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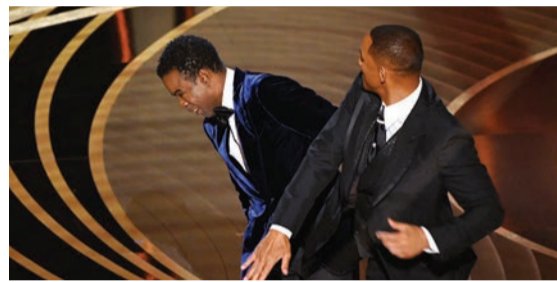
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Sheikh Ahmad renamed as PM

Row over whether Assembly can hold sessions without govt continues

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: An Amiri order was issued on Sunday reappointing caretaker Prime Minister HH Sheikh Ahmad Al-Nawaf Al-Sabah to form the new Cabinet, more than six weeks after the resignation of the previous Cabinet. Sheikh Ahmad submitted his Cabinet's resignation late January following a standoff with the National Assembly over a number of populist draft legislation, including a bill calling on the government to purchase billions of dinars of bank loans owed by Kuwaitis.

The resigned government did not attend Assembly sessions from Jan 10



HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Al-Nawaf Al-Sabah

and resigned less than two weeks later. MPs had criticized the slow process of naming a prime minister to form a new Cabinet. There is no timeframe for the prime minister to form the new Cabinet. MP Abdulwahab Al-Essa called on Sheikh Ahmad to form the new Cabinet "by yourself".

MP Hamdan Al-Azemi said on Twitter that HH Sheikh Ahmad had wasted unprecedented popular and parliamentary support, "but there is still enough time", adding the prime minister should not include ministers who trigger crises and should only select statesmen capable of resolving the political crisis in cooperation

with the National Assembly.

Meanwhile, the controversy over whether the Assembly can hold legal sessions without the presence of the government continued. Speaker Ahmad Al-Saadoun defended his decision to adjourn Assembly sessions since Jan 11 due to the absence of the government, saying he will also cancel sessions scheduled for Tuesday and Wednesday if the government does not attend.

Saadoun insisted his decisions are based on the constitution, which forbids holding Assembly sessions without the presence of at least one minister, adding the Assembly has not held a single session without minis-

ters since the inception of parliamentary democracy in Kuwait in 1962.

But MP Obaid Al-Wasmi lashed out at the speaker, stressing that his opinion is wrong and in contradiction with the constitution. He called on the speaker to step down to allow other lawmakers to hold the sessions even if the government does not attend. MP Abdulkarim Al-Kandari also called for holding sessions without the need for the government's representation and advised the speaker to abstain from the session and allow his deputy to hold it. Saadoun however said the best place to resolve the controversy is the constitutional court.

News in brief

No cash for KD 10+ pharmacy sales

KUWAIT: Minister of Commerce and Industry Mazen Al-Nahedh issued a decision banning cash transactions for amounts exceeding KD 10 at private pharmacies from Sunday. It said private pharmacies and others subject to the drug control sector should limit such payments only through K-Net. Cash payments for amounts less than KD 10 are allowed. — KUNA

Kuwait rejects Egypt labor request

KUWAIT: The Public Authority of Manpower has rejected an official request by Egyptian authorities to lift a ban on issuance of work permits to Egyptians. Sources said the reasons for the suspension still exist, as the Egyptian side has not addressed them. Kuwait is dissatisfied with Egyptian employment companies that send Egyptian workers to Kuwait on files of bogus companies. Sources said PAM has not granted exemptions to Kuwaiti companies to bring in Egyptian workers, adding if someone proves this with evidence, PAM will cancel them. They added there will be no return to the previous electronic labor link between Kuwait and Egypt after Kuwait canceled it.

Egypt arrests 29 in crypto scam

CAIRO: Egyptian authorities have detained 29 people, including 13 foreigners "of the same country", accused of running an online cryptocurrency scam that defrauded thousands of investors, state media reported Sunday. The network pocketed about \$620,000 at the expense of its victims. The group ran the online platform "HoggPool" which promised its clients "financial gains after having lured them by fraudulent means", said a statement released by the prosecution service late Saturday. Officials also seized 95 mobile phones, 3,367 SIM cards and 41 foreign bank cards, it said. — AFP

More Iran schoolgirls poisoned

TEHRAN: Iranian schoolgirls have again been targeted in poisoning attacks, media reports said Sunday, in a wave of such incidents that has sparked fear among parents and calls for authorities to act. For more than three months, hundreds of female pupils have reported suffering symptoms such as shortness of breath, nausea and vertigo after detecting "unpleasant" or "unknown" odors. — AFP (See Page 6)

Kuwait affirms LDCs require still more aid

DOHA: The world's least developed countries (LDCs) are still in need of more aid despite the progress they have made, Kuwait's Foreign Minister Sheikh Salem Al-Abdullah Al-Sabah told a UN gathering aiming to shore up support for these nations on Sunday. While these countries have made a qualitative leap in terms of development, more needs to be done to ensure such growth remains steady and sustainable, the minister, in his role as HH the Amir's representative, said in a speech during the fifth UN Conference on Least Developed Countries in the Qatari capital.

'Historic' UN deal to protect high seas

UNITED NATIONS: UN member states finally agreed Saturday to a text on the first international treaty after years of negotiations to protect the high seas, a fragile and vital treasure that covers nearly half the planet. "The ship has reached the shore," conference chair Rena Lee announced at the UN headquarters in New York shortly before 9:30 pm (0230 GMT

Trump slams GOP 'fools' at 'MAGApalooza'

NATIONAL HARBOR: Donald Trump dramatically raised the stakes of the 2024 election Saturday as he warned he was the only candidate who could save America from "war-monger" Democrats and the "zealots and fools" of the mainstream Republican party. Darkly invoking a nation on its knees, Trump told the Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC) that Americans were "in an epic struggle to rescue our country from the people who hate it and want to absolutely destroy it."

"We had a Republican Party that

Kuwait will continue to give its "firm backing" for all measures taken to help underdeveloped countries to overcome mounting obstacles such as soaring debt and hunger, the minister underlined, saying such a measure can only succeed through more cooperation across the international community. The Kuwaiti minister urged the international community to work together in a bid to develop crucial sectors that run the gamut from food security to healthcare, in addition to efforts aiming to accelerate a global digital drive. According to official UN statistics, some 46 countries have been designated as least developed, while the four-day UN conference seeks to give impetus to development strategies in these nations.

Earlier, Qatari Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani on Sunday met visiting Representative of HH the Amir

Continued on Page 6

Sunday), to loud and lengthy applause from delegates.

The exact wording of the text was not immediately released but activists hailed it as a breakthrough moment for the protection of biodiversity after more than 15 years of discussions. The treaty is seen as essential to conserving 30 percent of the world's land and ocean by 2030, as agreed by world governments in a historic accord signed in Montreal in December. "This is a historic day for conservation and a sign that in a divided world, protecting nature and people can triumph over geopolitics," said Greenpeace's Laura Meller. EU environment commissioner Virginijus

Continued on Page 6

was ruled by freaks, neocons, globalists, open border zealots and fools," he said, singling out multiple luminaries of the traditional party by name. American voters, Trump said, were tired of "entrenched political dynasties in both parties, rotten special interests, China-loving politicians" and supporters of "endless foreign wars".

"We're going to have World War III if something doesn't happen fast," he cautioned in a section voicing disapproval for US aid to Ukraine. "I am the only candidate who can make this promise: I will prevent World War III." Trump spoke for around 100 minutes to close out the four-day CPAC, a short hop down the Potomac River from the nation's capital Washington.

CPAC was until recently the premier gathering of conservative

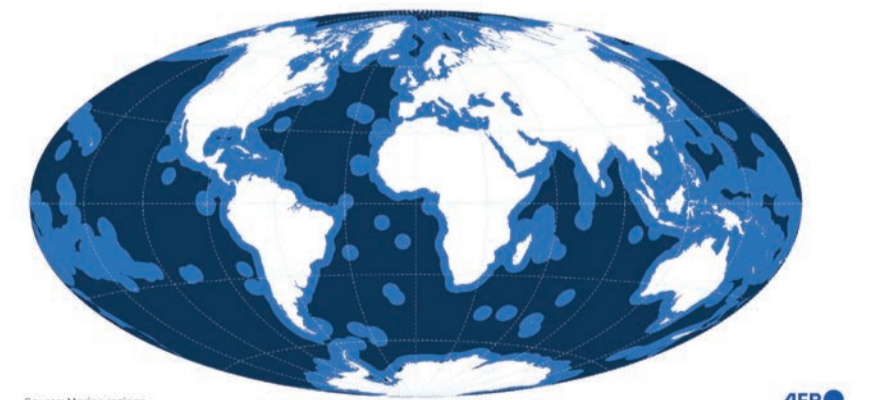
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DOHA: Qatari Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani meets Representative of HH the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, Foreign Minister Sheikh Salem Al-Abdullah Al-Sabah, on March 5, 2023. — KUNA

Ocean jurisdictions

■ National Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs) ■ High seas (international waters)



Source: Marine regions

AFP



NATIONAL HARBOR: Former US President Donald Trump addresses the annual Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC) at Gaylord National Resort & Convention Center on March 4, 2023. — AFP



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Local

Kuwait Commute's initiative promotes awareness on public transport system

Car culture a significant part of Kuwaiti society

By Faten Omar

KUWAIT: In many modern cities, cars are necessary to get around easily. Kuwait has a strong car culture and is known for its love of high-end luxury cars. The country has one of the highest per capita car ownership rates in the world, where passenger cars per 1,000 people reached 445 vehicles in 2019, according to the Central Statistical Bureau, with Kuwait ranking 29th among 135 countries.

Car culture is a significant part of Kuwaiti society. However, traffic jams are still a major issue in certain parts of the country, especially during rush hours. Although public transportation is available, it is considered inconvenient and a social stigma by many.

Founder of Kuwait Commute Jassim Al-Awadhi, who promotes an initiative to bring awareness about the public transportation system and the overall unpleasant traffic situation in Kuwait, told Kuwait Times: "Public transportation has many benefits. It reduces arrival time, reduces accidents and makes people focus more on the road, as well as increasing natural traffic."

Awadhi said people must demand a better transportation system. "We must create proper public transportation. People suffer in some areas where there is no public transportation service, as the bus network is not expanding and does not reach many areas," he said. "Usually on the GPS, the distance is faster by car than the bus, but GPS does not count the time taken to find parking spots

amid the current parking crisis, as it may take time to search for car parks in Kuwait City," explaining the bus takes 35 minutes to reach its destination and the car takes 20 minutes. But while the bus arrives exactly after 35 minutes, the car trip takes longer to conclude.

Awadhi affirmed the new generation are the ones who demand better public transportation. "One of them told me that transportation is more comfortable and better and is stress-free, as the pressure of driving and the time spent for obtaining a driving license cause inconvenience," he said. "When people experience public transportation with me, they are always surprised by the cleanliness of the buses, and it exceeds their expectations," he added. During the survey of the 'Kuwait Commute' initiative, Awadhi noted there are a lot of people willing to accept the use of public transportation, as 2,179 people interacted with the questionnaire consisting of 17 questions and 1,210 followers commented on the topic. In 2022, there was an increase in the number of vehicles, reaching 2,422,223, with total valid driving licenses reaching 1,655,408.



Jassim Al-Awadhi



KUWAIT: Photo shows traffic jams on Kuwait's roads. Kuwait has one of the highest per capita car ownership rates in the world. —Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

News in brief



Fire in a house in Adan

KUWAIT: Fire teams were able to control a fire that started in a house in Adan on Sunday. KFF teams from Qurain and dangerous materials stations rushed to the scene. Upon arrival, the teams found that the fire started on the second floor. They evacuated the residents immediately. All the people inside were rescued. One person was injured and was sent to the paramedics for further medical treatment.

Drug suspects nabbed

KUWAIT: The Public Prosecution has ordered the detention of a police officer and drug suspects for 21 days. The suspects will soon be transferred to the Central Prison. The suspects were accused of smuggling (almost) a ton of Hashish from Iran. In cooperation with the Coast Guard, the Interior Ministry was able to detain the state security officer who works in Shuwaikh Port office. Upon receiving information about an attempt to smuggle the illicit drugs, the concerned departments took legal measures and apprehended the suspects.

CSC employee, others detained

KUWAIT: The Public Prosecution is investigating a Kuwaiti employee who has been working in the Civil Service Commission (CSC). The suspect is accused of receiving monetary compensation in the form of bribery to speed up the process of civil identification cards in cooperation with some Egyptians who were middlemen. "The accused are under investigation. We decided to detain all the suspects," the prosecution said.

Local Bocce ball contest

KUWAIT: Kuwait's Special Olympics Committee on Sunday organized a contest of the European bowling game known as Bocce - a local initiative which is aimed at engaging people with special needs through the involvement of some 21 local bodies. The contest is a prelude to the Special Olympics world championship slated for June in Germany. Kuwaiti Special Olympics deputy chief Huda Al-Khaldi told KUNA, hailing the event as an opportunity to scout "exceptional talent." Such events also provide a platform for participants to hone their skills in preparation for larger contests ahead, according to World Special Olympics spokesperson for the Middle and North Africa region Mariam Theyab, who became the first disabled Kuwaiti to procure a taekwondo blue belt. —KUNA

Residents in Mutlaa protest over permits

KUWAIT: A number of residents who have been assigned plots in the new Mutlaa residential area protested in front of the Public Authority for Housing Welfare building on Sunday over not receiving construction permits despite the infrastructure being ready at the new suburb. Head of the Mutlaa area families committee Khaled Al-Enezi said: "People in the area are in pain due to the inexcusable delay in getting construction permits, as there is not equality in the distribution of these permits, which indicates Mutlaa was a victim of poor implementation. The gathering aims to deliver a message to concerned officials for speeding up the Residential Mutlaa file, which has been allocated for nearly 10 years, but only on paper."



New traffic patrols: Latest tech to achieve safety and security

KUWAIT: In a bid to achieve security and safety and preserve the rights of Kuwaitis and expats, the General Traffic Department introduced new service patrols equipped with the best and latest technologies that record events with audio and video. The new patrols are distinguished by the presence of cameras inside the vehicles, two front and rear cameras, and a wireless audio recording device, in order to document the events that occur on the roads, in a way that contributes to preserving the rights and safety of everyone. —KUNA

Ramadan with ease, comfort

KUWAIT: Acting Undersecretary of the Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs Muhammad Al-Olaim on Sunday announced that the Ministry is making the necessary arrangements in preparation for receiving the blessed month of Ramadan with ease and comfort. The Ministry is working with all its energy to prepare mosques and teams for cultural and awareness programs for worshippers. Al-Olaim said in a statement to Kuwait News Agency (KUNA) during the inauguration of the Saqifah exhibition of distinguished projects and creative ideas.

Some projects were presented, in addition to the digital transformation project from talented and distinguished people. The exhibition will be



KUWAIT: A number of Kuwaiti residents in the new Mutlaa residential area protest on Sunday.



accompanied by several events, such as a competition for the best pavilion, motivational lectures for preparing ideas and transforming ideas into projects, and the impact of the Distinguished Management Award. —KUNA



In my view

Strike Zionist entity deeply

By Muhammed Al-Muthafar

local@kuwaittimes.net

Every Arab Muslim from an early age knows that the Islamic world at this contemporary time is going through a stage of extreme weakness, and Muslims are suffering everywhere in all parts of the world, and we all wonder when salvation will arrive. For myself, I became aware of this early on, especially as I hear and witness every day crimes, injustice and systematic persecution against Muslims, whether in Palestine or around the world.

I was questioning myself and trying to find a way to present something tangible on this issue, since military and political struggle against the forces of injustice and corruption hostile to Islam and Arabism is difficult and we do not have any tools to end this injustice - so it came to my mind a way to do it and take advantage of the legal profession and my experience in the legal field to serve this issue.

I thought, decided, implemented and filed a complaint on behalf of a Palestinian with the United Nations and the Refugee Affairs Council. In the complaint, I demanded the right of my Palestinian client to recover his house and land that were usurped by the Zionist entity after the crisis of 1948, when his family was forcibly displaced to Jordan and then settled in Kuwait.

Neither diplomatic attempts nor international law succeeded in returning the family of this Palestinian citizen or others to their country - and I am currently I am following up the complaint that I submitted and it is still under investigation pending a decision to refer it to the International Court of Justice.

I aim to internationalize the case for the sake of getting the highest number of similar cases, since the Arab and Islamic world has a large number of lawyers - exceeding 1.5 million. If we assume that in every country they gather 50 cases like the one I filed and proceed with the claims, we will strike the Zionist entity in the depths, and thus we, the lawyers, will have presented a magnificent role for the case that broke the heart of the entire Islamic world.

Local

Combating pollution a must to protect food security, quality

KEPS underlines the importance of maintaining a habitable environment

By Ghadeer Ghloum

KUWAIT: Environmental pollution and climate change have become an undeniable global crisis that must be prioritized among other issues that various nations are facing. The wellbeing and existence of humans and different creatures, global food security and quality, as well as other living fundamentals are all connected to the environment's stability. President of Kuwait Environment Protection Society (KEPS) Wejdan Al-Oqab told Kuwait Times: "The global crisis has pushed multiple nations from around the globe to set strategies to find solutions and stop the problem from growing." She pointed out that sustainable development goals are set to be achieved by 2030, with three directly related to fundamental environment elements - focusing on water and sea life, the land (soil and rocks) and climate action. "These three goals represent the core of sustainable development," she said.

Oqab emphasized the negative effects of pollution on food quality and security, especially since unhealthy chemicals and plastics have been found in every level of the food chain. She began by shedding light on the importance of clean seas. "Sea creatures are the source of food for many populations. This means that sea pollution puts such populations on the verge of a food shortage crisis and increases the threat of starvation," she said.

Similarly, Oqab signified the importance of keeping earth free from damage and pollution. "Dealing with a polluted environment will def-

initely affect food and water security because pollution negatively affects the quality and quantity of agricultural produce. Unhealthy materials and chemical elements move through the food chain until they end up in the consumers' systems."

According to Oqab, health-damaging materials such as plastic are becoming an increasingly dangerous issue that is destroying nature. "Studies have shown that nano plastic particles are found inside human food. Therefore, controlling pollution is a priority to prevent the issue from getting worse. Studies have also proven that throughout the years chemicals accumulate in some types of food and transfer through the food chain. This means we would need to stop consuming these foods, which could lead to overconsumption of other foods, consequently putting pressure on our limited resources."

Oqab added that KEPS makes great efforts to raise awareness about the importance of maintaining a habitable environment that is free from factors contributing to pollution such as non-biodegradable trash, especially plastic, which never fully decomposes but only breaks down into very small particles.

KEPS is working on several fronts to raise awareness among different groups of people in society. They focus on youth through



Wejdan Al-Oqab



"green school programs", which aim to educate students about the environment. They also spread awareness through media by creating informative and entertaining programs, with Kuwait being the main focus, as well as taking part in exhibitions that allow effective face-to-face interaction with people.

KEPS also collaborates with different gov-

ernment bodies in Kuwait. Oqab said: "KEPS is in continuous connection with the public sector to provide decision makers with enough information about the state's environmental situation, such as the National Assembly's environment committee, Kuwait Municipality, Kuwait Environment Public Authority and others."

Is it disrespectful to ignore job title?

By Majd Othman

KUWAIT: A couple of days ago, a tweet saying it is disrespectful to call someone without mentioning their job title before their name, such as Dr X or Eng X, went viral in Kuwait. The tweet garnered 1.3 million views, and many of the users commented on it mockingly, while someone wrote "the only one who didn't comment on this tweet is Obama!"

Kuwait Times discussed the reasons many people prefer to be called by their job title as a mark of respect outside their workplace. The tweeter justified at the end of her tweet that people didn't study and work hard for their efforts to be ignored, and being called by their first name only without their job title.

Noof said she usually calls people by their job title out of respect and not due to the certificate they have, but added there is no reason to call people who we don't know by their job title outside of their work circle. Huwaida also disagreed, saying, "a degree is just a piece of paper; real education is seen in behavior." Marah said respect that comes due to the job title is not real. "People must not be that shallow to study a hard and exhausting major that needs great efforts only for other people's appreciation," she said.

Psychologist Dr Hassan Al-Mosawi told Kuwait Times in the Arab society and culture, using the job title as a kind of social appearance is the main reason people use their job titles to introduce themselves. "We have to consider the big sociocultural role when we compare between the Arab and foreign cultures. It is noticeable that we are giving great importance to this issue, while they only call each other by their first names even in high-profile jobs. This is due to their respect for

human beings for their performance, work and connection to their titles," he said.

"In our Arab culture, for many people it is not acceptable to call them by their name directly without mentioning their job title. Even among doctors, for example, it is inappropriate to call each other without their job titles," he said. Dr Mosawi clarified this issue as kind of psychological problem, as people think they are not respected if others don't mention their job title, or people don't recognize their job or certificate, stressing this is a belief specific to Arab societies, unlike Western societies.

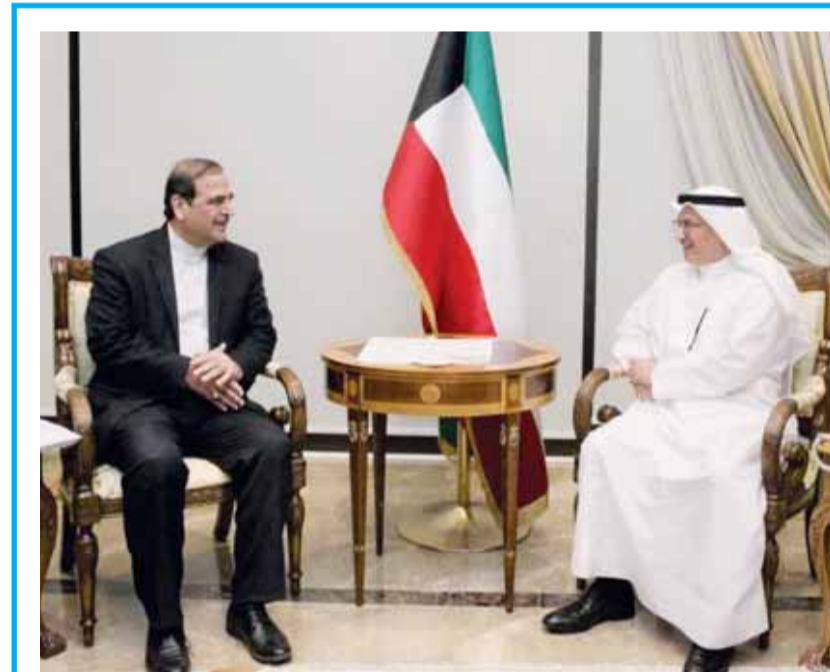
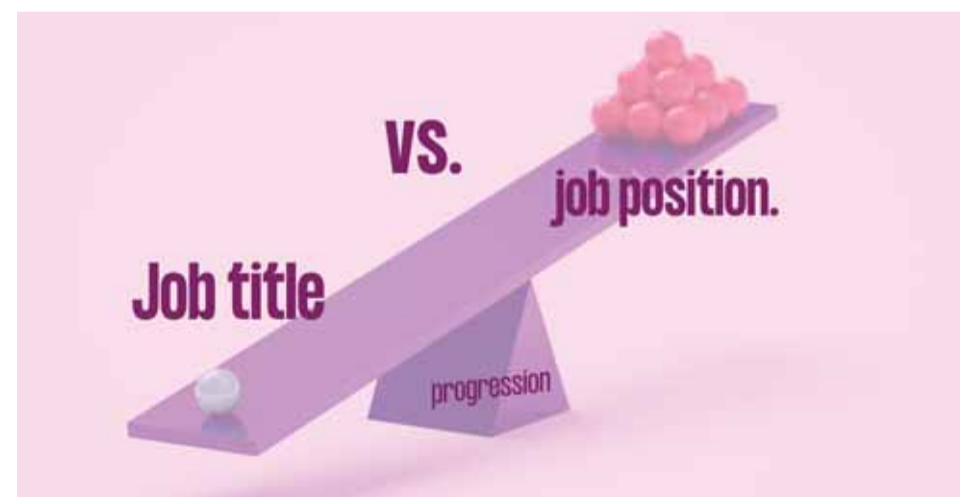
"Also, many people unfortunately obtain postgraduate degrees as a kind of social appearance, more than working with it and benefiting the people with their knowledge. Someone who cares about getting a certificate for social appearance has an inferiority complex, which is when a person feels people will respect them only when they add their job title before their name," Dr Mosawi said.



Dr Hassan Al-Mosawi



Dr Mosawi said social media's positive affect helped the new generation to understand that this is not a big issue anymore, as they have the awareness to focus on people's performance and achievements rather than the job title. On the other hand, he said some people are looking for getting some privilege by having higher degrees, such as increment in their salaries, social status and more respect, regardless of their weak knowledge.



KUWAIT: (Top) Deputy Foreign Minister Ambassador Mansour Al-Otaibi on Sunday received Iran's Ambassador to Kuwait, Mohammad Irani. During the meeting, both sides touched on bilateral ties between the two friendly countries and ways to boost cooperation at various levels. (Below) The Deputy Foreign Minister also received Iraq's Ambassador to Kuwait, Al-Manhal Al-Safi. Both sides touched on bilateral relations. —KUNA photos

Fresh graduates face challenges

By Ghadeer Ghloum

KUWAIT: Having a university degree no longer awards fresh graduates their dream job amid competition among job-seekers. Possessing an educational background sets expectations of finding a job that matches graduates' majors and provides financial independence. However, this does not apply to the reality of the job market, where fresh graduates face unreasonable restrictions. In Kuwait, three different categories of people - Kuwaitis, bedoons and expats - experience a stressful journey while searching for a fulfilling job, each according to their own circumstances.

Eman, a Kuwaiti industrial engineer, shared her experience after graduating with Kuwait Times. "I have waited for more than two years for my turn to come on the employment center's waiting list.

During this time, I applied to companies in the private sector, where I faced further struggles because non-Kuwaitis and those with lower educational degrees are preferred at lower pay," she said.

Despite being a local with a good education, Eman faced restrictions in both the private and public sectors. After as long wait, she got hired in the public sector, where she was further disappointed over the irrelevancy of the job's nature with what she has studied. "I mostly struggled with the ministries' needlessness of my major. Most ministries claim they already have enough industrial engineers, besides the fact that my responsibilities at my workplace do not match my education," she said.

Dana, a bedoon fresh graduate also had her own share of struggles finding a suitable position and fair pay. "I recently graduated with a bachelor's in English and literature from a private university in Kuwait. I also have a secretarial diploma as well, both with a high GPA. I also used to work while studying in order to empower my CV. In spite of that, I have

not found a job yet that takes my qualifications into consideration. Most companies try to exploit me by making me work for long hours for a low salary," she said.

According to Dana, when it comes to profit, some private companies disregard fairness and humanity. Being in an uncertain situation in Kuwait (neither Kuwaiti nor expat), Dana finds additional difficulties fitting in some job requirements. "When job vacancies are open at places related to the public sector, a lot of hindering factors come in the way. For example, not all bedoons are given equal opportunities. There are certain specifications such as only allowing bedoons whose mothers are Kuwaiti or of a certain nationality. Besides unstable hiring periods that are hard to follow up and other complicating factors," she told Kuwait Times.

Ala'a, an expat fresh graduate, also shared her experience. "People already have preconceived opinions and ideas about certain races. This becomes apparent when you are looking to get hired. Experience also plays a vital role

in getting hired at times. Most people will not hire you if you have no experience (despite being a fresh graduate), or they will take advantage of this fact to pay you lower wages."

Prejudice, low pay and lack of experience are major issues that Ala'a faces as

an expat. Moreover, she highlighted the issue of confiscating students' driving licenses after graduating as another unpleasant experience. "Although I wanted to graduate as soon as possible, I used to procrastinate in order to keep my driving license," she said.



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Device in viral video not a cure for heart disease

KUWAIT: A video circulating on social media showing a device advertised as a replacement to known heart-disease treatments is fake, said Kuwait Heart Foundation in a press statement. The claims in the video are not true, the foundation said, and are not based on scientific research.

The video falsely claimed that the device could treat several heart issues, such as "unclogging arteries and strengthening valves". The device could also allegedly "restore arteries to their original condition" and "adjust the heart's electrical activity" - all of which are not true.

The foundation said it's committed to responding to false information about the device in question and refuting any rumors that people might believe.

The device, in fact, emits sound waves, said the foundation. It's still under trial and has not proven effective in scientific studies, except in limited cases where patients are not fit for open heart surgery or unclogging arteries with stents. Effective results in these conditions remain limited and continue to be under study.

Claims that the device could fix arteries or affect the heart's activity are mere lies, said the foundation. The foundation urged patients to consult their cardiologists before believing such videos.

Photo of the day



KUWAIT: Herons, flamingos and brown-headed gulls are pictured at a beach in Kuwait City on March 4, 2023. —Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat

Avoid dehydration, eat on time: Advice for diabetics in Ramadan

Most diabetics can fast during the month, doctor says

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: Farwaniya Hospital's endocrinology unit organized a diabetes awareness day for the month of Ramadan under the theme "Your sugar is OK in the month of goodness". "Fasting during the month of Ramadan generally improves diabetic conditions," said Head of Kuwait Diabetes Society and endocrinologist at Mubarak Hospital Dr Waleed Al-Dhani.

Dr Dhani, who is also director of Kuwait's Endocrine Fellowship Program, said most diabetics can fast in Ramadan. He made exceptions in certain cases, such as those who suffer from repeated drop in blood sugar level (hypoglycemia) during the three months before Ramadan and those who suffer from chronic diseases such as heart, eye, nerve and liver conditions. Diabetics who are injected multiple times

a day, type one diabetics and diabetic pregnant women should also refrain from fasting.

Diabetes, said Dr Dhani, is a chronic disease that remains with the patient all their life and requires an adjustment in lifestyle and adherence to instructions, while regularly taking medication on time. It may also be accompanied with other chronic diseases such as obesity, high levels of cholesterol and hypertension.

There are around 148 million diabetic Muslims around the world, said Dr Dhani. He confirmed that the disease has a 25 percent prevalence in Kuwait, which is worrisome. Around 78 percent of type-2 diabetics fast half of the month of Ramadan, said Dr Dhani. The numbers are lower for type-1 diabetics, with 43 percent of patients fasting during the month.

Those with diabetes must visit their doctors one to two months before the holy month to know

whether their condition allows them to fast or not, said Head of Internal Medicine at Farwaniya Hospital Dr Naela Al-Mazidi.

She also had some advice for diabetics planning to fast: Break your fast on time and delay suhoor, drink enough water and avoid dehydration during the iftar period. She said patients should include fruits and vegetables in their meals and avoid eating too many sweets and drinks high in sugar and caffeine.

Head of Endocrinology Department at Farwaniya Hospital Dr Mohammad Al-Kandari said the number of out-patient visits last year was 4,892 cases, about half of which were cases at diabetes clinics. The number of gestational diabetes cases at outpatient clinics reached 924, he said, while the number of patients who visited diabetes clinics was more than double that at 2,480.



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Ceremony honors martyrs, marks national holidays

KUWAIT: Jawad Al-Matrouk, head of the Dawaween Union and writer and researcher Abdullah Boweir organized a ceremony in honor of the martyrs who sacrificed their lives during the 1990 Iraqi invasion. The event, held on Feb 27 on occasion of Kuwait's National and Liberation Days, was attended by ambassadors and representatives of a number of countries.

"We are happy to attend along with ambassadors and high officials at this ceremony in honor of our martyrs and in celebration of the publishing of our book titled, "The History of Kuwait and Sheikh Ahmad Al-Jaber," said Boweir at the event held in Bidaa area.

South Sudan's envoy Joseph Dut Kuoi congratulated Kuwait on the occasion. "South Sudan and Kuwait have been having long, tight ... relationships, so we are happy to celebrate the National Day of our sister country. We wish the people and the government of Kuwait prosperity and stability."



Lebanon's Charge d'Affairs Ahmad Arafah was also in attendance. "As Lebanese people, we feel we are part of these celebrations. There's a long history between the two people and a strong friendship. Kuwait's continued efforts to help Lebanon, as well as the Lebanese stance during the invasion will not be forgotten."

Kenyan Ambassador to Kuwait Halima Mohamad shared her greetings, as well. "I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate the government and the people of Kuwait. I want to also congratulate HHH the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, the Crown Prince and the Prime Minister and government of Kuwait for the National Day and Liberation Day."



KUWAIT: Attendees pose for a picture at an event celebrating the national holidays and honoring Kuwait's martyrs.





Estonians vote with parties split over Ukraine aid

Iran agrees to reconnect nuclear cameras, ramp up inspections: IAEA

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KHARKIV: A Ukrainian tank drives through a village in Kharkiv region, amid the Russian invasion of Ukraine. —AFP

Ukraine battles to hold Bakhmut

Bakhmut reduced to rubble during the longest and bloodiest battle of the invasion

KYIV: Kyiv said Sunday it was holding off attacks from Russian troops still attempting to surround Bakhmut, a now-destroyed eastern Ukrainian city that Moscow has been trying to capture for months. Ukraine has vowed to defend "fortress Bakhmut" but it has faced Russian troops determined to take the city that has turned into a political prize as the battle drags on.

The Ukrainian general staff said "more than 130 enemy attacks" had been repelled over the past day including in Kupiansk, Lyman, Bakhmut and Avdiivka. "The enemy continues its attempts to encircle the town of Bakhmut," it said on Sunday morning. Bakhmut has been mostly reduced to rubble during the longest and bloodiest battle of the invasion.

Sergiy Cherevaty, a spokesman for Ukrainian forces, said on Saturday the situation was "difficult but under control" in the city he described as a "priority target for the enemy". There is fighting in and around the city, the US-based Institute for the Study of War (ISW) said, warning that with Ukrainian supply routes were narrowing.

"The Russians may have intended to encircle Ukrainian forces in Bakhmut, but the Ukrainian command has signalled that it will likely withdraw rather than risk an encirclement," ISW said Saturday. Ukraine and Russia have since the summer fiercely fought for the city, whose symbolic importance surpassed its military significance.

Rivalries

Pro-Russian separatists in the Donetsk region posted a video purporting to show Wagner fighters in the suburbs north of Bakhmut, having taken control over the Stupki railway station. Wagner, a private army headed by Yevgeny Prigozhin, has taken centre stage in the fight for the city, which has exposed rivalries with Russia's conventional forces.

On Friday, Prigozhin said his fighters had "practically encircled" Bakhmut, and only one road remained under Ukrainian control. Prigozhin has for weeks been publicising the advances of his men towards the eastern city.

Prigozhin regularly posts videos of himself alongside mercenaries, on the ground or even in a

fighter jet, in contrast with Russian generals criticised for shirking the frontline. In a rare exception, Russia on Saturday released a video of defence minister Sergei Shoigu inspecting troops in frontline regions in Ukraine.

The ministry said Sergei Shoigu inspected an advance command post in the South Donetsk direction without specifying exactly where or when. He was seen travelling in a helicopter and talking to a soldier in front of damaged buildings.

The ISW think tank said Shoigu went there "likely to assess the extent of Russian losses around Vugledar and the possibility of a further offensive in this direction".

Zaporizhzhia 'hostage'

While the epicentre of the fighting is in the east of Ukraine, the death toll from a strike this week on an apartment block in southern Zaporizhzhia has now risen to 13. Zaporizhzhia is one of the four regions—along with Donetsk, Lugansk and Kherson—that Russia claims to have annexed but never fully controlled.

Still, Moscow's forces have held the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant since March 4, 2022. The plant has repeatedly made headlines and revived fears of nuclear catastrophes similar to the deadly Chernobyl disaster that shook Ukraine in 1986.

The exiled mayor of Enerhodar, which houses the central, told AFP Russia uses the plant as a "nuclear shield" for its troops and equipment. Kyiv and Moscow have blamed each other for shelling around the plant and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) posted observers there.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said on Saturday that Russia took the nuclear power plant "hostage" a year ago, and "turned the territory of the (power plant) into a de facto military training ground".

Zelensky on Saturday also met with European Parliament's president Roberta Metsola, who urged for Ukraine to be allowed to begin EU membership negotiations this year. The United States announced a new \$400 million security aid package for Ukraine on Friday that featured a range of ammunition for Kyiv's forces. —AFP



TUNIS: Police officers try to disperse demonstrators in Tunisia on March 5, 2023, rallying in defiance of a protest ban, to demand the release of prominent figures opposed to the president who were arrested in recent weeks. —AFP

Tunisians defy protest ban, demand release of Saied critics

TUNIS: Hundreds of Tunisians rallied Sunday in defiance of a protest ban, demanding the release of more than 20 prominent figures opposed to the president who were arrested in recent weeks. President Kais Saied sacked the government and froze parliament in a 2021 power grab and imposed sweeping changes to the political system of the sole democracy to have emerged from the Arab Spring uprisings.

More than 20 political figures have been arrested in the North African country in recent weeks, including members of the main opposition coalition, the National Salvation Front (NSF) and its main component, the Islamist-leaning Ennahdha party.

"Freedom for the detainees," chanted the demonstrators, most of them supporters of the NSF, with many waving Tunisian flags and pictures of detainees, AFP journalists said. Denouncing Saied's power grab as a "coup", the protesters defied a ban on demonstrations imposed by Tunis authorities.

Initially dozens gathered by a key bus and tramway station in central Tunis before charging police barricades then marched towards Habib Bourguiba Avenue, where the crowd soon swelled to more than 500, reporters said.

A policeman used a loudspeaker to urge demonstrators to move out of the iconic avenue—the site of repeated protests—and head towards the headquarters of Al Joumhour party several kilometres away, saying: "Please, the march is banned".

'National cause'

Issam Chebbi, head of Al Joumhour party, is among the Saied opponents who have been arrested in the crackdown launched in February. His brother Ahmed Nejib Chebbi, who heads the NSF, addressed the crowd and charged the arrests were "arbitrary".

Protester Ahmed Nejib Chebbi, 78, said: "We are defending a national cause and we will not stop until democracy and institutions return." Other detainees include senior opposition figures Jawhar Ben Mbarek, businessman Kamel Eltaief, the head of Tunisia's most popular radio station Mosaïque FM, Nouredine Boutar, as well as trade union officials.

Mbarek's father, Ezzedine Hazgui, who was imprisoned under the dictatorship of ousted president Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, attended the rally and denounced Saied in comments to AFP. "The president has placed all state institutions under his control and has divided the people. The police protects an illegitimate president," Hazgui said.

Saied has accused those arrested of "terrorism" and causing recurrent food shortages as well as plotting against the state. Rights group Amnesty International has labelled the arrests a "politically motivated witch hunt". —AFP

Greek PM seeks forgiveness over rail disaster

ATHENS: Greece's prime minister on Sunday asked for forgiveness from the families of the 57 dead in the nation's worst rail disaster as thousands of furious protesters rallied in Athens and clashed with police.

"As prime minister, I owe it to everyone, but especially to the victims' relatives, (to ask for) forgiveness," Kyriakos Mitsotakis wrote in a message addressed to the nation. "For the Greece of 2023, two trains heading in different directions cannot run on the same line and no one notices," Mitsotakis said in the message posted on his Facebook page.

The crash between passenger and freight trains near the city of Larissa on Tuesday has sparked widespread outrage across Greece. Thousands of angry demonstrators gathered outside the parliament in Athens on Sunday following a call by students, rail workers and public sector employees. AFP journalists saw violent clashes erupt between police and the protesters.

They had released hundreds of black balloons into the sky in memory of the dead, with some holding signs reading "Down with killer governments", while train and metro services were paralysed by strike action. Michalis Hasiotis, head of the chartered accountants' union, told AFP they felt "an immense anger", blaming "the thirst for profit, the lack of measures taken for the pas-

sengers' protection" for the disaster. Relatives and loved ones of those killed were also expected to gather Sunday for a memorial outside Larissa station, central Greece, near the site of the accident. The station master implicated in the disaster was due in court on Sunday, a hearing postponed from the previous day, where he may face charges of negligent homicide.

Grief and anger

Hellenic Train, the rail company that has become the focus of some of the anger expressed in the wake of the crash, released a statement late Saturday defending its actions.

Hundreds of people had demonstrated during the week outside their Athens headquarters, and one legal source has said that investigators are looking at the possibility of bringing charges against senior members of the company. Over the last few days, rail union officials have insisted they warned the company about the safety issues on the line. Hard questions are also being asked of the government over its failure to pursue rail safety reforms.

The demonstrations and vigils across Greece have expressed a combination of grief and anger at the disaster, which happened when a passenger train and a freight train collided. Syntagma Square, next to the Greek parliament in Athens, was the scene of clashes between police and angry protesters on Friday night.

Candle-lit marches and ceremonies have also been held in memory of the victims, many of them students who were returning from a weekend break.

"What happened was not an accident, it was a crime," said one protester, Sophia Hatzopoulou, 23, a philosophy student in Thessaloniki. —AFP



ATHENS: Protesters shout towards gas-throwing riot police during a massive demonstration in Athens on March 5, 2023, following the deadly train accident late on February 28. —AFP

International

Iran agrees to reconnect nuclear cameras, ramp up inspections: IAEA

Iran's top nuclear official call on all parties to the 2015 deal to fulfil their 'obligations'

VIENNA: Iran has agreed to reconnect surveillance cameras at several nuclear sites and increase the pace of inspections, the head of the International Atomic Energy Agency said on Saturday. UN nuclear watchdog chief Rafael Grossi hailed "a marked improvement" in his discussions with the Iranian government.

Grossi has been in Tehran for talks with Iranian officials following the discovery of uranium particles enriched to near weapons-grade level. On his return to Vienna, Grossi recalled there had been "a reduction in monitoring activities related to cameras and monitoring systems" and said "we have agreed that those will be operating again".

"This is very, very important" in terms of continuity of knowledge, "in particular in the context of the possibility of the revival of JCPOA", he said. Grossi arrived in Iran on Friday with talks deadlocked on reviving the landmark 2015 accord on Iran's nuclear activity, known formally as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, or JCPOA.

On Saturday evening, he told reporters: "We have put a tourniquet on the bleeding of information and lack of continuity of knowledge we had - so now we can start working again, reconstructing these baselines of information." He said the measures should be in place "very soon" following a technical meeting, but no precise timings were outlined in a joint statement with the Atomic Energy Organisation of Iran (AEOI).

Inspections

Grossi's two-day visit came as the Vienna-based IAEA seeks greater cooperation with Iran over its nuclear activities. In his series of meetings with Iranian officials, Grossi met President Ebrahim Raisi. Raisi acknowledged that "cooperation is a two-way street... (and) can continue based on maintaining the agency's independence and the rights of the Iranian nation," the political deputy of Iran's presidency, Mohammad Jamshidi tweeted.

A diplomatic source earlier told AFP the meeting with Raisi was designed to "relaunch the dialogue" on Iran's atomic work and to "reset the relationship at the highest level". Uranium particles enriched up to 83.7 percent - just under the 90 percent needed to produce an atomic bomb - had been detected at Iran's underground Fordo plant about 100 kilometres (60 miles) south of Tehran, according to a confidential IAEA report seen by AFP this week. Grossi said the IAEA needed to further inspect the facility and that Iran had agreed to "50 percent more inspections" there.

Iran denies wanting to acquire atomic weapons, and says it had made no attempt to enrich uranium beyond 60-percent purity. Iran's government has said, however, that "unintended fluctuations... may have occurred" during the enrichment process. The discovery came after Iran had substantially modified an interconnection between two centrifuge clusters enriching uranium, without declaring it to the IAEA.

'Obligations'

On Saturday, Iran's top nuclear official Mohammad Eslami called on all parties to the 2015 deal to fulfil their "obligations". "Three European and some other countries are just focusing on Iran's JCPOA obligations," he told journalists. "They too have obligations that they need to adhere to."

"We came to an arrangement (with Grossi) to define our cooperation within the framework of the safeguards" on nuclear activity, he added. "The relevant authorities will make a decision" if a resolution is reached, and Iran's atomic agency will adhere to that decision, he said.

"Iran never sacrifices its national interests for anything else," Eslami said. Depending on the outcome of Grossi's trip, the US as well as Britain, France and Germany will decide whether to submit a draft resolution censuring Iran to the IAEA board of governors, which convenes next week in Vienna.

Grossi also met on Saturday with Iranian Foreign



TEHRAN: A handout picture provided by the Iranian presidency shows Iran's President Ebrahim Raisi (C) meeting with International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) chief Rafael Grossi (L) in Tehran. — AFP

Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian, the official news agency IRNA reported. During his visit he had aimed to secure "more access to the (Fordo) site, more inspections," the diplomatic source said.

'Greater cooperation'

The 2015 deal between Iran and world powers promised Tehran relief from biting economic sanctions in exchange for curbs on its nuclear activities. The restrictions set out in the deal, including the 3.67-percent enrichment threshold, were intended to prevent Iran from developing a nuclear weapon.

The United States unilaterally withdrew from the pact in 2018 under then-president Donald Trump and reimposed sanctions, prompting Iran to suspend the implementation of its own commitments. Negotiations aimed at reviving the deal started in 2021 but have been stalled since last year.

Grossi's visit has been seen in Iran as another indication that a dialogue-based approach to resolving the nuclear standoff is possible. In November 2022, Western nations criticised Iran for its lack of cooperation after traces of enriched uranium were found at three undeclared sites.

Kelsey Davenport, an expert at the Arms Control Association think-tank, said: "Iran's willingness to increase monitoring is a positive and necessary step to de-escalate tensions and reduce the risk of miscalculation." But she warned it was "critical" for all sides to put the measures into place swiftly, and said the announcement was "not sufficient to reduce the growing proliferation risk posed by Iran's advancing nuclear program." She said the United States and European countries should "look to capitalize on this momentum with a diplomatic push to reengage Iran in negotiations." — AFP

Anger as climate activists smear German monument

BERLIN: Politicians reacted angrily Saturday after climate activists smeared a black liquid on a monument near Germany's lower parliamentary chamber on which the articles of the country's constitution are inscribed.

The group behind the action near the Bundestag in Berlin, Letzte Generation (Last Generation), has carried out several similar actions to draw attention to the climate crisis. They posted a video online of people dressed in fluorescent orange safety jackets spraying the liquid on some of the 19, three-metre high glass panels on which articles of the constitution are inscribed. They also put up posters bearing the slogan "Oil or constitutional rights?". The monument, called "Basic Law 49" in reference to West Germany's 1949 constitution, was created by Zionist artist Dani Karavan.

"I am shocked that the activists of the #LastGeneration are smearing this important work of art on the Basic Law," tweeted



BERLIN: Climate activists of the "Letzte Generation" (Last Generation) smeared a black liquid and put up posters on a monument near Germany's lower parliamentary chamber on which the articles of the country's constitution are inscribed in Berlin. — AFP

Baerbel Bas, president of the ruling Social Democrats in the Bundestag. "It stands as a reminder to respect our fundamental rights," she added — including the right to freedom of expression and assembly that they themselves enjoyed.

No matter what message was intended, Justice Minister Marco Buschmann tweeted, "... it can only be wrong!" "The Basic Law

stands for freedom, democracy and the rule of law," added Buschmann of the Liberal Democrats, one of the coalition partners of Germany's ruling Social Democrats.

Police have not yet identified the liquid the campaigners used in their action. The six activists involved have been identified and complaints had been filed, a police spokeswoman told AFP. — AFP

New cases of poisoning in Iran regions

TEHRAN: More cases of mysterious poisoning of Iranian schoolgirls were reported Sunday in several provinces, local media reported, sparking calls for the authorities to act amid growing concern among parents.

Since late November, hundreds of cases have been reported, mainly in the holy city of Qom south of the capital Tehran, with at least 52 schools targeted, according to an official tally published on Saturday. Some of the students have required hospitalisation.

The latest spate of poisonings affected several students in two high schools in the western city of Abhar and in the southwestern city of Ahvaz, ISNA news agency said, quoting local health officials.

Schoolgirls at a primary school in the city of Zanjan in the west were also targeted, ISNA added.

More cases were reported in the holy city of Mashhad in the northeast, Isfahan in the centre and Shiraz in the south, according to Mehr and Inna news agencies. Dozens of schoolgirls were taken to local hospitals for treatment, the reports said.

On Friday, President Ebrahim Raisi said he had asked the ministers of intelligence and interior to follow up on the poisoning cases, dubbing them "the enemy's conspiracy to create fear and despair" among the people.

Interviewed by the Fars news agency, Deputy Interior Minister Majid Mirahmadi said the "plotters of the poisoning of girls" were seeking "to close the schools". He added, however, that those behind this action were also trying to spark more protests in the Islamic republic.

Mirahmadi was referring to the protest movement triggered in Iran by the September 16 death in custody of Mahsa Amini, a young ethnic Kurd arrested for an alleged breach of strict dress rules for women. Mirahmadi said that most of the affected students suffered complications due to "anxiety and stress". — AFP

Kuwait affirms LDCs require...

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Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, Foreign Minister Sheikh Salem. Sheikh Salem conveyed sincere greetings and wishes on the conference from HH the Amir, HH the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Al-Nawaf Al-Sabah. Sheikh Tamim expressed wishes to HH the Amir, HH the Crown Prince, the government and the Kuwaiti people. The two sides touched on boosting relations between the two countries in various fields.

Meanwhile, leaders from the world's poorest nations poured out their disappointment and bitterness at the UN summit on Sunday over the treatment of their countries by richer counterparts. Many made pointed calls for the developed powers to come good with billions of dollars of promised aid to help them escape poverty and battle climate change.

Central African Republic's president told the UN Least Developed Countries meeting in Doha that his resource-rich but impoverished nation was being "looted" by "Western powers". UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres followed up an attack he made a day earlier on the "predatory" interest rates imposed by international banks on poor states. He said there could be "no more excuses" for not providing aid.

But the opening day of general debate at the once-in-a-decade summit saw no major announcement of desperately needed cash - apart from \$60 million that host Qatar said it would give to United Nations programs. Leaders of the world's major economies have been markedly absent from debate, which will last five days, on the turmoil in poor nations.

At a meeting with LDC leaders on Saturday Guterres called for \$500 billion to be mobilized for social and economic transformation. Leaders also used the first day of public debate to renew demands that industrialized governments hand over a promised \$100 billion a year to support their efforts to counter global warming. Presidents and prime ministers from Africa and the Asia-Pacific

region made calls for financial action.

Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, whose country of 170 million is scheduled to graduate out of LDC status, said poorer nations "deserve" certainty over financing for development and climate. "The international community must renew its commitment for real structural transformation in LDCs," Hasina said. "Our nations do not ask for charity. What we seek are our due international commitments."

Zambia's President Hakainde Hichilema said providing the finance was "a matter of credibility". "LDCs cannot afford another lost decade," declared Narayan Kaji Shrestha, deputy prime minister of Nepal, which is also to leave the LDC club for the Middle Income Countries division by 2026. Shrestha said that in the five decades since LDC status was established to give countries trade privileges and cheaper finance, they had been "fighting an epic battle against poverty, hunger, disease and illiteracy". He highlighted that only six countries had so far escaped the LDC status that some nations consider a stigma.

Central African Republic's President Faustin-Archange Touadera used his speech to lash out at sanctions imposed by the UN Security Council and other institutions against the huge but sparsely populated nation that has seen decades of instability. Touadera said the country's 5.5 million people could not understand how, with vast reserves of gold, diamonds, cobalt, oil and uranium, it "remains, more than 60 years after independence, one of the poorest in the world".

"Central African Republic has always been wrongly considered by certain Western powers as a reserve for strategic materials," he added. "It has suffered a systematic looting since its independence, helped by political instability supported by certain Western powers or their allies." The country has been under a UN arms embargo for a decade, while the EU imposed sanctions against the Russian mercenary group Wagner over its activities in Central African Republic and other neighboring countries. One sanctioned Wagner official was a "security adviser" to Touadera, according to the EU.

Gold and diamond companies linked to Wagner in Central African Republic and Sudan were also hit by EU sanctions. The LDC summit lasts until March 9 while hundreds of business executives are attending a parallel private sector forum. — Agencies

'Historic' UN deal to protect...

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Sinkevicius on Sunday called the treaty "a crucial step forward to preserve the marine life and biodiversity that are essential for us and the generations to come". Following two weeks of intense talks, including a marathon overnight session Friday into Saturday, delegates finalized a text that now cannot be significantly altered. "There will be no reopening or discussions of substance," Lee told negotiators.

The agreement will be formally adopted at a later date once it has been vetted by lawyers and translated into the United Nations' six official languages, she announced. UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres commended the delegates, according to a spokesperson who said the agreement was a "victory for multilateralism and for global efforts to counter the destructive trends facing ocean health, now and for generations to come".

The high seas begin at the border of countries' exclusive economic zones, which extend up to 200 nautical miles (370 km) from coastlines. They thus fall under the jurisdiction of no country. Even though the

high seas comprise more than 60 percent of the world's oceans and nearly half the planet's surface, they have long drawn far less attention than coastal waters and a few iconic species.

Ocean ecosystems create half the oxygen humans breathe and limit global warming by absorbing much of the carbon dioxide emitted by human activities. But they are threatened by climate change, pollution and overfishing. Only about one percent of the high seas are currently protected. When the new treaty comes into force it will allow the creation of marine protected areas in these international waters.

"High seas marine protected areas can play a critical role in building resilience to the impact of climate change," said Liz Karan of The Pew Charitable Trusts, which called the agreement a "momentous achievement". The treaty will also oblige countries to conduct environmental impact assessments of proposed activities on the high seas. A highly sensitive chapter on the sharing of potential benefits of newly discovered marine resources was one of the focal points of tensions before it was finally overcome as the scheduled talks, due to end Friday, overran by a day.

Developing countries, without the means to afford costly research, had fought not to be excluded from the expected windfall from the commercialization of potential substances discovered in the international waters. — AFP

Trump slams GOP 'fools' at...

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thought leaders in America - but it has been swallowed whole by Trump's far-right "Make America Great Again" movement, with pundits referring to the event lately as "MAGApalooza". "We are going to finish what we started," Trump said as he took to the stage, prompting a chant of "Four more years, four more years!"

The 2023 edition featured speeches from some of the country's most committed Trumpists - and even Brazil's defeated former president Jair Bolsonaro - although many potential 2024 candidates and Republican leadership skipped the con-

vention. The meeting drew smaller crowds than usual, raising questions over its continued relevance as many speeches played to empty rows of seating.

But the room was packed as Trump made his case for a second term, as he faces accusations of trying to steal the 2020 election through a multi-step criminal conspiracy that included inciting an insurrection. For the most part, he rehearsed the same litany of voter fraud conspiracy theories and grievances against law enforcement and "radical left" prosecutors that he dusts off for every post-presidency public appearance.

The address offered a split screen with the conservative Club for Growth's donor retreat in Florida, where much of the Republican establishment had decamped for the weekend. At CPAC, vendors hawked books, dating apps and even Wi-Fi services specifically marketed for conservatives. — AFP

International

China increases military spending in face of 'escalating' threats

Military must 'devote greater energy to training under combat conditions'

BEIJING: China said Sunday its military spending would rise at the fastest pace in four years, warning of "escalating" threats from abroad at a meeting of its rubber-stamp parliament that will hand Xi Jinping a third term as president.

The increase in the world's second-largest defence budget came as Beijing announced an economic growth goal of around five percent for this year—one of its lowest in decades. The country's planned budgets for the year put defence spending at 1.55 trillion yuan (\$225 billion), a 7.2 percent rise and the quickest rate of increase since 2019. It officially rose 7.1 percent last year.

Outgoing Premier Li Keqiang told delegates to the National People's Congress (NPC) that "external attempts to suppress and contain China are escalating". "The armed forces should intensify military training and preparedness across the board," he said as he presented the government's annual work report to thousands of amassed delegates in Beijing's Great Hall of the People.

The military must "devote greater energy to training under combat conditions, and... strengthen military work in all directions and domains", he added. China's defence spending still pales in comparison with the United States, which has allotted over \$800 billion for its military this year. But analysts have said Beijing spends much more money than the officially announced sums.

The ramped-up spending comes during a low point in relations between China and the United States.

Beijing and Washington have butted heads in recent years over trade, human rights and other issues, but relations soured even further last month when the US shot down a Chinese balloon it said was being used for surveillance—a claim strenuously denied by Beijing.

Top American officials have also repeatedly warned that China may invade Taiwan in the coming years, pointing to Beijing's increasingly assertive military moves around the self-ruled island, which it sees as its own territory and has vowed to bring under its control. Niklas Swanstrom, director of the Stockholm-based nonprofit Institute for Security and Development Policy, said Beijing appeared to be "investing in its capacity to take over Taiwan and keep the US out of the region".



BEIJING: China's President Xi Jinping walks past delegates including China's Defence Minister Wei Fenghe (L) after the opening session of the National People's Congress (NPC) at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing on March 5, 2023. — AFP

But James Char, an expert on China's military at Singapore's Nanyang Technological University pointed out that several countries across Asia were boosting their defence spending, in part due to "their respective threat perceptions of the regional security landscape".

'Steady recovery'

Experts expect few surprises at this week's carefully choreographed NPC, with thousands of politicians coming from across China to vote on laws and personnel changes pre-approved by the ruling Communist Party (CCP). Sunday's conservative economic goals followed China posting just three percent growth last year, widely missing its 5.5-percent target as the economy strained under the impact of strict Covid-19 containment policies and a property crisis.

"The growth target came in at the low end of the market expectation. But it should be taken as a floor of

growth the government is willing to tolerate," said Zhiwei Zhang, president and chief economist at Pinpoint Asset Management. "Given the very low base of economic activities last year, it is unlikely to see growth drop below five percent." Li struck a bullish tone in his speech, saying China's economy "is staging a steady recovery and demonstrating vast potential and momentum for further growth".

He lauded Beijing's growth-suppressing Covid curbs-abruptly abandoned late last year—and "effective and well-coordinated" economic and social development. The sustained growth in defence spending despite sagging economic expectations showed that "security is now much more important for the national leadership" than before, said Alfred Muluan Wu, an associate professor at the University of Singapore's Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy. "It is even, to some extent, more important than economic growth," he told AFP.

Xi dominant

Also top of the NPC's agenda will be Friday's norm-busting reappointment of Xi as president, after he locked in another five years as head of the party and the military—the two most significant leadership positions in Chinese politics—at an October congress.

Since then, the 69-year-old Xi's leadership has faced unexpected challenges and scrutiny, with protests over his zero-Covid policy and a deadly coronavirus surge after it was subsequently dropped.

But those issues are almost certain to be avoided at this week's Beijing conclave, which will also see the unveiling of Xi confidant and former Shanghai party chief Li Qiang as the new premier. Delegates to the NPC—and to the concurrent "political consultative conference" (CPPCC) that began on Saturday—will also discuss issues ranging from the economic recovery to improved sex education in schools, according to state media reports. The meetings serve as a forum for attendees to present pet projects, but they have little say in broader questions of how China is run. — AFP

Three arrested over killing of Philippine governor

PAMPLONA: Three people have been arrested over the murder of a Philippine provincial governor and eight others, authorities said Sunday, adding another suspect was killed in a shoot-out. Seventeen people were also wounded in the audacious attack on Saturday in the sugarcane-growing heartland of the Philippines.

At least six gunmen armed with rifles and wearing military-style uniforms opened fire in the governor's home in Pamplona municipality in the central province of Negros Oriental. Governor Roel Degamo became the latest victim of a recent rash of assaults on local Philippine politicians.

Two of the three suspects arrested were former soldiers who were dishonourably discharged several years ago, the Philippine Army said in a statement. A fourth suspect was killed in a shootout in a plantation on Saturday night, police spokesman Lieutenant Colonel Gerard Pelare told journalists.

Pelare said about 10 suspects were involved in the attack. Authorities believed they were still on the island after ports were closed to prevent their escape, he said. The previous death toll had been put at six but was raised to nine late Saturday, police said. Thirteen people were hospitalised for their wounds, while four others were treated for minor injuries. Negros Oriental is one of two provinces on Negros island, which is the centre of the nation's sugar industry and home to some of the country's wealthiest landowners as well as some of its poorest farm workers.

Degamo, 56, was at least the third politician to be shot in the Philippines since last year's general election. The Supreme Court declared him last month the rightful winner of the contest for the Negros Oriental governorship following a recount that unseated his rival, who had previously been proclaimed victor.

Degamo had campaigned for President Ferdinand Marcos during Marcos' run for the top job. Marcos has condemned the "dastardly and heinous" assassination of his political ally and has sent his top officials, including police and military chiefs, to investigate.

Authorities presented evidence at a news conference on Sunday gathered from the suspects, including high-powered firearms and camouflage uniforms, and vowed to solve the case. "We will capture the mastermind, I assure you that," Interior Secretary Benjamin Abalos said. — AFP

due to security threats. Mali is ruled by a junta that last year forced France to remove troops deployed there a decade ago on an anti-jihadist mission.

In the absence of French troops, the junta has brought in Russia's Wagner group to boost government forces. Last month, the EU slapped sanctions on the head of Wagner's forces in Mali, saying they "have been involved in acts of violence and multiple human rights abuses, including extrajudicial killings".

With government control weak in some parts of the country, kidnappings have become common, with motives ranging from ransom demands to acts of reprisal. In February, a World Health Organization doctor who had been abducted in Mali in late January was freed. In May, armed men kidnapped three Italians and a Togolese national in a southeastern area of the country. Unrest has spread beyond Mali into neighbouring Burkina Faso and Niger. In Burkina Faso, an American nun was kidnapped by jihadists last April and released in August. — AFP

Estonians vote with parties split over Ukraine aid

TALLINN: Estonians were voting on Sunday for a new parliament in an election that could strengthen far-right nationalists, who have campaigned against further arms deliveries to Ukraine. Prime Minister Kaja Kallas's centre-right Reform Party is predicted to win by the opinion polls, but will likely have to form a coalition to hang on to power.

The party is expected to garner 24 percent to 30 percent of votes, according to final polls during the week. The far-right EKRE was predicted to take second place with 14-25 percent. The Centre Party was on 16-19 percent and Estonia 200 between nine and 15 percent.

"Those who don't vote for EKRE will not be rid of the Reform (party)", EKRE leader Martin Helme wrote on Facebook on Sunday. Former prime minister and Reform Party member Siim Kallas warned of a splintered vote.

"The more the result is muddled and split, the more the government will be muddled, the more the ruling coalition will be weak," he posted on Facebook. Estonia, a country of 1.3 million people bordering Russia, has a unicameral parliament with 101 seats, all of them at stake in the election.

The Baltic state, a member of the EU and NATO, has led international calls over the past year for more military aid to help Ukraine fight off Russia's invasion. Estonia's military assistance to Ukraine amounts to more than one percent of GDP—the biggest contribution of any country relative to the size of its economy.



Prime Minister Kaja Kallas

Escalating tensions

"It's obvious that what is happening in Ukraine is very important for Estonia as well" 35-year-old engineer Juhan Ressar told AFP at a polling station in the capital Tallinn. "Maybe people ... have forgotten the importance of independence," he said.

Reform's Kallas told AFP in a recent interview, "We support an open, friendly, Western-minded, European, smart country. "My biggest competitor thinks that we shouldn't help Ukraine, we shouldn't support Ukraine, we should only look for our self-interest," she said.

According to EKRE's Helme, Estonia should not be "further escalating tensions" with Moscow. EKRE has campaigned against additional military aid to Kyiv, and called for a halt in Ukrainian refugee arrivals and for lower immigration rates to protect local workers.

At the same time, the cost of living crisis has spiralled in Estonia, with one of the EU's highest inflation rates — 18.6 percent in January over 12 months earlier. For 62-year-old pensioner Pjotr Mahhoniin, only EKRE "represents the Estonian people".

He accused the prime minister of being more interested in "another country", meaning Ukraine. Like many Estonians, he said he feared war. "We have a big neighbour, Russia, and it's very dangerous. "If war starts, we are the country on the frontline," Mahhoniin said.

Abstention uncertainty

The Centre Party, which is traditionally popular with Estonia's large Russian-speaking minority, has supported government policy on Ukraine and on Russia. This has put off some Russian-speaking voters, and rates of abstention among the minority, around a quarter of the population, could be high.

Reform is a centre-right liberal party that appeals to business owners and young professionals. It has promised to raise military spending to at least three percent of GDP, ease taxes on business and wants to pass a law approving same-sex civil partnerships.

The Centre Party is centre-left, and is promising more investment in infrastructure and affordable housing. According to political analysts, a coalition between Reform, Estonia 200 and the Social Democrats is possible, as is one between Reform, Centre and Isamaa.

However, EKRE's chances of fronting a coalition are projected as modest. The polls close at 8:00 pm (1800 GMT), with first results expected early Monday. More than 47 percent of voters had already cast their ballot by post or online, according to the electoral commission. — AFP



LAHORE: Supporters of former Pakistan's prime minister Imran Khan chant slogans outside his house in Lahore on March 5, 2023. Police in Pakistan said officers on March 5 attempted to arrest former prime minister Imran Khan, who is battling several legal cases as he pressures the government for early elections. — AFP

Pakistan police attempt to arrest former premier

LAHORE: Police in Pakistan said officers on Sunday attempted to arrest former prime minister Imran Khan, who is battling several legal cases as he pressures the government for early elections. Officers from the capital, Islamabad, arrived at Khan's home in Lahore, which was surrounded by hundreds of his supporters, but were unable to find him.

"A team of Islamabad police has arrived in Lahore to arrest Imran Khan to comply with the court orders," Islamabad police said in a tweet. "Imran Khan is reluctant to surrender—the Superintendent of Police had gone into the room but Imran Khan was not present there."

The arrest warrant was issued after Khan failed to appear before the court in a corruption case on February 28. Khan is accused of failing to declare gifts received during his time in office, or the profit made from selling them.

Two Red Cross staff kidnapped in Mali

DAKAR: Two workers with the International Committee of the Red Cross were kidnapped in northern Mali on Saturday, the organisation said, the latest abduction in the troubled West African country. Kidnappings are common in Mali, which has been battling a security and political crisis since jihadist and separatist insurgencies broke out in the north of the country in 2012.

Jihadists affiliated with Al-Qaeda and the Islamic State group have escalated their operations into central Mali and neighbouring Niger and Burkina Faso. Thousands of civilians, police and troops have been killed across the region, and more than two million have fled their homes.

"We confirm the kidnapping of two of our colleagues this morning", the ICRC said, adding that the incident took place between Gao and Kidal in the north of the country. The ICRC, which has been in the country for 32 years, reiterated that it is "neutral, independent and impartial", and asked that no speculations be made about the incident "so as not to hinder its resolution".

"The ICRC deplures (the incident) and demands the release of its collaborators," Aminata Alassane, a public relations officer with ICRC, told AFP. The agency's recently appointed director of operations, Martin Schuepp, visited Mali last year, saying "crime is rife" in the country, which posed a security challenge for the group. "In spite of all that, we're doing everything we can to reach those in distress, including in the remotest areas of the country."

Security woes

Insecurity has grown in northern Mali in recent months, with Prime Minister Choguel Kokalla Maiga cutting short a visit to the region in February

Business

MONDAY, MARCH 6, 2023

Wind and solar stake claim to land of oil

Wind power provides 29% and solar 11% of Texas' needs

DAWSON, United States: Modern Texas was built on oil, and its production has long been a source of immense pride. But now, areas that moved to the steady rhythm of oil derricks for more than a century are making the state a national leader in wind and solar energy.

A convergence of factors has led to this unexpected result: favorable weather (lots of wind and sun), relatively cheap land, the lure of federal clean-energy subsidies, and a desire to backstop a utility system that failed dramatically during a 2021 cold snap. Two counties south of Dallas, Navarro and Limestone, symbolize this surprising shift. Inextricably part of the Texas petroleum industry since the late 19th century, they are now in the vanguard of the renewable revolution. Wind and solar projects "have Navarro County leading the nation with renewables," said the county's economic development director, John Boswell.

Symbolizing this push is a new wind farm inaugurated last week by French multinational energy company Engie, with 88 wind turbines capable of producing 300 megawatts (MW) of power. A half-hour's drive to the west, in the small town of Abbott, is a 250 MW solar farm, also built by Engie, that is now producing electricity. Texas is the nation's leader-by-far in providing clean energy to corporate and industrial buyers, at 35 percent of the national total, according to the American Clean Power organization.

The state of Ohio has about half Texas's number of corporate and industrial projects, just ahead of California in third place. "It's true that when we think about Texas, we think about this very large oil and gas state," said Engie executive Frank Demaille. But, he added, its natural resources are not all buried in the ground. "They've got lots of wind, lots of sun, and are very good at managing all their different resources."

Plentiful resources

With its huge and sprawling petrochemical indus-



DAWSON, United States: Engie Executive Vice President Frank Demaille speaks during a ribbon cutting ceremony for the dedication of the Limestone Wind Project in Dawson, Texas.

try, a population of 30 million, and a fierce history of independence, Texas in many ways stands apart from the rest of the country—for better or for worse. One way its go-it-alone mentality did not help became apparent in 2021, when a rare and intense cold wave swept through the state—whose power utility was not connected to two major national grids—provoking electric outages that affected millions and were blamed for more than 200 deaths.

Texas today remains primarily dependent on fossil fuels. As of early this year, gas was its leading source of energy (at 42 percent, according to Ercot, which manages the state's electrical grid). Coal trails at 11 percent. But renewable sources have carved out a major role. Wind-generated power now provides 29 percent of Texas's needs, with solar at 11 percent. The remainder comes from nuclear and hydropower. By comparison, wind was at 24 percent just two years ago, and solar at less than 5 percent. Given Texas's deep investments in and long history with carbon-based energy, experts don't expect it to give way to renewables anytime soon.



DAWSON, United States: In this file photo taken on February 28, 2023, Engie employees inspect wind turbines during a tour for the dedication of the Limestone Wind Project in Dawson, Texas. —AFP photos

"I think what you'll see in the future is a combination of both of those, because Texas is committed to both" sources, said Jeff Montgomery, whose Blattner Energy company is behind 400 renewable projects across the country. Texas is a major supplier of natural gas to Europe. And now, said Demaille of Engie, "because of the war in Ukraine, we're importing more gas from the US, and especially from Texas." Meantime, however, legislation backed by the Biden administration and voted into law last year could accelerate the move to renewables through substantial federal subsidies.

'Show the value'

Robert Lovry, superintendent of the Coolidge school district in Limestone County, said the tax rev-

enues that renewable-energy projects generate can make a difference for school systems like his. "We have the funds now to be able to do some great things for our kiddos that we've ever had before," he said.

But not everyone shares that enthusiasm. John Null, an engineer who lives near Dawson, said locals aren't seeing the immediate benefit they would hope for from the huge wind turbines visible from his window. During an ice storm last month, for example, the turbines kept turning but, linked to a broader network, provided no energy to the neighboring community. He said wind power needs to be "properly pitched" to the public. "Show me the value," he said, and people would support wind energy. In some areas, renewable projects are touted as providing power to poorer neighborhoods. —AFP

Knowledge forum supports 'New Kuwait' vision

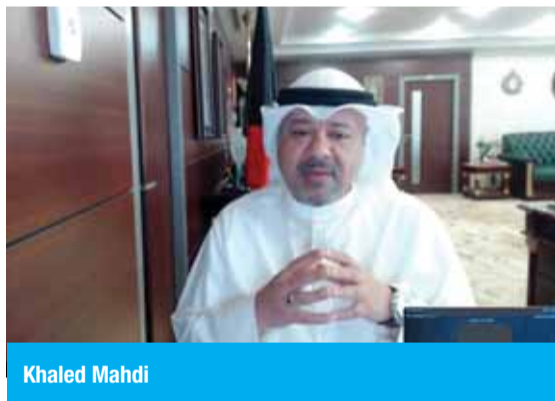
KUWAIT: General Secretariat of the Supreme Council for Planning and Development, represented by the National Knowledge Economy Center, held the third Knowledge Economy Forum virtually under the theme "Knowledge Markets" on March 5 and 6.

Secretary General of SCPD Khaled Mahdi said in a press statement that the forum aims at building an environment that supports the New Kuwait 2035 vision, towards the transformation to a knowledge economy, and educate public institutions and leaders on the importance of knowledge and its role in strengthening competitiveness and diversify economic roles.

Mahdi said among the goals of the forum is to build cooperation bridges with the international community in the field of knowledge economy and benefit from international experience in dealing with knowledge activities, in addition to introducing the principle of knowledge markets in the third millennium.

He said the forum will have several discussion sessions in which a group of experts in the field of knowledge economy will participate, adding that the sessions will allude to knowledge markets and its role in supporting state economies, the future of job opportunities and skills within the knowledge markets, and education and scientific research requirements in the knowledge economy, in addition to the legislative environment of knowledge markets.

Mahdi emphasized the importance of accurate



Khaled Mahdi

understanding of the knowledge economy principle, that is mainly building on knowledge, as knowledge is considered the main mover of the economy, relying on communications and information technology. He said Kuwait is moving steadily in the development of a knowledge economy, attempting to achieve it through benefiting from successful experiences by the best countries in the field. He said it is necessary to invest in education and training to reach the structural transformation of the knowledge economy at the level of wholesome economy policies and the business environment, which needs time and effort to achieve.

Mahdi said Kuwait considers knowledge economy as an important need, and that is why it is in consecutive development plans and considered among the main initiatives that should be achieved in both the public and private sectors. He said Kuwait considers knowledge economy, which builds human capital, as a main pillar among the national development plan pillars from which several goals are derived, represented in quality education, raising capacity of higher education, security and safety, as well as empowering youth and fixing defects of the marketplace to strengthen social cohesion.

Increase in business inflows boosts Saudi Arabia's non-oil sector

RIYADH: Business activity in the non-oil economy of Saudi Arabia hit an eight-year high in February as output in the kingdom recorded substantial growth. The reading for the Arab world's largest economy on the Riyadh Bank purchasing managers' index rose to 59.8 in February from 58.2 in January, marking the fastest growth in non-oil private sector business conditions since March 2015.

The reading was well above the neutral 50 mark that separates growth from contraction. A "sharp and accelerated" increase in business inflows boosted the non-oil sector, with total new orders rising to the greatest extent since September 2014.

Saudi Arabia's economy grew 8.7 percent in 2022, boosted by a sharp increase in the kingdom's oil and non-oil sectors, according to initial government estimates, according to reports. Non-oil activities increased by 5.4 percent during the 12-month period to the end of December, data from the General Authority for Statistics showed. The kingdom's preliminary estimates for 2023 indicate gross domestic product growth of 3.1 percent.

The International Monetary Fund expects the kingdom's economy to grow by 2.6 percent this year and by 3.4 percent in 2024. More than 42 percent of surveyed companies indicated that new orders had risen in February as market conditions improved and client numbers increased, according to the latest PMI survey. Export orders also rose at a "quicker" pace.

The survey also showed that both employment and purchasing activity increased in February as

businesses expanded inventories to a greater degree than in January.

Job numbers rose at the second-fastest rate in five years, as companies attempted to fill vacancies to meet future demand, the survey said. Increased labor capacity meant that firms "continued to finalize orders on time and cut their backlogs", though the rate of decrease was the softest for eight months, it said. A rise in purchase costs played a role in accelerating an overall increase in costs, which led to inflation reaching levels higher than those seen in November 2022. Companies raised the prices of their products and services as staff wages also continued to rise for the fourth straight month.

Saudi Arabia's inflation rate for 2022 was estimated at 2.6 percent and, according to preliminary forecasts, is expected at 2.1 percent in 2023, Saudi Finance Minister Mohammed Al-Jadaan said in December.

"Following a decline to an 11-month low in January, there was a significant acceleration in inflation for the prices of outputs, which remained strong overall," the survey said. The outlook for activity over the next 12 months was also strong, remaining above the average recorded in 2022.

Meanwhile, the PMI survey for Egypt, the Arab world's third largest economy, recorded a slight improvement in operating conditions in February as the rate of output decline eased from the previous month. The seasonally adjusted S&P Global Egypt Purchasing Managers' Index reading rose to 46.9 last month from 45.5 in January, indicating a softer downturn. The index remained below the 50 neutral mark. Demand in the country's non-oil economy continued to be affected by high inflation and supply chain pressures, with job numbers falling at their fastest rate in nine months, the survey said. However, inflationary pressures softened from January's recent highs, it added. —Agencies

France faces huge strikes over pension reform

PARIS: French trade unions are heading for what is expected to be a decisive showdown with President Emmanuel Macron over pension reform, with massive strikes from Tuesday aiming to bring the country "to a standstill". After five separate days of protests so far this year, this week's stoppages herald a new phase in the battle between the centrist government and opponents of the changes, which includes an overwhelmingly majority of French voters.

"We always said that we would go into a higher gear if necessary," the head of the influential hard-left CGT union, Philippe Martinez, told the Journal du Dimanche newspaper on Sunday. "It will be the case on Tuesday." More than 260 demonstrations are expected nation-wide, many in small and medium-sized towns where opposition to the reform is strong, while strikes will affect transport, the energy sector and public services.

Police are expecting between 1.1-1.4 million peo-

ple to hit the streets, a source told AFP on condition of anonymity. The upper limit of that range would represent the biggest day of protests in decades, higher than the 1.27 million who took part in demonstrations on January 31, and bigger than previous pension reform protests in 2010.

Unions representing workers on the national SNCF railways, the Paris metro and the energy sector, including refineries, have called for rolling strikes for the first time, with other industries expected to join in. All eight major French trade unions have called for the stoppages to bring the country "to a standstill" on Tuesday, with shopkeepers also encouraged to down shutters. "The 7th (Tuesday) is going to be very difficult," Transport Minister Clement Beaune admitted on Friday, calling on workers to stay home where possible.

Unfair reform?

Macron's plan to raise the official age of retirement from 62 to 64 is a flagship policy of his second term in office, which began last year after he defeated far-right leader Marine Le Pen. He has called the change "essential" because of deficits forecast for the system for most of the next 25 years, according to analysis by the independent pensions ombudsman. France also lags behind its neighbors and other major



PARIS: In this file photo taken on January 19, 2023, demonstrators gather at Place de la Republique during a rally called by French trade unions in Paris. —AFP

European economies where the retirement age has already been hiked to 65 or above to reflect higher life expectancy. But opponents see the changes as

unfair, penalizing low-skilled workers who start their careers early, while reducing the right to leisure and a long retirement at the end of working life. —AFP



(From left) Ayman Zamani, Pascal Bechu and Cedric Burel.



Tiara Jewelry team

Tiara Jewelry launches latest collection of Arnold & Son's watches in Kuwait

Local agent Ayman Zamani, regional officials and watch collectors attend event

By Ghadeer Ghloom

KUWAIT: Tiara Jewelry held an event on March 1 at Al-Hamra Tower to celebrate the arrival of Arnold & Son's five new watches to Kuwait, in the presence of Ayman Zamani, owner of Tiara and agent of Arnold & Son in Kuwait, as well as Cedric Burel, Regional Director of Arnold & Son in the Middle East, Pascal Bechu, Vice President of Sales, watch collector Waleed Al-Jassem and other clients.

Zamani told Kuwait Times about the history of Tiara Jewelry and Arnold & Son. "Tiara is the brand's agency in Kuwait for more than 15 years. This is our first event since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. Arnold & Son is an established brand that goes back to 1764. The brand's team has come from Switzerland to Kuwait to display the new models and provide a chance for watch collectors to come and meet the team members in person," said Zamani.

Watch collector Jassem introduced the main guests of the event. "The event represents Tiara Jewelry, the agency of Arnold & Son, which invited two of the main directors of Arnold & Son - Regional Manager Cedric Burel and Vice President of Sales Pascal Bechu. This evening, at Tiara's Boutique, located in Al-Hamra Tower, many guests are present, such as watch collectors, members related to Time Keeper Company and social media influencer Dana Al-Tuwarish. The guests gathered tonight will see the new watches and discuss further details about the brand with Burel and Bechu," he added.

Bechu explained the aim of holding the event. "We are here with our partner Ayman Zamani and Tiara Boutique to introduce our collection and spend a nice, relaxed moment with our guests, the press and our clients, spending quality moments to go through the watches and introduce the latest watches that arrived in Kuwait," he said.

Referring to the history of the brand, Bechu said it was founded by John Arnold, who was a famous British watchmaker. Arnold's quest was to bring accuracy and reliability to the marine chronometers of his time. Accurate chronometers were extremely important at that time to discover the ocean and facilitate exchange with neighboring countries. Today, the company is based in Switzerland and has its own manufacturer that develops and manufactures every movement in the timepieces," he mentioned.

Bechu added a brief highlight on the uniqueness of Arnold & Son's limited editions. "We work on very exclusive limited editions, because Arnold & Son only produces about 1,000 pieces a year, which gives uniqueness to almost every timepiece. We have a couple of limited editions in stainless steel and platinum and red gold. For precious metals, we have limited editions of 28 pieces only," he pointed out.

Burel further elaborated on the significant connection between Tiara Jewelry and Arnold & Son. "We are very proud to organize our first event in Kuwait for the brand in collaboration with Tiara and Ayman Zamani, who has been a long supporter of the brand. Tonight, we take the opportunity to show some novelties, new models and new limited editions of the brand, and give the opportunity for watch collectors and loyal customers from Tiara to discuss the details about the brand and about our project. It's always a good opportunity for customers to meet people from the brand and interact. And we are here to listen to them to get their ideas and feedback, as we can always do better, because listening to customers is the key to success," he said.

Burel explained the advantage of working with Tiara Jewelry. "Ayman Zamani has been behind the brand for many years and knows most of the customers personally. He has a passion for the brand, building a special relationship between the brand and this agency. He is very focused, curious and always happy to bring novelties to his customers. Zamani makes sure he has the right model and the right number of limited edition watches to provide really good service to his costumers," he concluded.



KUWAIT: (From left) Waleed Al-Jassem, Ayman Zamani, Dr Abdulaziz Al-Rushaid, Cedric Burel and Pascal Bechu.



Dana Al-Tuwarish



(From left) Pascal Bechu, Ayman Zamani and former minister Ali Al-Mousa.



Yousef Al-Marzouq (left) and Ayman Zamani.

Business

Al-Shall Economic Report

Kuwait's budget surplus is likely to stabilize around KD 5 billion

Monthly average price of oil reaches \$83.2 per barrel by February

KUWAIT: By the end of February 2023, the 11th month of the current fiscal year 2022/2023 ended with the monthly average price of Kuwaiti oil reaching \$83.2 per barrel. It is \$3.2 or 4 percent higher than the new hypothetical price of \$80 estimated in the current budget (\$65 before adjustment) and \$38.2 higher than the average hypothetical price of \$45 for the past fiscal year.

The average oil price of February is 4.2 percent higher than the average price of \$79.9 per barrel recorded in the past fiscal year 2021/2022. According to the Ministry of Finance, the average price for February is \$2.8 higher than the new budget's parity price of \$80.4 (\$75 before adjustment) and without the deduction of 10 percent of revenues for the future generations' reserve.

Kuwait is supposed to have achieved actual oil revenues of KD 1.634 billion in February. Assuming that production and prices would continue at the current level -an unrealistic assumption- Kuwait's oil revenues for the entire current fiscal year would reach KD 26.377 billion, after deducting annual production costs pertaining to the entire current fiscal year.

It would be KD 5.056 billion higher than the estimated revenues of KD 21.321 billion for the current budget (KD 16.741 billion before adjustment). Adding KD 2.078 billion in non-oil revenues, total budget expected revenues for the current fiscal year would amount to KD 28.455 billion.

Comparing this figure with the expected expenditures of KD 23.523 billion after being altered from KD 21.949 billion, it is likely that the public budget would achieve a surplus of KD 4.932 billion for the current fiscal year 2022/2023, with oil revenues being the only decisive factor. There is only one month left until the end of the current fiscal year, and it is not expected that there will be a significant change in the level of oil prices or the level of production, so the budget surplus is likely to stabilize at the limits of KD 5 billion, indicating a decrease of KD 5.5 billion versus the surplus projected by Al-Shall in June 2022, which was caused by the significant decline in the level of oil prices and production, in addition to the high level of public expenditures due to the adoption of populist legislation.



Huawei MatePad SE the best smart family entertainer tablet

KUWAIT: The best tablet for your needs can be quite tricky to find, whether you are looking to outfit the children with pocket-friendly, durable tablets for school or just want a beautiful second screen to keep near the couch. Fortunately, we can help you find the right tablet.

Tablets are great gadgets for accomplishing many tasks from light office work such as emailing, sketching and preparing presentations to consuming audio-visual entertainment, gaming and much more. The interesting thing about tablets is that they have become necessary for families as everyone can use them for different purposes. If you are on the lookout for a new top entry-level tablet with a price tag of KD 69.9 in Kuwait this 2023, whether it is for personal use or for your children for school or just for the whole family, then we definitely recommend the new Huawei MatePad SE as it stands as the smart family entertainer and here is why it is our favorite.

Eye-comfort 2K Huawei FullView Display

The Huawei MatePad SE 10.4-inch screen puts photos and videos on a clearer display, with intricate and vivid details, thanks to its 2K high definition resolution, 83% screen-to-body ratio, and 225 PPI. 4096-level brightness adjustment changes in real time to account for the ambient lighting conditions and keep the eyes refreshed at every moment. Additionally, the Huawei MatePad SE 10.4-inch has passed TÜV Rheinland Low Blue Light and Flicker-free certifications, demonstrating proven eye fatigue relief.

Powerful 6nm octa-core processor

The Huawei MatePad SE 10.4-inch is equipped with a 6 nm Octa-core Qualcomm Snapdragon 680 chipset, four Cortex A73 2.4 GHz (indicating highest frequency) performance cores, and four Cortex A53 1.9 GHz efficiency cores. The energy efficiency ratio (EER) is further improved, and multiple kernel-oriented optimizations have been applied to ensure a smooth experience. The tablet features low power consumption and continuous output performance.

Global equities advance on reassuring data

NEW YORK: World stock markets rose on Friday with data showing the resilience of the US and Chinese economies, reassuring investors rather than sparking worries about interest rate hikes. With central banks in the United States, Britain and eurozone raising interest rates to tamp down inflation, signs of economic strength could persuade policymakers to hike rates further for longer and possibly prompt a more severe downturn later.

A strong run of data sent chills through trading floors in February-wiping out almost all of January's rally-as investors realized the US central bank had more work to do to control prices.

But survey data from both China and the United States were welcomed. "The general mood has also been helped by better-than-expected economic reports, which while raising concerns about further rate hikes, have also helped to create a mood that the economic picture may not be as dire as had been predicted at the start of the year," said market analyst Michael Hewson at CMC Markets.

China's February Caixin services PMI rose to 55.0 from 52.9, where a score above 50 represents expansion. Meanwhile, the ISM services

Microsoft have pledged to help populations hobbled by poor Internet services to "leapfrog" into an era of online connectivity, with satellites set to play a key role as rival firms send thousands of new generation transmitters into low level orbit.

At the moment just 36 percent of the 1.25 billion people in the world's 46 poorest countries can plug into the Internet, the International Telecommunication Union said. By comparison, more than 90 percent have access in the European Union. The ITU condemned the "staggering international connectivity gap" that it said had widened over the past decade.

The divide has been a key complaint at a UN



delivering unparalleled entertainment and audio-visual performance. In addition, the Huawei MatePad SE comes with a 4GB RAM as well as 128GB internal storage for smooth processing.

Kids Care

Children need tablets to help understand the world and learn new things, but, at the same time, children may lack the self-control to limit their screen time. This can cause concern among parents for the risk of damage to their children's eyesight. For instance, children are often eager to watch cartoons and can become quickly addicted to games, both of which can directly affect their eyesight, as well as their motivation to learn. Kids Corner is designed to be used by children at home, providing time control, multiple eye protection, and education & fun balance, such as drawing board, recording, and photographing. In addition, multiple Kids Corner theme interfaces are designed, working with multiple eye protection and time control interfaces, to reassure parents that their kids will be safe and have fun while using the tablet.

Additionally, Parents can manage the usage time, apps, and content on Kids Corner, allowing them to set multiple designated time limit intervals throughout the day. For example, parents can set it so that their daughter or son can use the tablet for a maximum of 20 minutes after school between 5 pm and 6 pm, or after dinner between 7 pm and 9 pm. They can also apply different settings for the weekday versus the weekend, so that the tablet brings the perfect balance between study and play to meet different needs. In app management, parents can select apps that children can access, and videos and pictures that children can see in content management.



Super device

The Huawei MatePad SE comes with Super Device features that allow you to manage your devices and connections from a single place and even share devices between accounts, making cross-device operations easier than ever. Huawei MatePad SE lets you connect to a pair of FreeBuds or Huawei Vision devices simply by dragging the corresponding icons. For example, dragging and dropping is all it takes to switch the tablet audio to a pair of FreeBuds. The tablet offers a seamless user experience with its stackable Service Widgets of the same size, and combos of Service Widgets and shortcuts of different sizes, for easier access to your favorite content and features. The all-new Multi-Window feature turns the tablet into a standout multi-tasking tool by supporting up to four concurrent tasks. The new and improved App Multiplier feature allows you to open up to four ongoing tasks within a single app.

Immersive sound

Audio-visual experience is one of the outstanding features that make Huawei tablets one-of-a-kind. The Huawei MatePad SE 10.4-inch packs two speakers into its slim body, which generate sound from both the left and right, to provide for a wholly immersive listening experience. Histen 8.0 features auto-adaptable, context-based audio effects and fine-tuning, which account for frequency range and volume level, and support crystal clear voice enhancements. Lastly, with smart scene recognition the Huawei MatePad SE 10.4-inch provides optimization solutions for users' varying sound effect requirements in different scenes. For example, users tend to expect immersive stereo sound and resonant bass effects while watching movies, listen to folk music with a keen ear for vocals, and wish to stay alerted to every subtle change during gameplay.



Deliveroo partners with Costa Coffee & DOH! to surprise customers

KUWAIT: It's been a month full of celebrations and surprises from Deliveroo as the food platform continues to celebrate both the national holidays and four years since its launch in the Kuwaiti market.

On this occasion, the Deliveroo team surprised mall-goers with a variety of treats and gifts from popular local partners, Costa Coffee and DOH! From Costa Coffee, coffee lovers enjoyed free coffees and gift vouchers (each worth KD 2) for all orders placed on the Deliveroo app. In partnership with DOH! Deliveroo distributed donuts with teal frosting which were exclusively created in celebration of the Deliveroo anniversary and the national day holidays.

"We were delighted to partner with the Assima Mall and both Costa Coffee and DOH! to celebrate the national holidays and our fourth anniversary in style! We feel so grateful to be able to continue our tradition of celebrating our milestones and local holidays with such an incredible community of foodies and coffee lovers," said Seham Al-Husaini, General Manager of Deliveroo Kuwait. "We would like to thank the Assima Mall, Costa Coffee, and DOH! for helping us to deliver on even more exciting food moments in Kuwait, and we are looking forward to surprising our customers with even more of these initiatives in the future."

The Assima Mall is one of the country's premiere shopping destinations. Located within the heart of Kuwait City, the mall is a perfect backdrop for Deliveroo to surprise locals with their favorite treats from Deliveroo's favorite restaurant partners, including Costa Coffee. Coffee lovers can enjoy their favorite drinks from Costa Coffee's branch located in Assima Mall.

Since launching in Kuwait in February 2019, Deliveroo has partnered with around 5,000 local and international restaurants, onboarded over 2,000 riders, and achieved 95 percent delivery coverage in Kuwait. Notably, Deliveroo has also set the bar for customer satisfaction in the country; last year, and for the second year in a row, Deliveroo was also named the "Best Delivery App" in Kuwait by Service Hero, the region's only consumer-powered customer satisfaction index. Since its launch, Deliveroo has set itself apart with its unbeatable customer service, a wide selection of global & local restaurants, and consistently reliable delivery.

Satellites could beam poor out of digital desert

DOHA: Only a third of people in the world's poorest countries can connect to the Internet, the UN telecoms agency said Sunday, but low-flying satellites could bring hope to millions, especially in remote corners of Africa. Tech giants including



NEW YORK: Traders work on the floor of the New York Stock Exchange on March 3, 2023. —AFP

PMI in the United States was also in growth territory, dipping to 55.1 from 55.2.

February's reading was driven by growth in more than a dozen industries including agriculture and real estate, said the ISM report. "Overall, the survey is signaling ongoing expansion in service sector activity, not yet responding to more restrictive monetary policy," said Rubeela Farooqi, chief US economist at research consultancy High Frequency Economics.

All three major US indices finished solidly higher,

with the S&P 500 winning 1.6 percent and pushing to a gain for the week. Falling government bond yields also helped boost equities. In Europe, London stocks ended with a marginal gain, but Paris rose 0.9 percent and Frankfurt climbed 1.6 thanks to a 10.6 percent jump in Volkswagen shares.

The German automaker reported a net profit of 15.8 billion euros for 2022, up 2.6 percent on the previous year, and expressed optimism it would sell considerably more cars this year as global supply chain problems ease. —AFP

tech experts promised at the Doha summit.

Satellite coverage will play a key role in Microsoft's vow to bring Internet access to 100 million Africans by 2025, which was outlined ahead of the summit. Microsoft announced a first phase for five million Africans in December and last week added a commitment to cover another 20 million people. The initial five million will be served by Viasat, one of the companies sending constellations of satellites into space to compete with land-based fibre broadband. Elon Musk's Space X and Starlink are also putting thousands of satellites into an orbit between 400 and 700 km above Earth. —AFP

summit of Least Developed Countries in Doha, where UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres told their leaders that "you are being left behind in the digital revolution". The digital dearth is particularly acute in some African countries, including the Democratic Republic of Congo, where barely a quarter of the population of nearly 100 million can connect.

While Internet access is easy in major DRC cities such as Kinshasa, huge rural zones and swathes of territory battled over by rival rebel groups for more than two decades are digital deserts. The launch of thousands of Low-Earth Orbit satellites could bring speedy change and boost African hopes,

tech experts promised at the Doha summit.

China sets an economic growth target of 'around 5%' for 2023

Beijing aims to add 'around 12 million new urban jobs' this year

BEIJING: China on Sunday set an economic growth target of "around 5 percent" for 2023, one of the lowest in decades, as its annual National People's Congress opened in Beijing. The target was announced in a work report delivered by outgoing Premier Li Keqiang as the rubber-stamp parliament opened at the capital's Great Hall of the People.

The figure was slightly lower than the average of forecasts of economists surveyed by AFP, who predicted a goal of around 5.3 percent. Li said China would aim to add "around 12 million new urban jobs" this year and bring the urban unemployment rate to around 5.5 percent. He said Beijing would also target a rise in the consumer price index of around three percent.

"China's economy is staging a steady recovery and demonstrating vast potential and momentum for further growth," said Li in an hour-long speech punctuated by ripples of applause from thousands of delegates. But he warned that "uncertainties in the external environment are on the rise", noting high global inflation. Li also said "external attempts to suppress and contain China are escalating". China posted just

three percent growth last year, missing its stated target of around 5.5 percent by a wide margin as the economy strained under the impact of strict COVID-19 containment policies and a property crisis. Li said Beijing "should give priority to the recovery and expansion of consumption" and "place a higher priority on promoting the employment of young people, particularly college graduates".

But he was bullish on the slowdown, saying that "under the strong leadership of the Party Central Committee, we carried out COVID-19 response and pursued economic and social development in an effective and well-coordinated way". "Overcoming great difficulties and challenges, we succeeded in maintaining overall stable economic performance," he said. "Such achievements are a testament to the tremendous resilience of China's economy." Zhiwei Zhang from Pinpoint Asset Management said: "The growth target came in at the low end of the market expectation." But it should be taken as a floor of growth the government is willing to tolerate. Indeed given the very low base of economic activities last year, it is unlikely to see growth drop below 5 percent." — AFP



BEIJING: China on Sunday set an economic growth target of "around 5 percent" for 2023 at its annual National People's Congress in Beijing.



RIYADH: MoU seeks to create a joint Egyptian shareholding company aimed at delivering maritime transport services.

Saudi's Bahri inks MoU with Suez Canal Authority

RIYADH: Driven by its commitment to exploring regional cooperation horizons to achieve its growth objectives and enhance its global position, Bahri, the national shipping company of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and a global leader in transportation and logistics, has signed a non-binding renewable six-month agreement with the Suez Canal Authority, an independent general Egyptian Authority responsible for the canal facility's affairs, a key global shipping lane.

The cooperation lays the foundation for creating a joint Egyptian shareholding company to provide industry-leading maritime transportation services in the Egyptian market. The agreement was signed by Eng Mohammed Bin Battal, president of Bahri Dry Bulk and Eng Jamil Al-Sayed Abul Khair, board member at Suez Canal Authority, in the presence of admiral Osama Rabie, chairman of the Suez Canal Authority; Eng Ahmed Ali Al-Subaey, chief executive

officer of Bahri and Badr bin Ibrahim Al-Badr, the undersecretary of the Saudi ministry of investment for communication with investors.

Under the terms of the MoU, the two parties will discuss the potential of owning, leasing, hiring, and operating ships to transport general goods, including dry bulk, chemicals, oil, petroleum products, and liquefied gas, to meet the demands of the local market.

Admiral Osama Rabie, chairman of the Suez Canal Authority, affirmed the signing of the MoU, stating: "Our agreement with Bahri falls in line with our mission to maintain and enhance the Suez Canal for the benefit of operators and regional markets. We look forward to working in tandem with industry leaders to deliver effective, sustainable solutions that benefit the Suez Canal and the people it serves." Al-Subaey said: "We are proud to cooperate with the Suez Canal Authority to create a framework to explore successful potentials. The Suez Canal is positioned as a pivotal waterway that has allowed for the seamless transport of consumer goods and commodities from Asia and the Middle East to Europe. Our agreement with the Suez Canal Authority underlines Bahri's commitment to collaboration in order to deliver industry-leading maritime transport solutions."



شركة الصفاة للاستثمار
AL SAFAT INVESTMENT COMPANY

KUWAIT BOURSA WEEKLY REPORT

WEEK ENDED ON 02 MARCH 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	34,567	8,123.45	0.2%	0.7%	2.2%	217,996,719	105,416,114	18,029	16.3	1.2	81.0%
Main Market	8,087	5,561.14	0.5%	0.2%	-0.1%	109,084,515	15,532,987	8,139	12.1	0.7	19.0%
All Share	42,654	7,286.83	0.3%	0.6%	1.7%	327,081,234	120,949,101	26,168	13.3	0.8	100%

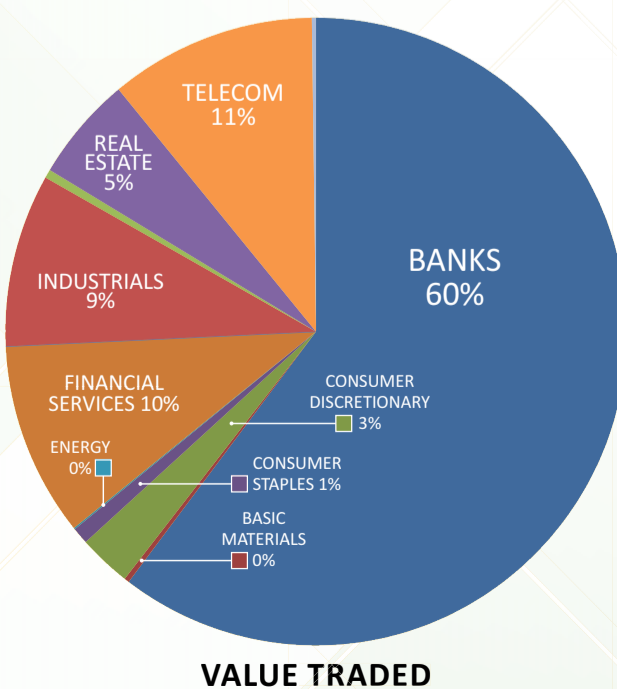
Sector	M. Cap (KD ml)	Last Close	WTD %	MTD %	YTD %	Quantity Traded	Value Traded	No. of Trades	P/E	P/B	% of Total M. Cap
Banking	27,391	1,824.14	0.2%	0.8%	3.5%	109,725,755	72,940,349	8,996	22.6	1.3	64.22%
Basic Materials	440	849.11	-0.7%	0.6%	-0.9%	399,397	309,897	190	8.2	1.3	1.03%
Consumer Discretionary	692	1,457.77	0.1%	0.1%	2.5%	12,003,402	3,311,503	1,005	13.1	0.9	1.62%
Consumer Staples	146	480.62	-0.2%	0.4%	2.0%	2,631,562	1,037,789	132	NM	1.0	0.34%
Energy	127	1,014.43	-2.5%	-0.3%	-13.9%	1,822,442	93,291	122	10.4	0.5	0.30%
Financial Services	4,157	1,247.61	0.6%	0.9%	0.9%	102,657,452	12,110,829	5,211	12.0	0.8	9.75%
Health Care	228	460.03	0.0%	0.0%	-0.4%	0	0.000	0	13.4	2.5	0.53%
Industrials	3,469	987.74	0.2%	-0.3%	-5.6%	20,939,452	10,793,224	3,421	13.0	0.9	8.13%
Insurance	525	1,631.75	0.1%	0.3%	5.1%	2,240,618	529,771	299	10.3	0.8	1.23%
Real Estate	2,229	1,136.60	0.1%	-0.5%	-4.5%	50,412,118	6,559,208	3,164	15.2	0.5	5.22%
Technology	9	646.02	-4.6%	-4.6%	-12.1%	32,681	2,949	23	NM	0.8	0.02%
Telecommunications	3,040	1,175.53	1.2%	0.3%	0.6%	22,784,841	12,999,242	3,397	14.1	2.0	7.13%
Utilities	200	478.95	-0.5%	0.0%	-1.1%	1,431,514	261,048	208	15.0	1.7	0.47%

Top Gainers					
Stock	last Close	Change %	Volume	Value	Trades
MRC	58	12.30%	36,311	1,881,324	29
SALBOOKH	8.7	10.13%	2,221,614	18,700,889	120
KMEFIC	95	8.09%	232,273	21,856,261	49
NRE	89	5.34%	14,243,049	1,260,307,980	776
URC	64	5.09%	321,425	19,731,836	41

Top Losers					
Stock	last Close	Change %	Volume	Value	Trades
ASIYA	53.5	-7.76%	12,135,304	662,519	566
IPG	435	-7.45%	22	10	3
MADAR	100	-6.13%	2,634	254	10
ARABREC	30.0	-5.96%	2,838,430	86,521	152
KINV	127.0	-5.93%	19,208,850	2,457,311	638

Top Volume				
Stock	Last	Change %	Volume	Value
KFH	861	-0.81%	49,400,235	42,478,404
KINV	127	-5.93%	19,208,850	2,457,311
ZAIN	556	0.54%	17,430,567	9,704,025
NBK	1,095	1.67%	16,492,891	17,761,002
GBK	309	2.32%	14,828,067	4,541,821

Top Value				
Stock	Last	Change %	Volume	Value
KFH	861	-0.81%	49,400,235	42,478,404
NBK	1,095	1.67%	16,492,891	17,761,002
ZAIN	556	0.54%	17,430,567	9,704,025
AGLTY	601	1.35%	7,878,323	4,732,180
GBK	309	2.32%	14,828,067	4,541,821



Market Summary:

- Premier market volume and value increased by 8% and 39%, while Main Market volume and value dropped by 14% and 10%, respectively.
- The Premier index was under pressure due to the inflation rise and the expected interest rate hike, while the Main index showed stability.
- Technically, the All Share index closed at 7286, with support levels at 7286, 7214, and 7162, and resistance at 7318. The Premier index closed at 8116, with support levels at 8064, 8013, and 7977, while resistance at 8184. The Main index closed at 5561, with support levels at 550, 5526, and 5513, while resistance at 5575.

Lifestyle | Features



US director Daniel Scheinert (top) and US director Daniel Kwan pose with the Best Screenplay award for 'Everything Everywhere All at Once' during 38th Film Independent Spirit Awards.



US-Vietnamese actor Ke Huy Quan holds the award for Best Supporting Performance in 'Everything Everywhere All at Once' during 38th Film Independent Spirit Awards in Santa Monica, California. — AFP photos

'Everything Everywhere' dominates Spirit Awards week before Oscars

'Everything Everywhere All At Once' swept up yet more film prizes Saturday, as it was named best feature at the Spirit Awards—one of the last major Hollywood ceremonies before next weekend's Oscars.

The trippy sci-fi won in every category it was nominated, at a ceremony held in a giant tent at Los Angeles' Santa Monica beach to celebrate low- and mid-budget movies. Its voters granted a whopping seven awards to the film, which was made for around \$25 million and became independent studio A24's biggest-ever hit, with a global box office gross above \$100 million.

"This is too many. We're so lucky!" said co-director Daniel Scheinert, collecting the night's final prize. Michelle Yeoh won best lead performance, and Stephanie Hsu won best breakthrough performance. It is the first year in which the Film Independent Spirit Awards have opted for gender-neutral acting categories. "Michelle, you beat a bunch of men!" yelled Jamie Lee Curtis in the backstage press room.

Curtis was the film's only nominee who failed to win—losing best supporting performance to her co-star Ke Huy Quan. Scheinert and Daniel Kwan won

director and best screenplay, and the film also won best editing. The absurdist sci-fi comedy stars Yeoh as the matriarch of a Chinese-American laundromat-owning family, who end up fighting a universe-hopping supervillain while undergoing a tax audit.

"You believed in us. You believed in the masterpiece from the Daniels," said Yeoh, addressing the studio's producers. "My boys, thank you for writing such an incredible script that gave us the opportunity to be here, to be seen, to be heard."

'So humbling and so cool'

This year's Spirit Awards were held the weekend before the Oscars. Voting for the season-concluding Academy Awards is currently under way. Final Oscars voting closes on Tuesday, before Hollywood's most coveted golden statuettes are handed out at a glitzy ceremony next Sunday.

Among the films that could receive a late Oscars boost from their Spirit Award wins Saturday were best documentary "All the Beauty and the Bloodshed," best first feature "Aftersun," and best cinematography winner "Tar." "Women Talking" received the pre-announced

Robert Altman Award, which honors a film's director, casting director and overall cast. But in a repeat of scenes at recent high-profile prize-giving ceremonies from Hollywood's actors', producers' and directors' guilds, the night's big winner was "Everything Everywhere," which cemented its already clear Academy Award frontrunner status.

"It's been so humbling and so cool," producer Jonathan Wang told AFP on Saturday's red carpet. The movie—which features characters with hot dog fingers, sex toy-shaped trophies and talking rocks—has overcome predictions from some pundits that it would prove too bizarre for mainstream audiences and voters. It leads the nominations at the Oscars, with 11 nods.

"What's happened is a lot of people went out and they gave our movie a chance," said Wang. "They said 'let's watch it for what it is' and they got past the kind of things that were going to be 'too edgy' for them. And then they were bulldozed by the emotion of it. That's what we wanted to do. So that's the highest compliment—that we were able to actually do that." — AFP

Indigenous art forgery ring smashed in Canada

Canadian police said Friday they had dismantled a decades-old forgery ring that produced and sold possibly thousands of fakes of Indigenous artist Norval Morrisseau's paintings around the world. Eight people including a nephew of Morrisseau were arrested this week and face a total of 40 charges including forgery of artworks and of paperwork that purported to authenticate them.

"Over 1,000 allegedly fraudulent paintings have been seized. The total number produced and sold is unknown," Ontario Provincial Police Deputy Commissioner Kari Dart told a news conference. Some of the paintings sold for tens of thousands of dollars to unsuspecting buyers across Canada and internationally.

Detective Kevin Veilleux said the forgery ring began in 1996 with a single individual, David Voss, 51, allegedly making counterfeit paintings himself "before growing his organization into a full assembly line of painters." In 2002 Morrisseau's nephew Benjamin, now 53, joined the group as one of two Indigenous painters enlisted to help mass produce the fakes.

Norval Morrisseau, also known as Copper Thunderbird and widely regarded as the grandfather of

Canadian Indigenous art, established a pictographic style of contemporary Indigenous art, referred to as the Woodland School. Self-taught, in 1962 he became the first Indigenous artist to have his artworks shown in a contemporary Canadian art gallery, sparking growing interest in his work.

Most Indigenous art until then had been viewed with an anthropological lens rather than as modern art. Morrisseau's artworks are now found in galleries across Canada and around the world.

Originally from the Bingwi Neyaashi Anishinaabek First Nation (formerly called Sand Point First Nation), he died in 2007 at age 75. "He was the first contemporary Indigenous artist to break into the mainstream art world in Canada," said Dart, who called his contributions to art and culture "significant and incomparable." It is those "contributions and his global success (that) may have made him an easy target for fraud," she concluded. — AFP



These photos show forgeries of artwork by legendary Canadian Indigenous artist Norval Morrisseau. — AFP photos



This picture shows veteran photographer Hiroaki Yamashiro checking archived negative and transparency films at his studio. — AFP photos

New generation revives Okinawa's once-banned Indigenous body art

Moeko Heshiki is no ordinary tattoo artist: she is one of the few people keeping the once-banned tradition of hajichi body art alive for the Indigenous Ryukyuu people of Japan's Okinawa region. The traditionally hand-poked markings were once common on women of the Ryukyuu, who lived throughout the southern islands of what is now Japan. The monochrome patterns, ranging from delicate arrow-like symbols to arrays of large dots, marked important moments in a woman's life and, in some cases, were believed to ensure passage to heaven.



This picture shows "hajichi" tattoo artist Moeko Heshiki displaying her tattoos during an interview with AFP on Ten-no-Hama beach in Nanjo, Okinawa Prefecture.

When Japan annexed the Okinawa island chain in 1879, however, a process of forced assimilation set the hajichi tradition on the path to extinction. In mainland Japan, tattoos were associated with illegal behavior, because criminals were sometimes tattooed by authorities to mark them out. "Those with hajichi were fined and discriminated against," 30-year-old Heshiki told AFP in Naha, Okinawa's main

city. "The body art) was degraded as tattoos, rather than understood as hajichi."

A ban on the markings was lifted after World War II, but the practice did not resume, and as women with hajichi passed away, the culture seemed destined to die out. Heshiki, born to a father from Okinawa and a mother from Japan's main island Honshu, stumbled across hajichi while researching possible tattoos.

"I was dying to have them on me," she said. After a tattooist specializing in tribal work inked her, she felt "more connected to myself, or to Okinawa." "I felt I had finally become my true self." She wears hajichi shaped like arrows on the tops of all her fingers, dots and geometric patterns on the backs of her hands and larger versions around her wrists. Today, she works as a "hajicha", reproducing the traditional designs on clients who connect with her through Instagram.

'Different from tattoos'

While tattoos are still often frowned upon in Japanese society, younger generations are increasingly open to body art. But Heshiki thinks hajichi should not become just another fad. She offers traditional patterns to those with roots in Okinawa and takes time to discuss the markings and meanings with clients beforehand, researching designs in books about the art.

Hajichi was traditionally applied with a bamboo stick and ink made from charcoal and the Okinawan liquor awamori. Heshiki hand pokes the designs, but with regular needles and ink. One of the best-known documenters of hajichi is Hiroaki Yamashiro, who photographed dozens of elderly women with the body art from 1970 onwards. A native of Okinawa's Miyakojima, the 73-year-old began the project almost by accident as a student, when he spotted an elderly lady as he scouted for subjects. "She had hajichi, and a very graceful look," he told AFP. — AFP

Youssef Chebbi's 'Ashkal' wins pan-African film award

Tunisian director Youssef Chebbi won the coveted Stallion of Yennenga award Saturday at the biennial pan-African Fespaco film festival for his murder mystery oeuvre "Ashkal". Tunis-born Chebbi, whose film centres on the investigation into the killing of a caretaker on a construction site at Carthage on the outskirts of his hometown, did not attend the ceremony in Burkina Faso, presided over by military leader Ibrahim Traore.

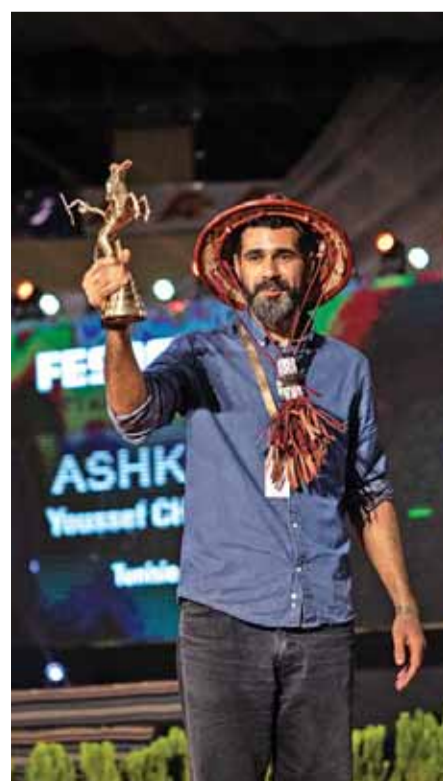
Chebbi won out over Burkinabe rival Apolline Traore, who picked up a consolation Silver Stallion award for "Sira", while the bronze went to Kenya's Angela Wamai for "Shimoni". The Stallion of Yennenga (Etalon d'or de Yennenga) is awarded for the fictional or documentary feature film judged best to depict African realities. — AFP



A man (second left) representing the Tunisian director Youssef Chebbi, receives from Burkina Faso military leader Captain Ibrahim Traore (third left) the Etalon d'Or won for the film "Ashkal", during the closing ceremony of the 28th Pan-African Film and television Festival (FESPACO), in Ouagadougou. — AFP photos



A woman brings on stage the Etalon d'Or, the most prestigious award of the festival, during the closing ceremony of the 28th Pan-African Film and television Festival (FESPACO).



A man representing Tunisian director Youssef Chebbi, waves on his behalf the Etalon d'Or won for the film "Ashkal".



Kenyan director Angela Wamai, won the Etalon de Bronze for her film "Shimoni", during the closing ceremony of the 28th Pan-African Film and television Festival (FESPACO).

Lifestyle | Features

Chris Rock hits back at Will Smith in Netflix livestream

Chris Rock finally hit back at Will Smith on Saturday in a brutal stand-up routine, a year after the actor slapped him in front of a global TV audience for the Oscars.

The comedian came out swinging, accusing the Hollywood star of "selective outrage" when he reacted to a jibe about Jada Pinkett Smith's shaved head, and saying Smith lashed out at a shorter man because he was annoyed his wife had cheated on him.

"Will Smith practices selective outrage," Rock told an audience in a show that was streamed live on Netflix. "Everybody that really knows, knows I had nothing to do with that. I didn't have any entanglements," he said, referring to Pinkett Smith's acknowledged marital infidelity.

Rock was presenting an Oscar in Hollywood last March when he made a crack about Pinkett Smith's closely cropped head. She has alopecia. The

"Men in Black" star mounted the stage and slapped the comedian hard across the face, before returning to his seat and yelling obscenities at the presenter.

A few minutes later, Smith was presented with an Oscar for best actor for his role in "King Richard." He later apologized to Rock, but was banned from the Oscars for a decade. Rock was praised for his measured response on the night, and has maintained near silence on the issue in the year since.

But on Saturday night's livestream from Baltimore, he let rip. "People ask 'Did it hurt?'. It still hurts," he said. "Will Smith is significantly bigger than me. Will Smith played Muhammad Ali in a movie. You think I auditioned for that?"

The comedian said Smith had been widely mocked after an episode of his wife's podcast in which the couple talked about her affair and how it affected him.



In this file photo taken on March 27, 2022 US actor Will Smith slaps US actor Chris Rock onstage during the 94th Oscars at the Dolby Theatre in Hollywood, California. — AFP

"Why would you do that?" he asked. Many people have been cheated on, but the Hollywood power couple are the only ones who discussed it in public that way, he said.

"Everybody in the world called him a

b****. They called his wife a predator. Everybody called him a b****," he said, noting that he had tried to offer condolences after news of the affair became public. Rock said the animosity from Pinkett Smith stemmed from a few years

earlier when she had called on him to boycott the Oscars because her husband had been overlooked for his 2015 movie "Concussion."

Rock, who at times appeared genuinely angry, said before last year he had always loved Smith, first as a rapper, and then as an actor. "He'd made some great movies. I've rooted for Will Smith my whole life," but now, he said, he was rooting for the slave master who beats Smith's character in his latest movie, "Emancipation."

Rock's show was the first live comedy event for Netflix, with the platform reportedly also looking at offering live sports. Rivals including Disney+ and Amazon Prime Video already offer live events including sports and musical performances. Netflix hosts a live comedy festival at dozens of venues in Los Angeles, but those shows have not yet been available to stream live on its platform. This year's Oscars will be held on March 12. — AFP



In this file photo Britain's Meghan, Duchess of Sussex and Britain's Prince Harry, Duke of Sussex, react as they attend the annual One Young World Summit at Bridgewater Hall in Manchester, northwest England.—AFP

Prince Harry says always felt 'different' from other UK royals

Prince Harry reportedly revealed he has long felt "slightly different" to the rest of Britain's royal family in an interview on Saturday with a trauma expert. In a wide-ranging discussion with Dr Gabor Mate, Harry, 38, described himself as coming from a "broken home" and said he was trying not to pass "trauma" onto his children, according to reports of the live-streamed conversation.

The interview follows the January publication of the prince's controversial memoir, "Spare", in which he admitted his adolescence was marked by drugs and alcohol and detailed the breakdown in his relationships with father King Charles III, and brother William.

"I certainly have felt throughout my life, my younger years, I felt slightly different to the rest of my family," Harry told Mate, according to numerous media reports on the interview. "I felt strange being in this container, and I know that my mum felt the same so it makes sense to me," he added, referring to his late mother Princess Diana.

Harry went on to credit his wife Meghan Markle for having "saved" him. "I was stuck in this world, and she was from a different world and helped draw me out of that," he said, describing her as "an exceptional human being".

During the conversation, Mate — the author of several books on trauma, addiction and illness — publicly diagnosed Harry with attention deficit disorder (ADD). Summarizing the prince's life, which has included losing his mother at the age of 12 and later serving with Britain's armed forces in Afghanistan, Mate said there was "a lot of trauma and suffering".

California-based Harry, who quit the UK and royal life with Meghan in 2020 amid a rift with the monarchy, opened up about his parenting style towards their two children, three-year-old Archie and one-year-old Lilibet.

"I feel a huge responsibility not to pass on any trauma or negative experiences that I've had as a kid or as a man growing up," he said. "There are times when I catch myself when I should be smothering them with that love but I might not be." He added that together with Meghan they were trying to learn "from our own past and overlapping those mistakes, perhaps, and growing to break that cycle".

In his memoir, Harry acknowledges using cannabis regularly earlier in life, and cocaine on several occasions when he was a teenager, saying he was "willing to try almost anything that would alter the pre-established order". He reiterated to Mate that cocaine "didn't do anything for me" but said marijuana was "different".

"That actually really did help me," he said, according to Britain's Press Association. The publication of "Spare" — in which Harry claims elder brother William attacked him during an argument about Meghan — is said to have significantly worsened relations between the self-exiled couple and other senior royals. It remains unclear whether they will attend Charles' landmark coronation in early May. — AFP

Out in the California desert, nestled between billboards advertising hair-line restoration and varicose vein removal, six hauntingly beautiful images of steel bridges and sunsets loom incongruously over the dusty highway.

They are photographs taken by Tyre Nichols, a 29-year-old amateur photographer who in January became the latest high-profile Black victim of US police brutality during a traffic stop in Memphis, Tennessee. The billboards have been installed in Palm Springs for Desert X, an art exhibition known for placing giant outdoor installations — often with political messages — against the stunning, arid mountain backdrop.

"Nearly all of us know about Tyre through his tragic and brutal death in the hands of law enforcement in Memphis," said artistic director Neville Wakefield, at a press conference launching the festival. "What we may not know is the insights that he gave into his life through his art."

California-raised Nichols was a keen photographer who trained his camera on the bridges, murals, neon lights and fiery sunsets of his adopted home city of Memphis, exploring the connections between people and their surroundings.

"My vision is to bring my viewers deep into what I am seeing through my eye and out through my lens," Nichols wrote on his website. The choice of a roadside installation site for his works was deliberate, organizers said. On January 7, Nichols — who had been taking photos of a sunset, his family said later — was stopped by police on suspicion of reckless driving, and beaten viciously. He died in hospital three days later.

'Ending the violence'

Wakefield said the "images of serenity and connection flying above the roadside" were particularly relevant because this type of location "is often where this violence unfortunately takes place." Members of Nichols' family, who approved the installation only a few days



Tyre Nichols' photos honored at California desert art fest

ago, hope the artwork will spotlight a California draft bill that would limit the power of police to stop drivers for minor infractions without specific cause.

In a statement from their representative, they called the bill "a much-needed step towards ending the violence Black people face when confronted by police at traffic stops." The late addition of Nichols' work to Desert X was motivated by "featuring Tyre as an artist, and showing his work, and having people engage with that emotionally," festival founder Susan Davis told AFP. "So many times these senseless deaths become just a name... it's making the invisible visible."

'Treasure hunt'

Founded six years ago, Desert X invites artists from around the world to

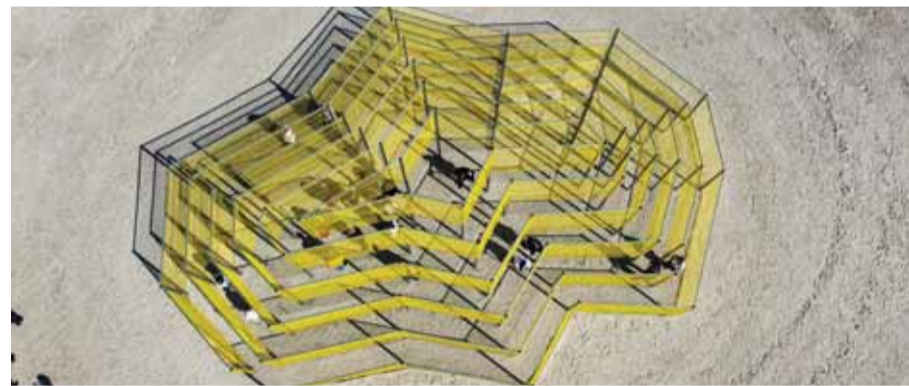
visit the Palm Springs region and create a new work to be installed in the Coachella Valley. Across the first three biennial editions, which typically run for around two months, some 1.2 million people have visited.

The artworks are free to visit, and are scattered across the valley in what Davis describes as a "treasure hunt" that visitors can tackle over one day or several. Also on display this year is "Sleeping Figure," a haphazard-looking pile of discarded shipping containers that have been welded together to stick up out of the desert floor at improbable angles.

First conceived of by artist Matt Johnson when a giant container ship got stuck in the Suez Canal in 2021, they have taken on "an entirely additional meaning" with the recent spate of US

train derailments, said Davis. "I started thinking about these containers as vessels of consumption" after the pandemic caused huge blockages in the global supply chain, said Johnson.

Another featured artwork is "Chainlink," a nebulous maze-like structure constructed from yellow wire fencing. And then there is "Immersion," a giant gameboard on which visitors can walk and learn about local Indigenous traditions via QR codes linking to audio recordings. As well as social justice, several of this year's projects address water scarcity, environmental degradation and the climate crisis. Desert X runs from March 4 to May 7. — AFP



View of Rana Begum's piece No. 1225 Chainlink during the media preview day of the Desert X exhibit.



View of Matt Johnson's piece Sleeping Figure during the media preview day of the Desert X exhibit.

Chinese tattoo artist tells women's stories through ink

For over two years, Chinese tattoo artist Song Jiayin has interviewed her female clients and posted the results online, recording the memories, hopes and fears of hundreds of women in ink and video. Her designs—from a sunset to a delicately stylized uterus and images of beloved pets—are as varied as the women's motivations for getting them etched on their bodies.

In a country where spaces for female self-expression have shrunk in recent years, getting a tattoo can feel like an empowering act. "When you choose to get tattooed, and choose a different image to put on your body, you are actually taking action to say, I control my body," Song told AFP.

China's Communist Party has long exercised control over women's bodies through coercive reproductive legislation, such as the now-abandoned one-child policy. Under President Xi Jinping, authorities have cracked down on almost every kind of feminist activism, restricting NGOs, arresting high-profile figures and suspending social media accounts. Conservative attitudes valuing women primarily for their appearance and child-

bearing remain the norm, reinforced by state media and popular culture.

Song, who describes herself as a feminist, sees her project as an open-ended documentary that she hopes will help both promote women's voices and challenge stereotypes. "I want to give (women) a bigger platform for more people to see what they express," she said. The "1,000 Girls" videos all stick to a simple format—they start off with an ice-breaker: "What is your zodiac sign?" But in the conversations that follow, interviewees share intimate thoughts about mental health, gender, anxieties about growing older, and the deaths of loved ones.

'Worst form' of sexism

Inside Song's book-filled studio last month, 27-year-old Liao Jingyi was excited to become a part of the project and receive her first-ever tattoo. Lying on the tattoo table with her jeans rolled up on one



Chinese tattoo artist Song Jiayin sketching a tattoo on the leg of her client Liao Jingyi at her studio in Beijing.

side, Liao braced herself as the needle moved over her skin, and the outlines of crashing waves and a boulder gradually took shape on her calf. She said she was inspired by a professor she looked up to at university, who told her to be like a "rock whose edges have not been worn down".

While tattoos are not uncommon in China's more cosmopolitan and wealthier areas, women in particular still face scrutiny over their appearance.

Getting inked, or not conforming to traditional styles, is frowned upon in conservative circles. The recent suicide of a young woman who became the target of misogynistic online abuse after posting a photo of herself with pink hair spotlighted the intense pressure women can face. "When a woman doesn't conform, she gets attacked and her morality gets questioned... It is sexism, rooted in gender inequality, in its worst form," writer and social commentator Lijia Zhang told AFP.

Defying disapproval

One client, a woman in her 30s who chose to be tattooed with rainbow motifs, said she had wanted to get inked as a younger woman but her boyfriend had threatened to break up with her. Another woman, a doctor who asked for a design based on her grandparents' purple hydrangeas, said that at her hospital many patients would feel a tattooed doctor "doesn't seem to be responsible enough".

Song said she was especially moved by a woman in her 40s who had come in for her first tattoo. Song recalled the woman asking: "I have been a mother, a wife, now can I be myself and get a tattoo of whatever I want?"

Broken chain

One of Song's own tattoos near her elbow stands out in particular. It depicts a broken chain as a tribute to Xiaohuamei, a woman who was found trapped in a shack in rural China with a chain and padlock around her neck last year.

Thought to be a victim of human trafficking, news of her plight sent shockwaves throughout the country. Several clients have asked for the same tattoo. "I think any woman seeing this, including her being forced to have eight children, would feel immense heartache," Song said. "I think we have struggled for too long. This struggle for women to gain rights has gone on for too long." — AFP



This photo shows a chain tattoo on the arm of Chinese tattoo artist Song Jiayin at her studio in Beijing. — AFP photos

Sports

Jones overpowers Gane, claims vacant UFC heavyweight crown

Jones forces Gane into a submission after just 2min 4sec

News in brief

Kilde retains WCup title

LOS ANGELES: Norway's Aleksander Aamodt Kilde retained his World Cup downhill title with a convincing victory in Aspen on Saturday. Kilde won the penultimate downhill of the season with a time of 1:31.60 finishing 0.61 seconds ahead of Canada's James Crawford with overall World Cup leader and downhill world champion Marco Odermatt a further two hundredths behind. Austria's Vincent Kriechmayer, the only man who could have stopped Kilde from winning the season downhill title, was fourth 0.70 seconds behind the Norwegian. That left Kilde with an unsurmountable lead in the points table ahead of the final downhill race of the season in Soldeu. "It's amazing! It's great to fight with the best and so much fun too, it pushes me to do even better next year," Kilde told NBC television. "I'm always looking for ways to improve, that's what brings me to where I am today," he added. — AFP

Harlequins hammer Exeter

LONDON: Marcus Smith rose to the challenge of being dropped from England's training squad ahead of a Six Nations clash against France by orchestrating Harlequins' 40-5 thrashing of Exeter on Saturday as Red Rose boss Steve Borthwick looked on from the stands. The gifted fly-half showed plenty of attacking flair as Quins ran in six tries in a 'Big Game' match played at Twickenham, the venue for the March 11 'Le Crunch' against Six Nations champions France, rather than Quins' nearby Stoop ground. Smith, 24 was directly responsible for two of those tries and was off target with just one of his conversions as Quins, who saw Cadan Murley, Josh Bassett, Sam Riley and Joe Marchant (twice) cross Exeter's line, ended a run of five consecutive defeats in the English Premiership. Victory also saw Quins surge from ninth to fifth place, with the top four at the end of the regular season qualifying for the title-deciding play-offs. — AFP

Medvedev wins in Dubai

DUBAI: Daniil Medvedev conquered all remaining doubts as he completed an impressive hat-trick, picking up a third title in as many weeks with a 6-2, 6-2 victory over Andrey Rublev in the Dubai final on Saturday. "Not over yet," scribbled the third-seeded Medvedev on the TV camera lens after his triumph, referring to his current 14-match winning streak amassed over the last 19 days, starting with the title in Rotterdam, followed by Doha and now Dubai. "It's amazing because the start of the year was not perfect; in tennis, when you don't win tournaments you're always doubting no matter what happens in practice," said Medvedev, who briefly dropped out of the top 10 last month before recovering in tremendous fashion. "I was doubting a lot and now it just feels better. I'm really happy with these three weeks and I'm looking forward to the next ones." — AFP

Grizzlies' Morant suspended

LOS ANGELES: Memphis Grizzlies NBA star Ja Morant was suspended by his team for at least two games on Saturday after posting a video where he appeared to display a gun in a nightclub. The Grizzlies issued a statement saying that Morant "will be away from the team for at least the next two games". That will mean Morant will not play on Sunday against the LA Clippers or Tuesday against the Los Angeles Lakers. A two-time NBA All Star and NBA Rookie of the Year in 2020, the 23-year-old Morant is seen as one of the brightest young talents in the league but has been involved in a series of off-court incidents. "I take full responsibility for my actions last night," Morant said in a statement. "I'm sorry to my family, teammates, coaches, fans, partners, the city of Memphis and the entire Grizzlies organization for letting you down. "I'm going to take some time away to get help and work on learning better methods of dealing with stress and my overall well-being," he added. — AFP

Sixers comeback snaps Milwaukee 16-game streak

LOS ANGELES: James Harden scored 38 points and spearheaded a dramatic late comeback as the Philadelphia 76ers ended the Milwaukee Bucks' 16-game winning streak with a 133-130 victory on Saturday. A titanic battle between the Eastern Conference leading Bucks and third-placed Sixers lived up to the billing, with Philadelphia fighting back from an 18-point third-quarter deficit to pull off a superb win at Milwaukee's Fiserv Forum. While the Sixers' Joel Embiid finished with 31 points and Tyrese Maxey added 26, Harden was the undeniable driving force of a pulsating late rally that took Philadelphia to victory.

LAS VEGAS: Mixed martial arts legend Jon Jones scored a stunning first-round victory over France's Cyril Gane to claim the vacant UFC heavyweight crown on Saturday. Former light heavyweight champion Jones, making his return to the Octagon after more than a three-year absence, forced Gane into a submission after just 2min 4sec of the opening round to seal the win. The 35-year-old American, who is widely considered to be the greatest mixed martial artist of all time, used all his skill and experience to outfox his 32-year-old French opponent.

Jones had talked boldly before the fight of scoring a quick victory against Gane, who hinted at nervousness in the opening seconds by aiming a kick at the American's groin which required an official timeout. Jones proved to be as good as his word, easily ducking under a wild left hand from Gane and wrestling the off-balance Frenchman to the floor with ease. He quickly had Gane in trouble and the Parisian submitted after being trapped in a guillotine chokehold by Jones. "I've been working for this for a long time," a delighted Jones said after his victory.

"You know a lot of people thought I was never coming back. I'd read that all the time 'This dude's never coming back' - but I've been faithful to my goal, faithful to my mission," Jones said while he was wary of Gane's prowess on his feet - the Frenchman is a former kick-boxing champion - he had always



LAS VEGAS: Jon Jones reacts to his win in the UFC heavyweight championship fight during the UFC 285 event at T-Mobile Arena in Las Vegas, Nevada. —AFP

been confident of winning if the bout ended up on the canvas. "I really had the strong conviction that if I could get him down to the ground the fight would

be in my area," Jones said. "I've been wrestling since I was 12 years old and I feel stronger and more comfortable, especially on the ground." — AFP

Gulf Bank launches second edition of Off-Road Challenge

KUWAIT: As part of its efforts to establish the principles of social sustainability, and as a way to continue supporting the youth, Gulf Bank has announced the second edition of the Off-Road Challenge, in cooperation with Suffix, that is set to happen next Friday, March 10, from 10:00 am to 5:00 pm. On this occasion, Assistant Manager of Corporate Communications at Gulf Bank, Fahad Al-Sharrah said, that dozens of 4x4 motor sport enthusiasts will be participating in this year's Off-Road Challenge activities and will be given the opportunity to practice their favorite sport, enjoy the challenges of the competition, and win valuable prizes.

Al-Sharrah mentioned that the registration to participate in the competition is eligible for both amateurs and professionals in 4x4 motorsports. He further confirmed that the registration is still open for those looking to take part, and that the high turnout of participants and the attendees during last year's event, reflects the interest of young people wanting to practice this sport.

He added: "Participants will compete on specially equipped natural and artificial obstacle courses in Bnaider, which will range from easy to medium levels. The competition's route has been prepared with



Fahad Al-Sharrah



many off-road obstacles - using sand, rocks, water basins, and other challenges that the participants must pass in order to complete the challenge - taking into account all security and safety measures."

Al-Sharrah indicated that the Off-Road Challenge consists of several stages, where every stage will consist of a different challenge. The contestants will be evaluated on their speed and skills in overcoming the challenges by a panel of specialized judges. He further stated that social responsibility is one of the main pillars of Gulf Bank's 2025 strategy, which deals with all financial, environmental, and social aspects. It contributes to the development of society and enhances its leadership in all fields by effectively applying sustainability practices. For those interested to register for this year's Gulf Bank Off-Road Challenge, they can visit the following website: <https://suffix.events/event/detail/540>

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

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

Kuwait Triathlon Club team shines

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: Kuwait Triathlon Club team gave a great performance at the World Cup held Friday and Saturday in Abu Dhabi - winning 10 medals, 7 gold, 1 silver and 2 bronze. Huda Al-Saleh, Najlaa Al-Jraiwi, Usama Burahma, Abdelaziz Al-Huwaidi, Ali Dashti and Loulwa Al-Refae won gold; Mohammad Bukhalaf won silver; Mohammad Al-Hammad and Abdelaziz Al-Duair took bronze.

Chairman of the Triathlon Club and Federation Rashid Al-Kandary dedicated this major win to HHH the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, HHH the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and Kuwait people. He also lauded the performance of Kuwait athletes at the world event and their determination to fly Kuwait's flag high.

Head of the delegation, Sufian Al-Khalil said

The 10-time NBA All-Star poured in 21 of his 38 points in the fourth quarter as Philadelphia outscored Milwaukee 48-31 in the final frame. Harden also laid on 10 assists and hauled down nine rebounds in a fine all-round performance. "He was fantastic, big shot after big shot, he led the comeback - he was just James Harden," Embiid said of his team-mate. Harden paid tribute to Embiid after arguably the best offensive display from the duo since they joined forces at Philadelphia.

"We've figured it out, he's the lead scorer and we try to give him the ball and give him shots," said Harden, who moved to Philadelphia last year from Brooklyn. "One game at a time, we try to get better quarter by quarter and just keep pushing into the postseason." Milwaukee were left ruing a late collapse that seemed improbable as the Bucks surged 18 points clear late in the game, leading 95-77 with only 2:41 left in the third quarter. The Sixers trimmed the gap to 14 points by the start of the fourth, and then went on a 15-2 run to transform the contest.



the winning came after hard work, besides the support of the board of directors. "This achievement will give us an incentive and motivation to

make more achievements in coming events. The performance of our athletes was very high, and were lauded by all participants," he said.

Milwaukee clung on to a slender lead with less than two minutes remaining, but a 29-foot three-pointer from Harden put the Sixers within one at 125-124. Harden set up Embiid for a three-pointer to put Philadelphia 127-125 ahead with 42 seconds remaining and the Sixers closed out the win. Giannis Antetokoumpo led the Milwaukee scorers with 34 points and 13 rebounds, Brook Lopez and Jrue Holiday recorded 26 points each and Grayson Allen had 20. Milwaukee remain top of the East with a 45-18 record, half a game ahead of Boston. Philadelphia improved to 41-22.

In other games on Saturday, Miami boosted their playoff hopes with a 117-109 win over the Atlanta Hawks. Bam Adebayo led the Miami scorers with 30 points from 10-of-12 shooting while Tyler Herro added 20 points. Jimmy Butler and Caleb Martin weighed in with 15 points apiece as Miami improved to 34-31 to remain in seventh place. The win came a day after Miami had fallen at home to the New York Knicks. "The best thing for us coming off a game like



James Harden of the Philadelphia 76ers

that was to play the very next night," Miami coach Erik Spoelstra said. "To get the win was really important." In Cleveland, the Cavaliers cruised to a 114-90 win over the Detroit Pistons, with Donovan Mitchell leading a comfortable win with 20 points. — AFP

Sports

Middlesbrough hammer Reading 5-0, revive Championship promotion race

Leaders Burnley draw; Huddersfield drop to the bottom

LONDON: Middlesbrough hammered Reading 5-0 on Saturday to move within sight of automatic promotion from the Championship after leaders Burnley drew and Sheffield United were beaten. Only the top two at the end of the regular season are guaranteed promotion to the Premier League, with the teams finishing third to sixth entering the play-offs to determine the final club to go up. Saturday's results left Boro just four points behind Sheffield United. Chuba Akpom put Boro ahead from a 24th-minute penalty to take his Championship tally to 20 goals before on-loan Aston Villa midfielder Aaron Ramsey made it 2-0 before half-time with an impressive solo effort.

Akpom scored from close range early in the second period before Ramsey completed a double of his own in the 51st minute, with Marcus Forsberg making it 5-0 from the penalty spot. Earlier, Boro were beaten 1-0 at Blackburn, with Harry

Pickering's early goal proving decisive. Championship leaders Burnley moved 13 points clear of the Blades following a goalless draw at relegation-battlers Blackpool. Stoke manager Alex Neil had an enjoyable return to former club Sunderland as the Potters ran out 5-1 winners at the Stadium of Light.

Josh Laurent broke the deadlock on the stroke of half-time before Tyrese Campbell's two goals in five second-half minutes left Stoke in command. Sunderland's Alex Pritchard reduced the lead just after the hour, but there was still time for Dwight Gayle to score twice as Stoke completed a convincing win. Norwich climbed into the top six after coming from behind to win 3-2 at play-off rivals Millwall. Tom Bradshaw gave Millwall a 20th-minute lead but Norwich were level before the break through Jacob Sorensen.

The Canaries went ahead when Bradshaw

unluckily diverted Onel Hernandez's cross into the net for an own goal, with Brazilian Gabriel Sara sweeping in Norwich's third. Zian Flemming headed in from a corner to give Millwall hope of a draw with seven minutes left but David Wagner's visitors held on to all three points in a tense finish. At the other end of the table, Wigan climbed off the bottom following a 1-1 draw against Birmingham after Ashley Fletcher's goal cancelled out an early free-kick from Juninho Bacuna.

Huddersfield dropped to the bottom following a 4-0 loss at home to Coventry, with Viktor Gyokeres scoring twice. Relegation-threatened Cardiff ended Bristol City's nine-match undefeated league run with a 2-0 win secured by goals from Sory Kaba and Jaden Philogene. Rotherham's Jordan Hugill scored his first goals for the club in a 3-1 home win over Queens Park Rangers that condemned the away side to a fifth straight league defeat. — AFP

L AFC survive; Miami stun Philly; St Louis triumph

LOS ANGELES: Former Italy captain Giorgio Chiellini scored his first goal in Major League Soccer as defending champions Los Angeles FC survived a late rally from the Portland Timbers to hold on and win their opening game of the season 3-2. Inter Miami continued their winning start to the season with an impressive 2-0 victory over last season's MLS Cup runners-up Philadelphia Union while Wayne Rooney's DC United fell to a 2-0 loss at Columbus Crew and new club St Louis City enjoyed a second straight win.

L AFC had begun the day in celebratory mood marking their first title win last season with the players given their championship rings and the title banner unveiled but Steve Cherundolo's squad quickly got down to business. The 38-year-old Chiellini, in his second season in Los Angeles after joining from Juventus last year, poked in a 24th minute opener after Portland had failed to deal with a cross into the box.

Ryan Hollingshead then had an effort disallowed for a foul in the box but L AFC soon had their second with Mexican forward Carlos Vela converting from the penalty spot after Santiago Moreno had

brought down Kwadwo Opoku. Vela went close to another after the break, with his curling free-kick clipping the outside of the post but Vela then turned provider with his ball inside well collected by Opoku who showed quick feet to beat David Bingham with a low drive.

Portland got themselves back in the game though when Juan Mosquera burst through the midfield and slipped the ball to club record signing Evander and the Brazilian swept home his first goal since joining from Denmark's Midtjylland in a reported \$10 million deal. With six minutes of regular time remaining, the Timbers pulled back another when L.A. keeper John McCarthy failed to reach a cross and from the resulting scramble Paraguay international Cristhian Paredes slotted home. Despite the late scare, L AFC held on to get their season off to a winning start after their scheduled opener last week was postponed due to bad weather.

Outstanding Strike

Phil Neville's Miami took the lead with a long-range strike from French forward Corentin Jean in the 32nd minute and sealed the victory with an outstanding strike from Finnish winger Robert Taylor. Just a minute after entering as a substitute, Taylor took a ball from Jean Mota on his chest and then volleyed into the far corner from the edge of the box. New club St Louis City celebrated their first home game in the league with a 3-1 victory over Charlotte despite falling behind to a fine angled header from Argentine Enzo Copetti.



LOS ANGELES: Giorgio Chiellini #14 of the Los Angeles FC volleys the ball against Jaroslaw Niezgodza #11 of the Portland Timbers during a game between the Portland Timbers and the Los Angeles Football Club at BMO Stadium on March 04, 2023. — AFP

An own goal from Charlotte's New Zealand defender Bill Tuiloma brought the home side level and then a penalty from Eduard Loewen had the crowd in City Park anticipating victory. The win was sealed when Brazilian Joao Klauss intercepted a woeful back pass from Adilson Malanda and gleefully chipped keeper Pablo Sisniega for his second goal of the season and a 3-1 win. — AFP

Bayern reclaim Bundesliga lead

BERLIN: Defender Matthijs de Ligt produced a crucial goal-line clearance before scoring himself as Bayern Munich reclaimed the Bundesliga lead from Borussia Dortmund with a 2-1 win at Stuttgart on Saturday. De Ligt's goal came late in the first half just after he prevented Stuttgart from going ahead, with Eric Maxim Choupo-Moting grabbing a second for Bayern midway through the second half. Stuttgart pulled one back late on through Juan Jose Perea, but Bayern held on to go back above Dortmund on goal difference ahead of Wednesday's Champions League last-16 second leg against Paris Saint-Germain in Munich.

Bayern picked up where they left off in last week's 3-0 win over Union Berlin, with Leon Goretzka forcing goalkeeper Fabian Bredlow into two stunning reflex saves in quick succession. Not content to allow Bayern to turn the screws, Stuttgart kept looking dangerous on the counter through the speed of striker Silas. Silas' near-post shot forced a save from Yann Sommer after 36 minutes and the home side almost took the lead from the ensuing corner, with De Ligt desperately clearing a deflected ball off the line.

The Dutch centre-back put Bayern in front just a



STUTTGART: Bayern Munich's German midfielder Leroy Sane (left) and Stuttgart's Japanese midfielder Wataru Endo vie for the ball during the German first division Bundesliga football match on March 4, 2023. — AFP

minute later, blasting a low shot under Bredlow from outside the box. Fresh from signing a one-year extension in Munich on Friday, former PSG striker Choupo-Moting doubled Bayern's lead by hammering a shot past Bredlow when put through on goal by Thomas Mueller. With just two minutes remain-

ing, the home side gave their fans hope, Tiago Tomas curling in a superb cross to find Perea, who headed past Sommer. French winger Tanguy Coulibaly had a chance to equalise in the second minute of injury time when he jumped high to head a cross from Hiroki Ito, but his effort went just wide. — AFP

Fiorentina deny Milan second spot in Serie A

MILAN: AC Milan missed the chance to go second in Serie A on Saturday after falling to a 2-1 defeat at Fiorentina, ending a recent upturn in form for the reigning champions. Nicolas Gonzalez's penalty three minutes after the break and a late Luka Jovic header earned Fiorentina the three points and ended Milan's four-match winning streak ahead of their Champions League showdown at Tottenham on Wednesday.

Theo Hernandez netted in stoppage time for Milan who are fourth, level on 47 points with local rivals Inter ahead of their match with Lecce on Sunday. Stefano Pioli's side, without suspended star attacker Rafael Leao, are one behind Lazio after their stunning win at runaway leaders Napoli on Friday moved the capital club second. Roma will move above Milan on goal difference if they beat Juventus on Sunday night.

"Fiorentina were better than us today, but not because our minds were on Tottenham," said Pioli to Sky. "That will be a different match, it's a knockout game and tonight's performance won't affect us, just as Tottenham won't be affected by their two consecutive defeats." Fiorentina meanwhile stay 12th, level on 31 points with Torino, after a win which came on the fifth anniversary of former Viola captain Davide Astori's death. Astori died in his sleep in a hotel room on this day in 2018, aged just 31, when Pioli was in charge at Fiorentina.

The former defender came through the youth ranks at Milan and was applauded by the more than 40,000 fans at the Stadio Artemio Franchi when play was stopped in the 13th minute in honour of his old shirt number. "We had been lacking a win against one of the top teams but today the boys were superlative, they all played with great quality and determination," Fiorentina coach Vincenzo Italiano told DAZN. "If we keep playing like this we'll have some joy between now and the end of the season."

Drab draw for Atalanta

The hosts would have been ahead midway through the first half had Fikayo Tomori not been on hand to clear Giacomo Bonaventura's scuffed close-range strike off the line. But it was the England international who handed Fiorentina the chance to take the lead when he was spun by Jonathan Ikone and then clumsily brought down the French attacker in the penalty area.

Gonzalez coolly placed his spot-kick past Mike Maignan and from there Fiorentina, pushed by passionate support, rarely looked like being pegged back. Pietro Terracciano kept out an Olivier Giroud header and then rushed out to deny Hernandez just before the hour mark but apart from the France full-back's consolation goal that was it from a poor Milan.

They were almost saved when referee Marco Di Bello inexplicably gave a penalty for handball when Artur Cabral headed a corner clear in the 78th minute, but the decision was quickly overturned by Di Bello after checking the pitch-side monitors. And once Jovic dove to head in Dodo's pinpoint cross with three minutes remaining that was that. Defeat for Milan will be a relief to Atalanta, whose bid for Champions League football took another hit after a drab goalless draw with Udinese. Gian Piero Gasperini's side stay sixth and five points off Italy's top four following an uninspiring performance against their off-form opponents in Bergamo. — AFP

Rangers close on Scottish leaders

GLASGOW: Rangers won 3-1 at home to Kilmarnock on Saturday as they moved to within six points of Scottish Premiership leaders Celtic. The Gers were looking to recover from last week's Scottish League Cup final loss to arch Glasgow rivals Celtic in manager Michael Beale's first defeat since taking charge at Ibrox in December. They took an early lead through defender Connor Goldson's sixth-minute goal and were 2-0 up before the half-hour mark thanks to a powerful shot from Fashion Sakala.

Rangers captain James Tavernier appeared to have made the game safe before half-time when he scored from the penalty spot after VAR detected a handball inside the box. But the second half was a more nervous affair with Kilmarnock defender Jeriel Dorsett pulling a goal back on the hour mark as the hosts struggled to replicate their first-half dominance. Even so the win saw Rangers narrow the gap ahead of reigning champions' Celtic's match away to St Mirren on Sunday. "You can only beat the team in front of you," said Beale. "We will roll on again to Hibs on Wednesday."

Josh Ginnelly scored twice as Hearts strengthened their grip on third place with a 3-0 win at home to Johnstone. The Englishman struck in each half before Jorge Grant put the result beyond doubt for Hearts, who remain five points clear of Edinburgh rivals Hibernian in the race for a European place. Motherwell moved further away from the relegation zone with a 2-0 win away to Ross County, who finished the match with 10 men following Jack Baldwin's 70th-minute red card. — AFP

Classifieds

Hospitals & Clinics

Sabah Hospital	24812000	Khaldiya	24848075
Amiri Hospital	22450005	Kaifan	24849807
Maternity Hospital	24843100	Shamiya	24848913
Mubarak Al-Kabir Hospital	25312700	Shuwaikh	24814507
Chest Hospital	24849400	Abdullah Salem	22549134
Farwaniya Hospital	24892010	Nuzha	22526804
Adan Hospital	23940620	Industrial Shuwaikh	24814764
Ibn Sina Hospital	24840300	Qadsiya	22515088
Al-Razi Hospital	24846000	Dasmah	22532265
Physiotherapy Hospital	24874330/9	Bneid Al-Gar	22531908
		Shaab	22518752
		Qibla	22459381
		Ayoun Al-Qibla	22451082
		Mirqab	22456536
		Sharq	22465401
		Salmiya	25746401

Clinics

Kaizen center	25716707
Rawda	22517733
Adalya	22517144

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Liverpool demolish United 7-0

Klopp's men set a new record margin of victory



LIVERPOOL: Liverpool's Dutch striker Cody Gakpo (left) vies with Manchester United's Brazilian midfielder Antony during the English Premier League football match between Liverpool and Manchester United on March 5, 2023. — AFP

LIVERPOOL: Cody Gakpo, Darwin Nunez and Mohamed Salah all scored twice as Liverpool shrugged off a season of frustration to thrash Manchester United 7-0 at Anfield on Sunday. Jurgen Klopp's men set a new record margin of victory in the clash between English football's two most successful clubs. Just a second defeat in 23 games in all competitions realistically ends United's hopes of a first league title in a decade as they remain 14 points adrift of leaders Arsenal in third.

But there could even more lasting damage from the club's heaviest defeat since 1931. Liverpool close to within three points of fourth-placed Tottenham with a game in hand on Spurs still to come. Klopp's side won the two league meetings between the teams by an aggregate score of 9-0 last season, but the tables had seemingly turned this season. A 2-1 win over the Reds in August gave Erik ten Hag his first win as United boss and they started the day 10 points clear of Liverpool.

Liverpool have looked a shadow of the side that



LIVERPOOL: Liverpool's Egyptian striker Mohamed Salah celebrates after scoring their sixth goal during the English Premier League football match between Liverpool and Manchester United on March 5, 2023. — AFP

came close to an unprecedented quadruple of trophies last season. But either side of a 5-2 humiliation on home soil by Real Madrid, they have got back in the race for a place in the Champions League next season thanks to a run of 13 points from a possible 15 in the Premier League.

Ten Hag told his players to embrace the hostile environment of Anfield, where United have not won since 2016. The visitors were forced to see off an early onslaught, but still arguably had the better chances of a fractious first half. Bruno Fernandes headed inches wide and Marcus Rashford should have continued his blistering goalscoring form when he fired tamely into the arms of Alisson. Casemiro also saw a goal ruled out for offside, but Liverpool finally produced a moment of quality in the final third to break the deadlock two minutes before the break.

Andy Robertson sliced open the United defense to play in Gakpo, who cut inside and fired low into the far corner. Ten Hag's men were then blown

away in the second period as Liverpool's new-look front three finally clicked. Nunez punished sloppy United defending as the Uruguayan stooped to head in Harvey Elliott's cross. Moments later, Gakpo scored his second with a delightful dink over David de Gea at the end of a lightning Liverpool counter-attack. It could have been even worse for United as Robertson and Ibrahima Konate saw efforts fly inches wide.

But Salah got the goal his performance deserved as he crashed in Nunez's through ball off the underside of the bar. Nunez then headed in his second as he was left completely unmarked from Jordan Henderson's cross. Salah moved outright as Liverpool's all-time Premier League goalscorer with 129 with a simple tap in after more shambolic United defending. Roberto Firmino will move on to pastures new at the end of the season it was revealed this week. But the Brazilian came off the bench to have the final say as he slotted a remarkable seventh two minutes from time — AFP

Mbappe breaks PSG goal record

PARIS: Kylian Mbappe became Paris Saint-Germain's all-time top scorer with his 201st goal for the club in their 4-2 win over Nantes in Ligue 1 on Saturday. The France superstar had equalled Edinson Cavani's previous record mark of 200 goals with a brace in last week's win at Marseille and went one better by netting in stoppage time at the Parc des Princes.

PSG had earlier squandered a two-goal lead as they prepared for their crunch trip to Bayern Munich, with Lionel Messi putting them ahead and a Jaouen Hadjam own goal making it 2-0 inside 17 minutes before Nantes fought back to draw level prior to half-time. Ludovic Blas pulled one back for the visitors and Ignatius Ganago equalised, but Mbappe

set up Danilo Pereira to put PSG back in front on the hour mark and then claimed his record-breaking goal late on. Mbappe reached the record in just 247 appearances since signing from Monaco aged 18 in 2017. Uruguayan star Cavani needed 298 games, and seven years, to establish the previous record in 2020.

The 24-year-old Mbappe was handed a trophy by the club after the game to mark his record in an on-field presentation. The result sees PSG open up a lead of 11 points at the top of Ligue 1 before nearest rivals Marseille play on Sunday, and before the Qatar-owned club go to Bayern for the second leg of their Champions League last-16 tie on Wednesday. PSG trail 1-0 from the first leg against the Bavarians and failure to progress to the quarter-finals in Europe would put a dampener on the end of the season for a club who do not have their problems to seek.

Injured Moroccan star Achraf Hakimi watched from the stands at the Parc des

Princes a day after he was charged with rape following accusations made by a 24-year-old woman. Neymar was also a spectator and will not be back for the match against Bayern, while centre-back Presnel Kimpembe is set to miss the remainder of the season with an achilles injury. Coach Christophe Gallier lost another defender to injury in the second half of this game, with skipper Marquinhos coming off in some discomfort with what looked a side strain.

Before the game there was a minute's applause for Just Fontaine, the legendary former France striker who scored 13 goals at the 1958 World Cup and who passed away on Wednesday at the age of 89. Fontaine also coached PSG, leading them to promotion to the top tier of French football in 1974. The Parisians went ahead in the 12th minute, with Messi turning in a deflected low cross from Nuno Mendes to score his 13th Ligue 1 goal this season. — AFP



PARIS: Paris Saint-Germain's French forward Kylian Mbappe raises a trophy during a ceremony after he became Paris Saint-Germain's all-time top scorer with his 201st goal for the club. — AFP

Verstappen wins Bahrain Grand Prix

SAKHIR: World champion Max Verstappen claimed his maiden season-opening victory and first at the Sakhir circuit on Sunday when he led Sergio Perez home in a dominant Red Bull one-two at the Bahrain Grand Prix. The defending double world champion led from start to finish, bar the pit stops, to establish himself as a strong favourite for a third consecutive drivers' crown this year.

It was his first win in the Gulf state at the 10th attempt. Behind the two Red Bulls, two-time champion Fernando Alonso continued to make light of his 41 years by storming his way to a rousing third place for Aston Martin in his first appearance with the team since succeeding the retired four-time champion

Sebastian Vettel. It was his record-increasing 356th race in Formula One in a career that started 22 years earlier, to the weekend, in Melbourne at the 2001 Australian Grand Prix.

Fellow Spaniard Carlos Sainz, who he passed in a late scrap for a podium finish, finished fourth in the second Ferrari ahead of seven-time champion Lewis Hamilton of Mercedes and Lance Stroll, racing in the second Aston Martin just weeks after cracking both wrists and breaking a toe in a pre-season cycling accident. George Russell took seventh for Mercedes ahead of Valtteri Bottas of Alfa Romeo, Pierre Gasly of Alpine, who had started last, and Alex Albon who claimed a point for Williams finishing 10th. Charles Leclerc, who won the race in 2022, failed to finish after engine failure on his Ferrari on the 41st lap.

"Thank you, guys," said 25-year-old Verstappen. "It's exactly the start we need-

ed. I had a good start and first stint and then had a gap and just looked after the tyres." Verstappen made a clean, quick start to pull clear as Leclerc passed Perez for second while, behind them, Stroll hit his Aston Martin team-mate Alonso, under braking at Turn Four.

Both Mercedes had good starts and passed Alonso. Hamilton climbing to fifth ahead of Russell in pursuit of Sainz as Verstappen opened up a commanding lead. By lap five, he was four seconds clear as Leclerc kept Perez at bay. Gasly began the pit stops on lap 10, switching his Alpine from softs to hards, followed quickly by Lando Norris and Yuki Tsunoda with tyre degradation taking early effect. Hamilton pitted from fifth on lap 13, prompting a classic scrap as Alonso battled past Russell to regain his original grid slot and climb to third when both Ferraris pitted. Russell followed. — AFP



SAKHIR: Red Bull Racing's Dutch driver Max Verstappen reacts as he exits his car after winning the Bahrain Formula One Grand Prix at the Bahrain International Circuit in Sakhir on March 5, 2023. — AFP