

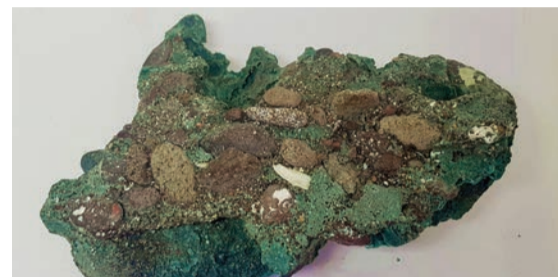
3 MoH opens tuberculosis clinic in Farwaniya governorate



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Ghanem calls for 'fair' elections

Speaker urges Assembly to approve higher election commission

By B Izzak



HH the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah

Amir greets citizens and residents on Ramadan

KUWAIT: The Amiri Diwan conveyed HH the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah's greetings on Tuesday to the citizens and residents on the advent of the holy month of Ramadan. The Diwan announced that HH the Amir will not receive citizens and residents to congratulate him this year, wishing everyone good health. Furthermore, the Diwan wished HH the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, HH the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Al-Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah wellness and prosperity. — KUNA

KUWAIT: Speaker of the court-reinstated National Assembly Marzouq Al-Ghanem on Tuesday called for fresh and fair parliamentary elections to resolve the political crisis. "My message, which a majority of MPs share with me, is the call to return to the people, the source of all powers, to elect their representatives through fair elections," Ghanem told a press conference at the National Assembly.

"The return to the people has become a pressing necessity," said the speaker, adding that before holding the elections, all constitutional and legal procedures must be carefully verified to avoid nullifying the poll results by the constitutional court. The speaker called on the Assembly to approve as soon as possible a draft law calling for the establishment of a higher election commission that will oversee the entire election process.

Continued on Page 6



KUWAIT: National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem speaks during a press conference on March 21, 2023.— Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat



KUWAIT: HH Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah interacts with children as French Ambassador to Kuwait Claire Le Flecher looks on on March 20, 2023.— Photo by Fouad Al-Shaikh

Sheikh Nasser feted at celebration of Francophonie Day

KUWAIT: The Embassy of France held a reception on Monday on the occasion of International Francophonie Day, with HH Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah as the guest of honor. "Kuwait is a very Francophile and Francophone country. HH Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah is the father of

Francophonie in Kuwait, the one who initiated the first actions in its favor in the 1980s, and that is why the Council for the Promotion of Francophonie in Kuwait chose him as President of Honor," French Ambassador to Kuwait Claire Le Flecher said.

HH Sheikh Nasser expressed his pleasure to attend the International Francophonie Day event that was suspended for years due to the COVID-19 pandemic, noting the suspension revealed the importance of this cultural influence. Sheikh Nasser said his participation is a reminder for Francophone countries that stood with Kuwait and supported it during the Iraqi invasion. (See Page 2)

Thursday first day of Ramadan

KUWAIT: Kuwait's moonsighting committee announced that Thursday will be the start of the holy fasting month of Ramadan. Chairman of the moonsighting committee, Justice Mohammad bin Naji, made the announcement after the committee's meeting on Tuesday evening. Consequently, Ramadan of the Hijri or Islamic calendar of 1444 will commence on Thursday, March 23, he pointed out.

On this occasion, Minister of Justice and Minister of State for Endowments and Islamic Affairs Abdulaziz Al-Majed greeted HH the Amir Sheikh

Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, Kuwait's political leadership, citizens and residents as well as Arab and Muslim nations.

Restaurants and cafés must remain closed during fasting hours in Ramadan and can open two hours before iftar for preparations, Kuwait Municipality Director General Ahmad Al-Manfouhi announced on Tuesday. Municipality inspectors were given instructions to inspect for violations starting from the first day of Ramadan, the Municipality added in a statement.

The Municipality also set timings for street sweeping during Ramadan to be in two periods: The first will be between 2:00 am and 10:00 am in all areas. The second period will be from 4:00 pm to 12:00 am in public areas such as markets, public beaches and co-op parking lots.

Saudi Arabia also announced that Ramadan will start on Thursday. Authorities earlier on Tuesday called on residents to try to spot the crescent moon that marks the start of Ramadan, but it was not visible, state media said. Qatar also announced that Thursday "is the first day of the blessed month of Ramadan". — Agencies

#بس_خَطَّت_قلم



Crown Prince receives letters from Saudi King, Iraqi leader



KUWAIT: His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah receives a reply message addressed to His Highness the Amir from the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques. — KUNA photos



KUWAIT: His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah receives a written message addressed to His Highness the Amir from the Iraqi president.

KUWAIT: His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah on Tuesday received a response message addressed to His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah from Saudi Arabia's King Salman Bin Abdulaziz, discussing bilateral relations and historical ties between both countries. Saudi Arabia's ambassador to Kuwait

Prince Sultan Bin Saad handed the message.

He also received a handwritten letter from President of Iraq Abdulatif Rashid addressed to HH the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah - discussing ways to strengthen the bilateral relation between both countries in various fields. Iraq's ambassador to Kuwait Al-Monhal Al-Safi handed the

letter. The meeting was attended by the Crown Prince Diwan chief Sheikh Ahmad Abdullah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, Minister of the Amiri Diwan Affairs Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah, Director of the Crown Prince Office Jamal Al-Thiyab and Secretary of the Crown Prince Diwan Foreign Affairs Office Mazen Al-Eisa. — KUNA

Embassy celebrates Francophonie Day

By Faten Omar

KUWAIT: The Embassy of France held a reception on Monday on the occasion of the celebration of International Francophonie Day. "Kuwait is a very Francophile and Francophone country. HH Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammed Al-Sabah is the father of Francophonie in Kuwait, the one who initiated the first actions in its favor in the 1980s, and that is why the Council for the Promotion of Francophonie in Kuwait chose him as President of Honor," French Ambassador to Kuwait Claire Le Flecher said.

The French ambassador emphasized that the French language is the language of the future globally. "French is currently the third language taught in Kuwait, a sign of strong and lasting relations between our two countries. It has nearly 30,000 cumulative learners, public and private systems combined, and nearly 10,000 students take French at the baccalaurate level each year," she said.

Le Flecher indicated that Kuwait understood this situation very early on and bet on teaching the French language as early as 1966, when French was introduced in the school system. Since then, without any interruption, high school students study French in literary classes.



KUWAIT: French Ambassador to Kuwait Claire Le Flecher speaks at the event with Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammed Al-Sabah.



KUWAIT: HH Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammed Al-Sabah and French Ambassador to Kuwait Claire Le Flecher take a group photo with other dignitaries. The Embassy of France held a reception on Monday on the occasion of the celebration of International Francophonie Day. —Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat

"France is not alone in supporting Francophonie, as shown by the Council for the Promotion of Francophonie in Kuwait, which for the past two years has brought together 44 French-speaking ambassadors to Kuwait," she noted, revealing that the celebrations in favor of Francophonie in Kuwait will continue throughout the year and people will be able to come to cultural events, sports activities and film screenings offered by the French Institute of Kuwait.

HH Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammed Al-Sabah expressed his pleasure to attend the International Day of Francophonie event that was suspended for years due to the COVID-19 pandemic, noting the suspen-

sion revealed the importance of this cultural influence. "The mutual influence between cultures seems to be a foregone conclusion, especially if there is a common history between peoples, which is obvious between Western and Arab cultures. The military confrontations that the world witnessed were not all about wars, but rather contributed to the transfer of Arab civilization to the West and the converse," Sheikh Nasser said.

He mentioned that this exchange led to the establishment of translation schools, where senior Muslim, Jewish and Christian specialists translated Arabic books into the Latin language, which resulted in the existence of Arabic vocabulary in Latin and other

European languages. "In our contemporary history, Francophone played an active role in the Arab renaissance movement, as it was a source of inspiration for many Arab enlightenment pioneers. Throughout that period, Francophone was key that Arabs used to communicate with the Western civilization," HH Sheikh Nasser pointed out.

Sheikh Nasser concluded that his participation is a reminder for Francophone countries that stood with Kuwait and supported it during the Iraqi invasion, expressing Kuwait's continuous gratitude to these countries, looking forward to spreading and teaching the French language on a larger scale.

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Local

Zain Great Idea's regional accelerator program reaches third stop in Cairo

Nine Kuwaiti entrepreneurs joined Zain's trip to RiseUp Summit '23

KUWAIT: Zain, Kuwait's leading digital service provider, announced that the regional accelerator program of its 7th Zain Great Idea tech start-up accelerator has successfully reached its third destination in Cairo, Egypt at the RiseUp Entrepreneurship Summit 2023. Zain's program reached its third regional stop after the first two in Dubai and Riyadh. Nine Kuwaiti entrepreneurs who have founded tech startups and joined the 7th season of the company's renowned Zain Great Idea tech accelerator program attended the RiseUp Summit in Cairo, considered one of the largest entrepreneurship gatherings in the MENA region.

The event featured over 150 startups, over 250 speakers and experts from around the world, and thousands of visitors and entrepreneurs. The 9 Kuwait-based startups are Armada: a tech-logistics company, Central Tenders Company: an e-platform that specializes in tenders for the private and public sectors, Droom: a prepaid subscription box provider for fashion and beauty, E-Fly: Kuwait's first smart e-vehicle sharing app, NOMADS: an e-platform to help digital nomads and freelancers to find clients, Kashcool: an interactive e-learning platform, Staffii: a provider of HR software tools, Trendal: an online shopping and e-marketplace

platform, and Business4sale: a digital platform for business exiting and investment.

Zain saw the need and ambition of Kuwait-based startups to expand into the MENA region, and it has selected the RiseUp Summit in Cairo for its third regional destination due to the Egyptian market being one of the biggest and most vital of the region's markets. This brought a great opportunity for ZGI participants to learn from the vast number of workshops and shared experiences in RiseUp, paving the way for them to prepare their regional expansion plans. The trip also focused on acquiring talent and resources and getting a close-up experience of the Egyptian market's trends.

Last year, Zain held Super Saturday, an event where ZGI participants presented their startups and outlined their strategic roadmaps to the judges panel that consisted of innovation and entrepreneurship experts, representatives of venture capital firms, investors, and startup accelerators. The panel carefully evaluated all entries and selected startups to take part in the Regional Accelerator Program's three destinations. 10 startups joined the first destination in Dubai, another 10 joined the second trip to Riyadh, and the above 9 startups joined the third and final trip to Cairo.



Kuwaiti entrepreneurs at RiseUp Summit in Cairo.



Ministry of Health opens Tuberculosis Clinic in Farwaniya. — KUNA photos

Tuberculosis clinic opens in Farwaniya

KUWAIT: The Ministry of Health (MoH) on Sunday opened tuberculosis clinic at Manahi Al Osaimi Health Center in Farwaniya Governorate to combat the disease. In a press statement Tuesday, Dr Abeer Al-Bahwa, head of health enhancement department at the Ministry, said tuberculosis is still one of the deadliest diseases in the world.

She added that international efforts have saved about 74 million since 2000, 10.6 million others were infected with the disease in 2021, 1.6 million of whom died and about 4,400 individuals pass away daily, she noted. Marking World Tuberculosis Day (WTD) on March 24, Al-Bahwa called for concerted efforts to eradicate this disease by 2030 to reach the sustainable development goals.

Meanwhile, head of Manahi center Dr Dhahia Al-Enzi said the WTD aims to raise awareness of individuals in the society on this disease and reduce



Dr Abeer Al-Bahwa, head of health enhancement department

the number of cases. For her part, head of public health in Farwaniya Dr Sali Al-Khaldi said tuberculosis is one of the most common diseases in the world that should be eradicated as part of the sustainable development goals. The tuberculosis clinic will offer early detection services to the high-risk categories, she elaborated. — KUNA

The project is one of the authority's main projects that fall under the development plan for a New Kuwait 2035, and will include maintenance work for the western dock of the port and maintenance of the suspended part of dock 8, added Kuwait Ports Authority. This would achieve a great diversity in the types of ships received by Shuwaikh Port, increasing the number of ships throughout the year, and positively reflecting on the movement of commercial goods exchange.

The project is in line with the directives and decisions of the Council of Ministers to raise the efficiency of the flow of incoming food supply and maintain food security in the country, added the authority, noting that it is currently working on designing four other projects within the development plan. — KUNA

take her baby outside on walks or to the shopping mall. She expects that in a month, she'd feel confident about handling it.

The drastic changes in a new mom's life are no secret for expecting moms, either. Dana Ghayyad, who's 34 weeks pregnant, said she's really hoping to check some things off her bucket list before her due date. So far, she's taken a mini vacation with her husband and has been getting as much sleep as possible. She's also been taking lots of photos to commemorate this special time of her life.

"One of my biggest concerns is that my personality will change — that I'll become a stereotypical mom whose life revolves around her baby. I know friends and family who don't venture outside because of their baby," said Ghayyad. The high expectations that society has of mothers, she added, puts extra pressure on them.

"Society wants moms to be perfect all the time and only talk about the positive side of motherhood. If you said you need to take a break, people would think that you're a bad mom or that you're not up to the responsibility. But it's normal to need a break because you're only human and you're working a 24/7 job," said Mortada.

The myriad of responsibilities competing for a mom's attention could lead to "mom guilt" — the constant worry about making mistakes when it comes to your child. "I'm the president of the mom-guilt club in Kuwait," said Kendari laughing. "My husband is also really sentimental and he shares those feelings with me. He tells me that our son is always on his mind when he goes to the diwaniya or the office."

Kendari said guilt towards her loved ones has been with her for as long as she remembers, but were amplified when she gave birth. "I started

EU delegation recognizes 3 KU students

KUWAIT: Three outstanding Kuwaiti students from Kuwait University (KU) have been recognized as "Women & Environment Ambassadors" in a competition organized by the College of Social Sciences at Kuwait University and the European Union Delegation to Kuwait, in the framework of a long-standing partnership between the European Union and Kuwait. The winners produced policy papers, which touched on key aspects of women's role in environmental policies in Kuwait and their contribution to minimize the effects of climate change and environmental degradation.

During an event held at the College of Social Sciences in Kuwait University on 20 March, the three winners were awarded a study visit to the European Union's institutions in Brussels, where they will have the opportunity to learn more about the European Union's expertise in enhancing the role of women in environmental policies.

In their state-of-the-art policy papers, students proposed solutions, recommendations and policy guidance for Kuwait. Two workshops were organized to prepare the students for this task. During the first workshop, participants discussed EU expertise regarding climate change and environmental policies in the context of the EU Green Deal, with a special focus on the role played by women. In the second workshop, participants discussed climate change and the role of women in policy-making in Kuwait through exchanges with Kuwaiti experts in environmental strategies, policies and instruments,

women empowerment, among other topics.

Irina Gusachenko, Chargé d'Affaires of the European Union Delegation to Kuwait said at the event: "The EU is committed to support Kuwait and the bright Kuwaiti youth in their efforts to protect the environment and to promote the role of women in environmental policies. It was very rewarding to discover during the workshops how women play a significant role in advocating against environmental degradation, also in Kuwait. We will build on this successful competition by enhancing our long-standing cooperation with Kuwait University."

Dr Mohamed Al-Sahli, Vice Dean for Students Affairs, said: "We are very thankful to the European Union Delegation for this initiative in raising awareness on climate change, highlighting the role of women in devising environmental policies and improving youth capabilities to sustain our natural resources. Given that we live in a vulnerable environment with limited resources and harsh conditions, improving our capacity building through training programs and workshops is an essential step towards mitigation and adaptation of climate change."

The output of workshops was promising, and further cooperation with the European Union Delegation will certainly enhance such environmental programs." The European Union Delegation to Kuwait and the College of Social Sciences at Kuwait University are dedicated to maintaining and strengthening their long-standing cooperation in promoting awareness on gender and climate issues.

Both institutions will continue to work together to support the development of awareness on women's role in alleviating the effects of climate change and enhancing environmental policies. The success of this competition is a testament to our shared commitment to promote sustainable environmental policies and gender equality.



The winners of the competition Anfal Al-Enezi, Fahad Al-Sabah and Fatima Al-Kandari pose for a group photo.

Kuwait Ports Authority inaugurates Shuwaikh port project

KUWAIT: Kuwait Ports Authority on Tuesday inaugurated the first phase of a project to redevelop and rehabilitate the docks of Shuwaikh port, with a length of 1,330 meters, that costs about KD 48.75 million (about \$160 million). In a statement, the authority said that the project, which will take 36 months, will be implemented by contract with the Korean company Hyundai and the Gulf Construction and Marine Works Company.

Motherhood: From guilt to social media

By Nebal Snan

KUWAIT: Before she became a mother, Manayer Al-Kendari used to scrutinize what mothers around her did or didn't do "as if (she) knew what she was talking about". But now as a mother of a 14-month old boy, Kendari knows better. "One of the biggest challenges of motherhood is that it brings you face-to-face with the unknown. You're throwing yourself into something that you only heard of second-hand," she said.

Motherhood, Kendari learned, comes with complex, contradicting emotions: happiness, sadness, fear, courage, responsibility — it's all of that and more. "It feels like your baby is holding you back from doing so many things you love, but at the same time, you can't imagine taking one step without them by your side. When my son is awake, I can't wait for him to fall asleep. But when he actually does, I find myself flipping through his photos on my phone."

The emotional paradox can be tough to navigate, especially for mothers with a career. Kendari often struggles with conflicting priorities because her job takes her away from her child. "I'm have so many goals I'd like to achieve. ... Since I gave birth, the way I manage my time has completely changed. My son gets priority over my needs and that can be difficult."

Hawraa Mortada, mother of a nearly five-month-old baby girl, has been trying to find time for her interests. But she still hasn't mustered the courage to

going to a therapist after becoming a mother and she's been guiding me through these feelings. She says that guilt distorts love because it takes your focus away from the person you love and directs it inwards. It's more about you looking for self-satisfaction than it is about how much you care about the baby," she said.

She's also been coping with the feelings by setting aside unnegotiable time dedicated for the baby. "For example, everyday I'd spend 2 to 3 hours with the baby — just the two of us. Screen-free. ... Because it's not about the quantity of the time we spend together but also the quality."

Besides seeking professional help, Kendari has been sharing her perspective as a first-time mother on her Instagram account, with nearly 40,000 people following her journey. "We shouldn't be afraid of talking about our failures or opening up about any conflicted feelings or anxiety we might have. I'm always wearing my heart on my sleeve and that makes me feel brave and strong."

Through her account, she's also heard from a lot of women who experienced post-partum depression, which she described as a "natural feeling that moms should come to terms with". The global prevalence of post-partum depression is 17.22 percent, according to a study published in the Translational Psychiatry journal. However, data looked at by the researchers conducting the analysis suggests that the condition is not common in the Gulf region.

Being away from home, Ghayyad is left without the robust emotional support system that many moms have, which could also put her at risk for post-partum depression, she said. That's why she planned to have family members visit her during the first six months after birth. She's also found community on TikTok, where she shares videos



KUWAIT: Sharing experiences about motherhood on social media helps young moms cope with the changes they face with the baby's arrival.

about what she eats in a day. She said the account helps her gauge whether she's eating too much or too little and encourages her to stay healthy. "It's really empowering to share my journey and help benefit other pregnant women. It's also great to take space in a community and feel seen by other expecting mothers," said Ghayyad.

But one must tread carefully on social media, she said. From misinformation to unrealistic images of new moms perpetuating myths, it can be exhausting to keep track of what everyone is saying and nearly impossible to verify some claims. For moms with no prior medical knowledge, however, social media accounts run by pediatricians or experts in newborn care can be a treasure trove of information, Ghayyad and Mortada agreed. "It helps to see other moms facing challenges because it validates my struggle and it helps me feel that I'm not alone," said Ghayyad.

Graish: Kuwaiti tradition inherited down the ages

By Ghadeer Ghloom

KUWAIT: When the holy month of Ramadan arrives, it is common to hear words that refer to celebrations related to this month, such as Girgian and ghabqa, among people in Kuwait. Such celebrations are very common and are part of the Kuwaiti heritage that is specifically linked to the month of Ramadan. However, traditional Kuwaiti events during the month of Ramadan do not stop at these two popular celebrations.

Graish is another Ramadan-related traditional event that people of Kuwait inherited from past generations. Unlike Girgian and ghabqa, Graish is celebrated on the last few days before the holy month of Ramadan begins. To further look into the history of Graish, Kuwait Times spoke to a local middle-aged woman, Om Ali, who has witnessed both the old and modern style of celebrating Graish in Kuwait.

Celebrating Graish in the past

Om Ali shared with Kuwait Times an overview of what people used to do while celebrating Graish. "To celebrate Graish, people gather at the house of the eldest member of their family. Everyone prepares a dish of whatever food is left in their homes and takes it to the family gathering to eat together before it spoils. The main dish people used to eat at Graish is

fish, because they do not usually eat fish during Ramadan, believing it makes them thirsty," Om Ali said.

"Kuwaitis in olden times did not have fridges to prevent their food from rotting, so women came up with the 'Graish' tradition to eat the remaining food rather than waste it. Graish is the final gathering before Ramadan, which was initiated by Kuwaiti women in the olden days. On this day, women wake up early in the morning to clean up and light bukhoor in their homes to welcome Ramadan. Graish in the past used to be during the day at around 10:00 am and not at night, because women did not use to leave their homes at night, as Graish used to be celebrated by women only," Om Ali said. She also said people who celebrate Graish on the last day of Shaaban (the month before Ramadan) eat the food as suhour, because the next day marks the first day of Ramadan, which means that Muslims will be fasting. Where does the word "Graish" come from?

Modern-style Graish

According to Om Ali, the word Graish is influenced by the Kuwaiti onomatopoeic word "Gargasha", which refers to the sound the coins make when someone puts their hand in their pocket to take them out. This gesture shows generosity, as people who did not have anything to bring from home would go and buy something to share with their relatives.



KUWAIT: Contemporary Graish celebrations involve family members gathering for a meal at a restaurant. —KUNA

Kuwait Times asked Om Ali about the difference between celebrating Graish in the past and today. "Today people are gathering at night and bringing food from restaurants to celebrate Graish in adherence to the contemporary lifestyle that Kuwaitis have nowadays. It is true that a few things have changed, but it remains a very lovely reason to bring family members together," she said. Regardless of how Graish has changed in terms of timing and food, the main thing is that the family gathering remains, and this is where the real value of this tradition lies.



DHAMAN participates in Amiri Hospital 2nd Health Awareness Day

KUWAIT: Health Assurance Hospitals Company (DHAMAN) participated in the second Health Awareness Day organized by the Amiri Hospital under the patronage and in the presence of His Excellency the Minister of Health, Dr Ahmad Al-Awadi. In a press release, DHAMAN affirmed its keenness to support the governmental and private medical activities out of its general interest in raising levels of health awareness in Kuwait. Adding that such participation is also an expression of DHAMAN's belief in leadership and care for social issues and to support health and awareness activities that aim to develop and elevate society.

Such activities contribute to raising health awareness among citizens and expats, which helps in improving public health and combating negative habits and lifestyles that lead to an increase in the spread of diseases in society, in addition to creating public awareness of DHAMAN and its developmental role in the national healthcare sector.

The company explained that DHAMAN has a pioneering vision for healthcare and the future trends of this vital sector in society that aims to build a healthier community through the implementation of sustainability programs, especially in the field of healthcare. Based on this vision, the company applies an advanced healthcare network that adopts the latest applications in this field, including smart healthcare and leading the digital transformation process that focuses on beneficiaries putting the patient at the center of attention through ways that would allow the patient and the medical staff to view the medical history through advanced information systems and technological databases, equipped with a high degree of security, and a smooth access to the required medical service.

It also declared that DHAMAN, as one of the most important pillars of the healthcare elements in the New Kuwait 2035 Vision, aims to raise healthcare indicators through preventive health and achieving a qualitative leap for the healthcare sector in Kuwait through the restructuring of health services, the establishment of a modern and advanced health network, administratively and medically, and the provision of around 7,000 job opportunities for Kuwaitis and others in the medical sector.

The company has completed two hospitals in the Ahmadi and Jahra governorates with a capacity of 660 beds, in addition to equipping and operating five primary healthcare centers distributed in different governorates, which are currently operating as private centers, ready to receive those wishing to obtain healthcare in family medicine, dental and pediatric clinics, in addition to radiology and laboratory services. All in preparation for the opening of the DHAMAN network and receive the main beneficiaries of its services, the residents working in the private sector and their families.



NBK organizes event to celebrate BACCH tenth anniversary

KUWAIT: National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) is always keen to deliver on its CSR commitments towards all segments of society and all sectors, particularly in childcare and healthcare. In this context, the bank organized a special event to celebrate the 10th anniversary of Bayt Abdullah for the Care of Children in Hospice (BACCH).

The event, which was organized by NBK's family at BACCH, hosted the children in the Hospice as well as some children from NBK Children's Hospital and their families, who spent joyful moments interacting with the various engaging activities. These activities included competitions, singing and entertainment, creating fun and joyful atmospheres, with the participation of the singer, Zak Al-Mosawi who gave an amusing and very engaging singing show.

On this occasion, Joanne Al-Abdul Jaleel, Senior

Public Relations Officer at National Bank of Kuwait, said: "We always seek to provide all support to the children undergoing long treatment journey, considering this an integral part of our CSR commitments."

"We always aim to put a smile on the faces of children who are in a dire need for such support. To this end, we introduce many initiatives to bring them happiness and joy, such as (I dream to Be) initiative, through which we made the dreams of many children come true, boosting their determination to overcome the disease in order to realize their dreams in the future," she added. Al-Abdul Jaleel said she was happy with the results achieved through these initiatives and events, most importantly seeing the joy and smile on the faces of children and their families. She also emphasized that caring for the families of children during these difficult times for all family members is a key goal of all the initiatives and events organized by NBK, as it gives them more strength to weather these times.

NBK continues to present a role model for CSR contributions, as seen in financing the development of all NBK Children's Hospital units. It also made a generous donation to establish Stem Cell Therapy Unit, and aligning it with the best international standards of care for patients and their families, making it one of



the leading stem cell transplant centers in the region.

NBK boasts a rich record of leading humanitarian and social initiatives, including providing different sorts of support to the children in Kuwait. It also organizes regular visits to many childcare humanitarian organizations with the aim of promoting community service culture and raising social responsibility awareness, an approach that is consistently followed and promoted by the bank.



KUWAIT: (From L) Dr Yousef Al-Haroun, the Dean of the College of Architecture Dr Adel Al-Mumin and Chair of the Department of Architecture Dr Shaikha Al-Mubarki pose with students and other faculty members.

Architecture students use over 6,000 cans for design project

KUWAIT: The Department of Architecture class held an exhibition to showcase construction projects made by students during their design studio class. The projects were comprised of structures made of unopened cans of food that have now been donated to charity organizations in Kuwait before the holy month of Ramadan. This exhibit is the first of its kind in Kuwait. Five teams of three used their creativity to build innovative structures using a minimum of 1,000 cans, rubber bands and chip board for support. A total of over 6,000 cans were used. The concepts

created were called: the Hidden Truth, the Walkway to Heaven, House of Emotions, the Family Tree and finally the Giving Ship.

Dr Yousef Al-Haroun from Kuwait University's Department of Architecture and fellow professors and outside professionals in the field selected the most creative design award. The prize went to the Walkway to Heaven and the Giving Ship. The people's choice award went to the Giving Ship. The winning students were Hesa Al-Faris, Lulwa Al-Azaz, Dalal Al-Khethaer for both Awards and Hassan Ansari, Deema Al-Rashdan, Sara Al-Rashdan, Ghalia Al-Zubi for the most creative design award.

The Dean of the College of Architecture Dr Adel Al-Mumin and Chair of the Department of Architecture Dr Shaikha Al-Mubarki with many other professors, architects, engineers, students, and their parents came to the event to support the student's installations.



KUWAIT: (From L) Award winners for the most creative structure design Hassan Ansari, Ghalia Al-Zubi, Deema Al-Rashdan and Sara Al-Rashdan.



KUWAIT: (From L) Award winners for the people's choice award for construction Hesa Al-Faris, Dalal Al-Khethaer and Lulwa Al-Azaz.



Afghanistan school year starts but no classes held

Thousands mourn Syria Kurd civilians killed by pro-Turkish fighters

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PARIS: French President Emmanuel Macron (C) greets freed French hostage journalist Olivier Dubois (C-R), who was held hostage in Mali for nearly two years, by the Support Group for Islam and Muslims (GSIM), surrounded by family members, upon his arrival at the Villacoublay airport, in Velizy-Villacoublay, near Paris. — AFP

Freed French journalist returns home

Dubois, greeted by his family, President Emmanuel Macron in an emotional return

VELIZY-VILLACOUBLAY: French journalist Olivier Dubois, 48, made an emotional return home on Tuesday following nearly two years in captivity in the Sahel, greeted by his family and President Emmanuel Macron at an airport near Paris.

Dubois and US aid worker, 61-year-old Jeffery Woodke, who was seized in southwest Niger in October 2016 -- arrived in the Niger capital, Niamey, on Monday after being freed. Dubois stepped off the plane at Villacoublay air base on Tuesday and went straight to hug family members waiting for him on the tarmac.

Macron also embraced him in front of the cameras, in a brief break from domestic political turmoil over his government ramming through a divisive pensions reform. "Yesterday, I couldn't believe it when I landed at the airport (in Niamey), but it's starting to sink in," Dubois told AFP. "I was not mistreated, nor humiliated or hit," he added. "There were some tough moments, but not physically tough." Dubois was kidnapped in Mali on April 8, 2021.

He said in a video released by his captors that he was taken by the Support Group for Islam and Muslims (GSIM), the main jihadist alliance in the Sahel, which is linked to Al-Qaeda. "I feel tired but I'm fine," he told journalists on Monday.

"I want to pay tribute to Niger for its skills in this delicate mission and pay tribute to France, to all those who have helped me to be here today," Dubois had lived in Mali since 2015 and was freelancing for French daily Liberation when he was seized. Details of the two men's release remain unclear, although Woodke on Monday thanked the "Nigerien, American and French governments", telling journalists: "Vive la France."

Niger Interior Minister Hamadou Souley, who was at Niamey airport, said: "The hostages were picked up safe and sound by the Nigerien authorities before being handed over to the French and American authorities." The head of watchdog Reporters Without Borders (RSF), Christophe Deloire, said Tuesday he did not know why Dubois had been freed "or why

now". Dubois is believed to have been the last French citizen held hostage by a non-state actor following the release in Mali of aid worker Sophie Petronin in 2020.

Paris considers six citizens officially confirmed to be behind bars in Iran as hostages of a state. The journalist's sister Canele Bernard on Monday told AFP: "It's just incredible, it's something that we've been hoping for two years."

"The nightmare is over for him and for his family. He will be able to get on with living, although it will be hard for him to get over it." At Niamey airport on Monday, Woodke was at Dubois' side, leaning on a stick. Woodke was seized at gunpoint from his home in Abalak in the Tahoua region of southwestern Niger. The 61-year-old had served as a missionary and humanitarian aid worker in Niger for 32 years, according to a supporters' website. He was said to speak the local language Tamasheq fluently, as well as Fula and Arabic. US President Joe Biden welcomed the freeing of Woodke and thanked

the government of Niger, calling it "a critical partner in helping to secure his release."

The Sahel has been ravaged by a jihadist campaign that began in northern Mali in 2012. In 2015, the insurgency swept into neighbouring Burkina Faso and Niger. The violence has killed thousands of people and displaced millions from their homes, and increased risks for journalists and humanitarian workers.

Two International Committee of the Red Cross employees kidnapped in Mali earlier this year were released on Sunday. At least three other Western hostages are believed to still be held in the Sahel. Romanian mineworker Iulian Ghergut and elderly Australian surgeon Arthur Kenneth Elliott were both abducted in Burkina Faso, in 2015 and 2016 respectively.

German priest Hans-Joachim Lohre is believed to have been held hostage in Mali since late 2022. Niger is an important Western ally in the troubled region, hosting a French military base and a US drone base. — AFP

Biden picks his 2024 path - right down the middle

WASHINGTON: When President Joe Biden motorcades from the White House to an environmental protection event on Tuesday he will hear grumbling on the left and grumbling on the right. And the 80-year-old Washington veteran will be perfectly happy.

The country is still waiting for Biden to announce officially that he will seek a second term next year. But already the Democrat has made clear what path he intends to use to get there: down the center.

In an era of intense blacks and whites, Biden wants gray. So when he addresses the environment forum at the Department of the Interior, he will highlight what his press office calls the administration's "historic investments to advance conservation, restoration, and stewardship."

He may mention that he oversaw Congress' passing of the biggest green energy spending bill in history, the IRA. Or his raft of orders giving national monument protection to wild areas that Donald Trump—whom he beat in 2020 and could face again in 2024 -- tried to open to development. But Biden will be speaking a week after approving a huge ConocoPhillips oil drilling project in the Alaskan wilderness that is projected to release the pollution equivalent of two million cars. Biden has similarly baffled friends and wrong-footed enemies on his approach to the chaotic southern border with Mexico.

Last year, a constant flow of undocumented migrants and asylum-seekers left his administration looking near helpless. This year, strict new measures discouraging them from even trying have resulted in dramatic reductions. Biden is even reportedly considering authorizing a revival of one of the most fiercely criticized policies under Trump—detaining whole families if they cross the border illegally. "The Biden administration has really turned a corner," said Bilal Askaryar, an activist in the group Welcome With Dignity, demonstrating outside the White House. — AFP

Japan PM Kishida to meet Zelensky in surprise Kyiv visit

TOKYO: Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida will meet Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky during a surprise visit to Kyiv on Tuesday to offer "solidarity and unwavering support," Japan's foreign ministry said.

Kishida is the last G7 leader to visit the war-torn country and has come under increasing pressure to make the trip, as Japan hosts the grouping's summit this May. He has repeatedly said a visit to Kyiv was "under consideration," though security and logistical challenges were reportedly a major obstacle.

Kishida was in India on Monday and had been expected to return to Tokyo, but instead flew to Poland, where he reportedly boarded a train to cross into Ukraine. He will express "respect for the courage and perseverance of the Ukrainian people" and offer "the solidarity and unwavering support for Ukraine of Japan and the G7, chaired by Japan," the foreign ministry said.

Kishida is expected to return to Poland for summit talks on Wednesday, the foreign ministry said, before arriving back in Tokyo on Thursday.

News of the trip was first reported by Japanese media, including national broadcaster NHK, whose reporters in Poland filmed a car carrying the premier in the town of Przemysl, from where foreign leaders have often taken the train into Ukraine.

Kishida became the only G7 leader not to have visited Kyiv after US President Joe Biden made a surprise stop to meet Zelensky in February. But Japanese officials were reportedly worried about the security risks of a trip for Kishida,

who becomes the first Japanese prime minister to visit an active warzone since World War II. His trip comes with Chinese President Xi Jinping visiting Moscow for talks with Russian leader Vladimir Putin, with the Ukraine conflict high on the agenda. Japan has joined Western allies in sanctioning Russia over its invasion of Ukraine, while offering support to Kyiv. It has also taken the rare steps of sending defensive equipment and offering refuge to those fleeing the conflict. It has not offered military support, however, because the nation's post-war constitution limits its military capacity to ostensibly defensive measures.

Kishida warned in a speech last year that "Ukraine today may be East Asia tomorrow", as concerns grow that China could invade democratic, self-ruled Taiwan. And in December, as Japan overhauled its key defence policies, the government explicitly warned that China poses the "greatest strategic challenge ever" to its security.

In its largest defence shake-up in decades, Japan set a goal of doubling defence spending to the NATO standard of two percent of GDP by 2027.

Japan is this year's host of the Group of Seven nations, which have taken a united approach in sanctioning Russia. The countries will meet for a summit in Hiroshima in May, which Kishida is reportedly considering inviting Zelensky to attend. Kishida has been on a diplomatic blitz in recent days, hosting South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol and German Chancellor Olaf Scholz in Tokyo before heading to New Delhi for talks with Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi. — AFP

Ministry of Commerce and Industry



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International

West Bank settler movement wins Zionist entity's parliament vote

UN asserts all Zionist settlements are illegal under international law

JERUSALEM: Zionist's settler movement celebrated Tuesday after parliament annulled part of a law banning them from living in areas of the occupied West Bank the government evacuated in 2005. That year the government of Ariel Sharon oversaw a unilateral withdrawal by Zionist entity from the Gaza Strip, and the removal of Jewish settlers from the Palestinian enclave and four settlements in the northern West Bank.

Legislation passed at the time barred Zionists from staying in those areas, but an amendment approved by lawmakers overnight permits Zionists to return to the West Bank settlement sites near the city of Nablus. The parliamentary vote notably paves the way for Zionist authorities to formally allow settlers to return to Homesh, the only one of the four sites whose residents were forcibly removed before their homes were demolished.

The United Nations asserts that all Zionist settlements are illegal under international law, a charge the government disputes. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu returned to power in December, at the helm of one of the most right-wing administrations in the country's history.

Amid a surge in violence in the Zionist-Palestinian conflict, the UN Security Council last month called on all parties to "refrain from provocative actions". The council in a February 20 statement expressed its "strong opposition to all unilateral measures that impede peace -- including Zionist construction and expansion of settlements, confiscation of Palestinians' land

and the 'legalization' of settlement outposts." Zionist's far-right settler lobby has made Homesh, which was home to 70 families in 2005, a symbol of their cause. A small group of activists returned to the site in 2009 and built a yeshiva, a Jewish seminary, which was evacuated dozens of times by Zionist forces until the military ultimately allowed them to stay.

'Messianic revolution'

Zionist's far-right Finance Minister Bezale Smotrich, himself a West Bank settler who has claimed "there isn't a Palestinian people", heralded the parliamentary vote as "historic". The legislative move "advances the regularization of our presence at Homesh," he wrote on Twitter, as further steps are needed before the government allows its citizens to return en masse to the site.

Limor Son-Har Melech, an extreme-right lawmaker who lived in Homesh in 2005, described the vote as a moment of "boundless joy". Zionist anti-settlement movement Peace Now said the parliamentary decision would spark the construction of more West Bank outposts -- settlements established by Zionists without prior government approval. "A Messianic revolution is taking place... this government will inevitably destroy our country," Peace Now wrote on Twitter.

The Palestinian Islamist group Hamas, which rules Gaza, described the vote as a "crime" and called on the international community to "stop the settler-colonial occupation violations". In December 2021, an AFP photographer saw the seminary



NABLUS: File photo shows Zionist settlers, students at the Homesh Yeshiva (religious school), pray in the former settlement of Homesh west of the West Bank city of Nablus. Zionist's settler movement won a victory in the parliament on March 21, 2023 by overturning a law banning them from residing in areas of the northern West Bank from which Jewish settlers were evacuated in 2005. — AFP

and a dormitory at the site, which was being guarded by the Zionist military. Last year, clashes broke out between Zionist security forces and Palestinians from the village of Burqa who claim they own the land on which Homesh was built. The Palestinian

residents were protesting against the return of settlers to Homesh. They also appealed to Zionist's supreme court, which in January gave the government 90 days to justify why authorities have not evicted Zionists who returned to the site. — AFP

Astronomers warn of light pollution from satellites

PARIS: Astronomers on Monday warned that the light pollution created by the soaring number of satellites orbiting Earth poses an "unprecedented global threat to nature." The number of satellites in low Earth orbit have more than doubled since 2019, when US company SpaceX launched the first "mega-constellation," which comprise thousands of satellites. An armada of new internet constellations are planned to launch soon, adding thousands more satellites to the already congested area fewer than 2,000 kilometres (1,250 miles) above Earth. Each new satellite increases the risk that it will smash into another object orbiting Earth, creating yet more debris.

This can create a chain reaction in which cascading collisions create ever smaller fragments of debris, further adding to the cloud of "space junk" reflecting light back to Earth. In a series of papers published in the journal Nature Astronomy, astronomers warned that this increasing light pollution threatens the future of their profession.

In one paper, researchers said that for the first time they had measured how much a brighter night sky would financially and scientifically affect the work of a major observatory. Modelling suggested that for the Vera Rubin Observatory, a giant telescope currently under

construction in Chile, the darkest part of the night sky will become 7.5 percent brighter over the next decade.

That would reduce the number of stars the observatory is able to see by around 7.5 percent, study co-author John Barentine told AFP. That would add nearly a year to the observatory's survey, costing around \$21.8 million, said Barentine of Dark Sky Consulting, a firm based in the US state of Arizona.

He added that there is another cost of a brighter sky that is impossible to calculate: the celestial events that humanity will never get to observe. And the increase in light pollution could be even worse than thought. Another Nature study used extensive modelling to suggest that current measurements of light pollution are significantly underestimating the phenomenon.

The brightening of the night sky will not just affect professional astronomers and major observatories, the researchers warned. Aparna Venkatesan, an astronomer at the University of San Francisco, said it also threatened "our ancient relationship with the night sky".

"Space is our shared heritage and ancestor — connecting us through science, storytelling, art, origin stories and cultural traditions — and it is now at risk," she said in a Nature comment piece.

A group of astronomers from Spain, Portugal and Italy called for scientists to "stop this attack" on the natural night. "The loss of the natural aspect of a pristine night sky for all the world, even on the summit of K2 or on the shore of Lake Titicaca or on Easter Island is an unprecedented global threat to nature and cultural heritage," the astronomers said in a Nature comment piece. — AFP

Thousands mourn Syria Kurd civilians killed by pro-Turkish fighters

JINDAYRIS: Thousands of angry Kurds rallied in rebel-held northern Syria on Tuesday after pro-Turkish fighters killed four fellow Kurds who were celebrating their Nowruz new year festival, an AFP correspondent reported. "They killed my children for no reason," Kuli Maho, 70, told AFP as she wept for her three sons and grandson.

Some people waved Kurdish flags as they gathered for the funeral procession in the border town of Jindayris and neighbouring villages in Aleppo province, an area that was badly affected by last month's devastating earthquake.

On Monday evening, fighters of the US-sanctioned Ahrar al-Sharqiya group opened fire on people who had lit a fire for Nowruz, killing four of them and wounding three, according to Britain-based monitoring group, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights. Residents told AFP that fighters of the Sharqiya Army, a splinter group of Ahrar al-Sharqiya, had carried out the killings. Both factions are part of a coalition of Ankara-backed rebel groups known as the Syrian National Army.

"They beat us, they have no conscience," added Maho, who said she and her family had been living in a tent since the February 6 quake. Jindayris was seized by Turkey and its Syrian rebel proxies in a 2018 offensive that drove Kurdish-led fighters — and much of the resident Kurdish civilian population — from the nearby Afrin area. "They treat us like fourth or fifth class citizens," said protester Abu Jan, 42, referring to pro-Ankara factions that control the area. "We can't move freely, they control everything and oppress us," he said.

'Nowruz is a national holiday, let us celebrate'

Some mourners huddled around bonfires set up for a Nowruz celebration overshadowed by the bloodshed. Also known as Per-



ATME: People mourn over the bodies of a Kurdish family killed by Turkish-backed fighters amid Nowruz celebrations in Jindayris in the rebel-held province of Aleppo, during a protest in the town of Atme in Syria's northwestern province of Idlib. — AFP

sian New Year, the Nowruz festival marks the start of spring and is celebrated by peoples of different ethnicities and faiths across the Middle East and beyond. The US Treasury sanctioned Ahrar al-Sharqiya in July 2021.

Fighters from the group had pulled a 35-year-old Syrian Kurdish politician, Hevrin Khalaf, from her car and shot her dead in a possible war crime, according to the United Nations human rights office. Elham Ahmad, a senior official of the Kurdish administration that retains control of much of the northeast, accused "Turkey and terrorist factions" it backs of "crimes against humanity" in the Afrin area. Afrin is one of a number of formerly Kurdish-controlled areas of northern Syria that Turkey cleared of Kurdish-led fighters in successive cross-border operations. — AFP

Xi seeks tighter cooperation at Kremlin talks

MOSCOW: Xi Jinping promised to strengthen coordination with Russia at a Kremlin summit with President Vladimir Putin on the Chinese leader's first visit to Moscow since the beginning of Russia's assault on Ukraine. Both nations seek allies to counteract Western power and the two are expected to sign a raft of economic cooperation agreements.

Putin called the talks "meaningful and frank" and said that Russia, which has been largely cut out of European markets because of sanctions, would be able to meet China's "growing demand" for energy. "I propose strengthening our coordination and cooperation," Xi said between two rounds of talks in the Kremlin in footage shown on Russian state television. Putin said he was "convinced that our multi-level mutually beneficial cooperation will strengthen further".

Neither leader made any mention of the conflict in Ukraine, although the Kremlin said they would discuss China's proposal to stop the fighting. The Chinese leader's Moscow visit has been viewed as a boost for Putin, who is subject to an International Criminal Court warrant over accusations of unlawfully deporting Ukrainian children. Xi earlier met with Prime Minister Mikhail Mishustin and hailed Russia and China as "great neighboring powers" on the second day of his visit to Russia. Beijing and Moscow's

trade ties have boomed since Russia's Ukraine offensive, linking the nations more closely and raising worries in Western capitals over how far the ties will go. Xi's trip coincides with a surprise visit to Kyiv by Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida, who visited Bucha, a town where Russian forces were accused of committing atrocities during their occupation last year. Ukraine's foreign ministry described the trip as "historic" and called it "a sign of solidarity and strong cooperation between (Ukraine and Japan)".

On Monday, Xi and Putin held four and a half hours of talks, calling each other "dear friend". In a rare move, Putin escorted Xi to his car after the talks, and the two were seen smiling together. During the meeting on Monday, the Russian leader said he was open to talks on Ukraine and praised Beijing's 12-point position paper on the conflict, which includes a call for dialogue and respect for all countries' territorial sovereignty.

Another key focus for discussions will be energy ties. Ahead of Tuesday's summit, Russian gas giant Gazprom said that supplies through the Power of Siberia pipeline to China had reached a daily record on Monday. Russia also announced that it was extending until the end of June oil production cuts of 500,000 barrels per day, a response to Western sanctions that was due to expire at the end of March.

Xi's three-day visit began a day after Putin travelled to Mariupol in eastern Ukraine, his first trip to territory captured from Kyiv since the start of the assault in February 2022. China has sought to portray itself as a neutral party in the Ukraine conflict, but Washington has said Beijing's moves could be a "stalling tactic" to help Moscow. — AFP

tions held on Sept 29 last year, because the Amiri decree that dissolved the previous Assembly was deemed unconstitutional. The court also reinstated the previous National Assembly elected in 2020 and dissolved by HH the Amir in August last year due to disputes with the government.

Speaking at the press conference, Deputy Speaker Ahmad Al-Shuhoumi claimed last year's parliamentary elections were marred by a series of violations, saying thousands of barred voters were allowed to cast their ballots. Shuhoumi called for probing the election process and investigating alleged violations before and during the polls. MP Obaid Al-Wasmi, who also took part in the press conference, said the total number of votes cast in last year's election exceeded the number of registered voters.

New York plays waiting game over Trump indictment

NEW YORK: Barricades set up near Trump Tower, police on high alert, and throngs of journalists outside the prosecutor's office: New York was waiting Tuesday for the likely indictment of Donald Trump, but the timing remained uncertain. The ex-president himself claimed he would be "arrested" on Tuesday over hush money paid to a pornographic actress, but his lawyer said the comments were based on media reports and not any fresh action by prosecutors.

Some US media speculated that the grand jury hearing the case could vote to indict on Wednesday but that it may be next week before Manhattan District Attorney Alvin Bragg announces any charges. Bragg, an elected Democrat, has not confirmed any plans publicly and grand juries operate in secret to prevent perjury or witness tampering before trials, making it virtually impossible to follow their proceedings.

The DA has put key witnesses in front of the panel in recent weeks and offered Trump the opportunity to testify, hinting that an indictment is close. The 76-year-old Republican would become the first former or sitting president to be charged with a crime if an indictment is filed — a move that would send shockwaves through the 2024 White House race, in which Trump is running to regain office.

The New York Police Department has geared up for an unprecedented arrest or self-surrender which would see an ex-leader of the United States booked, fingerprinted and possibly even handcuffed, by erecting barricades outside Bragg's office and Trump Tower on Fifth Avenue.

NBC News reported that every NYPD officer has been ordered to wear their uniforms and prepare for deployment starting from Tuesday. "While you will see an increased uniformed presence throughout the five boroughs, there are currently no credible threats to New York City," an NYPD spokesperson said in a statement.

Trump called over the weekend for mass protests if he is indicted but there has so far been no indication of any large movement. Leading Trump fig-



PALM BEACH, Florida: Supporters of former US President Donald Trump protest near Mar-a-Lago Club on March 21, 2023. — AFP

ures such as his sons have not openly urged action in the streets as they did after the 2020 election, when President Joe Biden defeated Trump. A Monday evening protest in lower Manhattan organized by the New York Young Republican Club attracted only a couple dozen Trump supporters.

Bragg's inquiry centers on \$130,000 paid weeks before the 2016 election to Stormy Daniels to stop the porn star from going public about an affair she says she had with Trump years earlier. Trump's ex-lawyer-turned-enemy Michael Cohen, who has testified before the grand jury, told Congress in 2019 that he made the payment on Trump's behalf and was later reimbursed.

The payment to Daniels, if not properly accounted for, could result in a misdemeanor charge for falsifying business records. That might be raised to a felony if the false accounting was intended to cover up a second crime, such as a campaign finance violation, which is punishable by up to four years behind bars. Legal experts say the argument would be difficult to prove in court however, and any jail time is far from certain.

An indictment would begin a lengthy process that could last several months, as the case would face a mountain of legal issues and move toward jury selection. Trump has denied having had an affair with Daniels and has blasted the investigation as a "witch hunt". "Our enemies are desperate to stop us because they know that we are the only ones who can stop them," Trump said in a video posted on his Truth Social platform overnight into Tuesday. — AFP

Ghanem calls for 'fair' elections...

Continued from Page 1

He said 28 MPs of the reinstated Assembly have submitted a motion calling for quick approval of a number of draft laws related to the elections, mainly the formation of the election commission. Ghanem called on Prime Minister-designate HH Sheikh Ahmad Al-Nawaf Al-Sabah to quickly form the new Cabinet to pave the way for convening the Assembly to study and approve those laws as soon as possible.

The constitutional court on Sunday in a shock ruling annulled the results of the parliamentary elec-

International

Kenya police arrest 238 in a day of violent protests against govt of President Ruto

Worst violence in East African nation since Ruto took office six months ago

NAIROBI: Kenyan police said Tuesday they had arrested 238 people during violent protests over the cost of living which also saw 31 police officers injured. Protesters had joined demonstrations in Nairobi and other parts of Kenya on Monday in response to a call by veteran opposition leader Raila Odinga for a day of action against the government of President William Ruto. Police fired tear gas and water cannon against demonstrators, some of whom were hurling rocks and burning tyres, as well as against Odinga's motorcade.

It was the worst violence in the East African nation since Ruto took office six months ago after narrowly beating Odinga in an election his rival claims was "stolen". The inspector general of police, Japhet Kooome, said in a statement that 213 people were arrested in Nairobi and 24 officers injured. In the province of Nyanza, an opposition stronghold in western Kenya, there were 25 arrests while seven officers were hurt, he said.

'Violent crime scenes'

Police had on Sunday said the demonstrations in Nairobi were banned because a request for authorisation had not been made in time. "What the organisers purported to be a peaceful demonstration turned into violent crime scenes with protesters engaging in running battles with, and stone throwing at the anti-riot police officers, barricading roads thus hinder-

ing freedom of movement for law-abiding citizens," Kooome said. "The unwarranted day-long standoff that was witnessed in Nairobi and (the western lakeside city of) Kisumu amounts to nothing short of violence against police and economic sabotage." Police had also announced on Monday that a university student was killed in the western town of Maseno after officers fired live rounds during "skirmishes" with protesters who were "pelting stones."

Odinga, 78, had called for the demonstrations over economic woes faced by Kenyans who are battling high prices for basic goods, a plunging currency and a record drought that has left millions hungry. Many people are angry that they are struggling despite Ruto pledging to work for the ordinary "hustler" during his campaign for the August election. Inflation was running at 9.2 percent in February, while the shilling is trading at record lows of around 130 to the US dollar. Deputy President Rigathi Gachagua had on Monday urged organisers to call off the "mayhem and the chaos," saying the protests had cost Kenya about two billion shillings (\$15 million) in lost business. But Odinga has vowed no let-up in the action, calling for protests and strikes to be held in Kenya every Monday. Odinga, who has lost five bids for the presidency, continues to claim that Ruto's election win was fraudulent and denounces his government as illegitimate. — AFP



NAIROBI: Raila Odinga (C), the leader of the Kenyan opposition coalition "Azimio la Umoja", speaks to supporters during a mass rally claiming the last Kenyan presidential election was stolen from him and blames the government for the hike of living costs in Mathare slum in Nairobi. — AFP

Chad jails 400 rebels for life after ruler's death

N'DJAMENA: More than 400 rebels in Chad were handed life sentences on Tuesday, mainly in connection with the death of former ruler Idriss Deby Itno, who was killed in 2021, the prosecutor told AFP. After a mass trial, they were sentenced for "acts of terrorism, mercenarism, recruitment of child soldiers and assaulting the head of state," said Mahamat El-Hadj Abba Nana, public prosecutor for the capital N'Djamena. He did not give a detailed figure for those jailed, saying only that "more than 400 were sentenced" to life, while 24 other defendants were acquitted. The trial opened last month behind closed doors in the Criminal Court of the Court of Appeal. It took place within Klessoum prison about 20 kilometres (12 miles) southeast of the capital.

In early 2021, the country's main rebel group, the Front for Change and Concord in Chad (FACT),

launched an offensive on the north of the country from its bases in Libya. On April 20, the army announced that Marshal Deby, Chad's iron-fisted ruler for the previous three decades, had died from wounds sustained in the fighting.

His death was announced just a day after he had been declared victor of a presidential election that gave him a sixth term in office. He was immediately succeeded by one of his sons, General Mahamat Idriss Deby Itno, who took the helm at the head of 15-member military junta.

He promised to hold free elections within 18 months, but that deadline was extended. Protests last October to mark the initially promised end to military rule were met by a crackdown in which 50 people were killed, according to an official toll contested by opposition groups.

A total of 262 people were then handed terms of between two and three years after a trial in the notorious Koro Toro prison, isolated in the desert 600 kms from N'Djamena. Despite criticism of his authoritarian rule, the elder Deby was a key ally in the West's anti-jihadist campaign in the unstable Sahel, particularly due to the relative strength of Chad's military. — AFP



N'DJAMENA: File photo shows Chadian soldiers stand by the coffin of the late Chadian president Idriss Deby during the state funeral in N'Djamena. More than 400 rebels were sentenced to life imprisonment in Chad on March 21, 2023, in particular for "attacking the life" of former President Idriss Deby Itno, killed on the front-line in 2021 during their offensive. — AFP

Sunken Philippine oil tanker found

POLA: A leaking oil tanker that sank in the Philippines three weeks ago has been found, officials said Tuesday, as the slick reached waters known for their rich marine life. The Princess Empress was carrying 800,000 litres (210,000 gallons) of industrial fuel oil when it sank on February 28 off the central island of Mindoro, south of the capital Manila.

Diesel fuel and thick oil from the vessel have since contaminated the waters and beaches of Oriental Mindoro province and other islands. The tanker was found by a Japanese remotely operated underwater vehicle (ROV), Oriental Mindoro Governor Humerli Dolor told reporters.

It is nearly 400 metres (1,300 feet) below the waves. Dolor said he received the first photos showing the exact location of the vessel on Tuesday morning. The national disaster agency said the ROV would assess the hull's condition before a decision was made about how to "control the spill from its source". The Philippines has sought assistance from several countries, including Japan, the United States and France, to help contain and clean up the slick. Thousands

of hectares of coral reefs, mangroves and seaweed could be affected, officials have said. Oil spill booms made out of hay, human hair and other materials have been deployed to try to protect coastal waters that people in the fishing and tourism industries rely on for their livelihoods. Oil has been spotted as far away as Casian Island, off the north coast of the western island of Palawan, about 350 kilometres (220 miles) southwest of where the tanker sank.

As feared, oil has also drifted north to the Verde Island Passage—a busy sea lane between Mindoro and the Philippines' main island of Luzon. Environment Secretary Maria Antonia Loyzaga said previously that the area was "globally recognised" for its marine biodiversity. The Philippine Coast Guard said clean-up operations on Monday removed oil from the shores of three villages on Verde Island, which is popular with divers. Oil also has been spotted further along the passage at Tingloy municipality on Marican Island, part of Batangas province.

Residents and coast guard personnel have been removing oil-coated seaweed and other debris from affected areas. Tens of thousands of people have been affected by the spill, with scores falling ill. The government is distributing food packs and other assistance. Among the hardest hit are fishermen, who have been ordered to stay on shore until they can fish safely. — AFP

can countries, according to the ministry. Belize and Guatemala are two of just 14 countries that officially recognise Taiwan over China, and Tsai's trip comes after Honduras said earlier this month that it would be switching recognition to Beijing.

China views self-ruled, democratic Taiwan as part of its territory, to be retaken one day—by force if necessary. Under its "One China" principle, no country may maintain official diplomatic relations with both China and Taiwan.

During her trip, President Tsai will meet her Guatemalan counterpart Alejandro Giammattei and Belize's Prime Minister John Briceno, the foreign ministry said. Asked if Tsai would meet US House Speaker Kevin McCarthy in Los Angeles, Deputy Foreign Minister Alexander Yui said only that her "transit

itinerary is being arranged appropriately with the US side". McCarthy said earlier this month that he would see Tsai in his home state of California, with the US State Department playing down the significance of the event in the face of China's protests. On Tuesday, Chinese foreign ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin reiterated his country's opposition to Tsai meeting with US officials.

"We firmly oppose any form of official exchanges between the US and Taiwan," he told a regular press briefing in Beijing. "China has made solemn representations to the US in this regard." Washington is one of Taiwan's key global allies and its largest arms supplier, despite itself switching diplomatic recognition to Beijing in 1979. In August last year, a visit by McCarthy's predecessor Nancy

Nigeria's ruling party wins majority in local election

LAGOS: Nigeria's ruling party has won the majority of governorships contested in last weekend's elections, results showed Tuesday, following a ballot marred by violence, intimidation and vote buying. Elections were held to choose governors in 28 of Nigeria's 36 states and state assembly lawmakers. Governors in the remaining eight states had earlier been chosen in by-elections due to court rulings.

The local elections came three weeks after the candidate of the ruling All Progressives Congress (APC), Bola Tinubu, won a presidential ballot that rivals said was massively rigged. According to the results from Saturday's vote declared by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), APC won the governorship in 15 states—Lagos, Sokoto, Katsina, Jigawa, Gombe, Kwara, Niger, Yobe, Nasarawa, Cross River, Ebonyi, Ogun, Benue, Kaduna and Borno. The main opposition Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) won seven—Plateau, Bauchi, Oyo, Delta, Rivers, Akwa Ibom and Zamfara states. The New Nigeria People's Party (NNPP) emerged victorious in Kano, northern Nigeria's largest state. More results were expected on Tuesday. Governors are powerful figures in Nigeria and some control state budgets that are larger than those of several African nations. The two main opposition presidential candidates—PDP's Atiku Abubakar, who came second, and Peter Obi of Labour Party who was third—are challenging Tinubu's victory in court. "The process of reclaiming the people's mandate has started," Labour spokesman Yunusa Tanko said in a statement on the legal challenge. In a major upset in the presidential election, outsider Obi won the most votes in Lagos, considered the fiefdom of president-elect Tinubu.

The big question on Saturday was whether Obi's popularity, especially among younger voters, would translate into success at the local polls. But the APC's Babajide Sanwo-Olu scored a landslide re-election as Lagos governor. In the key northeastern region of Adamawa—which could see the election of Nigeria's first woman governor—the results were declared "inconclusive" as the number of voters unable to cast their ballot was greater than the margin between the two frontrunners. INEC will set a new date for elections in areas of Adamawa where people had been unable to vote, and afterwards then declare the state-wide result. President Muhammadu Buhari of the APC steps down in May after two terms, leaving Africa's most populous country grappling with growing insecurity, economic woes and widening poverty.

Election hitches

Many Nigerians had hoped the presidential ballot would give them a chance to be heard, but many were disappointed by the way the election to replace Buhari was conducted. Turnout for Saturday's local polls was low. Voters and opposition parties complained last month that technical mishaps with voting machines caused delays and allowed for vote rigging, which the electoral commission has denied. Local and international observers said the latest poll was marked by apathy after disappointments in the presidential election but also by intimidation tactics, vote buying and violence. EU mission Chief Observer Barry Andrews on Monday said Nigerians' expectations for Saturday's election were not met in many parts of the country. "Many were disappointed and we witnessed voter apathy that is a clear consequence of failures by political elites and, unfortunately, also by INEC," he said. — AFP

Pelosi to Taiwan drew condemnation from China, which conducted massive military drills around the island in response. Tsai's trip comes at a critical time for Taiwan, after Honduran President Xiomara Castro said last week that her country would establish "official relations" with China.

Latin America has been a key diplomatic battleground for China and Taiwan since the two split in 1949 after a civil war. Honduras's move—which would result in the severing of longstanding official ties with Taiwan—followed negotiations between it and China on building a hydroelectric dam in the country. It continues a recent trend in the region, with Nicaragua, El Salvador, Panama, the Dominican Republic and Costa Rica all switching diplomatic recognition to Beijing in recent years. — AFP



KABUL: A worker cleans the corridor of Esteqlal High School in Kabul on March 21, 2023. Afghanistan's schools reopened on March 21 for the new academic year, but no classes were held as students were unaware of the start and hundreds of thousands of teenage girls remain barred from attending class. — AFP

Afghanistan school year starts but no classes held

KABUL: Afghanistan's schools reopened for the new academic year Tuesday, but no classes were held as students were unaware of the start and hundreds of thousands of teenage girls remain barred from attending class. Afghanistan is the only country in the world where girls are prohibited from going to secondary school.

Taliban authorities have imposed an austere interpretation of Islam since storming back to power in August 2021 after the withdrawal of the US-led foreign forces that backed the previous governments. The education ministry made no public announcement of the reopening of schools, several teachers and officials told AFP. "A letter issued by the minister of education was given to us by our principal to reopen the school today but, since no public announcement was made, no students came," said Mohammad Osman Atayi, a teacher at the Saidal Naseri Boys High School in Kabul.

AFP journalists toured seven schools in Kabul and saw only a few teachers and primary students arriving but no classes were held. Schools also reopened in provinces including Herat, Kunduz, Ghazni and Badakhshan but no lessons were held there either, AFP correspondents reported. Officials held a ceremony to mark the start of the new academic year at a boys school in Kabul. Tuesday's start of the new academic year coincided with Nowruz, the Persian New Year, celebrated widely in Afghanistan before the Taliban returned to power but now considered "illegal" by the country's new rulers.

'Taliban snatched everything'

Hundreds of thousands of teenage girls remain barred from secondary school. "The Taliban have snatched everything away from us," said 15-year-old Sadaf Haidari, a resident of Kabul who should have started grade 11 this year. "I am depressed and broken." Eighteen-year-old Deena Rahimi should have started grade 12 this year but is confined to her home while her brother attends class. "My brother and I used to go to school together daily but now he goes alone," Rahimi told AFP. "I'm just forced to watch him go to school while we are not allowed." The ban on girls' secondary education came into effect in March last year, just hours after the education ministry reopened schools for both girls and boys. — AFP

Taiwan president to visit Latam allies with stops in US

TAIPEI: Taiwan's president will visit diplomatic allies Guatemala and Belize next week while also making stopovers in the United States, the island's foreign ministry said Tuesday, as it aims to shore up ties in Latin America.

Tsai Ing-wen will depart Taiwan on March 29 for the 10-day trip, stopping in New York and Los Angeles while en route to and from the central Ameri-

Business

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 22, 2023

Zain platinum sponsor of Microsoft's second Smart Government Summit

Company joins its strategic partner in celebrating 25 years of Microsoft in Kuwait



KUWAIT: Dr Ammar Al-Hussaini and Microsoft executives with Zain's team.



Dr Ammar Al-Hussaini and Waleed Al-Khashti at the event.

KUWAIT: Zain, Kuwait's leading digital service provider, announced its platinum sponsorship of the second edition of Microsoft's Smart Government Summit, held in collaboration with the Central Agency for Information Technology (CAIT). The event celebrated the 25th anniversary of Microsoft's operations in Kuwait and was held under the patronage and attendance of Minister of Commerce and Industry and Minister of State for Telecommunications and Information Technology Mazin Al-Nahedh.

Zain joined the summit's opening ceremony, attended by the event's patron Minister of Commerce

and Industry and Minister of State for Telecommunications and Information Technology Mazin Al-Nahedh, Acting CAIT Director General Dr Ammar Al-Hussaini, Chief Corporate Relations and Affairs Officer of Zain Kuwait Waleed Al-Khashti, GM Public Sector of Microsoft MEA Ihab Foudeh, Director General of Microsoft Kuwait Alauddin Kareem, as well as many prominent government officials and private sector executives.

Zain's support to this summit, in which it was present since its first edition last year, came to reflect the company's strong strategic partnership with on the world's

biggest technology leaders. Zain and Microsoft's partnership centers around their shared vision of contributing to achieving the New Kuwait 2035 vision's goals. The event also coincided with the 25th anniversary of establishing Microsoft's operations in Kuwait.

Through its solid strategic partnerships ecosystem with the world's biggest tech players, Zain continues to lead the way towards a new stage of empowering digital transformation within the public sector. The company offers an extensive portfolio of solutions like cloud computing, cybersecurity, 5G, and much more to serve the needs of all government

institutions, benefitting citizens and residents and achieving the nation's developmental goals.

Microsoft's Smart Government Summit 2023 brought together government leaders and senior ICT professionals to learn more about leveraging the innovative tech solutions to improve the public services offered by various entities. The event featured panel discussions for the attendees to interact with technology experts on new and emerging technologies to help formulate a unique roadmap to adopt such technologies and accelerate the government's journey in providing smart services.

Sri Lanka bailout hinges on tackling corruption: IMF

COLOMBO: Sri Lanka must not allow entrenched corruption to undermine a bailout for its bankrupt economy, the IMF said Tuesday after signing off on a \$3 billion loan for the crisis-hit nation. The International Monetary Fund approved its long-delayed rescue program on Monday after China, the South Asian island's biggest bilateral lender, offered debt relief assurances.

But it said the rescue was conditional on tackling the deep-rooted culture of graft and government mismanagement blamed for tipping Sri Lanka into an unprecedented economic crisis last year. Peter Breuer, the IMF mission chief in Sri Lanka, said the government had agreed to enact tougher anti-corruption laws within months during the bailout negotiations.

"We emphasize the importance of anti-corruption and governance reforms as a central pillar of the program," he told reporters. President Ranil Wickremesinghe said the latest rescue would allow him to ease a range of import bans imposed since March 2020 to shore up foreign exchange reserves.

"The world has accepted that Sri Lanka is no longer a bankrupt country," he said in a national address. "Normal transactions can resume." Sri Lanka's tea-and-tourism economy is no stranger to crisis,



COLOMBO: A vendor arranges vegetables as he waits for customers at a market in Colombo on March 21, 2023. — AFP

and Monday's bailout is the 17th loan facility negotiated with the IMF since 1965.

Its last program, agreed in 2016, was scuttled by Colombo after a change of government three years later. "Every few years, we seem to go back to the Fund because we don't seem to be able to put our house in order," Murtaza Jafferjee of the Colombo-based Advocata Institute think-tank told AFP.

"But one is hopeful that because the crash was so steep this time, that there will be an awakening

and there will be permanent changes." Sri Lanka once again went to the Washington-based lender of last resort shortly before defaulting on its \$46 billion foreign debt last April.

A critical shortage of foreign exchange had left the island nation unable to finance even the most essential imports, causing severe food and fuel shortages. Sri Lanka's 22 million people also endured runaway inflation and prolonged blackouts, inflaming public anger as the crisis worsened. — AFP

German investor morale falls amid market turbulence

FRANKFURT: German investor confidence fell in March for the first time in six months, a key survey showed Tuesday, following market turbulence driven by fears of a widening banking crisis.

The ZEW institute's economic expectations index fell 15.1 points to 13 points. It remained in positive territory, but the decline was sharper than analysts surveyed by FactSet had predicted.

In February the indicator had risen for a fifth straight month, as concerns continued to ease that Europe's top economy was heading for a deep downturn due to Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

But the collapse of two US lenders and then the UBS takeover of troubled Credit Suisse has caused panic on global markets and knocked confidence. "The international financial markets are under strong pressure," said ZEW president Achim Wambach, adding the reading indicated a "high level of uncertainty". Authorities in leading economies have pledged support for depositors and troubled banks as worries grow about whether the global economy is headed for a serious financial crisis.

European Central Bank chief Christine Lagarde said Monday that capital buffers and liquidity of eurozone banks were "way in excess" of what is required while their exposure to Credit Suisse was "very limited." DZ Bank economist Christoph Swonke said there was no sign of German banks or financial institutions in the 20-nation eurozone being affected.

"However, the current situation shows that, in addition to the still high inflation and higher interest rates, a sustained uncertainty in the banking sector would be adding sand in the economic gears," he added. Confidence among German investors was initially hit hard by Russia's invasion of Ukraine and subsequent move to slash crucial gas exports, but it slowly recovered after Berlin rolled out relief measures. —AFP

Credit Suisse tells Hong Kong clients to 'embrace new reality'

HONG KONG: Days after it was rescued in an emergency buyout, Credit Suisse gathered hundreds of clients in an upscale Hong Kong hotel on Tuesday for a glitzy investment conference where they were told to "embrace the new reality". Executives at the event from the troubled Swiss lender were eager to offer reassurances, even as details of the takeover by Swiss giant UBS remained unclear and global markets were buffeted by fears for the banking industry.

UBS agreed on Sunday to a government-brokered deal to take over Credit Suisse for \$3 billion Swiss francs (\$3.25 billion), a move authorities say was vital to prevent further economic turmoil. Chairman Axel Lehmann and CEO Ulrich Korner cancelled their scheduled appearances at the event in the Chinese finance hub. That left Head of Global Equities Neil Hosie to welcome corporate clients at Hong Kong's Conrad Hotel, overlooking the city's famed Victoria Harbor.

A Credit Suisse executive at the event told AFP Hosie did not speak about company prospects during his closed-door welcome speech and took no questions. A brief statement was released to the media in which Hosie said: "The (conference) represents Credit Suisse at its best."



Promotional material for Credit Suisse is displayed as people attend the Asian Investment Conference in Hong Kong on March 21, 2023. — AFP

"For 26 years, it has been our privilege to present powerful perspectives on the themes that matter most." Organizers in Hong Kong announced the event would no longer be open to the media after the weekend's crunch talks at the Swiss finance ministry to decide the bank's fate.

A security guard tried to block an AFP reporter from taking photographs within the hotel, saying the event was private. The three-day event, in its 26th and potentially final iteration, was meant to discuss how investors can adapt to slower growth and elevated tensions in Asia, according to the company. The lineup of guest speakers includes British ad-

venturer Bear Grylls, who will speak on overcoming fears, building mental resilience and how "our mindset affect(s) our success in business".

City leader John Lee said on Tuesday Hong Kong would not be significantly affected by the Credit Suisse fallout and that the lender's business and assets in the city were relatively small. "The banking system in Hong Kong is very resilient and very properly regulated," Lee said at a regular news briefing.

Lee had been scheduled to address the conference but was replaced by another Hong Kong finance official.

'Don't sense panic'

While Credit Suisse prepares for life under new management, its Hong Kong clients were told to "embrace the new reality and thrive", according to promotional materials prepared well before the weekend's events. The event is expected to draw more than 1,600 institutional investors from more than 200 companies, including 84 Chinese firms, according to the bank.

A crowded lunch buffet and lively conversations in hotel hallways on Tuesday betrayed few signs that anything was amiss. Clients at the event were "by and large supportive" of the bank and have confidence in the takeover, according to the Credit Suisse executive.

"They are not worried about any problems because this (merger) has the backing of the Swiss government," he said. A conference attendee representing a Chinese firm told AFP news about the acquisition had been encouraging. — AFP



BRUSSELS: European Central Bank (ECB) President Christine Lagarde answers questions during the European Parliament Committee on Economic Affairs at the EU Parliament in Brussels on March 20, 2023. — AFP



KUWAIT: Gulf Bank Chairman Jassim Mustafa Boodai, Acting Chief Executive Officer Waleed Khaled Mandani and senior bank management pose for a group photo during the conference.



Minister of Social Affairs and Women and Children's Affairs Mai Al-Baghi (second left), Jassim Mustafa Boodai (second left) and Sheikh Ahmed Al-Duaij (right) lead the audience.

Gulf Bank's 'Lead The Way Conference' opens with wide attendance, participation

Female leaders form 28% of workforce at the bank, an increase of 300% in 10 years

KUWAIT: In celebration of International Women's Day 2023, Gulf Bank's 'Lead The Way Conference' commenced on Tuesday at Grand Hyatt 360 Mall in the presence and with the participation of various economic, banking, diplomatic and government figures in addition to several public associations.

The conference welcomed a large number of bank leaders and officials including Gulf Bank's Chairman Jassim Mustafa Boodai and Acting Chief Executive Officer Waleed Khaled Mandani. The conference shed light on the most prominent challenges facing the efforts of empowering women in Kuwait and the positive repercussions of this on the economy through interactive workshops, inspiring speeches, and thought-provoking panel discussions.

Women empowerment

In his opening speech, Gulf Bank's Board Member Ahmad Mohammad Al-Bahar said, "Despite the significant progress that has been achieved in recent years, women still face many obstacles in terms of obtaining equal opportunities despite their proven competence in the workplace."

Al-Bahar mentioned that the gender pay gap, lack of fair opportunities to handle leadership positions, and discrimination are some of the challenges that women face in the pursuit of economic empowerment. And those challenges were the subject of research, discussion and exchange of experiences at the conference.

He added: "The large number of attendees at the conference is a clear indication of the importance of this topic and the need to work on providing all means of support to genuinely and sustainably empower women." Al-Bahar noted that the issue is related to the desire and demands of the community as one important aspect is working to create inspiring ideas and providing solutions that we can all benefit from. He also spoke of Gulf Bank's keenness to focus on social sustainability as part of the Bank's 2025 strategy which places the employees at the forefront of its priorities as empowering employees and developing their skills, aids in promoting a comprehensive and sustainable healthy economy.



Ahmad Mohammad Al-Bahar

- The need to work on providing all means of support to genuinely and sustainably empower women
- Women still face many obstacles in terms of obtaining equal opportunities despite their proven competence in the workplace
- The gender pay gap, lack of fair opportunities to handle leadership positions and discrimination are some of the challenges that women face in the pursuit of economic empowerment



Salma Al-Hajjaj

- The Middle East needs years to close the gender gap according to the current rates of women empowerment
- Gender diversity is a need for the economy as it contributes to an increase in profitability, productivity, creativity and innovation



CEO of Alghanim Industries Samir Kasem (left) with Waleed Khaled Mandani (right) and his wife during the conference.

In her speech, the General Manager of Human Resources at Gulf Bank Salma Al-Hajjaj said that Gulf Bank's efforts over the past 10 years have contributed to an increase in the number of women leaders in the bank by almost 300 percent in 10 years – as their percentage increased from 10 percent to 28 percent.

Throughout her presentation, Al-Hajjaj indicated that the delay in empowering women costs the Kuwaiti economy annually at the expense of lost opportunities which calls for urgent action to accelerate the process of narrowing the gender gap.

She noted that recent studies indicate that continuing the efforts to empower women at the current rate will require more years to close the gender gap com-

pared to Europe and in North America.

they face and support their ability to overcome them in order to stop gender discrimination practices. Al-Hajjaj recommended the need to develop a well-studied plan within the 2035 strategy of empowering women and to conduct an annual evaluation on it to evaluate the results whilst working to spread the culture of gender equality in addition to ensuring diversity when it comes to employment by applying a clear concept based on competence and ability.

Dalal Al-Dousari moderates panel discussion

Deputy General Manager of Investment Relations at Gulf Bank Dalal Al-Dousari moderated the panel discussion with

that this figure is impressive as Kuwait's general index is 21 percent.

He noted that these achievements confirm the ability of the private sector to implement policies and meet the requirements of national plans quicker than the government sector, indicating that the government currently holds the greater responsibility to initiate changes as it controls 80 percent of the economic activities.

He also stressed the importance of shifting the culture of society towards having more men believe in the role of women and their support as well as the importance of women supporting other women. In addition to the need to change the image of women in academic curriculums that solely focus on their role within the home.

women, which was presented by Kuwait University Professor and Founder of SHORE Consultancy Dr Amar Behbehani, who discussed how women can remain emotionally and physically resilient as they progress to leadership positions.

The second workshop was presented by Global Brand Strategist and Reputation Risk Mitigator Steve Brazell, who provided deep insights on how to empower women in helping them master the secrets of creating a strong and distinct identity of their own that gives them the ability to compete and succeed in their professional and personal lives.

Gulf Bank's efforts to support and empower women

Salma Al-Hajjaj indicated that Gulf Bank has taken many measures that have significantly contributed to empowering women and increasing their percentage in leadership positions to 28 percent in 2020, the most important ones being:

- Gulf Bank was one of the first Kuwaiti private sector companies to sign the Women's Empowerment Principles (WEPs) in 2019.
- Gulf Bank was a pioneer in establishing equality between men and women when it came to job benefits, by deciding to eliminate cases of discrimination between the bank's male and female employees, and to achieve full equality between them in 2021.
- Gulf Bank launched the Women of Wisdom (WOW) initiative in 2017 with the aim of empowering and supporting women in the business world in terms of training, development and career advancement.
- Cooperation and partnership with international and local institutions to provide quality training programs that support the Bank's directions aimed at empowering women

Questionnaire to understand women's financial needs

Gulf Bank has launched a national survey to measure and understand women's financial needs, targeting Kuwaiti women working in the private and public sectors, aged between 25 and 35 years.

Acknowledgements

Gulf Bank extends its thanks and appreciation to the attendees and participants in the conference, including the banking, diplomatic and government officials, public associations, and others for their keenness to support and empower women.



Salma Al-Hajjaj and international expert Steve Brazil pose for a group photo.

He further questioned: Will all obstacles end once leadership positions are obtained by females? And what happens after that? He pointed out that the conference aims to develop a complete vision and model to overcome the obstacles that women face in leadership positions in order to preserve and build on their gains.

He stressed that a vision can only be achieved by having women and men on equal footing as they are a matter of pride and honor. As establishing a work environment based on equality where women are supported and empowered will achieve more innovation and success and make the work culture healthier for all. Al-Bahar indicated that this would lead to progress in society and reflect positively on the labor market and the future, calling on the importance of working together to promote gender equality and empower women, to achieve their full potential in the economy, and support the economic development of the country.

Al-Hajjaj indicated that gender diversity in the workplace contributes to an increase in profitability, productivity, creativity and innovation. Furthermore, the companies' ability to retain talent increases and the organization's reputation improves as well.

On a related note, Al-Hajjaj referred to many economic benefits of empowering women such as welcoming new capabilities and ideas that can contribute to increasing the productivity of organizations and the national economy. And with more women entering the labor market, the volume of spending increases. Hence, women's access to their rights contributes to increasing the level of happiness in society.

She also indicated that empowering women and enhancing their leadership role requires more flexibility in dealing with them, taking into account their social and family circumstances. This includes seeking guidance from those around them to reduce the difficulties



Dalal Al-Dousari moderates panel discussion.

the participation of General Secretary of the Supreme Planning and Development Council Dr Khaled Al-Mahdi, the resident representative of the United Nations Development Program Hideko Hadzialic and MasterCard representative Syntheia Saab.

At the beginning of the panel discussion, Hideko Hadzialic said, "I have met many women leaders in Kuwait who do not agree with the quota principle which is to allocate a certain percentage of women in leadership positions although it is sometimes a solution."

She indicated that there are some social barriers that hinder women's empowerment efforts in many societies, including unconscious biases, stressing the importance of moving away from stereotypes and providing training opportunities that further help women develop their careers.

Khaled Mahdi commended Gulf Bank's ability to increase the percentage of women in leadership positions by 300 percent to 28 percent in the last 10 years noting

Cynthia Saab, participating in the discussion, pointed out that there is a social dilemma with conscious and unconscious biases, but if there are policies that determine the selection criteria and women meet the criteria of competence and ability, there is no room for preference of men to women.

She mentioned that the continuous demands for gender equality should not be directed towards women only. For example, the mother gets a maternity leave to accompany the child, noting that the father is entitled to have the same benefit which makes him feel discriminated against.

Saab also spoke of the role of educating women from a young age about the various opportunities and fields to study and work in, and that it's not restricted to only medical, engineering and business disciplines, including SMEs.

Two workshops

The conference witnessed two workshops: The first one was exclusively for

Business

US home sales bounce in Feb, ending 12-month slide

Jump ends a year of declines in housing market

WASHINGTON: Sales of existing homes in the United States made their biggest monthly jump since 2020 in February, ending a year of declines according to industry data released on Tuesday. As the US central bank raised interest rates steeply over the past year to curb surging inflation, the rate-sensitive housing market has been reeling.

But last month, existing home sales rose 14.5 percent from January to a seasonally adjusted annual rate of 4.58 million, said the National Association of Realtors (NAR) in a statement. Compared with a year ago however, sales were still down by 22.6 percent, the NAR said.

"Conscious of changing mortgage rates, home buyers are taking advantage of any rate declines," added NAR chief economist Lawrence Yun in a statement. He added that sales are stronger in areas where home prices are falling and local economies are adding jobs. According to home loan finance company Freddie Mac, the popular 30-year fixed-rate mortgage averaged 6.6 percent as of March 16, down from the week before. Existing home sales make up the vast majority of the US property market.

Costs are a constraint
"Mortgage rates remain high although they have come off recent peaks," said High Frequency Economics chief US economist Rubeela Farooqi in a note. "But affordability remains a key constraint for buyers," she said. Kieran Clancy, senior US economist at Pantheon Macroeconomics, added: "A dramatic improvement in affordability is still needed before sales can recover."

The median home price across housing types was down slightly from a year ago at \$363,000, said the NAR. But Yun added that "inventory levels are still at historic lows."

Month-over-month sales picked up in all four major US regions. As of end-February, total housing inventory was 980,000 units, identical to January and up from a year ago, said the association.

"Unsold inventory sits at a 2.6-month supply at the current sales pace," the NAR noted. Nancy Vanden Houten, lead US economist at Oxford Economics, cautioned: "We expect home sales to come under renewed pressure in the months ahead, with a recession in the second half of the year also weighing on home sales." —AFP



ARLINGTON, US: In this file photo taken on November 21, 2020 a house's real estate for sale sign is seen in front of a home in Arlington, Virginia. —AFP

Canada inflation continues to drop to 5.2%

OTTAWA: Canadians paid 5.2 percent more for goods and services in February than a year earlier, led by soaring food prices, the national statistical agency said Tuesday. Beating analysts' forecasts, this followed inflation of 5.9 percent in January. For the second month in a row, Statistics Canada said the year-over-year deceleration—the largest since April 2020 — was due to what it called a "base-year effect."

That means prices spiked in February 2022 and were now down or rising more slowly relative to last year's big uptick. The agency said price increases for groceries remained in the double digits for a seventh consecutive month in February, amid bad weather in growing regions and higher input costs such as animal feed, energy and packaging materials.

Shelter costs rose at a slower pace, amid a "general cooling" of the housing market. Gasoline prices, meanwhile, fell. Although February's headline inflation came in lower than expected, "underlying price pressures remained hotter than the central bank would like," Desjardins analyst Royce Mendes said in a research note.

But, he added, "given the tightening in financial conditions as a result of events outside Canada's borders, central bankers won't be itching to move off the sidelines based on this report." The Bank of Canada earlier this month became the first major central bank to pause its aggressive monetary policy, holding its key lending rate at 4.5 percent as inflation eased, after eight consecutive rate increases.

The central bank noted that the economy had slowed, as hoped, but added it was prepared to resume increasing costs of borrowing if needed to reach its 2.0 percent inflation target. Earlier, stock markets jumped, gradually recovering from last week's plunge sparked by fears of a fresh financial crisis following the collapse of Silicon Valley Bank and Signature Bank in the United States.

The banking sector upheaval led to speculation that more central banks would hold off further hiking rates aimed at cooling inflation in order to calm jitters.

Meanwhile, Canadian Finance Minister Chrystia Freeland said Monday the federal budget, to be released next week, will include big investments in the "clean economy," to narrow a gap with massive US subsidies. Speaking to reporters ahead of the March 28 release of the federal budget, Freeland said to expect "serious investments" in this sector.

"We will invest in building Canada's clean economy," she said, adding that the "investments are going to be smart (and) they are going to be strategic."

The minister did not provide specifics, but Ottawa has been wooing investment in advanced lithium-ion batteries manufacturing for electric vehicles and critical minerals mining. Last week, German auto giant Volkswagen announced it was building its first North American battery factory in St. Thomas, Ontario. Stellantis and LG Energy Solution have also partnered on a new battery plant in Canada.

"From clean energy to clean technology, to battery manufacturing, to electric vehicles, we can and we are becoming a global leader in the growing clean economy," Freeland said, pointing to Canada's abundance of hydroelectricity and critical minerals.

Green technology production has taken on greater urgency after the United States unveiled a \$370 billion program of tax credits and subsidies for electric vehicles, batteries and renewable energy projects—if they are US-made. —AFP

NBK Capital named Global Investor MENA awards winner

KUWAIT: NBK Capital has been named the Kuwait Asset Manager of the Year 2022 winner by Global Investor Group's MENA Awards. The Global Investor 2022 MENA Awards recognize excellence by wealth managers, asset managers and brokers on both a national and regional basis. The 2022 MENA Awards opened on 5 October 2022 and saw firms across the region submit their entries for a chance to win an award across 17 regional and 24 country categories.

On this occasion, Shadi Khadder, the managing director of MENA Asset Management at NBK Capital said, "We are proud of this recognition and the



clear testament it holds for our team's great abilities, it reinforces again our position as the leader in Kuwait and one of the best asset managers in the Gulf region. It also reflects the success of our investment philosophy that focuses on capital growth and sound investment strategies. Winning this prestigious award is an additional evidence of the team's professional experience, proven track record over more than 14 years, and the strong performance of our investment products and solutions."

Khadder added, "NBK Capital's leading industry

position comes as a result of its relentless pursuit of developing innovative solutions that cater to our clients' needs and strong focus on achieving rewarding returns in the long-run." Khadder concluded his statement by thanking the Asset Management team, whose efforts and hard work have resulted in distinguished results culminated in winning the prestigious award Global Investor Group.

Luke Jeffs, Global Investor Managing Editor said: "NBK Capital has established itself as one of the most performed asset managers in Kuwait and the Middle East region more broadly. NBK Capital's Kuwait Equity Fund draws on in-house research to ensure market-leading performance."



Shadi Khadder

Deliveroo Kuwait launches rider awareness program

KUWAIT: As part of its ongoing initiatives to enhance riders safety and satisfaction in Kuwait, Deliveroo invited a number of its champions to attend a live educational session presented by the Kuwait Red Crescent Society (KRCS) prior to the start of the holy month of Ramadan. The educational awareness program provided valuable information on healthy food habits and best practices to ensure their health and wellness throughout the month, as well as steps to staying safe during heat exhaustion.

The program, led by medical doctors with over two decades of experience, highlighted the significance of adequate hydration during Ramadan, and offered useful tips on how to measure and consume the recommended amount of water and beverages between sunset and sunrise. Additionally, the program outlined suitable food choices for iftar and suggested which foods would be better avoided during Suhour. Presented in both English and Arabic, the session also reminded riders of safety tips especially during summer, and including the importance of wearing the proper rider kits and following bike box regulations.

"We would like to thank the Kuwait Red Crescent



Society for their ongoing partnership throughout the year. It has been a pleasure collaborating with the KRCS as part of our collective efforts to pursue riders safety and satisfaction," said Seham Alhusaini, Deliveroo's General Manager. "Deliveroo is committed to empowering our riders through periodic safety and awareness training programs, and we would like to thank all our riders for their efforts throughout the year — particularly during Ramadan and we would like to wish them all a blessed month."

"Our ongoing partnership with Deliveroo is a reflection of both parties' commitment to rider safety

and welfare in Kuwait," said Manhal Al-Anezei, the Director of Medical Services and Training at the Kuwait Red Crescent Society. "We hope every rider benefits from the Ramadan awareness program, and we would like to wish everyone a Ramadan Kareem." At Deliveroo, rider safety and well-being are of the utmost importance. The leading food delivery service is committed to providing a safe working environment for all its riders. Deliveroo currently has ongoing activities for riders like the Deliveroo Champions initiatives, the Roadwards initiative, as well as regular training and awareness programs.

Fed begins crucial rate talks amid ongoing concerns

WASHINGTON: Federal Reserve members kicked off two days of crucial interest rate talks on Tuesday, as the US central bank looks to chart a path between stubbornly high inflation and turbulent financial markets. A majority of analysts and traders believe the Fed will raise its benchmark lending rate a quarter percentage point on Wednesday afternoon—its ninth consecutive increase—while a minority predict the US central bank will halt its hiking cycle on banking sector concerns following the collapse of Silicon Valley Bank (SVB).

A hike of a quarter percentage point would match the Fed's last increase at its most recent meeting in February. "We expect the Fed to hike by 25bps (basis points) at

this meeting, but the decision & outlook for any tightening depend on financial stability," Bank of America Global Research analysts wrote in a note to clients.

Futures traders also see a strong probability that the Fed will hike interest rates by 25 percentage points, according to CME Group. Goldman Sachs, meanwhile, predicted that the Fed will take "a pause in the inflation fight" and hold rates.

"While policymakers have responded aggressively to shore up the financial system, markets appear to be less than fully convinced that efforts to support small and midsize banks will prove sufficient," Goldman Sachs Economic Research analysts wrote in an investor note. SVB's collapse on concerns about its exposure to interest rates have spread far beyond its home state of California, leading to the collapse of several big banks in the United States and abroad.

Over the weekend, Swiss investment bank Credit Suisse became the highest profile casualty of the crisis. It was pushed to merge with regional rival UBS after worries about its internal controls led its share price to plummet. The merger leaves UBS as one of



WASHINGTON: This file photo shows the Marriner S Eccles Federal Reserve building in Washington, DC. —AFP

the world's largest wealth management businesses. In the United States, volatility in First Republic Bank's share price continued Tuesday, with stock prices up close to 30 percent in premarket trading after another day of steep declines a day earlier. —AFP

TikTok says half of Americans use site as ban threat looms

WASHINGTON: TikTok CEO Shou Zi Chew said Tuesday that US user numbers had soared to 150 million—almost half the total population—as he prepared to fight at US Congress for the Chinese owned site's future. Chew will give testimony before the House Energy and Commerce Committee Thursday where he is set to face a barrage of questions over allegations by both Republicans

and Democrats that the app is beholden to the Communist Party in Beijing.

The company has also confirmed reports that the White House gave TikTok an ultimatum to part ways with its Chinese owners or face a US ban. "Today, I'm super excited to announce that more than 150 million Americans are on TikTok. That's almost half of the US coming to TikTok to connect, to create, to share, to learn or just to have some fun," Chew said in a TikTok post. This was up from TikTok's previous measure in 2020 that 100 million users came to the video sharing site every month, which already made it one of the most popular. Chew also asked the app's devoted users to "let me know in the comments what you want your elected representatives to know about what you love about TikTok." "Some

politicians have started talking about banning TikTok. Now this could take TikTok away from all 100 and 50 million of you," Chew said.

The Singaporean CEO said he would share with Congress "all that we're doing to protect Americans using the app," in a reference to a proposal called Project Texas that would guarantee a special handling for the data of US users. TikTok has consistently denied sharing data with Chinese officials and says it has been working with US authorities for more than two years to address national security concerns. Time spent by US users on TikTok has surpassed that spent on YouTube, Facebook, Instagram or Twitter and it is closing in on streaming titan Netflix, according to market tracker Insider Intelligence. —AFP

Business

Credit Suisse buyout faces harsh criticism at home

Acquisition sparks fears it could weaken country's financial sector

ZURICH: UBS's emergency takeover of its troubled Swiss rival Credit Suisse, with significant backing and arm-twisting from Bern, sparked fears it could weaken the country's biggest bank and financial sector as a whole. Switzerland was in shock after its largest bank agreed under pressure from Swiss authorities to swallow up the second largest for \$3.25 billion, in what the government insisted was a vital step to prevent economic turmoil from spreading throughout the country and beyond.

Swiss media and politicians alike expressed outrage that one of the country's oldest and most iconic banking institutions went poof, insisting that despite a string of crises and scandals, it could have been saved. Swiss authorities faced criticism for reacting too slowly as Credit Suisse—seen as the weakest link in European banking after several years of unrelenting scandals and crises—saw its share price implode last week amid market turbulence over the collapse of two US banks.

'Historic scandal'

Balthasar Glattli, head of the Green Party, which wants new rules for regulating banks like Credit Suisse and UBS that are considered too big to fail, warned Monday that the new UBS would be "a monster that is too big to bail." Thierry Burkart, head of Switzerland's rightwing Liberals party, meanwhile described Sunday as "a dark day for the Swiss financial sector and for Switzerland as a whole."

Both of their parties called Monday for an emergency parliament meeting to discuss the deal, including billions in guarantees and liquidity guaranteed by the government and the central bank.

Parliament told AFP it was looking at holding such a hearing in mid-April. The Tages-Anzeiger daily decried the deal as "a historic scandal", while the Tri-

bune de Geneve said it was a "waste, socially (for jobs), economically (for the reputation of the country), and shameful politically for the politicians who were too slow to act". Many acknowledged though that there had been little choice. The government had said the only alternative to the UBS deal was a full nationalization of Credit Suisse.

The deal was the "best solution for restoring the confidence that has been lacking in the financial markets recently", Swiss President Alain Berset told reporters Sunday. But investors remained on edge, with UBS shares falling by as much as 15 percent early Monday before climbing into positive territory in the afternoon. They closed the day up 1.3 percent at 17.33 Swiss francs per share.

Shares in Credit Suisse meanwhile opened nearly 64 percent lower Monday morning, before clawing back some losses. The closed down 55.7 percent at 0.82 francs per share—slightly higher than the UBS purchase price.

'Monster'

While UBS, which raked in a \$7-billion net profit in 2022, is entering this forced marriage in full health, observers warned the mega-merger is not without risk for the institution and beyond. "The deal could draw a permanent line under the Swiss banking sector's problems," Capital Economics analyst Andrew Kenningham said in a note. But he cautioned that "the track record of shotgun marriages in the banking sector is mixed" and that "further substantial losses in the legacy bank cannot be ruled out".

Vontobel analyst Andreas Venditti also warned of "many uncertainties and significant risks."

S&P Global Ratings revised the outlook on its A-/A-2 rating for UBS Group AG to negative, warning of "execution risk from the integration" although



ZURICH: Members of Young Socialists Switzerland party (JUSO) stage a demonstration in front of the headquarters of Credit Suisse bank and next to a UBS offices on March 20, 2023. —AFP

it added it believes the bank has "sufficient buffers to limit emerging risks effectively". The merger could among other things have dire consequences for jobs in Switzerland, where UBS and Credit Suisse have significant overlap in their businesses, and each with their own branch offices in every Swiss town and village. Credit Suisse employed around 50,000 people worldwide, and 17,000 in Switzerland. Commentators also warned of the impact of allowing UBS, already a giant, to swell further. UBS was already the

global wealth management leader, but the deal will create a behemoth managing around \$3.4 trillion in assets. The deal "creates such a large super bank that it can get an entire country in trouble," Marcel Fratzscher, head of the DIW think tank in Berlin, cautioned in an interview with Die Welt.

A commentary piece in the Neue Zürcher Zeitung also voiced alarm at the size of the merging bank. "A zombie is disappearing, but a monster is in the process of being born." —AFP



HONG KONG: People walk past a sign showing the numbers for the Hang Seng Index in Hong Kong.—AFP

Stocks rally as panic eases over banks

LONDON: Stock markets jumped Tuesday, gradually recovering from last week's plunge, as shares in banks rallied on easing fears of a fresh financial crisis. Panic across markets eased after authorities in leading economies pledged support for depositors and troubled lenders following the recent collapse of Silicon Valley Bank and Signature Bank in the United States. Still, the takeover of troubled Credit Suisse by Swiss rival bank UBS for \$3.25 billion fanned concerns about what could be next on the chopping block, and analysts warned it was too early to say that the crisis was over.

Fed uncertainty

"Despite the apparent relief, uncertainty is still in charge," noted Neil Wilson, chief market analyst at Finalto. The upheaval in the banking sector has led traders to re-evaluate their bets on the Federal Reserve's plans on interest rates, with speculation swirling that it could cut borrowing costs by the end of the year to provide further stability.

This would follow a series of aggressive rate hikes carried out by the Fed and other central banks since late 2021 aimed at cooling soaring inflation. Before the banking crisis kicked off, expectations were for US borrowing costs to go as high as six percent,

but now forecasts are for them to end at around four percent. They are currently at 4.5-4.75 percent, and there is much talk about whether the US central bank holds fire at its Wednesday decision or lifts rates by 25 basis points. Lower expectations for US rates rises weighed on the dollar, while oil prices firmed after heavy losses in recent sessions as investors fretted that contagion from the banking woes could hurt economic growth. All three main indices on Wall Street ended higher Monday—with the Dow up more than one percent—while European markets also ended with gains.

Asia caught up Tuesday, closing with solid gains. Europe's main stock markets were up around 1.5 percent approaching the half-way stage and ahead of US markets reopening. Promises of support from the Fed and other central banks, as well as the buyout of Credit Suisse, have sent equities higher. European bank shares surged Tuesday, with Commerzbank up seven percent, Barclays winning 4.8 percent and BNP Paribas up 4.6 percent.

However, embattled First Republic Bank collapsed almost 50 percent Monday, despite a coalition of US lenders agreeing to inject it with \$30 billion. There was less concern over high-risk debt markets with holders of AT1 bonds at Credit Suisse losing \$17.3 billion after authorities required them to be written off. The assets, also known as "CoCo" bonds, tumbled Monday as they were wiped out in the deal despite equity investors getting some of their cash back. That led traders to question the usual hierarchy of bonds over stocks. European officials on Monday reiterated that the usual structure remained the same for claims. —AFP

Syria GDP to shrink another 2.3% due to earthquake: WB

DAMASCUS: Syria's economy is expected to contract 2.3 percent more than it otherwise would have due to the impact of last month's deadly earthquakes, the World Bank said on Monday. The earthquake and its aftershocks killed more than 50,000 people in Turkey and Syria, and displaced millions more.

"The recent earthquake exacerbates the already dire consequences of the 12 year-long conflict for the people of Syria," World Bank Country Director for the Middle East Department Jean-Christophe Carret said. It's expected to cost the Syrian economy \$5.2 billion, including physical damages of \$3.7 billion and losses of \$1.5 billion, the bank announced in a statement. Recovery and reconstruction costs will approach \$8 billion over three years, the bank predicted. The earthquake's impact is likely to widen Syria's economic contraction by 2.3 percent to 5.5 percent this year, according to the bank. The country's economy is still under severe strain more than 13 years after the deadly civil war began.—AFP

US banking sector 'stabilizing' after turmoil: Yellen

WASHINGTON: The US banking sector is "stabilizing" after the recent failures of Silicon Valley Bank and Signature Bank rattled the industry, Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen will tell a summit Tuesday, according to prepared remarks. The collapses caused a crisis of confidence, with many customers of similarly sized banks withdrawing their money and depositing it in larger institutions—considered too big for the government not to bail them out if they faced failure.

But "aggregate deposit outflows from regional banks have stabilized" following authorities' moves to shore up confidence and stem contagion, according to Yellen's remarks. "Our intervention was necessary to protect the broader US banking system," she will say in a speech to the American Bankers Association's Washington DC summit. "And similar actions could be warranted if smaller institutions suffer deposit runs that pose the risk of contagion," she adds in the excerpts.

After SVB's collapse, the Treasury, Federal Reserve and Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation set out plans to ensure its customers would be able to access their deposits. A similar exception was announced for Signature Bank. The Fed also introduced a new lending tool for banks in an effort to prevent a repeat of SVB's quick demise, and has since launched a drive with other major central banks to improve banks' access to liquidity.

Reducing risk

"I believe that our actions reduced the risk of further bank failures," according to Yellen's remarks. For now, she maintains that the US banking system



WASHINGTON: The US banking sector is "stabilizing" after the recent failures of Silicon Valley Bank and Signature Bank rattled the industry, Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen will tell a summit Tuesday. —AFP

remains sound. But there are fears over which lender could be the next domino to fall, with 11 US banks announcing last week they would deposit \$30 billion into First Republic amid worries surrounding the bank. A coalition of midsized US banks has also asked federal regulators to guarantee all of their customers' deposits for two years, a move that would help to halt an "exodus of deposits" from smaller banks, Bloomberg reported Saturday.

Financial authorities have been scrambling to ease fears while worries of contagion spread to Europe, as Switzerland's second biggest bank Credit Suisse came under pressure. Rival UBS has since agreed to take over Credit Suisse in a government-brokered deal after days of market upheaval. While US and European markets picked up on Monday, analysts say investors remain wary. But Yellen, in her speech, is set to try to reassure bankers of the Treasury Department's commitment to safeguarding the "health and competitiveness" of the community and regional banking institutions. "You should rest assured that we will remain vigilant," according to her speech. —AFP

Sri Lanka: Timeline of a crisis

COLOMBO: The International Monetary Fund approved a \$2.9 billion bailout deal for Sri Lanka on Monday, raising hopes for an easing of the island nation's dire economic crisis. The South Asian country of 22 million people has suffered months of blackouts as well as acute food, fuel and medicine shortages.

Tens of thousands of people have protested against the government's handling of the crisis, aggravated by the loss of tourist revenue during the Covid-19 pandemic. At the peak of the demonstrations, an angry crowd stormed former leader Gotabaya Rajapaksa's house and forced the then-president to flee the country.

His successor Ranil Wickremesinghe has cracked down hard on demonstrations and introduced sweeping economic reforms in an effort to repair the nation's shattered finances. AFP looks at how the crisis unfolded:

April 1: State of emergency

President Gotabaya Rajapaksa declares a state of emergency after clashes between police and hundreds of demonstrators demanding his resignation outside his residence in the capital Colombo.

April 3: Cabinet resigns

Most of the cabinet resigns at a late-night meeting two days later, leaving Rajapaksa and his brother Mahinda—the prime minister—isolated. The central bank governor quits a day later.

April 5: President loses majority

Finance minister Ali Sabry resigns just a day after being appointed. The president then loses his parliamentary majority as former allies urge him to quit. He lifts the state of emergency.

April 12: Foreign debt default

The government announces it is defaulting on its foreign debt of \$51 billion.

April 19: First casualty

Police kill a protester, the first casualty after several weeks of anti-government protests. The next day, the IMF says it has asked Sri Lanka to restructure its colossal external debt before a rescue package can be agreed.

May 9: Day of violence

A mob of government loyalists bussed in from the countryside attacks peaceful protesters camped outside the president's office. Nine people are killed and hundreds more injured in reprisal attacks. Mahinda Rajapaksa resigns as prime minister and has to be rescued by troops after thousands of protesters storm his official residence in Colombo. He is replaced by Ranil Wickremesinghe, a political veteran also deeply unpopular among the protesters.

June 10: Humanitarian crisis

The United Nations warns that Sri Lanka is facing a dire humanitarian crisis, with millions already in need of aid. More than three-quarters of the population had reduced their food intake due to severe food shortages, it says.

July 9: President's home stormed

Rajapaksa flees his official residence with the assistance of troops, shortly before demonstrators storm the compound. Wickremesinghe's home is torched by protesters.

July 13: President flees country

Rajapaksa flies to the Maldives on a military aircraft, accompanied by his wife and two bodyguards. Six-time premier Wickremesinghe is appointed as acting president. The government declares a state of emergency.—AFP

US economic leaders looking at China trip

WASHINGTON: Washington and Beijing are discussing a potential trip to China by US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen and Commerce Secretary Gina Raimondo, the White House said Monday.

It would be the highest level visit between the two countries since relations took a nosedive in February. "Active" consideration of the trips is underway, John Kirby, spokesman for the National Security Council, told reporters. "We're having discussions with the PRC (China) right now about a potential visit by Secretary Yellen and Secretary Raimondo to go over there and talk about economic issues," he said. A much anticipated visit to Beijing by Secretary of State Antony Blinken was scrapped at the last minute in February after the United States shot down a Chinese balloon said by the US government to be spying on secretive military sites. Kirby said Blinken could yet go.—AFP

IRAQ FASHIONISTAS CHAMPION CLIMATE-FRIENDLY VINTAGE WEAR

In a palm grove north of Baghdad, bemused Iraqi shepherds looked on as models paraded second-hand garments down an improvised catwalk, seeking to raise awareness of the fashion industry's environmental impact. Haute couture has given way to upcycled outfits, sourced entirely from used clothes, as the models strut, pause and pivot on the runway, a sign of the growing popularity of chic, environmentally friendly vintage wear among young Iraqis. "We don't want overproduction of clothes, we have to reuse them," said Mohamed Qassem, 25, a hairdresser and organizer of the fashion show near Al-Hussainiya village.



People shop at a flea market in Baghdad. — AFP photos



People shop at a flea market in Baghdad.

The global fashion industry accounted for two percent of greenhouse gas emissions in 2019, according to the World Resources Institute. Campaigners and a growing number of climate-conscious social media influencers have led a push toward sustainable fashion. Many young people in climate-stressed Iraq, like Q-

assem, have become passionate about vintage clothing.

The palm grove event showcased fluorescent green puffer jackets, long black leather coats, ample double-breasted blazers, and modern takes on traditional costumes. In many parts of Iraq, scarred by decades of conflict, peaceful rhythms are gradually returning to daily life and second-hand clothing offers aspiring fashionistas an affordable chance to express themselves.

Climate threats

As Baghdad's streets see more "fast-fashion" and imported brands, the outfits at the Al-Hussainiya event predominantly feature green elements, a nod to the show's environmental message. Iraq, synonymous with date production, has seen its iconic date palms placed under stress by the effects of climate change and the years of conflict.

"The goal is not to focus only on clothes, but also abandoned orchards, palm trees that disappear every day," Qassem said.

The United Nations says oil-rich Iraq is one of the five countries most exposed to the impacts of climate change, already witnessing extreme summer heat, frequent droughts, desertification and regular dust storms, which will exacerbate as the planet heats. The designs at the fashion show will not be put on sale. Organizers mainly hope the symbolic parade will raise awareness.

Ahmed Taher, a 22-year-old stylist who put together the sets for the show, said "second-hand pieces are clothes of excellent quality". "When you wear them, you have the impression of wearing luxury clothes. It's different from what you find in stores." A business student, Taher offers Baghdad's hipsters vintage clothes on Instagram—where

he has around 47,000 followers—selling pieces for around \$20. "We want to wear unique clothes and not all look like each other," he said.

'Last a lifetime'

A student-turned-model for the day, Safaa Haidar, said she was attracted to vintage clothes as she could shop "according to my personality". But in Iraq, where the UN estimates nearly one-third of the 42 million inhabitants live in poverty, many wear used clothing out of necessity. In the winding alleys of central Baghdad's second-hand clothes market, stalls overflow every Friday with shirts, shoes and jeans, with shoppers checking sizes in front of the sellers.

Here a shirt can cost barely \$2, while other pieces can sell for as much as \$60 or even \$200. Mohamed Ali, a 20-year-old engineering student, came to buy shoes. "It's not that we can't afford to

buy new, but here we find better quality and unique pieces," he said.

Ali recounted his parents' stories from life in the 1990s, when Western sanctions against Iraq meant they would wear clothes, even "inside out, until they were worn out, because they could not afford" new ones. Now, Ali and most of his friends shop for vintage clothes for their durability and style, he said.

Merchant Hassan Refaat, 22, sells imported second-hand clothes which find a new life in Iraqi wardrobes. He also imports goods from Iraq's northern autonomous Kurdistan region, bordering major textile producer Turkey. "Second-hand clothes are of better quality than the new clothes available on the market," he said. "Very often, they are branded pieces, and the brands last a lifetime."—AFP



Duran Duran, the British band.

Duran Duran to reunite with original guitarist Andy Taylor

Duran Duran, the British band who led the New Romantic movement in the 1980s, are to reunite with guitarist Andy Taylor for a new project. The band said Taylor, who was diagnosed with stage four metastatic prostate cancer last year, would join them "for a few tracks". Taylor, whose rock and funk-inspired riffs drove dance floor hits such as "Girls on Film" and "Rio", left Duran Duran in 1986 to pursue other projects.

He had been due to reunite with his former bandmates for their induction into the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame in the US last November. But instead frontman Simon Le Bon read a message in which Taylor revealed his cancer diagnosis.

Duran Duran—Le Bon, keyboard player Nick Rhodes, bassist John Taylor and drummer Roger Taylor—said they were "thrilled" at the announcement.

The new project is due for release later this year, they said on Twitter late on Monday. "The new recordings will feature extended Duran Duran family and friends, old and new, including our former bandmate Andy Taylor who will join us on guitar for a few tracks," they said. Duran Duran, formed in Birmingham, central England, in 1978, enjoyed huge success in Britain and the United States, and have been seen as innovators in the then new medium of music videos.—AFP

Bat hat, wooden leg, coffin bed: Sarah Bernhardt's wild life offstage

French 19th-century stage legend Sarah Bernhardt, who died 100 years ago, was an institution in her country, who achieved superstardom playing tragic heroines in productions that toured the world. As the centenary of her death on March 26, 1923, approaches, AFP recalls some of the most astonishing details of the life of an extravagant and talented performer and style icon, who was also known for her eccentric life offstage.

First global superstar

"She was the first global star...To match her today, you would have to combine Madonna, Lady Gaga, Rihanna, Beyonce and Michael Jackson," historian and private collector Pierre-Andre Helene told AFP. As the face of France overseas, she became a living myth, captivating audiences from Europe, North and South America, Russia and Australia as Cleopatra, Cordelia or a cross-dressing Hamlet. Men in New York would throw their coats to the ground in the hope she would walk on them, while in Australia, "there were scenes of hysteria with tens of thousands of women who wanted to see her, to touch her," Helene said.

A coffin for a bed

Bernhardt, famous as an actress for her death scenes, sometimes slept in a coffin in her bedroom, which she also took on tour. A widely circulated



In this file photo taken on January 2, 1878 French actress Sarah Bernhardt plays the role of Queen "Dona Maria de Neubourg" in Victor Hugo's play "Ruy Blas", at the Comedie-Francaise. — AFP

photograph shows her lying in the sat-in coffin looking peaceful, eyes closed, draped with flowers.

A zoo for a home

She wore a stuffed bat on her hat, kept cheetahs, a tiger, lion cubs, a monkey and an alligator called Ali-Gaga that died of a milk and champagne overdose. She also owned a boa constrictor, which choked on a cushion.

Bubbly balloon ride

She got into trouble in 1878 for taking a hot-air balloon ride over Paris during the Exposition Universelle, sipping drinks as she sailed over the fairgrounds, the Eiffel Tower and the Louvre.

Muse and lover to many

Bernhardt was the muse of several authors and playwrights, including Victor Hugo and Edmond de Rostand, who wrote "Cyrano de Bergerac". Her many reported dalliances included Napoleon III, Edward Prince of Wales, who became King Edward VIII, and the Czech artist Alfons Mucha, behind the famous Art Nouveau poster for Bernhardt's production of "Gismonda".

Turned theatre into hospital

During the siege of Paris in 1870 during the Franco-German war, the deeply patriotic Bernhardt turned the Left Bank theatre, the Odeon, into a military hospital and personally tended to the wounded.

Incurable fabulist

Whether it was about her date or place of birth, the identity of her father, or the man who was the father of her son, Bernhardt was known for "obfuscations, avoidances, lapses of memory, disingenuous revelations, and just plain lies", according to biographer Robert Gottlieb. "Dull accuracy wasn't Bernhardt's strong point: She was a complete realist when dealing with her life but a relentless fabulist when recounting it. Why settle for anything else than the best story? " he wrote in "Sarah" (2010).

One leg

In 1915, aged 71, Bernhardt had her right leg amputated above the knee, following a fall onstage after jumping off a parapet while playing Tosca. After surgery she was carried about by two porters in a Louis XV-style sedan chair. Undaunted, she insisted on performing for French soldiers on the frontlines during World War I and in 1916 toured the United States for the last time, performing with a wooden leg.—AFP

Scientists make 'disturbing' find on remote island: Plastic rocks

There are few places on Earth as isolated as Trindade island, a volcanic outcrop a three- to four-day boat trip off the coast of Brazil. So geologist Fernanda Avelar Santos was startled to find an unsettling sign of human impact on the otherwise untouched landscape: rocks formed from the glut of plastic pollution floating in the ocean. Santos first found the plastic rocks in 2019, when she traveled to the island to research her doctoral thesis on a completely different topic—landslides, erosion and other "geological risks."

She was working near a protected nature reserve known as Turtle Beach, the world's largest breeding ground for the endangered green turtle, when she came across a large outcrop of the peculiar-looking blue-green rocks. Intrigued, she took some back to her lab after her two-month expedition.

Analyzing them, she and her team identified the specimens as a new kind of geological formation, merging the materials and processes the Earth has used to form rocks for billions of years with a new ingredient: plastic trash. "We concluded that human beings are now acting as a geological agent, influ-



encing processes that were previously completely natural, like rock formation," she told AFP.

"It fits in with the idea of the Anthropocene, which scientists are talking about a lot these days: the geological era of human beings influencing the planet's natural processes. This type of rock-like plastic will be preserved in the geological record and mark the Anthropocene."

Island paradise

The finding left her "disturbed" and "upset," said Santos, a professor at the Federal University of Parana, in southern Brazil. She describes Trindade as "like paradise": a beautiful tropical island whose remoteness has made it a refuge for all sorts of species—sea birds, fish found only there, nearly extinct crabs, the green turtle. The only human presence on the South Atlantic island is a small Brazilian military base and a scientific research center.

"It's marvelous," she said. "So it was all the more horrifying to find something like this—and on one of the most ecologically important beaches." She returned to the island late last year to collect more specimens and dig deeper into the phenomenon. Continuing her research, she found similar rock-like plastic formations had previously been reported in places including Hawaii, Britain, Italy and Japan since 2014. But Trindade island is the remotest place on the planet they have been found so far, she said. She fears that as the rocks erode, they will leach microplastics into the environment and further contaminate the island's food chain.

'Paradigm shift'

She and her team's study, published in September in the journal Marine Pollution Bulletin, classified the new kind of "rocks" found worldwide into several types: "plastiglomerates," similar to sedimentary rocks; "pyroplastics," similar to clastic rocks; and a previously unidentified type, "plastistones," similar to igneous rocks formed by lava flow. "Marine pollution is provoking a paradigm shift for concepts of rock and sedimentary deposit formations," her team wrote.

"Human interventions are now so pervasive that one has to question what is truly natural." The main ingredient in the rocks Santos discovered was remnants of fishing nets, they found. But ocean currents have also swept an abundance of bottles, household waste and other plastic trash from around the world to the island, she said. Santos said she plans to make the topic her main research focus. Trindade "is the most pristine place I've ever seen," she said. "Seeing how vulnerable it is to the trash contaminating our oceans shows how pervasive the problem is worldwide."—AFP





In this picture people wait to get their beverages in a coffee shop in Tripoli.



In this picture a barista prepares coffee at a cafe in Tripoli.



In this picture baristas prepare coffee at a cafe in Tripoli.

COFFEE-HOOKED LIBYANS BRACE FOR LOW-CAFFEINE RAMADAN DAYS

Italy left a deep cultural mark on Libya, the only Arab country it colonized: a national love of espresso. But as the Muslim fasting month of Ramadan approaches, Libyans are preparing to go without. Throughout the Islamic holy month, which is due to begin this week, observant Muslims everywhere are expected to refrain from eating and drinking from dawn to dusk. During Ramadan, "we spend the whole day dreaming about the coffee we're going to drink", said Abdel Basset Hamza, a shopowner in Tripoli's Old City. "There's nothing that we drink more than coffee," the 63-year-old said as he donned a hat and down jacket to step away from his luggage store to order a late afternoon brew.

Tripoli's centre is dotted with a myriad of cafes, from tiny kiosks to large halls, all equipped with sophisticated Italian espresso machines. While coffee is an integral part of daily life across North Africa and the Middle East, Hamza boasted that Libya stands out from its neighbors where "you don't find

coffee of this quality made in this way with such machines". As Ramadan approaches, the pavements outside the capital's cafes heave with mostly male crowds enjoying their last daytime beverages before the fasting begins.

Mohamed Zourgani, who runs an Old City cafe which his grandfather bought in the 1950s, said he does not expect business to slow due to the fast, just to become concentrated in the evenings. "The coffee Libyans usually drink over 16 hours, during Ramadan they drink over two hours, from as soon as the sun goes down," said the 31-year-old with a well-groomed beard. Immediately after people break their daily fast, he predicted, they will rush "to drink coffee as if it were water".

On every table

Libyans have been drinking coffee since at least the 15th century, as beans from Yemen made their way along North African trade routes and into Europe. But when Italy occupied formerly Otto-



In this picture men drink coffee outside a cafe in Tripoli.--AFP photos

man-ruled Libya in 1911, the country's coffee culture adopted a new twist, with punchy espressos taking the place of cardamom-tinted Arabic coffee. That said, old habits die hard, according to Zourgani. "The older generation still

loves its Arabic coffee, but young people mostly order espresso or macchiato," he said as his waiters served the thick black liquid into paper cups. "Even when war is raging, Libyans have to have their coffee," he added.

The oil-rich country has seen over a decade of war, since the 2011 revolution that overthrew dictator Muammar Gaddafi, and its capital bears the scars of several major battles that raged there as recently as 2020. But Tripoli's cafes still do a brisk trade, with punters sitting at street-side tables, discussing politics and daily life while sipping a "tazza" of coffee, an espresso-sized cup that costs less than a euro.

Some cafes even serve a localized version of affogato, with the Italian dessert stripped of its traditional liqueur. Ali Khawaja, a 24-year-old in a leather jacket, said he has been a coffee addict since adolescence, but Ramadan was an opportunity to appreciate the drink more. "Coffee is on every iftar table," he said, referring to the fast-breaking meal at dusk. "After we break our fast, we spend the evening drinking it outside with friends." —AFP



In this picture a man sips coffee from a cup at a market area in Tripoli.



In this picture a barista prepares coffee for his customers at a cafe in Tripoli.



In this picture people sit outside a coffee shop in Tripoli.

Electro-pop master M83: 'We're losing the mystery in music'



M83 band performs at the Samsung Galaxy S III celebration in New York with a special appearance by Kat McPhee at Hammerstein Ballroom.

Anthony Gonzalez, the man behind M83, the group that helped define electro-pop, fears for a music industry that increasingly wants artists to be influencers. M83 has had a string of global hits and critically lauded albums, with the 2011 song "Midnight City" clocking up more than 800 million listens on Spotify. In the words of music site Pitchfork, the group's mix of dreamy electronica and emotive rock has "become the base stock of most popular indie acts".

M83's new album, "Fantasy", is another ecstatic slice of electronica that mixes futuristic sounds with nostalgic emotion. It's about "escaping the daily routine, the macabre news environment, and leaving some place for the imagination and dreaming," Gonzalez told AFP.

'No modesty'

The B-movie horror mask on the cover highlights the fact that Gonzalez prefers to stay hidden behind the controls, rejecting the online culture of over-sharing. "These last six years (since previous album, 'Junk'), the music industry has

changed. Social networks have taken up more and more room. You basically need to have no modesty," he said. He created his own label in response, Other Suns, designed especially for artists "who can't put out records at the moment because they are asked not just to make good music, but also to be influencers."

"I hear from a lot of artists who can't find a label because they don't have enough followers, I find that tragic," he said. His occasional ventures into social media do not reassure him. "There are people that follow me probably because of 'Midnight City'... well, I have a feeling of being more and more averse to a certain section of my fans, which scares me," said the French-born musician, who now lives in Los Angeles.

'An escape hatch'

The entertainment industry feels increasingly like a rat race, Gonzalez added. "We are losing the mysterious side of artists. These days, unless you release an album every year and headline festivals every summer, it's like

you've disappeared. "I take my time when I make my albums. It's partly out of timidity, I don't want to force my music on people all the time."

That reticence is perhaps why he is less well-known in his native France than he is in the United States and Britain, despite being an exemplar of the dreamy "French Touch" scene alongside bands like Daft Punk and Air. "Many people (in France) don't know that he's French and had a massive career in the US before 'Midnight City'," said Paul Langeois, head of Beaugard festival, where M83 is playing this summer. For Gonzalez, who was born in the French Riviera town of Antibes, his concerns about the modern world make him all the more devoted to creating something that evokes a time before all of these issues. "When I was a teenager, I listened to albums that made me want to scream in my bedroom. I wanted adventure, freedom. That's what I wanted to create on this album—an escape hatch," he said. —AFP

Three found guilty of murdering US rapper XXXTentacion

A Florida jury on Monday found three young men guilty in the shooting death of the rising rap star known as XXXTentacion in 2018. The artist, whose real name was Jahseh Onfroy, was 20 when he was shot to death in broad daylight in Deerfield Beach, near Miami.



XXXTentacion

XXXTentacion had hit number one on the album chart in 2018 with "?" but his success proved controversial due to his history of violence. He had been awaiting trial on charges of beating his former girlfriend while she was pregnant. After a week of deliberations, a jury in Fort Lauderdale found three defendants guilty of first-degree murder and armed robbery. They are Dedrick Williams, 26; Trayvon Newsome, 24; and Michael Boatwright, 28.

Sentencing was set for April 6. The first-degree murder conviction could send them to prison for life. On June 18, 2018, a four-wheel drive vehicle cut off XXXTentacion's car and two people got out and shot him. They stole a bag containing \$50,000 in cash and fled. Prosecutors said it was Boatwright and Newsome who got out of the car, but Boatwright who shot the rapper. Williams was accused of being the getaway driver and mastermind of the attack. —AFP



Musicians Anthony Gonzalez, Joe Berry, and Kaela Sinclair of the band M83 perform onstage at 106.7 KROQ Almost Acoustic Christmas 2016 - Night 1 at The Forum.



Anthony Gonzalez of the band M83 performs onstage at 106.7 KROQ Almost Acoustic Christmas 2016 - Night 1 at The Forum.

Sports

Japan beat Mexico to reach World Baseball Classic final

Ohtani launches late rally that capped a thrilling duel

MIAMI: Japan came from behind twice to defeat Mexico 6-5 on Monday and set up a World Baseball Classic final showdown with the United States. Munetaka Murakami drove in a walk-off two-run double in the bottom of the ninth inning after Japan superstar Shohei Ohtani launched a late rally that capped a thrilling duel at Miami's LoanDepot Park. Japan, who had trailed 3-0 and 5-3 during Monday's semi, now advance to a mouthwatering final against the star-studded USA in Miami on Tuesday.

Japan manager Hideki Kuriyama said after the win he had always believed in his players to dig themselves out of trouble. "I know the more important the game is, I think the last players become the more critical," Kuriyama said of the ninth inning rally. "I always believed there's always the chance at the end, no matter how the game plays out." Mexico counterpart Benji Gil meanwhile saluted the Japanese.

"We have to take off our hats to the Japanese team," Gil said. "Neither team deserved to lose, but someone had to win. Both teams had a great performance. I think that Japan moves on, but the world of baseball won today." Japan are chasing a record third World Baseball Classic crown after winning the tournament in 2006 and 2009. The Asian powerhouses have been the most consistent side in this year's tournament, averaging more than nine runs per game en route to Monday's semi-final. But for long periods it looked as if Mexico were ready to score an upset.

A superb pitching performance from the Los Angeles Angels' Patrick Sandoval stymied Japan's vaunted offensive power through the first four innings. Mexico meanwhile broke the game wide open in the fourth. After bagging two outs, Japan prodigy Roki Sasaki gave up singles to Rowdy Tellez and Isaac Paredes on successive pitches before Luis Urias blasted a homer to left centerfield to put Mexico ahead 3-0. The Houston Astros' Jose Urquidy replaced Sandoval in the fifth and navigated a bases-loaded jam to keep Japan scoreless.

Urquidy emerged unscathed from another bases-loaded situation in the sixth to frustrate Japan again. But Mexico's resistance finally broke in the bottom of the seventh. Boston Red Sox new signing Masataka Yoshida smashed a three-run shot to tie it up at 3-3 and Japan were back in it. Yet Mexico responded well to start the eighth. Randy Arozarena doubled to lead off and then scored when Alex Verdugo doubled.

A Paredes single put Mexico up 5-3 and Japan were again chasing the game. Hotaka Yamakawa's sac-fly to left field scored Takumu Nakano to trim the deficit to 5-4 heading to the ninth. After Mexico went scoreless in the top of the inning it was left to Japan's golden boy Ohtani to start the fightback. Ohtani doubled off Giovanni Gallegos to keep Japan alive and then the pressure piled on the Mexican pitcher as Yoshida walked, and was replaced by pinch-runner Ukyo Shuto. Murakami then stepped up to crush a double to centerfield, and Ohtani and Shuto sprinted home for a stunning walkoff win. —AFP



MIAMI: Shohei Ohtani #16 of Team Japan hits a single against Team Mexico during the sixth inning in the World Baseball Classic Semifinals on March 20, 2023. —AFP

HyeJeong Kwak wins Hankook Golf 2023

KUWAIT: Hankook Golf Tournament was organized last Friday 17th March at the Sahara Golf Club. An annual feature, organized in the month of March to herald the onset of spring season, it has been held each year for the past seventeen years with the exception of pandemic years. Though the weather was rather unfavorable last week with intermittent rains and strong winds, thankfully it was quite pleasant on Friday with bright sunshine and a mild, cool breeze, which ensured conducive conditions for a good game of golf.

The tee-off commenced at 8 am, and as usual the game was played in the 'Stableford' format with 3/4 Handicap Allowance. The players were divided into two categories based on their Handicap levels - Division A (Handicap 0 to 14) and Division B (Handicap 15 to 28). The players were from diverse backgrounds, covering not just Sahara Club members but other golf enthusiasts as well.

The star of the day was HyeJeong Kwak, who achieved a fabulous score of 38 points to win the trophy in Division A, closely followed by another Korean Jung Jun Ahn at 36 points who claimed the second prize. As regards Division B, the first and second prizes were won by Ramesh Babu and Mohammed



Winners pose for a group photo.

Al Arfajat scores of 42 and 37 points respectively. The coveted trophy for Best Gross was won by Abdulaziz Al Sarawi, with a superb score of 72 points.

Among other winners, the prize for Longest Drive in the Men's category was won by Yun Ho Lee, whereas Nearest to Pintrophy went to Mike Walters. Among the ladies, both Longest Drive and Nearest to Pintrophies were won by the talented golfer Joung Run Won. Prize distribution was organized in the afternoon in the gracious presence of His Excellency Byung-ha Chung, Am-

bassador of the Republic of Korea to Kuwait and JeongSeung Ham, Managing Director of Hankook Tires, Middle East & Africa.

Speaking on the occasion Kuldeep Lamba Managing Director Al Maillem Group, thanked Hankook for their unwavering support for the past 47 years. Further, expressing his satisfaction at the enthusiastic participation from golfers, he complimented the Sahara-Team of Razmic, Richard, Leo and the support staff for their professional administration of the tournament.



Golfers take a photo before tee-off.

Ratcliffe will not pay 'stupid price' for Man United

LONDON: Prospective Manchester United owner Jim Ratcliffe says he will not pay a "stupid" price for the Premier League giants, with more bidders expected to enter the race to take over at Old Trafford. The British billionaire is one of two interested parties to have publicly announced their bids to Raine, the merchant bank brought in to assist the club in assessing offers.

NZ name Robertson as All Blacks coach

WELLINGTON: New Zealand (NZ) Rugby on Tuesday announced Scott "Razor" Robertson as the All Blacks coach for 2024, tapping him to lead a once all-conquering side now plagued by on and off-field woes. Crusaders boss Robertson will take up one of the sport's most coveted jobs after the World Cup in France-impressing selectors despite questions over his lack of pedigree at the international level.

"It's a job that comes with huge responsibility, but I'm excited by the opportunity to make a contribution to the legacy of the black jersey," the 48-year-old said. Robertson unsuccessfully applied for the job in 2019, and said he had left no stone unturned this time. "I have been preparing for the interview for the last three

weeks, making sure I had everything covered," he said. "I think my wife Jane knows the slides off by heart." Robertson played 23 Tests for the All Blacks between 1998 and 2002, but said coaching them was "in some ways" more significant. "Ask me that before the first Test match," he said. The messy recruitment process has angered incumbent coach Ian Foster, who urged New Zealand rugby to hold off until the World Cup was finished because it would be too distracting.

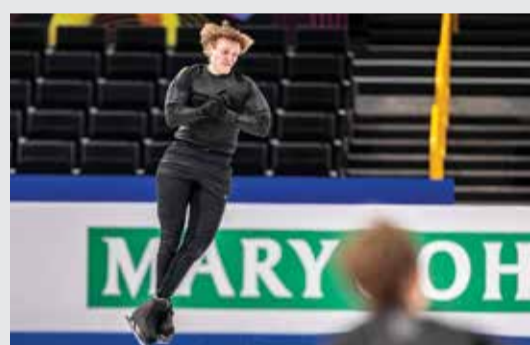
Robertson was chosen ahead of current Japan coach Jamie Joseph, and has been contracted through to the end of the 2027 World Cup in Australia. New Zealand Rugby praised Robertson's unparalleled success at the domestic level and his reputation for coaching innovation. "There are a number of quality coaches that New Zealand has produced in recent times, but for the things we are looking for in a candidate, 'Razor' is a compelling choice," chief executive Mark Robinson said.

how much it cost to build or how much it cost to paint. "What you don't want to do is pay stupid prices for things because then you regret it subsequently."

Ratcliffe, who already owns French club Nice, said his interest in United would be "purely in winning things", calling the club a "community asset", rather than a financial one. Sky News said Tuesday that Sheikh Jassim and Ratcliffe were understood to be preparing second bids before a Wednesday deadline for second offers, adding that a number of other parties could enter the bidding process. Elliott Investment Management has also reportedly made it through to the second stage of the process, although the firm is believed to be offering funding rather than a takeover. —AFP

"We're delighted he's bringing, we believe, a fresh set of eyes, huge energy and a deep understanding of our system." He will replace Foster, whose troubled tenure has coincided with the team tumbling to third in the world rankings following a series defeat to Ireland, and a first-ever loss to Argentina at home. It has been a rare period of upheaval for the three-time World Cup winners who crashed out of the 2019 tournament in Japan in the semi-finals.

Robertson has led New Zealand's domestic Canterbury Crusaders side to six Super Rugby titles since 2017, but has never coached a senior national team. Many of New Zealand's most successful former coaches, such as Graham Henry and Steve Hansen, worked overseas before entering the All Blacks setup. The Crusaders benefit from one of the most fertile rugby nurseries on the planet, and some pundits have questioned whether Robertson's influence has been overstated. —AFP



SAITAMA: USA's Ilia Malinin takes part in a practice session during the ISU World Figure Skating Championships 2023 at Saitama Super Arena in Saitama on March 21, 2023. —AFP

'QuadGod' targets figure skating title

SAITAMA: Self-proclaimed "QuadGod" Ilia Malinin said Tuesday that he is "ready to deliver" at this week's world figure skating championships in Japan and cement his place as one of the sport's hottest new talents. The 18-year-old American became the first skater ever to land the ultra-difficult quadruple axel jump in competition in September last year, in only his first season in the senior ranks. He successfully executed it again one month later to win Skate America, and then carried off his first US national men's title in January. Now he has arrived in Saitama, north of Tokyo, to try to wrest the world title away from Japan's defending champion Shoma Uno.

Olympic champion Nathan Chen is not competing while he studies at university, and Russian skaters are again banned from the competition because of the war in Ukraine. The stage is set for Malinin, who is not about to shy away from the spotlight. "If people are putting pressure on you, that means you're really important," he told reporters, wearing a cap emblazoned with a Japanese translation of QuadGod. "I love all the attention. I think that it drives my motivation up and it really increases my energy and my adrenaline and all of that."

Malinin said he was "really confident" about his chances of winning, and was "ready to deliver it all on the ice". His bullish tone was in stark contrast to Uno, who told reporters earlier in the day that he was struggling with his jumps and had "doubts" about his ability to defend his title. "I feel like it's not going to get better unless something big changes," Uno said. "I don't know what kind of result I can aim for in my present state," he added.

Uno is still seen as the favorite to win ahead of Malinin and other rivals, including France's European champion Adam Siao Him Fa and Canada's Keegan Messing. But Malinin will be the centre of attention after landing the quad axel that eluded Japanese legend Yuzuru Hanyu. Two-time Olympic champion Hanyu spent years trying to execute the jump but retired in July last year having failed to land it cleanly in competition.

Malinin achieved the feat just one month later, and paid tribute to Hanyu's legacy after practising on the Saitama ice where the retired great enjoyed so much success. "I've been watching Hanyu and I really wanted him to land it first," said Malinin. "I'm just so glad that he showed me that it was possible, and from there I just kept working and trying."

Malinin just missed out on a place on the US Olympic team last year, but made his world championships debut in France the following month, finishing ninth. He said he had "definitely seen a lot of improvement" in himself since then, and is relishing the attention that comes with his QuadGod nickname. "I just came up with it, but now everyone knows me by that," he said. "I gotta keep the name up, keep up the reputation." On the women's side, the continued absence of Russian skaters means Japan's defending champion Kaori Sakamoto will be favored to retain her crown. —AFP

Sports

Arsenal, Chelsea seeking to end English drought in Women's Champions League

The Blue, Gunners romped to top spot

PARIS: The Women's Champions League knock-out stage gets underway this week with Chelsea and Arsenal both hoping to become the first English team to lift the trophy since the Gunners in 2007. Back then, when Arsenal beat Umea of Sweden in the final, the tournament was still known as the UEFA Women's Cup. It was only in 2009 that it was rebranded as the Champions League, with a group stage being introduced last season.

Chelsea and Arsenal showcased the increasing strength of the English Women's Super League as they romped to top spot in their respective groups this season, with the Gunners notably thumping reigning European champions Lyon 5-1 away in France. Arsenal, who earlier this month beat Chelsea 3-1 to win the English League Cup, this week face Bayern Munich and are hoping to avoid a second straight quarter-final exit at the hands of German

opponents after going out to Wolfsburg last season.

Bayern are currently two points behind Wolfsburg at the top of the Frauen Bundesliga and the two legs of their tie against Arsenal fall either side of a crunch meeting with their rivals for the domestic title. Chelsea, meanwhile, head to France to play a Lyon side who have won the Champions League in six of the last seven seasons, and a record eight times overall. And yet Chelsea, who were beaten finalists in 2021, will not fear facing Sonia Bompator's team, for whom Norway star Ada Hegerberg is close to a comeback from a long injury absence.

After all, Emma Hayes's team beat Paris Saint-Germain home and away in the group stage, keeping a clean sheet in both games. The London side are currently top of the WSL, two points clear of Manchester United and Manchester City with a game in hand on each while Arsenal are five

points behind the leaders in fourth. In Australia's Sam Kerr they have one of the most dangerous attacking players in the world, but Lyon are hoping to be a different proposition to the team outclassed by Arsenal in October.

A different Lyon?

"We had a lot of injuries around that time. It is not an excuse, we still have to beat the good teams, but I think we were struggling a bit in the beginning of the season," Lyon's Danish international forward Signe Bruun told AFP. "We qualified and that was the most important and now we are starting from scratch."

Bruun, who had a spell at Manchester United last season, believes the rising threat of English teams in Europe is no bad thing. "It is very healthy for women's football that there are so many teams that can

compete for the Champions League. I think that is also an important part of the improvement for the women's game," she said. "I think it will be more and more rare that the same team wins twice in a row." Barcelona nearly retained the title last season, returning to the final only to lose to Lyon in Turin.

Despite the ongoing absence of injured Balon d'Or winner Alexia Putellas, they continue to crush all opponents in Spain and cruised through to the quarter-finals, where they will face Roma. "Barcelona's numbers are crazy, incredible," said Roma coach Alessandro Spugna. "I have seen a lot of Barcelona and the more I watch them the fewer weaknesses I see." Wolfsburg, who have been to five finals in the last decade and won two, saw their hopes of advancing against PSG take a hit after Germany midfielder star Lena Oberdorf was ruled out of Wednesday's first leg with a knee sprain. — AFP

African players in Europe: Kessie is El Clasico's hero

PARIS: Ivory Coast midfielder Franck Kessie came off the bench to score an added-time winner for Barcelona in a 2-1 El Clasico triumph over Real Madrid at the weekend. The dramatic victory confirmed Barca as hot favourites to regain the Spanish title for the first time since 2019. Kessie often celebrates his goals with a military-style salute — a tribute to his late father, who became a soldier after a professional football career. Here, AFP Sport highlights African headline-makers in the major European leagues:

Jeffrey Schlupp (Crystal Palace)

Ghana international Schlupp scored a consolation goal for managerless Crystal Palace in their 4-1 defeat at league leaders Arsenal. The 30-year-old midfielder hammered home from close range following a corner in the 63rd minute to make it 3-1 but any faint hopes of an unlikely comeback were quashed when Bukayo Saka restored the home side's three-goal margin.

Emmanuel Dennis (Nottingham Forest)

Nigeria forward Dennis opened the scoring for struggling Nottingham Forest against high-flying Newcastle. Dennis, who joined Forest from Watford this season, latched onto Sven Botman's back-pass before dinking the ball over Nick Pope in the 26th minute but Alexander Isak struck twice to seal a 2-1 win for the Magpies.

Abdoulaye Doucoure (Everton)

Mali midfielder Doucoure found the net in Everton's 2-2 draw at Chelsea, nodding over the line to cancel out Joao Felix's opener. Chelsea restored their lead through a Kai Havertz penalty but Ellis Simms scored a late equalizer, set up by Doucoure.

Struggling Sevilla fire coach Sampaoli

MADRID: Argentinean Jorge Sampaoli was sacked as coach of struggling Sevilla on Tuesday, with the club just off the relegation zone. "Sevilla FC have today relieved Jorge Sampaoli of his duties," the club said in a statement. "Following the defeat at Getafe, which leaves the side just above the relegation zone, the club have decided to part ways with the Argentine coach ahead of the international break."

"Sevilla FC would like to thank Jorge Sampaoli for his dedication and commitment at the club and wish him the best of luck in his future." The former Chile and Argentina coach joined Sevilla in Octo-



Barcelona's Ivorian midfielder Franck Kessie

Franck Kessie (Barcelona)

A low cross from Alejandro Balde set up Kessie at the far post to sweep the ball into the corner of the net. The match-winner gave Barcelona a 12-point advantage with 12 matches remaining.

Samuel Chukwueze (Villarreal)

The Nigerian winger continued his fine recent form by opening the scoring in Villarreal's 3-0 win at Osasuna. Drifting into the area unmarked, Chukwueze kept his cool to volley home Alfonso Pedraza's pinpoint cross.

Victor Osimhen (Napoli)

The Nigeria forward was once again one of the

ber, but the club has failed to shake off its disappointing mid-table form. Sampaoli's second stint at the club saw him oversee 13 wins, six draws and 12 defeats in 31 matches.

Sevilla sit 13th in La Liga on 28 points, two off Getafe — to whom they lost 2-0 on Sunday — and Almeria, who currently occupy two of the three relegation spots. Sevilla will face Manchester United in next month's quarter-finals of the Europa League, a competition the club has won a record six times. "It's time to say goodbye to a club I love," said Sampaoli, 62. "I go with my head held high. Football doesn't always make you happy. It can even give you insomnia. "But there's no doubt it was worth my while. It seemed like a good idea at the time," said the fiery coach who was under contract until the end of next season." — AFP

English Football League for not delivering March's salary to their squad. It is the fourth instance of not paying players on time in the last nine months, having also done so in June, July and October of last year.

In January, the club had accepted a suspended penalty should they fail to make payments on time. An EFL statement read: "Wigan Athletic has, with immediate effect, been deducted three points from the 2022/23 Championship table after the club failed to pay player salaries again in March 2023. "The club had previously been charged and sanctioned for failing to adhere to the terms of the standard contracts that were in force between the

stars of the show as Napoli continued their march to the Serie A title. Towering headers in each half in a 4-0 win at Torino helped Napoli eventually stretch their massive league lead to 19 points and took Osimhen's tally for the domestic campaign to 21 goals.

Kingsley Ehizibue (Udinese)

Germany-born Ehizibue struck the goal which sealed Udinese's 3-1 win over AC Milan and gave his team their first home win since September. Ehizibue, who represents Nigeria internationally, scored his second goal of the season in the 70th minute and helped Udinese up to eighth in Serie A.

Sebastien Haller (Borussia Dortmund)

Haller scored twice in Dortmund's 6-1 demolition of Cologne. In the first half, he hammered home and was on the spot in the second half to tap in a rebound from a free-kick.

Omar Marmoush (Wolfsburg)

Egypt forward Marmoush scored his second goal in three games for Wolfsburg amid speculation he will join Eintracht Frankfurt at the end of the season. His long-range effort gave Wolfsburg a 1-0 win at Stuttgart.

Bamo Meite (Lorient)

The 21-year-old defender from the Ivory Coast, who moved to Paris from Abidjan as a child, scored his first senior goal for Lorient in their 1-1 draw with Nice, a result which keeps alive their slim chances of qualifying for Europe. Meite only made his first-team debut for Lorient in January but has quickly become a regular starter.

Habib Diallo (Strasbourg)

The Senegal international striker had an eventful game for Strasbourg in their relegation six-pointer against Auxerre. He won a first-half penalty only to then see his kick saved. Diallo atoned by scoring late on to seal a 2-0 win for his side. With 14 goals this is already his most prolific season at this level. — AFP



Jorge Sampaoli

club and its players in the months of June 2022, July 2022 and October 2022.

"This latest infringement by the club to meet its obligations means the terms of the agreed decision the club entered into with the EFL in January 2023 has been breached and the application of the suspended sporting sanction has been automatically triggered." Bahraini businessman Abdulrahman Al-Jasmi fronted a takeover of the club in 2021 after they fell into administration a year earlier. "The club notes the EFL statement and charge and will issue a further update on the current wage situation in due course," Wigan said in a statement. — AFP



Roy Hodgson

Hodgson returns as Crystal Palace boss

LONDON: Crystal Palace have reappointed former England boss Roy Hodgson as their manager until the end of the season, with a mission to save the Premier League strugglers from relegation. The 75-year-old, who replaces the sacked Patrick Vieira, said the "sole objective" was to ensure survival in the English top flight.

Hodgson, who was in charge at Selhurst Park between 2017 and 2021, takes over with Palace lying 12th in the Premier League, three points above the relegation zone after a 12-match winless run. "It is a privilege to be asked to return to the club, which has always meant so much to me, and to be given the important task of turning the team's fortunes around," Hodgson said in a club statement. "Our sole objective now is to start winning matches, and to get the points necessary to ensure our Premier League status."

Hodgson will be assisted by Paddy McCarthy, with Ray Lewington returning as first-team coach. Palace chairman Steve Parish welcomed the former Liverpool and Inter Milan manager back to his boyhood club, saying his experience would be crucial in the battle to avoid the drop. "We are obviously in a very challenging period but we believe that Roy's and Ray's experience, knowledge of the club and players, alongside Paddy, can help fulfill the immediate requirement of keeping us in the league," he said.

Former Arsenal and France midfielder Vieira was sacked on Friday, taking the number of managerial sackings during the 2022/23 campaign to nine, one fewer than last season's total, which equalled the Premier League record. Hodgson has a difficult job on his hands turning around the form of a club that have not won a match in 2023. The bottom nine teams in the Premier League are separated by just four points, cranking up the pressure as the season enters its final months.

Palace, who lost 4-1 to league leaders Arsenal on Sunday, have scored just 22 goals in 28 games in the Premier League this season - the joint lowest tally in the division. Hodgson's first match in charge will be a home game against fellow strugglers Leicester on April 1. The widely travelled Englishman, who managed the national side from 2012 to 2016, was most recently in charge at Watford for a short spell in 2022, leaving after they were relegated to the Championship. — AFP

Classifieds

Hospitals & Clinics

Sabah Hospital	24812000
Amiri Hospital	22450005
Maternity Hospital	24843100
Mubarak Al-Kabir Hospital	25312700
Chest Hospital	24849400
Farwaniya Hospital	24892010
Adan Hospital	23940620
Ibn Sina Hospital	24840300
Al-Razi Hospital	24846000
Physiotherapy Hospital	24874330/9

Clinics

Kaizen center	25716707
Rawda	22517733
Adaliya	22517144
Khalidiya	24848075
Kaifan	24849807
Shamiya	24848913
Shuwaikh	24814507
Abdullah Salem	22549134

Nuzha	22526804
Industrial Shuwaikh	24814764
Qadsiya	22515088
Dasmah	22532265
Bneid Al-Gar	22531908
Shaab	22518752
Qibla	22459381
Ayoun Al-Qibla	22451082
Mirqab	22456536
Sharq	22465401
Salmiya	25746401

Change of Name

I, KHOJEMA, holder of Indian Passport No. Z5708610 having permanent address 131, naya pura bakhhal patel marg Ujjain, Pin 456006, Madhya Pradesh, India, residing in Kuwait at present, hereby declare that henceforth my name will be read as under given name Khozema and surname Bawajan. (C#3187)

I, SHIVA, holder of Passport No. T9188939 do hereby change my name to SHIVA (as given name) MADAN LAL (as Surname) for all purposes. I will henceforth be known in the name SHIVA MADAN LAL and I also undertake to carry out this name change in all my documents. (C#3188) - 22-03-2023

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Egypt women team blaze trail

Women's field hockey team upholds ancient mantle in Nile Delta



ZAGAZIG: Egyptian female field hockey players attend a training session in Al-Zagazig city.

ZAGAZIG: Egypt's fertile Nile Delta may not be the obvious destination for field hockey, but a women's team is blazing a trail in a region that lays claim to the sport's ancient roots. While hockey may never sell out stadiums in football-mad Egypt, 24-year-old forward Donya Shaarawy says the governorate of Sharqiya has become the country's hockey hub, and a potential launchpad for her dreams of going pro. "Hockey means Sharqiya, that's how we grew up," she told AFP, hopping off the practice field clad in a black jersey and matching hijab. Women first took to the field in the region 100 kilometers north of Cairo in 1995, 30 years after the first men's team was established.

But according to Sharqiya Hockey Club supervisor Ibrahim Al-Bagoury, the region's love for the sport goes back to Ancient Egyptian times, when a similar game was played with a stick made of palm fronds. "It was known to them as hoksha, and it was played in ancient cities such as Tel Basta" - located in what is now modern-day Sharqiya - as well as Amarna, Bagoury told AFP. The national hockey federation's logo attests to this history, showing two Ancient Egyptian figures sparring with sticks over a ball. Thousands of years later, the athletes of the Sharqiya women's team - which has won 25 out of

28 league tournaments in its history - dribble across the field to the sound of wooden hockey sticks colliding. "No woman in Egypt has broken into the professional leagues yet, but I hope to be the first," Shaarawy said. The Sharqiya team is the most decorated in Egypt, winning five out of seven national championships and taking the Africa Cup for Club Champions in 2019. Despite having "no media support", according to team coach Mostafa Khalil, clubs in Italy and France have offered contracts to four members of his team - all of which were turned down.

One of the members could not leave her studies, while the three others were unable to accept the offers because they were married with children. The coach chalks it up to Egypt's conservative culture, where young women and girls "can't travel alone" - a norm that Somaya Abdel Aziz, head of the club's division for women, says is "changing with time". Shaarawy, the ambitious forward, said she would not accept "any potential partner who objects to my athletic career".

For team captain Nahla Ahmed, 28, marriage and children have been no object. "I'm married, I have a daughter, and my husband plays hockey himself," she told AFP. She suggests "going pro in Egypt would be easier for women" than going abroad, as teams would

be more likely to accommodate the athletes' family commitments. Ahmed, who has played hockey for 18 years and was crowned the Egyptian hockey league's best player last season, has a bigger dream - "to become the best player in Africa."

'Bastion'

Though the women of Sharqiya have proven themselves time and again, they have come up against both stubborn social norms and punishing economic woes. "It's an expensive sport, and without media coverage, we don't get sponsors," coach Khalil said. It was only in 2019 that an Egyptian company sponsored the team, he said, when Egypt hosted the Africa Cup for Club Champions.

At the far end of the pitch, eagle-eyed goalkeeper Nada Mostafa guards her post, face hidden behind her protective mask. Mostafa - a college student and goalie for both Sharqiya and Egypt's national team - told AFP she chose her position "because you feel like you own the whole world". "As they say, the goalkeeper is half the team," she continued. A single imported hockey stick costs upwards of \$120, while a goalie's kit like Mostafa's can set the team back \$2,100 - a steep cost in a country where the local currency has been on a continu-



ZAGAZIG: Egyptian female field hockey players attend a training session in Al-Zagazig city, at Sharqiya governorate, northeast of Cairo. — AFP photos

ous downward spiral. There is little room for maneuver given the Sharqiya club's annual field hockey budget of 5-6 million pounds (about \$161,000-194,000), according to club president Hamdy Marzouk. But he remains unphased, vowing instead to "pre-

serve this bastion... (and) keep the game here". "With over 150 national and continental championship wins, we can't throw that away," he told AFP. "It's like samba and football in Brazil-everyone in Sharqiya has a hockey stick." — AFP

Mbappe to become new France captain

CLAIREFONTAINE-EN-YVELINES: Kylian Mbappe will take over as captain of France after Hugo Lloris stepped down following the World Cup final defeat to Argentina, a source close to the team has told AFP. Paris Saint-Germain forward Mbappe, 24, accepted the role after discussions with coach Didier Deschamps. His first game as captain will be Friday's Euro 2024 qualifier against the Netherlands at the Stade de France, Les Bleus' first match since their World Cup final disappointment in Doha on December 18. Tottenham goalkeeper Lloris, 36, brought an end to his international career in January, in the weeks after Lionel Messi's Argentina side beat the French in a penalty shootout following a thrilling match that ended 3-3 in extra-time. Lloris had been skipper for more than a decade. Atletico Madrid attacker Antoine Griezmann was named vice-captain after Manchester United centre-back Raphael Varane also hung up his boots following the defeat to Argentina in December. Mbappe, who scored a hat-trick in the World Cup final defeat, had been heavily linked with the captain's role for weeks.

Michel Platini, who captained France to victory in the 1984 European Championship, said the decision was "a very good idea". "In giving him the responsibility of the captaincy, it allows Kylian, when necessary, to go still further, higher, stronger," Platini, the ex-head of European football's governing body UEFA, said in a statement to AFP. Mbappe helped Les Bleus to World Cup glory as a teenager in 2018 and has established himself as arguably the leading forward on the global stage.

The Paris-born former Monaco player is vice-captain at PSG behind Brazilian defender Mar-



France's forward Kylian Mbappe

quinhos and led the side in the defender's absence during Sunday's loss to Rennes. Mbappe has scored 19 goals in 24 Ligue 1 matches this season and contributed seven goals in PSG's run to the last 16 of the Champions League, where they were knocked out by Bayern Munich. France are grouped with the Dutch, the Republic of Ireland, Greece and Gibraltar in their qualifying group for Euro 2024, to be held in Germany. — AFP

Bulls and DeRozan keep Sixers waiting

LOS ANGELES: DeMar DeRozan scored 25 points as the Chicago Bulls snapped Philadelphia's eight-game winning streak with a thrilling 109-105 victory in double overtime on Monday. The red-hot Sixers had been looking to clinch their playoff ticket with victory in front of an expectant home crowd at the Wells Fargo Center. But despite a 37-point performance from Joel Embiid - the MVP front-runner's 10th straight 30-point game - Philadelphia were left waiting to reach the postseason after a gritty road win from Chicago.

Embiid missed an attempted tip-in after Tyrese Maxey's attempted three-pointer at the end of regulation which would have snatched victory for the Sixers. Embiid put Philadelphia 99-97 ahead in the final minute of the first period of overtime but DeRozan leveled with a driving layup. The Chicago star missed an attempted three-pointer with less than two seconds on the clock, to take the game to a second period of overtime.

The Sixers looked to have taken a grip on the contest after opening up a 105-101 lead in the second overtime period, but with Embiid absent after fouling out, the Bulls reeled off eight unanswered points to close out the win. It was the first time in 12 career meetings against Chicago that Embiid has finished on the losing side. DeRozan admitted that he was aware of that statistic prior to the game.

"I knew that," DeRozan told reporters. "It was only a matter of time. Not saying that was part of the motivation. We've got a bigger goal than just trying to beat him. But I'm glad we got the win." Chicago improved to 34-37 and remain in 10th place in the Eastern Conference standings, leaving them on course for a place in the play-in tournament for teams ranked between seventh and 10th, which determine the last two spots in

the eight-team conference playoffs. Philadelphia, third in the East with a 48-23 record, remain one win away from formally clinching their playoff spot.

In other games around the NBA on Monday, Julius Randle erupted for 57 points in a scintillating performance but it was not enough to stop the New York Knicks falling 140-134 at home to the Minnesota Timberwolves. Randle's masterpiece included eight three-pointers from 19-of-29 shooting, while Jalen Brunson added 23 points. Three other Knicks players finished in double figures.

However Minnesota's balanced offense was enough to give the Wolves victory, with Taurean Prince leading the visitors scoring with 35 points. All of Minnesota's starters posted double-digit points totals, while Naz Reid (12) and Jaylen Nowell (14) combined for 26 off the bench. In Utah, the high-flying Sacramento Kings, who remain third in the Western Conference, came unstuck in a 128-124 loss to the Jazz, who are 11th in the standings.

Ochai Agbaji led the Utah scoring with 27 points, with no fewer than eight Jazz players making double-figures. De'Aaron Fox led the Sacramento scoring with 37 points. In Houston meanwhile, the Golden State Warriors finally snapped their miserable losing streak on the road with a 121-108 defeat of the Rockets. The NBA champions had gone into the game on the back of 11 straight defeats away from home, but ended that sequence against a Rockets team who have just 18 wins this season. Steph Curry and Klay Thompson combined for 59 points, including 10 three-pointers yet the Warriors still made hard work of the win, coughing up 20 turnovers, 14 of them in the first half. "We were not focused, but second half we did a better job of taking care of the ball," Warriors coach Steve Kerr said. "I don't remember the last road game we won," Kerr added. "It's been a while. We needed it obviously." In Memphis, the Grizzlies staged a late fourth quarter rally to down the Dallas Mavericks 112-108. Memphis outscored the Mavs 29-12 in the fourth to seal victory. — AFP