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Speaker Ghanem returns to chair National Assembly office meeting

MPs demand swift approval of election commission • Demographics laws a priority



By B Izzak

KUWAIT: Speaker of the court-reinstated National Assembly Marzouq Al-Ghanem returned to the Assembly for the first time since last August, after the constitutional court scrapped last year's election process and reinstated the previous Assembly. Ghanem chaired a meeting of the Assembly's office, which was attended by most members but not by the opposition. No statement was issued following the meeting, and Ghanem did not speak to the press.

The constitutional court on Sunday in a shock ruling scrapped the results of the parliamentary elections held on Sept 29 last year, saying the Amiri decree that dissolved the previous Assembly was unconstitutional. The court also reinstated the previous National Assembly.

Meanwhile, 28 MPs from the reinstated Assembly submitted a motion in which they demanded swift approval of draft laws related to the election process, especially the establishment of a higher election commission. The motion called on all MPs to respect the verdict of the constitutional court and speeding up the process of approving a draft law to set up an independent higher election commission to oversee the entire election process and ensure no violations are committed.

The lawmakers also said they are ready to go back to the ballot boxes, but only after ensuring all conditions of transparency of the elections. The motion also gave the legislative and legal committee of the Assembly authority to complete all legislation related to the elections within one month. One of the signatories MP Ghannam Al-Jamhour, who lost his seat in the scrapped polls, charged that serious violations were committed during the elections. It was not immediately known when the reinstated Assembly will meet.

Also, several MPs of the restored parliament said proposed laws on the population structure will have priority as soon as the parliament reconvenes, adding the laws would have been in effect if the parliament had not been dissolved. They said the Assembly will resume its focus on the population structure, besides the budgets and financial projects, including foreign investment in Kuwait, the northern economic zone and Silk City.

The new foreigners' residency law is ready, with discussions over limiting expats' stay in Kuwait for only five years, excluding investors and those whose with rare specialties. The MPs said the law will be discussed further at the interior and defense committee. They said expats' health insurance will also be on the agenda of the returning parliament, which will support the health ministry's plans to ban expats from receiving treatment at government hospitals.

Kuwait oil spill sparks 'state of emergency'

KUWAIT: Kuwait Oil Company declared a "state of emergency" Monday over an oil spill on land, in an incident decried by environmental activists as a "recurring problem" in the state. The emergency was sparked by an "oil leak in the west of the country", the state-owned company said in a statement, as videos posted by Kuwaiti media showed a gushing pipe surrounded by a large slick of oil.



This grab from video shows a pipe spewing large amounts of oil.

"No injuries have occurred as a result of the leak and production has not been affected," company spokesman Qusai Al-Amer was quoted as saying, adding that no toxic fumes had been reported. The leak "occurred on land but not in a residential area", he later told AFP. Teams have been dispatched to determine the source of the leak and contain the incident, Amer said, declining to give the exact location or the extent of the spill.

Kuwait is a major oil-producing country where nearly 90 percent of government revenues come from oil. The key member within the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) is currently producing about 2.7 million barrels per day. Kuwait Oil Company has previously reported oil leaks in its fields in 2020 and 2016. Kuwait had two oil slicks off its shores in August 2017, including one that was 1.6 km long. Experts said the other spill, close to a joint Saudi-Kuwaiti oil field, may have released up to 35,000 barrels of crude.

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Putin ready to discuss Ukraine plan at Xi talks

MOSCOW: President Vladimir Putin told his Chinese counterpart Xi Jinping on Monday that Russia was open to discussing China's proposals to end the fighting in Ukraine at the start of high-stakes talks in the Kremlin. "We are always open to negotiations," Putin told Xi, who was on his first visit to Moscow since the start of Russia's military intervention in Ukraine last year. "We will certainly discuss all these issues, including your initiatives which we treat with respect, of course," Putin said.

The summit between the Russian president and the Chinese leader comes as China seeks to portray itself as a neutral party in the Ukraine conflict. But Washington has accused Beijing of mulling arms exports to Moscow - claims China has vociferously denied. Xi's three-day trip also serves as a show of support for internationally isolated Putin, just days after a war crimes tribunal issued a warrant for his arrest over accusation of unlawfully deporting Ukrainian children.

Shortly after landing at Moscow's Vnukovo Airport, Xi said his visit would give "new momentum" to Chinese-Russian ties. He was greeted by Deputy Prime Minister Dmitry Chernyshenko on a red carpet as a military brass band played the countries' anthems, Russian

Continued on Page 6



MOSCOW: Russian President Vladimir Putin meets Chinese President Xi Jinping at the Kremlin on March 20, 2023. — AFP

Palestinians condemn racist Zionist ideology

RAMALLAH: The Palestinian Authority on Monday called a Zionist minister's remarks denying the existence of the Palestinian people "conclusive evidence" of the Zionist government's "racist ideology".

The Zionist entity's far-right finance minister, Bezalel Smotrich, is part of veteran leader Benjamin Netanyahu's government that took office in December, one of the most rightwing in the country's history.

Smotrich, who has a history of incendiary remarks, faced international rebuke earlier this month after calling for a Palestinian town in the occupied West Bank to be "wiped out". "There are no Palestinians, because there isn't a Palestinian people," he said on Sunday in Paris, quoting French-Zionist

activist Jacques Kupfer at an event in his memory, according to a video circulating on social media.

Palestinian prime minister Mohammad Shtayyeh said ahead of a cabinet meeting on Monday the "inflammatory statements" made by Smotrich "are consistent with the first Zionist sayings of 'a land without a people for a people without a land'". They provided "conclusive evidence of the extremist, racist Zionist ideology... of the current (Zionist) government", Shtayyeh argued.

Continued on Page 6

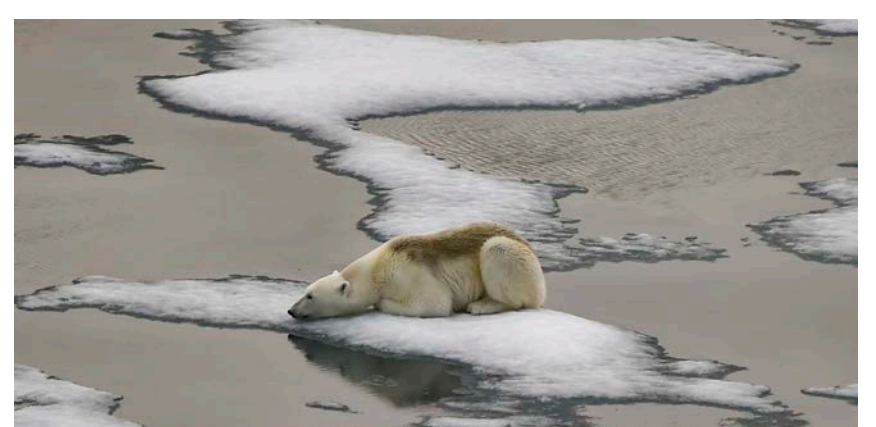
UN 'survival guide' report stark warning

PARIS: The world will cross the key 1.5-degree Celsius global warming limit in about a decade, the UN said Monday, warning that devastating impacts of climate change are hitting faster than expected. In the final instalment of a major series of reports, delivered in a crucial decade in human history, the UN's climate advisory panel urged dramatic reductions in plan-

et-heating emissions. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's key message is that while humanity has driven the planet to the precipice of climate catastrophe, there is still time to steer global temperatures to within relatively safe limits. That will require enormous global effort. "Rapid and far-reaching transitions across all sectors and systems are necessary to achieve deep and sustained emissions reductions and secure a livable and sustainable future for all," said the report's "summary for policymakers".

Distilling the weight of scientific knowledge on climate

Continued on Page 6



FRANZ JOSEF LAND, Russia: In this file photo taken on Aug 17, 2021, a polar bear is seen on ice floes in this archipelago on August 16, 2021. — AFP



Local

Municipal Council approves initiatives to reconstruct souq, beautify beach



KUWAIT: The Municipal Council members attend a session on Monday. Members approved initiatives for Kuwait commercial banks to reconstruct the sites damaged by the fire of Souq Al-Mubarakiya and a beautification project of Shuwaikh beach. —KUNA photos

KUWAIT: The Municipal Council in its main session on Monday (headed by Abdullah Al-Mahri), approved initiatives for Kuwait commercial banks to reconstruct the sites damaged by the fire of Souq Al-Mubarakiya and a beautification project and the development of part of Shuwaikh beach. The director general of Kuwait Municipality Ahmed Al-Manfouhi said during the session that the Council of Ministers agreed to accept this donation for the reconstruction of the sites damaged by the fire incident in Souq Al-Mubarakiya so that the area is rebuilt with the same heritage and architectural character and in coordination with the concerned authorities.

He stated that the initiatives was presented to

the council for approval in provisions of Article (21) paragraph (13) of the municipal law no (33) of 2016, which stipulates the competence of the municipal council to accept unconditional donations for the activities of the municipality after the approval of the Council of Ministers, which applies to all transactions of this kind.

Al-Manfouhi explained that the bank will submit the project to an advisory office for implementation in accordance with the conditions set for it, and the restoration and reconstruction process will be carried out under the supervision of the municipality as one of its projects. He pointed out that the rehabilitation and development of the square next to the national market,

which is one of the municipal projects will be done with a special donation from a local bank, as part of the trend to encourage the private sector - stressing that accepting the donation is subject to the approval of the Municipal Council.

He further stated that the municipality will make recommendation after the completion of the project, in case of addition of kiosks for commercial purposes. The council also approved the initiative of one of the banks to beautify and develop part of Shuwaikh beach, provided that the implementation of the works should be in accordance with the requirements of the Ministry of Public Works, the Ministry of electricity and water, the general Authority for agri-

culture and Fisheries Affairs and any other bodies that require coordination with them before the implementation of the works.

The council also approved the objection of the Minister of State for Municipal Affairs on the proposal to license Rehabilitation Centers for people with intellectual disabilities in residential areas to be close to their place of residence and residential areas for further study with the competent authorities. The council also approved the request of the Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs to expand the Ayed Al-Mutairi mosque located in Khaithan area, in addition to approving the proposal to classify cleaning companies according to capacity, capabilities and experience. —KUNA

Crimes

Customs confiscate supplies

KUWAIT: Land customs officers at Sulabiya vegetable market confiscated large amounts of subsidized supplies that are banned for export after shipments were inspected before leaving the country. A customs report was prepared to be sent to the commerce ministry for further legal action.

Citizen stabbed to death

KUWAIT: The public prosecution ordered a citizen be detained after he went to Ali Sabah Al-Saleem police station and told them he stabbed a citizen to death, then buried him in the desert and set his car on fire. Investigations are underway.

Three jailed for bribery

The criminal court sentenced a member of the Municipal Council and a middleman to 10 years in jail for receiving a bribe and fined them KD 360,000 each. It also sentenced a businessman to five years in jail. The prosecution charged the suspects of processing a transaction for a company in exchange of a KD 180,000 bribe.



KUWAIT: Kuwait Foreign Minister Sheikh Salem Abdullah Al-Sabah speaks during the meeting. —KUNA

FM underscores importance of joint Arab work

KUWAIT: Foreign Minister Sheikh Salem Abdullah Al-Sabah underscored the importance of bolstering joint Arab work in light of ongoing geopolitical changes. This came during his meeting with Arab ambassadors and heads of diplomatic missions accredited to the United Kingdom.

The meeting came prior to the top diplomat's visit to the British capital as head of Kuwaiti delegation engaging in the first round of strategic dialogue slated to be held on Monday. The foreign minister examined along with the diplomats the deeply rooted sturdy historic relations between Kuwait and the United Kingdom, as well as handled a slew of issues and developments on regional and international fronts, at the forefront of which is the Palestinian case.

Minister Sheikh Salem Al-Sabah took the opportunity to commend the Saudi-Iranian pact and underlined the necessity of extending peace bridges in support of security and stability. The minister also received Kuwaiti attaches in the UK to examine workflow and performances as he also hailed their exemplary efforts and their tireless work, and urged them to further their efforts in easing procedures of Kuwaiti citizens in the UK and providing them with the necessary services. —KUNA



KUWAIT: Federation Chief Major General Waleed Al-Shahab takes a photo with representatives from World Sports Union during the press conference. —Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat

Kuwait to host World Police Tournament

By Faten Omar

KUWAIT: Kuwait Police Sports Federation announced Kuwait will host the World Police Indoor Soccer Tournament in November. Federation Chief Maj Gen Waleed Al-Shahab said the tournament will be held under the auspices of the World Police Sports Union, headed by IHH the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Al-Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, in cooperation with Kuwait Football Association.

In a press conference held on Monday, Shahab announced Kuwait's hosting of the tournament based on international regulations, with referees from inside and outside Kuwait. "The World Police Indoor Soccer

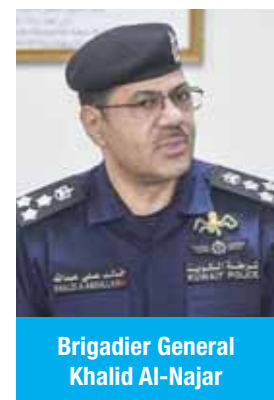
Tournament is an international futsal tournament for police officers from around the world. The keenness of the federation to ensure teams participate seriously in international competitions is reflected in the participation of the Kuwait Police Sports Federation team, especially since the union has all the necessary resources at its disposal and can effectively represent the Kuwait police force," he said.

"The Police Sports Federation will work to prepare the Kuwaiti police team in the best way to ensure the best result in the tournament, which is expected to witness the participation of 32 teams representing various countries of the world," he added. Shahab affirmed the federation's keenness in exerting all possible efforts to make this tournament a success and make clear progress for Kuwait, as the game will be at the global level following international laws set by FIFA.

The federation's deputy secretary general Brig Gen Khalid Al-Najar affirmed that 15 countries have already confirmed their participation so far. "During the past 10 days, 15 countries confirmed their participation. The aim is to have 32 teams, but there are still

two months before the registration for the tournament closes," he said.

Vice-President of the Colombian World Police Sports Union Maj Gen Gonzalez Londono said due to its successful organization of numerous international police and regional sports events since it headed the organization of union events in 1994, Kuwait is a significant member of the organization, and that is why the tournament will be held in the country. Regarding Kuwait's notable international activity, he pointed out the World Police Sports Union has a close relationship with Kuwaiti Police Sports Federation, affirming Kuwait's success as its cadres are highly skilled at organizing the most significant police sports competitions.



Brigadier General Khalid Al-Najar



Major General Waleed Al-Shahab



Major General Gonzalez Londono

'Influence of Arabic Literature on the Western Literature'

By Majd Othman

KUWAIT: As part of the celebrations of Francophonie Month, and in cooperation with the Contemporary Art Platform (CAP), the French Institute of Kuwait hosted on Sunday a lecture under the title "Influence of Arabic Literature on Western Literature of the Middle Ages", presented by French researcher Dr Sana Sassi.

Sassi is a researcher with a doctorate from Sorbonne University, and a member of the French Research Centre of the Arabian Peninsula (CEFREPA). She is a specialized researcher in human sciences and language, and her research focuses mainly on the French literature of the Middle Ages. Among other things, she is the author of the book "The rewritings of Christian novels in the 13th, 14th and 15th centuries", published by Harmattan in Paris.

Sassi told Kuwait Times that everyone usually thinks Western and especially French literature is the main influencer of Arabic literature, but it's the opposite, especially during Middle Ages. "Western writers came to the Arab region and took lots of their knowledge, archeology, arts and literature. And this is what I am trying to highlight in this event," she said. Sassi said the most important points she will focus on is historical influences and how the narratological and linguistic way of writing looked like. "Also themes, as there are lots of things that Arab people talked about even before French and European people wrote about it. We are talking about a literature that traveled for around 400 years before the Western people adopted it," she added.

The Francophonie Month

Sassi explained the importance of highlighting literature during Francophonie Month. "In my point of view, it's important not only to read books, but also understand how they were written. We can never write a book from nothing - we always have something to start from, or



KUWAIT: As part of the celebrations of Francophonie Month, and in cooperation with the Contemporary Art Platform (CAP), the French Institute of Kuwait hosted a lecture under the title 'Influence of Arabic Literature on Western Literature of the Middle Ages'.

something might inspire us. History is showing us that we cannot do anything alone; we always need someone else to give us some ideas," she said.

Kuwaiti-French literature

Regarding the Kuwaiti-French relationship in the literature domain, she said: "There is a lot of cooperation between both countries, especially in the translation field for many Kuwaiti books. As an example, Kuwaiti author Taleb Al-Refaei has many amazing books translated into many languages. In my opinion, literature is very important to meet other people's cultures. I discovered his literature after reading his books translated into French. Books travel everywhere, and this is how anybody anywhere can discover the culture of many countries. It helped me discover the culture and history of Kuwait through just enjoying reading books."

"We have continuous cultural activities throughout the year, but we decided to cooperate with the French Institute on the occasion of Francophonie Month, because we care about the cultural relations between

communities in Kuwait. The topic that was chosen is an important topic that enjoys a large public turnout in Kuwait, especially due to the lack of resources on the influence of Arabic literature on Western literature," Director of Cultural Programs Ibrahim Farghali told Kuwait Times. Benoit Cathala, Cooperation and Cultural Counselor Director of the French Institute said as part of Francophonie Month, "we had sports events, concerts, conferences, debates, film festivals and many partnerships with universities and galleries".

Francophone community

Cathala pointed out the Francophone community in Kuwait reached more than 500,000 people, while the French community is only 1,000. "So, it is all about the link of the French language in the region and Kuwait. French is being taught in Kuwait schools since the sixties. Kuwait asked to be a member of the Francophone Organization four years ago, but it was postponed due to COVID-19. The next summit will take place next year in Paris and will look at new membership requests, including from Kuwait," he said.

Local

International Committee of the Red Cross marks 160th anniversary 'serving humanity'

By Ghadeer Ghloom

KUWAIT: The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) held a meeting on Monday to mark its 160th anniversary 'serving humanity', in the presence of Regional Head of Delegation for GCC Countries Mamadou Sow. During the meeting, Sow linked ICRC not only to human aid, but also to Islamic values. "The story of ICRC is about men and women who are victims of war around the world. It is also the story of men and women whose work is harnessed for the idea that is taught by Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and his companions - that men, women and children should be spared in times of war. This idea was later embraced in the Geneva convention and it's the essence of what we do today in so many countries," he said.

Sow also said ICRC and Kuwait are joined by an outstanding relationship that has existed since the liberation of Kuwait, especially in the last 30 years. "Today our strategic partnership is a source of strength for us, particularly in the leading efforts to alleviate suffering in places where we are working around the world, from Bangladesh to Syria to Yemen to Lebanon, not to mention Afghanistan and

many other places. We have together established concrete humanitarian action to enable the needed assistance to victims around the world," he said.

Although Sow has been in Kuwait only for seven months, he said he has already learned a lot from Kuwaitis. "I have learned that true wealth is not really what you accumulate, but also what you share with the community and people around the world. I believe this is a true investment - it is an investment in hope and humanity. So, I would love to express my appreciation to the people and the government (of Kuwait)," he said.

However, according to Sow, ICRC's work is not done yet. Today, there are many conflicts around the world. For instance, in Yemen, the population is around 30 million people, but 24 million of them are in need of humanitarian aid. Up to 17 or 19 million people face food insecurity, 17 million lack access to clean water and 3 million have been displaced. ICRC's action is absolutely needed in Yemen, where ICRC works on helping Yemenis with all their needs.

Sow said ICRC is also present in Gaza and the West Bank to continue supporting Palestinians, despite their suffering is no longer in the news like before.

Moreover, 15 million Syrians need humanitarian assistance, because on top of 12 years of war, a massive earthquake affected them too, so ICRC is there to help and alleviate their suffering. Speaking about the Syrians' sufferings after the earthquake, Sow repeated his gratitude and appreciation to Kuwaitis who donated and supported the Syrians after the earthquake struck.

Sow also mentioned Afghanistan, saying Afghanistan's infrastructure has collapsed. Thus, ICRC has taken it upon itself to take care of more than 30 hospitals. "These are only a few examples of crises that the world is facing. There are also situations in different parts in Africa regarding food insecurity, and the list goes on, especially since the guns are not silent in Africa," he said. Sow assured ICRC, as it has been doing in the last 160 years, will continue standing on the side of people who are suffering around the world.

Additionally, Sow highlighted the importance of the relationship between ICRC with Kuwait and GCC countries. "ICRC's office in Kuwait is the regional office. We have also opened offices in Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Oman and the United Arab Emirates, and we will visit Bahrain. So, we are present here in the



KUWAIT: Regional Head of delegation for GCC countries Mamadou Sow (left) chats with Alaa Nayel, Communication Officer at the International Committee of the Red Cross.

GCC because we think that the GCC is a very important place for ICRC, not only to do humanitarian action, but also to partner with many parties and governments to support people in need globally," he said.

Sow added in terms of action in GCC countries, ICRC does a lot of teaching on international humanitarian law, because people have to recognize this law in order to respect it. "If it is not respected, it will not save lives. But people will not

respect it if it is not known. That is why you find us in different places like the military academy, at diplomatic institutes, at universities, to make sure that humanitarian laws are known," he said.

Sow expressed his gratitude to people of Kuwait and the government, and highlighted the humanitarian leadership of HH the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah for positioning Kuwait as a strong supporter of humanitarian activities around the world.

WHO's chief praises Kuwait's humanitarian efforts

GENEVA: WHO Director-General Dr Tedros Ghebreyesus on Monday praised Kuwait's aid for afflicted countries, especially the victims of the recent earthquake waves that hit Turkey and Syria. This came in a statement during his meeting with Kuwait's Permanent Representative to the United Nations and International Organizations Naser Al-Hein at Kuwait Embassy headquarters in Geneva.

Ambassador Al-Hein said that the meeting tackled latest humanitarian developments in Syria and Turkey, and the amount of suffering that he witnessed in his visit to Aleppo. He added that the director-general briefed him on the organization's plans and programs to deal with the Turkey-Syria crisis, and he valued Kuwait's contribution and efforts.

World Health Organization chief lauded Kuwait's

healthcare system, saying it has enjoyed great success in fighting non-communicable diseases through effective treatment and preventive measures. Kuwait has made great efforts in a bid to boost its healthcare system, the WHO chief told the country's permanent representative to the United Nations and other international bodies during talks. The Kuwaiti diplomat praised his country's "exceptional" rapport with WHO, saying bilateral cooperation has been fruitful across numerous fields.

Anti-epidemics programs

Meanwhile, Kuwait Ministry of Health (MoH) has adopted World Health Organization's programs for monitoring and predicting and responding to outbreaks of epidemics, a ministry official said. The whole world has dedicated attention to latest treatments for viral and communicable diseases, conducting intensive studies to reach most effective treatments, Dr Buthaina Al-Mudhaf, the MoH assistant undersecretary for public health said during a conference themed "Kuwait second infection control conference." The conference sheds light on latest innovations and challenges facing efforts for combating the infectious diseases. —KUNA



Kuwait's Permanent Representative to the United Nations and International Organizations Naser Al-Hein meets WHO Director-General Dr Tedros Ghebreyesus. —KUNA

In my view

Drugs awareness

By Dr Khalid Al-Saleh

Local@kuwaittimes.com

I participated in two events of drugs awareness last week. The first was along with volunteers fighting drugs, while the second was a workshop on the capabilities of drug gangs to use science and brainwashing to spread drugs around the world. Dr Musaed Al-Najjar, a security academic with experience in fighting drugs, introduced me to the volunteers, some of are participating in this effort with the American Embassy, which is interested in protecting its people and others from falling in the trap of misuse of drugs and addiction in general.

The meeting reflected the benefit of cooperation between communities that are interested in such major issues like drugs, and there is no doubt that the participation of the American Embassy with its leadership in the field of awareness in all humanitarian issues is a positive act. They deserve thanks for it. We have this voluntary alliance that will achieve its goals in protecting our children and children of all our guests from the dangers of drugs.

The second participation was at an important workshop about brainwashing in drugs issue that was organized by the Secretariat General of the Arab Federation for Drugs Prevention and supported by Kuwait Foundation for the Advancement of Sciences. It was hosted by Kuwait Social Association.

This workshop focused on one of the most important drugs issues at this time, which is the use of science and psychology to convince leaders around the world to side with legalizing drugs and make it accessible to people, and even protect it by law. The workshop showed how gangs, which have huge financial sources, used the science of brain programming to send certain messages in order to convince youth and sometimes children how to deal positively with narcotic substances and hallucinogenic tablets and consider them as something normal in life.

The workshop revealed new tools that must be confronted at the level of family, state and legislations. A confrontation that prevents the loss of our youth's minds, our lagging behind in the development race which needs aware mental energy and not brains absent and lost to addiction. Thanks to the efforts of the American Embassy and the Arab Federation for Drug Prevention - we wish them success in their noble efforts.



KUWAIT: Participants attend a symposium held by the Arab Planning Institute on Monday. —KUNA photos



Kuwait's women empowerment 'key pillar of Vision 2035'

KUWAIT: The secretary general of the Supreme Council for planning and Development Dr Khalid Mahdi, stressed that the empowerment of women is a key pillar of the Kuwait Vision 2035 and the development plan for their involvement in the labor market in a way that achieves the fifth goal of sustainable development.

This was stated in a statement to the Kuwaiti news agency (KUNA) on the sidelines of the symposium (women's economic empowerment) held by the Arab Planning Institute on Monday - titled "The reality and challenges of women's empowerment in accordance with the Kuwait Vision 2035".

Dr Mahdi explained that the policies of the development plan emphasize the importance of women's empowerment, stressing the state's keenness to develop and empower women's capabilities to have a positive and important role in the public and private sectors.

He added that women's empowerment is considered an intellectual luxury. It is urgently needed to make the social, economic and political impact. It enhances growth rates in all areas. Amal Al-Hamad, economic adviser for local and international affairs at the Arab Planning Institute, said in a similar statement that this seminar highlights

what Kuwaiti women have been doing for years and reviews their achievements in all fields - political, economic and social development.

In turn, the chairman of the board of Directors of Abdullah Al-Salem University Dr Moudi Al-Hammoud, said in a similar statement, that women are an essential and important element in the economic construction of the state, indicating that the vision of 'Kuwait Vision 2035' takes care of the Kuwaiti citizen, whether man or woman.

Al-Hammoud added that empowering women and enhancing their role need legislation first and then government decisions - pointing out that she needs support. She stated that Kuwaiti women are distinguished by their education and excellence. The seminar discussed women and the challenges they face. —KUNA



Kuwait University Acting Director opens session, with GCC higher education chief attending. —KUNA photos



GCC student committee deans

Deans of Student Affairs urge exchange of ideas

KUWAIT: Acting Director of Kuwait University Dr Fahad Al-Rashidi on Monday confirmed the 33rd meeting of the Deans of Student Affairs Committee in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC)

countries, enhances opportunities for openness, communication and exchange of experiences between universities and Gulf higher education institutions. This was in Dr Al-Rashidi's speech during the opening of the meeting, which is being hosted by Kuwait in Sabah Al-Salem University City and will continue until tomorrow, Tuesday.

This meeting embodies the belief of the Deanships of Student Affairs activating the role of youth through the implementation of development plans that give youngsters an effective strategic role in growth considering the changes that the world is

passing through to its future, Al-Rashidi said. He pointed to the important role of the Deanships of Student Affairs in highlighting and encouraging student talents, which contributes to achieving the 2030 UN Sustainable Development Goals, given that young people are the pivotal aspect of the educational process and are relied upon in achieving the knowledge and qualitative leap in the region.

In a similar speech, Acting Dean of Student Affairs at Kuwait University Dr Dhari Al-Huwail said that this meeting confirms the depth of Gulf ties and interdependence between them, point-

ing out that the Gulf is full of creative humans. The Deanships of Student Affairs deals with youths that must employ for the development of society by caring for them to create a conscious generation, he indicated.

The agenda of the meeting is full of activities that highlight the efforts and achievements of the Deanships of Student Affairs, especially the Deanship of Student Affairs at Kuwait University, to introduce them to the activities provided by the university through a tour of several faculties of Kuwait University, he stated. —KUNA

News in Brief

Schools to start at
9:30 am in Ramadan

KUWAIT: School hours for the holy month of Ramadan will start at 9:30 am for all educational stages, the Ministry of Education announced Monday. Kindergarteners will get off school at 1 pm, elementary school students at 1:30 pm and both intermediate and secondary school students will go home at 2 pm. The ministry's spokesperson Ahmed Al-Wahida said the start times for schools at the Department of Special Education won't go past those at public schools. — KUNA

Mikshat turnout
exceeds 60,000

KUWAIT: More than 60,000 visitors, including citizens and residents, enjoyed the unique atmosphere and events at the Mikshat recreational project, Minister of Social Affairs May Al-Baghli said in a press statement. The one-of-a-kind entertainment which offered visitors activities such as watching folklore performances, enjoying delicious food and shopping local products. It lasted for a month at the waterfront of Sulaibikhat Beach. At a ceremony honoring the volunteers, Baghli emphasized the importance of supporting and caring for creative Kuwaiti youth, pointing out that the doors of the ministry are always open to creative young people who wish to contribute to the country's development and prosperity.

GCC committee talks
investment definition

RIYADH: The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Common Market Committee discussed Monday the unified definition of investment within Gulf countries. The GCC Secretariat announced in a statement the meeting handled discussions of tabled items revolving around investment development in Gulf states, including the mechanism of electronically linking investment bodies within each country. — KUNA

Photo of the Day



KUWAIT: A bee and a ladybug sit on blooming flowers at a park in Kuwait City on March 20, 2023. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

KRCS affirms Kuwait's support for Palestine

Palestinian president hails Kuwait's vital role

RAMALLAH: Kuwait Red Crescent Society (KRCS) Chairman Dr Hilal Al-Sayer on Monday reiterated Kuwait's unyielding support to the Palestinian cause. Speaking to KUNA while concluding a two-day visit to Palestine, Sayer said Kuwait's leadership, government and people strongly back the Palestinian people, boasting that Kuwait provides them with health, relief and food aid. He added that the visit encompassed inaugurating projects and holding meetings aimed at bolstering partnerships. Sayer said the children's intensive care unit "Mohammad Zaman Aqeel" was opened yesterday at the Kuwaiti hospital by Palestinian Prime Minister Mohammad Shtayeh.

Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas praised Kuwait's "important and pivotal" role in supporting the Palestinian people and their just cause at all levels. The Palestinian News Agency (Wafa) noted that Abbas's praise came during his reception in the city of Ramallah to the KRCS delegation.

The Palestinian leader stressed the strong relations that bind the two peoples and countries. Abbas



RAMALLAH: Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas receives a delegation from Kuwaiti Red Crescent Society headed by Hilal Al-Sayer. — KUNA

also stressed the importance of such visits in supporting the steadfastness of the Palestinian people.

Sayer thanked Abbas for the warm welcome they received and briefed them on the progress of the various projects implemented jointly with the Palestine Red Crescent. The KRCS chief thanked the Kuwaiti, Jordanian, and Palestinian Foreign Ministry as well as Kuwaiti embassies in Jordan and occupied Palestine for their efforts in easing the delegation's mission. He also extended thanks to Palestinian Red Crescent Society, and commended the projects they have executed.

In another development, Secretary General of the Arab League Ahmad Abul-Gheit expressed

Sunday extreme dismay about the deteriorating situation in the occupied Palestinian Territories due to the Israeli occupation's excessive violence and escalation. This came in a press statement issued by the Arab League following Abul-Gheit's meeting with Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Mikhail Bogdanov in Cairo today. During the meeting, both sides discussed Arab-Russian relations and the situation in the Arab region. Abul-Gheit also listened to a briefing from Bogdanov about Russia's view to the Syrian, Yemeni and Libyan crises and options for settlement. They also discussed the political and serious economic crises in Lebanon. — KUNA



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KUWAIT: Science students engage with the Ministry of Electricity and Water booth.

KU inaugurates ScienceExpo 2023

KUWAIT: Acting Director of Kuwait University, Dr Fahd Al-Rashidi opened Monday the College of Science exhibition titled "ScienceExpo 2023", with participation from inside and outside the university.

Acting Dean of the College Dr Muhammad bin Sabt, said in a press statement that the annual exhibition is the largest held by the college with the participation of clubs affiliated with scientific departments and several entities from the public and private sectors.

The exhibition, said Bin Sabt, aims to introduce new students to the scientific departments of the college and its programs in order to determine their path at the college. Outside entities participated to introduce graduating students to job opportunities in their field and get them acquainted with the nature of work after graduation.

The head of the Office of Guidance and Counseling, Mona Mahmoud said the exhibition includes an introduction to the majors offered by the Faculty of Science and how they are related to one another.

Taking the spotlight this year is the marine sciences program, which first launched in 2016 and is the newest program at the college. The exhibit will explain the relationship of the marine sciences major



A marine sciences student shows visitors a specimen at the exhibit. — KUNA photos

with the rest of the scientific disciplines in the College and clarify the potential work opportunities that students can join after graduation.

The exhibition includes various scientific departments at the college of science, including chemistry, financial mathematics, applied chemistry, engineering physics, statistics, research and operations, applied statistics, physics, marine sciences, earth sciences and environmental and biological sciences. There were also pavilions where students presented their experiences and offered tutorials on some of the scientific procedures used in laboratories. — KUNA



Thai prime minister dissolves parliament, calls for election

Yemen warring parties agree prisoner swap as peace efforts accelerate

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North Korea's Kim leads 'nuclear counterattack' simulation drill

Drills were fourth show of force from Pyongyang in a week and came during Freedom Shield

SEOUL: North Korean leader Kim Jong Un led two days of military drills "simulating a nuclear counter-attack", including the launch of a ballistic missile, state media reported Monday. Kim expressed satisfaction over the weekend drills, which were held to "let relevant units get familiar with the procedures and processes for implementing their tactical nuclear attack missions", said the report by the official Korean Central News Agency (KCNA).

The drills were the fourth show of force from Pyongyang in a week and came during Freedom Shield, the biggest US-South Korea military exercise in five years. North Korea views all such exercises as rehearsals for invasion and has repeatedly warned it would take "overwhelming" action in response.

The weekend drills in North Korea were divided into exercises simulating the shift to a nuclear counter-attack posture and a drill for "launching a tactical ballistic missile tipped with a mock nuclear warhead", KCNA said. South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff said Sunday that the short-range ballistic missile flew 800 kilometres (500 miles) before landing in the East Sea, also known as the Sea of Japan.

They branded it a "serious provocation" that violated United Nations sanctions. Kim said the weekend drills had filled the North Korean military units "with great confidence", according to KCNA. He also noted that North Korea "cannot actually deter a war with the mere fact that it is a nuclear weapons state", and that it could only reach its goals "when the nuclear force is... actually capable of mounting an attack on the enemy."

Yang Uk, a researcher at the Asan Institute for Policy Studies, said the weekend drills demonstrated that North Korea's nuclear posture was becoming "a little more realistic". "It seems North Korea is trying

to show it possesses enough practical nuclear attack capabilities to conduct comprehensive tactical trainings for its frontline units," he said.

'Flashpoint'

Seoul and Washington have ramped up defence cooperation in the face of growing military and nuclear threats from Pyongyang, which has conducted a series of banned weapons tests in recent months.

It has also pushed South Korea and Japan to mend fences over historical disputes and try to boost security cooperation. On Thursday, North Korea test-fired its largest and most powerful inter-continental ballistic missile, the Hwasong-17, its second ICBM test this year.

That followed two short-range ballistic missiles on Tuesday and two strategic cruise missiles fired from a submarine last Sunday. The UN Security Council is expected to hold an emergency meeting on Monday over the ICBM launch at the request of the United States and Japan, South Korea's Yonhap news agency reported.

North Korea's nuclear claims cannot be taken at face value, said Leif Easley, a professor at Ewha University in Seoul. Photos published by North Korean state media showed Kim and his young daughter surrounded by uniformed officers watching the ICBM launch.

"If these firing drills were practice for real conflict, the leader would not be in the field with his daughter, posing with missiles for the cameras," Easley told AFP. Analysts previously said North Korea would likely use the US-South Korea drills as an excuse to carry out more missile launches and perhaps even a nuclear test.

This is turning the Korean peninsula into "a flash-



CHOSAN: Picture released by North Korea's official Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) on March 20, 2023 shows North Korea's leader Kim Jong Un (C) and his daughter (L) observing a warhead missile launch exercise simulating a tactical nuclear attack in Cheolsan county, North Pyongan Province. — AFP

point with higher potential for a nuclear war", said Lim Eul-chul, a professor at Kyungnam University's Institute for Far Eastern Studies. "As the intensity of the South Korea-US exercises increases, the possibility of unforeseen situations increases, and as a re-

sult, mutual physical clashes may occur," he added.

Last year, North Korea declared itself an "irreversible" nuclear power and Kim recently called for an exponential increase in weapons production, including tactical nuclear weapons. — AFP

ICC prosecutor vows war crimes accountability

LONDON: International Criminal Court prosecutor Karim Khan said Monday that the ICC "won't hesitate to act" over possible war crimes in Ukraine, as ministers from more than 40 countries met in London. The gathering, to discuss boosting support for its probes into the conflict, follows the court's issuance on Friday of an arrest warrant for Russian President Vladimir Putin and his Commissioner for Children's Rights, Maria Lvova-Belova.

They are accused of the war crime of "illegal deportation" of Ukrainian children following Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. In comments before the London conference, Khan said that other ICC investigations into alleged atrocities remained ongoing but required funding and technical support.

"We have a standard that we must meet in terms of the criminal prosecutions," he told BBC radio. "We can't do everything at once. We don't have unlimited resources." However, "If reliable evidence has been brought together and gathered, and if there's no exonerating evidence that mitigates or reduces the criminal responsibility, we won't hesitate to act," he said.

The meeting in the UK capital, hosted by justice minister Dominic Raab and his Dutch counterpart Dilan Yesilgoz-Zegerius, follows repeated

ICC calls for more support for its Ukraine probes. Alongside Khan, Ukraine's justice minister Denys Maliuska and its prosecutor general, Andriy Kostin, will address attendees.

London has already announced additional funding of nearly £400,000 (\$488,000) to help pay for psychological support for witnesses and victims of crimes or to hire additional British experts to reinforce the ICC. Other countries are expected to pledge practical and financial support for the court at the conference, according to the UK's justice ministry.

'Responsibility'

The event will also include sessions on evidence gathering and co-ordination to progress investigations, it said. "We are gathering in London today united by one cause, to hold war criminals to account for the atrocities committed in Ukraine during this unjust, unprovoked and unlawful invasion," Raab said.

Yesilgoz-Zegerius added that the international community "must take responsibility" for ensuring that the perpetrators of the crimes committed during the war in Ukraine are prosecuted. "Together we must establish the truth, achieve justice and ensure security," she said. In 2022, the Netherlands dispatched two forensic investigation teams under the banner of the ICC to collect evidence to be used in investigations into crimes committed in Ukraine since the start of Russia's invasion.

The ICC has more than 900 staff with a budget of 169 million euros for 2023, below the court's request of a 175 million euro budget for the year.



THE HAGUE: File photo shows 2022 Chief prosecutor of the International Criminal Court (ICC) Karim Khan poses for a picture at the ICC headquarters in The Hague. — AFP

Its 123 member states share responsibility for ensuring the court's finances. It also receives voluntary contributions from international organisations, individuals and corporations.

In his interview, Khan noted that the ICC decision to issue warrants against Putin and Lvova-Belova followed their own admissions that Ukrainian children had been taken to Russia during the conflict. "They're not denying that children have crossed international boundaries. They're not denying that they're given to Russian strangers for adoption," he said. "So the quite important elements of the offence are accepted by the individuals concerned." He added that countries cannot "treat children as the spoils of war... children deserve better". — AFP

20 years after US invasion, Iraq faces uncertain future

BAGHDAD: Iraq on Monday marked 20 years since the start of the US-led invasion that toppled dictator Saddam Hussein, but no official celebrations were held. The oil-rich country remains traumatised from the years of war, occupation and bloody sectarian turmoil that followed the operation launched on March 20, 2003.

A semblance of normalcy has returned but Iraq still battles a range of entrenched challenges, from political instability to poverty and rampant corruption. Neighbouring Iran, the major Shiite power and arch-foe of the United States, now wields much influence in Iraq, whose Shiite majority was freed from the oppression of Sunni strongman Saddam.

Prime Minister Mohamed Shia al-Sudani, who is backed by a pro-Iranian coalition, at an event Sunday did not speak of the US invasion but only of the "fall of the dictatorial regime" of Saddam, who was caught, tried and executed. At a Baghdad conference on the eve of the anniversary, Sudani said: "We remember the pain and suffering of our people in those years that were dominated by senseless wars and systematic sabotage."

The government planned no events to mark the anniversary, and Baghdad's streets on Monday looked busy as ever, with most people more focused on the holy fasting month of Ramadan due to start later this week.

"It's a painful memory" for the country, said Fadel Hassan, 23, a journalism student. "There was a lot of destruction and too many victims-innocent people, Iraqis and American soldiers." The US march to war started under then-president George W. Bush and gained pace in the aftermath of the September 11, 2001 attacks on the United States by Osama bin Laden's militant group Al-Qaeda. Bush, backed by British prime minister Tony Blair, argued that Saddam presented a major threat and was developing weapons of mass destruction, although none were ever found.

'Shock and awe'

Operation Iraqi Freedom was launched with a ground invasion led by 150,000 US and 40,000 British forces, and the "shock and awe" bombing of strategic sites. Within three weeks, Saddam's regime had fallen, and the invasion forces took control of the capital Baghdad on April 9.

TV footage beamed around the world soon showed US Marines toppling a giant statue of Saddam, and later Bush declaring the "Mission Accomplished" aboard an American warship. But the invasion had sparked widespread disorder and looting, the chaos deepened by the US decision to disband the Iraqi state, ruling party and military apparatus.

The stated US drive to bring liberal democracy to Iraq was soon derailed by violence and sectarian conflict as Shiite militants battled with Sunni groups. By the time US troops left in 2011, the war had claimed the lives of more than 100,000 Iraqi civilians, according to the Iraq Body Count group, while US losses reached nearly 4,500.

The bloodshed would give rise to the Sunni extremists of the Islamic State group whose jihadist "caliphate" brought new horrors across Iraq and Syria before its eventual defeat, after a US-led coalition returned to help fight them. — AFP

India 'indispensable' in ensuring free Indo-Pacific: Japan PM

NEW DELHI: Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida on Monday called India vital to ensuring a free and open Indo-Pacific after talks with his counterpart touching on shared concerns about China. Speaking in New Delhi after meeting Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Kishida laid out plans for billions of dollars in investments in infrastructure and other sectors across the region.

"I have described Japan's plan to develop a free and open Indo-Pacific. To achieve this, India is an indispensable partner," Kishida said. "Japan will strengthen coordination with the US, Australia, UK, Canada, Europe and elsewhere. Of course, India is indispensable." India, Japan, the United States and Australia make up the Quad alliance, which positions itself as a bulwark against China's growing assertiveness in the Asia-Pacific region under President Xi Jinping.

India's relations with China nosedived after 20 Indian troops died in clashes with Chinese soldiers in 2020 on their disputed Himalayan frontier. In December Japan, officially pacifist since 1945, revamped its defence policy after warning that China, with which it has a fraught history, posed the "greatest security challenge ever". Japan is also boosting military spending and is carrying out more joint exercises with other countries, including India, which has also deepened defence cooperation with Western nations.

Quad summit

In June, Kishida had said Japan would help train 800 maritime security personnel and provide at least \$2 billion to other countries to buy patrol boats and build up infrastructure as part of the Free and Open



NEW DELHI: Japan's Prime Minister Fumio Kishida (L) shakes hands with his Indian counterpart Narendra Modi after attending a joint media briefing at the Hyderabad House in New Delhi on March 20, 2023. — AFP

Indo-Pacific (FOIP) strategy.

Kishida said Monday that FOIP's scope would expand to include new areas like climate change, cybersecurity and food security. It would also direct public and private capital worth \$75 billion towards Indo-Pacific infrastructure by 2030.

Kishida's visit came less than a fortnight after Modi hosted his Australian counterpart Anthony Albanese for talks that also covered worries about China. Albanese, who is also forging closer

ties with the United States and Britain under the separate so-called AUKUS alliance, is due to host all Quad leaders in May.

The Quad members deny hostile intentions and stress that they are not a military alliance, but China has described the grouping as an attempt to encircle it. Kishida had been expected to press Modi to take a tougher line on Russia's invasion of Ukraine, which India—a major buyer of Russian arms and oil—has refused to condemn. — AFP

International

Yemen warring parties agree prisoner swap as peace efforts accelerate

UN-brokered ceasefire brought a sharp reduction in hostilities

SANAA: Yemen's Huthi rebels and the internationally recognised government have agreed at talks in Switzerland to swap more than 880 prisoners, both sides said Monday as efforts accelerate to end the war. The agreed exchange comes after Saudi Arabia and Iran, who back opposing sides in the conflict, this month moved towards restoring diplomatic ties after a seven-year rupture.

"An agreement has been reached to implement a (prisoner) swap" that will see more than 880 people released in total, said Abdul Qader al-Murtada, the leading Huthi delegate to the talks in Bern, according to the rebel's Al-Masirah TV channel.

The exchange is set to take place within weeks, he said. The Huthis seized control of the capital Sanaa in 2014, prompting a Saudi-led intervention the following year and fighting that has left hundreds of thousands dead and caused one of the world's worst humanitarian crises.

A UN-brokered ceasefire that took effect last April brought a sharp reduction in hostilities. The truce expired in October, though fighting largely remains on hold. Under the agreement, the Iran-backed Huthis will release 181 detainees, including Saudi and Sudanese nationals, in exchange for 706 prisoners, said Murtada, who heads the Huthi's National Committee for Prisoners' Affairs. Sudanese soldiers have taken part in the Saudi-led coalition.

"The swap will be implemented after three weeks," Murtada said, noting there are plans for another round of prisoner-exchange talks in coming months. Majed Fadail, a member of the Yemeni government's delegation, said that the Huthis would re-

lease former defence minister Mahmoud al-Subaihi and other officials, as well as four journalists.

A Yemeni government official, who asked not to be named as he was not authorised to speak to the press, said 15 Saudi citizens and three Sudanese nationals were among those to be freed.

The Yemeni government welcomed the agreement in a statement released by the official Saba news agency, praising efforts by the UN and the ICRC to facilitate the deal.

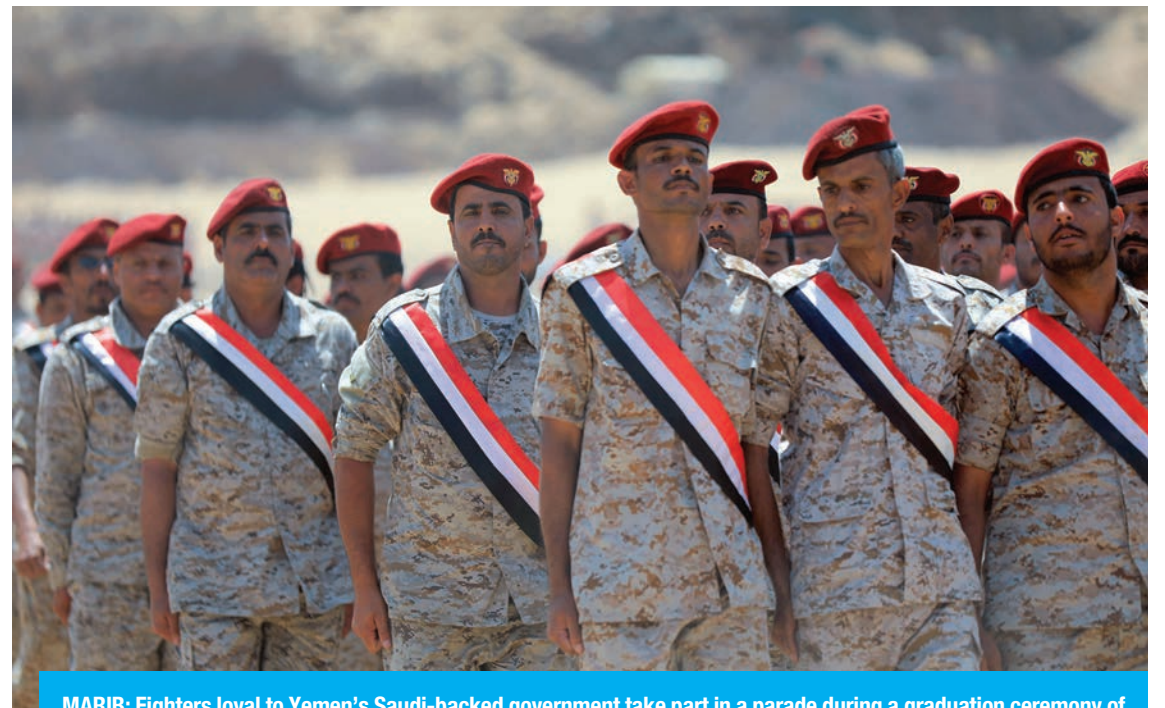
Diplomatic momentum

The prisoner swap was announced after Hans Grundberg, the UN Secretary General's Special Envoy for Yemen, last week noted "intense diplomatic efforts" to end the conflict.

The negotiations in Switzerland, overseen by the United Nations and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), started earlier this month. The UN and the ICRC have yet to comment on the deal.

The latest closed-door negotiations mark the seventh meeting aimed at implementing an agreement on prisoner exchanges reached in Sweden five years ago. Under that deal, the sides agreed "to release all prisoners, detainees, missing persons, arbitrarily detained and forcibly disappeared persons, and those under house arrest", held in connection with the conflict, "without any exceptions or conditions".

The latest agreement comes a year after the Huthis said they had agreed to a prisoner swap that would see 1,400 rebels freed in exchange for 823 pro-government fighters—including 16 Saudis and three Sudanese nationals.



MARIB: Fighters loyal to Yemen's Saudi-backed government take part in a parade during a graduation ceremony of officers and the completion of specialised military courses, in the country's northeastern province of Marib. — AFP

In 2020, more than 1,050 detainees were released following an agreement reached by the warring parties, according to the ICRC.

During a Security Council meeting last week, UN officials said the detente between Saudi Arabia

and Iran should offer momentum towards peace. However, it will not solve all the problems in Yemen, where the influence of the two regional powers is only one dimension of an increasingly complex conflict, analysts warn. — AFP

UK hits more Iranian officials with sanctions

LONDON: The UK on Monday sanctioned more senior officials of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), including financiers and commanders, in its latest set of asset freezes and visa bans. The government said it was slapping sanctions on five board directors of a foundation which manages the IRGC's domestic investments, as well as two provincial commanders of the state security service.

It follows a flurry of other sanctions against Iranian officials by London, the European Union and the United States in recent months over Tehran's bloody crackdown on protesters. "Today we are taking action on the senior leaders within the IRGC who are responsible for funneling money into the regime's brutal repression," said UK Foreign Secretary James Cleverly.

"Together with our partners around the world, we will continue to stand with the Iranian people as they call for fundamental change in Iran." The UK has imposed dozens of asset freezes and UK travel bans since the start of the year on Iranian individuals and organisations, including leading IRGC commanders and Tehran's prosecutor general.

The last set of sanctions in January followed Iran announcing that it had executed British-Iranian dual citizen Alireza Akbari for spying for the UK, prompting widespread Western outrage. Demonstrations have swept Iran since the September 16 death in custody of Iranian Kurdish woman Mahsa Amini, 22, after her arrest for allegedly failing to adhere to the Islamic republic's strict dress rules.

Iran has since arrested at least thousands of people in the wave of protests, according to the United Nations and rights groups. — AFP

Donor conference seeks quake aid for Turkey, Syria

BRUSSELS: Aid organisations urged international donors at a funding conference in Brussels on Monday to step up their support for the victims of the devastating earthquake that hit Turkey and Syria last month. The catastrophic 7.8-magnitude quake flattened entire cities, killing more than 50,000 people across southeastern Turkey and parts of war-torn Syria.

Millions were displaced and a preliminary estimate from the United Nations says the damage in Turkey alone could amount to more than \$100 billion. Last week's flash floods in the region only added to the misery, killing 14 people living in temporary shelters. The United Nations Development Programme warned earlier this month about the poor level of response to a call made in mid-February for urgent funding.

One aid group, the International Rescue Committee (IRC), called on donors to at least ensure that the UN's emergency appeal for \$1 billion for Turkey and \$397 million for Syria are fully funded. The UN says the appeal for Turkey has so far only been 16 percent fulfilled, while

the figure for Syria stands at 72 percent. "Over a month since the earthquake, the situation in affected regions remains desperate," said Tanya Evans, IRC country director for Syria. "With many homes damaged or destroyed, many people are left with no choice but to sleep in overcrowded and under-resourced collective shelters," she said.

The European Union, which is hosting the conference in coordination with Turkey's government, has said it plans to make a "significant pledge" for further relief, recovery and reconstruction. It has urged the rest of the international community to commit funds "in line with the scale and magnitude of the damage". Germany has said it will double its support for the quake victims to 240 million euros (\$255 million), and France promised an additional 12 million euros. Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, who has admitted "shortcomings" in the government's initial response as he bids for re-election in May, will address the meeting via video link. Turkey is a key partner for the EU even if ties are often strained, and the bloc already gives billions in aid to help its eastern neighbour house refugees from Syria's 12-year war.

Assad, Russia excluded

But the government of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, sanctioned by the West since the brutal crackdown that sparked the

ongoing civil war, will not be involved. While international rescue teams and aid flowed quickly to Turkey, humanitarian organisations faced major hurdles reaching stricken areas in northern Syria. UN investigators say the area became the "epicentre of neglect" as the warring factions and hesitancy by the international community held up desperately needed aid. "Syria deserves the world's solidarity and support," said Fabrizio Carboni, Middle East director for the International Committee of the Red Cross.

"Despite these staggering needs, which have deepened after the February earthquake, our work in Syria is heavily under-funded," he said. Aid has belatedly begun reaching the stricken areas in northern Syria, and the EU and United States eased sanctions to try to speed up deliveries, while the Syrian government opened two new border crossings.

Assad has been receiving calls and humanitarian aid from Arab leaders in the aftermath of the quake, in a move analysts say could be the start of improved ties. He arrived Sunday for his second visit since the quake to the United Arab Emirates, which has already pledged more than \$100 million in assistance.

The donor conference in Brussels is open to countries from the Middle East and across the globe, but Assad's key backer Russia is excluded because of the war Moscow launched against Ukraine. — AFP

Kuwait oil spill sparks 'state...'

Continued from Page 1

Kuwaiti environmental activist Khalid Al-Hajery said the extent of damage from Monday's oil leak remains largely unclear but decried non-compliance with environmental protocol. "The oil pollution we constantly see in the air, land and sea proves that the oil industry is not sufficiently serious when it comes to protecting the environment," said Hajery, who is the chairman of the Green Line Environmental Group, a non-governmental organization. "We are facing a re-

curing problem due to leniency and non-compliance with environmental and safety standards," he told AFP, criticizing Kuwait's Environment Public Authority for "not dealing firmly with the oil sector".

Kuwaiti oil expert AbdulSamee Bahbahani said the leak appears to stem from an abandoned oil well, citing images circulating on social media networks. "I think the well was closed improperly, which led to erosion of the pipes and the cement cover, as well as an increase in pressure," he said, explaining the reason for the oil gush and warning that a spark could ignite a fire. In 1991, during the first Gulf War, retreating Iraqi forces set fire to hundreds of Kuwaiti oil wells in blazes that took months to extinguish. — AFP

Russia said it opened a criminal probe into ICC prosecutor Karim Khan, saying he had accused "a person known to be innocent" and was planning "an attack on a representative of a foreign state enjoying international protection". Beijing and Moscow have drawn closer in recent years under a partnership that has served as a diplomatic bulwark against the West.

China has lambasted what it sees as a US-led pressure campaign against Russia as Moscow's military effort in Ukraine drags on, instead calling for what it calls "impartial" mediation of the conflict. "No single country should dictate the international order," Xi wrote in a Russian newspaper article published on Monday. "China has all along upheld an objective and impartial position based on the merits of the issue, and actively promoted peace talks," he added.

Beijing's stance has drawn criticism from Western nations, which say China is providing diplomatic cover for Moscow's armed intervention. They argue that China's proposals are heavy on grand principles but light on practical solutions. The United States last week said China's proposals would simply consolidate "Russian conquest" and allow the Kremlin to prepare a fresh offensive.

"We don't support calls for a ceasefire right now," White House national security spokesman John Kirby said Friday. "We certainly don't support calls for a ceasefire that would be called for by the PRC in a meeting in Moscow that would simply benefit Russia," he said, referring to the People's Republic of China, the country's official name.

Analysts say Xi's moves are unlikely to yield a cessation of hostilities, but his trip will be closely watched in Western capitals. The Wall Street Journal has reported that Xi could also be planning his first call with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky since the conflict began. Zelensky has said he would welcome talks with his Chinese counterpart. — AFP

Palestinians condemn racist...

Continued from Page 1

Evoking biblical "prophecies" that are "beginning to come true", Smotrich said. "After 2,000 years... God is gathering his people. The (Zionist) people are returning home. There are Arabs around who don't like it, so what do they do? They invent a fictitious people and claim fictitious rights to the land of, only to fight the Zionist movement," he said. "It is the historical truth, it is the biblical truth," he added.

"The Arabs in (the Zionist entity) must hear it, as well as certain Jews in (the Zionist entity) who are confused - this truth must be heard here at the Elysee Palace (in Paris), and at the White House in Washington, and everyone must hear this truth."

The minister, who met no French government officials during his trip, was speaking from a lectern which featured a map of so-called Greater Zionist entity, including the West Bank, annexed Golan Heights, blockaded Gaza Strip and Jordan - the neighboring Arab country that signed a peace treaty with the Zionist entity in 1994. The Zionist entity has occupied the West Bank since the Six-Day War of 1967, when it also seized east Jerusalem, the Gaza Strip and the Golan Heights.

Smotrich's comments came as Zionist and Pales-

tinian representatives met in the Red Sea resort of Sharm el-Sheikh along with Egyptian, Jordanian and US officials for "extensive discussions on ways to de-escalate tensions between the Palestinians and (Zionists)," according to a joint statement. The Jordanian foreign ministry on Monday condemned the minister's remarks, calling them "extremist racism" and Smotrich himself an "extremist".

It warned in a statement that his "use of a map... that encompasses the border of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan" may be in violation of the 1994 peace accord. Hamas, Gaza's Islamist rulers, said the comments revealed the "racist and fascist policies" of the Zionist entity, urging the international community to take a "firm stance".

Smotrich had called in early March for the Palestinian town of Huwara to be "wiped out" after two Zionists were shot dead there by an alleged Hamas militant. After the shooting, hundreds of rampaging Zionist settlers torched Palestinian homes and cars in the West Bank town, and a Palestinian man was killed in the nearby village of Zaatara. Speaking last month, the United Nations' Middle East envoy Tor Wennesland called for the "cycle of violence" in the Zionist-Palestinian conflict to be "stopped immediately".

Violence has intensified in the West Bank in recent months, coinciding with Netanyahu's return to office. Since the start of the year, the conflict has claimed the lives of 86 Palestinian adults and children, including militants and civilians. — AFP

Putin ready to discuss Ukraine...

Continued from Page 1

state media showed. During his initial meeting with Putin, Xi hailed "close ties" with Russia and the Russian leader said the two countries had "plenty of common objectives and tasks". The two will continue talks on Tuesday.

The two leaders are due to discuss China's 12-point position paper on the Ukraine conflict, which includes a call for dialogue and respect for all countries' territorial sovereignty. Putin has welcomed Beijing's statements on Ukraine as being indicative of a willingness to play a "constructive role" in ending the conflict.

But Kyiv on Monday reiterated calls for Russia to withdraw its forces from Ukraine. "We expect Beijing to use its influence on Moscow to make it put an end to the aggressive war against Ukraine," Ukrainian foreign ministry spokesman Oleg Nikolenko said in comments sent to AFP. A day before Xi's arrival, a defiant Putin went to the Russian-held Ukrainian city of Mariupol - his first visit to territory captured from Kyiv since Moscow's forces pushed across the border in Feb 2022.

Xi's visit also comes just days after the International Criminal Court (ICC) issued an arrest warrant for Putin on the accusation of unlawfully deporting Ukrainian children. Beijing said on Monday the ICC should avoid what it called "politicization and double standards" and respect the principle of immunity for heads of state. The court should "uphold an objective and impartial stance" and "respect the immunity of heads of state from jurisdiction under international law", foreign ministry spokesperson Wang Wenbin told a regular briefing.

UN 'survival guide' report...

Continued from Page 1

change, the IPCC's work will form the basis of intense political and economic negotiations in the coming years, starting with the UN COP28 climate negotiations in Dubai later this year. The 36-page summary - a synthesis of six major reports since 2018 - is a brutal reminder that while humanity has the tools to prevent climate catastrophe, it is still not putting them to use.

But it represents a "message of hope", the head of the IPCC told AFP. "We have know-how, technology, tools, financial resources - everything needed to overcome the climate problems we have known about for so long," Hoesung Lee said in a video interview. "What's lacking at this point is a strong political will to resolve these issues once and for all."

The IPCC said the world is currently set to reach

1.5C above pre-industrial levels - the more ambitious and safer target of the Paris Agreement - in the early 2030s, which will ratchet up the severity of impacts in the near future. "The fact that the people in power still somehow live in denial, and actively move in the wrong direction, will eventually be seen for and understood as the unprecedented betrayal it is," climate activist Greta Thunberg told AFP.

At just under 1.2C of warming so far, the world today has already seen a crescendo of deadly and destructive extreme weather. The most vulnerable populations have already been hit hard. "The warmest years we have experienced to date will be among the coolest within a generation," Friederike Otto, a climate scientist at Imperial College London and lead author of the report, told AFP.

The benefits to society and the world economy of capping global warming under 2C outweigh economic costs, the IPCC said. Breaching 1.5C could signal extinctions on land and in the oceans, crop failures and an increasing possibility of reaching so-called "tipping points" in the climate system, including the death of biodiversity-rich coral reefs and faster melting of the polar ice sheets feeding sea level rise. — AFP

International

Thai prime minister dissolves parliament, calls for election

Former coup leader seeks to extend army-backed rule

BANGKOK: Thai Prime Minister Prayut Chan-O-Cha dissolved the country's parliament on Monday, setting up a general election in May as the former coup leader seeks to extend army-backed rule. The vote pits unpopular former army chief Prayut, who came to power in a 2014 putsch, against the daughter of billionaire former PM Thaksin Shinawatra, whose shadow still looms over the kingdom's political scene despite more than a decade in exile.

The main opposition Pheu Thai group, fronted by Paetongtarn Shinawatra, is polling strongly but Thailand's junta-scripted 2017 constitution will make it hard for the party to secure the top job. A statement in the official Royal Gazette published on Monday announced the dissolution, and the Election Commission will confirm the date of the poll later, with May 7 or 14 tipped as the most likely.

The election is the second since the 2014 coup and the first since the country was rocked by massive youth-led pro-democracy protests in Bangkok in 2020. Unofficial campaigning has been under way for weeks, with rising living costs and the kingdom's sluggish recovery from the pandemic high on the agenda. The 68-year-old Prayut, who cemented his rule in a controversial election in 2019, has demonstrated a longevity that is rare in Thai politics. But in a poll pub-

lished Sunday of who voters would like to see as PM, Prayut lagged in third place at just over 15 percent, well behind front-runner Paetongtarn at 38 percent.

In the same poll of 2,000 people, conducted by the National Institute of Development Administration, nearly 50 percent said they would vote Pheu Thai, with Prayut's United Thai Nation party on around 12 percent.

Odds favour army

Pheu Thai have said they are targeting a big victory to prevent the military establishment from blocking their route to power-avoiding a repeat of 2019 when they won most seats but were shut out of government. Once the Election Commission has finalised the results, parliament is expected to appoint a prime minister sometime in July.

Under the army-drafted 2017 constitution, the prime minister is chosen by the 500 elected lower-house MPs and 250 senators—all of whom were appointed by the military. "I have a strong hope that we can form the government for sure," Paetongtarn told reporters at a rally on Friday. "That's why we... campaign about the landslide, because the landslide is going to make us strong enough to form the government." If successful, she would be the third Shinawatra to become premier after her father and his sister



BANGKOK: File photo shows Pheu Thai Party candidate Paetongtarn Shinawatra takes part in a party meeting at the Pheu Thai Party headquarters in Bangkok. Thai Prime Minister Prayut Chan-O-Cha has dissolved the country's parliament, an official announcement said March 20, setting up a general election in May. — AFP

Yingluck ousted by Prayut's coup in 2014. The opinion polls would indicate Pheu Thai are in with a chance, with many voters sick of Prayut and the lack of progress they have seen in their own lives. Prayut is polling behind the pro-reform Move Forward Party, which hopes to capitalise on the anti-establishment

spirit of the 2020 street protests. "I would argue that on the ground for the past four years that the sentiment of the era has changed so much for every institution in this country," Move Forward leader Pita Limjaroenrat told AFP, saying he believed voters were ready for change. "I am sure they will vote for the future, and not the good old days."

Coup-prone

Thailand has seen more than a dozen coups since the birth of democracy in 1932 and the military-royalist establishment remains a major force. It remains to be seen whether this elite is prepared to accept another prime minister linked to Thaksin, who remains a bogeyman figure for them.

Chulalongkorn University political analyst Thitinan Pongsudhirak told AFP the election would be "most consequential in my lifetime". It will decide whether the kingdom "breaks out of an entrenched prolonged rut that goes back two decades", he said. If Pheu Thai misses its landslide, it is possible that two or more military-linked parties—such as Prayut's United Thai Nation and the ruling Palang Pracharath Party—will form a coalition. Thailand's Constitutional Court has also previously dissolved two of Pheu Thai's predecessor parties, in 2006 and 2008. — AFP



FLORIDABLANCA: (L-R) Major General Ramon Guiang, acting Commanding General of the Philippine Air Force, Victor Gonzaga, Philippines' Assistant Secretary for the Office of American Affairs, Philippine acting Defence Secretary Carlito Galvez, Frank Kendall III, US Secretary of the Air Force, United States Ambassador to the Philippines MaryKay Carlson, and Major General Jeffrey Hechanova of the Philippine Air Force, pose for a group photo after a ground breaking ceremony of a runway rehabilitation at Basa Air Base in Floridablanca. — AFP

Philippines announces new bases US soldiers can use

FLORIDABLANCA: The Philippines and the United States will soon announce the location of four additional military bases in the Southeast Asian country that American soldiers will be allowed to use, officials said Monday. The longtime treaty allies agreed last month to expand cooperation in "strategic areas" of the country as they seek to counter China's growing assertiveness over Taiwan and its building of bases in the South China Sea.

The 2014 Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement, known as EDCA, gave US forces access to five bases in the Philippines. It has been expanded to nine, but the locations of the four additional bases have not been revealed as the government consults with local officials.

It has been widely reported that two of the sites will be in the northern province of Cagayan, less than 400 kilometres (250 miles) from self-ruled Taiwan, which China sees as part of its territory. Cagayan Governor Manuel Mamba has publicly opposed having EDCA sites in his province for fear

of jeopardising Chinese investment and becoming a target in a conflict over Taiwan. But Philippine acting defence chief Carlito Galvez told reporters Monday the government had "already decided" on the sites and that Mamba had agreed to "abide with the decision". "The two countries will announce as soon as they can (the locations)," said US Air Force Secretary Frank Kendall at a joint press conference with Galvez and other officials.

Galvez and Kendall were at Basa Air Base, north of the capital Manila, where the United States is investing \$24 million in upgrading the 2.8 kilometre runway. Basa is one of the five bases originally included in the EDCA. The agreement allows US troops to rotate through the bases and also store defence equipment and supplies at them. The pact stalled under former president Rodrigo Duterte, who favoured China over the country's former colonial master. But President Ferdinand Marcos, who succeeded Duterte last June, has adopted a more US-friendly foreign policy and has sought to accelerate the implementation of the EDCA. Beijing has been critical of the agreement, which its embassy in the Philippines said recently was part of "US efforts to encircle and contain China through its military alliance with this country". But Kendall said it was for the "good of the region". "The defence treaty with the Philippines... is about mutual protection and peace and security in the region in general," Kendall said. — AFP

Myanmar's displaced dig to safety from junta air strikes

KAYAH STATE: At a makeshift camp for Myanmar's displaced people, two young men hack away at the red earth with a hoe and machete to build a bunker before the next junta shelling or air raid. Kayah state, near the Thai border, has become a flashpoint of armed resistance to the military's coup, with "People's Defence Forces" clashing regularly with junta troops.

"We hear the sound of heavy weapons firing every day and we wonder if the shells will land near us," said Ar Mu, who lives in the settlement near Demoso town. She has been in the camp, a patchwork of tarpaulins strung up in the gaps between trees that is a temporary home to around 200 people, for months after fighting drove her from her vil-

lage. Two years after launching its coup, the military is struggling to crush resistance to its rule.

Battling fierce opposition on the ground, experts say it is resorting to artillery strikes and air power. The military carried out more than 300 air strikes in the last year, the United Nations said earlier this month. More than 90,000 people are currently displaced in Kayah state, according to the UN's refugee agency.

The bunkers that pockmark the camp near Demoso are little more than small chambers in the earth, their sides and roofs reinforced by sandbags and strips of wood. In one, a group of small children play a game of snakes and ladders. Strikes can come at any time, said Ar Mu. "Sometimes while we are having lunch we hear the sound of firing and we have to go straight into our bunkers." "It's the worst for elderly people who are unhealthy like me. We can't move quickly." Last year Amnesty International said the junta was likely using air strikes and artillery barrages as "collective punishment" against civilians opposing its coup. — AFP

Former Taiwan president Ma to make trip to China

TAIPEI: Taiwan's ex-president Ma Ying-jeou will travel to China next week, his spokesman said Monday, in the first cross-strait visit by a current or former leader of the island in more than 70 years. Ma will not visit Beijing and has no current plans to meet Chinese government officials, the spokesman added.

China claims self-ruled, democratic Taiwan as part of its territory to be seized one day, by force if necessary. The two split in 1949 after a civil war won by the Communist Party, with the defeated nationalists fleeing to the island.

A member of Beijing-friendly party the Kuomintang (KMT), Ma oversaw a dramatic improvement in ties during his 2008-16 rule, which culminated in a summit between him and Chinese leader Xi Jinping in Singapore in 2015.

Relations have plunged under Ma's successor, President Tsai Ing-wen, who has taken a more robust position on Taiwan's sovereignty, prompting increasing military, diplomatic and economic pres-

Nigerian ruling party keeps Lagos post

ABUJA: Nigeria's ruling party has held onto the powerful post of Lagos governor, the country's electoral commission said on Monday, following weekend local elections marred by reports of violence and vote buying. So far, the ruling All Progressives Congress (APC) has been declared winner in the majority of governorships where ballot counting has been completed.

Governors are powerful figures in Nigeria and some control state budgets that are larger than those of several African nations. Saturday's elections for 28 governors and more than 900 state assembly lawmakers came three weeks after the governing party won a presidential ballot that opposition candidates claim was massively rigged.

Outsider Peter Obi of the Labour Party (LP) caused a stir in the February 25 election by gaining the most votes in Lagos, considered an APC fiefdom. But he came only third nationwide and APC candidate Bola Tinubu was declared president-elect.

Both Obi and second-placed candidate Atiku Abubakar of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) are contesting the presidential result in court. The key question on Saturday was whether Obi's growing popularity, especially among Nigeria's youth, would translate into success at the local polls.

But the APC's Babajide Sanwo-Olu scored a landslide re-election as Lagos governor, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) said. The incumbent won more than twice the number of votes of LP candidate Gbadebo Rhodes-Vivour and more than 10 times those of PDP hopeful Olajide Adediran. He also passed the required threshold of 25 percent of votes across two-thirds of the state, the INEC said.

'A sense of discouragement'

So far, the APC has won the governorship races in the states of Gombe, Jigawa, Katsina, Kwara, Nasawara, Ogun, Sokoto and Yobe. The PDP has won in Oyo, Bauchi and Akwa Ibom. In the highly contested state of Kano, the economic heart of the mainly Muslim north, thousands of supporters of the smaller New Nigeria People's Party took to the streets to celebrate their trouncing the APC.

"The victory of NNPP is a victory for Kano because the will of the people has prevailed despite attempts to subvert it," said Hajara Sani, 23, who was

watching the crowds. Results were still pending on Monday in the key southern state of Rivers. Adamawa, in the northeast, could see the election of Nigeria's first woman governor. Head of state Muhammadu Buhari of the APC is stepping down in May after two terms and critics were hoping the presidential ballot would bring change.

But many were disappointed by the way the February election was conducted and turnout for Saturday's local polls was low. Voters and opposition parties complained in February that technical mishaps allowed for vote rigging, which the electoral commission has denied.

The Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD), which observed Saturday's poll, noted in parts of the country "a sense of discouragement that due to the unfavourable outcome of the presidential election 'there is no point' coming out to vote". Despite signs of low turnout, observer group Yiaga Africa said it had recorded "significant improvement in the management of election logistics" on Saturday. Nigeria's new president and governors will take office at a time when Africa's most populous country and largest economy is struggling with growing insecurity and widening poverty.

Beatings and arrests

Polling units mostly opened on time and both the biometric registration machines and online portal to view results functioned relatively well, both Yiaga Africa and the CDD said. But violence was recorded across several states, with thugs showing up at polling units to intimidate voters and in some cases destroying electoral material.

In southeast Imo State, where armed separatist groups are active, a group of ad hoc electoral staff were taken hostage on Saturday morning. They were quickly rescued but election material went missing. In Lagos, the CDD said there were reports in the Lagbasa and Ajah areas of "voters being flogged".

Amnesty International warned these tactics were being "used to scare people from voting". "Many ended up with severe injuries... This is unacceptable and must be investigated thoroughly," the rights group said on Twitter.

As a result of tensions, voting was postponed until Sunday at some polling stations in Lagos and Rivers State. "Processes were disrupted by actors over whom we have little or no control," INEC official Festus Okoye said on Sunday evening.

He condemned the violence and said "allegations of voter inducement, harassment and manipulation of results will be reviewed and addressed". Vote buying was more rampant than during the presidential election, observers reported earlier in the day. — AFP



LAGOS: Officials of Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) count votes at a polling station after local elections, in Lagos. — AFP

sure from Beijing. Ma hoped to help reduce tensions with his visit, set to take place between March 27 and April 7, his spokesman said. During his trip, he will pay tribute to his ancestors and promote youth exchanges, he added.

Tsai's Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) has condemned Ma's planned visit, accusing him of following a pro-Beijing agenda. "The people of Taiwan cannot accept a retired head of state becoming a pawn in the CCP's promotion of unification," the party said in a statement, referring to the Chinese Communist Party.

Taiwan will hold a presidential election next year, with the KMT and DPP the main political parties

vying for the top post. In Beijing, the Taiwan Affairs Office on Monday welcomed news of the visit and offered to "provide the necessary assistance", according to spokesman Ma Xiaoguang.

Ma Ying-jeou was born in Hong Kong in 1950 to Chinese immigrant parents from Xiangtan in Hunan province, which he will visit in addition to the cities of Shanghai, Nanjing, Wuhan, Chongqing and Changsha, his office said. His visit comes after a series of recent exchanges between China and KMT officials. Last month, KMT vice-chairman Andrew Hsia conducted a nine-day trip to China, followed by the visit of a delegation of Shanghai officials to Taipei. — AFP

Business

TUESDAY, MARCH 21, 2023

Kuwait seeks to draw a roadmap for digital future, says Al-Nahedh

Microsoft, CAIT host second 'Smart Government Summit' in Kuwait

KUWAIT: Minister of Commerce and Industry and Minister of State for Communications and Information Technology Affairs Mazen Al-Nahedh stressed the importance of supporting the partnership between the government of Kuwait and international information technology companies and adopting applications in line with the requirements of the New Kuwait vision.

Delivering a speech at the opening of the second 'Smart Government Summit' in Kuwait hosted by Microsoft in partnership with the Central Agency for Information Technology (CAIT) to celebrate the 25th anniversary of its founding in the country, Al-Nahedh said Monday that the summit aims to accelerate the adoption of Smart technologies to promote digital government transformation and launch several initiatives with government agencies.

"We are meeting today to draw a roadmap for the digital future of Kuwait. We have always supported the partnership between the Kuwait government and international information technology companies which resulted in the establishment and development of many technological infrastructure projects and targeted initiatives for Kuwait to reach an economy and society based on knowledge and smart technology such as the cloud, artificial intelligence, data and robots and others," Al-Nahedh said.

He added, "We always strive for transformation towards a comprehensive digitization." He expressed his happiness at leading the country's ambition in this path and expanding at the regional and global levels to achieve its vision of developing human capital capabilities in the field of digital economy and within the framework of its efforts to implement a comprehensive digital transformation process.

He explained that the world is changing very quickly and that digital transformation is part of this change, stressing that the information tech-



KUWAIT: Minister of Commerce and Industry and Minister of State for Communications and Information Technology Affairs Mazen Al-Nahedh delivers his opening speech. —KUNA



Acting Director General of Information Technology Dr. Ammar Al-Husseini during his speech.



Ihab Fouda addresses the summit.

nology will continue to accelerate the wheel of transformation through access and the establishment of supportive infrastructures that keep pace with modern technology.

He pointed out that the digital transformation process increases investment returns and contributes to promoting a diversified and sustainable national economy, leading to building a society based on knowledge economy to achieve prosperity and wellbeing for all.

Acting Director General of the Central Agency for Information Technology Dr Ammar Al-Husseini said that Kuwait has made significant steps towards smart transformation by adopting smart and advanced technologies to contribute to enhancing the competitiveness of government institutions, raising its efficiency and increasing its productivity. This also has helped accelerate the digital transformation agenda which is a fundamental pillar of Kuwait Vision 2035.

with (AML/CFT) recommendations of the Financial Action Task Force (FATF).

Held on March 20th and 21st, one workshop was catered to local banks' staff and the other to staff in exchange companies to shed light on the changes in requirements the amendments entailed. They will also address requirements mentioned in ministerial resolution (35) of 2019 regarding implementation of UN Security Council Resolutions issued virtue of Chapter VII of the UN Charter in relation to combating terrorism and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, as well as CBK policy in this regard. Some issues and findings of CBK follow-up and supervision would also be discussed, which the concerned units are expected to address and rectify.

The workshops are being hosted at CBK headquarters and by CBK specialists in the field of compliance with AML/CFT requirements. This effort comes as the CBK seeks to maintain continuous communication and interaction among professionals in the field to enhance the capabilities of all staff in the banking and finance sector.

CBK hosts workshops for bank employees, money exchange firms

KUWAIT: The Central Bank of Kuwait (CBK) is organizing two workshops for local banks and exchange companies on topics of anti-money laundering and combating terrorist financing (AML/CFT) measures, international recommendations in this regard, and recent amendments to CBK instructions to local banks and exchange companies in this area. The workshops are organized within the effort to enhance the bank's supervisory role and encourage staff capacity building within the banking and finance sector it regulates.

The workshops are held following recent amendments to CBK instructions to stress the importance of adequate preparation for the evaluation that the State of Kuwait is to undergo in terms of compliance

Digital transformation

Al-Husseini said during the past few months, the CAIT in partnership with Microsoft, launched important initiatives to support the acceleration of the digital transformation agenda in the government sector, including Center of Excellence for Digital Productivity to enhance productivity and institutional effectiveness through optimization of digital technologies, take advantage of Microsoft 365 programs and the application 'The Hub', the digital platform that provides a new experience for exchanging information and request for digital services within government agencies.

Ihab Fouda, general manager of the government sector at Microsoft Middle East and Africa, affirmed in a similar speech the company's commitment to the Kuwaiti government, institutions and people by providing safe technology and smart solutions to enable institutions and companies in various sectors.

Fouda said that the activities of the summit wit-

nessed the official launch of the joint cooperation between the Kuwait's Ministry of Oil and Microsoft as a digital environmental initiative which aims to create a joint dialogue platform to discuss and crystallize the roadmap for a digital project and an advanced and a sustainable oil sector program which will help preserve petroleum wealth and maintain environmental sustainability through artificial intelligence (AI) technology.

Undersecretary of the Ministry of Oil Sheikh Dr Nimr Fahd Al-Malik Al-Sabah said in his speech that the launch of the environmental digital initiative is of great importance in encouraging the use of technology and artificial intelligence to accelerate digital transformation in the oil sector and enhance Kuwait's path towards sustainable development of the petroleum sector. Sheikh Nimr Al-Sabah stressed the need to develop a roadmap for sustainability and identify the necessary steps for the oil sector in particular and the government. — KUNA

Saudi bank says 'no impact' after Credit Suisse buyout

RIYADH: Credit Suisse's largest shareholder Saudi National Bank on Monday said there was "no impact" on its growth plans or profitability after the troubled Swiss lender was bought out by UBS. "Changes in the valuation of SNB's investment in Credit Suisse have no impact on SNB's growth plans and forward-looking 2023 guidance," SNB said in a statement to the Saudi stock exchange.

Credit Suisse announced on Sunday that UBS would take it over for "a merger consideration of three billion Swiss francs," or about \$3.24 billion. After slumping on the stock market last week, Credit Suisse's share price closed Friday at 1.86 Swiss francs, with the bank worth just over \$8.7 billion. UBS said Credit Suisse shareholders would get 0.76 Swiss francs per share.

The Saudi bank said its statement came "in

light of the recent market announcement with regards to Credit Suisse", without directly mentioning the UBS buyout. Saudi National Bank spent 5.5 billion riyals (\$1.5 billion) on a 9.88 percent share in Credit Suisse in November.

As of December, the bank said the holding was less than 0.5 percent of its total assets and about 1.7 percent of its investments portfolio. Last Wednesday, Credit Suisse's share price plunged by more than 30 percent to a record low of 1.55 Swiss francs, after Saudi National Bank said it would not raise its stake in the group due to regulatory constraints. The lender-Switzerland's second-largest-later announced it would borrow nearly \$54 billion from the nation's central bank to provide "support", before Sunday's buyout was announced following crunch talks aimed at thwarting a wider international banking crisis. "SNB remains comfortably above all prudential thresholds and continues to enjoy healthy capitalization and liquidity," the Saudi National Bank statement said, adding that its total assets topped 945 billion riyals (\$251 billion). "SNB remains focused on its core strategy of growth in Saudi Arabia, which is among the fastest growing countries within the G20." — AFP



COLOMBO: A street vendor sells prawns and sea-food at her kiosk at the Galle Face Beach in Colombo on March 20, 2023. Cash-strapped Sri Lanka is seeking a 10-year moratorium on its foreign debt. —AFP

Sri Lanka seeks 10-year debt moratorium

COLOMBO: Cash-strapped Sri Lanka is seeking a 10-year moratorium on its foreign debt, President Ranil Wickremesinghe's office said Monday on the eve of a desperately needed \$2.9 billion IMF bailout. Wickremesinghe's office quoted him as saying the widely expected International Monetary Fund rescue "will only give us a breathing space where they will say we are no longer bankrupt".

"All the money we have to repay this year, I hope we will be given at least 10 more years to repay it," Wickremesinghe told a meeting of students in Colombo on Sunday. He did not give details of his plans to restructure Sri Lanka's \$46 billion external debt. Sri Lanka defaulted on its foreign debt in April 2022

as the country plunged into its worst economic crisis, running out of cash to finance even the most essential imports and causing massive social unrest.

Widespread protests over economic mismanagement, acute shortages of food, fuel and medicines, and runaway inflation forced Wickremesinghe's predecessor Gotabaya Rajapaksa to flee the country and resign in July. The IMF's executive board was expected to sign off on Colombo's bailout application later on Monday after a long delay in securing financial assurances from China, Sri Lanka's largest bilateral lender. Beijing had said this year it was offering a two-year moratorium on its loans to Sri Lanka, but the concession fell short of IMF expectations for the sustainability of the island's debt.

Wickremesinghe had said after China agreed to restructure its loans that he expected the first tranche of the \$2.9 billion IMF package would be made available within the month. Officials involved in the negotiations said the terms of debt restructuring must be finalized and agreed by all parties before June, when the IMF was expected to review the bailout program. — AFP

Bank shares wobble after Credit Suisse buyout

LONDON: Bank shares wavered in volatile trading on Monday after a UBS takeover of embattled Swiss rival Credit Suisse and actions by financial authorities aimed at calming investors fearing a broader crisis. UBS agreed to take over Credit Suisse for \$3 billion Swiss francs (\$3.25 billion) in a government-brokered deal over the weekend following days of market upheaval over the health of the banking sector.

Hours later, the US Federal Reserve and other major central banks announced a coordinated effort to improve banks' access to liquidity. The broader stock markets fluctuated, with Asia closing lower while Wall Street opened mixed and European indices bounced after a starting the day in the red as investors pore over details of the deal. The Credit Suisse deal "may have some effect in reducing anxiety levels in financial markets, but it may only be short-lived, with traders left wondering which bank could be next to hit the headlines for all the wrong reasons," said Tim Waterer, analyst at Kohle Capital Markets.

Shares in Credit Suisse and lenders worldwide had already sunk last week over concerns of contagion to the rest of the sector from the failure of US regional banks. The Swiss bank had been shaken by other scandals, including its exposure to the 2021 collapses of investment firms Archegos and Greensill. One concern from Sunday's deal was the effect it could have on the high-risk debt market as holders of such bonds at Credit Suisse, known as AT1, will lose \$17.3 billion after authorities required that they be written off.



NEW YORK: Traders work on the floor of the New York Stock Exchange (NYSE). — AFP

AT1 bonds, which offer high returns but also carry high risks, were created following the 2008 global financial crisis to put the burden of losses on investors instead of taxpayers. "Sentiment vis-a-vis the AT1 bond asset class will likely remain weak following last night's deal," said Stephen Innes, managing partner at SPI Asset Management. The sector's Stoxx Europe 600 Banks index seersawed while UBS shares rose after falling as much as 12 percent earlier in the day. French banking giant BNP Paribas also recovered while Germany's Deutsche Bank steadied.

Credit Suisse shares clawed back massive losses but were still down 51 percent. In the United States, troubled First Republic Bank shares continued their decline, plunging more than 19 percent after a coalition of US lenders injected \$30 billion into their peer. Bigger US banks including JP Morgan, Bank of America and Citigroup opened higher. — AFP

Business

Central banks take coordinated action to keep dollars flowing

Investors continue to reel from turmoil in the banking sector

FRANKFURT: The US Federal Reserve and other top central banks on Monday kicked off a coordinated effort to keep dollars flowing through the financial system and shore up confidence, as investors reel from turmoil in the banking sector. In a move reminiscent of emergency action taken during the 2008 financial crisis, the Fed and five other central banks announced they were stepping up their so-called swap-line operations, giving foreign banks greater access to safe-haven US dollars.

What are swap lines?

A swap line is a temporary agreement between two central banks to exchange currencies, usually because one of the parties needs to pass the foreign currency liquidity on to their domestic commercial banks. The Fed, the European Central Bank, Bank of England, Bank of Japan, Bank of Canada and the Swiss National Bank said in a statement late Sunday that they would switch from weekly to daily swap lines, ensuring quick access to US dollars.

The "coordinated action" will last until at least the end of April. The domestic banks must place collateral with their central banks in return for the dollars, but are then sure of getting as much of the US currency as needed. The central banks said their network of swap lines "serve as an important liquidity backstop to ease strains in global funding markets".

Why now?

The initiative was announced just hours after Switzerland said its largest bank UBS would take over troubled rival Credit Suisse—the first rescue

of a major bank since the global financial crisis 15 years ago. Markets have already been riled by the recent collapse of three US regional lenders, which has fuelled concern about the health of the global financial sector.

Analysts saw the expanded swap line action as a precautionary move. "It is important to signal to the public and the markets that whatever happens, the central banks will be there to ward off any crisis," Baader Bank analyst Robert Halver told AFP. There is no sign yet of "outsized demand" for US dollars, added ING economist Padhraic Garvey.

But fears that the banking turmoil could turn into a full-blown crisis have called into question whether the Fed, ECB and other central banks will continue to aggressively raise interest rates to combat inflation. Higher rates make it harder for businesses and households to get credit, and there's a risk that the recent banking tensions could see the supply of loans dry up further—with damaging consequences for the economy. It is therefore "reasonable" for central banks to boost US dollar liquidity while tightening monetary policy, said UBS Global Wealth Management chief economist Paul Donovan. But "if the existing tightening of lending standards accelerates, economic policy will have to change," he said.

Lifeline in past crises

The network of swap lines was set up during the 2008 financial crisis, when credit dried up and non-US banks struggled to access US dollars. Swap lines have since become a key part of the central bank toolkit during challenging times. Daily dollar auctions were last used in the early days of the pan-



LONDON: People use the entrance of the London office of Swiss bank UBS in central London, on March 20, 2023. — AFP

demic in 2020, when COVID-related restrictions battered the global economy and sent investors scrambling for the safety of the dollar. That central

banks are once again reaching for the tool now shows "that the dollar faces no credible rival as a global reserve currency", said Donovan. — AFP

Saudi Aramco, DHL announce joint venture

DHAHRAN: Saudi Aramco, one of the world's leading integrated energy and chemicals companies, and global logistics company DHL announced the signing of a shareholder agreement to create a new global hub for procurement and logistics services in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia with the aim of contributing to enhancing supply chain efficiency and sustainability. The center, which is the first of its kind in the region, meets the needs of companies operating in the industrial, energy, chemical and petrochemical sectors.

The joint venture, which is expected to be operational by 2025, aims to provide integrated and reliable procurement and supply chain services to companies operating in various sectors of industry, energy, chemicals and petrochemicals. It is expected that the project will initially focus on the center's activities within the Kingdom, with the possibility of expanding its services in the future to include the Middle East and North Africa region. The joint venture will combine Saudi Aramco's industry-leading energy supply chain system with DHL's global expertise in logistics. It seeks to add value to meet procurement services, warehouse and inventory management, transportation, and reverse logistics.

The joint venture aims to achieve best industrial practices in procurement and supply chain management, as well as work to adopt more sustainable solutions in the field of supply



DHAHRAN: Saudi Aramco and DHL announce a joint venture to create a global integrated procurement and logistics hub.

chain, transportation and warehousing.

On this occasion, the President and Chief Executive Officer of Saudi Aramco, Eng Amin bin Hassan Al-Nasser, said: "We are proud of signing this agreement to establish a company based on an innovative business model through which a platform is created that serves as a huge electronic market to serve companies operating in the energy and chemicals sector in supplying their needs." Equipment, industrial materials and spare parts. The project will focus in the first phase on the Kingdom with the aspiration at a later stage to extend its business to serve companies in the Middle East and North Africa. The new project builds on the strengths of Saudi Aramco, which is characterized by a large system with high reliability for procurement and warehouse management to meet the projects and operational business, and builds on the strengths of DHL,

which has extensive and long-standing global experience in the field of freight and logistics to meet the needs of a large customer base.

For his part, CEO of DHL, Oscar de Boeck, said: "We are pleased to announce the conclusion of this agreement with Saudi Aramco, through which the company aims to enhance its business and its logistics service network throughout the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the Middle East and North Africa region. In addition to expanding our presence in the industrial sector, we aim, by working with Saudi Aramco, to provide regional and multinational companies operating in these sectors with a strong global logistics network, promote positive economic growth, and encourage them to adopt sustainable activities."

This joint venture is subject to regulatory approvals and customary closing conditions.

Systemically important banks: Giants with feet of clay?

ZURICH: The buyout of Credit Suisse, a bank considered too big to fail, by its Swiss rival UBS, has brought back into focus the difficulty of saving so-called systemically important lenders. The buyout, announced by Swiss authorities over the weekend, hasn't completely calmed the markets, testifying to the nervousness that pervades the financial system in the face of the pressure of rising interest rates.

What is a systemically important bank?

Credit Suisse was one of the around 30 largest lenders considered to be Global Systemically Important Banks, often considered "too big to fail". These are designated by the Financial Stability Board, an institution created in the wake of the collapse of US investment bank Lehman Brothers to supervise reforms to strengthen the international financial system. They are required to hold larger capital buffers that are supposed to help ensure that they can absorb shocks.

The list includes JP Morgan Chase, Bank of America, Citigroup, HSBC, Barclays, BNP Paribas, Deutsche Bank, Santander, UniCredit, UBS, as well as others including Credit Suisse. The lenders are considered so big that their collapse would have devastating consequences for the overall financial system and real economy, whether that is businesses or households.

The problem, for Thierry Philipponnat, chief economist at the NGO Finance Watch, is that "today, all of the banks have become systemic" and that the authorities feel compelled to intervene. He pointed to the failure of two banks in the United States earlier this month. Despite their moderate size, both were key to serving certain sectors of the US economy, which prompted authorities to rescue them to avoid a widespread bank crisis, with only limited success.

Why did Credit Suisse need to be rescued? For the past two years Switzerland's number two bank had suffered a series of scandals that provoked huge losses. Confidence in the bank eroded and suddenly it had difficulty accessing funding at reasonable rates. The run on Silicon Valley Bank in the United States, which even if it had particular circumstances, still unnerved investors and depositors in the banking sectors. A similar state of panic in Credit Suisse was triggered last week when Saudi National Bank, its largest shareholder, said it wouldn't invest any more capital.

Even if Credit Suisse's reserves weren't in a critical state, Swiss President Alain Berset said the takeover was the "best solution for restoring the confidence that has been lacking in the financial markets recently" and to prevent a run on the bank. According to the Financial Times and Blick, the bank's clients withdrew 10 billion Swiss francs in one day at the end of last week.

What lessons can be learned? Even if the buyout by UBS, which was strongly encouraged by the authorities, was the best short-term solution, questions remain about its long-term impact. "Creating even bigger banks only multiplies the moral hazard risk", said Finance Watch's Philipponnat.

He said investors and executives don't have to same incentive to adopt rigorous management because they know they will be bailed out in any event.

Economist Veronique Riches-Flores said she "isn't sure this is the most efficient model in the medium to long term". One can also question the efficacy of the numerous measures to bolster big banks taken after the 2008 crisis.

Credit Suisse met all the solvency criteria, and yet when faced with a crisis in confidence the authorities had to step in to arrange its buyout. Riches-Flores criticized comments from the European Central Bank that sought to calm markets. One "spark can quickly create a chain reaction that no one can anticipate", she said. She said the Credit Suisse crisis was caused by the general uncertainty in the sector provoked by the failure of US banks that had no link at all with the Swiss lender. — AFP

California's desert farmers defend their river rights

SAN FRANCISCO: A blanket of crops covers the floor of the Imperial Valley in southern California, a patchwork of vibrant greens given life by the Colorado River in a landscape bleached by the desert sun. But as a decades-long drought desiccates the US West and the once-mighty river dwindles, questions are being asked about why a handful of farmers are allowed to take as much water as all of Nevada and Arizona combined.

"We average less than two inches (five centimeters) of rainfall per year," fourth generation farmer Andrew Leimgruber told AFP. "So without the supply of Colorado River water coming here, there would be no one living here, there'd be nothing being grown here, this would be a desert."

The valley, along with Yuma in Arizona, is a vital part of America's huge agricultural sector, producing most of the vegetables the United States eats over winter, in a business that generates around \$2 billion a year. Farmers here also grow alfalfa, a forage crop supplied to beef and dairy ranchers.

Ancient agreement

The land here has always been fertile, but it's always been dry. The pioneers who forged the West realized that with its permanent sunshine, Imperial Valley could produce crops year-round to feed a growing population, as long as they could keep the fields watered. Their solution was to build an 80-mile (130-kilometer) canal from the Colorado River, positioning themselves at the head of the queue for the rights to that river.

An agreement hashed out over a century ago allows Imperial Valley farmers to use 3.1 million acre-feet of water every year—about 70 percent of all the water California is allowed to take. An acre-foot refers to an acre covered in water a foot deep, which equals some 326,000 gallons (1.23 million liters) or about half an Olympic-size swimming pool.

But as human-caused climate change worsens a



HOLTVILLE, US: Farm workers tend to a lettuce field in Holtville, California. A blanket of crops covers the floor of the Imperial Valley in southern California, a patchwork of vibrant greens given life by the Colorado River in a landscape bleached by the desert sun. — AFP

drought that has now lasted more than two decades, the river is struggling to keep up with demand. The 40 million people in the West who rely on it, including in some of America's biggest cities, are being told they need to cut back.

Residents of Los Angeles last year faced fines for watering their gardens too often, and are urged to take only short showers instead of baths. The predicament has pitted suburban homeowners surveying their brown lawns against nearby farmers. "As the largest water user on the river, we become a target because it becomes an easy solution," says Tina Shields of the Imperial County Irrigation District.

"We're not going to sacrifice our community for urban sprawl and urban development and other areas." In any case, says Shields, many of the people who complain about farmers using water are happy to fill their refrigerators with the food they produce. "We grow a half million acres a year of crops that feed our nation and other nations as well. So it's critical to our community and our economy in particular."

'No lack of work'

Despite its water wealth, Imperial County is

one of the poorest in California and would struggle to survive without agriculture. Rural workers, mostly Latinos, come from a wide area, including across the Mexican border several dozen miles away, to earn money in the fields.

"There has been no lack of work here," says Ramon Cardenas, who has toiled for three decades under summer temperatures that regularly top 100 degrees Fahrenheit (38 degrees Celsius). Some farmers have cut deals with power generation companies, signing long-term leases that see crops replaced by solar panels. They might not be using water anymore, but neither are they offering work. Cardenas hopes the trend won't spread. "We depend on this," he says gesturing to the crew picking lettuce.

Despite a very wet California winter, Imperial Valley hasn't gotten much rain this year. As Leimgruber's sprinklers spray hundreds of liters (gallons) of water onto a field, he insists it is well used. Even thirsty alfalfa—around 15 percent of which he says is exported—is vital for a country that consumes so much meat and dairy, he says. "California is the top dairy-producing state in the country, and that's because of the Imperial Valley's ability to plant alfalfa," he says. — AFP

Business

Sweden's teens drive Porsches and BMWs, no license needed

Century-old regulation allows kids 15 and older to drive without a license

STOCKHOLM: Too young for a driver's license at 15, Evelina Christiansen is already cruising in a sleek BMW in Sweden, where teens can drive any car modified to roll no faster than a golf cart. An almost century-old regulation originally applied to agricultural vehicles allows kids 15 and older to drive without a proper driver's license, as long as the vehicle has been altered to have a maximum speed of 30 kilometers per hour (18.6 miles per hour).

Called an "A-traktor" — with Swedes often using "EPA" as the older designation — these cars and trucks have become so popular in recent years that authorities are now concerned about a rise in road accidents. "I got it a year ago, in April, for my birthday," Evelina tells AFP proudly in front of her dark blue 5-series BMW in the driveway of her family's home in a southern Stockholm suburb.

The gift was a special reward for her achievements in school. While teenagers elsewhere have to make do with a moped or scooter until they get a driver's license, young Swedes can use almost any vehicle that has its top speed capped. In Stockholm's wealthy suburbs, young kids are regularly seen driving Porsche Cayennes on their own.

"I usually use it when I go to school or meet up with friends," Evelina says. A triangular warning sign in the back indicating a slow-moving vehicle and a hitch ball for trailers are both mandatory for an "A-traktor".

The back seat must also be removed, so they can carry only the driver and one passenger. All that is required is a simple moped license, available from the age of 15, or a tractor license, from 16.

The system is surprisingly lenient in a country known for championing road safety — the three-point seatbelt is a Swedish invention — and for its strict drink driving rules. The system was relaxed even further in mid-2020, when it became possible to cap cars' top speed electronically, making it much easier to modify a modern car.

Criticism from EU

Originally the domain of youths in rural areas, city kids have increasingly been getting wheels of their own, with the number of registered A-traktors doubling to 50,000 in just two and a half years, in a country of 10.3 million inhabitants. The predecessors to today's A-traktors originated during the 1930s Depression, when there was a shortage of agricultural equipment.

To encourage the construction of cheap vehicles when tractors were still out of reach for farmers, the government allowed them to cobble together simple cars. In the 1950s, as the economy prospered, real tractors became more common and the need for these homesteaded vehicles began to subside.

But in the countryside, young people without a license were happy to use them to get around, especially in areas without much public transport. The state formalized the use of A-traktors with a 1963 regulation, which has been closely guarded for decades in rural Sweden.

Only in 2018 did authorities introduce mandatory road worthiness testing for the vehicles. Sweden looks set however for a battle with the EU — the European Commission criticized the system in early March, and proposed that a simplified permit become mandatory. For many rural teenagers, the A-traktor symbolizes their dream of independence. It is also the focus of a growing subculture focused on customized cars and a new music genre hugely popular in Sweden called "EPA Dunk".

In the western Swedish town of Karlstad, 17-year-old Ronja Lofgren regularly turns heads with her 5.5-tonne Scania Vabis truck from 1964, which her father saved from the scrap heap. The teen has adorned the refurbished truck with a gleaming red-and-blue paint job and lots of headlights. The motto "Queen of the Road" is emblazoned on the front and "Go with style" on the back. "When I went into town at first, everyone would pull out



HUDDINGE, Sweden: Picture taken on February 10, 2023 shows Evelina Christiansen, 15, posing next to a car in Huddinge, Sweden. —AFP

their phones and film me," the teenager said.

Soaring accidents

Following the surge in new registrations since 2020, insurers and police have expressed alarm at the more than fivefold increase in accidents involving A-traktors in five years. The number of injuries has exceeded 200 per year and there were four deaths in 2022 alone. For others, the surge has become a business opportunity. Oskar Flyman, 21, and his younger brother started a busi-

ness in 2021 converting cars into A-traktors. "You can find A-traktors from 30,000 kronor (\$2,900) to 200,000 kronor," Flyman said, adding that if you already have a car, a typical conversion costs around 25,000 kronor.

In their garage in a suburb north of Stockholm, filled with Audis and BMWs, they do about five to six conversions a month. Sweden's transport authority has recently proposed that as with regular cars, the wearing of seatbelts and the use of winter tires become compulsory. — AFP

Boubyan Bank and Mastercard partner on remittance transfers

KUWAIT: Boubyan Bank and Mastercard have partnered to simplify and speed up cross-border remittance payments. Through Mastercard Cross-Border Services, Boubyan Bank customers are now given greater choice and flexibility when sending money to destinations around the world.



Abdullah Al-Mejhem

Through the partnership, Mastercard Cross-Border Services is now available on Boubyan Bank's mobile application, allowing users to seamlessly transfer money. Through a single connection, users can send money in a swift and secure manner to beneficiary bank accounts, mobile wallets or cash-out points globally. While previously, customers were only able to send funds through an exchange house, both retail and corporate customers at Boubyan Bank can complete near real-time transfers at competitive rates to over 35 countries wherever they are, any time of the day.

J K Khalil, cluster general manager, MENA East, Mastercard, said: "Remittances continue to play an integral part in the global economic recovery and are a vital service for those in this region, in particular, and their beneficiaries around the world. Boubyan Bank joins a growing list of global partners working with Mastercard to offer people and businesses a more certain and secure way to pay and get paid across borders. This partnership further expands our multi-rail proposition through the Mastercard payments matrix as we enable money to be sent how, where and when people choose."

Abdullah Al-Mejhem, chief consumer & private banking officer at Boubyan Bank, said: "We are pleased to collaborate with one of the world's largest known companies for instant cross-border transfers such as Mastercard, and what this partnership can provide to our customers in terms of distinguished services when making money transfers to more than 35 countries around the world from while using the Boubyan App."

Mastercard's Cross-Border Services enable banks, fintechs, mobile network operators and exchange houses to modernize remittances with a network footprint in around 140+ countries and real time transfers to 40+ countries. Bolstered by the acquisition of Transfast in 2019, Mastercard enables its partners to better respond to the challenges in a post-pandemic world by providing safe, convenient ways to send and receive money nearly anywhere in the world.

Al-Mejhem added that this partnership stems from the recent developments in the banking sector, where there has become an imperative that calls for our investment in many of our digital channels to provide new and distinctive services, especially for our customers, in order to meet their needs and to complete all financial transactions instantly in a safe and fast manner.

Gulf Bank donates corals to EPA

KUWAIT: As part of its continuous efforts to establish the principles of environmental sustainability, Gulf Bank has donated a quantity of corals to the Environment Public Authority, to be recycled or used for other purposes. On this occasion, Gulf Bank's Corporate Communications Officer, Mohammad Al-Hebeshi said, "We have transferred a quantity of corals to the Jahra Reserve, as reusing these rocks help in preserving the environment. This also aids in supporting habitats in order to enhance their potential of becoming ideal environments for wildlife animals."

Al-Hebeshi stressed Gulf Bank's keenness to continuously cooperate with the Environment Public Authority, in implementing many initiatives that aid in consolidating the principles of environmental sustainability in society. This aligns with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, Kuwait Vision 2035, as well as the Bank's 2025 strategy.

Kuwait Airways signs agreement with Malaysia Airlines

KUWAIT: Kuwait Airways announced the signing of a bilateral interline agreement with Malaysia Airlines to enhance the framework of cooperation between the two carriers in the commercial air transport sector, commencing from 1st April, 2023.

The agreement was signed by Kuwait Airways' Chief Executive Officer, Eng Maen Razouqi and the Chief Executive Officer of Malaysia Airlines, Captain Izham Ismail on the sidelines of a ceremony held in the Malaysian capital of Kuala Lumpur, which was attended by numerous officials, representing both airlines.

Speaking on the occasion, KAC's Chief Executive Officer, Eng Maen Razouqi stated, "Kuwait Airways is pleased to sign the bilateral interline agreement with Malaysia Airlines. This agreement is the first partnership which will further facilitate a strategic cooperation with Malaysia Airlines, across multiple areas and in all fields of the aviation sector. This is also an important part of the historical and strong relations between the State of Kuwait and the Kingdom of Malaysia, which are characterized by an understanding at all political, economic, and cultural levels between both the countries."

Razouqi added, "This strategic cooperation will benefit all parties, as Malaysia Airlines is one of the leading airlines in the regional and global market with a great history in the aviation sector. We are hopeful that this agreement will bring about the best prospects through the expansion of both airlines' global network and contribute effectively to achieving the desired objectives."

Razouqi continued by saying, "The enhanced partnership will enable Kuwait Airways to expand its network and serve its passengers through Malaysia Airlines operations, connectivity to several cities in Asia-Pacific, Australia and New Zealand including to Sydney, Melbourne, Perth, Auckland, Tokyo, Taipei, Seoul, and Singapore, in addition to popular tourist destinations within Malaysia."

"This agreement will support the operation of Kuwait Airways and Malaysia Airlines to points beyond on Kuwait Airways' network in the Mid-

dle East, North Africa and Gulf Cooperation Council countries", explained Razouqi. Razouqi concluded his statement by emphasizing on these fruitful relations and cooperation, expressing thanks and appreciation for the productive efforts of Malaysia Airlines in making this partnership a success.

On his part, the Chief Executive Officer of Malaysia Airlines, Captain Izham Ismail said, "We are pleased to enter a new chapter in the long-standing relationship between Kuwait Airways and Malaysia Airlines, which is expected to add value to our customers and offer them various options, greater efficiency, and a more comprehensive network. The Middle East market is important to Malaysia Airlines, and we are constantly striving to expand our network and range of products to better serve this sector."

Ismail concluded, "We look forward to working with Kuwait Airways and creating a greater cooperation between our expanded networks, to provide new services and diverse solutions to our customers from both sides."

New sales office in Kuala Lumpur

In line with Kuwait Airways' expansion plans in the Far East, the company announced the inauguration of its new sales office in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. The company celebrated the opening of the office in the presence of Kuwait Airways' Chief Executive Officer, Eng Maen Razouqi with numerous officials attending the event consisting of dignitaries and representatives, headed by the Ambassador of the State of Kuwait to the Kingdom of Malaysia, Rashid Al-Saleh, and his accompanying delegation, as well as various officials from the Civil Aviation Authority of Malaysia, Malaysia's Ministry of Tourism and Culture, travel and tourism companies, and various media representatives and also included honoring outstanding partners from travel and tourism offices.

Speaking on the occasion, Kuwait Airways' Chief Executive Officer, Eng Maen Razouqi welcomed the attendees, and extended his sincere thanks to the guests for accepting KAC's invitation. Razouqi in his speech stated, "Kuwait Airways is pleased and honored to be present to participate in the inaugural ceremony of its new sales office in Kuala Lumpur and to honor our successful partners. The opening of the office comes within the framework of the Blue Bird's preparations for the summer season of 2023 and

years 2020 and 2021.

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.



Mohammad Al-Hebeshi



KUALA LUMPUR: Kuwait Airways' Chief Executive Officer Eng Maen Razouqi and the Chief Executive Officer of Malaysia Airlines Captain Izham Ismail.

is part of the company's objectives to expand and launch new destinations to provide the best services to our valued customers, in addition to meeting their requirements. The new office is situated in a distinguished location in the heart of Kuala Lumpur, which is easily accessible to KAC's customers."

Razouqi added, "Kuala Lumpur is one of Kuwait Airways' most important destinations. Since its launch in October 2022 with two flights per week, there has been a growing demand from our valued passengers to travel to this destination. Accordingly, Kuwait Airways increased the number of flights by three flights per week operated on the Airbus A330-800. Moreover, Kuala Lumpur also distinguishes itself as a suitable destination for holidays and is considered the cultural, financial, and economic hub of Malaysia and the Far East."

Razouqi concluded by saying, "Kuwait Airways is diligently striving to expand its horizons of joint cooperation, especially in the field of commercial air transport, which will contribute effectively to assisting passengers to the fullest and providing them with all means of comfort for their travel."

During the visit, Kuwait Airways' CEO reached an agreement to carry part of Malaysian Hajj and Umrah travelers on Kuwait Airways, ensuring that they have a relaxed, peaceful travel experience.

Lifestyle | Features



Indian Ambassador to Kuwait Dr Adarsh Swaika lighting the lamp to inaugurate the event.



Indian Ambassador to Kuwait Dr Adarsh Swaika.



A dance performance.

Indian Embassy hosts 'Festival of India'



India's Minister of State for External Affairs and Culture, Meenakshi Lekhi inaugurates the event.

A festival of India was organized in Kuwait from 17-18 March, 2023 by the Embassy of India, Kuwait under the aegis of ministry of culture, government of India. This was the first 'Festival of India' abroad held by the ministry of culture following the COVID-19 pandemic. The inaugural event on March 17, 2023 was virtually inaugurated by India's Minister of State for External Affairs and Culture Meenakshi Lekhi. In her remarks, she highlighted the strong historical relationship between India and Kuwait and also appreciated the ongoing cultural exchange between India and Kuwait. She emphasized that the 'Festival of India in Kuwait' will strengthen the vibrant cultural ties between the two countries. The finale event was organized at the Dar Al-Athar Islamiya (DAI), Yarmouk Cultural Centre on March 18, 2023. The event was well attended by Kuwaiti friends and Indian community members. Local media in Kuwait gave a wide coverage to the event.

The highlight of the festival was the performance by renowned Indian cultural troupes sent by the ministry of culture, government of India. The three troupes who performed at the festival were: Qutbi Brothers - Qawwali performance, Hasan Khan and Group - Rajasthani Folk, and the AnirudhVarma Collective - fusion of Indian classical and contemporary music. The troupes presented a picture of India's rich civilization with their performances drawn from diverse regions, cultures and religions of India. The festival was supported by the ministry of information and culture, government of Kuwait and National Council for Culture, Arts and Letters (NCCAL), the government of Kuwait. Alongside the cultural performances, the Embassy of India, Kuwait organized 'Incredible India - Tourism Exhibition' and the Indian coffee tasting event for the Kuwaiti friends and diplomatic community on March 18.



Cultural events during the 'Festival of India'.



'Shazam!' sequel tops North America box office but lacks magic

"Shazam! Fury of the Gods" topped the North American box office this weekend with an estimated \$30.5 million opening, but that represented a sharp dropoff from the original blockbuster and analysts called the result disappointing. "This is a soft opening for a non-Marvel superhero follow-up, down substantially from 'Shazam 1,'" said industry analyst David A. Gross. Hollywood Reporter called it "one of the worst starts for a major Hollywood superhero film." The original "Shazam!" enjoyed a \$53.5 million opening in April 2019, while the sequel, a DC Studios/New Line production distributed by Warner Bros. and starring Zachary Levi, Asher Angel, Adam Brody and Rachel Zegler, cost more than \$110 million to make and has had tepid reviews, according to Variety.



Last weekend's top film, "Scream VI" from Paramount and Spyglass Media, slipped to second place, at \$17.5 million, industry watcher Exhibitor Relations reported Sunday. Melissa Barrera, Jenna Ortega and Skeet Ulrich star in the latest edition of the horror series. Also slipping one spot to third was United Artists' boxing drama "Creed III," with an estimated take of \$15.4 million for the Friday-through-Sunday period. First-time director Michael B. Jordan also plays the title character, Adonis Creed. Sci-fi thriller "65" from Sony and Columbia Pictures took fourth place, at \$5.8 million. Adam Driver plays a pilot whose spaceship crashes on an unknown planet, which turns out to be the Earth of 65 million years ago, when dinosaurs still ruled and an extinction-level asteroid was approaching. And in fifth place was Marvel and Disney's "Ant-Man and the Wasp: Quantumania," at \$4.1 million. Paul Rudd and Evangeline Lilly star. Rounding out the top 10 were: "Cocaine Bear" (\$3.9 million) "Jesus Revolution" (\$3.5 million) "Champions" (\$3 million) "Avatar: The Way of Water" (\$1.9 million) "Puss in Boots: The Last Wish" (\$1.5 million) — AFP

Censorship or evolution? 'Sensitivity readers' divide publishing world

It's a profession which is increasingly under the spotlight as the culture wars rumble on: "sensitivity readers"—editors who identify insensitivities or stereotypes in manuscripts—are becoming a lightning rod for the publishing industry. Such readers have worked in the wings of the Western literary world for years now, though they were largely confined to children's literature. But amid social reckonings such as the #MeToo and Black Lives Matter movements, sensitivity readers are becoming prominent in contemporary fiction publishing also—and not everyone is pleased about it. Publishers "are doing a damn good job trying to ruin our books, and to ruin our fun as readers," the American author of "We Need to Talk About Kevin," Lionel Shriver, complained on ultra-conservative British channel GB News last month. Sensitivity readers have recently been pilloried again with the announcement that books by children's writer Roald Dahl and Ian Fleming, the author of the James Bond novels, were being republished to be more adapted to current sensibilities. In Dahl's books, for example, some characters are no longer identified as "fat" or "crazy." Fleming's books were being reissued with racial references—including the N-word—removed. Accusations of censorship began flying almost immediately from observers who fear sanitized literature could whitewash the past as well as the present. "People say that, but I don't feel that they understand the process," Patrice Williams Marks, a Los Angeles-based sensitivity reader, tells AFP. "If you're writing about a people or community that you're unfamiliar with, and you want it to be authentic... then you find somebody who's a sensitivity reader

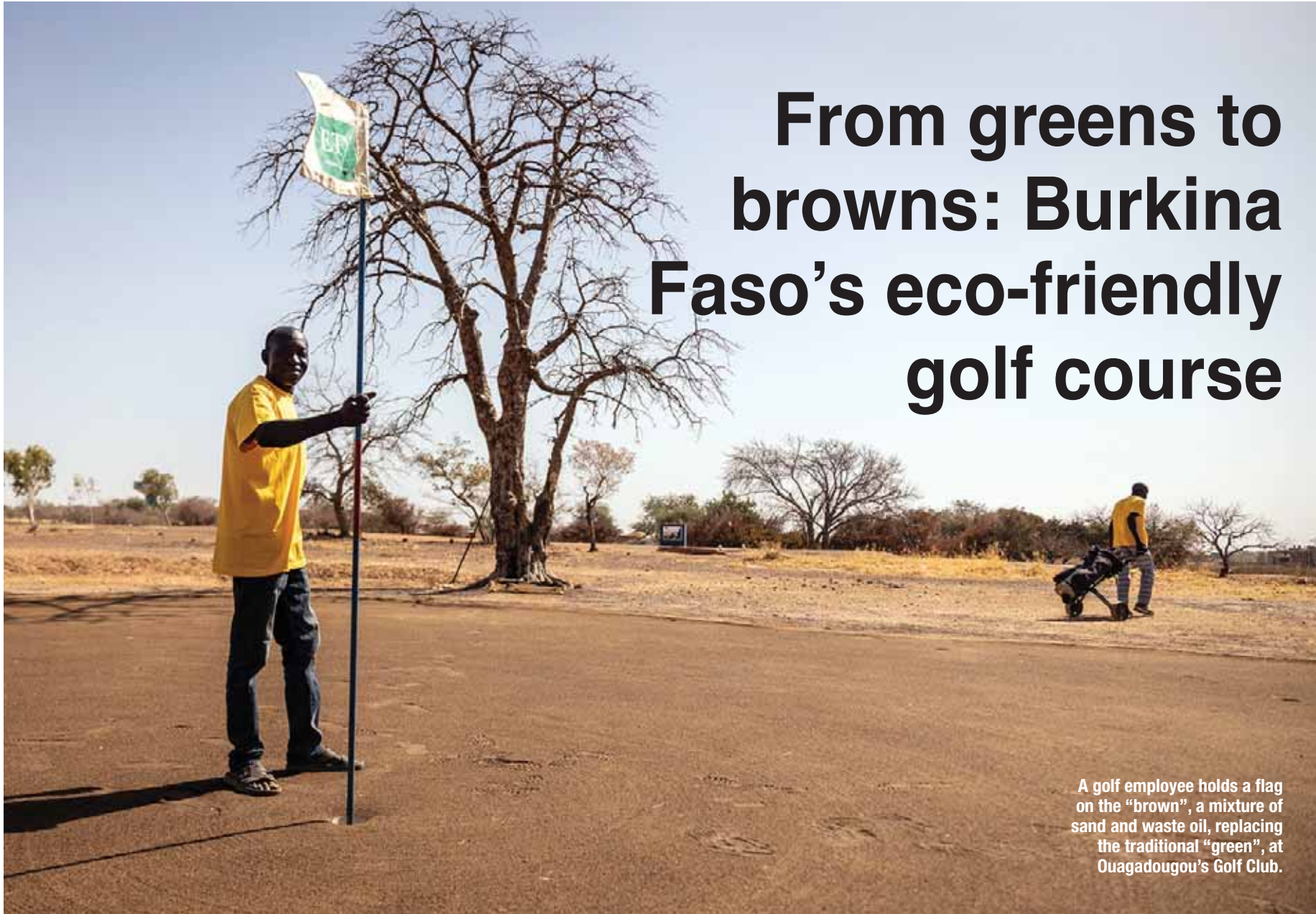


who's part of that community and ask for their opinions," she explains. "I always let them know that they don't have to accept the changes that I suggest," says Lola Isabel Gonzalez, another sensitivity reader, also based in Los Angeles.

Modern censors?

So who are "sensitivity readers"? Mostly they are freelance editors, often paid by the word or number of pages—and with strict confidentiality clauses, of course—by authors or publishers concerned about the accuracy of their manuscripts. Or, as critics charge, to avoid at all costs the disaster of being canceled in a social media storm over a faux pas. The proofreaders often list their areas of expertise: "child of immigrants," "bisexual," "autistic," "hijabi," "deaf," "expertise in both mainland Chinese and Hong Kong culture" and so on. "There are good reasons for regulating children's reading: it is foundational and formational," British author Kate Clanchy wrote last year. But she is much more circumspect when it comes to adults. Adults "are able to put books down if they use them, so their books may safely contain difficult ideas," argues Clanchy, who was herself at the center of a sensitivity reader controversy when her memoir was accused of being racist and insensitive. For Shriver, who has long

complained about such readers, they are nothing less than "sensitivity police." "At the keyboard, unrelenting anguish about hurting other people's feelings inhibits spontaneity and constipates creativity," she wrote in The Guardian newspaper in 2017. In France, a country widely resistant to this type of revisionism, the essayist Raphael Enthoven in 2020 denounced these "modern censors" as "the vanguard of the Identity Plague." **Progress** But many other writers are in favor of readers—like the American Adele Holmes, who hired one of these readers for her first book, "Winter's Reckoning." The reader "was able to point out some areas of white privilege and the white savior role," Holmes told AFP. And, more prosaically, for the character of a Black woman described as having "silky" hair, this reader suggested using the word "coil" instead, to make it more realistic. Holmes feels that the proofreader helped her "immensely." As for the criticisms, she argues they come from people who feel "threatened" by minorities, in a publishing world long known to be predominantly white. For her part, Marks dates the renewed interest in her profession to the 2020 killing of George Floyd, an African American man, by a white police officer in Minneapolis. The murder ignited protests and a social reckoning on modern racism in the United States and around the world. Since then, authors have "become more conscious of the lens that they're looking through," Marks said. Gonzalez also sees this increased care as reflecting social evolution.—AFP



A golf employee holds a flag on the "brown", a mixture of sand and waste oil, replacing the traditional "green", at Ouagadougou's Golf Club.

From greens to browns: Burkina Faso's eco-friendly golf course

When Burkina Faso makes the headlines these days, it's usually because of turmoil or suffering-its jihadist insurgency, repeated military coups or grinding poverty. But in one intriguing aspect, the landlocked Sahel country is at the forefront: its sole golf club is a pioneer in bringing water conservation to this thirstiest of sports. Founded in 1975, the Ouagadougou Golf Club boasts an 18-hole and two nine-hole courses-all certified by the French golf federation.

Visitors to the club, lying amid buildings on the outskirts of the Burkinabe capital, will find the courses a tawny color, the natural tint of the site. Here, there are no greens but "browns" and the fairways comprise earth, stones and sinewy shrubs rather than manicured lawns. Players may well have to contend with a passing herd of goats, which can find themselves vulnerable if a wayward golfer hooks or slices a shot.

"Water is a very rare resource in Burkina Faso," said Salif Samake, the club's president, in an interview ahead of a UN conference on water opening in New York on Wednesday. "Here we play golf in a natural setting... What we have here is a model that can be exported to other countries."

Burkina Faso already suffers heavy water constraints and lies in a region where drought and desertification are likely to accelerate under climate change, researchers say. To water a top-class 18-hole golf course takes an average of 5,000 cubic meters (1.3 million US gallons) per day-equivalent to the

daily consumption of a town of 12,000 people. Sprinkler needs are particularly acute in desert settings. There is the obvious loss from evaporation, but also the sustainability of the water itself-it may have been drawn from aquifers, rather than rivers, which can take hundreds of years to recharge.

Hitting the brown

Ouagadougou's "browns" comprise sand that is bonded with old motor oil to provide a level if rather crumbly surface. "The ball doesn't roll as well (as on grass) and yes, putting is a bit more complicated," Samake conceded. "You do have to rake it (the brown) to remove the small stones, because if the ball hits one, it can bounce off in any direction," he said.

But that, says the club, is part of what makes it fun and an exceptional challenge for even experienced golfers. Ouagadougou resident Nathanael Congo, a newcomer to golf, was looking for balls that he had shot off into the undergrowth. "It's all part of the sport, it's part of what makes the Ouagadougou course exceptional," he said.

Congo said he at first balked at taking up golf. "Most Burkinabe think that it's a sport that's reserved for a certain category of person," he said. Membership fees alone cost 250,000 CFA francs (\$400) annually-a fraction of the cost of a club in the capital of a rich country, but a hefty tag in a country that ranks 184th out of 191 nations in the UN's Human Development Index.

Rustic origins

The golf club's origins date back more than half a century, to the time when the area "was a village, with people growing crops and raising cattle," said the director of sports, Abdou Tapsoba. It was his father, he says, who introduced golf to

who say they have lived in the area for 70 years. Their home is on land adjoining the fifth and 10th hole and is regularly bombed by ill-struck golf balls.

Herder Omar Diallo said he had no complaints about the hazard. He said he was more worried about the threat



Two caddies watch the trajectory of the ball after a player hits the ball at Ouagadougou's Golf Club. — AFP photos

Ouagadougou after taking up the sport while in the French army following World War II. Villagers whose land was taken over by the club found jobs tending the courses, then became caddies and, quite often, turned into exceptional golfers in their own right, Tapsoba said.

But one family remains a holdout-the Diallos, a clan of Fulani cattle herders

posed to his land from property speculators, as Ouagadougou spreads out. "It's hard to find pasture for the cattle-you have to take them far," he said. "We don't know we will be able to stay here when tomorrow comes." — AFP



Salif Samake, president of Ouagadougou's Golf Club, poses for a photo in Ouagadougou.



A man plays golf with a small synthetic grass mat at Ouagadougou's Golf Club.



A general view of a small synthetic grass mat that is used to play golf at Ouagadougou's Golf Club.

'Ted Lasso' cast to visit White House to promote mental health

Actors from the smash-hit comedy series "Ted Lasso" will meet President Joe Biden at the White House on Monday to discuss the importance of mental health, the administration said Sunday. The Apple TV+ series, whose third season premiered March 15, delves into various characters' mental health, with storylines tackling issues with bullying, anger, relationships and self-esteem, as well as panic attacks.

The show stars Jason Sudeikis as Ted Lasso, an out-of-his-depth American football coach who is recruited to lead a dysfunctional English soccer club in the aftermath of its owners' divorce, and as Lasso faces his own mental health issues. The president and First Lady Jill Biden "will welcome Jason Sudeikis and the cast of Ted Lasso to the White House to discuss the importance of addressing your mental health to promote overall well-being," the White House said in a statement.

"Ted Lasso" has inspired the world through its universal themes around optimism, kindness, and determination, and the Lasso philosophy to "believe," Apple TV+ said in a statement, as reported by entertainment news outlet Deadline. Biden on Sunday tweeted a photo of the Oval Office with a sign reading

"BELIEVE" taped above the door-a reference to Lasso's mantra.

The Biden administration said it has expanded mental health resources for young people and provided nearly \$500 million to help states transition to the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline. Anyone experiencing a mental health or suicide crisis can access confidential counseling by calling or texting 988 in the United States to reach the hotline.

"Ted Lasso" won Emmys in 2022 and 2021 for best comedy, best lead actor in a comedy for Sudeikis and best supporting actor in a comedy for Brett Goldstein, among other wins. After winning in 2021, Sudeikis said the show was about family, mentors and teachers, and teammates. "And I wouldn't be here without those three things in my life," he said. — AFP

Spurred by TikTok, some Americans return to cash to curb spending

Manicured fingers meticulously place cash in transparent envelopes marked "food," "gas" and other categories, demonstrating in a TikTok video a retro technique for controlling what you spend that is newly popular with some money-conscious Americans. Returning to cash to control spending may be old fashioned, but in an era of high inflation, a growing number of consumers find that it works.

Judith Griner, 25, started "cash stuffing" two years ago when she was a student at Old Dominion University in Virginia. Now, her TikTok account has more than 200,000 followers. "I was like, I need to somehow use my own money to pay off the tuition so I won't be in too much debt," Griner told AFP.

"I realized that I had no idea how to do that, because I just didn't know how much money I had," she said. "I would swipe my card, and I would just kind of cross my fingers and hope that it wouldn't be declined."

It was a similar situation for 31-year-old Jasmine Taylor, who launched her TikTok channel in February 2021 and now has more than 620,000 followers. "I had a degree but no outlook for a job. My finances were bad," Taylor, a Texan, said. "I was a pretty big impulse shopper." Both women decided the way to turn around their spending behavior was to rely on the technique of paying cash for everything.

Once they cash in their pay checks, they separate it into different envelopes for specific expenses-rent, shopping, etc. On TikTok, the hashtag #cashstuffing has now reached more than 930 million views.

Old method, proven results

The method is reminiscent of the age-old piggy bank system, and was popularized in its current form 20 years ago by financial guru Dave Ramsey, before the era of smartphones and contactless payments. Despite being outdated and at times inconvenient-some businesses refuse to accept cash-the method has allowed Griner to save \$7,500 to finance her education.

"The card didn't feel like real money to me," Griner said. But using cold cash made it very real. "I could physically see myself spending all my cash and it just went away and that's what helped me curb my spending," she said.

Taylor, too, saw immediate results. She pays 95 percent of her expenses in cash, got rid of \$32,000 in student debt, \$8,000 in credit card debt and \$5,000 in health care debt. Wracking up debt is a national affliction in a country with abundant credit card offerings that goad households to take on more and more loans. "It's a problem that my generation kind of suffers from: consumerism and just overspending everything," Griner said.

Sense of comfort

For Priya Malani, founder of Stash Wealth, a financial advisory service for young professionals, the economic downturn plays a role in the current success of the envelope system. "With so many insane headlines-crypto crashes, market pullbacks, looming recession, the list goes on-it makes sense that people are looking for a little more control," Malani said. "A dollar bill you hold in your hand provides that comfort."

But, Jason Howell, a wealth management professor at American University warned that "2023 is probably the worst time to keep your cash in your house" because it earns no interest and depreciates. Taylor, who keeps her envelopes stuffed with small bills in a fireproof safe in her home, is well aware of this. She still deposits money in the bank when she saves \$1,000 or more.

The two experts acknowledge that there is no broader movement back to cash in the United States, where the trend has been the gradual decline of cash in favor of card or mobile payments. In 2022, about four in ten Americans (41 percent) said they would not make any cash purchases in a typical week, compared to only 24 percent in 2015, according to a recent Pew Research Center study.—AFP



This illustration picture shows the 'cash stuffing' TikTok trend, videos where people put cash in envelopes as a budgeting method, displayed on a smartphone in Washington, DC. — AFP



Ted Lasso



People gather around a giant couscous prepared by Libyan chefs on the site of the ancient Roman theatre of Sabratha, about 70 km west of the capital Tripoli. — AFP photos



Libyan chef Monira Zwait, prepares a couscous in the kitchen of her restaurant in Tripoli.



Libyan chef Monira Zwait, prepares a couscous in the kitchen of her restaurant in Tripoli.



Libyan chef Monira Zwait, prepares a couscous in the kitchen of her restaurant in Tripoli.

LIBYAN COUSCOUS CONNOISSEURS COOK UP RECOGNITION BID

Dozens of Libyan chefs are busy preparing a couscous platter the size of a large inflatable swimming pool as they seek international recognition for their country's beloved dish. "It's part of our identity, our culture, our heritage and we're proud of it," said spectator Ahlam Fakhri, watching the four-meter (13-foot) diameter semolina dish take shape. Couscous is an every-

ingredient depending on region and individual tastes.

But it is more readily identified with Algeria, Mauritania, Morocco and Tunisia, which in 2020 jointly inscribed the dish on UNESCO's list of intangible cultural heritage. Conflict-scarred Libya missed out as the country remains mired in political crisis, with two rival camps claiming to be the country's legitimate government.

giant cooking event this month at the site of the ancient Roman theatre of Sabratha, some 70 kilometers (40 miles) west along the Mediterranean coast from the capital Tripoli.

The recipe combined 2,400 kilograms (5,300 pounds) of semolina, mutton, pumpkin and "boss-la"-caramelized onions cooked in clarified butter that are the signature touch to a Libyan couscous.

steel pots, the cooks stirred the semolina, reddened by tomato juice, and heaped cooked ingredients onto platters. "I haven't slept all night," said one of kitchen assistant, taking a short break on a garden chair with a tired smile on his face.

Fakhri was delighted to see Libyans come together for a day in a country that endured more than a decade of chaos following the 2011 overthrow and death of longtime dictator Muammar Gaddafi. "I come from a village known for its couscous, which you can smell from far away," said Fakhri, a well-travelled doctor from Tripoli. "The whole of the Maghreb is renowned for its couscous, which distinguishes us from the Arab east".

Ali Messaoud Al-Ftimi, who organized the giant couscous, said he hosts similar events each year at different historical sites to send "a message to parliament" that Libya should have its couscous recognized too.

Ftimi, who heads an association aiming to encourage tourism and preserve Libya's heritage, told AFP the efforts come from "a popular impulse" and he hopes lawmakers will ratify the international UN convention "in the near future". "Adhering to this conven-



Libyan chefs and people gather around a giant couscous, on the site of the ancient Roman theatre of Sabratha.

tion will not only preserve couscous," the 54-year-old said. "Libya is rich in culture and heritage and this heritage is not protected".

'More than a dish'

UNESCO said there is no barrier to Libya ratifying the convention on cultural heritage and subsequently adding its name to its couscous file, "because a designation doesn't mean ownership or exclusivity to a country". In Tripoli, chef Monira Zwait said she hopes authorities will achieve the goal.

The 43-year-old runs a restaurant and prides herself for pastry creations inspired by current

trends on social media. But she said cooking couscous is a tradition that requires strict adherence to age-old recipes, which she called a "red line".

Wearing a white chef's uniform embroidered with golden trim, she prepares couscous as her mother taught her—with a pinch of salt, a little chilli powder and a touch of cinnamon for a sweet aftertaste. "Couscous is not just a dish that we eat," Zwait said. "It is the mirror of a civilization and a knowledge transmitted from generation to generation". — AFP



People gather around a giant couscous prepared by Libyan chefs on the site of the ancient Roman theatre of Sabratha.

day staple in Libya and across North Africa's Maghreb region. Originally a Berber specialty, it is made with hand-rolled semolina flour that is steamed and cooked, then served with a range of in-

Its couscous tradition has not been recognized by UNESCO as Libya is yet to ratify the UN's cultural heritage convention. In a bid to showcase Libya's beloved couscous, the chefs held their

'Heritage not protected'

Families gathered happily for the event, which was guarded by police, while young people filmed the scene with their phones. In hefty stainless



Guardian Lahcen Boutirane walks at the ancient collective granary of Ait Kine village in Morocco's region of Tata. — AFP photos



A woman sits at the ancient collective granary of Ait Kine village.



Guardian Lahcen Boutirane walks at the ancient collective granary of Ait Kine village.



Guardian Lahcen Boutirane walks at the ancient collective granary of Ait Kine village.

Surrounded by olive and palm trees in a Moroccan mountain village, a centuries-old collective granary preserves the ancient practices of the Amazigh culture. "The traditions are vanishing, but not here," said proud village elder Hossine Oubrahim, in Ait Kine in the Anti-Atlas mountains.

High in the rugged hills some 460 kilometers (280 miles) south of the capital Rabat, Ait Kine is home to one of country's few remaining collective granaries called agadir in Amazigh, Morocco's Berber language. The imposing, fully functional structure, likely built in the 18th century and restored in 2012, is still used by local residents to store and protect their produce.

"We were raised on the tradition of storing our grains, dried fruit, oil and valuables there," recalled Oubrahim, in his 70s and wearing an indigo-colored tunic. "And we continue to respect it." The village's granary is a "monument" that "represents our community spirit", said Abdelghani Charai, a 60-year-old merchant who returned to his ancestral home in Ait Kine after years away.

Grains, fruit, family archives

The granary, built using a practice known as rammed earth, sits in the village centre, protected by a fortified wall with a stone watchtower. In the past, during times of unrest and rebellion against the government, it offered a safe place for storage, Charai explained. "The granary guaranteed security," he said. Inside, 76 cubicles are arranged in three levels around an open courtyard with a water cistern.

The agadir has stocks of barley, dates and almonds, but it is also used to safeguard documents like marriage and birth certificates, religious texts and contracts, and recipes for traditional medicine inscribed on palm stems. Lahcen Boutirane, the guardian of the collective storeroom, said the village's 63 remaining families use it.

"Others have left, but they keep their archives here," he

Moroccan villagers keep communal store tradition alive



told AFP. Unwritten laws have kept these granaries sacred and inviolable spaces, not only storing crops to use in drought but also protecting them from attacks, said archaeologist Naima Keddane. Boutirane stressed the importance of preserving Ait Kine's agadir, which "bears witness to our ancestors' ingenuity".

'Solidarity'

Collective granaries can be found elsewhere in North Africa—in Algeria's Aures mountains, Tunisia's south and Libya's Nafusa mountains—but they are most common in Morocco, though many are no longer in use. The kingdom has more than 550 ancient igoudar—the plural of aga-

dir—according to the culture ministry, which is preparing a UNESCO World Heritage nomination. They are located primarily across central and southern Morocco, in caves or on cliff sides, on hillsides and in valleys.

"The challenge is to save Morocco's collective granaries, which have almost disappeared in Algeria, Tunisia and Libya," said architect and anthropologist Salima Naji. Passionate about these "institutions of solidarity", she had helped restore Ait Kine's agadir, now an attraction for both researchers and tourists.

A group of Italian visitors appreciated the carved wooden door, adorned with forged iron. "We are doing a tour of granaries," said guide Emanuele Maspoli, describing them as "extraordinary places that attest to the historical wealth of Morocco's oases". "It's a magical place," said tourist Antonella Dalla. — AFP



Guardian Lahcen Boutirane walks at the ancient collective granary of Ait Kine village.

Sports

US squad rips Cuba to reach World Baseball Classic final

Turner smashes 2 home runs as US rout political rival Cuba

MIAMI: Trea Turner smashed two home runs and defending champion United States routed political rival Cuba 14-2 on Sunday to reach the World Baseball Classic final. The Americans advanced to Tuesday's championship game against the winner of Monday's other semi-final between undefeated Japan and Mexico, which defeated the US squad in group play.

Japan, winner of the first two Classics in 2006 and 2009, will start 21-year-old right-handed ace pitcher Roki Sasaki against Mexico, a first-time semi-finalist. Turner and Paul Goldschmidt each drove in four runs as the Americans pounded out 14 hits and scored in each of the first six innings to overwhelm their rivals from the Caribbean.

"It was a great win for us," said US winning pitcher Adam Wainwright. "It's a great feeling. I'm so proud to be out there." Cuba's Roel Santos, Yoan Moncada and Luis Robert Jr. delivered infield singles to open the game and Wainwright, a 41-year-old right-hander, then walked Alfredo Despaigne to force in a run. "They didn't hit any balls hard," Wainwright said. "There was a lot of stuff going on. I just had to realize they weren't smacking me around. It wasn't like they were hitting balls hard."

"I was getting myself into situations that I didn't need to get myself into. I had to just keep making pitches. I took a big step off the mound, took a deep breath, reset and just tried to make some pitches." The Americans limited the damage to a lone run and dominated from there. "Luckily, I've got a good curve ball. I could spin the ball well," said Wainwright, who pitched four innings. In the bottom of the first inning, Mookie Betts doubled and first baseman Goldschmidt, last year's National League Most Valuable Player for St Louis, blasted a two-run homer to left field off Roenis Elias for a 2-1 US edge.

Elias, a 34-year-old southpaw, is among several players who defected from Cuba to join MLB clubs that Cuban officials allowed onto the Classic squad for the first time. Turner, who blasted the game-winning grand slam in a US quarter-final victory over Venezuela, smashed a solo homer in the second for a 3-1 USA lead. Pete Alonso's bases-loaded single in the third plated another US run and Tim Anderson's sacrifice fly gave the hosts a 5-1 advantage. In the fourth, Goldschmidt walked and scored on a triple by Nolan Arenado, who ran home on a wild pitch by Carlos Viera for a six-run US lead.

In the fifth, Moncada doubled, advanced on a Erisbel Arruebarrena single and scored on an Andy Ibanez single to pull Cuba within 7-2. But the Americans answered in the fifth when Goldschmidt smacked a two-run single. Turner blasted a three-run homer in the sixth, his team-best fourth of the Classic, for a 12-2 US advantage. Betts followed with a single and scored on Mike Trout's double to right field as the rout rolled on.

'Wildest environment'

US supporters erupted in delight, part of an electric atmosphere at the home of MLB's Miami Marlins. "That's the wildest environment I've ever



MIAMI: A fan is subdued after running on the field during the World Baseball Classic Semifinals between Team Cuba and Team USA on March 19, 2023 in Miami.— AFP

pitched in. Fans were going crazy the entire time," Wainwright said. "It has been like that every round. It seems like every fan in the house is on their feet all the time cheering. "You can barely hear yourself

talk on the bench. You can barely hear yourself think on the mound. You've got to really focus." Cedric Mullins added a solo homer in the eighth to create the final margin. — AFP

Ramadan tourney begins March 28th

KUWAIT: The Ramadan Saad Al-Tamimi Futsal tournament will be launched on March 28th at Martyr Fahad Al-Ahmad Hall in Daeya. 32 teams will participate in the event which is scheduled March 28th-April 6th. Tournament Director Abdelaziz Atiya said the organizing committee has completed its preparations. He congratulated Kuwaitis, the Arabs and Muslim nations for the arrival of the Holy month, adding that the days of the month will witness many sports activities.

He said the organizing committee seeks to have in Ramadan a distinguished tournament for Kuwait youths and Futsal lovers. Professional and local players will be participating in the tournament. There will be matches for former national team players, media personalities and artists. There will be valuable prizes for the winners. The first place will win KD 5,000



and second place will grab KD 3,000. He said the 20-minute matches will start from 3:00 pm until 5:00 pm. There will also be a Padel tournament for both professionals and amateurs on April 5th-7th at the Padel Academy with valuable prizes allocated.

Rybakina secures Indian Wells title

INDIAN WELLS: Wimbledon champion Elena Rybakina edged Aryna Sabalenka 7-6 (13/11), 6-4 on Sunday to win the Indian Wells WTA title and avenge her loss to the Belarusian in the Australian Open final. Kazakhstan's Rybakina, the world number 10 who ousted top-ranked defending champion Iga Swiatek in the semi-finals, followed up with her first victory over second-ranked Sabalenka in five career meetings.

Rybakina, projected to rise to seventh in the world, handed Sabalenka just her second defeat of the year, denying her a third title to go with a win in Adelaide that presaged her first Grand Slam triumph at Melbourne. "It's actually the first time it goes my way," Rybakina said as she accepted the trophy, a smiling Sabalenka leaning to the microphone to interject. "I will make sure it was the last one." "We'll see next time," Rybakina laughed. The banter belied another tense battle between the two, who had gone to three sets in all four prior encounters.

Sabalenka had the edge from the baseline, but, in the face of fierce pressure from Rybakina, the serve demons that beset the Belarusian last year resurfaced and her 10 double faults in the opening frame ultimately proved too much to overcome. After fending off three break points in a marathon fourth game, she broke Rybakina to gain the first advantage. But Sabalenka handed back the break with a double fault as Rybakina leveled the set at 4-4. She gifted Rybakina a set point with another double fault in the 12th game and while the Kazakhstan player couldn't capitalize, she would do so finally in the tiebreaker.

Sabalenka herself let two set points go begging



INDIAN WELLS: Elena Rybakina of Kazakhstan poses with the winner's trophy after defeating Aryna Sabalenka of Belarus during the Women's Final of the BNP Paribas Open on March 19, 2023.— AFP

on her own serve in the 17-minute tiebreaker before her 10th double fault of the set gave Rybakina her sixth set point and she took it. Sabalenka, struggling to quell her emotions, was broken to love to open the second set and that was all the opening Rybakina needed. "It was a rollercoaster," Rybakina said. "With all these double faults, I think we were both so tight, because we both knew that it's not easy with our serves to hold it but also to try to break. "It's been just a rollercoaster and I'm happy that the first set went my way so the second was a bit easier."

An early break was even more important as the blustery wind picked up in the second set. The Moscow-born Kazakh saved a pair of break points to push her lead to 3-1 and, with Sabalenka in survival mode, she ripped a backhand return up the line for a break that put her ahead 5-2. Sabalenka wouldn't go quietly, breaking Rybakina to love and holding serve with ease with the wind at her back. — AFP

"The shot on 15 is really when I kind of locked in for the finish," Moore said. "Hit a great 9-iron there. "Then 16. I was trying to just hit the middle of the green there. It got a little closer than I thought it would and made that putt, and finished it off." World number 103 Moore's best prior PGA finish was a share of fourth in last year's pairs event at New Orleans, but he made all 64 of his putts this week from inside seven feet.

"That was pretty awesome," he said. "I don't think I've ever done anything close to that, so that was really cool. Just a testament to the work I've put in. "Yeah, that was pretty sick to see." Spieth, Schenk and Moore shared the lead at 10-under entering the final holes, but Spieth was undone when his tee shot at the 16th found a watery grave and Schenk went left beyond a cart path then over the green. Spieth made a clutch 14-foot bogey putt at 16 and Schenk followed with a six-foot par putt to keep a share of the lead. At the par-3 17th, Schenk found a bunker but saved par on a 16-foot putt to stay tied for the lead while Spieth missed a seven-foot birdie putt and remained one back. "I tried to die the putt in on 17 and just misread how much it was going to dive at the end," Spieth said. — AFP

Unheralded Moore wins shootout for PGA Valspar title

MIAMI: Unheralded Taylor Moore birdied two of the last four holes to win a back-nine shootout on Sunday and capture the Valspar Championship for his first PGA title. The 29-year-old American fired a four-under par 67 - the only round in the 60s among the final 11 pairs on the course-to finish 72 holes on 10-under 274 at Innisbrook's Copperhead course in Palm Harbor, Florida.

That was good enough to edge Adam Schenk by one stroke with England's Tommy Fleetwood and three-time major winner Jordan Spieth sharing third on 276. "It's a pretty awesome feeling," Moore said. "Super happy." Moore, in only his 46th PGA start, sank a six-foot birdie putt at the par-3 15th and made a 26-foot birdie putt at the par-4 16th, then closed with back-to-back pars while Spieth and Schenk stumbled down the stretch.

Starc powers Australia to a series-leveling win

VISAKHAPATNAM: Mitchell Starc on Sunday returned figures of 5-53 with his excellent swing and seam to power Australia to a series-leveling 10-wicket win over India in the second one-day international. Starc, a left-arm quick, rattled the Indian batting with his pace and swing to bundle out the opposition for just 117 in only 26 overs in Visakhapatnam. Openers Travis Head, who hit 51, and Mitchell Marsh, who smashed 66 off 36 balls, then took apart the Indian bowling to romp home in 11 overs. Australia finished the chase with 39 overs to spare and bounce back from their opening defeat to hand India their biggest ODI loss in terms of balls remaining.

Starc led the team's lethal attack with the wicket of Shubman Gill for a duck after the tourists decided to bowl first after overnight rain. "It was a great day for us," man of the match Starc told broadcasters Star Sports. "I think the bowling unit was pretty spot on. I guess the conditions helped the ball swing a bit but I think we bowled really good areas. We were probably on the more aggressive side when we started to get a few wickets in the powerplay."

Marsh, who stood out with his blazing knock that included six fours and six sixes, praised Starc. "It was a pleasure to watch. You know what he can do with the white-ball, especially when he is swinging it. He is the best in the world," said Marsh. Two successive strikes from Starc to get returning skipper Rohit Sharma for 13 and then Suryakumar Yadav, out for a second straight first-ball duck, pushed India onto the back foot.

'Superman' Smith

KL Rahul played out the hat-trick ball but lasted for just 11 more deliveries before falling leg before wicket to Starc, who returned figures of 4-31 in his first spell of six overs. Skipper Steve Smith took a stunning one-handed catch at first slip to dismiss Hardik Pandya for one off the bowling of Sean Abbott, who took three wickets. Smith went full stretch to his right and was airborne when he took the catch off an edge from Pandya, setting social media abuzz with praise for his "superman" effort. Virat Kohli attempted to hit back for India with a score of



VISAKHAPATNAM: Australia's Mitchell Starc bowls during the second one-day international (ODI) cricket match between India and Australia on March 19, 2023.—AFP

31 that included four boundaries before he was trapped in front by Nathan Ellis.

Wickets kept tumbling and the departure of Ravindra Jadeja, the hero from Friday's first match in Mumbai, for 16 off the bowling of Ellis added to India's woes. Starc wrapped up the innings with his ninth ODI five-wicket haul. Axar Patel, who came into the team in place of Shardul Thakur, was unbeaten on 29 after hitting two sixes. "He is a quality bowler. He's been doing it for years for Australia with the new ball," Rohit said of Starc. "We kept falling to his strength. Failure was from our batsmen."

The left-handed Head and Marsh came out firing as they smashed Mohammed Siraj and Mohammed Shami to all parts of the ground. Head began the attack with two straight boundaries off Siraj and Marsh soon joined the charge with a string of fours and huge sixes, one of them into the second tier of the packed stands. Marsh, who hit 81 in his team's opening loss, hit two straight sixes off Pandya to reach his fifty off 28 balls. Head soon raised his fifty and Marsh hit the winning boundary to take the series decider to Chennai on Wednesday. — AFP

think my tennis didn't improve so much since last year. What I improve a lot is to not take the pressure, just to play relaxed. That, for me, is the most important thing. "That's why I show a great level, because I feel like I have no pressure. I enjoy."

Medvedev certainly wasn't able to ratchet up the pressure on him. A stinging backhand winner gave Alcaraz an early break in the opening set as he raced to a 3-0 lead. He gave himself a set point with a sharply angled forehand volley and sealed it with an unreturnable serve, then won the first 10 points of the second set on the way to a 4-0 lead. He didn't face a break point as he polished it off in one hour and 11 minutes, a diving volley winner giving him match point that he converted with another service winner.

Not easy

"I expected a tougher match," he said. "Against him is always a tactical match, and I did perfect today. That's why it looks easy-but it wasn't." Alcaraz has returned to number one despite a late start to the year. Injury forced him to miss the Australian Open, where Djokovic claimed a record-equalling 22nd Grand Slam title. Since launching his season in February Alcaraz has won a title in Buenos Aires and reached the final in Rio de Janeiro. But to stay at the top he'll have to successfully defend his Miami title over the course of the next two weeks.

Medvedev, a former world number one and US Open winner himself, was disappointed that he didn't play his best, but pleased to get past the fourth round at Indian Wells for the first time, despite twisting his ankle in a win over Alexander Zverev and cutting his thumb in another tumble against Alejandro Davidovich Fokina. — AFP

Alcaraz reclaims world Number 1

INDIAN WELLS: Spain's Carlos Alcaraz swept past Daniil Medvedev 6-3, 6-2 on Sunday to win the Indian Wells ATP Masters 1000 and secure his return to number one in the world. US Open champion Alcaraz ended Medvedev's 19-match winning streak, denying him a fourth title in as many tournaments to ensure he will supplant Australian Open champion Novak Djokovic atop the rankings.

"It feels amazing to lift the trophy here, to recover the No 1," Alcaraz said. "I would say this has been the perfect tournament." Serbia's Djokovic, barred from entering the United States because he hasn't been vaccinated against COVID-19, sat out Indian Wells and will miss the Miami Open starting this week, where Alcaraz is the defending champion.

Alcaraz, 19, who became the youngest world number one ever after his triumph at Flushing Meadows last year, claimed his third Masters 1000 title and joined compatriot Rafael Nadal as the only players to win at least three as a teenager. Nadal won six before turning 20. He was unstoppable on Stadium Court, breaking through what he'd called the "wall" of Medvedev's formidable defenses. Medvedev, coming off titles in Rotterdam, Doha and Dubai, could find no answer as Alcaraz fired winners from all over the court, defying the windy conditions.

"Daniil obviously didn't play at his best level, but I'm very happy for my performance and how I played this tournament." He said the big change in him since a semi-final defeat to Nadal last year at Indian Wells was his comfort level on the game's biggest stages. "I

Sports

Bucks return to winning ways, overpower Raptors

Antetokounmpo bags triple-double; Lopez delivers huge 4th quarter

LOS ANGELES: Giannis Antetokounmpo bagged a triple-double and Brook Lopez delivered a huge fourth quarter as the Milwaukee Bucks returned to winning ways with a 118-111 victory over the Toronto Raptors on Sunday. The Eastern Conference leaders, jolted by a lopsided loss to Indiana on Thursday, returned to form with a dogged come-from-behind win over the Raptors at Milwaukee's Fiserv Forum. Toronto led by eight near the end of the third quarter, but were overpowered down the stretch with Lopez scoring 17 of his 26 points in the final period to drag Milwaukee over the line.

Antetokounmpo meanwhile finished with 22 points, 13 rebounds and 10 assists as Milwaukee improved to 51-20 at the top of the Eastern Conference, 25 games clear of the in-form Philadelphia 76ers. Fred VanVleet led Toronto's scorers with 23 points. In other games on Sunday, Austin Reaves scored a career-high 35 points as the Los Angeles Lakers bounced back from Friday's agonizing loss to Dallas to see off Orlando 111-105. The Lakers, battling to remain in the hunt for a post-season berth in the Western Conference, were left shell-shocked after a buzzer-beating loss to the Mavs on Friday.

It looked as if history might repeat itself on Sunday as the Magic closed to 101-101 with 2 minutes and 39 seconds remaining. But Reaves took over by rattling in his team's final 10 points to secure a win which lifted the Lakers into the play-in positions. "It's a good win," Reaves said after-

ward. "Every win from now is crucial, and every game from now is crucial. It's all about how we approach the game-if we're locked in to what we need to do I feel like we've got the firepower to be one of the best teams in the league."

Blazers struggling

In Portland, the Trail Blazers' playoff push suffered a blow with a 117-102 defeat to the Los Angeles Clippers. The Clippers never trailed throughout, with Paul George finishing with 29 points and Kawhi Leonard with 24 points. The loss leaves Portland in 13th place in the Western Conference with a 31-40 record, three spots outside the play-in places. Elsewhere Sunday, Shai Gilgeous-Alexander scored 40 points as the Oklahoma City Thunder staged a second-half rally to eclipse Devin Booker and the Phoenix Suns.

Gilgeous-Alexander shot 12-of-24 from the field while draining 16-of-19 free throws as Oklahoma City overturned a 15-point first-half deficit to complete a 124-120 victory. The Thunder trailed by 10 points early in the fourth quarter but outscored Phoenix 34-24 in the final frame with Gilgeous-Alexander contributing 10 points-to grab victory. The win boosts Oklahoma City's playoff hopes, with the Thunder improving to 35-36 in the Western Conference for eighth place.

Only a handful of games separate a swath of teams jostling for the postseason in the West, where Phoenix

remain in fourth place with a 38-33 record. Phoenix, meanwhile, were sparked by 46 points from Booker but saw only three other players break into double figures after a steely OKC defensive display in the second half. "It was a total team effort," Gilgeous-Alexander said afterward. "There was some adversity throughout the game, but we just kept pushing and stuck to our gameplan and came up with the 'W'."

In other games on Sunday, Nikola Jokic's 28th triple-double of the season helped the Denver Nuggets take a 108-102 win on the road against the Brooklyn Nets. Two-time NBA Most Valuable Player Jokic finished with 22 points, 17 rebounds and 10 assists as the Western Conference leaders improved to 48-24. The Nuggets have already assured themselves of a postseason berth and are now aiming to lock down top seed in the final three weeks of the regular season.

Michael Porter Jr led the Denver scorers with 28 points, while Jamal Murray added 25. In San Antonio, Keldon Johnson and Devin Vassell both finished with 29 points as the Spurs fought back from 24 points down to stun the visiting Atlanta Hawks 126-118. The Hawks looked to be romping to a comfortable road win after piling on 83 first-half points to lead by 22 at half time. But the Spurs-already eliminated from postseason contention-flipped the script after the break, outscoring Atlanta 39-20 in the third before a 26-15 fourth quarter. —AFP



ILWAUKEE: Giannis Antetokounmpo #34 of the Milwaukee Bucks handles the ball during the game on March 19, 2023. —AFP

West Asia Triathlon Championship ends

By Abdellatif Shara

KUWAIT: West Asia Triathlon Championship organized by Kuwait Triathlon Club and federation concluded at the Marina beach with large participation of athletes of various ages. In the Spring Ages group's competition, world champions participated with Lebanon's Lindsey Nader winning; Soria took second position while Tonia Mkari grabbed third. In the men's category Ali Al-Zubi from Lebanon took first; Thomas Beeroka from Argentine (second); Saudi Arabia's Rayyan Al-Khuwaiter (third).

In the professional sprint event, Lidya Musleh (from Jordan) took the first position; Najlaa Al-Jraiwi (second) and Huda Al-Saleh (third). The men's event was won by Syria's Adnan Zaki, Bahrain's Abdulrahman Mubarak and Saud Al-Zaabi from UAE respectively. The women's super sprint event was won by Shajwan Mohammad (from Iraq); Kuwait's Fai Al-Mulla and Loulwa Al-Rifai grabbed second and third respectively. Chairman of the Triathlon Club and Federation, Financial Secretary of West Asia Federation Rashid Al-Kandary said the Championship was a success and received appreciation from participating athletes and teams.



Conte's outburst leaves Levy with decision to make

LONDON: Antonio Conte's astonishing rant at his "selfish" Tottenham players and the culture of the club leaves the Spurs hierarchy with a difficult decision to make. Conte's days in north London already seemed numbered prior to his scathing outburst after Saturday's 3-3 draw at bottom-of-the-table Southampton. The Italian is out of contract at the end of the season, with neither side keen on extending his stay into a third campaign, but now he could face the sack during the forthcoming international break.

With Tottenham desperately trying to hold on to

fourth place in the Premier League and the riches of a return to the Champions League next season, chairman Daniel Levy must decide whether their final 10 games would be more profitable with Conte removed from the equation.

Conte arrived at Spurs in November 2021 with the reputation of a serial winner. The 53-year-old won league titles at each of his previous three spells in charge of Juventus, Chelsea and Inter Milan. Despite his success, the former Italian international's time at all three clubs ended in acrimony. The pattern is set to continue at Spurs but without Conte ending the club's 15-year wait to win a trophy.

Tottenham were dumped out of the both the FA Cup and Champions League within a week earlier this month. Conte has only recently returned to the touchline after a spell back in Italy recovering from gallbladder surgery and his patience ran out after

seeing his side throw away a 3-1 lead with just 13 minutes remaining at St Mary's. "It's the right moment to speak because I think that after this performance, for me this is unacceptable," said Conte. "I see selfish players, I see players that don't want to help each other and don't put their heart."

Conte was even more cutting when pushed on the reasons for Tottenham's continued failure to succeed under a string of different managers. "Tottenham's story is this. Twenty years there is the owner and they never won something," he added. "Why? Because they are used to it here, they are used to it. They don't play for something important. They don't want to play under pressure, they don't want to play under stress. It is easy in this way." Amid such a crisis it is hard to believe that Conte's men still sit fourth in the Premier League table. But they are just two points ahead of Newcastle having played two games more than the Magpies. —AFP

Man United set up FA Cup semi-final against Brighton

MANCHESTER: Manchester United set up a FA Cup semi-final against Brighton in remarkable fashion as Fulham captain Aleksandar Mitrovic was sent off for pushing the referee in a 3-1 defeat at Old Trafford on Sunday. Mitrovic was shown one of three Fulham red cards in a matter of seconds as he barged into Chris Kavanagh for awarding United a penalty after a VAR review for Willian's handball on the line.

The Brazilian was also dismissed, along with Fulham manager Marco Silva on the touchline. United took advantage as two goals from Bruno Fernandes and Marcel Sabitzer's first for the club kept Erik ten Hag's men on course for a treble of cup competitions. "Mitro should control his emotions a bit," said Silva. "If he wants to give me the red card I have to accept it because he didn't listen to me at all. As I left my area I have to accept it."

Fulham's fury was partly born out of a penalty appeal for a foul on Mitrovic in the first half that VAR did not intervene to award. "It is a shame the ref wasn't shown VAR for the first-half moments," added Silva. "It is difficult to be Fulham at Old Trafford, the VAR feels the pressure too." The Cottagers had been on course to reach the last four for the first time in 21 years when Mitrovic fired them ahead early in the second half.

United needed goalkeeper David de Gea to make a remarkable save to deny the Serbian a second before the tie completely turned on one incident 18 minutes from time. Willian used his hand to deflect Jadon Sancho's shot behind, preventing a certain goal. Kavanagh initially only gave a corner, but reversed his decision on seeing the replay to spark chaotic scenes. Silva was first to be shown red for approaching the official near the VAR monitor.

Willian was then dismissed, but it is Mitrovic who faces the most severe ban after pushing the referee on the arm and then squaring up to Kavanagh. Fernandes coolly sent Bernd Leno the wrong way from the penalty spot to level. United quickly made the most of the two-man advantage as Luke Shaw crossed for Sabitzer to flick home. Fernandes inflicted the final blow as he blasted home in the sixth minute of added time to take United to Wembley on April 23. "This team has great character," said Ten Hag after his side shrugged off the fatigue of playing away to Real Betis in the Europa League on Thursday. "We are mentally and physically fit, and I'm happy with our progress as a team." —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
Adaliya	22517144



Embassy of India Kuwait

Embassy of India, Kuwait invites bids from interested companies for cleaning of 29 Air Handling Units, 9 Fan Control Units and connected ducts of Heating, Ventilation and Air Conditioning (HVAC) System installed in the Embassy premises and its adjacent 10 residences.

Prospective / Interested companies are invited to bid and present their offers in a sealed cover marked "Offer for Cleaning of HVAC System- to be opened by addressee only" and addressed to the "Head of Chancery, Embassy of India, Diplomatic Enclave, Arabian Gulf Street, Safat 13015, Kuwait." The bid must be submitted at the Embassy on or before 10th April 2023.

The detailed tender document along with its annexure may be downloaded from Central Procurement Portal <https://eprocure.gov.in/cppp/> and also the official website of the Embassy of India, Kuwait from <https://indembkwt.gov.in/tender-kuwait-in-india.php>.

Barca snatch a 2-1 Clasico win

Barcelona move 12 points clear of Madrid



BARCELONA: Barcelona's Spanish midfielder Sergi Roberto (2nd-left) scores his team's first goal past Real Madrid's Belgian goalkeeper Thibaut Courtois (2nd-right) during the Spanish league football match between FC Barcelona and Real Madrid CF on March 19, 2023. — AFP

BARCELONA: Barcelona snatched a 2-1 Clasico win over Real Madrid with Franck Kessie's late goal Sunday to move 12 points clear at the top of La Liga. The victory dents Madrid's ambitions of retaining the title and leaves the Catalans close to lifting the trophy for the first time since 2019. Carlo Ancelotti's Madrid took the lead through a Ronald Araujo own goal but Barcelona pulled level when Sergi Roberto tucked home just before half-time.

Both sides had chances to win the game and Marco Asensio struck for Madrid, but the goal was ruled offside by VAR, before Alejandro Balde set up Kessie in the 92nd minute. "It's not definitive but it's a very important step," Xavi told reporters. "Twelve points clear at the top of La Liga, we are having an extraordinary league campaign, I am very happy for that and proud to watch the team play." The build-up to the match was overshadowed by Barcelona's corruption charge in the "Caso Negreira" refereeing scandal.

Madrid joined Spanish prosecutors' complaint against Barcelona last week and their president Florentino Perez snubbed the game for the first time in over 20 years, amid rising tensions between the two Spanish giants. That fed the match's intensity, both on and off the pitch, in Xavi's sixth Clasico as Barcelona coach but only his first at Camp Nou. Xavi asked fans to make the stadium a pressure cooker and they responded, selling it out, whistling Madrid in possession and conjuring one of the best atmospheres of the season.

However, they fell behind in unfortunate circumstances. Araujo deflected Vinicius' cross in at the near post, with Ter Stegen helpless. Araujo, playing at right-back to counteract the Brazilian, has enjoyed his duels with Vinicius in the past but this time the winger triumphed, albeit fortuitously. Barcelona supporters became enraged by his emphatic celebration in front of them. It was the first goal from open play

Barcelona have conceded at Camp Nou in La Liga all season long, and only the second strike at home and ninth overall.

Comeback charge

Barcelona complained defender Nacho, already booked, should have been sent off for a hand-off on Raphinha. The hosts did not get their wish, but were building up steam and found the breakthrough just before half-time, from an unlikely source. Selected in place of injured midfielder Pedri, Sergi Roberto was in the right place at the right time to control a loose ball in the box and arc it beyond Courtois. Barcelona had significantly more possession than in their cup win over Madrid and significantly more chances, but Madrid nearly won it. Madrid substitute Asensio fired home but the goal was ruled out for offside after a nery wait for VAR instruction.

"We did not win because of an offside that we're

still doubtful about," complained Ancelotti. "I was not so sure. We have doubts about it, and we go back to Madrid with this doubt." Barcelona seemed content with the draw but Kessie's last-gasp strike sparked wild celebrations at Camp Nou. "I don't have the feeling (the league is won) but I understand the fans singing 'campeones' - it's a considerable advantage but we can't relax," added Xavi. "The atmosphere was extraordinary, how the fans supported the team."

Earlier Real Sociedad held on to fourth place with a 2-0 win over Elche on Sunday. They are under pressure from Real Betis and Villarreal who both won too. Betis, fifth, are three points behind the Basque side after they beat Mallorca 1-0, while Villarreal, sixth, thrashed Osasuna 3-0 on the road and sit four points behind the Andalusians. Sevilla fell to a disappointing 2-0 defeat at Getafe as their topsy-turvy season continued, leaving Jorge Sampaoli's side 14th and two points above the drop zone. — AFP

'Street fighter' Perez storms to GP victory

JEDDAH: Red Bull's Sergio Perez flexed his street circuit muscles with dramatic effect on Sunday by storming to victory ahead of team-mate Max Verstappen at the Saudi Arabian Grand Prix. While the top two were clear cut, the next two places remained in confusion long after the race had finished with Fernando Alonso first stripped of third place and then reinstated in the early hours of Monday morning.

Perez, a 33-year-old Mexican, came home 5.355 seconds clear of the defending double world champion as Red Bull reeled off a masterful one-two triumph, the Dutchman having stormed through the field from 15th on the grid. Verstappen also clocked the fastest lap of the race on the final lap to retain his lead of the embryonic drivers' championship, snatching it back from Perez as they duelled at high speed.

It was Perez's fifth career win having previously triumphed in Monte Carlo and Singapore to earn his reputation as a 'street fighter'. "It turned out to be tougher than expected," he said. "The safety car tried to take the victory from us again here, but not this year! The team did a great job. Now we must keep pushing." Verstappen was eliminated from qualifying after a drive-shaft failure. "It wasn't easy to get through the field," he said. "We settled for second so it's a good recovery in the end."

Two-time world champion Alonso finished a stirring third on track for Aston Martin to claim a 100th podium finish on his record-extending 357th start. That place was initially taken from him. He had received a five-second penalty for starting outside his grid position. When he tried to serve it during a pit stop, stewards ruled a jack had touched the car too soon and they hit Alonso with a 10-second penalty. George Russell rose to third for Mercedes.

But Aston Martin requested a review and showed stewards videos of similar incidents that went unpunished. Stewards accepted that it was not clear the offence had broken Formula One rules and lifted the punishment. Alonso was back to third followed by the two Mercedes cars of Russell and Lewis Hamilton. Next were the Ferraris of Carlos Sainz and Charles Leclerc, who started 12th. Esteban Ocon and his Alpine team-mate Pierre Gasly occupied the next two places. The race began under dazzling floodlights at the Jeddah Street Circuit in balmy conditions, ideal for spectators,



JEDDAH: Red Bull Racing's Mexican driver Sergio Perez celebrates after winning the Saudi Arabia Formula One Grand Prix at the Jeddah Corniche Circuit in Jeddah on March 19, 2023. — AFP

drivers and cars. Alonso made the best start, from his incorrect position too far to the left of his grid slot, as he surged past Perez to lead into turn one. He was unable to retain it for long and was passed by Perez at turn one at the start of lap four. By then, he had been given a five-second penalty for his starting spot error. Behind them, Leclerc, on soft tyres, began his climb from 12th and reached seventh by lap eight as Verstappen climbed from 15th to 10th while Russell and Stroll settled into third and fourth.

After an unexceptional start, Hamilton, one of only two drivers on hard tyres while the majority took mediums, was warned for weaving on the straight. By lap 11, Hamilton was eighth, trapped between Leclerc and Verstappen. The Dutchman passed Hamilton on lap 12 while Perez reeled off another fastest lap to pull three seconds clear of Alonso. On lap 18, yellow flags waved as Stroll obeyed a team order to stop his Aston Martin on the track - resulting in a full safety car deployment and a rush to pit for Perez, Alonso, Russell, Verstappen and Hamilton.

Despite attempting to serve his penalty during the pit stop, Alonso stayed second behind Perez. Hamilton, sixth, was the only front-runner on mediums while the rest took hards. Verstappen showed great pace as he pressed Russell, breezing past him for third on lap 24. When he passed Alonso, he had gone from 15th to second before half-distance. With 10 laps remaining, Verstappen said his drive-shaft, which had caused his exit from qualifying on Saturday, was "running a bit rough". He was pacified by the team as was Perez who complained of a "long brake pedal" before the final fast laps were completed. — AFP

PSG slump to a home defeat against Rennes

PARIS: Paris Saint-Germain's march towards another Ligue 1 title was slowed on Sunday as they went down 2-0 at home to Rennes, a result that allowed Marseille to close the gap on the leaders to seven points with 10 games remaining. Kylian Mbappe had an effort disallowed for offside before Karl Toko-Ekambi put Rennes in front with a magnificent strike right on half-time.

Arnaud Kalimuendo made it 2-0 three minutes after the restart against his former club, as PSG-faced with a defensive injury crisis-slumped to a first home league defeat of the campaign. It is the Parisians' fourth Ligue 1 loss this season, all of them in 2023, and the second time they have been beaten by Rennes. They also lost when the teams last met in Brittany in January. Marseille responded by winning 2-1 away to Reims later, with Alexis Sanchez scoring twice.

"A defeat is always upsetting. Obviously I can't be happy with the way the match went but in the context, with the number of players we had out, we knew we were going to have difficult moments in defence," said PSG coach Christophe Galtier. PSG only have a ninth Ligue 1 title in 11 seasons left to play for after being knocked out of the Champions League in the last 16 by Bayern Munich. Galtier has insisted that the prospect of what would be a French record 11th top-flight title is sufficient motivation for his team, but their performance indicated otherwise.

"The objective is to win the league. Will this defeat mean the board will consider my future? Maybe. But everything needs to be put into context," Galtier added when asked about his position. "There are no excuses but there are reasons for it." The result allowed Rennes to reclaim fifth place in the fight for European qualification. "To beat Paris twice in the same season says something about us. If we are capable of taking six points out of six against such a team, it means we have progress to make so we can do that in 90 percent of our matches," said Rennes coach Bruno Genesio.

PSG have been severely hampered by injuries, with Neymar recovering from ankle surgery and their defence decimated. Achraf Hakimi, Presnel Kimpembe, Marquinhos, Sergio Ramos and Nordi Mukiele were all sidelined, leaving an almost unrecognisable back line



PARIS: Paris Saint-Germain's French forward Kylian Mbappe (center) shoots the ball during the French L1 football match between Paris Saint-Germain (PSG) and Stade Rennais FC on March 19, 2023. — AFP

featuring 17-year-old El Chadaille Bitshiabu. PSG have usually been able to rely on their attack for inspiration but Mbappe could not add to his 19 league goals this season and Lionel Messi was denied by veteran Rennes goalkeeper Steve Mandanda, who was in fine form.

Cameroon international Toko-Ekambi, brought up in Paris as a PSG fan, opened the scoring with an emphatic finish past goalkeeper Gianluigi Donnarumma after latching onto a long ball forward. The home side were left facing an uphill struggle as they conceded again just after the interval, with Lesley Ugochukwu's low centre being turned in by Kalimuendo.

It was a seventh Ligue 1 goal of the campaign for the 21-year-old, who joined Rennes last summer from PSG after the capital club decided not to keep the forward who had performed well on loan at Lens last season. Marseille moved back above Lens, who beat bottom side Angers 3-0 on Saturday, by coming from behind to end Reims' long unbeaten run. Reims had not lost a Ligue 1 game under 30-year-old Belgian-born English coach Will Still, their unbeaten run stretching back 19 games to September.

They went ahead early on when on-loan Arsenal striker Folarin Balogun scored his 17th league goal this season. However, Sanchez equalized soon after from a free-kick and then struck what proved to be the winner before the half-hour mark. Fourth-placed Monaco won 2-0 at Ajaccio as Wissam Ben Yedder scored his 17th league goal this season and Krepin Diatta also netted. Nice lost ground in the race for Europe but are now unbeaten in 13 games since Didier Digard was named coach in January after a 1-1 draw at home to Lorient. There were also wins for Strasbourg and Montpellier. — AFP