



RAMADAN TIMINGS	
Fajr	04:31
Shurooq	05:51
Dhuhr	11:56
Asr	15:24
Maghrib	18:02
Isha	19:18

Refineries get ‘advanced ranking’

KNPC following up with the latest global engineering criteria

Kuwait Crown Prince exchanges greetings

KUWAIT: His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah on Wednesday received greetings on the advent of the Holy Month of Ramadan from several local officials and figures. Speaker of the National Assembly Marzouq Al-Ghanem, chief of the Kuwait National Guard (KNG) His Highness Sheikh Salem Al-Ali, His Highness Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, His Highness Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, and His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah sent cables expressing sincere wishes of the joyous month of Ramadan towards His Highness the Crown Prince.

His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah sent reply cables to the officials, wishing them and the country's leadership under His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah a joyful and blessed Month of Ramadan.

His Highness also conveyed greetings on the Holy Month of Ramadan to the citizens and residents of Kuwait. In a statement by the Diwan of the



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

Crown Prince wished a joyous Ramadan occasion for all under the leadership of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. He expressed wishes of prosperity and welfare to Kuwait as well as the Arab and Muslim world. - KUNA

KUWAIT: Mina Abdullah and Ahmadi Refineries have got an ‘advanced international ranking’ of risk engineering quality, the Kuwait National Petroleum Company (KNPC) said Wednesday. This came in line with the study made by ‘Marsh’ company, a world leading insurance broker and risk advisor, KNPC Deputy CEO. Fuel Supply Operations and spokesman Ghanim Al-Otaibi said in a statement to KUNA.

He added that the two refineries got this advanced ranking compared with more 1,400 other refineries all over the world. The field survey of risk engineering at the KNPC refineries included several aspects, in which the company managed to achieve advanced levels, he said. He went to say that the company showed remarkable technical excellence, mainly in the units of the environmental fuel project.

He affirmed keenness of the KNPC on following up the latest global engineering criteria and focusing on improving the management systems regarding safety and periodical maintenance measures to ensure the safety of the facility. Al-Otaibi pointed to excellence of emergency response facilities and preparing effective response plans to ensure the facility's readiness to face any emergency.

This ranking is an unprecedented and key achievement to the company and reflects its interest in this vital aspect, he stressed. It also shows the company's great interest in implementing the



Mina Abdullah refinery

best and latest measures and systems to curb possible risks and ensure safety of workers as well as maintain the company's facilities mainly its refineries, Al-Otaibi pointed out. This result is the fruit of all workers of the company and their keenness on abiding by safety measures and disciplines, health, security and environment, he said. — KUNA

RAMADAN KAREEM

Breaking fast with dates

By Hassan TwahaBwambale

Before delving into the topic, I would like to remind you that Almighty Allah says what can be translated as: “Obey Allah and obey the Messenger (PBUH). But if you turn away from obedience, (then know that) Our Messenger (PBUH) has no other duty than to clearly convey the Truth.” (At-Tagha'bun 64: 12)

It is clear that dates have historically been a major part of Middle Eastern culture and cuisine. Apart from their spiritual significance and being juicy and delicious treats, dates are also an incredible source of nutrients, antioxidants, and many health benefits. While observing Ramadan and fasting from dawn to sunset, dates are a perfect food to consume to restore your energy and give your body the fuel it needs.

The Majestic Allah also tells what can be translated as: “There has certainly been for you in the Messenger of Allah an excellent pattern for anyone whose hope is in Allah and the Last Day and (who) remembers Allah often.” (Al-Ahzab 33: 21) Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) - breaking his fast on dates and water: Anas bin Malik narrated that Allah's Messenger (PBUH) used to break his fast before performing (the Maghreb – sunset) - prayer on some fresh unripe dates, but if there were no fresh unripe dates, he would then eat a few dry dates, and if there were no dry dates, he would take some mouthfuls of water.” (Al-Albani rated it as Hasan/Saheeh in Saheeh Abu Dawud # 2, 356)

The following is a list of reasons why dates are a nutritious food to eat after fasting. According to modern research, dates are high in sugar to give you a natural energy boost. After fasting all day, your body craves carbohydrates and sugars to maintain its energy sources. Dates are naturally high in sugar and are the right kind of carbohydrates to rejuvenate your body's

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Grand Mosque opens its doors for night prayers

KUWAIT: The Grand Mosque re-opens its doors for night prayers in Ramadan after three years' suspension due to maintenance work as well as COVID-19 pandemic. The Grand Mosque is considered to be one of the Islamic cultural landmarks in Kuwait, as it is the largest mosque in Kuwait, with an area of 45,000 square meters and a capacity for more than 60,000 worshippers.

It was taken into account while designing the mosque to have it represent the Islamic architectural heritage with inspiration from the local Kuwait and Gulf architecture. In a statement to KUNA, Assistant Undersecretary for Cultural Affairs at the Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs Tarrad Al-Enezi on Wednesday said that the cultural affairs sector is doing its part in spreading moderation and Islamic

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Humanity lifeblood is under threat: UN

UNITED NATIONS: The future of humanity's “lifeblood”—water—is under threat worldwide, the UN secretary-general warned Wednesday at the opening of the global body's first major meeting on water resources in nearly half a century. “We’ve broken the water cycle, destroyed ecosystems and contaminated groundwater,” Antonio Guterres said at the three-day summit in New York, which gathers some 6,500 participants including a dozen heads of state and government.

“We are draining humanity's lifeblood through vampiric overconsumption and unsustainable use, and evaporating it through global heating,” Gu-

Google launches ChatGPT rival in US and Britain

SAN FRANCISCO: Google has invited people in the United States and Britain to test its AI chatbot, known as Bard, as it continues on its gradual path to catch

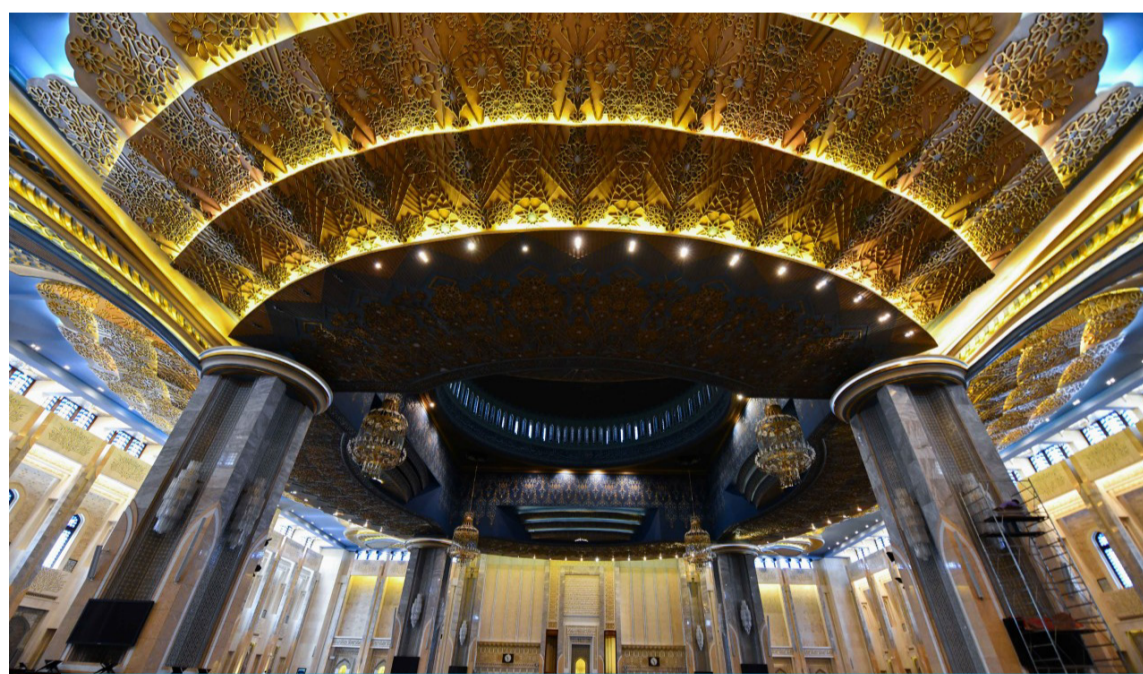


Photo shows the Grand Mosque

terres told the conference. A report by UN-Water and UNESCO released Tuesday warned of too little or too much water in some places and contaminated water in others—conditions it said highlight the imminent risk of a global water crisis.

“If nothing is done, it will be a business-as-usual scenario—it will keep on being between 40 percent and 50 percent of the population of the world that does not have access to sanitation and roughly 20-25 percent of the world will not have access to safe water supply,” report lead author Richard Connor told AFP. With the global population increasing every day, “in absolute numbers, there'll be more and more people that don't have access to these services,” he said. The report also warned that water “scarcity is becoming endemic” due to overconsumption and pollution, while global warming will increase seasonal water shortages in both areas with abundant

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up with Microsoft-backed ChatGPT. Bard, ChatGPT and other similar artificial intelligence apps churn out essays, poems or computing code on command and have taken the world by storm as the biggest new thing in tech since the advent of the iPhone.

Google CEO Sundar Pichai told staff that after testing Bard with 80,000 Google employees, the chatbot would be tested with the public in the United States and Britain as a “first step” before going out to more countries in other languages. “As more people start to use Bard and test its capabilities, they'll



JOHANNESBURG: A woman holds up a placard reading ‘We want water, its our human right’ as residents protest outside the offices of Johannesburg Water's Southdale Depot in the south of Johannesburg on World Water Day. — AFP

surprise us,” Pichai said in a memo to staff seen by AFP. “Things will go wrong. But the user feedback is critical to improving the product and the underlying technology,” added Pichai, who had faced some criticism within the company for rushing to catch up with Microsoft.

In the launch, people wishing to play with Bard can sign up on a waiting list at bard.google.com website, distinctly separate from the tech giant's search engine.

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India Minister hails strong India-Kuwait bilateral ties

Embassy marks 62nd anniversary; India, Gulf deepen ties

NEW DELHI: Indian Minister of State for Foreign Affairs and Culture Meenakshi Lekhi affirmed the strong relations between India and Kuwait and expressed her keenness to seek ways to strengthen and develop these ties into broader areas to achieve common interests of both countries. Kuwaiti Ambassador to India Jassem Ibrahim Al-Najim said that this year marks the 62nd anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries, expressing his hope that these close relations between the two countries will witness growth and development in the coming years.

He praised the 'Project Mausam' which aims to restore communication between the countries of the Indian Ocean, including the countries in the Arabian Gulf, which will also contribute to strengthening cultural relations between India and Kuwait. This came during a ceremony held by the Kuwait Embassy in New Delhi on the occasion marking the 62nd anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries.

The event was attended by a number of officials in the Indian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and a number of heads of missions accredited in New Delhi. It is worth noting that Meenakshi Lekhi supervises the 'Project Mausam' which was launched in June 2014 in Qatar with an aim of creating a comprehensive database and electronic platform for UNESCO on sea routes, linking UNESCO cultural agreements with the World Heritage Convention. It also promotes research in sustainable tourism, heritage development, and highlights other cultural legacies across the Indian Ocean region.

India, GCC ties

In another development, India and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries have agreed to deepen cooperation in several areas of mutual interest. The Indian Ministry of External Affairs said in a statement that Secretary from the External Affairs Ministry Ausaf Sayeed headed the Indian delegation in the first round of India-GCC Senior Officers Meeting held in Saudi city of Riyadh. The GCC delegation was led by Assistant Secretary General for Political Affairs and Negotiations, GCC Abdulaziz Bin Hamad Al-Owaishaq.

Both sides agreed for early finalization of India-GCC Free Trade Agreement while conveying happiness over the progress in trade and investment. The Indian official appealed for more collaboration between the two countries in renewable energy, food security, health, IT sector and counter terrorism.

"Both sides proposed formation of Joint Working Groups to cater to particular areas of cooperation between India and GCC countries. These joint working groups would be headed by experts and would ensure regular and continuous progress across priority sectors," the statement said. Indian and GCC officials also hailed the progress in relations between India-GCC countries built on historical relationship, growing trade and investment, and presence of an 8.5 million Indians in the region.

"GCC as a trade bloc is the largest trade partner to India with a total trade of 154 billion dollars in 2021-22," it said adding people-to-people ties need to be further enhanced. The discussion



Indian Minister of State for Foreign Affairs and Culture Meenakshi Lekhi meets Kuwaiti Ambassador Jassem Ibrahim Al-Najim. —KUNA

also touched upon regional issues and both sides looked forward for early convention of India-GCC TROIKA meeting at Foreign Minister Level. The meeting, which saw participation from all GCC

countries, was pursuant to a MoU inked on India-GCC Mechanism of Consultation during Indian External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar visit to Riyadh in September 2022.—KUNA

Doctors perform a rare surgery at Jaber Hospital

By Abdellatif Sharaa

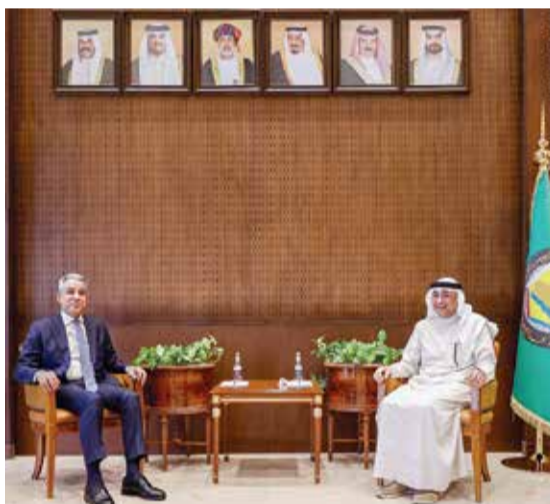
KUWAIT: Jaber Hospital held a five-day workshop during which five delicate pediatric neurosurgeries were carried out, including one that was done for the first time in Kuwait. The procedure, called a rhizotomy, is a minimally invasive surgical procedure to remove sensation from a painful nerve by killing nerve fibers responsible for sending pain signals to the brain. It was done on the back nerves of a child in order to alleviate the muscle cramps he is experiencing and help him move.

Jaber Hospital Neurologist Dr Aliaa Askar said such cases are rare but affect the general health of the patient, including their general functions and the nerves condition. She said the success rate in some cases may reach 80 percent. She added that the workshop was held under the supervision of the health ministry and aimed at learning from physicians with international experience in field of pediatric surgery.

Head of Jaber Hospital's surgery department Dr Suleiman Al-Mazidi lauded the ministry's role in bringing in the most competent doctors in addition to the best equipment to serve patients. He said the hospital seeks to attract Kuwaiti doctors along with inviting international experts to carry out delicate operations which contributes to reducing medical treatment abroad by presenting the best health services and most modern techniques to patients.

The visiting medical team carried out consultations for pediatric neurosurgery cases. The team also reviewed symptoms and diagnoses for cases to be operated on during the workshop. Askar hoped the ministry will continue to invite international experts in the future. Pediatric Neurologist and Head of the Neurosurgery Department at Arnold Palmer hospital in Florida Dr Samer Al-Baba said the visit was a consultative one where he carried out some surgeries. Dr Al-Baba said he prescribed the best medication for the cases he reviewed with assistance from the local team at Jaber Hospital.

He added that Jaber Hospital is a modern and advanced facility supplied with the best available equipment. Head of the neurosurgery unit Dr Ayoub Dixon lauded the efforts of brain and spine surgeons and their efforts in improving patient service. He added that the field of surgical technology will see more advancements in coming days in order to carry out complex, delicate surgeries.



Secretary General of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) receives Iraq's Ambassador to Saudi Arabia.

GCC foreign ministries, Pakistan officials meet

RIYADH: Senior officials of the foreign ministries of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and Pakistani officials from the foreign ministry held, Tuesday, a political dialogue meeting, hosted by the GCC General Secretariat. The meeting highlighted a number of political and regional security issues, the Assistant Secretary for Political Affairs and Negotiations at the General Secretariat of the Cooperation Council, Dr Abdulaziz Al-Owaishaq, said in a statement issued by the secretariat.

Al-Owaishaq added that the meeting also discussed mechanisms to enhance strategic dialogue



LONDON: UK, Kuwait hold strategic dialogue on boosting ties, cooperation. —KUNA photos

UK, Kuwait hold strategic dialogue on boosting ties

LONDON: The first round of strategic dialogue between Kuwait and the United Kingdom has been held in the UK, with both sides examining prospects of cementing further the historic and broad relations and cooperation at diverse levels. The Kuwaiti side in the dialogue session was headed by Foreign Minister Sheikh Salem Abdullah Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, while the British side was chaired by Sir James Cleverly, the Foreign Secretary of Great Britain and North Ireland.

Sheikh Salem, at start of the meeting, conveyed sincere greetings from His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah; addressed to King Charles III, the Monarch of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and North Ireland. He also relayed identical salutes from His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah toward the UK leadership, government and people, lauding the solid, historic and



GCC Senior officials of the foreign ministries and Pakistan officials meet. —KUNA photos

between the two sides and develop aspects of cooperation between them in light of the memorandum of understanding and the joint action plan that was approved for the period (2022-2026). The officials also talked about some economic and trade issues of common interest.

Firm partnership with Iraq

Meanwhile, Secretary General of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Jassem Al-Budaiwi has underlined the significance of the firm strategic partnership between the GCC member states and Iraq that were established by their leaderships. This came during a meeting between Al-Budaiwi and Iraq's Ambassador to Saudi Arabia Abdul Sattar Al-Janabi in Riyadh, the GCC Secretariat said in a statement Tuesday. This partnership was translated in a memo signed in 2019 and the action plan for 2014-2019 during which the two sides agreed on enhancing cooperation, dialogue and partnership in all fields,

Al-Budaiwi said. He stressed GCC's stances and resolutions on backing brothers in Iraq in the face of terrorism and illegal arms, and achieving stability and security in the country, as well as maintaining its sovereignty and territorial integrity. These resolutions and stances also aim to maintain Arab and Muslim identity of Iraq, and its national and social unity, and reject all foreign interferences into its domestic affairs, Al-Budaiwi noted.

During the meeting, the two sides discussed enhancing partnership and implementing the action plan in all domains through political and security dialogue, and investment and commercial cooperation, and cultural and sports activities, according to the statement. They further reviewed the GCC-Iraqi ties and means of developing and enhancing them to serve their common interests, in addition to discussing the most outstanding challenges and crises on regional and international arenas, the statement concluded. —KUNA



LONDON: Kuwait's Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Salem Abdullah Al-Jaber Al-Sabah met with MP of the UK House of Commons Nigel Evans, head of the Foreign Affairs Committee Alicia Kearns and head of the parliamentary group at the House of Lords Rehman Chishti, as part of his UK visit on Monday.

friendly relations between the two countries.

His Highness the Prime Minister affirmed necessity of boosting cooperation and coordination for serving mutual interests between the two friendly countries, while emphasizing significance of elevating the bilateral ties to broader levels for serving the joint interests. He recalled historic events that had been witnessed in the process of partnership, friendship dating back to more than 124 years ago, exactly in the year 1899; such a process that has been based on security, defense cooperation, boosting mutual investments, cultures' exchange, in addition to coordination in the sectors of medicine and teaching, noting Britain's unwavering commitment to safeguarding security and sanctity of Kuwait.

Also during Monday's session, Sheikh Salem praised solidity of the cooperation at various international quarters, expressing hope for boosting this cooperation and lauding the high level of the solid, historic, strategic and friendly relations bonding the State of Kuwait with the UK. Sir Cleverly expressed pride of the friendly and close relations and the strategic partnership between his nation and the State of Kuwait. Although the world has been witnessing major and various developments, the Kuwaiti-UK relations have grown stronger, he said, also applauding Kuwait's balanced foreign policy that is based on bol-

stering regional security and peace.

Sheikh Salem and Sir Cleverly discussed during the first round of the dialogue latest regional and international developments, means of boosting the mutual cooperation on the international arena, coordination vis a vis some issues such as the situation in the occupied Palestinian territories and humanitarian aid for Ukraine. The two parties expressed desire to hold the second round of the strategic dialogue in Kuwait, next year.

Meanwhile, Kuwait's Foreign Minister Sheikh Salem Abdullah Al-Jaber Al-Sabah met in the British capital, London, with UK National Security Adviser Sir Tim Barrow, as part of his official visit to the UK, leading the delegation for the first round of strategic dialogue between the State of Kuwait and the UK. The meeting, which took place yesterday, Monday, dealt with the close deep-rooted ties between Kuwait and the UK that go back as long as over a century.

They also reviewed the process of joint cooperation between both sides, in addition to conversing the most prominent developments regionally and internationally. During the meeting, ways to enhance joint cooperation between the two sides were discussed to support efforts to establish peace, stability and security in the Middle East, in a way that benefits both sides. —KUNA



KUWAIT: Jaber Hospital held a five-day workshop during which five delicate pediatric neurosurgeries were carried out, including one that was done for the first time in Kuwait.



Local

Crown Prince receives Al-Mubarakiya's team

KUWAIT: His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah on Wednesday received Palace members of consultative team overseeing the post-fire rehabilitation and development of the Al-Mubarakiya Market. The team is made up of President of the Voluntary Work Center Sheikha Amthal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, Director General of Kuwait Municipality Eng Ahmad Al-Manfouhi, Consultant at the Center of Research Studies on Kuwait (CRSK) Eng. Ali Al-Fadhel, Researcher of Kuwaiti history and heritage Fahad Abduljaleel.

As per leadership directives, the team briefed His Highness the Crown Prince on the progress of the project to rebuild the residence of Imam Abdulrahman bin Faisal. The site, first launched by late Saudi King Abdulaziz bin Abdulrahman Al Saud at Al-Enezeh alleyway at Al-Mubarakiya, has been transformed into a museum reflecting the deep-rooted relations between Kuwait and Saudi Arabia. —KUNA



Ministry encourages youths to launch new innovative projects

No need to raise fuel prices: Oil Ministry

KUWAIT: Undersecretary of the Ministry of Oil Sheikh Nimr Fahad Al-Malik Al-Sabah on Wednesday emphasized on alluring youth to set up new innovative projects in the ministry's sectors. In a speech during the ministry's prize festival, Sheikh Nimr Al-Sabah stressed the need to inspire individuals to increase pioneering schemes, in line with the national strategy objectives and the country's position.

The Ministry believes in the strong partnerships and institutions in order to achieve a sustainable society, he said. He referred that the prize is organized for the second year in a row, indicating that the ministry seeks to back youth and their rights as they are the core of progress and prosperity, and encourage them to adopt new ideas.

Promising youth are the future of Kuwait, which has minds interested in innovation, he said, adding that enabling creative persons will be a fertile environment for knowledge economy. The prize came in harmony with the ministry's efforts aiming to support innovation and digital revolution, and develop employees and encourage them for excellence, he said. Meanwhile, head of the ministry's public relations

and media department Sheikha Tamader Khaled Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah said the ministry seeks to invest in youth and upgrade their skills and knowledge. She stressed the importance of making universities' youth be ready to create partnerships among students and the oil sector to develop their skills and abilities. The winners will contribute to facilitating work and fulfillment inside the ministry, she said. The ministry is keen on providing continued support to youth in all sectors and providing all tools and methods to enable them to offer abilities and skills to serve their country, Sheikha Tamader concluded.

Oil sector informs

In a new report submitted to the Council of Ministers, the Oil Ministry announced there is no need to raise fuel prices currently in response to a request from the government whether fuel prices need to be increased within a series of government reviews of the prices of services provided, as well as the prices of state property, which were recently reviewed.

"The government seeks to increase the revenues of the state's non-oil general budget, which has made ministries re-price their services in

line with needs, as well as their compatibility with the real cost of services provided. The oil sector responded to the government that current gasoline prices are appropriate, under control of the Kuwait Petroleum Corporation, as well as its sales are very appropriate and gasoline production is suitable for consumption" sources revealed to Kuwait Times.

"Moreover, the report did not reject the increase in the future, but rather attributed it to the circumstances and developments. If the circumstances require the increase, the Kuwait Petroleum Corporation will request a decision from the Council of Ministers approving the price increase by a proportion commensurate with production and cost," they added.

"The government assigned the Ministerial Economic Committee to study the extent to which the increase in government service prices reflects on public prices in Kuwait as well as its effects on the local market," calling on concerned ministries to tighten their control over the markets in order to prevent any increase, and to hold each party that goes to this path accountable. —Agencies

KRCS launches orphanage unit building in Jordan

AMMAN: Kuwait Red Crescent Society (KRCS) Head Dr Helal Al-Sayer on Tuesday inaugurated a newly established orphanage support unit in Jordan. In a statement to KUNA, Dr Helal said this project focuses on the renovation of the building next to the Red Crescent Society in Amman and the establishment of a multi-purpose hall to receive orphans and their families, including offices for workers, in addition to provisions for logistical support while also laying the groundwork needed to implement the project.

The project aims to support those in need specifically the orphans and migrants in the country who fled conflicts as the current number of orphans under this program amounted to 7,900. He also recognized the efforts of the Foreign Ministry represented by the Kuwaiti Embassy in Jordan in easing the matters of the KRCS in facilitating the conveyance of aid within the country.

Facilitating the matters, Charge d'affaires at the Embassy Dr Mubarak Al-Hajery said the project embodies Kuwait's role and its upholding slogan of the "Kuwait beside you" campaign, as a result of leadership efforts and the ongoing charitable works of its citizens. Additionally, this project is a fine example of co-opted work between the Red Crescent Societies branches waged together to help bolster humanitarian efforts and reach out to those in need, mentioning these efforts are expanded out to the worldwide gamut.

Kuwait pledges \$90 million for quake victims

NEW YORK: Kuwait pledged about \$90 million to support the UN's efforts to aid survivors of the earthquake that hit Turkey and Syria last month. The pledge is part of the UN's urgent appeals for the two countries, which include the donations of both the people and government, the UN office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights Martin Griffiths said in a press statement on Wednesday.

The UN Secretary General's undersecretary for humanitarian affairs and rescue coordinator noted that he is deeply concerned that the amount of financing is not any close to the target number, adding that Kuwait's pledge will be of great help for families who lost everything.

The pledge, the highest any country had offered since the disaster, will aid the UN organizations in providing food, education, shelter, health services and more for about 18 million people affected by the earthquakes. After the earthquakes, the UN had announced the need for \$398 million for an urgent response in Syria and one billion dollars for Turkey. Up until now, 79 percent of the target number for Syria was met, while finance rate for Turkey reached 19 percent.

Zionist's remarks

Meanwhile, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has



KRCS inaugurates orphanage support unit building in Jordan. —KUNA

Heading the organization in Jordan, Mohammad Al-Hadeed said the undertaking of volunteering deeds is linked to the Kuwaiti Society, to express thanks and sincere appreciation for the work being done to help alleviate the suffering of the destitute in Jordan. Additionally, the endeavors for the orphanage and the agreement to fund medical and surgical procedures are one of the many deeds presented by the state of Kuwait as they continue these supporting efforts since the Syrian crisis ensued.

WHO lauds Kuwait

Meanwhile, the Director-General of the World Health Organization, Tedros Ghebreyesus has praised Kuwait's cooperation with the organization in various fields, especially in supporting those affected by the earthquake that hit Syria and Turkey

expressed its condemnation and denunciation to the racists and provocative remarks made by an Zionist official of the occupation government, through which he denied the existence of the Palestinian people and the use of a map of Zionist entity that includes the borders of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. In a statement, the ministry affirmed Kuwait's rejection of the continued inflammatory and irresponsible remarks that contradict historical facts and geographical reality, and are inconsistent with all international laws and norms.

The Ministry reiterated Kuwait's principled and firm position, which calls for the need for the United Nations and the international community to assume its moral and legal responsibilities to stop such extremist statements targeting the Palestinian people, and the need to work to deter these negative practices. The statement noted on the need to provide to the Palestinian people full international protection, and support to all UN and international efforts aimed at reaching a permanent solution. The statement underlined the need for a comprehensive and just solution for the Palestinian people in accordance with international resolutions, the road map, and the Arab peace initiative, which in turn leads to the Palestinian people obtaining all their legitimate rights and establishing their independent state within the borders of 1967, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

Attacks on Syrians

Kuwait also expressed concern over attacks targeting civilians in Syria as documented by the independent fact-finding commission in Syria. The Kuwaiti stand was expressed by the permanent rep-

resentative to the United Nations and other international organizations in Geneva, Ambassador Nasser Al-Hain, told Kuwait News Agency (KUNA) that he met with Gebresus at the Kuwait embassy in Geneva to discuss developments in the humanitarian situation in Syria and Turkey with the repercussions of the earthquake.

He added that Gebresus expressed his appreciation Kuwait's efforts in support of relief efforts for those affected by the earthquake in Turkey and Syria. He explained that the UN official briefed him on the results of his recent visit to Idlib, northern Syria, and the extent of the suffering of the earthquake victims, as well as the organization's plans and programs to deal with the crisis that both Syria and Turkey were exposed to. —KUNA



Permanent representative at the UN and other International Organizations in Geneva, Ambassador Nasser Al-Hayen

representative at the UN and other International Organizations in Geneva, Ambassador Nasser Al-Hayen, in an address to the UN Human Rights Council during an examination of a report filed by the commission.

Kuwait believes that tackling the humanitarian crisis in Syria hinges on ending the conflict that in turn can only be resolved through a political process, according to the 2023 Geneva declaration and the UN Security Council resolution 2245, he said. It calls on all parties to observe the cease-fire and revive the political process, masterminded by the UN special envoy for Syria, ambassador Al-Hayen said. Al-Hayen confirmed that Kuwait had allocated 50 million dollars worth of aid for the Syrian people in the aftermath of the recent earthquakes that jolted the nation. —KUNA

Ramadan greetings

US Chargé d'Affaires James Holtsnider

On behalf of the US Embassy in Kuwait, President Biden, Secretary Blinken, and the American people, I would like to express my heartfelt congratulations to the people of Kuwait on the occasion of the holy month of Ramadan. This Ramadan, I look forward to sharing in the many wonderful traditions that Kuwaitis and Muslims all over the world observe during this special month - dedicated to family, hospitality and faith. These include spending time with friends, colleagues, and neighbors at diwanis, celebrating Kuwaiti traditions like Girgian, gathering for Iftars and Suhoors. May this Ramadan brings each of you, your friends, and your loved ones joy and an abundance of blessings.



French Ambassador Claire Le Flecher

At the start of the holy month of Ramadan and on behalf of the French Embassy in Kuwait, I am happy to extend my sincere congratulations to HH the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, HH the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and Kuwait people. The month of Ramadan in Kuwait and France is a nice occasion for family and friends to form strong links and maintain loving ties in the society. As for Muslims all over the world, this month indicates a major importance and spiritual links between human and Allah as well as noble humanitarian values that urge love, mercy, forgiveness, solidarity and call for rejecting hatred. I hope peace and stability prevail around the world. I look forward to enjoying this month with my Kuwaiti and Muslim friends. I congratulate you and your families where ever you may be, and wish you a blessed Ramadan.



Ambassador of Switzerland, Dr Tiziano Balmelli

I would like to extend my warm wishes for a holy month full of blessings, peace and joy. I wish the Kuwaiti people and friends of Switzerland Ramadan Kareem. I appreciated the spirit of Ramadan for five years in Turkey, where times and rituals are partly collective, according to tradition, and partly lived according to individual choices. A lot of Muslims live in Switzerland - around 5% of the population. They are mostly from the Balkans and Turkey. They practice their religion freely and in peace. Each country practices its own traditions and has its own private charm during the holy month of Ramadan. I think this diversity of traditions and cultures makes the world beautiful and it is therefore important to preserve and value the different roots of the human family. I am looking forward to participating in Ramadan Iftar tables with Kuwaiti friends during my first year in Kuwait. The food in Kuwait is delicious and reflects the diversity of the people who have lived or passed through Kuwait over the centuries. I enjoy the traditional food and the culinary fusion with the different blends, in particular the Indian one.



Interior Ministry adds 26 services to Sahel app

KUWAIT: The Ministry of Interior announced adding 26 electronic services to the Sahel app, through which citizens and residents can finalize their transactions online without the need to visit a relevant MoI department office. In-person attendance will therefore be restricted to senior citizens, people with special needs and people with cases that cannot be resolved online.

The services include: (1) Inquiring about the election registration number and voting location (2) Traffic fines payment (3) Medical test result for residents (4) Residency renewal for domestic helpers (5) Driving license services (6) Criminal record certificate issuance (7) Downloading registration documents (8) Misdemeanor cases' follow up (9) Residency renewal (10) Residency issuance (11) Inquiry about unimplemented rulings (12) Early membership request registration (13) Enrollment request follow up (14) Residency affairs fines payment (15) Inquiry about a resident's interior ministry reference number (16) A facsimile (exact copy) of Kuwaiti passport (17) Temporary residency transfer and renewal (18) Reporting loss of documents. (19) Payment of additional fees related to domestic helpers (20) Traffic fines payment for companies. (21) Self-sponsorship residency renewal (22) Traffic fines payment for others. (23) Visa fines payment. (24) Deportees' travel ticket payment (25) Dependency fees payment and (26) Legal disclaimer certificate.

News in briefs

Customs seize 84 pills
and 79 hashish pieces

KUWAIT: Airport Customs have seized around 84 pills with an Asian expatriate who tried to hide them within his clothes in his personal items. Another Asian expatriate tried to hide 79 pieces of hashish in his clothes. They were both transferred to the concerned departments. Airport Management Director Osama Al-Shami said the increase in seizures is evident of the increased awareness of customs inspectors and their keenness to perform their duty.

Social Affairs team
to investigate charities

KUWAIT: The social affairs ministry has announced the formation of a team to inspect violating and illegal charities for immediate removal. The team will be following a program to monitor violations which has been prepared by charity societies. This comes within the efforts to supervise activities during the holy month of Ramadan in cooperation with the Awqaf ministry.

Awqaf releases guidelines
for Ramadan charity collection

KUWAIT: The Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs announced that it is permissible to collect donations in mosques throughout the holy month of Ramadan, according to conditions and controls in agreement with the Ministry of Social Affairs and Community Development. The Director of Information Department in the Ministry Ahmed Al-Otaibi said in a press statement that Awqaf allows the collection of donations through bank transactions and (Knet) devices only. The directions stipulate that the imam of the mosque must be notified of the visit of the charitable association's representative. Al-Otaibi added that representatives of charitable societies and entities authorized to collect donations are not allowed to speak inside mosques to deliver an introductory speech about the association or the projects it is carrying out, so as not to disturb the worshippers.

British Council honors local
climate change innovators

Winning projects tackled food waste, greenhouse gases and marine sustainability



KUWAIT: Country Director at the British Council Tony Skinner poses with winners at the event.



People mingle at the ceremony honoring environmental projects held by the British Council.



A participant introduces her project as the audience listens.



A spokesperson from one of the participating teams explains the project to the audience.

By Khaled Al-Abdulhadi

KUWAIT: The British council held earlier this week its climate change awards for local innovative projects where five different projects with a diverse approach to sustainable economy were awarded for their successful environmental efforts. The awards were presented by Country Director at the British Council Tony Skinner and Project Manager at British Council Tracey Carlin. "The mission is to establish friendship between (the UK and Kuwait). My mission is to establish relations with those wishing to build a relationship between the countries. One of the ways is engaging with (innovators), taking their initiatives and moving forward," Skinner said before introducing the winning groups.

The first project receiving an award is called CLAP, which involves using leftover food to serve cats. The group is concerned about climate change and environmental issues. They were awarded the best food waste reduction campaign. "Food waste is energy waste. Kuwait wastes about 400,000 kilograms or six percent of total food in the world. The average person consumes two kilograms of food everyday enough to feed around 200,000 people," said the spokesperson for the group behind CLAP. "Our project aims to reduce greenhouse gases from nitrogen waste by reusing leftover foods and giving them to cats. By distributing containers for my students, they helped collect food."

A project called "Give and Take" won the award for the best greenhouse gas reduction project. "Our project aims to help the environment while also generating

revenue for companies," the team's spokesperson said.

"The growth of coffee shops in Kuwait has increased methane in the atmosphere, especially with consumption and production on the rise. This leads to the increase of coffee waste which has harmful effects on the environment whereby there's more methane than carbon dioxide in the atmosphere."

The group said they aim to serve as a link between cafes and farmers who have composting experience. "Our method leads to different outcomes for the soil. Chemical fertilizer will produce a good appearance without the purity. Composting produces purer and more organic soil. In Kuwait, chemical fertilizer leads to plants growing in the winter rather than throughout the year." The third project awarded at the event is called "Sustainable Future". The project, which won the award for best private sector initiative, aims to provide certificates to companies based on certain criteria. "Our main target is the private sector due to the high carbon emissions they produce. Every certificate provides each company with an identity and credibility. Our objective is to evaluate businesses according to how green they are," said the group's spokesperson.

"The certification involves using a checklist where we go to inspect companies and if they suffice the criteria, they get the certification. We have categorized the checklist with bronze, silver, and gold to see if companies fit those criteria," they explained. The fourth group, "Go Fish", were winners of the best climate change award. They worked to spread climate

change awareness for the younger generation. "Our main goal is to change bad habits and make young people more aware about climate issues. Our Instagram covers environmental issues from around the world. We have participated in many events across Kuwait. We faced a number of obstacles, including getting approvals," said the group's spokesperson.

"Fishing is the second largest industry in Kuwait around 50 percent demands met locally. Many organisms are under threat, due to unprecedented climate change, the presence of endangered fish and lack of awareness," they said. "The app is simple and easy containing expert verified information." Winners of the best social media and marketing awards are two projects by Cornerstone. The projects use a character called Raihan to raise awareness about climate change through social media. "We created Raihan, a loving character to creatively educate young children. We faced obstacles including getting sponsorships and providing new and creative content."

"Raihan was created through our imagination with the feedback of students. Raihan is a 'human plant'," said the group's spokesperson. "Our target audience is from five to 10-year-olds. We also want to indirectly reach parents through their children so they can have more awareness." Skinner thanked all groups for their efforts at the end of the ceremony. "We hope that you will develop further, and the council is going to follow up to see the progress of your projects," he said.



KUWAIT: The Diplomatic Women's Committee held an event at Yom Al-Bahhar marking several occasions usually celebrated in the spring.

Diplomatic women's
committee celebrates
spring festival

KUWAIT: The Diplomatic Women's Committee prepared its activities for the month of March celebrating the Spring Festival, which concluded many other occasions, such as International Women's Day and Mother's Day, which is celebrated in Arab countries, and Nowruz, which is celebrated in many coun-

tries in Central Asia, Turkey and Iran. This festival is held every year in one of the vital sites of the State of Kuwait. This year, the Yom Al-Bahhar Heritage village was chosen because of its strategic location on the Gulf as it is considered one of the important cultural and heritage sites.

Many African, Asian and Central Asian countries participated in this festival such as Tajikistan, Azerbaijan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Mongolia, Nepal, Tanzania, Sudan and the Kingdom of Eswatini. The countries of Central Asia also presented the various traditional and classic cuisines that are special for the festivals. Some folklore costumes were also displayed. The audience enjoyed music and folk songs

and visited the Ministry of Information's museum located at Yom Al-Bahhar Heritage village.

The members of the committee welcomed the ambassadors, spouses of the ambassadors and diplomats accredited to the State of Kuwait at the Diwan of Yom Al-Bahhar, where the advisor of the committee presented an overview of the history and the importance of this strategic site in the past, as travelers, divers and trade exchange trips start from this location. In conclusion, Ms. Narges Al-Shatti praised DWC board members specially the media and public relations officer Fauzia Abdul Basit for her great efforts and the participants who contributed to make the activities and programs of the committee a great success.

Students celebrate
national holidays

NOTTINGHAM: Kuwaiti students based in the British city of Nottingham held an event on Feb 25 to celebrate Kuwait's National Day for the first time. The celebration was attended by more than 700 people.

It included photo booths, competitions with gifts from sponsors, a performance by Ibrahim Dashti and booths showcasing businesses operated by Kuwaiti students. Kuwait Times participated in the event with a photo booth. The event was organized by BoWael and amazing young and talented students who are passionate about making an effort to entertain their fellow students while studying abroad.

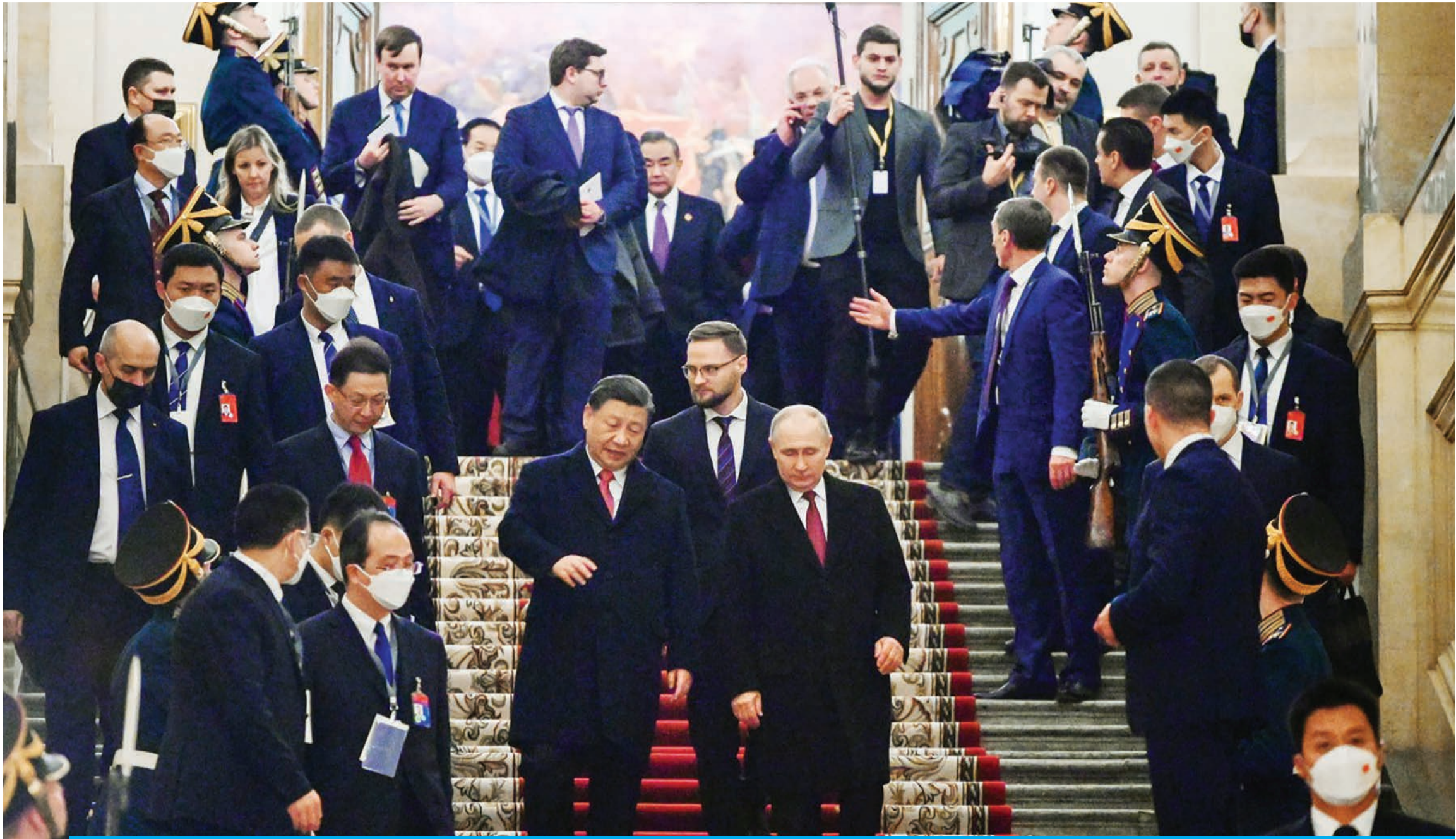


KUWAIT: UK-based students take a photo at the Kuwait Times booth at an event they held to celebrate National Day last month.



Rohingya sceptical of Myanmar refugee return offer

Gaza fisherman tests waters in legal fight over blockade



MOSCOW: Russian President Vladimir Putin and China's President Xi Jinping leave after a reception following their talks at the Kremlin in Moscow. — AFP

Four dead as Russia strikes Ukraine school

Xi departs Moscow, hails a ‘new era’ in their nations’ ties

KYIV: A Russian drone attack on a school near Kyiv killed at least four people before Chinese leader Xi Jinping left Moscow on Wednesday at the close of a summit with President Vladimir Putin. Xi called each other “dear friend” and hailed a “new era” in their nations’ ties following two days of talks marked by pomp and a display of unity against the West.

But there was no apparent breakthrough on the war in Ukraine, despite Beijing touting a “visit for peace”, and few concrete economic proposals were signed. Both eager to curb Western dominance, Putin and Xi expressed concern about NATO expansion in Asia and agreed to deepen a partnership which has grown closer since Putin invaded Ukraine a year ago.

Xi’s plane left Moscow’s Vnukovo airport on Wednesday after being seen off by an honour guard, capping a visit that was seen as a boost for the internationally-isolated Russian leader. But in Ukraine, at least four people were killed and others wounded in a drone attack that hit a school in the Kyiv region late Tuesday, officials said Wednesday.

Ukraine’s air force said Russia attacked Ukraine with 21 “Iranian-made” drones overnight, and 16 were shot down. During the Moscow summit Putin 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.

After talks with Xi, Putin said that “many of the provisions” of China’s initiative can form the basis of a peace settlement for Ukraine when Kyiv and the West are ready for it. “However, so far we have not seen such readiness on their part,” he added. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said Kyiv had invited China to talks, and was waiting for an answer from Beijing. The United States, however, said it does not see China as capable of being an impartial mediator—Washington’s most direct criticism yet of Beijing’s aim to be a middleman in efforts to end the conflict. On Wednesday, the Kremlin said it was not surprised by the West’s “hostile” reaction to the summit.

‘Unlimited possibilities’

Moscow and Beijing have over the past years ramped up cooperation, both driven by a desire to counterbalance US-dominated international order. The Chinese leader’s Moscow visit has been viewed as a coup for Putin, who is subject to an International Criminal Court warrant over accusations of unlawfully deporting Ukrainian children.

“I am sure that Russian-Chinese cooperation has truly unlimited possibilities and prospects,” Putin said at a state dinner following the talks, where he toasted the “prosperity” of Russian and Chinese people. He also gushed over the “special nature” of the relationship between the two countries.

On the second day of his visit to Moscow, Xi said ties with Russia were “entering a new era”. 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.

Putin said the two countries had reached an agreement on the Power of Siberia 2 gas pipeline, which will send Russian natural gas to China via Mongolia. Despite Russia’s keen interest, analysts have warned that there will be limits to the relationship.

US ‘undermining’ global security

In a joint statement, the two leaders took aim at the West, accusing the United States of “undermining” global security, and expressed “great concern” over NATO’s growing presence in Asia. China and Russia have often worked in lockstep at the UN Security Council, using their veto power as permanent

council members to counter the West.

Russia’s assault on Ukraine has also deepened fears among Western powers that China could one day try to take control of the self-ruled island of Taiwan, which Beijing sees as part of its territory. 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. The United States has also accused Beijing of mulling arms exports to Moscow, claims China has denied.

Xi’s trip coincided with a surprise visit to Kyiv by Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida, who on Tuesday also visited Bucha, a town where Russian forces were accused of committing atrocities last year. “Our talks with Mr Kishida were quite productive,” said Zelensky. “I also heard a very concrete willingness of Japan to work together with us to even more actively mobilise the world for international order, to protect against aggression, to protect against Russian terror.”

Kishida, the last Group of Seven leader to visit the country, had come under increasing pressure to make the trip, as Japan hosts the group’s summit this May. Zelensky confirmed on Tuesday he would participate in the G7 summit via video link. — AFP

Greek trains back on track after worst rail disaster

ATHENS: Intercity rail travel resumed in Greece on Wednesday for the first time since a head-on collision killed 57 people in the nation’s worst rail disaster more than three weeks ago, operator Hellenic Train said. Trains from the Piraeus seaport to the capital’s international airport, as well as links between Athens and Chalcis on the island of Evia and two other local services in the Peloponnese region have started running again, the company said.

But the line where the crash happened on February 28 -- the country’s busiest, spanning 600 kilometres (370 miles) from Athens to the second-largest city of Thessaloniki in the north—will not reopen until April 1, acting Transport Minister Georgios Gerapetritis said.

The disaster sparked weeks of angry and occasionally violent protests, piling pressure on the conservative government of Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis ahead of elections due in May. Most of the victims were university students returning from a long holiday weekend. Greece’s transport minister resigned after the disaster.

The stationmaster on duty during the accident and three other railway officials have been charged and face possible life sentences. Greece’s rail watchdog found serious safety problems across the network, including inadequate basic training of critical staff.

Panagiotis Terezakis, the new director general of the state-owned Hellenic Railways Organisation (OSE) that owns the network, said Wednesday the company “would do everything humanly possible to win back our passengers’ confidence”.



ATHENS: Protesters, including some holding placards with officials’ portraits marked with a red cross such as Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis (C), take part in a demonstration against the government and to voice outrage at the February 28, 2023, train disaster during a 24-hour strike, in Athens. — AFP

“We have to move forward after the tragic event that has shaken us all,” he told journalists. On Tuesday, train drivers called for safety assurances including better monitoring of rail crossings, improved tunnel lighting, bridge inspection data and the removal of debris and overgrown vegetation from tracks.

Railway unions had long warned the network was underfunded, understaffed and accident-prone after a decade of spending cuts. The drivers’ union said Tuesday that repeated warnings were “downplayed or not taken seriously.”

At the peak of the demonstrations, more than 65,000 people took to the streets nationwide demanding accountability and calling for Mitsotakis’s resignation, with some accusing the government of being “murderers”. Many Greeks have been alarmed at the decay of public services amid large-scale privatisation, including passenger and freight trains, to pay off debts stemming from the country’s 2009-2018 debt crisis. — AFP

Defiant Johnson faces parliament grilling over ‘Partygate’

LONDON: Britain’s former prime minister Boris Johnson re-enters the bear pit of parliamentary inquisition on Wednesday for a grilling about “Partygate” that could decide his political future. In July, the end of Johnson’s three years in 10 Downing Street played out in another parliamentary committee hearing, while outside the room his government was collapsing in a wave of ministerial resignations.

Voters’ anger at the scandal about serial partying at Downing Street, in breach of COVID lockdown laws, was one backdrop to the resignations. But Johnson’s supporters insist he was betrayed by Conservative colleagues, and are campaigning for his return ahead of a general election likely next year.

Opinion polls suggest that Johnson remains toxic for a large swathe of the electorate, and Wednesday’s hearing by the cross-party privileges committee will reopen old wounds just as his successor, Prime Minister Rishi Sunak, mounts a turnaround bid.

If the committee decides that Johnson lied to parliament about the parties, it could recommend his suspension from the House of Commons. If the full House agrees to a suspension of more than 10 sitting days, that could trigger a special election for his northwest London seat, if enough voters demand one.

This month, the committee found in an interim report that Johnson should have known the rules were being flouted. It released previously unseen photographs and also published WhatsApp messages showing senior aides struggling to come up with a public justification for the parties.

Hours before Wednesday’s televised hearing, it published a larger 110-page bundle of evidence. It

includes a Downing Street official stating that Johnson “often saw and joined” gatherings in the complex during lockdowns and that “he had the opportunity to shut them down”. “He could see what was happening and allowed the culture to continue,” the official added. Johnson’s former senior adviser Martin Reynolds also states that ahead of “Prime Minister’s Questions” in early December 2021, he questioned him “whether it was realistic to argue that all guidance had been followed at all times”.

Meanwhile, the evidence shows Cabinet Secretary Simon Case, Britain’s most senior civil servant, denying he ever assured Johnson that Covid rules were followed at all times. On Tuesday, Johnson released his own 52-page dossier detailing his belief that he was truthful when he repeatedly told parliament that all regulations were respected. In hindsight, he recognised that he did “mislead” MPs, but only inadvertently and based on assurances given by top aides that the rules had been followed. “I did not intentionally or recklessly mislead the House” on any date, he wrote. “I would never have dreamed of doing so.”

Johnson was fined by police for one gathering, along with Sunak, his finance minister at the time, while dozens of other staff received fines. The former Conservative leader apologised and corrected the parliamentary record last May after previously insisting to MPs that the gatherings were above board.

Johnson said that correction came at the earliest opportunity—after London police and senior civil servant Sue Gray had concluded their own investigations. Johnson, 58, nearly died himself of COVID, but relatives of patients who died said his claims were a brazen attempt to evade responsibility.

“Johnson’s defence continues to highlight his lack of shame and humility,” said Kathryn de Prudhoe, a psychotherapist whose father died early in the pandemic. “The victims in all of this are families like mine who lost loved ones... people who lost their jobs, livelihoods and homes or their mental health because they followed the rules that he made, but couldn’t stick to,” she said. — AFP

International

10 Yemeni troops killed as new fighting clouds peace efforts

Houthis lean more towards the option of military confrontation than current negotiations

DUBAI: At least 10 soldiers were killed in renewed fighting in Yemen, military sources told AFP, despite diplomatic efforts to halt the long-running war in the Arab world's poorest country. The clashes took place in oil-producing Marib province, one of the main battlegrounds and the scene of sporadic fighting even during a lull in hostilities over the past year.

Iran-backed Houthi rebels attacked a mountainous area and have been engaged in a build-up of forces in the region, two military sources told AFP. "The Houthis launched an attack on hills overlooking Harib district, south of Marib, and made progress on that front, causing the displacement of dozens of families," one of the sources said, speaking on condition of anonymity.

"At least 10 soldiers were killed, in addition to an unknown number of attackers," the source added. The details of the clash were confirmed by a second military official. The fighting comes a month after at least four soldiers were killed in the same district, and dents new optimism after Saudi Arabia and Iran, who back opposing sides in what amounts to a proxy war, agreed to restore diplomatic ties. Analyst Maged Al-Madhaji, commenting on the latest fighting, said "the Houthis are interested in sending a clear political message that ... the Tehran-Riyadh deal does not mean" the rebels will just surrender.

"The Houthis lean more towards the option of a military confrontation than current negotiations,"

said Al-Madhaji, the co-founder of the Sanaa Center for Strategic Studies think tank. An exchange of hundreds of prisoners was agreed this week and Hans Grundberg, the UN secretary general's special envoy for Yemen, has said "intense diplomatic efforts" are underway to strike a peace deal.

The Houthis seized control of Yemen's capital Sanaa in 2014, prompting a Saudi-led military intervention the following year and fighting that has left hundreds of thousands dead, through direct and indirect causes, and triggered one of the world's worst humanitarian crises.

But a UN-brokered ceasefire that took effect last April brought a sharp reduction in hostilities and, even though the truce expired in October, fighting has largely remained on hold. On Monday, after talks in Switzerland, the Houthis and Yemen's internationally recognised government agreed to exchange 887 prisoners -- 181 held in Houthi prisons and 706 rebels.

During a Security Council meeting last week, UN officials said the detente between Saudi Arabia and Iran—welcomed by both the Houthis and the Yemeni government—should offer momentum toward peace.

However, it is unlikely to solve all Yemen's problems. The influence of the two regional powers is only one dimension of a complex conflict in a country fractured along confessional, regional and political lines, analysts warn. — AFP



MARIB: Yemeni Defence Minister Lieutenant General Mohsen Mohammed Al-Daeri (C) attends a military parade of fighters loyal to the Saudi-backed government during a graduation ceremony of officers and the completion of specialised military courses. — AFP

Zionist entity missiles hit arms depot in Aleppo

BEIRUT: A Zionist missile strike destroyed a suspected arms depot used by Iran-backed militias at Syria's Aleppo airport Wednesday, a war monitor said, with authorities saying the strike put the airport out of service. It was the second such attack in a month on the airport in Syria's second city, which has been a major conduit for relief flights since a February 6 earthquake devastated swathes of northern Syria and neighbouring Turkey.

The pre-dawn strike targeted "the airport compound and a weapons depot belonging to pro-Iranian forces on the airport's perimeter," the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights group said. The Britain-based war monitor said the arms depot was "completely destroyed".

The Syrian defence ministry reported "damage" but did not immediately mention any casualties. "Around 3:55 am (0055 GMT), the Zionist enemy carried out an air attack... targeting Aleppo international airport, leading to some material damage," a ministry statement said. "A number of missiles" were fired from the Mediterranean west of the coastal city of Latakia, it added. The transport ministry said the strikes caused damage to the runway and to airport equipment, forcing all flights to be redirected to Damascus or to Latakia on the Mediterranean coast.

The Zionist military rarely comments on individual strikes against Syria, but has vowed repeatedly to keep up its air campaign to stop arch foe Iran consolidating its presence. The Zionist military said Wednesday that "we do not comment on reports in the foreign media", its standard response when questioned about such strikes. Previous strikes blamed on Zionist entity have also stopped flights using the airport following damage to the runway. On March 7, three people were killed in an Zionist strike on the airport that brought air traffic, including relief flights, to a halt. — AFP

Gaza fisherman tests waters in legal fight over blockade

GAZA CITY: Gaza fisherman Jihad al-Hissi is used to rough waters but he now faces a new storm. A Zionist entity court may seize his boat after he breached the limits of the enclave's fishing zone. The issue is crucial for thousands in the blockaded Palestinian territory of 2.3 million people, where fishing in the Mediterranean Sea remains one of the few economic lifelines.

Hissi, 55, with square shoulders and a scruffy beard, told his story at Gaza's dock early one morning as fishermen sold their overnight catch of sea bream, prawns and sardines. For now he has his boat, but its fate is uncertain as Zionist authorities argue before a Haifa court that it should be permanently taken away.

The vessel, used to catch gamberi prawns off southern Gaza near Egypt, is named the "Haji Rajab", but its owners have erased the name from its yellow hull. "I don't want the Zionists to spot us and seize my boat," said Hissi, who had a violent encounter with a Zionist naval patrol boat more than a year ago.

Zionist entity says its land, air and sea blockade of Gaza is needed to protect it from rocket and other attacks from Hamas and to prevent arms smuggling to the Islamist militant movement. Palestinians argue it is an effective siege that has crippled Gaza's economy and further impoverished its people, while the fishing limits deny it crucial protein.

Last year's incident came on February 14 when Hissi's vessel ventured beyond the maritime zone that Zionist entity declared in 2007, the year Hamas seized power in Gaza. Jihad's brother Nihad, who was at sea that day, said that "100 meters beyond the area, we were surprised by three Zionist boats



GAZA CITY: Palestinian fisherman Jihad al-Hissi (C) and his sons work on their boat at the seaport in Gaza City on January 10, 2023. - Gaza fisherman Jihad al-Hissi is used to rough waters but he now faces a new storm. — AFP

with commandos. "They attacked our boat... tied us up and arrested us." The boat's cabin is still damaged from the water cannon blasts and the rubber-encased bullets fired by the Zionist forces that day. Zionist entity, in documents presented to court, accuses Hissi of having "repeatedly violated the security restrictions imposed by the Zionist army in the maritime zone adjacent to Gaza". The Zionist non-government group Gisha has helped defend Hissi and in September secured the boat's return, but Zionist authorities now demand the court "permanently confiscate" the vessel. The fishing zone allowed by Zionist entity currently extends only to the heavily fished areas between six and 15 nautical miles (about 11 to 28 kilometres) off the Gaza coast. Hissi argues this is less than the maximum of 20 nautical miles agreed in the 1990s under the Zionist-Palestinian agreements

in Oslo. But he also admits to going even beyond that from time to time, in search of shrimp which nets around \$21 per kilogram (2.2 pounds) and can make the difference between profit and loss.

The legal fight is closely watched by thousands of fishermen in Gaza. If Hissi's boat is permanently confiscated, this would spell "a serious threat to the thousands of fishermen in Gaza, because it aims to put an end to fishing," charged Nizar Ayyash, president of the union representing the 4,000 fishermen in Gaza.

The court battle comes amid a rise in Zionist's temporary seizures of fishing boats suspected of smuggling or breaching the fishing zone. Last year saw 23 boat confiscations, the highest number since 2018, according to the Palestinian non-governmental group Al Mezan. — AFP

Breaking fast with dates...

Continued from Page 1

energy levels. It is common to feel lethargic after fasting. Eating one to three or more dates before anything else to break your fast, is a sure-fire way to combat the exhaustion you may feel. Within an hour of digesting a date or two or three, your body feels stronger, and the sugar is replenished in the blood, the lack of which is the main cause of hunger and tiredness. Note that Prophet (PBUH) preferred to break his fast on dates in odd numbers.

Additionally, dates help alleviate symptoms of low blood sugar. During a fast, whether during Ramadan or any other time, you can experience low blood sugar which can leave you feeling weak, tired, and lightheaded. Dates are a natural sugar supply that will combat low blood sugar and help you feel better. Headaches are a common result of low blood sugar levels and fasting. Dates can help alleviate headaches.

More benefits of dates: Dates are a great source of fibre. Fiber helps you feel full. When you've spent a long day fasting, your first instinct might be to stuff your stomach once it's time to break the fast. By eating a few dates before you consume anything else, you can satiate your hunger without overeating and causing yourself any discomfort. Dates can help with digestion. You can often experience nausea or an upset stomach in general when you start eating after fasting all day long. Dates are great for digestion. They help ease constipation due to their high fibre content.

tion due to their high fibre content.

Dates are full of vitamins and nutrients. It is no wonder why dates are a significant part of Middle Eastern culture. They are jam-packed with essential vitamins and nutrients. Dates contain more potassium than a banana, and magnesium, iron, copper, phosphorus, and calcium. In conclusion: fasting during the month of Ramadan is a spiritual tradition to bring you closer to the Almighty and your community, especially when you enjoy a communal meal while breaking the fast, and to empathize with the poor and the needy.

Following the tradition of consuming dates upon breaking the fast allows one to feel closer to Almighty Allah, Prophet (PBUH) and the entire community, which is a sacred experience for Muslims. All these points as well as others underscore the Message that Almighty Allah delivered to us in Surah (chapter) Fussilat 41, verse 53 that can be translated as: "Soon shall We show them Our Signs on the horizons and within themselves until it becomes clear to them that (the Quran) is the Truth. Is it not enough that your Lord is a witness over everything?" (Fussilat 41: 53)

Courtesy of the TIES Center: The TIES Center is one of the projects of Kuwait Society for Cultural Dialogue, and is the social and educational hub for English speaking expats in Kuwait and aims at empowering Kuwait's expats through social and educational services that promote a positive and productive role in society. It also facilitates opportunities for intra- and interfaith interactions that promote social solidarity. For more information, you can contact TIES at Tel: 25231015/6; Hotline: 94079777; e-mail: info@tiescenter.net

He added that there are plans to develop the Islamic Arts Center and to set up a third exhibition for the Prophet's (PBUH) biography, and that for 30 years the Grand Mosque administration successfully achieved and organized charitable events and activities for nine million benefactors, held night prayers for more than five million worshippers and Eid prayers for more than 300,000 devotees.

In a similar statement to KUNA, Director of Information Department at the Ministry of Awqaf Dr Ahmad Al-Otaibi said that the Grand Mosque's areas of work are numerous and not confined to Ramadan only, including cultural, artistic activities and many others. He praised the role of ministries and state institutions that actively contribute to the organization process as well as the volunteers for their participation in preparing for the blessed nights of Ramadan in the Grand Mosque. The Grand Mosque construction began in 1979 at the initiative of the late Amir Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, and opened in 1986. — KUNA

Humanity lifeblood is under threat...

Continued from Page 1

water as well as those already strained. Governments and actors in the public and private sectors are invited to present proposals at the conference to reverse that trend and help meet the development goal, set in 2015, of ensuring "access to water and sanitation for all by 2030."

The last conference at this high level on the issue, which lacks a global treaty or a dedicated United Nations agency, was held in 1977 in Mar del Plata, Argentina. "The water crisis is bad enough without climate change," said Stuart Orr of the World Wildlife Fund. "We can build resilient societies and economies if governments and businesses urgently pursue policies, practices and investments that recognize—and restore—the full value of healthy rivers, lakes and wetlands," he said. But some observers have already voiced concerns about the scope of commitments and the availability of funding to implement them.

"About 10 percent of the world's population lives in a country where water stress has reached a high or critical level," the report says. According to the most recent UN climate study, published Monday by the IPCC expert panel, "roughly half of the world's

population currently experience severe water scarcity for at least part of the year." Those shortages have the most significant impact on the poor, Connor told AFP. "No matter where you are, if you are rich enough, you will manage to get water," he said. Women and girls are also "disproportionately affected," actor Matt Damon, co-founder of the nonprofit Water.org, said Wednesday, adding that "millions of girls aren't in school because of this, because they're collecting water." The report noted the impact of existing water supplies becoming contaminated due to underperforming or nonexistent sanitation systems.

"At least 2 billion people (globally) use a drinking water source contaminated with feces, putting them at risk of contracting cholera, dysentery, typhoid and polio," it said. That high number does not take into account pollution from pharmaceuticals, chemicals, pesticides, microplastics and nanomaterials. To ensure access to safe drinking water for all by 2030, levels of investment would have to be tripled, the report said.

Freshwater ecosystems—which in addition to water, provide life-sustaining economic resources and help combat global warming—"are among the most threatened in the world," the report warned. "Everything we need to live a decent life is directly related to water: our health, food safety, habitats, economy, infrastructure and climate," said Dutch King Willem-Alexander, who is summit co-chair alongside the president of Tajikistan. — AFP

Grand Mosque opens its doors...

Continued from Page 1

culture among various segments of the society, through seminars, lectures, conferences and cultural forums. Within the Grand Mosque preparations for the holy month of Ramadan, a complete Tarawih prayers schedule of 10 reciters have been set, added Al-Enezi, noting that there will be a lot of activities and events during Ramadan, such as Quran memorizing competitions, preparing Ramadan banquets and many other activities. Director of the Grand Mosque Administration Ali Shaddad told KUNA that they are eager to serve worshippers, especially in Ramadan after the suspension of night prayer for three years due to COVID-19 and the maintenance works in the mosque.

Google launches ChatGPT rival in...

Continued from Page 1

"We've learned a lot so far by testing Bard, and the next critical step in improving it is to get feedback from more people," Google vice presidents Sissie Hsiao and Eli Collins said in a blog post. As exciting as chatbots can be, they have their faults, Hsiao and Collins cautioned. Google has so far proceeded more carefully in its rollout of generative AI to consumers, in contrast to Microsoft's choice to swiftly make the products available despite reports of problems. ChatGPT's OpenAI is backed by Microsoft, which earlier this year said it would finance the research company to the tune of billions of dollars.

Asked by AFP how its product was different from ChatGPT, Bard said that unlike its Microsoft-backed ri-

val it was "able to access and process information from the real world through Google Search and keep my response consistent with search results." The bot also underlined that it was still "under development, while ChatGPT has been released to the public. This means that I am constantly learning and improving, while ChatGPT is likely to remain relatively unchanged." OpenAI recently released a long-awaited update of its AI technology that it said would be safer and more accurate than its predecessor.

Much of the new model's firepower, known as GPT-4, is now available to the general public via ChatGPT Plus, OpenAI's paid subscription plan and on an AI-powered version of Microsoft's Bing search engine. Microsoft has said that its quick adoption of generative AI has seen usage of its Bing search engine increase in recent weeks, but it is still a clear underdog to Google, which captures about 85 percent of the global search engine market. — AFP

International

At least 13 killed in Pakistan, Afghanistan strong earthquake

Some 50 houses collapse in the village located in the snow-capped mountains

JURM: At least 13 people were killed in Afghanistan and Pakistan by a strong earthquake felt across thousands of kilometres, but the region appeared Wednesday to have dodged the mass casualties usually associated with a tremor of such scale.

The United States Geological Survey said the magnitude 6.5 quake was centred near Jurm in northeastern Afghanistan, but the depth of 187 kilometres (116 miles) mitigated extensive damage. The quake, which struck around 09:30 pm (1700 GMT) Kabul time on Tuesday and lasted more than 30 seconds, was felt from central Asia to New Delhi in India—more than 2,000 kilometres away.

“It was a powerful earthquake and we feared maximum damage due to the intensity—that’s why we issued an alert,” Bilal Faizi, a spokesman for Pakistan’s emergency Rescue 1122 service in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, told AFP.

“But fortunately our fears proved wrong. Residents panicked due to the magnitude of the earthquake, but the damage was minimal.” The region is frequently hit by quakes—especially in the Hindu Kush mountain range, which lies near the junction of the Eurasian and Indian tectonic plates.

‘Stayed awake’ all night

In Jurm district, near the epicentre, a resident of one village reported no casualties despite the proximity. “We are about 2,000 to 3,000 people in our village and we all spent the night outside under the sky,” said Inamullah, reached by telephone.

“We were all scared and stayed awake the entire night.” Some 50 houses had collapsed in the village located in the snow-capped mountains, an AFP cor-

respondent who arrived in the area reported. Panicked residents of cities and towns in Afghanistan and Pakistan also fled their homes to seek safety away from buildings—with many too scared to return. “We stayed the night in our courtyard... it was cold outside, but we preferred to stay out rather than go back,” 24-year-old student Neda Raihan told AFP in Kabul. Khudadad Heights, a vast multi-storey residential block in the Pakistan capital, was evacuated after huge cracks appeared in the building.

More than 55,000 people were killed by an earthquake that struck southeastern Turkey and parts of Syria last month, heightening fears across the region. “The children started shouting that there is an earthquake. We all ran out. The horrors of the earthquake in Turkey and neighbouring countries had a strong effect on our nerves,” said Ikhlaiq Kazmi, a retired professor in the Pakistani city of Rawalpindi. Officials in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, north of Islamabad, said nine people had been killed in the quake, including two women and two children.

‘People screaming’

In Afghanistan, officials reported four dead, including a child, and 74 injured—but phone and internet links to remote parts of the country had been severed and communication was patchy. “When we were rushing out a wall of our house collapsed on the children. One lost her life,” said Abdul Baseer, a resident of Laghman province.

Officials said about 150 houses were damaged in Laghman. In the Afghan capital Kabul, shopkeeper Noor Mohammad Hanifi set up tents in the street for his family to spend the night in. “Nobody dares to



JURM, AFGHANISTAN: Residents clear debris from a damaged house at Sooch village in Jurm district of Badkhashan Province on March 22, 2023, following an overnight earthquake. At least 13 people were killed in Afghanistan and Pakistan by a strong earthquake felt across thousands of kilometers. — AFP

go inside their homes,” Hanifi told AFP as his family, cloaked in blankets, took shelter.

In Afghanistan, many families were out of their homes celebrating Nowruz, the Persian New Year, when the quake struck. “I heard people screaming and yelling as they came out in the streets,” said Masieh, who was outside with his family when the tremor hit. “It’s possible that there could be another tremor so I’m still waiting outside,” he said late on Tuesday. Those indoors also quickly left their houses and apartments. “They just fled without wearing shoes, just carrying their children in their hands,” an AFP correspondent said.

Spain lawmakers reject far-right no-confidence motion

MADRID: Spanish lawmakers on Wednesday roundly rejected a no-confidence motion against socialist Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez brought by the far-right Vox party and fronted by an 89-year-old former communist.

After nearly 14 hours of parliamentary debate which began early Tuesday, the motion was rejected with 201 votes against, to 53 in favour and 91 abstentions in the 350-seat chamber. It never had a chance of success given it was only supported by Vox’s 52 MPs, although it secured one extra vote from an independent lawmaker.

As pledged, the right-wing opposition Popular Party (PP) abstained. The no-confidence move—which was defended by elderly economist, Ramon Tamames, who does not belong to Vox—comes two months before local and regional polls in Spain on May 28 and ahead of a December general election.

“We will not vote in favour of this motion out of respect for the Spanish people, and we will not vote against this motion out of respect for you, Mr. Tamames,” the PP’s number two, Cuca Gamarra, told lawmakers ahead of the vote. An earlier Vox-led no-con-

Pakistan’s Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif ordered the National Disaster Management Authority to be ready to deal with any emergency. Last June more than 1,000 people were killed and tens of thousands made homeless after a 5.9-magnitude quake—the deadliest in Afghanistan in nearly a quarter of a century—struck the impoverished province of Paktika.

Afghanistan is in the grips of a humanitarian disaster that deepened with the Taliban takeover of the country in August 2021. International development funding on which the South Asian country relied dried up after the takeover and assets held abroad were frozen. — AFP

fidence motion in October 2020 also failed but the PP had voted against, with Wednesday’s decision to abstain drawing fierce criticism from Sanchez.

Vying to govern

“It is remarkable and revealing to see the traditional right... getting closer and closer to the far-right,” he said, accusing opposition leader Alberto Nunez Feijoo, who is not a lawmaker and did not attend the vote, of seeking to appease Vox ahead of the elections. “What does the absent leader of the traditional right say today in the face of history repeating itself? He is silent. But his silence says it all: they know they need Vox to be able to govern,” Sanchez said. Vox became Spain’s third-largest party when it entered parliament in 2019, and last year won its first share of power in one of Spain’s regional governments alongside the PP.

It is a model the party is hoping to repeat with polls suggesting the PP would win December’s election but would need Vox’s support to govern. However, Vox’s ultra-conservative stance, notably over abortion in recent months, has embarrassed the PP which has sought to distance itself from the faction.

Despite the motion’s rejection, Vox leader Santiago Abascal said he was “satisfied”. “Once again, we have exposed one of the worst governments in our history,” he told reporters. “We knew what the outcome (of the vote) would be but above all we were satisfied with the debate, we wanted this government to be exposed and it was.” — AFP



UKHIA: A Rohingya refugee child walks back to his makeshift shelter after collecting water at Hakimpura refugee camp in Bangladesh’s Ukhia district. — AFP

Rohingya sceptical of Myanmar refugee return offer

COX BAZAR: Rohingya refugees said Wednesday they doubted Myanmar was offering a genuine return to their homeland, as a spokesman for the country’s military junta said it would begin welcoming back members of the persecuted minority as soon as next month. A delegation of 17 officials from Myanmar’s junta was in Bangladesh this week to interview potential candidates for return, more than five years after a brutal military crackdown drove immense numbers of Rohingya out of their homes.

The visit, brokered by China and partly facilitated by the United Nations, jumpstarted a repatriation agreement between the two countries that has languished for years, partly over fears that the refugees would not be safe on their return. But Rohingya interviewed by the delegation told AFP that none of their queries about security or recognition of their right to citizenship in Myanmar had been answered.

“They used to treat us badly there. I asked whether we would be able to live a normal life there, but then they stopped me,” Shamsun Nahar, a 40-year-old Rohingya woman, told AFP. “They did not want any more questions,” she added. “I don’t think they will take us to Myanmar. If they do, they won’t give us any rights.” The Myanmar delegation left Wednesday after a week in the sprawling refugee camps home to around a million Rohingya. Junta spokesman Zaw Min Tun told AFP after their departure that Myanmar would likely begin

the repatriation process by mid-April and would welcome around 1,000 refugees at first. Myanmar’s representatives were officially there to assess refugees for potential return, based partly on whether they could prove their residence in the country before the 2017 crackdown. But another refugee interviewed by the delegation said documentation proving his residency was treated with scepticism. “I provided all the documents, they said ‘hmm’,” Soyod Hossain, 50, told AFP. “I don’t think they believe that our documents were genuine.”

‘Token’ return

The Rohingya are widely viewed in Myanmar as interlopers from Bangladesh, despite roots in the country stretching back centuries, and are stateless after Myanmar ceased recognising their citizenship in 2015. Junta chief Min Aung Hlaing, who has dismissed the Rohingya identity as “imaginary”, was head of the armed forces during the 2017 crackdown. That year’s violence is now subject to a genocide investigation, with the International Court of Justice probing allegations of rape, murder and arson against entire Rohingya villages by Myanmar’s security forces.

The Arakan Rohingya National Alliance, a prominent Rohingya diaspora group, accused Myanmar last week of planning to orchestrate a “token” return of refugees to avoid the court’s censure. The UN refugee agency said once again Sunday that conditions in Myanmar remained unsuitable for the “sustainable return” of Rohingya refugees. But civil society groups have criticised the agency for facilitating the transport of Myanmar officials into Bangladesh last week as part of the return scheme. A repatriation plan was first agreed upon soon after the 2017 crackdown but failed to make any significant headway.—AFP

Algeria to return envoy to France after standoff

ALGIERS: Algeria will send its ambassador back to France soon, President Abdelmadjid Tebboune said weeks after he withdrew the envoy following a diplomatic spat over a French-Algerian activist. Algiers withdrew its envoy in early February after accusing its former colonial ruler of helping activist Amira Bouraoui’s “clandestine and illegal exfiltration” from Algeria to France after she was sentenced to two years in jail for “offending Islam” and for insulting the president. But in an interview with pan-Arabic news channel Al-Jazeera quoted by state news agency APS, Tebboune said its ambassador, Said Moussi, would “soon be back in Paris”. “Our relationship with France is fluctuating,” he said.

Algerian-French ties fell into crisis in late 2021 after controversial comments on Algerian history by French President Emmanuel Macron. But Macron visited the vast North African country last August, signing a joint declaration with Tebboune to relaunch bilateral cooperation. The Bouraoui affair has reignited tensions. Al-

gerian authorities have placed four people in pre-trial detention over the case, prosecutors said in February. A prominent figure in a 2014 protest movement against then-president Abdelaziz Bouteflika’s bid for a fourth term in office, Bouraoui was also involved in the Hirak protest movement which unseated him in 2019. She was sentenced in June 2020 to two years in prison before being granted provisional release the following month, but banned from leaving Algeria.

‘Point of no return’

During the interview, Tebboune also addressed his country’s relations with its regional rival Morocco, a year and a half after Algiers cut ties with Rabat, citing “hostile acts”. “We regret to see relations between Algeria and Morocco get to this stage,” he said. “They’ve reached a point of no return and our position was reactive.” Algeria is deeply opposed to Morocco over Rabat’s ties with and arms purchases from the Zionist entity, as well as over the Western Sahara dispute. Morocco occupies most of the former Spanish colony and sees it as part of its sovereign territory, but Algeria backs the Polisario movement which seeks independence there. Spanish premier Pedro Sanchez’s government last year broke with decades of neutrality on the issue, declaring it now backed a Moroccan proposal for limited self-rule under Moroccan sovereignty.—AFP



SIEM REAP: Cambodia’s King Norodom Sihamoni (2nd R) lights the torch with a candle lit from the sun’s rays as Prime Minister Hun Sen (R) looks on during a ceremony prior to the 32nd SEA Games at Angkor Wat temple in Siem Reap province on March 21, 2023. — AFP

Cambodian oppn activists charged with insulting king

PHNOM PENH: Two Cambodian opposition activists were charged with insulting the king and incitement Wednesday following Facebook posts the authorities deemed disrespectful to the monarch, according to court warrants.

Human rights activists had previously warned enactment of the 2018 lese majeste law, which carries a sentence of between one and five years in prison, could be wielded to target dissent. The two youth activists—Yim Sinorn and Hun Kosal—were arrested on Tuesday evening after posting allegedly insulting language against King Norodom Sihamoni on Facebook.

Yim Sinorn, a close aide to opposition leader Kem Sokha, posted “according to the voice of people from coffee shops, today we can clearly see who is the real King”. Hun Kosal also posted that he would gather behind Kem Sokha to protect the monarch

and the throne after “seeing they mistreat the feeling and dishonour the Khmer King.”

The activists wrote the posts after King Sihamoni, Prime Minister Hun Sen and senior government officials attended a live-televised ceremony at Angkor Wat temple on Tuesday morning to light the torch for the upcoming SEA Games in Cambodia.

In two separate warrants, seen by AFP, a judge on Wednesday night ordered the detention of the two activists “on charges of insulting the king and incitement to commit a serious unrest to social security”. Speaking at a graduation ceremony on Wednesday morning, Hun Sen said the pair had “bad intention” and vowed he won’t forgive anyone who insulted the king and himself.

“This is not a right to freedom of expression. This is an intentional slander that aims to destroy, to insult the king and to destroy the name of the prime minister,” Hun Sen said. The pair also face up to two years in jail for the incitement charge.

Phil Robertson, Human Rights Watch’s deputy Asia director, said the pair were detained “on fabricated, politically motivated charges”. Earlier this month opposition leader Kem Sokha was sentenced to 27 years in jail and placed under house arrest for treason. Cambodia will go to polls in July. — AFP

THURSDAY, MARCH 23, 2023

Business

Bolster supply chain management to ensure food security: Economist

‘Kuwait needs to reform agricultural lands, boost investments’

By Majd Othman

KUWAIT: Food security is in focus recently due to the political and economic situations around the world including the Russia-Ukraine war, financial crises and debates whether to raise the interest rate to control growing inflation. Meanwhile, food staples have been weaponized to pressure countries — for instance, the Russian invasion of Ukraine has forced the world to find alternative suppliers to secure sufficient supplies amid shortages of wheat and other raw materials.

The Kuwaiti government has announced food reserves in Kuwait are stable and can cover the country's population for six months with all basic consumables. But will the global instability force the country to rethink options to ensure its food security? And whether the presence of financial resources is enough to depend on during crises?

Economist Hajjaj Bou Khaddour stressed the importance of developing the country's food security, saying the most realistic solutions are through three steps — working on a solid supply chain management, reforming local agricultural lands and investing in agricultural lands outside Kuwait.

Bou Khaddour said proposals have been presented to the government since the early nineties based on the situation the country went through during the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait. "After the liberation, I proposed we should adopt the concept of food security, and highlighted the country must invest in it," he said. He added that as Kuwait is not an agricultural country, it has to invest in agricultural lands outside Kuwait and in the food industry as well. It is also important to work on creating a solid management of the country's supply chain, starting from the procurement of raw materials to the delivery of the product to its final destination in stores.

"Land reform for agriculture must include lands reserved for oil production, especially since Kuwait's exploitation of oil lands is only about 5 to 10 percent, while the rest of the land is also reserved for the ministry of oil," Bou Khaddour said. He pointed out technology and techniques can



Hajjaj Bou Khaddour

make it possible to develop investment methods in a way that can be adopted in Kuwait, such as using vertical farming. "There are vertical farms in many countries such as Japan," he said.

"This investment will achieve internal and external food security. Kuwait established distinguished projects during the sixties like the Food Catering Company, Flour Mills Company and the Livestock Company. The country was proactive in this field, then the wheel stopped in the seventies when food insurance came for certain items," Bou Khaddour recalled.

Financial resources

Bou Khaddour said financial resources are not a rescue factor during times of need. "For some cases it could help, but when we think about it, we are talking about food security, not food imports. It is a matter of state security in terms of food. Therefore, it is required to secure food through a strong strategic dimension," he said.

"Investing in the agricultural lands, whether outside or inside the country, will save plenty of money in the import budget, especially since consumer prices are constantly rising exponentially," he highlighted, pointing out that despite the importance of a local role in cooperating to help in this issue, unfortunately there are no institutions equivalent to Kuwait Flour Mills to lend a hand as well.

Expected results

Regarding the expected results from creating a supply chain management (CSM), he said the rate of food savings will be much higher, as it will exceed the period of five years instead of only six months. "The benefits of supply chain management are that

ing pay rises won by some sectors thanks to mass strike action. The BoE—caught between hiking rates to dampen hot inflation or pausing owing to chaos in the commercial banking sector—unveils its latest monetary policy announcement Thursday.

The world's central banks are rushing to contain fallout from the recent collapse of two regional US banks and the enforced buyout of troubled Credit Suisse by its Swiss rival UBS. Rate decisions are due also from the Federal Reserve on Wednesday—and Thursday in Switzerland and Norway.

'Compelled' to hike

Nigel Green, head of financial consultancy de Vere Group, said the BoE was "likely to feel compelled to continue increasing interest rates" following the UK inflation data. "This is despite growing fears over the unfolding confidence crisis in the global banking system." The BoE has gradually increased its key rate to 4.0 percent from a record-low 0.1 percent in December 2021.

Yet inflation remains in double digits, fuelled by rampant food and energy prices in the wake of Russia's war on Ukraine. "The re-acceleration in overall CPI inflation... may be enough to tilt the BoE towards raising interest rates from 4.0 percent to 4.25 percent tomorrow," said Paul Dales, chief UK economist at Capital Economics.

"The recent tightening in financial conditions caused by the banking turmoil will probably weaken UK economic activity and underlying price pressures. "But the Bank of England may well want to see hard evidence of that before it

Less competition

"This is where the question arises of what skills will be kept, said Cordonier, as the profiles of the two banks, although close, are not identical. So far, many questions remain unanswered.

Such a takeover would normally need months of negotiations, but UBS only had a couple of days, under some serious arm-twisting by Swiss authorities.

UBS chief executive Ralph Hamers admitted at an analysts' conference that he did not yet have all the details of the takeover. Switzerland is a confederation of 26 cantons and Cordonier said the alternative could be to turn from the national banks to the cantonal banks.

However, many do not currently have the skills to help companies export to far-off markets such as Asia, and would have to develop them. The other option is to turn to foreign banks, although they would not possess "in-depth knowledge of the Swiss market, Cordonier said.

"If there is only one major bank that has the capacity to work abroad, this will restrict the choice of solutions for companies, said the engineer, who is also concerned about the repercussions on costs "if there is less competition.

Founded in 1856 by Alfred Escher, the godfather of Swiss railways, Credit Suisse was closely linked



KUWAIT: A vendor puts fresh vegetables and fruits for display at his stall in Souk Mubarakiya in this file photo. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

it is not limited by time; it is continuous and permanent. It will also achieve what is called sustainable development," Bou Khaddour said. "As a quick solution, there are too many lands in the hands of the government, which must be invested in setting up warehouses, even with the BOT system, especially if the government decides one day to implement the CSM system, so it won't be facing obstacles."

UAE experience

In 2017, the Department of Agriculture and Livestock in Sharjah announced a local initiative titled "Emirates wheat", to operate a wheat farm in Maliha area, representing national efforts in the field of enhancing food security, which extends over an area of 1,900 hectares, according to Emirates news agency WAM. The initiative today produces more than 80

tons of wheat at the state level during the harvest season, according to Emarat alyoum.

On Monday, Ruler of Sharjah and Member of the Supreme Council Sheikh Sultan bin Muhammad Al-Qasimi clarified that the wheat produced in Sharjah is considered one of the best in the world as it contains the highest percentage of protein and is free from chemicals, fertilizers and other substances harmful to human health.

Meanwhile, UAE benefited from its location as a geographic gateway between the East and West, and succeeded in developing a commercial system that made it a trade corridor and one of the most important transport corridors and re-exporter of many products, including wheat, while it exported about 100,000 tons of wheat in 2017/2018, according to Arabic RT.

Surprise jump in UK inflation deals new blow

LONDON: British inflation unexpectedly accelerated in February, official data showed Wednesday, deepening a cost-of-living crisis and pressuring the Bank of England to hike interest rates further despite global markets turmoil. After slowing for three straight months, the UK Consumer Prices Index shot up to 10.4 percent in February—not far from 40-year highs and more than five times the BoE's target. That followed CPI of 10.1 percent in January and dashed expectations for a slowdown to 9.9 percent.

'Tough' times

Wednesday's data comes after the UK government last week forecast inflation would slow sharply to 2.9 percent by year-end, adding that the country would avoid recession in 2023. The predictions were published alongside finance minister Jeremy Hunt's £94-billion (\$114-billion) cost-of-living measures for this year and next. "We recognize just how tough things are for families across the country, so as we work towards getting inflation under control we will help families with cost-of-living support," Hunt said Wednesday.

Soaring inflation continues to erode the value of wages for millions of UK workers, even follow-

Swiss sweat over size of new superbank

ZURICH: The arranged marriage of UBS and Credit Suisse will create the biggest bank Switzerland has ever seen, with some wondering if the superbank might be too big for its own good. The deal struck late Sunday prevented the collapse of the country's second-biggest lender by folding it into the largest.

Even before last week's dramatic events, both firms were already among the 30 around the world deemed of strategic importance to the global banking system and therefore too big to fail. Some in business, industry and politics are not convinced that one even bigger bank will turn out for the better.

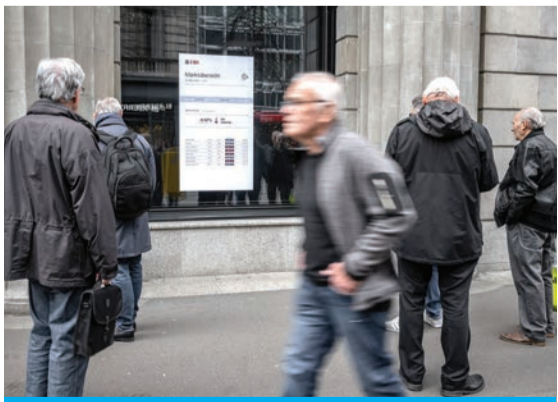
"Credit Suisse was really the bank of the economy and industry, said Philippe Cordonier of Swissmem, the national association representing the engineering industry. For exporting companies, Credit Suisse offered a range of services essential for international transactions, "payments abroad, credits, leasing or currency hedging, he told AFP.



LONDON: In this file photo taken on February 20, 2023, a sign displays the price in pound sterling for a pineapple, displayed alongside fruit and vegetables at a market stall in east London. — AFP

stops raising interest rates," Dales added. Widespread salad and vegetable shortages sent UK food prices rocketing to their highest rate of increase in more than 45 years last month, the Office for National Statistics said Wednesday.

ONS chief economist Grant Fitzner said this was caused by high energy costs and bad weather across Europe. Inflation was driven also by rising alcohol prices in pubs and restaurants after recent discounting. Inflation around the world last year struck the highest levels in decades, while the UK rate peaked at 11.1 percent in October. —AFP



ZURICH: People watch a market board at the headquarters of Swiss giant banking UBS in Zurich. —AFP

to the country's economic development. The bank financed the expansion of the rail network, the construction of the Gotthard Tunnel beneath the Alps, and the start-up of Swiss companies that went on to become leaders in their sector. "Twenty-five years ago, there were four big Swiss banks, recalled the Swiss Federation of Companies, which represents small and medium enterprises. —AFP

Sri Lanka leader warns hard times to follow IMF bailout

COLOMBO: Sri Lanka's president warned Wednesday of more economic pain to come for the crisis-hit nation, with strict austerity measures needed to restore its ruined finances after an IMF bailout deal. The International Monetary Fund approved its long-delayed rescue package on Monday after China, the South Asian island's biggest bilateral lender, offered debt relief assurances.

President Ranil Wickremesinghe lauded the deal in a speech to parliament as a milestone in Sri Lanka's recovery from last year's unprecedented economic crisis. But he also told lawmakers that the bailout was only the first step in more difficult structural reforms. "The IMF loan is not an end in itself, this is the beginning of a long and more difficult journey," Wickremesinghe said.

"We have to traverse it with care and courage. The only objective is to rebuild the economy."

Sri Lanka defaulted on its \$46 billion foreign debt last April after nearly exhausting its foreign exchange reserves, making it almost impossible for importers to source vital goods. The island nation's 22 million people endured months of food and petrol shortages, along with runaway inflation and prolonged blackouts, as a result. Wickremesinghe has sought to restore government coffers by sharp tax hikes and ending generous consumer subsidies on fuel and electricity.

On Wednesday he said more taxes were on the cards to meet the IMF's demand that Sri Lanka halve its spend on foreign debt servicing from the 9 percent of GDP recorded last year.

The IMF also requires Sri Lanka to set up tough anti-corruption laws and sell off cash-bleeding state companies, including beleaguered carrier SriLankan Airlines. Wickremesinghe said the government would assume the external debts of key public companies to make them more attractive to investors.

Trade unions have opposed the austerity program with strikes crippling the health and transport sectors last week and warnings of further industrial action to come. — AFP

Business

Boubyan Bank distributes 6% in cash dividends and 6% in bonus shares

Bank holds AGM with an attendance of 83.1%



KUWAIT: Abdulaziz Abdullah Dakheel Al-Shaya and Adel Abdul Wahab Al-Majed during Boubyan Bank AGM.



KUWAIT: Abdulaziz Abdullah Dakheel Al-Shaya and Adel Abdul Wahab Al-Majed.

KUWAIT: Chairman of Boubyan Bank Abdulaziz Abdullah Dakheel Al-Shaya reiterated the bank's ongoing endeavors to achieve excellent and accelerating growth of financial indicators and market shares in a manner that benefits all its shareholders and the Kuwaiti economy, in addition to focusing on quality customer service and upskilling the bank's human resources, which turns Boubyan into a banking and digital powerhouse in Kuwait and the region.

In his word before the bank's general assembly held with an attendance of 83.1 percent, with physical and electronic attendance by shareholders, Al-Shaya said that Boubyan concluded last year by recording KD 57.8 million in net profits at a growth rate of 19 percent with a earnings per share of 14.2 fils. Moreover, the bank continued its prudential approach by allocating KD 43.6 million in provisions.

He added: "All of the bank's key indicators witnessed a remarkable growth in 2022, where the total combined assets of Boubyan Bank Group increased to KD 7.9 billion at a growth rate of 7 percent. Moreover, the total of customers' deposits grew by 6 percent to reach KD 6 billion while the financing portfolio grew by 7 percent to reach KD 5.9 billion and operating income grew by 7 percent to reach KD 201 million.

Al-Shaya thanked all shareholders for their trust in Boubyan Bank's Board of Directors, which reflected positively on supporting the bank's journey as a part of its well-studied strategy at the level of the banking sector, thus leading to positive indicators across all levels despite the domestic and global challenges that affected the performance of banks and other business sectors in general.

Al-Shaya stressed the board's full and ongoing support to the efforts of the bank's highly-professional executive management, stating that he valued their efforts towards achieving the best results, which could not have been achieved without the sincere efforts of the management and all employees of the bank.

Approval of profit distribution

During the general assembly meeting, it was approved to distribute 6 percent in cash dividends and 6 percent in bonus shares to eligible shareholders who are registered with the bank's registers as at the end of the maturity date of April 17, 2023 and to allocate the same to shareholders on April 19, 2023. The board of directors shall be authorized to dispose of the share fractions and amend this schedule in case the confirmation thereof is not announced at least eight business days ahead of the maturity date as stipulated and in line with the provisions of the Law.

Furthermore, the Ordinary General Assembly approved the proposal of the Board of Directors to distribute dividends to shareholders at the end of the financial year or semi-annually, and authorized the Board to execute the decision of the General Assembly as per the percentages decided by the Board.

On his part, Boubyan Bank's Vice-Chairman & Group Chief Executive Officer Adel Abdul Wahab Al-Majed stated: "Throughout its successful journey, Boubyan Bank managed to become one of the leading banks in the Islamic banking sector, locally and regionally, through effective application of sound governance bases and principles.

"The bank's market share and its ongoing growth, coupled with the continued reinforcement of our expansion plans, reflect the high levels in customer service and digital excellence, which are the fruit of the bank's clear strategy, professional executive team, and continued investment in our human resources with special focus on our national cadres", Al-Majed added.

Nomo Bank and expansion overseas

He added: "In line with the strategic approach aiming to reinforce the global presence of Boubyan Bank with focus on digital banking services, Boubyan Bank managed in 2020 to complete the acquisition of the UK-based Bank of London and The Middle East "BLME" by acquiring 71 percent of its existing shares. We aspire for BLME to become the Islamic bank of choice for GCC customers in the United Kingdom as we have incorporated a set of main principles for the bank as a part of its transformation strategy following the acquisition including having a sustainable customer-focused brand aligned with Boubyan Bank Group."

He went on to add "One of those principles is making the best use of the group's existing business, technology, assets and the group's network in addition to breaking from capital and liquidity restrictions by shifting the focus of growth towards capital-efficient business, and offering business products and services that meet market needs for GCC customers while developing a future-proof tech-platform that caters for existing and future needs."

Speaking about Nomo's experience, Al-Majed



The attendance of Boubyan Bank's AGM.

Al-Shaya: Boubyan turned into a banking and digital powerhouse in Kuwait and region

Al-Majed: Our vision to become the leading Islamic bank in innovative digital financial solutions

said: "Through Nomo, the bank aspires to become the Islamic bank of choice for GCC customers in the United Kingdom."

He elaborated: "Nomo continues to leave its mark on the Islamic digital banking sector through the recent launch of many products such as the sharia-compliant property finance product, which allows all customers in the Middle East to own properties in the United Kingdom in a major step towards employing the digital bank's services in providing easier, more convenient, and secure property finance solutions.

Additionally, it has launched its new multi-currency account which allows customers to perform banking transactions in 6 different currencies and to link them all to one Nomo card and Apple Pay to use them globally, thus offering easier, more convenient, and secure digital payment solutions."

18th anniversary

Al-Majed added: "We celebrate Boubyan Bank's 18th anniversary following its incorporation as an Islamic financial institution. Over those years, the bank managed to confirm its status as one of the most important Kuwaiti banks that made lots of achievements and successes in the local market despite its establishment since a relatively short period compared with other banks."

He went on to highlight: "Boubyan Bank's digital transformation strategy gained a significant momentum, being a real example for succeeding in being highly competitive regionally in digital services, and in changing the lives of our customers through our services and products. Our digital services' journey is very exceptional. It has seen us excel and climb to the top of the pyramid amid tough competition in the market for digital banking services which is growing rapidly."

National cadres, the real power

Al-Majed stated: "Boubyan continued supporting its human resources and recruiting national cadres, and was able to reach the highest percentage of manpower across the private sector which now exceeds 80 percent, and continued its enablement approach for women who now account for 26 percent of the bank's employees, with many of them occupying leadership positions."

In 2022, Boubyan Bank invested in its human cadres to improve their competence and sharpen their skills by offering them training programs and courses in cooperation with top companies specialized in human resources' consulting and development. This came out of Boubyan Bank's keenness to adopt leading international standards to ensure that the bank is ready for future challenges by qualifying its leaders and providing them with the necessary tools to sufficiently compete in the market.

A year of achievements

Moreover, Al-Majed highlighted Boubyan Bank's achievements during 2022 and its success in earning many awards from renowned regional and international institutions in addition to the ongoing improvement of its credit ratings from international rating agencies, reflecting the positive role played by the bank along with its outstanding contributions to the Islamic banking industry in various areas.

Last year, Boubyan Bank received an upgrade of its credit rating from Moody's and Standard & Poor's, where the bank's "long-term issuer credit rating" received an upgrade to A2 and A respectively; such ratings placed Boubyan Bank in the lead of local banks and ahead of all Islamic banks rated by Standard & Poor's in Kuwait, while ranking second at the level of all local banks rated by Moody's and Fitch.

Moreover, Global Finance named Boubyan Bank the "World's Best Islamic Digital Bank" for the eighth consecutive year, owing to the bank's continuous achievements in this area as well as the role Boubyan plays in offering the best digital services in Kuwait, and its acquisition of influential market shares. Additionally, the bank joined the annual list of Forbes Top 100 Listed Companies in the Middle East, which crowns a decade full of achievements and successes that took the bank to the top of the pyramid of the Kuwaiti banking industry.

Continuous excellence to ensure customers' satisfaction

Al-Majed elaborated: "Our priority continues to be our readiness to serve our customers and our ongoing focus on offering excellent products or services, be they digital or conventional, as well as our engagement with our customers. This qualified us to earn two awards recently from Service Hero, the international consumer-driven customer satisfaction index. The bank was named the Best Islamic Bank in Customer Service for the 13th year in a row since 2010, in addition to receiving the First Place Award in Customer Service as a Country Winner across all economic sectors in Kuwait."

"Boubyan Bank continues in the leading position among all conventional and Islamic local banks, evidenced by a customer-satisfaction score of 98 percent. Moreover, we increased the number of our branches and redesigned them to better serve our customers nation-wide, in addition to revising our procedures to guarantee a better, easier, quicker, and smoother banking experience to our customers," he added.

Corporate banking: Outstanding solutions

Speaking about corporate banking, Al-Majed stated: "Attracting companies across various sectors in the local market is one of the most important goals of Boubyan Bank to be achieved through offering a group of outstanding banking services and solutions that meet all the needs of corporate customers. The Corporate Banking Group is keen on developing and improving advanced digital products and services that support and expand the scope of offered services, thereby reinforcing the banking services. Also, SMEs always have the constant support of Boubyan Bank, leading to the growth of their business by offering them the best banking services and solutions."

During this year, Boubyan Bank announced the launch of a new service offered for the first time in the local market for instant collection of commercial receivables of suppliers and extension of payment terms for them, allowing customers to better manage their liquidity by improving financial statements of companies, by offering preferential financing rates through integrated solutions of a smart supply chain financing platform.

Maintaining leadership in digital services

Over the recent years, Boubyan managed to monopolize Global Finance's award for the World's Best Islamic Digital Bank owing to the strength of strategy set by the bank for attracting and servicing digital customers, getting clients to use digital offerings and providing them with cutting-edge services, and growth of customers who use digital banking services through the bank's various channels, whether through online banking or smart phones.

Boubyan Bank was also a pioneer and outperformed others in digital services by launching Boubyan Send, the international transfer service, in collaboration with Mastercard and Western Union to offer the highest levels of digital services and guarantee quick service while ensuring the safety and security of information and banking data of customers. This service aimed to keep pace with the developments witnessed by the banking sector, which necessitate the instant completion of financial transactions around the clock in a safe and secure manner.

Boubyan has recently provided its customers with Apple Pay, Google Pay services for users of Android devices, and Wear OS in Kuwait. This step comes as a part of Boubyan's steps to develop a set of innovative digital payment solutions to provide customers with state-of-the-art payment technology to offer them a unique banking experience that meets their expectations and needs while ensuring the highest levels of excellent and comprehensive protection and security."

Corporate social responsibility, biggest challenge

Corporate social responsibility and serving the Kuwaiti society represent the cornerstone of the bank's dealings with various segments in contribution to development. Hence, the bank was a pioneer in launching many social initiatives and supporting several activities and events targeting various segments of the society, out of the bank's belief in the necessity of implementing ESG principles, which cover many major aspects that concern our customers, shareholders, employees, and the society as a whole.

During the past year, the bank launched its "Go Green" initiative, which was the first initiative of its kind in Kuwait. It allowed customers to own electric cars, in a major step towards reinforcing the sustainability approach. The "Go Green" initiative aims to encourage the replacement of traditional cars with environmentally-friendly electric cars, which will help protect the environment and deal with climate changes.

Also, as a part of its corporate social responsibility, Boubyan Bank organized workshops to various government entities and institutions on enhancing efficiency, effectiveness, and change management.

Sound governance

Boubyan Bank is committed to following a sound and effective governance framework by adopting the best sound governance and risk management standards. The bank complies with these standards in concluding all transactions according to the principles and rulings of the noble Islamic sharia. Boubyan Bank continuously updates its governance structure in a manner that meets the requirements of the Central Bank of Kuwait, and the banking industry-specific governance procedures.

Thanks and appreciations

"For myself and on behalf of all Boubyan Bank's employees, I would like to take this opportunity to express deepest thanks and appreciation to His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, may Allah protect him as well as to HH the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, and HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, may Allah protect them all. We deeply thank them for all their efforts towards the development and growth of our dear country, and to guarantee the stability and security of everyone who considers this blessed land home," Al-Shaya concluded his word in the general assembly meeting.

He added: "I would also like to express the deepest thanks to all the executives of the Central Bank of Kuwait, headed by Governor Basel Al-Haroon, who spared no effort to take the actions deemed appropriate to develop and safeguard the Kuwaiti banking system. I would also like to express deepest thanks to all the bank's esteemed shareholders and customers who have always been the key factor behind our success by supporting us in overcoming our challenges.

Moreover, I would like to thank all members of the Sharia Supervisory Board at the bank for their great efforts, and I would like to thank members of the Board of Directors and the Executive Management, as well as all the bank's employees for their cooperation, commitment, and keenness in supporting the bank for the benefit of the bank and its shareholders."

Business

Manpower shortage dims solar power boom in Germany

Europe's biggest economy struggles to ramp up share of renewable energy

BERLIN: Balancing on a sloping tiled roof, apprentice Pascal Ode installs a solar panel under the watchful eye of his trainer. Hopes are high that Ode may soon be able to install the systems on both homes and businesses. When he is trained, he will be a much-needed new pair of hands in the industry that is crucial to Germany's energy transition—but is suffering from an acute worker shortage.

Demand for new photovoltaic panels soared as Europe's biggest economy was forced to ramp up the share of energy produced by renewables in the wake of Russia's invasion of Ukraine which hit energy supplies, lifting prices. The conflict has led Germany to end its reliance on Russian energy, at a time when the country was also accelerating its plan to become carbon neutral.

Compared with 2021, the installed photovoltaic capacity in the residential sector has leapt by 40 percent. "Since the Russian invasion of Ukraine, many people wanted to free themselves from fossil energy and the high costs of energy," said Wolfgang Gruendinger, spokesman for Enpal, one of many companies benefitting from soaring demand. The Berlin start-up offers long-term solar panel rentals, complete with installation and maintenance. The formula is proving attractive. Enpal, which began business in 2017, said it has rented 40,000 kits to individuals, including 18,000 last year alone.

It currently installs 2,000 kits a month. "Demand is very strong. We have to install many units in the shortest possible time, while at the same time, we are seeing huge shortages in qualified workers," said Alexander Friedrich, who was hired by the company to train new employees. To cope with the demand, Enpal set up its own training school last year in Blankenfelde, in the south of Berlin, to train workers to install panels, as well as train specialized electricians to work on photovoltaic panels.

"We are recruiting people from all backgrounds—former pizza workers, cooks, delivery riders, taxi drivers," said Gruendinger. The company puts about 100

new hires through the school each month. Among them is Ode, 19, who responded to an advertisement on Instagram offering the four-week training.

'Something new'

Learning "something new" had attracted him to take on the challenge, he told AFP.

"I really enjoy the fact that it is a job that comes with fresh air and that you're always on the road," he added. Enpal does not have prohibitive education criteria for their new hires. But one key requirement is for new recruits to climb a high ladder reaching at least two storeys up to screen out those with a fear of heights. The sound of drills, screwdrivers and metal components being handled by groups of apprentices reverberated around the training hangar.

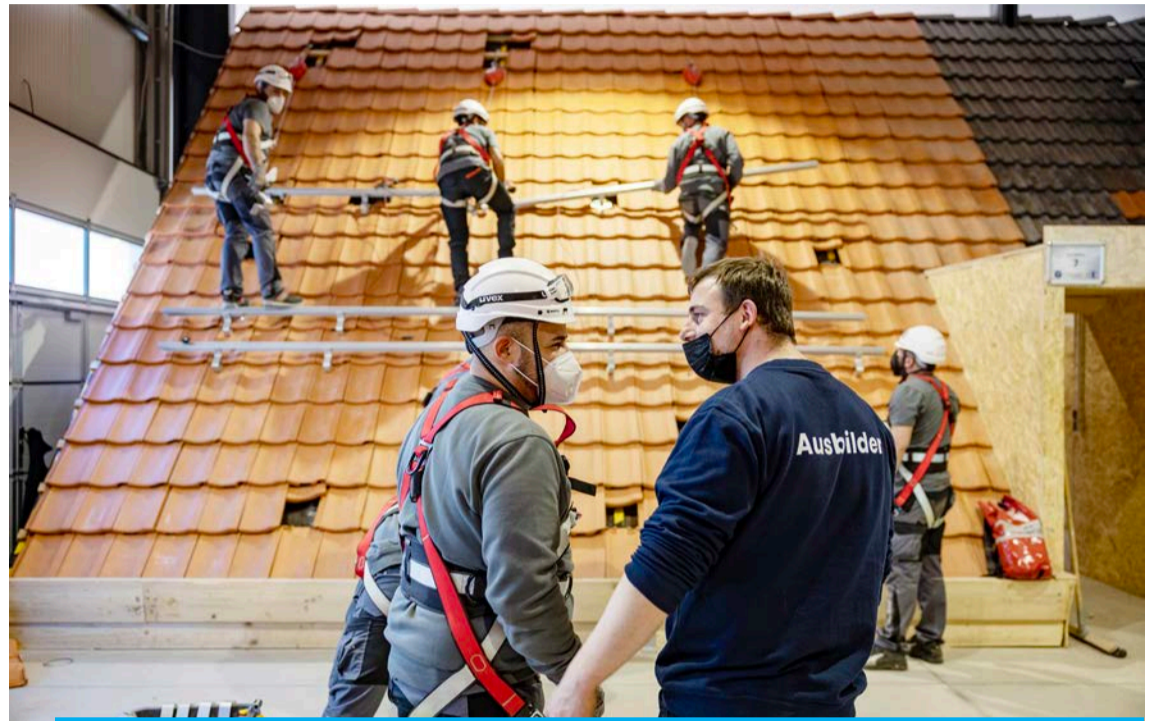
Wearing helmets and attached to ropes, the trainees were practicing on roof replicas mounted on the ground. Their task is urgent.

Germany is aiming for 80 percent of its energy needs to be covered by renewables by 2030, against 46 percent a year ago. To do so, lawmakers have set a target of installing 215 gigawatts (GW) of photovoltaic capacity by 2030 -- meaning that annual rate of installation has to be tripled from last year's effort of 7.2 GW.

The plan is for roofs of factories and commercial buildings, as well as fields, to be covered with them, according to draft legislation promoting their installation. But "the shortage of qualified workers threatens to slow down the energy transition", warned the Cologne-based think-tank German Economic Institute (IW) in a recent report. The worker gap is so wide that the Federation of Solar Industries BSW said it was looking to Chancellor Olaf Scholz's ambitious immigration reform to provide some relief.

The law, expected to be passed this year, is aimed at easing immigration issues. The BSW cites the example of a recent agreement that aims to attract Indian workers trained in solar energy installations.

IW estimates that there is a shortfall of 216,000 electricians, heating and air-conditioning experts,



BLANKENFELDE, Germany: Trainees install solar panels at the solar power company Enpal's training facility in Blankenfelde-Mahlow, south of Berlin.—AFP

and IT specialists necessary to develop the solar and wind energy sector in Germany. The figure does not take into account plans to bring back production of solar panels to Germany.

Bring production back

Currently, 80 percent of the panels' components come from China, according to the International Energy Agency. The massive reliance on the Asian giant for the supply chain for materials such as polysilicon, wafers, cells and modules has come to the fore for Germany after it was recently stung by

its dependency on Russian energy.

Once a leader in producing photovoltaic cells, with market heavyweights in the 2000s like Solarworld, Q-Cells and Centrotherm, Germany has seen its market share plunge after state subsidies dried up and China ramped up its production. Over the past two decades, some 100,000 jobs in the sector have been lost. But the trend may be starting to reverse.

Swiss specialist in the sector, Meyer Burger, built a factory at Thalheim, east Germany, in 2021, spurred by lower production costs and growing homegrown demand.—AFP

Moody's assigns first time ratings for Elaf Islamic Bank

LIMASSOL, Cyprus: Moody's Investors Service (Moody's) has assigned first time local and foreign currency long-term and short-term bank deposit ratings of Caa2/NP for Elaf Islamic Bank (EIB). At the same time, the rating agency has assigned a Baseline Credit Assessment (BCA) and Adjusted BCA of caa2, long-term and short-term Counterparty Risk (CR) Assessments of Caa1(cr)/NP(cr), long-term local and foreign currency Counterparty Risk Ratings (CRRs) of Caa1, and short-term local and foreign currency CRRs of NP. The outlook assigned to the long-term deposit ratings is stable.

Ratings rationale

Elaf Islamic Bank (EIB) is a privately owned bank registered and incorporated in Iraq since 2001. The bank changed its name from Al Baraka Bank for Investment and Finance to Elaf Islamic Bank in 2007. EIB provides sharia-compliant banking and financial services through 16 branches inside Iraq. Paid up capital is 250 billion Iraqi dinars (IQD), equivalent to around \$171 million.

EIB's Caa2 long-term deposit ratings take into consideration the bank's caa2 BCA and no uplift from the Government of Iraq (Caa1 stable), based on Moody's expectation of a low probability of government support, given the bank's relatively small size in the country's banking system and the government's track record of allowing private banks to fail.

Rationale for BCA

EIB's caa2 BCA reflects Moody's expectation that the bank will maintain adequate capital, low profitability and ample liquidity buffers. These are balanced by strained asset quality largely due to the bank's impaired letter of guarantees (LGs) portfolio, claims of funds misappropriation by a previous board member which resulted in change of the board of directors in 2019, and sizeable balances with the Central Bank of Iraq (CBI) which closely links EIB's credit profile to that of Iraqi government's Caa1 issuer rating. In addition, the bank's BCA is also constrained by the highly challenging operating environment in Iraq.

Gulf Bank a diamond sponsor at Gust Career Fair

KUWAIT: As part of its continuous efforts to empower the youth and to establish its position as a preferred destination in the Kuwaiti financial sector, Gulf Bank participated as a diamond sponsor at the 24th Gulf University for Science and Technology (GUST) career fair which was held over three days.

Throughout the career fair, Gulf Bank representatives shed light on the nature of the workplace at the Bank by providing detailed explanations on the work structure and job opportunities available for recent graduates; in addition to conducting personal interviews for applicants.

As part of its continuous efforts to establish the principles of environmental sustainability in the society, the Bank's representatives distributed a quantity of reusable bags – aiming to encourage students to reduce the use of plastic bags, and number of small trees were also distributed as gifts.

On this occasion, the General Manager of Human Resources Department at Gulf Bank, Salma Al-Hajjaj said: "We are keen to annually participate in the Gulf University for Science and Technology (GUST) career fair, as part of our continuous efforts to support Kuwait's youth and talents. Al-Hajjaj mentioned that Gulf Bank is keen to attract young talents from various fields, as part of its efforts to consolidate its position as the bank of the future, and to align with its strategy for the year



Salma Al-Hajjaj

Good Stuff launches air-baked luqaimat on Deliveroo this Ramadan

KUWAIT: With Ramadan upon us, Deliveroo has partnered with local healthy-food destination, Good Stuff, to create a Ramadan treat to remember. The new dessert, a healthier version of luqaimat, will only be available to order through Good Stuff on Deliveroo.

Because no Ramadan meal is complete without dessert, Good Stuff has developed a limited-quantity, air-baked luqaimat dessert that will only be available to order via Deliveroo. Good Stuff's luqaimat dessert offers customers the chance to enjoy a healthier option of everyone's favorite Ramadan dessert.

"Good Stuff has always offered healthier options of favorite items such as our air-baked chicken fillet sandwich. Now, in collaboration with the excellent team at MK's Creamery, we are delighted to launch



the limited-quantity air-baked luqaimat, exclusively on Deliveroo," said Yousef Alateeqi, Good Stuff's co-owner. "The air-baked luqaimat mixed with organic sheera epitomizes our commitment to serving delicious, air-baked food made with the best ingredients available and we hope everyone enjoys them."

"Deliveroo is excited to partner with Good Stuff to offer customers a healthier, air-baked version of a Ramadan dessert that we all know and love," said Seham Al-Husaini, general manager of Deliveroo Kuwait. "Good Stuff has long been a customer favorite due to their air-baked options, organic ingredients, and delicious meals. We could not be more excited to partner with Good Stuff during Ramadan, and we can't wait for everyone to try their latest twist on luqaimat."

The new luqaimat dessert will be available on De-



Seham Al-Husaini

velopments that the banking industry is going through."

Gulf Bank's vision is to be the leading Kuwaiti Bank of the Future. The bank is constantly engaging and empowering its employees as part of an inclusive and diversified workplace in recognition of every employee's role in delivering customer excellence and serving the community at large. With its extensive network of branches and innovative digital services, Gulf Bank is able to give its customers the choice of how and where to conduct their banking transactions, all while ensuring a simple and seamless banking experience. Gulf Bank is committed to maintaining robust developments in sustainability at environmental, social and governance levels through diverse sustainability initiatives, strategically selected to benefit the Bank both internally and externally. Gulf Bank supports Kuwait Vision 2035 "New Kuwait" and works with various parties to achieve it.



liveroo throughout the month of Ramadan. To try Good Stuff's newest Luqaimat dessert, order from Good Stuff on Deliveroo. Since its launch, Deliveroo has set itself apart with its unbeatable customer service, a wide selection of global and local restaurants, and consistently reliable delivery.

Gaming giant Tencent's 2022 net profit falls

BEIJING: Chinese gaming giant Tencent's profits fell steeply last year, according to an earnings report released Wednesday, as the country's tech sector weathers a government crackdown and a shaky economy.

Annual net profit in 2022 fell 16 percent year-on-year for the group, which owns the popular Chinese messaging app WeChat. Tech titans such as Tencent and Alibaba have faced increasing pressure from Chinese authorities since 2020 after years of meteoric growth.

Many have been investigated for alleged anti-competitive behavior and data security issues, dampening investor enthusiasm. Wednesday's report also showed a dip in Tencent's total annual revenue, which came to 554.6 billion yuan (\$80.5 billion), down one percent year-on-year.

The group recorded a quarterly revenue drop in the second quarter last year, the first since its 2004 IPO.

However, founder and CEO Pony Ma struck an optimistic note in Wednesday's earnings report. Changes implemented last year would "position us to benefit from, and contribute to, a rebound in China economic growth which our users' activity suggests is now underway", he wrote.

The Shenzhen-based company showed improvement during the three-month period ended December 31, with revenue of 145.0 billion yuan, up three percent from the previous quarter. These were the first quarterly results posted by Tencent since the government's sudden lifting in December of its zero-Covid poli-

cy, which dragged heavily on the domestic economy. Tencent, a world-leading video games provider, has been seeking to diversify its business operations and ensure its survival in the face of what it has referred to as "transitional industry challenges". Beijing moved against the gaming sector in 2021 as part of the sprawling crackdown on big tech, including a strict cap on the amount of time children could spend playing online. But recent signals from authorities suggest the storm clouds could be receding. The firm received formal approval in November to publish new games after an 18-month hiatus. —AFP

Lifestyle



KUWAIT: NBK executive management honors the "Most Valuable Team Players" (MVP) and "Most Collaborative Team" (MCT) during a ceremony.



NBK honors outstanding employees through MVP program for 2022

Al-Ablani: We are pursuing our initiatives aiming to motivate employees

KUWAIT: National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) has celebrated its outstanding employees in Kuwait and IBG locations for 2022, reflecting its firm belief that recognizing high achievers and appreciating their efforts is a fundamental part in its strategy focused on human capital, as it drives employees' performance and innovation.

In this annual recognition, the bank's executive management presented the "Most Valuable Team Players" (MVP) & "Most Collaborative Team" (MCT) Awards within each group. Through this initiative, NBK aims to increase teamwork, productivity, engagement and responsibility among employees through recognizing their efforts. The executive management praised the efforts, dedication and commitment of the bank's employees, who exhibited a positive and supportive attitude towards their teams and group, which is always the main driver of the bank's success and world-class banking services provided to customers.

The purpose of these awards presented for the 6th year in a row is to recognize employees who have shown an exceptional manner by exemplifying outstanding service through his or her work and encourage them to increase teamwork and productivity in order to further bolster NBK's leading local and regional position. This year's awards included, for the first time, IBG branches, including Watani Wealth Management in Saudi Arabia, Ge-



neva, London, Paris, New York, and Singapore, in addition to Bahrain, Iraq, and the UAE.

This recognition also demonstrates NBK's focus on human capital and endeavors to fully support them, which is reflected in their performance and helps improve the quality of products and services provided to its customers. Speaking on this, Emad Al-Ablani, GM – Group Human Resources at National Bank of Kuwait said: "This recognition, which we are keen to hold annually, demonstrates our appreciation of the crucial role played by our employees in NBK's successive achievements locally, regionally and globally."

"Improving services quality and introducing new products tailored to customers' needs and satisfac-

tion is the result of the dedication and commitment of our employees to provide the best services. Therefore, we are keen to appreciate their dedicated efforts, exemplar performance and adherence to high standards of quality and customer service that make NBK stand out from all other competitors," he continued. Al-Ablani mentioned that NBK is pursuing its initiatives aiming to motivate its employees in line with its belief that sustaining its long-term excellence is conditioned on having highly-qualified professional human resources.

"Our human capital is instrumental to maintaining our success, and none of our strategic goals can be achieved without their active participation and dedicated efforts to achieve those goals," he noted.

"Our employees are our most valuable resource, and we are always keen to be closer to them and listen to them. We also seek to motivate them and appreciate their efforts and dedication, which is an integral part of a successful work environment and a sustainable performance culture," he added.

Al-Ablani affirmed that NBK boasts a unique work environment encouraging continuous career development. To this end, it harnesses all its enormous capabilities towards developing its employees, and always seeks to unlock their creativity to go the extra mile and achieve excellence, thus paving the way for career growth and taking on leadership positions in the future.

MVP awards offer a unique appreciation mechanism, as employees have the chance to vote for their colleagues from the same divisions/groups as the "Most Valuable Team Player". Those employees are rewarded by the executive management, in recognition of their efforts during a number of special celebrations held for each division bank-wide.

The results are based on a digital vote, in which each employee can nominate a colleague for the "Most Valuable Team Player" award, based on the following criteria: excellent teamwork spirit and engagement, efficiency, positive and supportive attitude towards their teams and group. The winning staff are awarded a certificate of recognition by top management in an event attended by executive management.



Abu Dhabi hosts world's largest investment forum

ABU DHABI: The capital of the United Arab Emirates, Abu Dhabi, will be hosting the 12th edition of the Annual Investment Meeting (AIM Global 2023) to be held on May 8 to 10 under the theme "The Investment Paradigm Shift: Future Sustainable Investment Opportunities to Foster Sustainable Economic Growth, Diversity and Prosperity" with over 600 high-level speakers participating in more than 160 dialogue sessions.

Abu Dhabi's hosting of the AIM Global for the first time, which is supported by the Ministry of Industry and Advanced Technology in partnership with the Abu Dhabi Department of Economic Development, is aligned with the emirate's efforts to further strengthen its economic position in the region and to promote foreign direct investments among the countries of the world by consolidating investment opportunities aimed at sustainable development and leveraging digital technology.

Dawood Al-Sheza-wi, Chairman of the Annual Investment Meeting, said: "The Annual Investment Meeting, the largest investment forum, has succeeded throughout its previous editions in solidifying the position of the United Arab Emirates on the global investment map, and in pushing forward its progress over the next 50 years." He added that organizing the 12th edition of the Annual Investment Meeting in Abu Dhabi, which has established itself as a preferred and thriving business and investment destination, is a result of its proactive ability and flexibility in dealing with changes and developments to stimulate and support appropriate events and talents, and providing innovative solutions to face current and future challenges."

He also stressed that they are continuously working to establish the foundations of a business system that provides opportunities for growth and prosperity for investors to achieve sustainable economic and social development goals.



ECB chief warns financial tensions may hit eurozone

FRANKFURT: Recent financial turbulence could add to "downside risks" in the eurozone, European Central Bank chief Christine Lagarde warned Wednesday, while insisting policymakers remained focused on taming sky-high inflation. The collapse of three regional US lenders and the enforced UBS buyout of Swiss rival Credit Suisse plunged global markets into

US Fed mulls more rate hikes after banking turmoil

WASHINGTON: US banks will be paying especially close attention to the Federal Reserve's interest-rate decision on Wednesday after two weeks of market turmoil over the collapse of three regional lenders. The US central bank is walking a tightrope between continuing to raise rates to combat high inflation and stepping on the brake to prevent further upheaval in the commercial banking sector.

A stock market rally earlier this week solidified calls by most analysts that the Fed will hike interest rates again, despite wider concerns about the financial sector. The majority of futures traders predict the Fed will increase its benchmark lending rate by 25 basis points to a range of 4.75-5.00 percent, according to CME Group.

That would be in line with the size of the central bank's previous rate hike in February, and mark the ninth increase since it began tightening monetary conditions last year. Despite these efforts, price rises remained stuck well above the Fed's long-term inflation target of two percent.

Hot data and banking uncertainty

The implosions of Silicon Valley Bank (SVB) and two other regional lenders pummeled banking stocks around the world last week, with Credit Suisse swallowed up by Swiss rival UBS after its shares sank to a record low. Asian stock markets and most European indices rose ahead of the Fed's decision on Wednesday. But British inflation rose unexpectedly last month despite a concerted effort by the Bank of England to tackle rising prices. Wall Street stocks opened nearly flat on Wednesday as investors await the Fed's decision. US regional

banking turmoil and triggered fears of a snowballing banking sector crisis. Lagarde said the latest ECB forecasts—which lowered inflation projections and raised the growth outlook for this year—did not take into account the recent upheaval. "Those tensions have added new downside risks and have made the risk assessment blurrier," she said in a speech in Frankfurt. She added that there was "additional uncertainty" when it came to the ECB projections. The ECB president insisted, however, that if the most recent forecasts were confirmed, "we will still have ground to cover to make sure that inflation pressures are stamped out".

But faced with "high uncertainty," future decisions would depend on the data, she said, and refrained from making a commitment to raise rates further. The recent market turmoil has left central bankers walking

a tightrope between pushing on with their efforts to bring down stubbornly high costs and seeking to ensure they do not worsen the upheaval.

After Russia's invasion of Ukraine sent eurozone inflation soaring last year, the ECB embarked on an unprecedented campaign of monetary tightening, raising rates by 350 basis points since last July. The Frankfurt-based institution hiked rates half a percentage point at its meeting last week, as it had previously pledged to do, shrugging off calls to pause its tightening or slow the pace in response to the turmoil. Declining energy prices in recent months have helped slow inflation to 8.5 percent in February. After days of turmoil, markets have been recovering this week as pledges of government support soothed worries over the banking sector. —AFP



WASHINGTON: US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen (left) speaks with American Bankers Association CEO and President Rob Nichols during the American Bankers Association's (ABA) 2023 Washington Summit in Washington, DC, on March 21, 2023. — AFP

banks opened lower before paring some losses. Embattled First Republic Bank was down around two percent 30 minutes into trading, while PacWest Bancorp was down nearly four percent.

The combination of hot US economic data at the start of the year and uncertainty in the banking sector has led most analysts to predict the Fed will continue with a more modest hiking cycle than was previously predicted. "After the recent news, the recent developments in the financial markets, we now see a kind of risk to both sides," Stephen Juneau, senior US economist at Bank of America Global Research, told AFP. "We're still looking for a 25 basis point hike in March, May, and June," he said.

More 'dovish' language

Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen said Tuesday that the US banking sector was "stabilizing" after authorities stepped in to protect deposits following the failures of SVB and Signature Bank. But she conceded that "similar actions could be warranted if smaller institutions suffer deposit runs that pose the risk of contagion."

Yellen's comments contributed to this week's relief rally in the stock markets, along with actions by the

Fed and other major central banks to improve lenders' access to liquidity. The challenge on Wednesday for Fed Chair Jerome Powell will be to convey the message that the banking system has turned a corner while continuing to confront inflation. "The Fed will need to emphasize that it has a dual mandate of full employment and stable prices, with the latter nowhere close to being met," Oxford Economics' chief US economist Ryan Sweet wrote in a note to clients.

It is likely to be "a bit more dovish" in the language that accompanies the decision, Juneau from Bank of America said, adding he expects the US central bank to reinforce its confidence in the banking system in the statement. The Fed will also update its GDP growth and interest-rate projections on Wednesday. Its announcement will follow on the heels of the European Central Bank's decision last week to raise rates by 0.5 percentage points.

ECB chief Christine Lagarde warned on Wednesday that the eurozone's monetary policymakers "will still have ground to cover to make sure that inflation pressures are stamped out." She said the recent banking turmoil could add to "downside risks" in the single currency area. —AFP

Lifestyle



The National Museum of Qatar is a unique landmark where visitors get acquainted with the Qataris' lifestyle in the past and manifestations of modern times' modes of living since the 19th century. The museum encompasses 11 halls, with displayed old dhows and various objects and tools, depicting the Qataris' old lifestyle. Some had earned their bread from venturing into the sea and others from investing in land wealth. Some of the displayed objects are handmade and signal the Qataris' unique culture. —KUNA



Bad Bunny ex seeking \$40m in unauthorized use of voice note

Former girlfriend of Bad Bunny has filed a \$40 million lawsuit against the Puerto Rican megastar, alleging he used a recording of her voice in several songs without permission. Carliz De La Cruz Hernandez, who dated Bad Bunny from 2011 to 2016, filed the lawsuit at a Puerto Rican court in San Juan earlier this month, though the outlet Notice first reported it just this week.

In 2015, before Bad Bunny had skyrocketed to global fame, she recorded a voice note for him saying the phrase "Bad Bunny, baby," court documents say. She alleges that the singer, born Benito Martinez Ocasio, used the recording shortly thereafter without authorization, in the introduction of the song "Pa Ti" and a few years later in "Dos Mil 2016," a track off his latest blockbuster album "Un Verano Sin Ti."

For that most recent release, the

artist's team sent contracts seeking consent to use De La Cruz's voice, one day before the album release, according to the lawsuit. But the documents say representatives did not wait for a response before putting out the record. "Since then, thousands of people have commented directly on Carliz's social media networks, as well as every time she goes to a public place, about the 'Bad Bunny, baby,'" says the lawsuit. "This has caused, and is currently causing De La Cruz to feel worried, anguished, intimidated, overwhelmed and anxious." —AFP



Paltrow defends against 'meritless' skiing lawsuit in Utah court

Gwyneth Paltrow appeared in court in the western US state of Utah on Tuesday, where she is being sued for damages by a retired optometrist over a skiing accident seven years ago. In opening statements, Terry Sanderson's lawyer said the alleged collision on the slopes of Deer Valley had caused him damages worth \$3.3 million. The "Shakespeare in Love" actress has in turn countersued. Paltrow's lawyer Steven Owens told the Park City court on Tuesday that Sanderson is "obsessed" with the lawsuit, and that the case was a "meritless claim of false allegation."

"Really kind of an offensive one. That she somehow left him an unconscious man and bolted? I can tell you, we believe it to be utter BS," said Owens. The alleged collision occurred in February 2016 at Deer Valley, a glamorous ski resort above the swanky larger resort of Park City in the Rocky Mountains. Deer Valley hosted Winter Olympics skiing events in 2002, while Park City is home to the annual Sundance film festival. Paltrow, wearing a white turtleneck sweater, sat silently beside Owens as proceedings began

Tuesday. She is expected to later take the stand in her own defense.

Paltrow's husband Brad Falchuk and children Moses and Apple are due to address the court, Owens said. Sanderson says Paltrow skied into him from behind and then vanished, leaving him unconscious, lying in the snow. Lawrence D Buhler, representing Sanderson, said in his opening statement that Paltrow had been skiing in

a "dangerous" and "reckless" manner, and had caused his client "four broken ribs and permanent brain damage." Paltrow says Sanderson skied into her back, and is countersuing for a nominal \$1 plus legal expenses.

Her lawyer Owens said "Gwyneth is a conservative skier" who was "not going fast," and said she had initially feared she was "being assaulted" when Sanderson appeared directly behind her. "It rattled her and physically hurt her," he said. Owens also said Sanderson is "blind in one eye" and suffers from "decreasing vision" in the other—suggesting poor eyesight was a reason for the crash.

In addition to her Oscar-winning acting career, Paltrow has forged a second career marketing wellness products on her Goop website. The online blog and store promotes healthy eating and stress-free living, as well as a range of unorthodox products—from DIY coffee enema kits to a line of scented goods made with cedarwood, bergamot, rose and ambrette. —AFP



US actress Gwyneth Paltrow looks on before leaving the courtroom in Park City, Utah. — AFP



Egyptian markets ready for Ramadan with assortment of products, festivities

As the Holy Month of Ramadan nears, Egyptian markets began preparations for this joyous occasion by lining up an assortment of products and festivities. Families from all walks of life frequent the Ramadan markets to buy products related to the

Holy Month whether it was food, fabrics or ornaments. Top of the food list are dates, nuts and dried fruits with spices and special drinks also heavily sought by the markets' customers.—KUNA



Joking Biden teases 2024 run at arts awards ceremony



US President Joe Biden awards actress Mindy Kaling with the 2021 National Medal of Arts during a ceremony in the East Room of the White House in Washington, DC. —AFP photos

Joe Biden used an arts awards ceremony Tuesday—where one honoree was an actress who famously played a fictional president—to drop perhaps his heaviest hint yet that he's seeking a second White House term in 2024. Presenting a National Humanities Medal to "Underground Railroad" author Colson Whitehead, Biden noted that the writer also had the rare distinction of winning two Pulitzer prizes in a row.

The Democrat then sparked laughter in the packed White House hall by adding: "I'm kinda looking for back-to-back myself." Biden has previously made clear, without formally announcing, that he intends to run for a second term in 2024 when he'll be just under 82 years old on election day.

He dropped another hint when awarding the National Medal of Arts to rock legend Bruce Springsteen, riffing on one of his most famous hit songs by

saying: "Bruce, some people are just born to run." Some of the loudest cheers of the day came when Biden awarded the arts medal—the highest American honor for artists—to actress Julia Louis-Dreyfus, best known for portraying vice president and later president Selina Meyer in "Veep."

Her character bumbles through the TV series as a frustrated, ignored vice president who finally gets the main job, throwing the White House into ever more hilarious crises. Opening the ceremony, Biden welcomed her as "former president Selina Meyer." Among those also given the arts awards were fashion designer Vera Wang and veteran blues, gospel and pop singer Gladys Knight. Writers Walter Isaacson and Ann Patchett were among those who, like Whitehead, were awarded the National Humanities Medal. —AFP



US President Joe Biden awards actress Julia Louis-Dreyfus.



US President Joe Biden awards musician Bruce Springsteen.



US President Joe Biden awards fashion designer Vera Wang.



US President Joe Biden awards author Colson Whitehead.



US President Joe Biden awards musician Gladys Knight.



US President Joe Biden awards Jaclyn Sallee (left), on behalf of Native America Calling, the National Humanities Medal during a ceremony.

Sports

Sixers into playoffs after Cavaliers defeat Nets

LOS ANGELES: Donovan Mitchell scored 31 points as the Cleveland Cavaliers defeated the Brooklyn Nets 115-109 on Tuesday to send the Philadelphia 76ers into the postseason. Mitchell made 10-of-22 from the field including five three-pointers while Caris LeVert added 18 from the bench against his former club as Cleveland improved to 46-28 to tighten their grip on fourth in the Eastern Conference.

Cleveland's victory ensured that third-placed Philadelphia became the latest team to punch their ticket to the playoffs despite not playing on Tuesday. While Cleveland are yet to clinch, it will take a monumental collapse in the final weeks of the season for them not to advance to the postseason. Tuesday's game could well turn out to be a sneak preview for the playoffs, with Brooklyn still occupying the sixth automatic qualifying spot in the Eastern Conference.

Against Cleveland they started brightly, taking a 30-23 lead into the second quarter before being outscored 71-48 in the next two periods to effectively cede the game, even if they managed to reduce the deficit to single digits in the final stages. Day'Ron Sharpe led Brooklyn's scoring with 20 points while Spencer Dinwiddie had 19 points with 11 assists and five rebounds.

Cavs coach J B Bickerstaff was unhappy that his team eased off late in the fourth quarter. "We need to play a complete game," Bickerstaff said. "We allowed the lead to dictate our emotions, we allowed a big play to dictate our emotions, instead of doing the job and finishing the game the way we need to finish the game," Bickerstaff added.

Nets coach Jacques Vaughn lamented his team's collapse in the second and third quarters. "That's a big question for us," Vaughn said. "I think we got a little stagnant with the basketball. Tough second quarter for us. "Along those lines of putting four quarters together, it all seems as if there's one quarter that punches us in the gut a little bit."

Elsewhere Tuesday, the Los Angeles Clippers' stumbled to a 101-100 defeat to the Oklahoma City Thunder in a game that saw Clippers ace Paul George exit with an apparent right leg injury in the fourth quarter. George needed to be carried back to the locker room after his right knee buckled in a collision with the Thunder's Lu Dort in the fourth



NEW YORK: Donovan Mitchell of the Cleveland Cavaliers dunks against Yuta Watanabe of the Brooklyn Nets during their game at Barclays Center on March 21, 2023. —AFP

quarter. There was no immediate word on the extent of George's injury, with Clippers coach saying the eight-time All-Star was still being evaluated.

Boston topple soaring Kings

In Sacramento, the Boston Celtics' gave the high-flying Kings a postseason reality check with a blowout 132-109 win. Sacramento have been one of the surprise packages of the Western Confer-

ence this season, sitting third in the standings. But the Kings were overpowered by a Celtics line-up that showed flashes of their dominant early season form as they cut loose in the second half to outscore Sacramento 72-55.

Jayson Tatum led the Celtics scoring with 36 points while Jaylen Brown added 27 points and Derrick White 20. In other games on Tuesday, Trae Young finished with 30 points in Atlanta's 129-107

win over the lowly Detroit Pistons, who are propping up the East with a league-worst record of 16-57. Atlanta improved to 36-36 with the victory and are on track for at least a spot in the play-in tournament.

In Orlando, Gary Harris finished with 22 points and Franz Wagner 20 as the Magic dented Washington's playoff aspirations with a 122-112 victory. The Wizards are currently outside the play-in places in 12th spot in the East with a 32-40 record. — AFP

Navratilova reveals she is 'cancer-free'

LONDON: Martina Navratilova has revealed she is now "cancer-free" after the tennis great feared she "may not see next Christmas" following a devastating double diagnosis. The former world number one, who won 18 Grand Slam singles titles during her long career, revealed in January she had been diagnosed with throat and breast cancer. The 66-year-old is due to undergo further preventative radiation treatment but said in an interview with Piers Morgan on TalkTV she should then "be good to go". "As far as they know I'm cancer-free," she said in the interview aired on Tuesday.

Navratilova, winner of 59 Grand Slam titles in singles and doubles, revealed her diagnosis had left her fearing the worst. "I was in a total panic for three days thinking I may not see next Christmas," she said. "The bucket list came into my mind of all the things I wanted to do. And this may sound really shallow, but I was like, 'OK, which car do I really want to drive if I live like a year?'"

Navratilova, who previously underwent treatment for early-stage breast cancer in 2010, sought medical help after noticing an enlarged lymph node in her neck, with tests subsequently confirming she had cancer. She added: "This was the first week in December, (I'm thinking) I will see this Christmas but maybe not the next one."

But doctors were able to tell her the throat cancer was "extremely treatable" and she had a "95-percent" chance of a full recovery. Navratilova, a Czechoslovakia-born naturalized American, brought a new physical dimension to women's tennis, with her powerful serve and agility at the net making her the dominant player of her era.

She won her first Wimbledon singles title in 1978 and went on to lift the trophy a record nine times — more than any other player in the men's or women's game. And she believes her competitive nature on the court helped her mentally prepare for the battle against cancer. — AFP

Kuwait, Oman sign Special Olympics MoU

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: Kuwait Special Olympics signed a memorandum of understanding with its Omani counterpart to cooperate in supporting and developing services, activities and programs for those with mental and growth disabilities in both countries. The MoU was signed by Kuwait National Special Olympic Director Rihab Buresli and Oman's Special Olympics Director Mohammad Al-Rashidi.

Buresli was pleased with the MoU to support cooperation with the Oman experience and work together to enable special Olympics players through sports and health initiatives and care programs. This is in addition to coordination and preparations for upcoming regional and international events, particularly the world games in Berlin to be held in June.

'I have never felt that much hate,' says Sabalenka

MIAMI GARDENS: Belarus' world number two Aryna Sabalenka says she has faced "hate" in the women's tour locker-room but hopes tensions with Ukrainian players will eventually ease. Australian Open champion Sabalenka lost to Kazakhstan's Elena Rybakina in Sunday's Indian Wells final and at the media day for this week's ATP-WTA Miami Open was asked about her recent comments on "tensions" in the locker-room between Ukrainian and Russian and Belarus players.

"It was really, really tough for me because I've never faced that much hate in the locker room," said Sabalenka. "Of course, there are a lot of haters on Instagram when you're losing the matches, but like in the locker room, I've never faced that," she added. "It was really tough for me to understand that there's so many people who really hate me for no reason, like no reason. I mean, like I did nothing," she said.

I am coming in with the number one ranking. That is something very special. I fulfilled my dreams quicker than I expected," he told reporters on Tuesday.

Because of his victory in Miami last year, Alcaraz must win at the Florida event again if he is to hold on to his number one spot, but he says he feels no pressure in that regard or to meet newly raised expectations. "I don't feel the pressure too much. I know the things I have to do. I need to play relaxed and not mind if I lose or if I play well or not," he said.

"My goal is always the same. To feel comfortable on court. To enjoy playing tennis and try to have great thoughts when playing. That is why I am playing at a good level. I am enjoying every single second and playing relaxed. That is what I am thinking about on court," he added.

'You have to improve'

As at Indian Wells, world number two Novak Djokovic is missing after being refused entry to the United States due to his lack of a COVID vaccine and Alcaraz says he misses the Serb's presence, along with the injured Rafael Nadal. "I'm a profes-

sional tennis player, but also I'm a huge fan of tennis and I always want to watch the best players in the world, like Rafa, like Djokovic," he said.

"I played a couple of times against Rafa and I wish to play against him more and with Djokovic as well. I wish to play against him more times, you know, but obviously in every tournament I want them to be playing and I hope we get them back soon," he said.

Far from feeling the weight of following in the footsteps of the 'Big Three' of Djokovic, Nadal and the now retired Roger Federer, Alcaraz says he is trying to draw lessons from their successes. "You have to improve, you have to get better every day. That's why the big players, the Big Three, for example, did all through their careers - to improve every day a little bit," he said.

Alcaraz can expect plenty of support from the crowd in Miami, which includes many Spanish-speaking fans. "It's so special to come back here and feel the same energy that I felt, for example, last year," he said. "I have great supporters here, a lot of people supporting me. I remember last year it was unbelievable you know, with the crowd. I feel like I



Buresli said the memorandum dealt with the cooperation mechanism in training and competitions sanctioned by the Special Olympics. It also includes bilateral cooperation to form teams for unified games and work towards developing parallel programs to sports that will help mental and growth of disabled persons.

Rashidi lauded the care disabled persons in Kuwait are enjoying as well as the good efforts of Kuwait Special Olympics in this field. He said the MoU is an important step towards the activation of sustainable development goals, especially since Kuwait and Oman have extensive experience in caring for the disabled.



MIAMI GARDENS: Aryna Sabalenka of Belarus fields questions from the media during the Miami Open at Hard Rock Stadium on March 21, 2023. — AFP

control emotions of others," she said. "It seems like, everyone's just ignoring each other," she said. "Not everyone actually, I'm still talking to some of the Ukrainians, but there are some of the girls who are like really aggressive against us. So I'm just staying away from that," added Sabalenka. — AFP

Alcaraz returns to Miami Open after rapid rise

MIAMI GARDENS: World number one Carlos Alcaraz heads into this week's Miami Open looking to defend both his title and top ranking and admitting even he has been surprised by his dizzying rise to the top of the sport. A year ago, the 19-year-old came to Miami on the back of wins on clay in Croatia and Brazil and hoping to make his mark on the hard courts. His victory in South Florida launched a remarkable year.

The highlight was his US Open triumph which made him the youngest player to become world number one and he returns to Miami after last week's win in Indian Wells, achieved without dropping a set in the tournament. "It's all been very fast, when I got to Miami last year I was around number 20 and a year later



MIAMI GARDENS: Carlos Alcaraz of Spain fields questions from the media during the Miami Open at Hard Rock Stadium on March 21, 2023. — AFP

am at home, you know," he added. The top seed will begin his title defense against Argentine Facundo Bagnis or a qualifier and could face two-time Miami champion and former world number one Andy Murray in the third round. — AFP

Sports

Battle for Manchester Utd heats up ahead of deadline for improved bids

LONDON: The race to buy Manchester United enters a crucial stage on Wednesday as bidders face a deadline to submit improved offers for the Premier League giants. Qatari banker Sheikh Jassim Bin Hamad Al-Thani and British billionaire Jim Ratcliffe have rival bids on the table. There are reported to be several other groups whose interest in United has remained private throughout a bidding war which has intensified this week.

Elliott Investment Management reportedly made it through to the second stage of the process, although the firm is believed to be offering funding to United owners, the Glazer family, rather than a take-over. Those who want to buy United have to declare their offer to Raine, the merchant bank brought in to assist the club, by 2100 GMT on Wednesday.

At least six bids, possibly rising to eight, are expected to be submitted, with those comprised of offers for full control as well as smaller stakes in United. The Glazers have reportedly set a £6 billion

(\$7.3 billion) figure for their valuation of a club they bought for £750 million in a highly-leveraged deal in 2005. The initial offers for United last month were believed to have been worth around £4.5 billion.

That would surpass the Premier League record £4.25 billion paid for Chelsea by a consortium fronted by American Todd Boehly last year. Sheikh Jassim is reported to be ready to submit a second indicative bid before the cut-off. But INEOS chemical company founder Ratcliffe, a boyhood United fan, has been more circumspect in his assessment of the process, insisting he will not pay a "stupid" price as the bidding war for one of football's most iconic clubs increases.

"How do you decide the price of a painting? How do you decide the price of a house? It's not related to how much it cost to build or how much it cost to paint," Ratcliffe told the Wall Street Journal this week. "What you don't want to do is pay stupid prices for things because then you regret it subsequently."

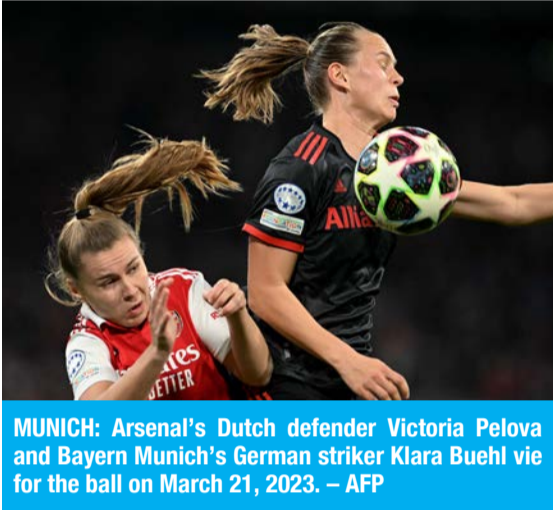
'Community asset'

Ratcliffe, who already owns French club Nice and Swiss side Lausanne-Sport, said his interest in United would be "purely in winning things", calling the club a "community asset". Ratcliffe and INEOS representatives visited United last Friday after a delegation from Sheikh Jassim's group toured Old Trafford and the club's Carrington training ground to hold more talks as part of their due diligence. Sheikh Jassim has promised to clear the club's debt.

Ratcliffe wants the 69 percent stake owned by the Glazer family, although he could join forces with another bidder to take outright control of the 20-time English champions. It is still possible the Glazers could decide not to sell if they don't receive their asking price, which would infuriate large sections of United's fanbase, who have protested against the unpopular American owners for much of their reign.

The consortiums that make improved offers are expected to hear from United next week, with another round of bidding still in play. If one group's bid is vastly ahead of the others, they could be chosen to enter into a period of exclusivity, which would see further negotiation ahead of a final sale. The Glazers reportedly want any potential sale to be concluded before the summer, giving new owners the chance to get settled in time for the vital close-season transfer window.

United, three-time European champions, haven't won the Premier League since legendary boss Alex Ferguson led them to the title in his final season before retiring in 2013. They are enjoying a renaissance under Erik ten Hag's management this season, winning the League Cup final against Newcastle in February to clinch the club's first major trophy for six years. Ten Hag's team also sit third in the Premier League and face Brighton in the FA Cup semifinals. — AFP



MUNICH: Arsenal's Dutch defender Victoria Pelova and Bayern Munich's German striker Klara Buehl vie for the ball on March 21, 2023. — AFP

Barca, Bayern seize upper hand in Women's Champions League

PARIS: Barcelona edged Roma 1-0 in the first leg of their Women's Champions League quarterfinal tie on Tuesday after a Lea Schueller goal had given Bayern Munich a victory by the same score against Arsenal. Nineteen-year-old Salma Paralluelo curled in a strike from the edge of the area in the 34th minute for Barcelona at the Stadio Olimpico. That proved enough to take a lead back to Catalonia for next week's return leg.

Barcelona found themselves up against it in the closing stages, with captain Sandro Panos making fine late saves to deny Manuela Giugliano and Valentina Giacinti in front of a crowd of more than 39,000. Barcelona will be favourites to advance to the last four as they seek to reach a third consecutive final. They won the title in 2021 and were runners-up to Lyon last season.

In Munich, Germany forward Schueller scored the only goal for Bayern six minutes before half-time, rising at the back post to head in a hanging cross from the right by Maximiliane Rall. Arsenal could have come away with at least a draw to take back for the second leg in London. Caitlin Foord hit the woodwork early in the second half. Japan's Saki Kumagai made a superb goal-line clearance to deny Stina Blackstenius, and Schueller made a similar intervention to stop Leah Williamson. "It was an even game and could have ended 1-1," said Bayern coach Alexander Straus. "Arsenal were pushing us in the second half and we were defending deeper than we wanted to, so credit to them for that." —AFP

Ream says Reyna row 'in past' as US squad gathers

MIAMI: United States defender Tim Ream said Tuesday Gio Reyna has been welcomed back into the fold by team-mates despite the acrimonious feud that erupted following the World Cup. The US squad are training in Florida this week ahead of the team's CONCACAF Nations League game in Grenada on Friday, the squad's first competitive fixture since they exited in the last 16 in Qatar.

The months since the World Cup have been dogged by a welter of revelations detailing tensions between Reyna and his family and former coach Gregg Berhalter. Berhalter's contract expired after the World Cup, and US Soccer say a decision on whether he will be re-hired or replaced will not be made until later this year.

Speaking to journalists on Tuesday, Ream said Borussia Dortmund star Reyna had impressed US team-mates with his work ethic in training in Florida and that the squad was keen to leave the controversy behind. "The main thing is making sure that everyone knows we're here for a reason and what's happened with Gio in the past is in the past, and what happened at the World Cup happened at the World Cup," Ream said. "We moved on from that as players," the Fulham center-half added.

Berhalter stoked controversy after the World Cup by indirectly revealing that Reyna had almost been sent home from the tournament due to his attitude in training. Reyna later hit back, saying the behind the scenes bust-up should have remained private while acknowledging he reacted poorly after being told by Berhalter he would only have a "limited role" in Qatar before the tournament. —AFP

Southgate challenges England to take 'next step' towards glory

MANCHESTER: England's quest to win a first major tournament since 1966 starts afresh on Thursday as the Three Lions' Euro 2024 qualifying campaign begins with a testing trip to champions Italy. After taking time to consider his future following a World Cup quarterfinal exit to France in December, Gareth Southgate will remain in charge as England boss for a fourth attempt at glory. Southgate has overseen a transformation of his country's fortunes on the international stage.

But after reaching a quarter-final, semi-final and final in their last three major tournaments, anything less than ending a 58-year trophy drought in Germany next year will be seen as a disappointment. Southgate might have sounded a warning this week about the declining number of England-qualified players playing regularly in the Premier League, but he admitted that is a worry for the long term given the array of talent available to him currently.

Arsenal winger Bukayo Saka and Borussia Dortmund midfielder Jude Bellingham proved themselves to be two of the brightest young talents

in world football in Qatar. Harry Kane's next goal for his country will make him England's leading scorer in history, while Marcus Rashford's potential is finally being realised under Erik ten Hag at Manchester United.

An injury to Rashford means he will miss the opening two qualifiers against Italy and Ukraine this week, but Southgate is not short of options with Manchester City duo Phil Foden and Jack Grealish set to battle it out for a place in the side. For all the progress made under Southgate, though, victory over Germany in the last 16 of Euro 2020 remains his only knockout win against one of the major nations in international football.

The Three Lions outplayed France for much of their meeting in the quarter-finals in Doha three months ago, but still came up short when it mattered. "These are the sorts of games where we have to show we can go to these places and win," said Southgate on the prospect of facing Italy in front of an intimidating atmosphere at the Estadio Diego Armando Maradona in Naples. "That is the next step for us as a team."

England fell short on penalties against Italy in the Euro 2020 final on home soil and failed to beat Roberto Mancini's men in two clashes in the Nations League prior to the World Cup. The Three Lions did not win a single game in their Nations League campaign but were still able to bounce back close to their best once the World Cup came around. And



Southgate is wary of another drop off in standards during a qualifying process with little jeopardy for the major nations thanks to the expansion of the European Championship to 24 teams.

The top two from a group also containing Ukraine, North Macedonia and Malta will automatically qualify. "That is the big challenge we have got. To go to a World Cup, everyone wanted to be there and the fight for places was immense, the hunger was there and it was clear. Now you have to start again," added Southgate. "I know exactly where our most senior players are with that challenge: they are ready. The (Jordan) Hendersons, the Kanes, they set the tone for that sort of mentality that is going to be needed. — AFP

Mancini looking for answers before Euro qualifying opener

MILAN: Roberto Mancini is wondering where the next generation of Italian talent is going to come from as the Azzurri begin their Euro 2024 qualifying campaign on Thursday with the visit of England. Italy coach Mancini is in the process of another rebuild after the European champions missed out last year's World Cup following a second straight disastrous play-off defeat.

The euphoria of beating England at Wembley in the Euro 2020 final had well and truly dissipated by the time North Macedonia stunned Italy last year. And while the rest of the world's top teams prepared for Qatar, Italian football was again pondering its place in the world, with Mancini lamenting a lack of young players in a country which used to be a conveyor belt of world class talent.

Italy has three clubs in the Champions League quarterfinals for the first time since 2006, with three more in the last eight for Europe's other two competitions, but Mancini is not hailing a rare continental success story for Serie A. "They (Napoli, AC Milan and Inter Milan) have seven or eight Italians in the team between them... This is the reality and we need to do something different," Mancini told reporters on Monday. "Italian football hasn't been reborn... If there were 33 Italians on the pitch, maybe, even half of them being Italian would be enough."

Mancini has lamented in particular a lack of forwards and used Leeds United winger Willy Gnonto as an example of how young talent is overlooked by Serie A clubs. However he has also been criticized for some of the selections in his 30-man squad for the Thursday's match in Naples, which includes a first call-up for Argentina-born Tigre striker Mateo Retegui. Udinese defender Destiny Udogie, who will move to Tottenham next season, Juventus midfielder Nicolo Fagioli and Lazio pair Mattia Zaccagni and Nicolo Casale are the omissions which have most befuddled fans.

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
Khaldiya	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 bakhal 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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Emergency 112

JOB VACANCY

EMBASSY OF ITALY IN KUWAIT

Recruitment announcement of 2 contractual employees
To be employed as:
administrative assistant
at the Embassy of Italy in Kuwait.
Interested applicants should present their application module in person at our Embassy premises (Jabriya, Block 9, st. 1, Villa 84) within and not later than Thursday, April 6th at 12 pm. More information, requirements and application module, are available on the Embassy's website www.ambalkuwait.esteri.it

Avviso di assunzione di 2 impiegati a contratto

Ambasciata d'Italia in Kuwait

Avviso di assunzione di n. 2 impiegati a contratto da adibire ai servizi di:
assistente amministrativo
presso l'Ambasciata d'Italia in Kuwait.
I candidati devono presentare di persona il modulo di domanda presso la sede (Jabriya, Block 9, St.1, Villa 84).
Entro e non oltre giovedì 6 aprile ore 12.
Ulteriori informazioni, requisiti e modulo di presentazione, sono disponibili nel nostro sito web www.ambalkuwait.esteri.it

Japan clinch World Baseball Classic

Ohtani shines as Samurai down USA in fairytale win



MIAMI: Team Japan celebrates after defeating Team USA in the World Baseball Classic Championship at loanDepot Park on March 21, 2023. — AFP

MIAMI: Shohei Ohtani delivered a fairytale 3-2 victory for Japan over the United States on Tuesday as the Asian powerhouses won the World Baseball Classic for a record third time. Home runs from Munetaka Murakami and Kazuma Okamoto helped put Japan ahead before Los Angeles Angels superstar Ohtani closed out the win from the mound in the ninth inning.

In a perfectly scripted finale at Miami's loanDepot Park, Ohtani struck out Angels teammate and US captain Mike Trout to clinch Japan's third WBC victory following triumphs in 2006 and 2009. Two-way threat Ohtani, the 2021 American League Most Valuable Player who has earned comparisons to Babe Ruth since arriving in Major League Baseball, said the win was the highlight of his career. "It's definitely number one," Ohtani told FOX television through a translator. "It's got to be up there. It was a storybook ending."

"More than anything, I appreciate this tournament, this whole situation, this whole atmosphere," added

Ohtani, who was named tournament MVP. Ohtani had fired up Japan with a rousing pre-game speech in which he urged his teammates to "stop admiring" an American lineup regarded as the strongest US baseball team ever assembled. "Obviously, the US lineup, one through nine, they're all household names, superstars," Ohtani said afterward.

"All the Japanese guys know them. So I didn't want us to be passive. Show respect — but stay aggressive, stay confident. That's why I gave that speech." The star-studded US team, defending champions after winning the last edition of the tournament in 2017, were left ruing their inability to get on top of Japan's pitchers. Philadelphia Phillies shortstop Trea Turner blasted the hosts to a 1-0 lead in the top of



the second inning with a solo shot to left field. But Japan hit back immediately with Murakami — the hero of Japan's walk-off win over Mexico in Monday's semifinal — launching a home run to right-center field in the bottom of the second off US starter Merrill Kelly. Kelly's problems were only just beginning, with the Arizona right-hander giving up singles to Okamoto and Sosuke Genda before walking Yuhei Nakamura to load the bases.

That prompted US skipper Mark DeRosa to pull Kelly, with Aaron Loup brought in to get out of the jam. Loup managed to emerge from the situation relatively unscathed, with Japan picking up just one more run for a 2-1 lead after Lars Nootbaar grounded out to score Okamoto. Japan extended their lead in the bottom of the fourth when Okamoto crushed a fly ball to left field off US reliever Kyle Freeland to make it 3-1. The Americans threatened to haul themselves back into contention in the fifth but left Mookie Betts and Nolan Arenado stranded on base. It was a similar story in the top

of the seventh when Jeff McNeil took a leadoff walk before Betts singled to leave US runners on first and second with no outs.

Once again though, the US were unable to cash in, with Trout lining out to right fielder Kensuke Kondoh before a double-play ended the inning. Japan manager Hideki Kuriyama turned to Yu Darvish to lock it down in the eighth. But after getting rid of Arenado, the San Diego Padres pitcher was jolted by a monster home run from Kyle Schwarber, who launched a fly ball into the upper tiers to make it a one-run game.

Devin Williams went scoreless through the eighth inning, setting up a dream final inning, with Ohtani pitching to close out the game. Ohtani started nervously by walking McNeil, but Betts grounded into a double play to leave Japan just one out from victory. That left Ohtani needing to dispose of Trout to clinch the victory, and the US captain struck out swinging to end the game. — AFP

World Cup winner Mesut Ozil retires

ISTANBUL: World Cup winner Mesut Ozil announced his retirement from football on Wednesday after an illustrious international career with Germany and club spells with Real Madrid and Arsenal. The 34-year-old helped Germany to glory in Brazil in 2014 but bitterly quit the international scene after the Germans crashed out of the 2018 tournament in Russia.

"After thoughtful consideration, I'm announcing my immediate retirement from professional football," the attacking midfielder said. "I've had the privilege to be an international footballer for almost 17 years now and I feel incredibly thankful for the opportunity. But in recent weeks and months, having also suffered some injuries, it's become more and more clear that it's time to leave the big stage of football."

Ozil, born in the German city of Gelsenkirchen but of Turkish descent, played on some of football's biggest stages but also became embroiled in international politics and accusations of racism. When Germany were knocked out of the 2018 World Cup at the group stage, a wounded Ozil accused the German public of "racist" attacks.

His club career blossomed when his deft passing and vision helped secure his move from the Bundesliga to Jose Mourinho's Real Madrid



Mesut Ozil

side in 2010. He soon led La Liga in assists while helping the Spanish club to their 32nd league title in 2012. His big-money move to Arsenal in 2013 helped the London club end their FA Cup drought the following year.

In 2014, Ozil started the final as Germany beat Lionel Messi's Argentina 1-0 in the Maracana in Rio de Janeiro thanks to Mario Goetze's extra-time goal. Ozil was repeatedly shortlisted for the Ballon d'Or but the later stages of his career were troubled by disputes over playing time and his close personal friendship with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

Erdogan was the best man at Ozil's Istanbul wedding to former Miss Turkey and actress Amine in 2019. But it was Ozil's decision to be pictured with Erdogan on the eve of Turkey's 2018 presidential election that caused particular controversy during that summer's World Cup. Ozil's picture with the Turkish leader was widely interpreted as his political endorsement of Erdogan in the 2018 election campaign. He ended his international career before moving to Fenerbahce and most recently Istanbul Basaksehir. — AFP

Messi 'madness' in Argentina as champs play first match

BUENOS AIRES: Lionel Messi and his Argentina teammates will make a triumphant return in their homeland on Thursday when they play their first match since winning the World Cup in Qatar. More than 1.5 million fans applied for 63,000 available tickets for the match against Central American minnows Panama at the Monumental stadium in Buenos Aires.

Football-mad Argentines were out in even larger numbers following the Albiceleste's dramatic penalty shoot-out victory over France in December. An estimated five million people thronged the streets of Buenos Aires a few days later for the trophy parade. Such was the multitude that the parade had to be abandoned long before it reached central Buenos Aires as it was already hours behind schedule.

Messi had been widely expected to retire from international football after the final in Doha, in which he scored two goals and a shoot-out spot-kick, but the Paris Saint-Germain forward said he wanted to carry on a bit longer so he could wear the blue and white Argentina jersey as a world champion. "He is in good shape, he wants to keep coming. When he tells me that he doesn't feel good, we'll see," coach Lionel Scaloni said on Tuesday. "At the moment he is happy with the national team."

The expectation was slightly soured earlier this month when two men fired shots at a closed supermarket belonging to the family of Messi's wife, before leaving a menacing message aimed at the seven-time Ballon d'Or winner. "Messi, we're waiting for you. Javkin is a narco, he won't take care of you," said the handwritten message left on the ground, in reference to Pablo Javkin, the mayor of Messi's hometown Rosario, around 320 km north of Buenos Aires.

Messi, though, has taken it all in his stride, as his father pointed out. "I spoke to the kid and he told me: 'relax'," Jorge Messi told reporters. For the mayor of Rosario, it was more of a publicity stunt than a genuine threat. "What story goes more quickly viral in the world than an attack on Messi?" said Javkin. While it may not directly affect Messi, the incident



EZEIZA, Argentina: Argentina's forward Lionel Messi smiles during a training session on March 21, 2023, ahead of the friendly football matches against Panama and Curazao. — AFP

did highlight a growing problem in the 35-year-old's hometown. Rosario is a port city on the Parana river that has gradually become a nerve center for drug trafficking and the most violent city in Argentina, with 287 murders in 2022.

'Everyone will want to beat us'

A party atmosphere is expected in Buenos Aires for the team's competitive homecoming. With 20,000 places in the 83,000-capacity stadium reserved for invitees, the remaining tickets were snapped up within two hours of going on sale. The cheapest cost 12,000 pesos (\$60) up to 49,000 pesos (\$245), which is more than half the average monthly salary in the South American country.

Argentine football federation president Claudio Tapia said the body had received more than 130,000 requests for media accreditation, in a stadium that has capacity for just 344 journalists. "We would love to be able to accommodate everyone, but we would need two ... stadiums, just for journalists. The madness for Argentina is total," said Tapia.

Those not lucky enough to get inside the stadium will at least be able to watch the match for free on television after the government decided to broadcast it freely. Scaloni promised them is that the team would not rest on their laurels, regardless of the occasion or opponents. "The aim is to keep playing at the same level," he said. "Now, it will be harder than ever because everyone will want to beat us." After Thursday's match, Argentina will play the island of Curacao on Match 28 in Santiago del Estero. — AFP