"Today, character was key. They did not let themselves sink. They came out with an incredible attitude and that is important. We have worked on that through the season, that in the bad moments you have to give the best version of yourself."

Defeat would have been a big setback, with the club determined to dominate women's football, reaching four of the last five finals. Barcelona played their first Champions League final in 2019, when Lyon steamrollered them 4-1, netting four goals inside the first 30 minutes. They won their second in 2021, inflicting the same misery on Chelsea — hitting four by the 36th minute.

Last season it was their turn to collapse against Lyon, conceding three in the first 33 minutes, with Putellas pulling one back in a 3-1 defeat. After Ewa Pajor and Alexandra Popp struck early on for Tommy Stroot's Wolfsburg, history seemed to be repeating itself once more. Barcelona's mentality is not the same now as it was then, though, with the club taking steps forward each year in their bid to lead women's football in the 2020s, as record eight-time winners Lyon did in the 2010s.

'Never worried'

Barcelona defender Lucy Bronze made a mistake for Wolfsburg's opener, giving the ball away under pressure from Pajor, who finished well. However she said her team always believed in themselves to come back, despite how difficult a task it was. "I don't think we were ever worried about scoring three goals, which is a crazy feat, and that's the talent of this team," Bronze told DAZN.

Giraldez hailed Bronze's ability to brush off her mistake and play the 90 minutes. "One of the most important things after making a mistake is how you react," said Giraldez. "The winger didn't beat Lucy at any time — some players can go down (in morale). Lucy's reaction was magnificent." Player of the match Guijarro said coming from two goals behind in a final is "so difficult", but praised the team's mental strength.

A superstition called the "theory of two" was shared by Barcelona fans in the lead up to the game, with the players also discussing it among themselves. The theory supposedly indicated Barcelona were going to win the Champions League because it was their second, while Putellas has two Ballons d'Or and the game was two years after their last triumph, among other light-hearted "two" related reasons.

"On special days we are used to taking small beliefs and keeping them in mind, to give us strength," Guijarro told reporters. "In the first Champions League win, we played with this all the time, we did silly things to bring us luck. With the theory of two, it set our minds in the way they should be. These are things that don't make you win, but they give you a vibe and a connection with your team-mates, it adds something. It's something that helps the mind." — AFP

Leipzig defend German Cup title



BERLIN: Leipzig's Hungarian defender Willi Orban lifts the trophy after the German Cup (DFB Pokal) final against Eintracht Frankfurt on June 3, 2023. — AFP

BERLIN: A Christopher Nkunku-inspired RB Leipzig won their second straight German Cup title on Saturday, beating Eintracht Frankfurt 2-0 in Berlin. A year after scoring a second-half goal which sent the 2022 final to penalties, Nkunku broke the deadlock after 71 minutes, his low shot taking a deflection and into the goal against the run of play.

A shellshocked Frankfurt, who had the better of the second half looked to equalize but Leipzig scored again, Dominik Szoboszlai sweeping in an Nkunku pass on the counter. After featuring in four of the past five German Cup finals, Leipzig's second title in two years firmly establishes themselves alongside Borussia Dortmund as challengers to Bayern Munich's throne.

"When you win something like this,

then you just have to celebrate — and that's what we'll do," Leipzig midfielder Konrad Laimer told Germany's ZDF network. Leipzig manager Marco Rose told German TV "to win a title and make so many people happy, it's something great". "I've drunk very little alcohol lately, but today I'll be getting stuck in, I think."

Frankfurt captain Sebastian Rode said Nkunku's goal was the turning point, telling ZDF "we just didn't have the power in behind" after the strike. The victory spoiled Frankfurt manager Oliver Glasner's farewell, with the Austrian leaving the club at the end of the season after two years with the Eagles, one year after taking them to the Europa League title.

Glasner said "when you go toe-to-toe with Leipzig, that's an accolade. I am very proud of what the team has

achieved in the past two years". "I'm looking back at two wonderful years. When I think about it, I get goosebumps." Despite the victory, the immediate future is uncertain for Leipzig, who could lose several stars including Nkunku, Szoboszlai and Laimer in the summer. Sporting director Max Eberl confirmed a possible exit for Nkunku, telling German TV "it could be" the France striker's last match for Leipzig.

Nkunku shines

Pre-game, the match had been billed as a clash of conflicting ideologies in German football. In one corner, nouveau riche Leipzig, playing in just their 14th season, against the tradition of Frankfurt, one of only four clubs remaining from the first Bundesliga season in 1963-64 guar-

anteed to play in next year's top division. The Frankfurt stadium announcer played into the conflict just before kickoff, saying "tradition can't be bought", a direct jab at the Red Bull-owned Leipzig.

Unbeaten in their last 11 cup games, Leipzig burst out of the blocks, Werner latching onto a Dominik Szoboszlai pass just four minutes in before blasting straight at the 'keeper. Leipzig dominated possession but Frankfurt caused problems on the counter, France striker Kolo Muani probing a defense missing the commanding presence of the suspended Josko Gvardiol.

The best chance of the first half fell to Nkunku in the shadows of halftime, the France striker cannoning the ball into the side netting past the outstretched fingers of Frankfurt goalie Kevin Trapp.

Fresh from extending his deal in Frankfurt by one year until 2026 on Friday, 2014 World Cup winner Goetze grabbed control of the game early in the second stanza. The veteran of four German Cup final wins, two with Dortmund and two with Bayern, put Kolo Muani through on goal with a perfect threaded path before forcing a desperate close range save from Janis Blaswich.

With a Frankfurt opener looking likely, Leipzig scored against the run of play, Nkunku's shot from the edge of the box taking a sharp deflection of defender Evan Ndicka and into the net. Frankfurt made multiple changes pushing for an equalizer but Leipzig scored again, Szoboszlai hammering in after a sweeping counter attack with five minutes remaining to seal the win. — AFP



RABAT: USM Alger's players pose for a group picture ahead of the CAF Confederation Cup quarterfinal against Morocco's AS FAR at Prince Moulay Abdellah Stadium on April 30, 2023. — AFP

USM lift CAF Cup despite loss to Young Africans

JOHANNESBURG: USM Alger became the first Algerian winners of the CAF Confederation Cup despite losing 1-0 at home to Tanzanian club Young Africans on Saturday in the second leg of the final. The teams drew 2-2 on aggregate and the north Africans triumphed on away goals after winning the first leg 2-1 in Dar es Salaam last Sunday. USM succeeded after fellow Algerian clubs Entente Setif, Mouloudia Bejaia and JS Kabylie lost previous finals in the African equivalent of the UEFA Europa League.

It was a hollow triumph, though, and not what a partisan crowd who filled all but a few rows of main-stand seats in the 65,000-capacity Stade 5 Juillet expected. The supporters flocked to the national stadium hoping the local side would maintain a perfect record in Africa this season having won all seven home matches en route to the final.

Instead, they saw Young Africans made a perfect start with Djama Shabani, one of three changes to the first-leg team, calmly convert a seventh-minute penalty to put the visitors ahead. But the east Africans barely threatened to score again in a match delayed briefly in each half when smoke from flares lit by supporters drifted across the pitch

in Algiers. USM squandered a great chance to equalize on the night when a Zineddine Belaid penalty on 59 minutes was pushed way by Malian goalkeeper Djigui Diarra.

Hostile environment

The Mauritanian referee, who excelled in a hostile environment, pointed to the spot after only five minutes when Saadi Radouani pushed Kennedy Musonda in the back. With green lasers pointing at his face and the crowd whistling, Shabani sent goalkeeper Oussama Benbot the wrong way from the penalty spot. Aymen Mahious, who angered the referee and Young Africans with theatrics that led to a yellow card, came close to levelling on the half hour with a header that was just off target.

Young Africans star Fiston Mayele was poised to score at the other end only to be foiled by a brilliant last-ditch tackle from Adam Alilet. Diarra made an excellent save in first half added-time after a clever free-kick maneuver from USM almost caught the visitors napping. USM got their chance to score from a penalty when Ibrahim Hamad fouled Tumisang Orebonye, a Botswana international and the only non-Algerian in the starting line-up.

But the kick from captain Belaid lacked height and Diarra guessed correctly, diving to his right to push the ball away, and then blocking an attempt to score off the rebound. As rain that began early in the second half became increasingly heavy, the match became increasingly scrappy with neither goalkeeper seriously troubled in the closing stages. USM pocketed a record two million dollars (1,865 million euros) for winning with the first prize increased this season from 1,250 million. — AFP

Real Madrid great Benzema to leave club

MADRID: Real Madrid striker Karim Benzema has agreed a deal to leave the club, the Spanish giants said Sunday. The 35-year-old forward has been heavily linked this week with a lucrative move to Saudi Arabia and Saudi state television channel Al-Ekhbariya reported Sunday that he had signed with Jeddah-based Al-Ittihad. "Real Madrid and our captain Karim Benzema have agreed to put an end to his brilliant and unforgettable era as a player at our club," said Los Blancos in a statement. "Madrid want to show their gratitude and all their love to someone who is one of our greatest legends."

The announcement comes after Madrid coach Carlo Ancelotti had said Saturday there was "no doubt" about Benzema's future being at Madrid, noting the forward had one more year left on his contract. And Benzema himself had said "not everything you read on the internet is reality" after reports emerged in the week about his potential departure to Saudi Arabia, where his former Real Madrid teammate Cristiano Ronaldo is playing for Al Nassr. According to Al-Ekhbariya, however, the president of Saudi champions Al-Ittihad and his deputy were in Madrid "to officially sign" Benzema in a "record transfer with Real Madrid". The TV channel said Benzema had agreed a two-year deal with the club, based on the Red Sea shores of the Gulf kingdom.

Leaving Lyon

The French forward joined Madrid in 2009 from Ligue 1 side Lyon. Benzema established himself as a key player alongside Ronaldo and Gareth Bale in the vaunted "BBC" attacking trident, before developing into the team's leader when the Portuguese striker left in 2018. Benzema has lifted five Champions

Leagues, four La Liga titles and three Copas del Rey with Real Madrid and is the current holder of the Ballon d'Or for the world's best player.

He is Real Madrid's second top scorer of all-time, with 353 goals for Madrid, behind only Ronaldo on 450. Madrid confirmed Saturday that Eden Hazard, Marco Asensio and Mariano Diaz are all leaving this summer too, leaving plenty of space for new acquisitions in attack. Ancelotti avoided talking on Saturday about Madrid's alleged interest in England and Tottenham striker Harry Kane. "I'm not going to talk about the future of the squad that is in place," said Ancelotti. "Kane is a great player, he is a Tottenham player, we have to respect the player and Tottenham."

Rise to glory

Benzema battled with Gonzalo Higuain for a regular starting spot in his early days at Madrid, and was once derided by then-coach Jose Mourinho for being a "cat" instead of the "hunting dog" he wanted. While playing alongside Ronaldo, Benzema took the role of supplier and worked hard to provide for his teammate. The forward greatly increased his goal output after Ronaldo left, playing centrally, and scored 44 in 46 games last season, a performance that earned him the 2022 Ballon d'Or.

Benzema's most recent conquest was the Copa del Rey in May, with Real Madrid beating Osasuna to lift the Spanish cup for the first time since 2014. Benzema may cherish last season's Champions League triumph the most of all his successes because he played a crucial role in winning it. The forward scored a stunning hat-trick to help Madrid come from behind against Paris Saint-Germain in the last 16 and progress.

Benzema netted another treble at Stamford Bridge in the quarterfinals against Chelsea and scored the extra-time goal in the second leg which sent his team into the semifinals. The forward also scored three goals over two games against Pep Guardiola's Manchester City to help Madrid reach the final, which they won against Liverpool in Paris — his first Champions League triumph as the team's figurehead. — AFP

