

2 Misbah: A unique accessory to Kuwaiti men's traditional dress



5 'Not a crime': Trump dismisses New York probe at Texas rally



16 Morocco stun Brazil for first time in friendly international



Fajr	04:25
Shurooq	05:44
Dhuhr	11:54
Asr	15:23
Maghrib	18:03
Isha	19:21

GCC appeals to US on Zionist minister's Palestinian remarks

Zionist forces, settlers storm Aqsa Mosque • Kuwait condemns Denmark Quran burning



JERUSALEM: Worshippers perform the first Friday prayers of the fasting month of Ramadan in front of the Dome of the Rock at the Al-Aqsa Mosque compound on March 24, 2023. — AFP

KUWAIT: The Gulf Cooperation Council said Sunday it had written to Washington's top diplomat condemning controversial comments from the Zionist entity's finance minister in which he denied the existence of a Palestinian people. The GCC, in a letter to US Secretary of State Antony Blinken, called on Washington "to assume its responsibilities in responding to all measures and statements that target the Palestinian people". The letter from the six-member GCC's foreign ministers also called on the United States "to play its role in reaching a just, comprehensive and lasting solution" to the Zionist-Palestinian conflict.

The Zionist entity's far-right Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich, speaking earlier this month, said that the Palestinians did not exist as a people, comments that sparked outrage among Arab nations. The US State Department said they had found Smotrich's comments "to not only be inaccurate but also deeply concerning and dangerous". Smotrich is part of Zionist leader Benjamin Netanyahu's hard-right government that took office in December.

The GCC ministers also denounced earlier remarks by Smotrich, calling for the Palestinian town of Huwara in the West Bank to be "wiped out", remarks he later walked back. The GCC, whose foreign ministers met in Riyadh last week, includes the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain, which normalized

relations with the Zionist entity under the US-crafted 2020 Abraham Accords, as well as Saudi Arabia, which has not.

Violence has intensified in the West Bank in recent months, which the Zionist entity has occupied since the Six-Day War of 1967. On Tuesday, the State Department criticized a move by the Zionist parliament to annul part of a law banning Zionists from living in areas of the West Bank evacuated in 2005, calling it "provocative" and in direct contradiction of promises made to Washington at the time. Blinken, appearing before a Senate committee, also reiterated previous US pushback on Smotrich's comments about Palestinians, saying they do not reflect US values.

Tens of settlers raided the courtyard Al-Aqsa Mosque at dawn on Sunday under the protection of Zionist police, forcing Palestinians to leave the mosque and preventing them from performing their prayers. The Islamic Waqaf Department said in a brief statement that dozens of settlers stormed the mosque from the Mughrabi Gate and held provocative tours in its courtyards. Witnesses said occupation forces tightened military procedures in the old town before Fajr prayer and obstructed the entry of young men to the mosque to pray to secure the settlers' incursions.

Continued on Page 6

RAMADAN KAREEM

Ramadan and the Noble Quran

By Nisar Ahmad

The month of Ramadan has been honored by the Creator of the universe because of the revelation of the Holy Quran and other divine scriptures such as the Torah and the Bible in this month for the guidance of entire mankind. Almighty Allah revealed these books to take mankind out of darkness into light, out of polytheism into oneness of Allah, from disbelief into belief, from hypocrisy into sincerity. Almighty Allah conferred sacredness to this month and prescribed this month for His devotion so that people may realize the essence of His message and prepare themselves to live by it.

The main subject of the Noble Quran is man, ie, man's guidance. The Noble Quran contains perfect guidance for entire mankind and guides them in all aspects of life. No sphere or aspect of human life is left out from this guidance. The Noble Quran says what can be translated as: "And We have sent down to you the Book explaining all things, a Guide, a Mercy, and Glad Tidings to Muslims (those who have submitted to Allah)." (Al Nahal 16:89)

Ramadan is the month to refresh our connection with the book of our Lord by reading and reflecting upon His message with a firm determination to implement it in all aspects of life. The Noble Quran provides best solutions to all the contemporary problems that human beings are currently facing, be it polytheism, atheism, adultery, homosexuality, lesbianism, usury, alcoholism, deception, deteriorating moral values, broken

Continued on Page 6

5,000 expats abroad for more than six months lose iqamas

KUWAIT: The interior ministry has rejected renewal applications of residency permits of 5,000 expatriates for staying abroad for more than six months, as they submitted their renewal applications online, stating they had to remain abroad due to sickness, family situations and financial inability, among other reasons.

Lebanese squabble over clock change

BEIRUT: A last-minute decision in Lebanon to delay daylight savings by a month has been met with opposition from the influential church, leaving the small country divided between two time zones. Wracked by a crippling economic meltdown and political deadlock, a seemingly odd question was added on Sunday to the growing list of Lebanon's woes: "What time is it?"

2,000 ram heads unearthed at Egypt temple

CAIRO: Archaeologists in Egypt have discovered more than 2,000 ancient mummified sheep heads left as offerings in a temple to the pharaoh Ramses II, the tourism and antiquities ministry said Sunday. Mummies of dogs, goats, cows, gazelles and mongooses were also exhumed by a team of US archaeologists from New York University at Abydos, a site in southern Egypt famous for its temples and tombs.

"Other expatriates will also lose their iqamas this month for the same reason. The ministry, through the department of residency affairs, automatically and immediately cancels the residency of any expatriate who has been outside Kuwait for six months. Through an automated link with the Public Authority of Manpower and the Public Authority for Civil Information, the work permit of an expatriate whose residency has been canceled is revoked, and their civil ID card is also canceled," sources at the interior ministry told Kuwait Times.

In October, the interior ministry announced it would begin the electronic cancelation of residence permits of workers in the government sector (article

17), partners in the private sector (article 19), dependents (article 22), students (article 23) and self-sponsored residents (article 24), who have been outside the country for six months or more.

"The period of their presence outside the country will be calculated from August 1, 2022 until January 31, 2023, and then their residency will be automatically canceled, as six months have passed since they left the country," sources said. The sources also indicated that the interior ministry has started reviewing the residencies of all expatriates, which will be revoked for losing any of the conditions for granting them residency, in coordination with the manpower authority, including failing to obtain a work permit.

The caretaker government announced on Thursday its decision to delay rolling clocks forward until April 20, instead of the last week of March as is usually the case in Lebanon and much of the northern hemisphere. But institutions including the Maronite Church, schools and media outlets insisted on turning their clocks forward at midnight (2200 GMT on Saturday).

"Had the government taken the decision a month ago, and not 48 hours in advance, then there wouldn't have been a problem," said Pierre Daher, CEO of Lebanese broadcaster LBCL. The channel had said in a statement it would defy the government's decision

Continued on Page 6



BEIRUT: A clocktower in Beirut's Jdeideh district indicates the time on March 26, 2023, after Lebanon's government announced a decision to delay daylight savings. — AFP

Sameh Iskandar, head of the American mission, said the ram heads were "offerings" indicating "a cult to Ramses II celebrated 1,000 years after his death". Ramses II reigned over Egypt for nearly seven decades, from 1304 to 1237 BC. Mostafa Waziri, head of Egypt's Supreme Council of Antiquities, said the finds will help people know more about the temple of Ramses II and the activities which took place there from its construction between 2374 and 2140 BC and the Ptolemaic period, from 323 to 30 BC.

As well as the remains of mummified animals, archaeologists discovered the remains of a palace with five-meter-thick walls dating to some 4,000 years ago. They also found several statues, papyri, remains of ancient trees, leather clothes and shoes. Abydos, which lies some 435 km on the Nile river south of Cairo, is famed for its temples such as that of Seti I, as well as its necropolises. — AFP



ABYDOS, Egypt: This handout picture released on March 25, 2023 shows mummified ram heads uncovered in recent excavations at the temple of Ramses II. — AFP



Misbah: A unique accessory to Kuwaiti men's traditional outfit



KUWAIT: A customer examines strings of beads at a prayer bead shop at a Kuwait City market. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat



A Kuwaiti man checks a collection of prayer beads displayed at a shop in downtown Kuwait City, during the holy fasting month of Ramadan.



A collection of prayer beads are displayed at a shop.



A vendor sorts displayed prayer beads at a market.



A vendor assembles prayer beads.

By Ghadeer Ghloom

KUWAIT: Prayer beads, known as misbah in the Kuwaiti dialect, is a unique accessory that is often carried by Kuwaiti men to add an elegant and luxurious look to their traditional dishdasha. Its value and distinction constitute a public culture among Kuwaiti men. Prayer beads in Kuwait come in different types, shapes and prices depending on the quality of the material and manufacturing. To take a closer look at Kuwaiti men's fashion, Kuwait Times interviewed three Kuwaiti men, who shared their thoughts on what makes the misbah extra special.

How do Kuwaiti men accessorize their traditional outfit (dishdasha and ghutra with egal)?

Abu Abdullah, a local middle-aged

man, told Kuwait Times that the misbah in Kuwaiti culture is considered as an accessory to the outfit worn, and part of putting on a fashionable look. In addition to wearing the formal Kuwaiti dress of a dishdasha and ghutra with egal, men add accessories to show their status and sophisticated appearance, such as putting a fountain pen in the chest pocket, replacing sleeve buttons with cufflinks (bazmat), wearing a watch and carrying misbah made of beautiful and valuable beads. These accessories are usually worn on special meetings and events.

However, the misbah has a special value among other accessories over the precious material used and its purpose, which is rooted to not only fashion and tradition, but also religion and psychology, as some people believe it is capable of healing some illnesses. Therefore,

the misbah is not just an accessory. Abu Abdullah said carrying a misbah has become an inherited social behavior, as today we see youngsters and teenagers carry it to manifest the prototypical appearance of a Kuwaiti man.

Carrying a misbah is also a habit for some men. "They are always playing with the prayer beads for calmness and entertainment, or while thinking, so they move the beads around their thumb or fingers in a certain manner that interacts with their thinking and concentration. Also, some men see that carrying prayer beads adds to their masculine identity, as men should carry a misbah," Abu Abdullah said.

Is misbah only for men?

Both men and women use the misbah for its uniqueness and sophistication. Khaled, a middle-aged local, told Ku-

wait Times: "We are used to seeing men with a misbah, and a woman with a misbah used to be very rare. Women used it for prayers, but not in public. However, this is not the case today, as women have started wearing it as a bracelet around their wrists."

Young men, teens carrying misbah

Abdulrahman, an 18-year-old Kuwaiti, said that he carries a misbah not only at formal events or while wearing the dishdasha. "My misbah is of kahrab (a precious stone used to make prayer beads). I carry it even when I go to shopping malls and when I am wearing casual clothes. Using a misbah is very relaxing and is good for my psychological wellness," he said. Like many others, Abdulrahman believes the purpose behind using a misbah is beyond accessorizing — it also improves health.



Public Authority for Youths launches a mobile lab project

KUWAIT: The Public Authority for Youths has launched the mobile lab (Fab bus), which conducts field visits to schools to familiarize students with the courses offered by the Authority on digital transformation in the fields of robotics and three-dimensional printing, and to provide practical and theoretical mini-training workshops.

The deputy director general of the youth development sector Dr Mishaal Al-Janoubi said in a press release on Sunday that the Bus Project comes in cooperation with the Ministry of education and out of the authority's keenness to implement the state's orientation on digitization. He added that Fab Bus also aims to empower young people in the technology and scientific research sector to benefit them and society and to provide diverse spaces to embrace the energies of youth and directing them towards contributing to the advancement of development in the country.

He pointed out that it also aims to develop a pas-

sion for technology and ignite the enthusiasm of children and young people, and it is a community partnership in which everyone cooperates to deliver this information to future generations. He mentioned that the launch of free courses and workshops for the youth program, (the third season) which is the complementary and specialized face of the (Fab Bus) project, has recently been completed. He pointed out that 54 different courses and workshops were offered over two months specialized in technology, space, robotics and digital transformation, where more than 900 trainees were trained. — KUNA



ADIYAMAN: A displaced man carries a sack of tomatoes as he walks under the rain past tents set up to home displaced people following a massive earthquake in Adiyaman, southeastern Turkey. — AFP

Kuwait pledges \$90 million for quake victims

KUWAIT: The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) said that Kuwait pledged nearly \$90 million to support UN efforts to help survivors of the earthquakes that occurred in Syria and Turkey last month. OCHA said in a statement Sunday that this pledge will finance the urgent appeals launched by the UN to both countries, which include contributions from the Kuwaiti government and people.

This funding, which is one of the largest funds provided by one country thus far, will help UN agencies to provide food, education, shelter, protection, health and early recovery services, as well as water, sanitation and hygiene services to nearly 18 million people affected by earthquakes in both countries, it explained. According to the statement, Under-Secretary-General for OCHA Martin Griffiths was thankful and expressed gratitude to Kuwait for this support, indicating that this assistance and contribution from the Kuwaiti government and its people will be provided immediately to the families who have nothing in those stricken areas.

OCHA referred to the statement of the Kuwaiti Foreign Minister Sheikh Salem Abdullah Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, that under the directives of 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 and His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, the campaign "Kuwait is beside you" that launched on February 12 collected \$67.7 million.

Sheikh Salem Al-Sabah reaffirmed that Kuwait will remain a strong supporter of the efforts made by the UN agencies in providing humanitarian and emergency relief assistance to the affected countries, out of belief in the importance of strengthening international and regional partnerships, especially in humanitarian aspects. Kuwait's government announced other relief efforts worth \$30 million prior to the fundraising campaign, thus bringing the total amount pledged by Kuwait entirely to the victims of the massive earthquake that struck parts of both countries to \$97.7 million, distributed equally between them.

The UN announced, in the aftermath of the earthquakes, that it would need \$398 million for the immediate response in Syria and one billion dollars for the response in Turkey and so far, 79 percent of the funding for the Syria earthquake appeal has been financed, while the percentage of funding for the Turkey earthquake appeal reached 19 percent. —KUNA

Local

Fasting is safe, effective for 'fatty liver' patients

A good way to reduce weight and fat levels in the blood

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: Internist, Gastroenterologist and Hepatologist Dr Wafaa Al-Hashash said fasting is safe and effective for "fatty liver" patients, adding it is a good way to reduce weight and fat levels in the blood, in addition to the accumulated and stored fat in the body. It also improves enzyme and liver functions with a reduction of liver fatty acid and cirrhosis, but it should be under medical supervision.

Dr Hashash said in a press statement that a study published in Feb 2022 proved that fasting affects fatty liver through various mechanisms to reduce weight, including transforming the metabolism process away from forming and accumulating fat in the liver and improving insulin resistance and metabolic syndrome. She said fatty liver is the main reason for liver cirrhosis and cancer, adding there are no approved treatments for it. Among its causes are obesity and diabetes.

Dr Hashash said WHO statistics show that 9.5 percent of global inhabitants have "fatty liver" through autopsies, i.e. around 1.5 billion people have liver disease and divided into 60 percent with fatty liver, 29 percent with hepatitis B and 9 percent with hepatitis C. She said stats indicate fasting for 12 to 14 hours has positive results, as it was found that after fasting for 30 days, a notable improvement was observed in the following: Reduction of body mass index by 6 percent; Reduction of fatty liver by 27 percent with the use of FibroScan (elastography); Reduction of the rate of liver cirrhosis by 30



Dr Wafaa Al-Hashash

percent: Reduction of accumulated fat in the body by 47 percent; Reduction in the HbA1C (a test that measures the average blood sugar levels over the past three months) by 10 percent.

This in addition to improvement in liver enzymes and functions. But Dr Hashash said it was found eating meals at night that are rich in fats and sugars, in addition to a change in sleeping patterns and changes in the biological clock, may reduce the benefits of fasting. She advised early detection of fatty liver and cirrhosis, adding there are modern techniques that help in the discovery such as the FibroScan system without the need for a biopsy. It measures the fat percentage in the liver with the use of ultrasound and is highly accurate.

Meanwhile, General Surgery Consultant at Mubarak Hospital Dr Abdallah Al-Haddad said Kuwait Society for Colon and Rectal Surgery held two days awareness program about colon cancer in order to make citizens and expats aware of the disease. He said the disease is the most spread among middle-aged men in Kuwait, according to Kuwait Tumors Center, and second to breast cancer. He said colorectal cancer affects Kuwaitis at a rate



KUWAIT: Participants take a group photo after the two awareness programs.

of 14.8 for every 100,000, while among non-Kuwaitis, the rate is 6.7 for 100,000 individuals.

Dr Haddad said the awareness campaign that was launched by the society succeeded in its goals in informing citizens and expats about the dangers of this disease and explained the importance of early detection of colon and rectum cancer. The earlier the discovery is made, treatment will be highly beneficial

and the disease can be eradicated in its early stages.

Dr Haddad advised those over 45 years of age to undergo colonoscopy for early detection of colon and rectum cancer. Also, those suffering from bloating, abdominal pain, unexplained weight loss, change in defecation or blood in the feces must refer to a doctor to take the necessary action for treatment.



KUWAIT: In this file photo, Muslim men pray at Fatmah Mosque in Kuwait City during the holy month of Ramadan. — Photo Yasser Al-Zayyat

Ramadan hashtag sparks controversy on social media

By Faten Omar

KUWAIT: The hashtag #last_ten_days_of_Ramadan has sparked controversy on social media between opponents and supporters. The hashtag came after demands by several citizens to apply a proposal by MP Hamad Al-Obaid to suspend work in the public sector during the last 10 days of the holy month of Ramadan in order to give employees more time for worship, prayers and rituals.

A number of experts in several fields agreed any government move to consider the last 10 days of Ramadan as an official holiday will afflict Kuwait with more economic paralysis, in addition to perpetuating the behavior of disrespecting the value of work. It will also cause severe harm at an educational level for students who are already suffering from learning loss due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Meanwhile, the ministry of education confirmed

earlier that it had not received any instructions regarding a holiday on the last 10 days of Ramadan, affirming that such a decision will affect the study plan. Several citizens on Twitter rejected the adoption of this decision. Ali Al-Fadhala affirmed that a decision to suspend work in the last 10 days of Ramadan is considered irresponsible, as suspending work for 10 days, in addition to the Eid holiday, will lead to a lot of disruption.

"I feel bitter when I read about demands for a holiday in the last 10 days of Ramadan. Work is worship, and we are in the month of worship. How can Muslims face God if they are being lazy? It is pure ignorance. Hopefully, the government will not heed an illegal request in the name of sharia," Farida Al-Habib said.

"To work diligently to benefit yourself and others during the last 10 days of Ramadan is better than spending its nights praying. A country that obstructs people's interests over worship is a state which has mixed priorities. Worship is an individual matter. It is hypocrisy to demand a holiday for the last 10 days of Ramadan for worship, then spend it traveling," Salah Al-Rashed tweeted.

Kawther Al-Jouan revealed that families in the olden days fasted during summer heat and winter cold, while their children went to school walking under the burning sun, rain and cold. "They fasted,

prayed and went to tarawih with their children. Today, people are inside their air-conditioned cars and workplaces, and they want a holiday!"

Fahad Al-Jaffar emphasized that the generation of the seventies and eighties was the most patient. "We used to go to our unairconditioned schools, while our Palestinian teachers counted every mistake we did. Our backpacks were full of books, and we had a notebook with not less than 120 pages for every subject we studied. We always returned home with a smile on our faces," he said.

"The month of Ramadan is the month of goodness, fasting and worship. It is not a month of sleeping, eating, staying up late, shopping or visiting. It is just a month and sometimes it is only 29 days. We should teach our children to be more patient and teach them about how our grandparents survived with no such luxuries," he added.

On the other hand, some citizens supported the decision. For Ashkanani, the 10-day holiday is a must, because people are now up until Fajr prayer and stay up late worshipping, calling on people who object to the decision to stay out of this matter. Budoor also supported the proposal. "I strongly agree, because everyone is busy with worship and tarawih prayers, as well as preparing for Eid. And with school homework and drops and pickups, how can all of this be done?"

News in Brief

Kuwait's unsteady weather

KUWAIT: Kuwait Fire Force on Sunday urged citizens and residents of the country to be cautious while moving publicly due to the unstable weather. Anyone in need for help can call the phone number: 112. Kuwait is currently witnessing an unsteady weather, marked with rainfalls and low visibility. Authorities had repeatedly warned motorists to be cautious due to slippery, rain-drenched roads. — KUNA

Burning of Quran condemned

CAIRO: The Arab Parliament on Sunday decried the burning of a copy of the Holy Book the Quran in the Danish capital. Recurrence of such provocative acts foments hatred, violence, threatens communities' security and stability, said the parliament chairperson, Adel Al-Asoumi, in a statement. "The burning of the sacred book is a barbaric act," he said, noting that the provocative act happened during the fasting month of Ramadan. Al-Asoumi called for dissemination of ideal values such as co-existence and tolerance among peoples of the globe. "Those militants will not attain their vile objectives because the Islamic religion will remain standing, unruffled with such systematic campaigns," he said, urging the international community to prohibit acts intended to desecrate all religions. Earlier this week, anti-Islam fanatics set a copy of the Quran afire along with the Turkish flag outside premises of the Turkish embassy in Copenhagen. — KUNA

EPA denies social media rumors

KUWAIT: The Environment Public Authority (EPA) said that the levels of concentrations of all air pollutants in Kuwait are within the national standards and guideline limits. In a press release, the Authority denied in detail what is being circulated on social media about "smells spread due to a gas leak belonging to a company working in the gas field". She stressed that she is working on monitoring and evaluating air quality around the clock through a monitoring system and network distributed in many regions of the country. — KUNA

Minister inspects Ramadan Center

KUWAIT: Minister of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs and Minister of State for integrity promotion Abdulaziz Al-Majid inspected on Saturday the Ramadan Center held at the Grand Mosque of the state, confirming the success of the Awqaf plan and the working teams in organizing the third night of the holy month by receiving masses of worshippers easily and providing all their needs.

Al-Majid told the Kuwaiti news agency (KUNA) after his inspection tour that the Awqaf will continue to achieve its successes thanks to the efforts of officials and workers in the competent authorities. He praised the cooperation of the ministries and state institutions in successfully organizing and covering the revival of the nights of the holy month of Ramadan, especially the ministries of (Interior), (Health), (Media), the Kuwait News Agency and the Red Crescent Society. The director of the Grand Mosque, Ali Shaddad, in a similar statement to KUNA, confirmed the tangible success in reviving the third night of Ramadan in terms of receiving worshippers and providing for their needs. Shaddad noted the events planned in advance to accompany the performance of the Tarawih prayer through the reciters' schedule and the belief thought accompanying the prayer. — KUNA



Local

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Zain's volunteer team joined in delivering food supplies.

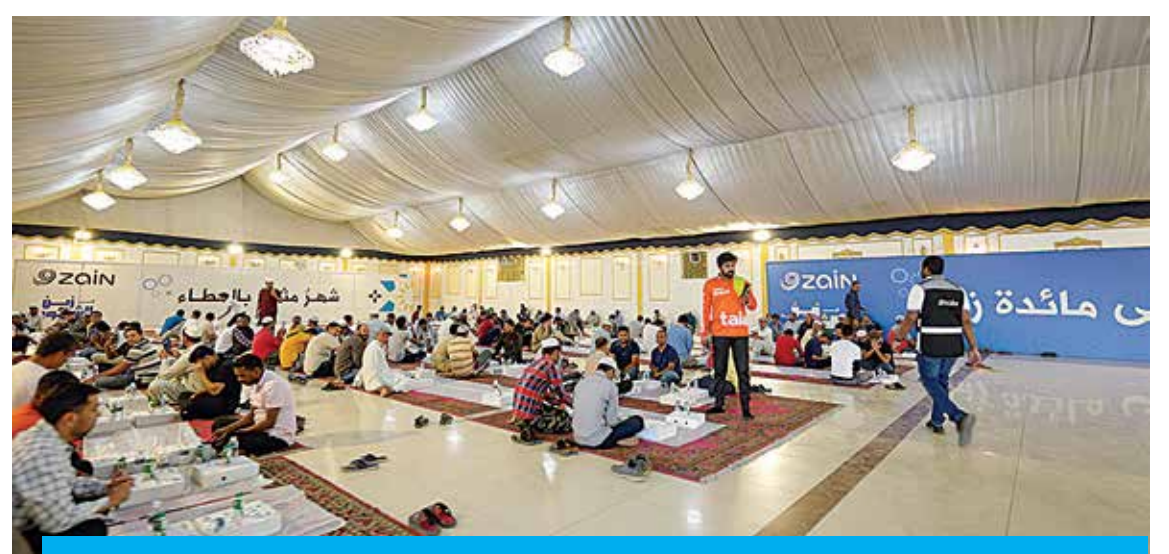
Zain kicks off annual Ramadan social campaign

Numerous programs and initiatives to reflect values of Holy Month

- Company partnered with 3 non-profit organizations to distribute 'Ramadan Machla'
- Zain's Iftar hall in Ardiya provides daily meals throughout the Holy Month
- Zain Ramadan Challenge at Al Shaheed Park to promote active lifestyle
- Month-long social and entertainment programs on TV and radio



Waleed Al Khashti and Anwar Al Hasawi with Zain and KRCS teams.



Zain's Iftar hall welcomes worshippers daily throughout the Holy Month.



Waleed Al Khashti and Ahmad Al Majed announce the Zain Ramadan Challenge at Shaheed Park.



Zain sponsors Mukhalat show with 360 FM.



Zain and Social Care Centers' officials.

KUWAIT: Zain, Kuwait's leading digital service provider, announced the launch of Zain Alshuhoor, the company's annual social campaign for the Holy Month of Ramadan. The company kick-started its campaign to share the blessings of the Holy Month with the community, partnering with public and private sector institutions to reflect the spirit of giving.

This year, Zain's Ramadan program features various contributions in a number of the most vibrant sectors within the community, including charitable and humanitarian efforts, social, religious, and entertainment programs, and sports and health activities. Through its campaign, Zain works hand in hand with its strategic partners from across Kuwait's public and private sectors under its Corporate Social Responsibility and Sustainability strategies.

Zain already kicked off its Ramadan campaign before the beginning of the Holy Month by delivering 'Ramadan Machla' (food supplies) in collaboration with three of its non-profit strategic partners: the Kuwait Red Crescent Society (KRCS), the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor's Social Care Centers, and the Zakat House. In addition, Zain's volunteers team directly distributed supplies at Taimaa, Jahra in partnership with KRCS.

Zain's Iftar Hall initiative also came back for its 16th year, which is considered one of the main pillars of the company's Ramadan campaign every year. Zain provides daily meals at the hall in Ardiya throughout the Holy Month, while also distributing meals across Kuwait via trucks in partnership with the Kuwait Food Bank. The trucks visit the most

populated areas to secure the daily Iftar meal of workers, underprivileged individuals and families, and others who are in most need during Ramadan.

During the Holy Month of every year, Zain is keen on supporting health and sports programs to encourage adopting an active and healthy lifestyle during the Holy Month. This year, Zain continues to partner with suffix, a sports management and consultancy leader, to present Zain Ramadan Challenge at Al Shaheed Park, which will feature walkathons and marathons throughout the Holy Month, with advanced tech tools being used to monitor the participants throughout the challenge.

Every Ramadan, Zain diversifies the content of its campaign to include cultural and recreational programs. This year, Zain sponsors Mukhalat in partnership with 360 FM, offering daily prizes to listeners



and winners all through the Holy Month. The company also sponsors the new season of Qudwa, a program hosted by Sheikh Fahad Al Kandari that presents beautiful Islamic values. Zain also sponsors a wide range of TV programs of the biggest local channels.



KUWAIT: A man stands in front of a marble mosaic at the entrance hall to Kuwait's Ministry of Information. The mosaic shows various styles of Arabic calligraphy which read "In the name of God, the merciful, the compassionate". (Source: 'Kuwait' by Ralph Shaw, London, 1976. Prepared by: Mahmoud Zakaria Abu Al-Ella, researcher in heritage at the Ministry of Information.)



Gold prices record gains for 4th week

KUWAIT: Gold recorded positive gains for the fourth week in a row, closing at \$1,978 an ounce, despite the slight decline witnessed at the end of last Friday's trading. A report issued by Kuwaiti Dar Al-Sabaek said on Sunday that the yellow metal prices declined on Friday, with an evaluation of the course of monetary policy and the developments of the global banking disruption that hit several American and European banks.

The report added that the Standard & Poor's Global purchasing managers' index data in the United States rose to the highest level in 10 months, indicating the improvement in the performance of the American economy in parallel with the decision

of the US Federal Reserve (the Central Bank) to raise interest rates by 25 basis points.

The report explained that raising the interest rate by this rate made financial analysts and purchasing managers think that the tightening US monetary policy is about to end, which means the possibility of low inflation in the upcoming months and the recovery of the economy. Due to these developments, gold fell by \$15 at the end of Friday's trading, after recording its highest level at 2006 per ounce, which is its best gain in three years.

Gold futures (for April delivery) closed at \$1,884 an ounce, with a slight decrease, among expectation that gold prices will rebound soon, with concerns about the global banking crisis. As for the local market, the report mentioned that the price for 24 carat gold closed on Friday at KD 19.45 per gram and the 22 carat gold reached KD 17.83 per gram, whereas silver reached KD 274 per kilogram. —KUNA



Honduras, China establish diplomatic ties

'Like a war zone': Volunteers travel miles to tornado-hit Mississippi

Page 6

Page 7



YEFREMOV, Russia: A woman grieves at the grave of her son, a fallen Russian soldier, at a cemetery in the town of Yefremov in the Tula region on March 23, 2023. — AFP

Kyiv seeks to stop Russian 'nuclear blackmail' in Belarus

Russia to retaliate if West supplies Ukraine with depleted uranium: Putin

KYIV : Kyiv on Sunday said it was seeking an emergency meeting of the United Nation's Security Council to counter Russia's "nuclear blackmail" after President Vladimir Putin announced the deployment of tactical nuclear weapons to Belarus.

Putin said the move was similar to the United States transferring weapons onto the territory of its allies, an analogy Germany called "misleading". "Ukraine expects effective actions to counteract the Kremlin's nuclear blackmail from the United Kingdom, China, the United States and France," the Ukrainian foreign ministry said.

"We demand that an extraordinary meeting of the UN Security Council be immediately convened for this purpose," it added. On Saturday, Putin announced Russia would station tactical nuclear weapons in neighbor and ally Belarus "without violating our international agreements on nuclear non-proliferation".

The Ukrainian foreign ministry accused Russia of breaching its obligations, and of undermining the

"nuclear disarmament architecture and the international security system in general". It called on "all members of the international community to convey to the criminal Putin regime the categorical unacceptability of its latest nuclear provocations."

Strongman Alexander Lukashenko, who has been in power in Belarus for almost 30 years, is a key Putin ally. Back in February 2022, Minsk allowed the Kremlin to launch its invasion of Ukraine from Belarusian territory.

'Nuclear hostage'

Fears have since risen that Belarus may join its ally's offensive, but Lukashenko said he would do so "only if attacked". On Sunday secretary of Ukraine's National Security and Defence Council, Oleksiy Danilov wrote on Twitter that "the Kremlin took Belarus as a nuclear hostage."

He added that the move was "a step towards the internal destabilization of the country". Ukrainian presidential aide Mykhaylo Podolyak added that

"(Putin) admits that he is afraid of losing and all he can do is scare" people.

In an interview broadcast Saturday, Putin said the move to deploy tactical nuclear weapons to Belarus was "nothing unusual". "The United States has been doing this for decades. They have long placed their tactical nuclear weapons on the territory of their allies," Putin said.

Putin said he spoke to Lukashenko and said "we agreed to do the same." Russia will start training crews on April 3 and plans to finish the construction of a special storage facility for tactical nuclear weapons by July 1.

'Nuclear intimidation'

Germany on Sunday called the announcement "another attempt at nuclear intimidation by Russia", an official in the foreign office told AFP. "The comparison made by President Putin to nuclear sharing in NATO is misleading and does not justify the step announced by Russia," the source said.

Belarus would also "contradict" its own international declarations to be a nuclear weapons-free zone, they said. Putin has previously said nuclear tensions were "rising" globally but that Moscow would not deploy first.

The Russian leader said renewed discussions with Lukashenko on the issue were spurred by a British official's suggestion to send depleted uranium weapons to Ukraine. Russia will respond if the West supplied Ukraine with such ammunition, he added.

"Russia of course has what it needs to answer. Without exaggeration, we have hundreds of thousands of such shells. We have not used them yet." He said the weapons "can be classified as the most harmful and hazardous for humans... and also for the environment".

Depleted uranium munitions are highly effective at piercing armor plate, but their use is controversial. The metal is toxic for the soldiers who use the weapons and for civilians in areas where they are fired. — AFP

Scholz looks to quell divisions within coalition

BERLIN: German Chancellor Olaf Scholz is battling to put out the fires threatening his government as the three-way coalition meets for crisis talks on a growing series of disputes. A little more than a year after taking office, the relationship between Scholz's Social Democrats (SPD) and his governing partners, the Greens and the pro-business FDP, looks more strained than ever. Earlier this week, Vice Chancellor and Economy Minister Robert Habeck of the Greens accused the FDP of blocking progress, while the FDP's deputy chief Wolfgang Kubicki compared the Green politician to Russian President Vladimir Putin. Kubicki later apologized but the damaging row underlines the state of the three-way coalition — the first in Germany's post-war history. The alliance got off to a good start in December 2021 under the motto of their coalition agreement — "Dare for more progress".

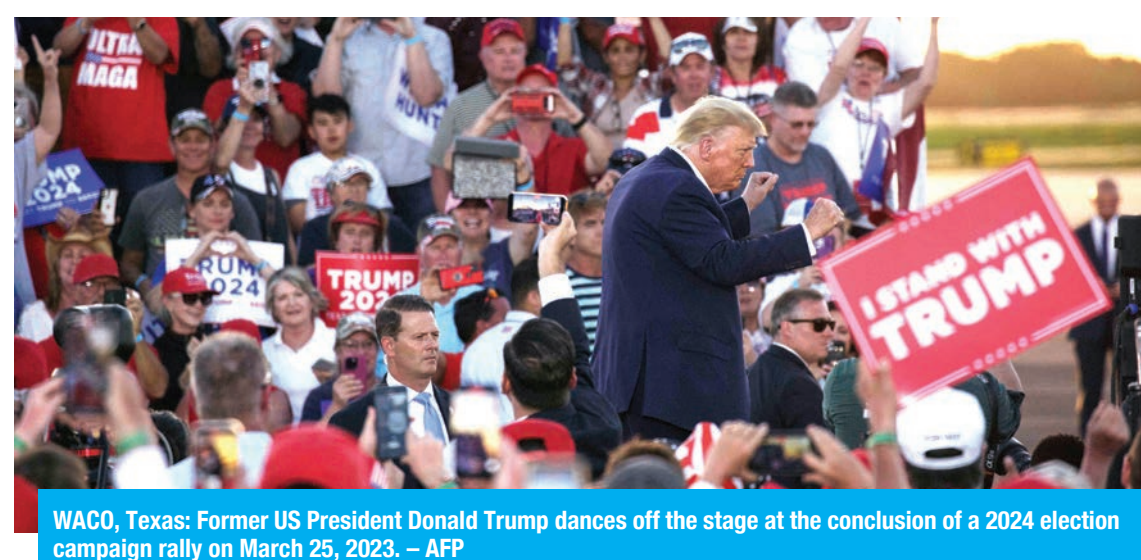
It was put to a tough test when Russia invaded Ukraine just two months on, upending decades of German economic and political certainties. But tensions have since soared — particularly between the Greens and the FDP.

The two are unnatural bedfellows, with the former set on environmental commitments to phase out nuclear energy and combustion engines, and the latter promoting very different economic policies. It could not be "that in a coalition of progress only one coalition partner is responsible for progress and the others for preventing progress", Habeck said at a Green party event during the week.

Boiling over

Sunday's talks would be a good opportunity to "overcome blockages" on key issues, Habeck also told broadcaster ARD, blasting the coalition's record and policy leaks. At the root of Habeck's discontent is a controversial project put forward by his ministry to ban the installation of new oil and gas boilers from 2024 — a year earlier than previously planned.

The accelerated move from fossil fuels to greener technologies such as heat pumps would be accompanied by a multi-billion-euro package of financial support for switchers, Habeck has promised. But the idea has caused ructions within the coalition, with critics underlining the costs involved.—AFP



WACO, Texas: Former US President Donald Trump dances off the stage at the conclusion of a 2024 election campaign rally on March 25, 2023. — AFP

Trump slams NY probe at Texas rally

WACO, Texas: Donald Trump staged his first presidential campaign rally in Texas Saturday, brushing off his potential indictment as he railed against multiple criminal probes threatening his bid for the White House. The Republican addressed several thousand supporters — far fewer than the 15,000 he had expected — in the city of Waco as he braced for possible charges over a hush-money payout just days before the 2016 election, to a porn star alleging a sexual encounter.

Maintaining the investigation was over "something that is not a crime, not a misdemeanor, not an affair", Trump told supporters how he had been the victim of "one witch hunt and phony investigation after another". The former president has made a torrent of increasingly bellicose statements, claiming "misconduct" by prosecutors he refers to as "human scum" who are pursuing cases against him in New York, Washington and Atlanta.

The 76-year-old — who was impeached for inciting an insurrection — called last weekend for protests against Manhattan District Attorney Alvin Bragg, and claimed falsely that he was about to be arrested. "This is really prosecutorial misconduct. That's what it's called. The innocence of people makes no difference whatsoever to these radical left

maniacs," he told an enthusiastic crowd. For loyal followers, the lines were likely familiar, with the appearance marking a thrilling opportunity finally to see the ex-president at a rally. As Trump spoke in the background, Hungarian-American retiree Marianna Bodrogi told AFP the occasion marked "the first time I've seen Trump in person". "I love him, he's our savior," the 69-year-old said.

Some of those arriving in Waco for the Trump rally came from other states, and said they were eager to see their candidate returned to the Oval Office, with many wearing MAGA caps or waving flags touting his campaign. "We have huge power behind Donald Trump that has yet to be unleashed," said Kelly Heath, 49, who lives in Georgia. "You will be shocked."

Trump is believed to be the frontrunner to be the Republican nominee in the 2024 presidential election. The chasing pack, led by Florida Governor Ron DeSantis, was initially reticent in its criticism of the ex-reality TV star, but has recently begun criticizing his character and the constant whiff of scandal that surrounds him.

Physician Felicia Macik, a Waco resident in the crowd, told AFP that, "getting ready to move forward into the new election season, it's been just real inspiring". The 54-year-old said that among the rally's joys were "just seeing him in person and feeling his spirit and making our presence known here." At the end of the rally, the ex-president departed on his plane, which served as part of the background for his speech.—AFP

Tunisia recovers 29 bodies after migrant vessels capsized

TUNIS: Tunisia's coastguard said Sunday the bodies of 29 migrants from sub-Saharan African countries had been recovered after three vessels capsized, the latest in a string of such tragedies.

A series of shipwrecks has left dozens of migrants dead and others missing in the country that serves as a key conduit for migrants seeking to reach nearby European shores. It comes after President Kais Saied made an incendiary speech last month, accusing sub-Saharan Africans of representing a demographic threat and causing a crime wave in Tunisia. The coastguard said in a statement Sunday that it had "rescued 11 illegal migrants of various African nationalities after their boats sank" off the central eastern coast, citing three separate sinkings. In one, a Tunisian fishing trawler recovered 19 bodies 58 kilometers (36 miles) off the coast after their boat capsized. A coastguard patrol off the coastal city of Mahdiya also recovered eight bodies and "rescued" 11 other migrants after their boat sank as it headed towards Italy. Fishing trawlers in Sfax meanwhile recovered two other bodies.

Black migrants in the country have faced a spike in violence since Saied's speech and hundreds have been living in the streets for weeks in increasingly desperate conditions. People fleeing poverty and violence in Sudan's Darfur region, West Africa and other parts of the continent have for years used Tunisia as a springboard for often perilous attempts to reach safety and better lives in Europe.

The Italian island of Lampedusa is just 150 kilometers (90 miles) off the Tunisian coast, part of the Central Mediterranean route described by the United Nations as the most deadly in the world. Rome has pressured Tunisian authorities to rein in the flow of people, and has helped beef up the coastguard, which rights groups accuse of violence. Italy's hard-right Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni warned Friday that Tunisia's "serious financial problems" risked sparking a "migratory wave" towards Europe.—AFP

International

'Like a war zone': Volunteers travel miles to tornado-hit Mississippi

Tornado killed more than 20 people, left thousands without power

ROLLING FORK: Outside, houses are torn open and trees lie with their roots in the air. Inside, stretchers are lined up in front of tables overflowing with food.

In Rolling Fork, Mississippi, where a tornado caused chaos and death, volunteers are pouring in from surrounding towns to help. The American Red Cross moved into a National Guard building less than 24 hours after the tornado struck Friday night, killing at least 25 people in the community of 2,000.

Some 4,800 customers were without power in Mississippi, and nearly 11,000 homes and businesses remained in the dark in neighboring Alabama, monitor poweroutage.us reported. President Joe Biden ordered federal aid to Mississippi on Sunday to support local recovery efforts. The funding will provide grants for temporary housing, home repairs and low-cost loans to cover uninsured property losses, the White House said in a statement.

'A bomb went off'

An ambulance is parked at the entrance of a room being used as an infirmary and, through the back door, boxes full of cereal bars and baby diapers keep arriving. "We're trying to give people a place to stay overnight with food and medical support so they can just have a place to lay their heads, because they've lost everything," said John Brown, a Red Cross official for Alabama and Mississippi.

The city is "like a war zone," he said. "It looks like a bomb went off." Whether or not residents choose to stay in the town center, they will at least have access to information and food and regain some strength, Brown said.

Anna Krisuta, 43, and her 16-year-old son Alvaro Llecha sit in the shelter, one on a stretcher, the other on a chair, electric blue energy drinks in front of them. Their house is "in pieces," Anna Krisuta says, putting on a brave smile. Both pull out their cell phones to show the extent of the damage, captured

on video. The pair are not sure whether they will spend the night at the center. Maybe they'd prefer to sleep in the car. Alvaro said, giving his mother a hesitant look. The teenager said he survived only by hiding in the bathroom, which he considered was the safest room in their house. "I thought I was going to die," he said, recounting the strong wind "rushing in through the bottom of the door."

'Resilience'

Lauren Hoda travelled 70 miles (110 kilometers) from Vicksburg to Rolling Fork to volunteer. She described the mixture of sadness, grief and anger she feels at the "injustice" inflicted on the residents.

"When I woke up this morning, I wanted to cry for the people of this town because I don't think they had much time before (the tornado) came. There were people eating in restaurants, families in bed," said the 28-year-old, who also experienced Hurricane Katrina in 2005.

She spent her Saturday night at Rolling Fork bringing donations from collection points: water, food, canned goods, diapers, wipes, medicine, deodorant, and toothpaste. Jon Gebhardt, an assistant professor of military science at the University of Mississippi, travelled three hours to Rolling Fork, arriving in the middle of the night to help set up the center.

"I cried quite a bit today," he said. "But this morning, when I woke up and saw the generosity and ability of this community to come together at such a difficult time, (I felt) lucky to be in Mississippi." He said he was confident in the resilience of the Mississippi Delta. "Will this community rebuild for the better and become a better version of itself in the next few years? Yes, I think so."

Storm chaser Aaron Rigsby told AFP he arrived in Rolling Fork right after the storm hit, in the pouring rain and with "lightning still all around." "When I got there, it was just a constant cry of voices scream-



ROLLING FORK: Aerial view of a destroyed neighborhood after a tornado touched down in the area March 25, 2023. — AFP

ing for help from people that were trapped," he said, adding he helped residents to free a few people from their destroyed homes.

The National Weather Service issued a rare tornado emergency for Rolling Fork and surrounding areas at 9:00 pm Friday, warning people to seek shelter from life-threatening conditions and forecasting golf ball-sized hail.

The NWS warned residents that as clean-up operations continue, "dangers remain even after the storms move on." Tornadoes, a weather phenomenon notoriously difficult to predict, are relatively common in the United States, especially in the central and southern parts of the country. In January, a series of damaging twisters, all on the same day, left several people dead in Alabama and Georgia. — AFP

US base drops Confederate name, honors soldier

WASHINGTON: The United States renamed a military base to honor a decorated Native American soldier instead of a general who fought for the pro-slavery breakaway Confederacy. Previously called Fort Pickett, the 41,000-acre Virginia National Guard installation is the first of nine bases to drop the name of a figure who served the Confederate States of America, which was made up of southern states that seceded and were defeated in the 1861-1865 US Civil War. The base was renamed after Colonel Van T. Barfoot, a World War II Medal of Honor recipient, its commander, Colonel James Shaver, said in a ceremony there. "This will be the first army post in the continental United States to bear the name of a Native American soldier," Shaver said, referring to Barfoot's Choctaw heritage.

Members of Barfoot's family attended the ceremony and helped unveil a sign bearing the base's new name: Fort Barfoot. "Having his service to this nation memorialized by this redesignation is a tribute to a man who epitomized what is great about our American soldiers," his daughter Margaret Nicholls said.

Barfoot, who served in World War II, Korea and Vietnam and reached the rank of colonel, died in 2012 at age 92. He received the Medal of Honor — the nation's highest military award for valor — for actions including taking out two German machine gun nests, capturing 17 enemy soldiers, disabling a tank and aiding wounded troops in Italy in 1944.

The base was previously named for Confederate major general George Pickett, who led three bri-



BLACKSTONE: The Virginia National Guard's Fort Pickett is officially redesignated Fort Barfoot in honor of Col. Van T. Barfoot, a World War II Medal of Honor recipient with extensive Virginia ties. — AFP

gades in an assault on Union troops during the 1863 Battle of Gettysburg that became known as "Pickett's Charge."

Pickett — who graduated last in his class from West Point and served in the Mexican-American war before resigning his commission to join the Confederacy — lost over half his command in the attack, which was ordered by general Robert E. Lee. The Confederacy lost the battle and the war, but Pickett survived both and later worked as a farmer and insurance salesman.

The president of the Virginia NAACP civil rights organization welcomed the renaming of the base.

"Public property should not be named after Confederate folks, so I think it's a good step in the right

direction to change it," Robert Barnett told AFP. Calls to change the names of bases that honor Confederate figures gained momentum during nationwide protests against racism and police brutality that were sparked by the 2020 murder of George Floyd, an African American man who died at the hands of a white police officer in Minneapolis.

In the National Defense Authorization Act for 2021, Congress required the establishment of a commission to plan for the removal of Confederate-linked "names, symbols, displays, monuments, or paraphernalia" from Defense Department property, and gave the secretary three years to carry out its recommendations. — AFP

Lula postpones China trip due to pneumonia

BRASILIA: Brazil's leftist leader Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva, who was due to head to China for key talks with President Xi Jinping, has indefinitely postponed his trip to recover from pneumonia, the government said Saturday. Lula, who succeeded the far-right leader Jair Bolsonaro at the start of the year, had hoped to use the trip next week to reclaim his country's role in global diplomacy, with discussions in Beijing expected to focus on reinforcing trade and the war in Ukraine. No new date was given for the 77-year-old Lula's trip, the government said, adding that Chinese authorities had already been told of the decision.

Lula had originally been scheduled to leave on Saturday but that was put back by a day due to what his office called a case of "mild pneumonia," which was being treated with medication. But doctors suggested he put off the trip, which entails some 20 hours of flight time, after a new exam on Saturday.

"Despite the improvement in his condition, the president's medical service recommends that the China trip be postponed" until Lula is no longer contagious, physician Ana Helena Germoglio said, according to the government statement. Lula's health has been a source of concern in recent years.

In November, Lula — who first governed Brazil from 2003 to 2010 — had surgery to remove a lesion from his vocal cords. The president was diagnosed with throat cancer in 2011, shortly after he left the presidency. He went into remission after undergoing treatment. — AFP

GCC appeals to US on Zionist...

Continued from Page 1

Late Saturday, Zionist military forces stormed Al-Aqsa Mosque and forcibly expelled Muslim worshippers. In a press statement, the Occupied Jerusalem Governorate said Zionist forces threw sound bombs at worshippers and beat them to push them out of the mosque. It added that the forces also detained two worshippers. The Zionist action prompted many Palestinians in the occupied city of Jerusalem to take to the streets to protest the attack on the Muslims' holy place and worshippers, the statement noted. Meanwhile, Kuwait condemned and denounced

Saturday the burning of a copy of the Holy Quran and the Turkish flag by a group of extremists in the Danish capital Copenhagen, the foreign ministry said. This new provocative act, which took place in the Muslim holy month of Ramadan, risks stirring anger among Muslims worldwide, the Kuwaiti foreign ministry warned in a statement. It renewed Kuwait's principled calls on the international community and relevant governments to take swift actions to counter hatred and extremism and to bring to a halt the repeated offenses against Muslim symbols and sanctities. The ministry called for holding perpetrators of such acts accountable and to make sure that the freedom of expression is not used to offend Islam or any other religion. It underlined the need for spreading the values of tolerance and peaceful coexistence among all peoples of the world. — AFP

The purpose of Ramadan is to strengthen God consciousness and improve the character and the Noble Quran is the means to achieve this purpose. By reading and reflecting upon the verses of the Noble Quran, one strengthens his faith in Allah and that results in augmented piety and abstinence from the prohibitions thereof. When the Noble Quran is recited to the true believers, it increases their faith (iman) and they tremble out of awe of Allah.

The Noble Quran says what can be translated as: "True believers are those whose hearts tremble with awe when God is mentioned, whose faith increases when His revelations are recited to them, who put their trust in their Lord" (Al Anfal 8:2). Unfortunately, many of us spend this month as a formality without realizing the real purpose of fasting and read the Noble Quran without giving it due attention.

The Noble Quran commands us to uphold justice, fairness and equality in our dealings and compassion, truthfulness and trustworthiness are to be traits of a sincere believer. These ideals are vital for any society to prosper. A Muslim has to learn to commit himself to these ideals and Ramadan provides an opportunity to inculcate these ideals. If true essence of Ramadan and teachings of the Noble Quran are realized, the world would be better place to live in. — TIES



BEIRUT: A woman holds a mobile telephone showing contradicting time zones on March 26, 2023, after Lebanon's government announced a decision to delay daylight savings. — AFP

Lebanese squabble over...

Continued from Page 1

as the delay would affect its operations. Three other Lebanese networks also moved clocks forward. But Daher said his concerns went beyond programming. "The worst thing is that the decision on when to begin summer time took a sectarian turn," he told AFP. While the government has not explained the move, a video shared widely on social media may provide an explanation. It shows a debate between caretaker prime minister Najib Mikati and parliament speaker Nabih Berri, who asks the premier to wait with the clock change until the end of the holy month Ramadan, in what appeared to be an attempt to cater to Muslims who fast daily until sunset.

Lebanon's powerful Maronite Church said it would not abide by the government decision which had been taken "without consultations and without any regard

for international standards". "A decision like this should have been announced a year earlier to avoid harming people's lives," church spokesman Walid Ghayad told AFP. "It cannot be made over a cup of coffee." The church's move was to prevent "further isolating Lebanon", he said.

Two prominent Christian political parties have called on the government to reverse its decision. And Gebran Bassil, leader of one of them, the Free Patriotic Movement, tweeted: "Do not change your clocks, they will move forward automatically." On many phones and other electronic devices, they did. Lebanon's two major telecommunications companies advised customers over the weekend to manually set clocks on mobile phones to avoid the automatic change.

Justice Minister Henri Khoury has backed calls for Mikati to go back on the decision, which would have "catastrophic" consequences for an economy in free fall since 2019. "The decision has created confusion and caused divisions and disturbances among religious authorities, private media and education institutions," Khoury said in a statement. — AFP

Ramadan and the Noble...

Continued from Page 1

families, surplus women, oppression and violence; you name it, it has the solution. The Noble Quran was revealed at a time when Arabs were deeply sunk in idolatry, and the other social evils such as adultery, alcoholism, and oppression of the weak and women. The Noble Quran elevated them from this debasement to the position of being torch bears for the generations to come within a short span of time. When they started following the book, they became trend setters for future generations.

The Noble Quran instilled profound faith in the creator of the universe in them, and in the meeting with Him. It constantly reminded them that they exist here to worship and obey their Creator and to serve fellow human beings and rest of His creation. Constant encouragement of the Noble Quran towards feeding the poor and helping the needy made them most generous and most kind of the mankind. They became the living example of the verse what can be translated as: "You are the best of peoples, evolved for mankind, enjoining what is right, forbidding what is wrong, and believing in Allah." (Ale Imran 3:110)

International

Honduras and China establish diplomatic ties in blow to Taiwan

Debt, need for investments behind Honduran change of allegiance

BEIJING: China and Honduras began formal diplomatic relations on Sunday, with Taiwan accusing Beijing of using "coercion and intimidation" to lure away its few remaining allies. China's announcement of the move came shortly after Tegucigalpa said it had officially severed ties with Taipei. "The two governments have decided to recognize each other and establish diplomatic relations at the ambassadorial level", effective immediately, China's foreign ministry said in a statement.

The switch cuts to 13 the number of countries that still diplomatically recognize Taiwan, which has lost several Latin American allies in recent years. China considers the self-ruled, democratic island a part of its territory, to be retaken one day — by force, if necessary. Under its "One China" policy, it does not allow countries to recognize both Beijing and Taipei.

Honduran Foreign Minister Enrique Reina and his Chinese counterpart Qin Gang signed a joint communique in Beijing, according to video released by state media outlet CCTV. "China welcomes (Honduran) President Xiomara Castro to visit China at an early date," said Qin.

Earlier, Reina said that upon Castro's instructions he had "communicated to Taiwan the decision to cease diplomatic relations". "The government of the Republic of Honduras recognizes the existence of only one China in the world, and that the government of the People's Republic of China is the only legitimate government that represents all of China," the Honduran foreign ministry said. "Taiwan is an inalienable part of Chinese territory."

Taiwanese President Tsai Ing-wen said the switch was part of "China's coercion and intimidation" of Taipei's allies. "China has suppressed the international space of (Taiwan) for a long time, unilaterally endangering regional peace and stability," read a statement from her office. In Beijing, Reina and Qin

clinked champagne glasses in front of their countries' flags, while in Taipei, officials at the foreign ministry had removed the blue-and-white banners of their former ally. Taiwan Foreign Minister Joseph Wu confirmed the severing of ties, accusing China of offering "financial incentives" to lure away the island's allies. Earlier this month, Reina said economic necessity was behind his country's decision, and that the Honduran government had asked Taiwan to increase financial aid.

On Sunday, Wu said Castro's government had "demanded we provide billions of US dollars in financial aid". Tegucigalpa, he said, had asked Taiwan to pay \$90 million for a hospital and \$350 million for dam, and to forgive \$2 billion in debt, adding "it felt like what they wanted was money, not a hospital".

Honduras is one of the poorest countries in its region, with almost 74 percent of its nearly 10 million people living in poverty. Tegucigalpa's move followed negotiations with China on building a hydroelectric dam.

In a social media post, Tsai said Taiwan supported the "substantial development" of its allies. But she added: "We will not engage in a meaningless cash diplomacy contest with China." In its Sunday statement, China's foreign ministry said Beijing "stands ready to enhance friendly cooperation with Honduras in various fields to the benefit of our two countries and peoples".

Responding to Tegucigalpa's move, the American Institute in Taiwan said: "While Honduras' action is a sovereign decision, it is important to note the PRC often makes promises in exchange for diplomatic recognition that ultimately remain unfulfilled."

Dwindling recognition

Latin America has been a key diplomatic battleground for China and Taiwan since the two split in 1949 after a civil war. Honduras's announcement



BEIJING: Honduras Foreign Minister Eduardo Enrique Reina (left) and Chinese Foreign Minister Qin Gang shake hands following the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries. — AFP

continues a trend in the region, with Nicaragua, El Salvador, Panama, the Dominican Republic and Costa Rica all switching diplomatic recognition to Beijing in recent years.

The United States remains Taiwan's most significant ally, and largest weapons supplier, despite having switched recognition to Beijing in 1979. This week, Taiwan confirmed that Tsai would depart on Wednesday to visit Guatemala and Belize — two re-

maining diplomatic allies — while also making stopovers in New York and Los Angeles.

Analysts linked the timing of Honduras's switch with Tsai's trip. "This is a warning before Tsai begins her visit to Central America on March 29 and I think China will make more diplomatic moves during her visit," said Kuo Yu-jen, a political analyst at National Sun Yat-sen University in Taiwan. — AFP



Hong Kong: A policeman issues numbered lanyards to protesters as they hold the first authorized march in two years on March 26, 2023. — AFP

Strict rules constrain first Hong Kong protest in two years

HONG KONG: Hong Kong's first protest against a government policy in about two years went ahead on Sunday, but under strict rules including a cap on numbers and a requirement that everyone wear an identifying number tag.

In mid-2020 Beijing imposed a National Security Law (NSL) to stamp out dissent in the southern Chinese city, which had been rocked by pro-democracy unrest. There have been few public protests against official policy since then, due to a combination of the crackdown and social-distancing measures to counter the COVID-19 pandemic.

Sunday's march was against a land reclamation plan in the city's east. As the first officially authorized protest against a government plan since the coronavirus measures were lifted, it offered an indication of the measure of dissent still allowed in the city.

Police required organizers to follow stringent conditions including capping numbers at 100, making participants wear number tags around their necks, and surrounding the crowd with a cordon, with media separated from marchers.

Officers closely examined banners and placards for "politically sensitive and seditious words", said protest organizer Cyrus Chan. One marcher — among about 80 who turned up — said the arrangements were "ridiculous".

"I am here to join a march, not a shame parade," said the retired civil servant, who did not wish to be identified. "This is intimidation ... but what can we do?" the marcher told AFP. "Now even trying to take a breath of fresh air may endanger national security." Responding to an AFP query about the restrictions, police said they conducted "comprehensive" risk assessments for public events based on their "purpose, nature, number of participants, past experience and latest developments".

Eric Lai, a fellow at Georgetown University's Center for Asian Law, told AFP the conditions to monitor headcount and identify marchers were "disproportionate", and unheard of in previous police-approved marches in Hong Kong.

Large-scale public events — including music festivals and art fairs — are returning to Hong Kong after the pandemic curbs were lifted, and local authorities insist residents still have freedom of speech and assembly. Earlier this month, a women's rights group called off what would have been one of Hong Kong's first authorized civil rights protests in years, after organizers were summoned multiple times by police. — AFP

New opposition protests banned in Kenya: Police

NAIROBI: Kenya's police chief announced a ban on fresh opposition demonstrations called for Monday, after protests last week degenerated into riots. "We will not allow violent demonstrations," Inspector General of Police Japhet Koome told reporters on Sunday. "The demonstrations they plan tomorrow (Monday) are illegal and will not be allowed," he said, adding that his force was ready to keep the peace and would arrest anyone carrying offensive weapons. Veteran opposition leader Raila Odinga has urged people to take to the streets on Monday and Thursday for further anti-government protests against the surging cost of living in Kenya.

Last Monday's demonstrations — which were also not authorized by police — descended into violence, with riot police firing tear gas and water cannon at people hurling rocks and setting tyres ablaze. A university student was killed by police fire while 31 officers were injured in running battles in Nairobi and opposition strongholds in western Kenya, according to police. More than 200 people were arrested, including several senior opposition politicians, while Odinga's own convoy was hit with tear gas and water cannon.

"You all saw what happened last week and we won't allow that to happen again, where hooligans come to town to loot and destroy people's property and businesses," Koome said. It was the first major political violence since President William Ruto took office six months ago after beating Odinga in an election his rival claims was "stolen". Many Kenyans are struggling to put food on the table, bat-

New calls to free South African hostage in Mali

JOHANNESBURG: The family of a South African held hostage by jihadists in Mali for over five years launched a fresh appeal for his release Saturday, just days after a French journalist was freed. Gerco van Deventer, 47, was kidnapped in Libya on November 3, 2017 on his way to a power plant construction site around 1,000 kilometers (600 miles) south of the capital Tripoli.

Three other Turkish engineers seized at the same time were freed seven months later, but Van Deventer remained in captivity and was moved to Mali. "I'm launching a fresh appeal ... we desperately need him home," his wife Shereen van Deventer, told AFP in an online interview. "He's a

Somalia flash floods kill 14, damage towns

MOGADISHU: At least 14 people have been killed in southern Somalia after torrential rains triggered flash floods that have caused havoc in several towns and villages.

Bridges, roads and houses have been damaged or destroyed and many people have been forced to flee their homes in search of safer ground. In the town of Baardhere in Jubaland state, 14 people were killed including three members of the same family, district commissioner Mohamed Weli Yusuf told reporters.

"Most of the casualties were caused after the victims were trapped across a bridge in the town



NAIROBI: In this file photo taken on March 20, 2023, a protester gestures towards police officers during a mass rally called by the opposition leader Raila Odinga who claims the last Kenyan presidential election was stolen from him. — AFP

ting high prices for basic goods, a plunging local currency and a record drought that has left millions hungry. "We call upon all patriotic Kenyans to come out in large numbers on Monday, 27th March 2023, for the mother of all demonstrations and to do so peacefully," Odinga said on Twitter last week. Ruto, who is leaving the country on Sunday for a trip to Germany and Belgium, has called on the opposition leader to halt the action.

"I am telling Raila Odinga that if he has a problem with me, he should face me and stop terrorizing the country," Ruto said on Thursday. Last week's protests proved costly — Nairobi lost more than half its daily

revenue as people kept away from the central business district, the city's governor Johnson Sakaja said.

Deputy President Rigathi Gachagua said the demonstrations cost the country \$15 million. During the election campaign, Ruto sought to portray himself as the champion of the downtrodden and vowed to improve the lot of ordinary Kenyan or so-called "hustlers". But he has since removed subsidies for fuel and maize flour — a dietary staple. And last week, Kenya's energy regulatory body announced a hike in electricity prices from April 1, despite Ruto insisting in January there would be no such increase. — AFP

father of three children," she added, referring to their children aged between 12 and 18 years. His parents, in their 80s miss him, so do his siblings, she said. "I miss him. It's time, it's been too long. It's a difficult situation for us as a family, we would really ask for ... their (captors') compassion to release him," she pleaded speaking from the small town of Swellendam, 220 kilometers east of Cape Town. Van Deventer, an emergency paramedic who was working for a security company, is the only South African citizen held hostage by a non-state actor in the Sahel, according to his wife. The fresh call for his release came after the freeing of French freelance journalist Olivier Dubois, 48, and 61-year-old American aid worker Jeffery Woodke — kidnapped in 2021 and 2016 respectively. Shereen van Deventer, 39, said Dubois's "release certainly provides us with renewed hope for Gerco's release." "There's that hope that there's that door being opened," she said.

In his post-release interview with Radio France Internationale (RFI), Dubois said he had spent slightly more than a year with van Deventer in captivity. "He's in his sixth year. He doesn't deserve this, he needs to go home," Dubois said.

Thursday evening which was swept up in the floods," he said. "It was very difficult to rescue these people because of the time the incident happened and the lack of resources in the town."

The rains signal the early start of the April-June rainy season, and have brought some relief to areas of the country suffering from the worst drought in four decades. But the UN's humanitarian response agency OCHA warned in a statement on Saturday of the risk of an increase in diseases such as cholera as living conditions likely deteriorate.

Baardhere resident Ahmed Omar said there had been heavy rains in the region over the past three days. "Floods devastated Baardhere town, my house was destroyed and most of my belongings swept away by the flood. Thanks to God my family survived but five people died in my neighborhood including children and women," he told AFP.

"Now the whole town is under water and most families fled to higher ground," he added. Jubaland

There was flurry of negotiations for his release during the first few years after his kidnapping, but the Covid-19 pandemic put the brakes on those efforts until early this year, said his wife. Several people are involved in negotiations, she said, adding that the government had told her it was still trying to get her husband back home. A spokesman for South Africa's foreign ministry told AFP: "Negotiations are still ongoing, we are trying to get him out".

Intiaz Sooliman, head of an influential South African Muslim charity, Gift of the Givers, which is also involved in mediation for his release, told AFP that a negotiator would be travelling to Mali in the next few days "to appeal to the kidnappers". — AFP



Gerco van Deventer

president Ahmed Mohamed Islam on Saturday sent condolences to the relatives of those who lost their lives and called for urgent assistance to be sent to those affected by the disaster.

The Horn of Africa is one of the region's most vulnerable to climate change, and extreme weather events are occurring with increased frequency and intensity. Earlier this month, the World Health Organization (WHO) warned that nearly 100,000 people in Somalia were facing catastrophic levels of hunger due to the worst drought to hit the region in four decades.

Five straight failed rainy seasons across swathes of Somalia, Kenya and Ethiopia have killed millions of livestock, destroyed crops, and forced more than one million people from their homes in search of food and water. While famine thresholds have not been reached, the United Nations says more than half of Somalia's population will need humanitarian assistance this year. — AFP

Business

MONDAY, MARCH 27, 2023

Risks to global financial stability have increased, warns IMF chief

2023 to be another challenging year: Georgieva

BEIJING: International Monetary Fund chief Kristalina Georgieva warned on Sunday that risks to financial stability had increased and stressed "the need for vigilance" following the recent turmoil in the banking sector. Speaking at a forum in Beijing, the IMF managing director said she expected 2023 "to be another challenging year", with global growth slowing to below 3.0 percent due to the war in Ukraine, monetary tightening and "scarring" from the pandemic.

"Uncertainties are exceptionally high," with the outlook for the global economy likely to remain weak over the medium term, she told the China Development Forum. "It is also clear that risks to financial stability have increased," she added. "At a time of higher debt levels, the rapid transition from a prolonged period of low interest rates to much higher rates—necessary to fight inflation—inevitably generates stresses and vulnerabilities,

as evidenced by recent developments in the banking sector in some advanced economies."

Her comments came after the financial sector was shaken by the collapse of Silicon Valley Bank and the enforced takeover of Swiss bank Credit Suisse by rival UBS, leading to fears of contagion. Bank shares tumbled on Friday as fears about the health of the financial sector resurfaced, with German Chancellor Olaf Scholz forced to give reassurances about Deutsche Bank after the long-troubled lender became a focus of investor concerns.

Georgieva said policymakers had acted decisively in response to financial stability risks. "These actions have eased market stress to some extent, but uncertainty is high which underscores the need for vigilance," she said. The IMF chief, however, pointed to China's rebound as a bright spot for the world economy.

The IMF forecasts China's economy to grow

5.2 percent this year, driven by a rebound in private consumption as the country reopens after its pandemic isolation.

"The robust rebound means China is set to account for around one third of global growth in 2023 -- giving a welcome lift to the world economy," she said. "A 1.0 percentage point increase in GDP growth in China leads to 0.3 percentage point increase in growth in other Asian economies, on average—a welcome boost." Georgieva urged China's policymakers to seek to raise productivity and rebalance the economy away from investment and towards more durable consumption-driven growth.

"Market-oriented reforms to level the playing field between the private sector and state-owned enterprises, together with investments in education, would significantly lift the economy's productive capacity," she said. — AFP



BEIJING: IMF chief Kristalina Georgieva warned on Sunday that risks to financial stability had increased and stressed "the need for vigilance" following the recent turmoil in the banking sector.



Kuwait's money supply rose by 0.2% in February

KUWAIT: The Central Bank of Kuwait (CBK) announced on Sunday an increase in Kuwait's money supply (M2) by about 0.2 percent in February on a monthly basis to reach KD 1.39 billion (about \$129 billion). The economic research department of the bank said in statistical tables released to KUNA that private sector deposits with local banks in dinars rose 0.3 percent last February to reach KD 35.6 billion (about \$117 billion).

It added that the private sector deposits in foreign currencies decreased by 2.5 percent to reach KD 1.8 billion (about \$5.9 billion), while the total balances of local banks' demand on the Central Bank in dinars, represented by (CBK) bonds, amounted to KD 3.3 billion (about \$10.8 billion).

The statistics showed that the total assets of local banks increased by 0.1 percent, to record KD 86 billion (about \$280.5 billion), while the net foreign assets of local banks decreased by 5.1 percent, to KD 10.5 billion (about \$34.6 billion).

It stated that time deposits with the CBK jumped last February by about 20 percent to reach KD 1.5 billion (about \$4.9 billion), while the balances of cash credit facilities (loans) increased by 0.4 percent to 52.6 billion dinars (about \$173.5 billion). Also, it showed that the average interest rates on treasury bonds with a maturity of one year remained last February at 4.5 percent, while the financing of Kuwaiti imports fell 22.2 percent to KD 686 million (about \$2.2 billion) while the average exchange rate of the US dollar against the dinar rose in February by 0.1 percent to 305.7 fils.

The money supply is the sum total of all of the currency and other liquid assets in a country's economy on the date measured. The money supply includes all cash in circulation and all bank deposits that the account holder can easily convert to cash. — KUNA

Egypt calls for setting up 'global water info system'

NEW YORK: Egyptian Minister of Water Resources and Irrigation Hany Swailem called for establishing a global water information system contributing to climate action and disaster risk reduction. Speaking at the UN Water Conference, Swailem asserted the need to build on the outputs of the UN Climate Change Summit (COP 27) hosted by Egypt in Sharm el-Sheikh last year.

Swailem was speaking during the closing session of the Water Conference in New York, reviewing the results of the interactive dialogue on "Water for Climate, Resilience, and Environment: Source to Sea, Biodiversity, Climate, Resilience and DRR," which was held under the Egyptian-Japanese joint presidency. The Egyptian minister discussed the main challenges and measures facing water and climate issues, warning that interactive dialogue concluded with several recommendations following the global water scarcity due to climate change and the resulting negative multidimensional consequences on human needs.

Swailem outlined several recommendations, including maintaining the frameworks for integrated water resources management policies and linking them to other frameworks related to environmental systems and the socioeconomic dimensions associated with them. He also called for a global water information system contributing to climate action and limiting water resources.

Egypt fears its share of the Nile water will be affected by the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) that Ethiopia has been building since 2011 on the river's main tributary. The session also included other recommendations, including mobilizing funds, facilitating their allocation to the water

sector and climate-resilient measures, and ensuring cost-effective implementation.

It also asserted the importance of having a mechanism to follow up the actions and commitments resulting from the UN Water Conference as a significant step to achieve tangible progress in water and climate in the coming years. Meanwhile, the UN Sec-Gen, Antonio Guterres, called for a change of course in managing this valuable common resource amid the global shortage.

Guterres stressed that "water needs to be at the center of the global political agenda" because of its impact on health, sanitation, hygiene, disease prevention, peace, sustainable development, fighting poverty, supporting food systems, and creating jobs and prosperity.

"All of humanity's hopes for the future depend, in some way, on charting a new science-based course to bring the Water Action Agenda to life. They depend on realizing the game-changing, inclusive, and action-oriented commitments that Member States and others made at this Conference," he said.

Guterres stressed that now is the time to act after he strongly criticized the "excessive consumption" and the resulting climate crisis. Non-governmental organizations, governments, and the private sector have made about 700 commitments in this unprecedented conference since 1977, including constructing latrines and reviving 300,000 km of deteriorating rivers.

The three-day conference, which hosted ten thousand attendees, pleaded for Guterres to appoint a UN special envoy for water, which the secretary-general says is under consideration.

In 2020, two billion people were still deprived of safe, fresh water, while 3.6 billion lacked "safely managed sanitation," including 494 million defecating in the open air, according to the latest figures collected by the UN Committee on Water Resources. Climate experts at the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change believe that about half of the world's population suffers from "severe" water shortages for at least one period of the year. — Agencies

Lebanon protests rage amid rising economic crisis

BEIRUT: Protests have broken out in Lebanon once again in response to the country's deteriorating economy and the dramatic devaluation of the Lebanese pound. The International Monetary Fund offered aid to Lebanon on the condition of government reforms, which can only be fully enacted when a new president is elected. Over the last three years, the Lebanese pound lost more than 97 percent of its value against the dollar, and its value further declined by 15 percent on Tuesday. One US dollar is currently worth 140,000 Lebanese pounds. One week ago, a dollar was worth 100,000 LBP. Less than four years ago, in September 2019, a dollar was worth 1,500 LBP.

According to a report by Human Rights Watch, 80 percent of Lebanon's population is living in poverty following the country's economic meltdown in 2019. The economic crisis was further exacerbated by the Port of Beirut explosion in 2020 and general corruption and government mismanagement. "You wake up in the morning having a specific amount of money to pay for something, but by the time you arrive, it's not enough anymore because the currency already lost a percentage of its value," said Mohamad Radwan Al-Omar, president of the Lebanese Assembly for Inclusive Development and representative adviser to Lebanon for MediateGuru's Global Advisory Board. "With the central bank's regulations, the Lebanon crisis plane has been falling down for almost three years now without crashing," Al-Omar said, adding that the economic instability "is much worse than the final crash."

"A lot of people made fortunes out of the crisis, and a lot more are living their worst nightmares because of poverty," Al-Omar said. He warned that the gap between socioeconomic classes will continue to grow.



BEIRUT: Lebanon forces fire tear gas to disperse protesters in Beirut.

During these past four years of economic downturn, Lebanon has experienced its coldest winters and hottest summer in recent years. The extreme weather led to mass suffering and even death for those unable to afford electricity or fuel for climate control. "Our hospitals witnessed the largest number of deaths in the last few years because of lack of nutrition, colds, and more," Al-Omar said, noting that some died at home as they could not afford to go to the hospital or to pay for health insurance.

The current protests are being led mostly by retired members of the country's security forces and other retired civil servants whose monthly pension allowances are worth less than \$50. On Wednesday, a peaceful protest of retired military and police officers demanding higher pay was dispersed with tear gas by the country's security services. "When we talk about the private sectors, they all regulated their prices and income, maybe not enough, but still sufficient for survival," Al-Omar said.

Compared to private sector workers and cur-

rent military personnel, military retirees were hit hardest. Most are unqualified to find new work and rely on their pensions, which have significantly diminished in value. What's more, "they are no longer 100 percent fully covered for health insurance and other benefits either," Al-Omar said. The IMF has offered the Lebanese government a bailout if it agrees to enact certain reforms. Talks are ongoing between an IMF delegation led by Ernesto Ramirez Rigo and Lebanese government officials. Ibrahim Kanaan, a Lebanese member of parliament and chair of the Finance and Budget Committee, told The Media Line that the IMF and the Lebanese government have already come to some agreements during the talks. "The two sides agreed on the need to elect a president for the republic as a starting point for restructuring the institutions and producing a homogeneous government team that has a clear road map for financial and economic rescue and implementation of the required reforms," Kanaan said. — Agencies

Apple enjoys a 'symbiotic' relation with China: Cook

BEIJING: Apple enjoys a "symbiotic" relationship with China, CEO Tim Cook said on Saturday, as the iPhone giant looks to move production out of the country. Cook, who is in China to attend the high-profile China Development Forum, said "Apple and China grew together," during an interview on the role of technology in education.

"This has been a symbiotic kind of relationship that I think we both enjoyed," he said at the state-run event attended by top government officials and corporate leaders. Cook's visit comes as Apple, the world's biggest company by market value, is trying to move production out of China. Last year, Apple sales were hit by curtailed production at factories as a result of China's zero-COVID policy. US export controls on high-tech components are also threatening the company's supply chain.

Cook did not address supply chain issues during his discussion. Instead, he focused on the need to bridge the education gap between urban and rural schools and encouraged young people to learn programming and critical thinking skills. He also pledged to increase Apple's spending on its rural education program in China to 100 million yuan (\$15 million). Cook visited an Apple Store in downtown Beijing on Friday, and a photo of him posing for a selfie with singer Huang Ling has gone viral on Chinese social media. — AFP

Business

Leaders sign deal on LatAm food crisis, migration at Ibero-American Summit

Summit seeks more financial support for region's struggling economies

SANTO DOMINGO, Dominican Republic: Twenty-two countries signed a declaration at the Ibero-American Summit in the Dominican Republic on Saturday committing to fight food insecurity in Latin America, improve migration controls and negotiate more financial support for the region's struggling economies. The goal is to reach "zero hunger" across Latin America, said Andres Allamand, a former Chilean minister and the current Ibero-American secretary general.

"We have more or less 60 million people who face food security problems. One-third of the food produced in the region is wasted" due to problems in distribution, storage or marketing chains, he added. But the agreement, made by leaders of the Spanish- and Portuguese-speaking countries of Latin America and Europe, faces serious challenges.

Growth projections for Latin America are below two percent, and the cost of a basic healthy diet is the highest in the world — \$3.89 per day per person, compared with \$3.19 in North America and Europe. It is a price that 22.5 percent of the population cannot afford, according to the United Nations.

"Access to healthy food should be a right, not a privilege for a few," Bolivian President Luis Arce said, stressing the impact of climate change on food production. Several leaders agreed that more favorable financial support would help countries reduce hunger and fight global warming.

"The Ibero-American countries will work as one bloc to negotiate better conditions," Dominican Republic President Luis Abinader said. "We are witnessing an international scenario characterized by high and unsustainable levels of debt that determines the growth of our countries," said Argentine President Alberto Fernandez, whose country is struggling to emerge from a deep economic crisis.

Chilean President Gabriel Boric, meanwhile, also called for greater coordination in tackling the region's migration crisis, and Colombian President Gustavo Petro proposed organizing a summit focused specifically on the issue. Leaders also discussed the need to address the humanitarian crisis in Haiti, where violent gangs have killed around 530 people and kidnapped another 300 since January, according to the UN. "The international community cannot allow this situation to continue," said President Abinader, whose country, the Dominican Republic, borders Haiti on the island of Hispaniola.

The summit's debates were also marked by some heated exchanges. Boric at one point criticized the "family dictatorship of (Daniel) Ortega and (Rosario) Murillo in Nicaragua."



SANTO DOMINGO, Dominican Republic: Handout picture released by the Dominican Foreign Ministry of leaders posing for the official group picture of the XXVIII Ibero-American Summit of Heads of State and Government, in front of the National Palace in Santo Domingo, on March 25, 2023. — AFP

"Democracy aside, there is no possibility of freedom or dignity (in Nicaragua)," he said. "We see in the world new risks... we must respond with more democracy, not less."

Addressing a food crisis affecting a fifth of Latin America's population featured high on the agenda of an Ibero-American leaders summit that started in the Dominican Republic on Friday. According to the United Nations' Food and Agriculture Organization, Latin America and the Caribbean is the region of the world where eating a basic healthy diet is most expensive—at \$3.89 per person per day in 2020, compared to \$3.19 in North America and Europe. It is a price that 22.5 percent of the region's population cannot afford, according to the UN—more than 130 million people in 2020.

Heads of state and government from 14 of the 22 Spanish- and Portuguese-speaking countries of Latin America and Europe, were due to attend the two-day summit. Spain's King Felipe VI and Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez and Portuguese President Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa are among those gathered in Santo Domingo with the leaders of Chile, Uruguay, Honduras and others.

The surprise attendance of Venezuela's President Nicolas Maduro was announced by a master

of ceremonies listing the arrival of leaders. It is the first time Maduro has taken part in the summit since he came to power in 2013.

Since his re-election in 2018, his legitimacy has been questioned by several members of the forum, including Spain, Ecuador and Paraguay. Maduro was absent from the opening ceremony, but was expected to participate in discussions.

Latin America, which faces a "difficult" 2023 according to predictions by the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), will be hoping the meeting results in more support for its struggling economies.

Financing will be "a central point," the Dominican Republic's deputy minister of multilateral foreign policy, Ruben Silie, said at a press conference this week. Much current financing "does not take into account the crisis situation that our countries are experiencing," he added. "They do not respond adequately to the indebtedness of the countries and... the burden of the health crisis and later the crisis in Europe," Silie said, referring to the Ukraine war. The Ibero-American group's secretary general, Andres Allamand, said the summit should approve "a roadmap that marks the path towards food security" and charters dealing with technological threats and environmental protection. — AFP

British retail sales jump as consumers flock to discounters

LONDON: British retail sales jumped in February on strong buying at discount stores in the face of a cost-of-living crisis, official data showed. Sales by volume increased 1.2 percent last month, the Office for National Statistics said in a statement. "In the latest month, discount department stores performed strongly with food shops also doing well as consumers, confronted with cost-of-living pressures, cut back on eating out or purchasing takeaways," noted ONS director of economic statistics, Darren Morgan. Separately Friday, research group GfK said there had been a slight lift this month in consumer confidence among Britons.

Its Consumer Confidence Index increased two points in March. At the same time, "the cost-of-living crisis remains a stark reality for most", said GfK client strategy director, Joe Staton. Further data Friday showed growth in the UK private sector appears to have slowed in March after hitting an eight-month high in February. The S&P Global/CIPS flash UK purchasing managers' index dipped to 52.2 in March, from 53.1 a month earlier. Bank of England (BoE) governor Andrew Bailey on Thursday voiced optimism that the UK would avoid recession this year. The forecast was less certain than one provided by the government a week ago when it said the country would avoid recession in 2023. But that was before official data this week revealed an unexpected jump in UK annual inflation to 10.4 percent in February, from 10.1 percent the previous month.

The surprise increase pushed the BoE to raise its key interest rate once more on Thursday to 4.25 percent, the highest level since the 2008 global financial crisis. The BoE joined the Federal Reserve and Swiss central bank in hiking borrowing costs this week despite a fresh banking crisis which was spreading Friday as shares prices in major European lenders plunged. — AFP



شركة الصفاة للاستثمار
AL SAFAT INVESTMENT COMPANY

KUWAIT BOURSA WEEKLY REPORT

WEEK ENDED ON 23 MARCH 2023

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Market	M. Cap (KD ml)	Last Close	WTD %	MTD %	YTD %	Quantity Traded	Value Traded	No. of Trades	P/E	P/B	% of Total M. Cap
Premier Market	33,642	7,812.31	-0.3%	-3.2%	-1.7%	436,942,118	174,711,547	32,918	15.1	1.1	78.7%
Main Market	9,102	5,530.62	2.0%	-0.3%	-0.7%	147,989,062	19,433,107	9,613	11.9	0.7	21.3%
All Share	42,743	7,050.87	0.1%	-2.7%	-1.6%	584,931,180	194,144,654	42,531	13.1	0.8	100%

Sector	M. Cap (KD ml)	Last Close	WTD %	MTD %	YTD %	Quantity Traded	Value Traded	No. of Trades	P/E	P/B	% of Total M. Cap
Banking	26,160	1,751.00	-0.5%	-3.3%	-0.6%	174,490,717	100,259,436	14,826	22.3	1.2	61.20%
Basic Materials	471	834.00	0.1%	-1.2%	-2.6%	1,823,134	918,698	557	7.7	1.3	1.10%
Consumer Discretionary	982	1,465.00	0.0%	0.6%	3.0%	11,217,745	3,644,433	1,516	12.5	0.9	2.30%
Consumer Staples	140	461.00	-0.9%	-3.7%	-2.3%	4,012,675	1,540,092	279	NM	0.9	0.33%
Energy	208	995.00	-1.0%	-2.3%	-15.5%	2,556,368	97,419	166	10.7	0.6	0.49%
Financial Services	4,259	1,194.00	1.8%	-3.4%	-3.4%	219,641,968	28,186,540	10,540	10.8	0.7	9.96%
Health Care	226	455.00	-1.5%	-1.0%	-1.4%	214,169	140,188	5	11.8	2.5	0.53%
Industrials	3,448	981.00	1.9%	-0.9%	-6.3%	60,671,583	38,927,295	7,152	13.2	0.8	8.07%
Insurance	778	1,893.00	16.3%	16.3%	21.9%	957,137	730,014	351	10.4	0.8	1.82%
Real Estate	2,342	1,090.00	-0.5%	-4.6%	-8.4%	87,853,883	8,858,420	4,115	13.7	0.5	5.48%
Technology	9	669.00	-0.4%	-1.2%	-8.9%	48,099	4,266	12	NM	0.8	0.02%
Telecommunications	3,527	1,150.00	-0.9%	-1.8%	-1.6%	18,536,379	10,325,253	2,683	14.2	1.9	8.25%
Utilities	194	463.00	-1.7%	-3.3%	-4.3%	2,907,323	512,599	329	13.4	1.7	0.45%

Top Gainers

Stock	last Close	Change %	Volume	Value	Trades
GINS	1,400	35.40%	504,011	633,513	195
ALMANAR	60	13.58%	290,354	14,724	73
NRE	84	9.09%	16,662,865	1,392,423	967
AGHC	354	8.92%	1,367,582	476,248	162
SULTAN	88	8.77%	1,293,680	112,415	98

Top Losers

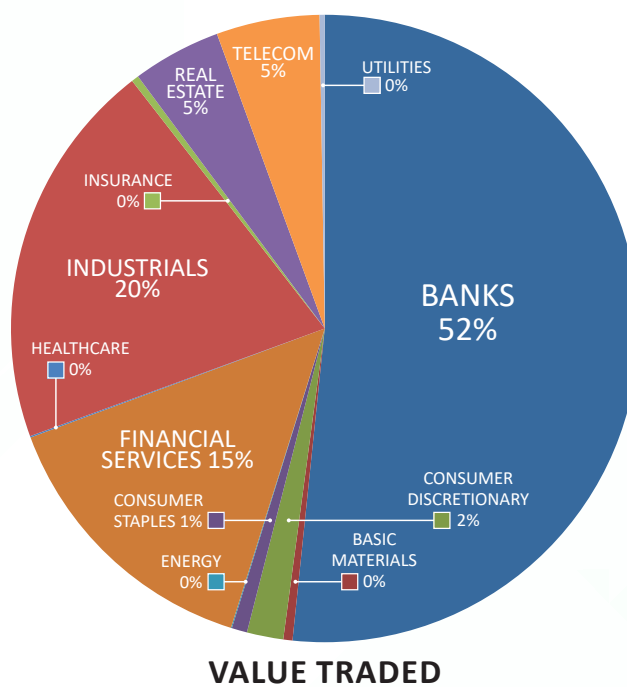
Stock	last Close	Change %	Volume	Value	Trades
THURAYA	146	-9.32%	2	-	2
ENERGYH	50	-7.92%	10,921	551	15
MRC	61	-7.73%	84,698	5,263	21
KCEM	180	-7.69%	187,375	35,289	75
NICBM	174	-7.45%	525,843	88,274	52

Top Volume

Stock	Last	Change %	Volume	Value	Trades
KFH	824	-0.12%	58,838,526	48,689,577	5,449
KPROJ	120	7.14%	46,006,406	5,452,274	1,103
AGLTY	613	3.90%	44,404,083	27,275,442	4,185
AAYAN	130	2.36%	42,978,062	5,611,122	762
GFH	74	3.48%	39,163,061	2,850,449	1,372

Top Value

Stock	Last	Change %	Volume	Value	Trades
KFH	824	-0.12%	58,838,526	48,689,577	5,449
AGLTY	613	3.90%	44,404,083	27,275,442	4,185
BOUBYAN	651	-6.47%	26,814,128	17,993,468	3,395
NBK	1,060	-0.56%	14,477,693	15,384,438	2,874
ZAIN	540	-0.55%	15,624,676	8,416,283	1,796



Market Summary:

- Premier market volume and value dropped 30% and 40%, while Main Market volume and value dropped 33% and 47%, respectively. This drop can be seen as a positive indicator of reducing selling pressure.
- Premier and Main indexes both showed stability.
- Technically, the All Share index closed at 7050, with support levels at 7041, 7000, and 6981, while resistance at 7105. The Premier index closed at 7812, with support levels at 7784, and 7701, while resistance at 7828. The Main index closed at 5530, with support levels at 5526, 5495, and 5467, while resistance at 5550.

Business

A vital pillar of US economy, regional banks soldier on

US regional and community banks to remain key players

NEW YORK: When Barrett Hill, a farmer in the US state of Illinois, needs a loan for land or new equipment, a simple phone call is all that it takes. "My banker makes my life way easier," Hill told AFP, adding that he grew up with his contact at Peoples State Bank of Newton, which has eight branches in the Midwestern state. Shaken by the banking crisis and jitters among some clients, US regional and community banks are determined to remain key players in financing small businesses and individuals. "We are relationship focused," says Brad Bolton, chief executive of Community Spirit Bank, an institution in the southern US with \$195 million in assets and six branches in Alabama and Mississippi.

"My customers know me, and I know them. I know their financial standing," he says. In the US, community banks account for 60 percent of loans to small businesses and 80 percent to farmers, according to the Independent Community Bankers of America, a trade group that represents small and mid-sized US banks. US banking giants with global operations, such as JPMorgan Chase and Citigroup, are the most widely known. But there are over 4,700 banks and 4,760 credit unions in the United States whose deposits are guaranteed up to a threshold by the Federal Deposit Insurance Corp., which dates back to rampant bank failures during the Great Depression (1929-1941).

Small and medium-sized banks offer all the basic services, although it may be difficult for them to offer competitive rates on home loans, said Julie Hill, a banking expert at the University of Alabama. They are very strong in lending to small businesses when risk analyses are not easily done by computer.

"It's much easier to have a person assess the business plan," she said, adding that big banks rely on "economy of scale and financing for rather large businesses."

Freedom to experiment

Another advantage of mid-sized regional banks, in her eyes, is that authorities can let them experiment, such as with cryptocurrencies. "If you have only a large handful of really big banks, the government will be hesitant to let them experiment," she said.

The downside, she added, is that regional banks are not considered big enough for the government to save in times of trouble. "Even if they think their bank is in pretty good health, is well run, the bigger depositors might get worried," Hill said.

After the failure of three medium-sized US banks—Silvergate, Silicon Valley Bank and Signature Bank—other publicly traded institutions with similar profiles worried about customers withdrawing their money en masse. First Republic's stock has lost 88 percent since March 8, and its fate was still up in the air on Wednesday, despite help from the authorities and rival institutions.

PacWest has lost 62 percent over the same period, Western Alliance 55 percent and Zions Bank 35 percent. The president of Zions Bank, the 36th-largest US bank by assets, acknowledged Tuesday at an American Bankers Association conference that the previous week had "really been busy" between conversations with employees, customers and the media—all while putting in place contingency funding plans. Silicon Valley Bank, a competitor, focused on a very specific clientele—tech entrepreneurs—and was "an outlier compared to all of the other banks in the United States," said Zions Bank CEO Scott Anderson.

Some customers withdrew their money before bringing it back, he recounted. "They want to make sure they can do that. And obviously we're there to help them with that when they have those questions." Heads of other smaller institutions present at the conference also sought to be reassuring.



SANTA MONICA: The SVB Private logo is displayed outside of a Silicon Valley Bank branch in Santa Monica, California. —AFP

"We had a few phone calls, but really it wasn't that much," said Dan Robb, chief executive of Jonesburg State Bank in Missouri. "I think people do believe in the safety of the system and feel that we are resilient." "Every community bank that I have talked to, there

has been no large outflows of deposits," Bolton said. "And matter of fact, we've had a deposit inflow." "My bank has been here for 115 years, and I have full intention of being here another 115 years. And my customers know and understand that." —AFP

Morocco committed to water security in Arab world: Minister

UNITED NATIONS, New York: Moroccan Minister of Equipment and Water Nizar Baraka reaffirmed in New York, Morocco's commitment to initiatives aimed at ensuring water security in the Arab region, noting that the Kingdom is willing to share its successful experiences in this field.

Speaking on the sidelines of the UN Water Conference (22-24 March), Baraka said that in Morocco, water management and climate change impacts are a national priority, reiterated in the speeches of HM King Mohammed VI. He noted that the sovereign has given His high guidance to continue efforts to mobilize conventional and non-conventional water resources, including through the desalination of seawater and the reuse of treated wastewater.

During this meeting on "the common commitment in the Arab region to accelerate the achievement of water security for sustainable development", the minister also said that Morocco, as part of its national energy strategy, plans to develop the production of hydro-electric power as renewable energy. The goal is to reach 14 percent of the renewable energy production mix, which represents 52 percent of total energy production by 2030, he said, noting that the Arab region has a strong potential to develop solar and wind energy.

Baraka leads the Moroccan delegation to the UN Water Conference, which is dedicated this year to the mid-term review of the implementation of the goals of the Water Action Decade 2018-2028, proclaimed by the UN General Assembly in December 2016.

During the plenary session of the conference, the Minister highlighted the main lines of Morocco's strategy for integrated water resources management. He stressed that the Kingdom, under the leadership of King Mohammed VI, has succeeded through its national policy to meet its water needs, thanks in particular to the infrastructure upgrading. —Agencies



DUBAI: Malabar Gold & Diamonds inaugurates its brand-new global base of international operations, the Malabar International Hub (M-IH) at Dubai Gold Souq in

Malabar Gold & Diamonds opens its new base in Dubai Gold Souq

KUWAIT: Malabar Gold & Diamonds, the 6th largest jewelry retailer globally with an extensive retail network of over 310 outlets across 10 countries in India, the GCC, Far East and the USA, has unveiled its brand-new global base of international operations, the Malabar International Hub (M-IH) at Dubai Gold Souq in Deira, Dubai. M-IH was inaugurated by Abdulla Bin Touq Al-Marri, cabinet member and UAE minister of economy on March 22. The inauguration was conducted in the presence of chairman, directors, government officials, distinguished guests, well-wishers, and management team members of Malabar Gold & Diamonds.

Celebrating its 30th year anniversary, the opening of M-IH marks a momentous landmark for Malabar Gold & Diamonds, which began its international operations in 2008 from the UAE. The 28,000 sq ft LEED gold certified hub, that is located in the heart of Dubai's gold district has been designed to be the epicenter of the brand's current and future business aspirations. Spread across four floors, houses all functions, from a global centralized supply chain to all enabling and supporting functions for existing operations in GCC, USA, Singapore, Malaysia; and set the foundation for the growth aspirations of the group to continue its am-

bitious expansion plans into countries such as the UK, Australia, Canada, Turkey, Bangladesh, New Zealand and many more.

Malabar Gold & Diamonds opting to base their entire international operations out of the UAE highlights the prestigious position of the UAE as one of the most preferred trade destinations for global companies.

Malabar Group Chairman M P Ahammed commented, "With the establishment of M-IH in Dubai, Malabar Gold & Diamonds has taken one step closer to our dream of being the biggest jewelry retailer in the world. The new facility is all set to be the stepping stone of our Vision 2030 goal of scaling up our operations to conquer new markets and strengthen our presence in existing markets. As we celebrate 30 years of providing exemplary jewelry shopping experience to our loyal customers across the world, our dedication towards quality, perfection and service has propelled us to the position of world's most trusted jewelry retailer. I would like to take this opportunity to express my immense gratitude to our stakeholders - customers, employees, associates, shareholders, and authorities who stood with us through thick and thin and contributed towards propelling the brand to new heights," he said.

Speaking on the occasion, Shamal Ahamed, managing director, international operations, Malabar Gold & Diamonds said, "The launch of Malabar International Hub is indeed a historic occasion for Malabar Gold & Diamonds. It is also a moment of added pride and joy that this inauguration coincided with our brand's 30th anniversary. It has always

been our experience that the UAE provides one of the best ecosystems for a business to flourish and this has only been strengthened manifold by the signing of CEPA between India and the UAE. The removal of import duty through the CEPA will help us in using that to add new international markets as well as improve our retail presence in current markets such as the US. With the opening of our new global base in the UAE, all our existing international operations including the US and Far East will be managed from Dubai. Considering the instrumental role that our chief guest, Abdulla Bin Touq Al-Marri and his team played in getting the historic agreement implemented, it was both a symbolic and auspicious gesture to have him open the doors of our new global hub for us."

"The state-of-the-art facility has been designed considering the needs and requirements of all the various elements that keep our operations afloat, with special consideration given to the comfort of our employees. We earnestly look forward to closely working with the UAE government and other key stakeholders to further our reach in the international jewelry trade and thereby be a key partner in enhancing Dubai's status as the City of Gold", said Abdul Salam K P, vice chairman of Malabar Group.

In strict adherence to Malabar Gold & Diamonds' commitment towards ESG (environmental, social & governance) guidelines, various environmental and sustainable initiatives have been incorporated in the building's designs and the facility is in the process of getting its LEED GOLD certification.



LuLu Hypermarket felicitates winners of Hala promotion

KUWAIT: LuLu Hypermarket, the retailer of choice among discerning shoppers in the region, organized a prize distribution ceremony on 25

March at the Al-Rai outlet to felicitate winners of its Hala February promotion. The LuLu gift voucher promotion that ran from 1 February to 11 March, as part of Kuwait's Hala February celebrations, gave shoppers who purchased goods worth KD 5 the chance to win gift vouchers of various denominations from a prize pool that totaled KD 17,500.

The promotion, which ran concurrently at all branches of the hypermarket, saw a total of 115 lucky winners receiving free gift vouchers. Five winners received KD 1,000 worth of gift vouchers,



10 winners received KD 500 gift vouchers, 50 winners were presented with gift vouchers worth KD 100 each, while a further 50 winners were distributed gift vouchers worth KD 50.

The winners were presented with the gift vouchers during the prize distribution ceremony held in the presence of the top management of the hypermarket. The digital draw for picking the winners was held in the presence of officials of the ministry of commerce and industry and LuLu officials on 20 March.

Microsoft's bid for Activision gets a boost in UK

LONDON: Microsoft's \$69-billion takeover bid for US video game giant Activision Blizzard scored a victory on Friday as Britain's competition regulator narrowed the scope of its probe to cloud gaming. Xbox-owner Microsoft launched last year its bid to create the world's third biggest gaming company by revenue with the takeover of Activision, owner of hit games "Candy Crush" and "Call Of Duty", triggering European antitrust concerns. The UK's Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) had stated in provisional findings last month that the deal could hurt competition in cloud gaming and gaming consoles.

However, it declared Friday that the "transaction will not result in a substantial lessening of competition in relation to console gaming in the UK", citing new evidence from a consultation with interested parties. As a result, the CMA's investigation will now focus only on cloud gaming. —AFP



A Sudanese woman prepares Helo Murr, a Ramadan drink made with dried corn with spices which is then dipped in water in a village south of Khartoum. — AFP photos

Sudan's specialty 'bittersweet' Ramadan drink



A Sudanese woman pours a glass of Helo Murr.

As generations of Sudanese have done before her, Wissal Abdel Ghany crouched next to a fire to prepare a traditional drink, a thirst-quenching favorite enjoyed during the fasting month of Ramadan. In Sudan, the arduously made "he-lo-murr", which means "bittersweet", is a drink synonymous with the Islamic holy month. It can be found on almost every table across the northeast African country at the end of the day's fast. "Without it, our table feels empty," said Abdel Ghany, wearing a bright orange headscarf.

She sat in a small room in the village of Om Eshr, on the outskirts of the capital Khartoum, which teemed with a small force of women busily scraping and spreading a mixture before serving the beverage in clear glasses. The drink has satisfied thirsty fasters for decades and recipes are "inherited from our mothers and grandmothers," the 43-year-old said.

Corn is harvested and left to dry in the sun before being ground and mixed with spices such as fenugreek, cumin or even hibiscus—Sudan's other essential Ramadan beverage. This mixture is then soaked in sugar and water for several days.

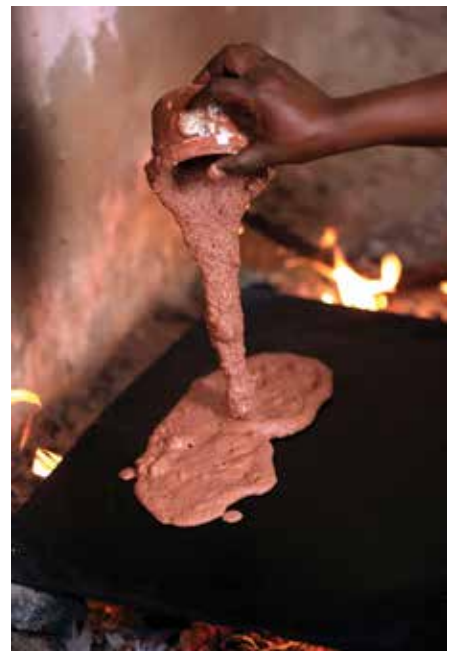
Abdel Ghany spread a layer of the thick brown paste over a grill plate above the coals of a wood fire, cooking it into a thin, leather-colored film. The resulting crepe-like layer is then peeled away and stored—ready to be soaked in the final step to create the beloved drink. Served as cold as possible, the drink is one of many ways that fasting Sudanese cool off, a significant challenge in one of the world's hottest countries.

Collective effort

The daytime fasting month of Ramadan is one of the five pillars of Islam. Observant Muslims refrain from eating and drinking from dawn to dusk,

after which they traditionally gather with family and friends to break their fast. In Sudan, the brew is so identified with Ramadan that even the US embassy took to Twitter to promote its staff making it, with diplomats wielding wooden spoons over embers and sipping the amber liquid.

Abdel Ghany said preparing the drink is a collective effort, bringing "together our sisters and friends". "We make it together to share among ourselves", she said. In Sudan's cities, she added, some people don't make it themselves. "But they still have to offer it for dinner, so they buy it ready-made", she said. For Abdel Ghany, the preparation of helo-murr and the holy month cannot be separated. "All it takes is a whiff of the scent coming out of a home to know that Ramadan is here," she said.—AFP



A Sudanese woman prepares Helo Murr.



Sudanese women prepare Helo Murr.



A child walks as a Sudanese woman prepares Helo Murr.



Sudanese women prepare Helo Murr.

Algeria's *Fashion Day Dzair* returns with sixth edition

Fashion Day Dzair is back again, with its sixth edition for the fashion lovers in Algeria. The event was organized by Rayan Prince and Mahdi to preserve the traditional Algerian dress and introduce it to the world. Many designers from different parts of the country participated in this ceremony.



Lifestyle



Rini Saha, co-owner of FullFillery, speaks during an interview with AFP at FullFillery refill shop in Takoma Park, Maryland.—AFP photos



Rini Saha, co-owner of FullFillery, pours liquid soap into a glass jar at FullFillery refill shop.



Empty ice cream containers to be reused for selling toilet tabs sit on a shelf at FullFillery refill shop.



Personal care products made by Eموke Gaidosch, chemist and co-owner of FullFillery, sit on a shelf at FullFillery refill shop.

TOOTHPASTE TABLETS AND SYRUP ON TAP: US REFILL SHOPS CUT THE CONTAINER

Toothpaste tabs plunk into a jar. Maple syrup flows viscously from a spout. Dishwasher powder crunches under the tip of a metal scoop. The chorus of consumer goods lacks one familiar sound: the crinkle of plastic wrap. At Mason & Greens in Washington, the lack of packaging is the point—the small shop selling household goods and groceries

4.9 pounds of waste per day, according to government statistics.

Marino says the aim is to help anyone from novices to experts on their journey towards less waste, citing paper towels as a personal catalyst. "Quitting paper towels was one of the first things that my family did and it was a significant reduction in the waste that we were creating on a weekly basis,"

Reusable containers, such as mason jars, can be purchased if needed. Upstairs, shampoo bars and toothpaste tablets that are chewed until becoming paste are among the store's many unpackage hygiene products. Less than a third of US municipal solid waste was recovered for recycling or composting in 2018, according to the Environmental Protection Agency, and only about nine percent of plastic material was recycled. Statistics such as these are why Marino asks suppliers to send shipments in compostable, or minimal packaging.

'Reduce, reuse' first

"We can't recycle our way out of the plastics crisis," says Jenny Gitlitz of the advocacy group Beyond Plastics. She points to toxins in plastic that can be carcinogenic or cause genetic mutations, as well as to endocrine disruptors.

On top of that, tiny particles called microplastics have been discovered in virtually every environment, from the Mariana Trench to Mount Everest, as well as in the human body including the lungs and blood. Unlike aluminum and glass, plastic can only be recycled a few times before its polymers break down. And many types are not widely recyclable in the first place.

"If all else fails, then recycle," sums up professor Shelie Miller at the School for Environment and Sustainability at the University of Michigan. "I think folks often skip straight to the recycle and forget to reduce, reuse," she told AFP. Miller cautions that the issue of plastic waste will not be solved simply by individuals changing the way they consume—as exemplified in places like Mason & Greens. Creating a sustainable future "really is a complete



Emoke Gaidosch, chemist and co-owner of FullFillery, shows personal care products that she makes at FullFillery refill shop.



Emoke Gaidosch pours liquid soap that she made into a glass jar at FullFillery refill shop.



Glass jars containing liquid soap sit on a shelf at FullFillery refill shop.

is among dozens of zero-waste refill stores sprouting up in US cities from Brooklyn to Los Angeles.

Customers bring their own containers—from used jars to Tupperware, to fill with bulk items. The store even has "had people bring in the sleeves that their newspapers come in," owner Anna Marino, 34, told AFP. Such stores are emblematic of what experts say is a necessary culture shift in one of the world's largest consumer economies, where the average person generates

said Marino, who co-founded the store with her husband.

Reusable "paper" towels made of cloth are just one of the products she now sells at her store, where beans and oats fill wall-mounted dispensers, metal containers hold vinegar and olive oil, and shelves are stocked with package-free artisanal bread, veggies and vegan food. For bulk items, customers pay by weight, Marino's aim being to avoid any "obnoxiously outrageous price" and to keep things "accessible."

shared responsibility model" involving corporations, governments and waste handlers, she said.

'No choice'

In the meantime, though, Rini Saha—the co-owner of the FullFillery, another Washington-area refill shop in the suburb of Takoma Park, Maryland—hopes to make a difference from the ground up. "We want you to reuse as much as we can, because recycling is still a huge carbon footprint," the 46-year-old told AFP. Saha and colleagues make a number of body care and cleaning products on-site, for refill or purchase in a returnable container.

On a recent Wednesday morning, fellow co-owner Eموke Gaidosch, a chemist by training, poured liquid soap she had made into a large receptacle. Aside from the lack of packaging, Miller says bulk sales could yield even bigger environmental benefits by helping consumers buy only what they need.

That, ultimately, can help eliminate the impacts from a product's entire lifecycle, from the energy and resources used to create it, to things like methane released when unused organic waste decays in landfills.

Over three years of existence, the FullFillery has morphed from a farmer's market stall to a large store lined with environmentally friendly products and extremely limited packaging. Similarly, Mason & Greens' Washington location, which only opened in September, was an expansion after the success of its first location in another suburb. The model "is profitable," Saha told AFP. "I don't think it's as profitable as a disposable business." "But I think that inevitably, there's no choice. This is the way that business has to go."—AFP



A plate served with grilled foie gras is seen at Tocqueville restaurant in New York.



A plate served with "Pate de foie gras" is seen at Tocqueville restaurant in New York.



A plate served with "chawanmushi foie gras" is seen at Tocqueville restaurant in New York. — AFP photos

New York state vs New York City: The war over foie gras

In New York, one of the most celebrated culinary centers in the world, a war over foie gras is pitting the city, backed by animal rights activists, against duck farmers and restaurant owners, whose position is supported by the state. Karen Frommer, enjoying a meal at an upscale restaurant in Manhattan, shrugs when asked about the Big Apple's ban on the sale, consumption and possession of the controversial delicacy. "We will never be able to deal with vegans at all," the 78-year-old tells AFP.

"But if they are always focused on the feeding of the ducks, let them watch a film on a slaughtering process of lambs, or housing of chickens in huge buildings," she adds. The retiree developed a taste for foie gras in southwestern France half a century ago and often eats it terrine, whole or pan-fried at the restaurant 15East @ Tocqueville. For director Marco Moreira, a Brazilian of Italian origin, "It's hard to imagine no fine dining without foie gras." For now he doesn't have to, as the courts consider a challenge to New York City's ban that was supposed to take effect last November.

All of the foie gras in New York is made exclusively in the state of 20 million people, as France no longer exports the controversial delicacy. Ex-NYC mayor Bill de Blasio signed off on municipal legislation outlawing foie gras in November 2019, following a similar move in California and after lobbying by animal welfare associations. Lawmakers ruled it was cruel to force-feed ducks and geese to fatten their livers for human consumption, and the ban prohibiting any establishment from selling, serving or even possessing foie gras was due to take effect three years after its passage.

But last September, New York state's two largest duck farms and foie gras producers—Hudson Valley Foie



An employee processes duck at Hudson Valley Foie Gras.

Gras Farm and La Belle Farm—won a stay on the ban from a local court. Late last year, restaurant owners and farmers then won the support of the New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets, which challenged the legality of New York City's law.

The dispute deepened further when in January the city, led since last year by center-right Democrat and vegan Eric Adams, countered by suing the state to get the ban back in place. Farmer and producer Marcus Henley is equally certain of his rights, with foie gras legal everywhere else in New York state. Resembling an old rocker, and with a slow, soft-spoken delivery, the vice president of Hudson Valley Foie Gras Farm gives AFP a tour of his huge duck and chicken operation in Ferndale, two hours northwest of Manhattan.

'Worrisome'

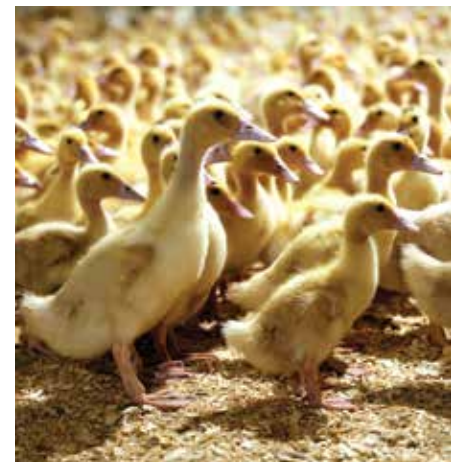
Employing 320 mostly Latin American farm workers who force-feed, slaughter, bleed, pluck and then remove the livers from the ducks, Henley says he generates \$25 million in annual sales. He would lose a quarter of that if the ban comes into force. "Anytime you

smell typical of poultry farming, three-month-old ducks are force-fed with compressor machines bearing plastic pipes and tubes that send grain mixed with water into their gizzards. The practice is banned in several countries, including Britain. "I can tell you as a farmer, that, no, absolutely not, the animals don't suffer," insists Henley, who believes the gizzard has a natural storage function.

"It's easy to anthropomorphize," says the trained scientist. (But) animals and people are different," he adds. Bryan Pease, a lawyer for the Voters for Animal Rights association, which worked on the New York law, is shocked by the ducks' treatment. "The vast majority of people believe that all animals deserve to be humanely treated, even animals raised for food," he told AFP. Pease is convinced that foie gras will disappear from New York City tables for good "in a few months." But until judges rule on the final decision, all predictions are for now just speculation.—AFP



An employee feeds a duck at Hudson Valley Foie Gras.



Ducklings are pictured at Hudson Valley Foie Gras, in Ferndale, New York.—AFP photos

Lifestyle



Abdullah Sobeih, 25, a graduate of the Amman Comedy Club (ACC), performs on stage at the Al-Shams theatre in Amman.—AFP photos



Kamal Sailos, a graduate of the Amman Comedy Club (ACC), performs on stage at the Al-Shams theatre in Amman.



Yazan Abu Al-Rous (second left), a co-founder of the Amman Comedy Club (ACC), speaks to comedians at the Al-Shams theatre in Amman.

It's no joke: Club helps Jordanians win comedy gold

When life gave them lemons, two Jordanians launched a club to train people in the art of comedy in a country where years of economic woes have left little to laugh about. Since being founded in 2019, the Amman Comedy Club (ACC) has been training aspiring comics, offering free, three- to four-month workshops in stand-up, improv, comedy sketches and satire writing.

Aided by foreign institutions such as the Konrad Adenauer Foundation, and with the help of Chicago-based comedy club The Second City, the club has already trained more than 140 people.

The new comedians hoping to put a smile on Jordanian faces range in age between 18 to 40 and include students, doctors and lawyers among others, keen to learn the art of comic timing and delivery. "Comedy is a message, and our message is to make people laugh," said Moeen Masoud, one of the club's co-founders.

"If you come to this place and spend two hours laughing and forget about your problems and worries, this means I have fulfilled my message."

It is part of the founders' broader social mission. "In our daily lives, we



Yusef Bataineh, a graduate of the Amman Comedy Club (ACC), performs on stage at the Al-Shams theatre in Amman.

face a lot of economic, social and psychological pressures, and the best way to relieve these worries is to laugh," the other co-founder Yazan Abu al-Rous added. Jordan's deep economic difficulties were exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. According to official figures, unemployment rose in 2021 to about 25 percent — and up to 50 percent among young people.

With public debt exceeding \$47 billion, or more than 106 percent of gross domestic product, the poverty rate also



Yazan Abu Al-Rous, a co-founder of the Amman Comedy Club (ACC), speaks to AFP at the Al-Shams theatre in Amman.

increased to an unprecedented 24 percent that year.

Social critique

Shining a light on social issues through comedy could also help the country as societies need criticism "in order to grow and be able to fix their defects," added Abu al-Rous.

Masoud lamented that "comedy did not get what the attention it deserves in Jordan." "We have great ambitions, beyond Jordan. We aspire to have a tour

in the Arab world and the wider world for Jordanian comedians and hope to train many people around the world."

The duo has also spearheaded efforts to dispel one lingering notion about their compatriots.

"There is a stereotype that Jordanians do not laugh," said Abu al-Rous, who has a master's degree in business administration. "We at ACC wanted to challenge this idea and prove the opposite to the world, that we love laughter and jokes."

So far, the club graduates have performed shows across Jordan and are also training students at private schools in stand-up comedy.

The club also runs psychological support courses for children in areas that host Syrian refugees.

'Forget worries'

Among the club's graduates are now well-known comedians, who have amassed hundreds of thousands of followers on social media and perform weekly shows in Amman. Graduate Abdullah Sobeih, 25, said his training taught him "how to choose topics that affect people's lives, how a comic story is built".

With over 340,000 followers on Instagram, the business graduate hopes his new career can help fellow Jordanians "make them forget their worries".

"We know that people suffer from problems and pressures... we are trying to bring them to this place in order to offer some relief," Sobeih said.

He is among four of the club's better-known alumni, alongside Kamal Sailos, Abdulrahman Mamdouh, and Yusef Bataineh, who are slowly establishing themselves as household names in Jordan.

In the 350-seat Al-Shams Theatre, the trio perform separate stand-ups to an audience of mostly young men and women. "Our country is the only country in the world that when you google its name the results would show Michael Jordan," said Yusef Bataineh to roars of laughter at the comparison of the Hashemite kingdom with the legendary US basketball player. After the show, university student Ahmed said the tough daily grind can mean "people really lose the value and importance of laughter". "What they do here is give people positive energy that they desperately need," he added.—AFP



In these file photos, a pottery worker works on a range of fine bone china designed to commemorate the coronation of Britain's King Charles III, at Duchess China 1888 in Longton, central England.—AFP photos

Coronation souvenirs boost struggling English ceramics industry

With an expert flick of a gilt-covered paint brush, a craftswoman puts the finishing touches to commemorative mugs marking the first coronation of a British monarch in 70 years. Just six weeks before King Charles III is crowned at Westminster Abbey on May 6, an historic English pottery is working flat out to meet demand for the fine bone china souvenirs.



"You just feel so proud. There's been nothing like this since the queen's coronation," said Gary Fraser, production manager at Duchess China 1888 in the central English city of Stoke-on-Trent, home of the country's pottery industry.

Fraser, 57, whose father and grandfather also worked in the potteries, remembers them coming home with commemorative pieces from previous

royal occasions such as Queen Elizabeth II's silver jubilee marking her 25th year on the throne in 1977.

"You get a sense of being part of history. People will pass these things on to their grandkids," said Fraser. Established in 1888 in Longton, one of the six towns that make up the city of Stoke-on-Trent, Duchess China has been making fine bone china for over 130 years. The commemorative plates, mugs and other items Duchess China is making now were inspired by items produced in 1937 for the coronation of his grandfather King George VI.

The bold red, white and blue design incorporates the Tudor crown of English monarchs from the time of Henry VIII with the words "God Save The King" in large gold letters.

Prices range from £25 (\$30) for a mug or £44.95 for a cup and saucer set. Produced using meticulous techniques honed over generations, each piece will go through the hands of over 20 craftspeople before it is finished.

Time-honoured skills

The factory is as busy as ever with three major royal events — the queen's



platinum jubilee and her death last year, and now Charles's coronation — all in the space of less than 12 months.

"Obviously, a coronation year (is) something we've never experienced before and something I don't think you can ever prepare for," said director Jason Simms, who took over the struggling firm four years ago with business partner Andrew Tooth. The factory is currently producing its ceramics five days a week instead of the usual two to three and has had to take on extra staff.

The sharp decline of the Stoke-based potteries in recent decades, with many firms going bust or moving production overseas, however, has made recruiting difficult. Fraser was working for Dudson, a firm that dated back to

the very start of the 19th century, when it closed down in 2019.

"Grown men were crying. Within 20 minutes all the machines were turned off, the gates were locked, and we were escorted off the premises," he recalled.

With so many firms having moved their production out of the country due to production costs, staff have retired or disappeared into different industries, interrupting the time-hon-

oured passing of skills from one generation to the next. "It is a tragedy to see the industry like this. Recruiting becomes difficult because the skills are lost," Fraser added.

'The pots'

For now, Duchess China is bucking the trend thanks to Simms and Tooth, who share a passion for "the pots".

"If we had listened to what people said, we wouldn't ever have tried to do this," said Simms. Since taking over in February 2019, the pair have weathered successive crises, from Brexit and the COVID-19 pandemic to the massive hike in energy prices triggered by Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Just a handful of ceramics firms remain in Stoke and Duchess is the last dating from the 19th century that still manufactures its products from start to finish in the city.

Design expert Simms said the style of the commemorative coronation range was meant to be "bold" and "impactful". "We wanted it to look very British and very sort of traditional.... Hopefully we've done something befitting of the king," he said. Simms hopes the firm's royal collection will be the start of a new era for the firm.

An illustrious but rather forgotten history once saw the "much sought after" Duchess China used in the Ritz Hotel in the 1920s and 30s before it fell by the wayside in the face of competition from firms such as Wedgwood and Royal Doulton.

Reversing the decline of the pottery industry in Stoke is impossible, said Simms. But what might be possible however is to get Duchess "back where it belongs, providing a really great British product and keeping the traditional skills going for the generations to come".—AFP

As winter ends, a garden takes shape near Ukraine frontline

Galyna hunches over her small garden in Chasiv Yar, her frail silhouette in stark contrast with the powerful tanks rumbling past her home near the frontline in eastern Ukraine. "I love gardening, you know," the 69-year-old says as she plans a fresh crop at the end of a harsh wartime winter. Her face lights up at the mention of her passion. "Last year, I had incredible tomatoes here, even watermelons, small ones, but it's a treat, believe me," she enthuses as she spoke to AFP.

The town where she has lived for 38 years is the first to the west of Bakhmut, a city in eastern Ukraine that has been destroyed in the longest and bloodiest battle of the Russian invasion. Already facing regular bombings, Chasiv Yar, home to 13,000 people before the war, could be the next target of Moscow's army if Bakhmut falls.



Galyna, 69, cleans her garden outside her apartment in the town of Chasiv Yar, near Bakhmut.—AFP

But Galyna plans to plant more tomatoes and flowers anyway. Her garden is an unmarked patch of land at the back of her three-storey apartment building, where she lives in a first-floor apartment with her disabled son, who is around 40 years old.

Just ahead lies a road where armored vehicles and tanks make their way to and from the frontline. The crash of cannon and mortar fire aimed at Russian positions regularly sound in the small town.

Galyna, who uses her little garden as an outlet for the stress of the war, has grown used to the racket. "When I realized the war had started, I brought violets and many different types of flowers here. They grow in the forest, so I plant them here so that I don't miss them," she said. "I feel happy every time I look at them."—AFP

Sports

Gauff knocked out of Miami Open; Rybakina stuns Badosa

Azarenka falls to Linette • Third-seed Pegula advances

MIAMI GARDENS: American Coco Gauff was knocked out of the Miami Open on Saturday after an intense three-set battle with Anastasia Potapova while Indian Wells champion Elena Rybakina earned a hard-fought comeback win against Spain's Paula Badosa. Three-time Miami winner Victoria Azarenka fell to Poland's Magda Linette but third-seed Jessica Pegula advanced with a 6-1, 7-6 (7/0) win over fellow American Danielle Collins.

Potapova showed determination, stamina and some powerful baseline hitting as she beat South Florida-based Gauff, the world number six, 6-7 (8/10), 7-5, 6-2. The two-hour, 41-minute match in the early afternoon heat ebbed and flowed before Potapova took a firm grip in the third set. The 27th seeded Russian led 5-2 in the first set but Gauff fought back to win the tie-break after Potapova went wide with a poor shot on set-point.

Gauff looked to have the momentum and served for the match at 5-3 up in the second set but with nothing to lose, Potapova changed gears and her free-swinging approach paid off with her winning the next four games. After a 10-minute heat break, Potapova returned looking fresh and confident but Gauff was struggling to refine her rhythm and after Potapova, ranked 26th, broke in the fifth game the outcome never looked in doubt.

The win was Potapova's third career victory against a top 10 opponent and her first against Gauff after two losses. "I think I just let it go, and I started to focus on my tennis and going for my shots and not thinking what she is going to do," Potapova said of her turnaround performance. Gauff was disappointed with a performance where

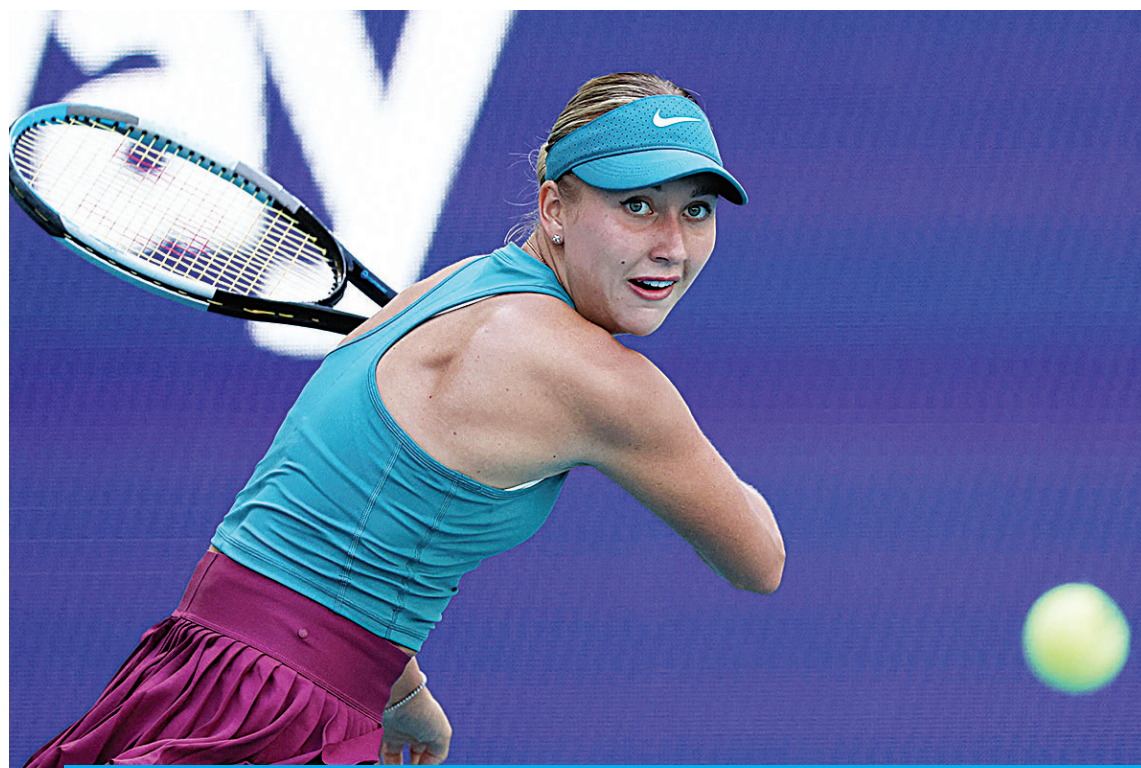
she failed to find a consistent rhythm.

"I felt like I just didn't play how I wanted to today. Really, where I got in the match was just because of my mentality, but not because of my game," said the 19-year-old, who said that while she felt some nerves on her home court, she wasn't over-awed. "I don't think that's the reason why I lost today. I really think it was a combination of Anastasia playing well and me not stepping into the court when I needed to in certain moments," she said.

Potapova will play Chinese starlet Zheng Qinwen in the round of 16 after she beat 12th seed Liudmila Samsonova 5-7, 7-6 (7/5), 6-3 in 3 hours and 7 minutes. Rybakina rallied from a set down to sink Badosa 3-6, 7-5, 6-3. She extended her winning streak to 10 matches as she kept on course to claim the Miami-Indian Wells "Sunshine Double". The Kazakh struggled in the first set with Badosa breaking her serve four times and although she got her game together in the second set, she found herself 5-4 down and facing match point.

Late energy

That proved to be the momentum swing in the contest as Rybakina held serve and then broke the Spaniard to see out the set and she was in full charge of the third set. "It didn't start well in the first set but in the end I just found some energy," said Rybakina. "It was a really tough battle. I was trying to focus on every point because the first set didn't go my way, but it was just a few mistakes here and there. Overall, I played well," she said. Azarenka fell in three sets to the lower-ranked Linette 7-6 (7/3), 2-6, 6-4 ending her hopes of a fourth Miami title.



MIAMI GARDENS: Anastasia Potapova plays a backhand against Coco Gauff of the United States in their second round match at Hard Rock Stadium on March 25, 2023. —AFP

Linette, who had not won a set off of Azarenka in their two prior meetings, converted five of her eight break points and will now face Pegula for a place in the quarter-finals. Former French Open winner Jelena Ostapenko defeated 13th seed Bra-

zilian Beatriz Haddad Maia for the fourth time in as many meetings to reach the fourth round with a 6-2, 4-6, 6-3 win. Pegula advanced to the fourth round with a 6-1, 7-6 (7/0) win over fellow American Danielle Collins. —AFP

Kawada takes Tesoro to Dubai World Cup win

DUBAI: Ushba Tesoro, ridden by Japanese jockey Yuga Kawada, produced a stunning finish to secure his first win outside his home country, with a commanding performance in the \$12 million Dubai World Cup on Saturday. Japan, which was represented by 27 horses in the nine-race card, secured three wins. Apart from Ushba Tesoro, Equinox, the Japanese Horse of the Year, won the \$6 million Dubai Sheema Classic with a blinding run, and Derma Sotogake secured the UAE Derby. The complexion of the showpiece race changed completely as the field turned into the home stretch. Algiers, trained by Simon Crisford, was in the lead and looked good for another Dubai World Cup win for the trainer, who tasted plenty of success with Godolphin as their racing manager.

However, Kawada seemed to suddenly put Ushba Tesoro on turbo charge as he burst through the field from sixth place to the front in no time. Having started the race at the back, it was a brilliant finish. UAE horse Algiers was second with Emblem Road in third place. Country Grammer, the pre-race favorite and the 2022 champion, finished seventh, while Panthalassa, the Saudi Cup winner last month, was in 10th place. "He jumped quite well. I just tried to focus on maintaining the horse's rhythm and just to keep him from the middle of the pack," said Kawada.

"There were eight Japanese horses in the field and aside from myself, the only other Japanese jockey on a Japanese horse was Yutaka Yoshida on Panthalassa. "I was on the horse for the first time today but it was a tremendous honor to ride him as there was a lot of pressure as the leading Japanese jockey heading into the race." Equinox, also traveling out-



DUBAI: Jockey Yuga Kawada reacts after winning the Dubai World Cup horse racing event at the Meydan track in Dubai. —AFP

side his country for the first time like Ushba Tesoro, was another star of the night.

Even though the son of Kitanas Black was never challenged from front to finish, he still managed to set his own pace and took nearly a second off the course record with his 2min 25.65sec demolition. Jockey Christophe Lemaire said: "I rode the best horse, I had no fear to set the pace. "Race after race, he's going up the rankings of the horses I have ridden. It was a great, great performance against these kind of horses at the top level. I couldn't be happier."

Lord North became the first horse to win three

straight renewals of the Group 1 Dubai Turf, run over 1,800m, and gave his jockey Frankie Dettoni a winning farewell from the Dubai World Cup. The Italian, who rode for Dubai ruler Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum's Godolphin for several years, is retiring from riding at the end of the season. It was Dettoni's 23rd win at the Dubai World Cup. "It's amazing to win once; three times, it's unreal. Lord North... what a star. To just get one on the board in my last race at this beautiful place, in Dubai that has been my home for so many winters, it's pretty special." —AFP

Bagnaia wins sprint as Quartararo blasts 'dangerous' format

PORTIMAO: World champion Francesco Bagnaia said winning MotoGP's first ever sprint race at a bruising Portuguese Grand Prix on Saturday was "quite fun" but 2021 title winner Fabio Quartararo blasted the new format as "dangerous" and a "jungle". Bagnaia came home ahead of fellow Ducati rider Jorge Martin with Honda's pole-sitter Marc Marquez in third. This was the inaugural sprint in an innovation that will see the riders contest a fast and furious 12-lap race for half the points awarded for Sunday's showpiece event. A sprint will precede every race of the 21-event calendar in 2023.

"It was quite fun," said 26-year-old Bagnaia. "It was more intense as it was shorter than a race. We had new tyres, fewer laps so you can push more." "I am happy for today as it was a target to finish in the top three so it's a good feeling." However, Yamaha rider Quartararo, who became France's first ever MotoGP world champion in 2021, predicted more crashes over the forthcoming season. "I don't like it at all, it's dangerous but if we're not aggressive, we lose places," said Quartararo.

"It's a jungle, we're not in cars where it's much safer and where contact is less of a problem. Physically it's going to be tough, in (a full race distance) 25 laps you have a little bit more time." This first sprint race in MotoGP history was marked by a shuddering collision between Italian riders Enea Bastianini of Ducati and Luca Marini of the satellite Ducati-VR46 team. Bastianini, 25 and nicknamed "The Beast", suffered a broken collarbone and will sit out Sunday's season-opener and next weekend's Argentina race.

Honda's Joan Mir, the 2020 world champion,



PORTIMAO: Ducati Italian rider Francesco Bagnaia rides during the warm-up before the MotoGP race of the Portuguese Grand Prix at the Algarve International Circuit in Portimao, on March 26, 2023.

was also a non-finisher on Saturday after clashing with Quartararo who ended the day in 10th spot. The crashes came a day after Spanish veteran Pol Espargaro was hospitalized with "severe spinal trauma" following a crash in practice. The high-speed crash suffered by 31-year-old Espargaro on his KTM Tech3 GASGAS bike caused a long interruption to the session which eventually finished around two hours late.

Marquez, a six-time MotoGP world champion, had surprisingly started from his 64th career pole position ahead of Bagnaia and Martin having struggled in Friday practice where he also crashed out. "I spent a lot of energy. It was only 12 laps, but we did an extraordinary job today," said Marquez, whose career has stalled after undergoing four surgeries in recent seasons. "Tomorrow is the most important race of the weekend, it will be more difficult." Despite his reservations, Marquez will still start Sunday's race from pole position where he will seek his 60th premier class victory but first since October 2021. —AFP

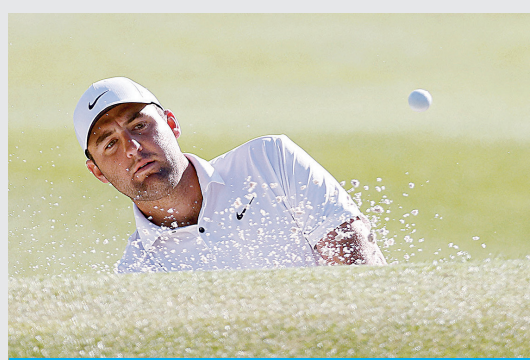
Kho claims maiden Asian Tour victory for Hong Kong

HONG KONG: Taichi Kho overcame final-round nerves to become the first Hong Kong player to win an Asian Tour event at a rain-shortened World City Championship on Sunday. Kho only turned professional in January but held off New Zealand's Michael Hendry to win by two strokes at a soggy Hong Kong Golf Club and claim a place at this year's Open Championship. Organizers reduced the tournament to 54 holes overnight after heavy rain and lightning led to play being called off on Saturday.

The course was still suffering the effects of the bad weather when play resumed on Sunday, with Kho holding a four-shot lead over Miguel Tabuena of the Philippines. "Being at home, in front of everyone, having my parents here, it just means the world to me. I want to say thank you to everyone," Kho said. "I can't put into words how grateful I am to have this opportunity. The fans gave me a lot of momentum, thank you to Hong Kong," the 22-year-old said.

Kho struggled when play resumed on Sunday, dropping shots at the third and sixth holes to see his lead over Tabuena cut in half. To the delight of his home fans, Kho got his game back on track by holing out from about 45 metres for a much-needed birdie at the par-four ninth hole. Tabuena, fresh from winning the DGC Open in New Delhi last week, started disastrously with a double-bogey six at the first and, despite a birdie two at the next hole, never really recovered.

South Korea's Bio Kim and Australian Travis Smyth raced up the leaderboard while Kho steadied and Tabuena faltered. Another bogey at the par-four 11th saw Kho's lead cut to a single shot over the hard-charging Smyth and another Korean, Yoseop Seo. Successive birdies at the next two holes, including almost holing his tee shot at the 12th, restored Kho's lead to three and he finished with an even-par 70 for a three-round total of 198. —AFP



AUSTIN: Scottie Scheffler of the United States plays his shot from the bunker on the eighth hole during day four of the World Golf Championships-Dell Technologies Match Play on March 25, 2023. —AFP

Scheffler, McIlroy rally late to reach WGC Play semis

WASHINGTON: Top-ranked defending champion Scottie Scheffler and third-ranked Rory McIlroy rallied late for dramatic triumphs on Saturday to reach the semi-finals of the WGC Match Play Championship. Reigning Masters champion Scheffler, who won the Players Championship earlier this month, birdied five of his last six holes to beat Australian Jason Day 2&1 at Austin Country Club. "It was a tough match," Scheffler said. "Jason came out of the gates really hot."

Four-time major winner McIlroy took his only lead of the match with a 12-foot birdie putt on the 18th hole to defeat Tokyo Olympic champion Xander Schauffele 1 up on the Texas layout. "I needed to dig deep," McIlroy said. "I got down early but I battled back." Scheffler will face pal Sam Burns in an all-American semi-final on Sunday morning while McIlroy, the 2015 WGC Match Play winner from Northern Ireland, will face American Cam Young in the other. The winners meet Sunday afternoon for the title.

Burns beat Canada's Mackenzie Hughes 3&2 while 2022 British Open runner-up Young defeated compatriot Kurt Kitayama 1 up. Scheffler, who won three of the last four holes to edge J.T. Poston 1 up in the morning round of 16, made another fightback to dispatch Day, the 2014 and 2016 Match Play winner. Day won the fourth and fifth holes with birdies and eagled the sixth from just inside six feet to go 3 up, the biggest deficit for Scheffler this week.

Scheffler won the eighth on a Day bogey and the ninth on a 29-foot birdie putt then two-putted from 48 feet for birdie to win the par-5 12th and pull level. "I just stayed patient," Scheffler said. "He made a mistake on eight and then I birdied nine and it was a match from there on." Scheffler drove the green at the par-4 13th and tapped in for birdie to win the hole and seize his first lead, then went 2 up when Day made a bogey to lose 14. Both birdied 15 and 16 and Scheffler's tee shot at the par-3 17th ended two inches from the hole to seal a date with Burns.

"Should be a fun match. We'll have a good time out there," Scheffler said. "Should be a good challenge for both of us." Schauffele sank an 18-foot birdie putt to win the first hole. McIlroy, who edged Aussie Lucas Herbert 2 up in the morning, and Schauffele each won two more holes with birdies on the front nine. "I'm 16-under for the two rounds of golf I've played today," McIlroy said. "It just sort of shows you the caliber you need to play at to compete out here." —AFP

Sports

England thrash Scotland in women's Six Nations

England captain Hunter bows out of rugby

NEWCASTLE: England captain Sarah Hunter bowed out of rugby feeling "overwhelmed" as the reigning women's Six Nations champions began their title defense with a 58-7 thrashing of Scotland on her Newcastle home ground. England ran in 10 tries against an outclassed Scotland, with flanker Marlie Packer, co-skipper for the day, scoring a second-half hat-trick. Saturday's match brought down the curtain on a remarkable career that saw the retiring Hunter, 37, make 141 Test appearances as the No 8 became the most-capped player in women's international rugby union.

Hunter, who made her Test debut in 2007, was a member of the Red Roses' 2014 World Cup-winning squad and led her team to finals in 2017 and 2022, with last year's defeat by tournament hosts New Zealand ending England's 30-match unbeaten run. "I am overwhelmed," Hunter told the BBC. "It's been such an incredible week and then to have the performance we did and to see the crowd, it's so, so special. I can't think of a better way to end my career."

Packer added: "I am going to miss Sarah massively. She's been with me on my whole rugby journey." Scotland captain Rachel Malcolm paid tribute by saying: "Sarah Hunter is an incredible person and leader...I am very sad not to have the chance to play alongside again her." Saturday's fixture was England's first game since their agonizing World Cup final loss and they were rarely troubled by a Scotland side, who unlike their hosts, have only recently started to become a professional outfit.

A rampant England led 31-0 at half-time, having run in five tries, with left wing Claudia MacDonald and hooker Amy Cokayne both scoring twice, with Tatyana Heard grabbing her first Test try. England, criticized for being overly reliant on the driving maul at the World Cup, made good use of their backs on Saturday, but also saw experienced lock Poppy Cleall power over for a try early in the second half. The one-way traffic continued with Sadia Kabeya scoring a try before fellow back-row Packer's quickfire treble.

'Bottle that moment'

Hunter left the field to a standing ovation from a crowd of over 10,000 just before the hour mark. "I didn't want to milk it but I wanted to thank the fans for coming and supporting me," she added. "I wanted to bottle that moment and take it all in because I'll never get that moment again." With England down to 14 players, having used all their replacements, Scotland full-back Chloe Rollie managed a consolation try six minutes from time.

Earlier, Wales overwhelmed Ireland 31-5 at Cardiff Arms Park, with the host scoring four tries in just 33 minutes to secure a bonus point as Alex Callender, Keira Bevan, replacement Sioned Harries and captain Hannah Jones all crossed the Irish line. Wales added a fifth try when prop Sisilia Tuipulotu powered over in the 46th minute before Ireland captain Nichola Fryday crossed 15 minutes from time. "I'm delighted for the players, they put in so much hard work," said Wales coach Ioan Cunningham. — AFP



NEWCASTLE: England's flanker Sadia Kabeya (center) is tackled just short of the line during the Six Nations international women's rugby union match between England and Scotland on March 25, 2023. — AFP

Michelin Tyres drive Ibrahim to victory

KUWAIT: Michelin, the world-renowned tyre manufacturer, has once again proven their commitment to excellence in the world of motorsports. At a recent race, Naser al Ibrahim, driving on Michelin tyres, achieved a thrilling victory that left spectators on the edge of their seats. The race was intense from start to finish, with skilled drivers were competing for the top spot. Naser Al Ibrahim, a seasoned professional with a passion for speed, drove with precision and determination, pushing his car to the limit on the challenging course.

One of the key factors that contributed to Naser's success was the superior performance of his Michelin tyres. Designed with cutting-edge technology and manufactured to the highest standards, Michelin tyres provide drivers with exceptional grip, durability, and handling, giving them the confidence they need to perform at their best. As Naser sped around each turn and accelerated down each straightaway, his Michelin tyres provided the grip and stability he needed to maintain control and stay ahead of his



competitors. The tyres also held up under the intense pressure and stress of the race, giving Naser the reliability he needed to cross the finish line first.

The victory was a testament to the skill and determination of Naser al Ibrahim and the performance of Michelin tyres. It also demonstrated Michelin's ongoing commitment to excellence in the world

of motorsports, where every fraction of a second counts and where the smallest details can make all the difference. As fans and competitors alike celebrate Naser's thrilling victory, Michelin looks ahead to the next race, where they will continue to push the limits of tyre technology and support drivers as they strive for glory on the track.

Uno retains world figure skating title

SAITAMA: Japan's Shoma Uno said he felt "relief" after shrugging off mental doubts and injury to retain his world figure skating title in front of an adoring home crowd on Saturday. Uno held off a challenge from American teenager Ilia Malinin—who became the first skater ever to land a quadruple axel at a world championships—to claim gold in Saitama, north of Tokyo. Uno went into the competition anxious about his jumps after twisting an ankle in practice one week earlier, then injuring it again on the eve of the short program.

But he stamped his class all over the event to earn an overall score of 301.14 and finish ahead of South Korea's Cha Jun-hwan on 296.03 and third-place Malinin on 288.44. Olympic champion Nathan Chen is currently taking a break from competition, while Russian skaters were banned over the war in Ukraine. Uno said he "needed to give more in the competition than in practice" to win the title, and breathed a sigh of relief when it was over. "If I had to do it again, it would be impossible," said the 25-year-old. "If you ask what I am capable of doing right now, I can't do any more than that."

Uno's victory gave Japan its third gold medal of the competition, after Kaori Sakamoto retained her

women's title the previous night and Riku Miura and Ryuichi Kihara won the pairs event. Uno stumbled on an early jump but delivered the rest of his program with smooth precision, before collapsing on the ice at the finish. "These past two weeks have been very tough because I've been in bad shape and I've caused problems for the people around me," he said. "But I was able to pay them back and show my gratitude with my performance today."

Malinin lands quad axel

Uno had to be at his best to beat the 18-year-old Malinin, who lived up to his own hype with another electrifying performance. Malinin became the first skater ever to land the ultra-difficult quadruple axel in competition in September last year, in only his first season in the senior ranks. He has dubbed himself "QuadGod", and he delivered on his promise on the world stage by nailing the move again with the first jump of his routine.

The rest of his performance was not enough to earn him silver ahead of Cha, but he said it was "a huge achievement" to reach the podium. "I was just very happy that I did my job, that I came here and was able to stay on my feet," Malinin told reporters, wearing a cap wearing a Japanese translation of his "QuadGod" nickname. "Next year, I think it will be a lot more beneficial if I practice the artistic side too."

Earlier in the day, American ice dancers Madison Chock and Evan Bates hailed their own "grit" as they finally claimed their first world title, after recovering from a fall in the free dance. Chock and Bates took gold in the 10th world championships of their career,



SAITAMA: Japan's Shoma Uno competes during the men's free skating at the ISU World Figure Skating Championships in Saitama. — AFP

beating Italy's Charlene Guignard and Marco Fabbrì and Canada's Piper Gilles and Paul Poirier. Chock said the experience the pair had picked up over their long careers helped them shrug off her tumble midway through their routine.

"I know that we wouldn't be sitting here today without many of those challenges that we've faced, not just this season but throughout all the many seasons of our career," she said. "We have really persevered and shown a lot of grit. I think maybe our performance today was a little reflection of that." Chock and Bates, who last year got engaged to be married, finished with 226.01 points overall, ahead of Guignard and Fabbrì's 219.85, and Gilles and Poirier's 217.88. — AFP

St Louis extend perfect MLS start

MIAMI: Sensational St Louis City continued their record-breaking perfect start to their first Major League Soccer season with a thumping 4-0 win at Real Salt Lake on Saturday. Expansion team St Louis became the first new side to win their opening four games last week and they extended that record with another hugely impressive display. Nicholas Gioacchini opened the scoring for St Louis with a left-foot finish in the 47th minute before Brazilian Joao Klaus took advantage of a sloppy giveaway from Pablo Ruiz to double the lead.

Klaus then fired in his fourth goal of the season with a first-time drive from the edge of the box before Swedish winger Rasmus Alm finished off a flowing attack to make it 4-0. Elsewhere, Jordan Morris scored all four goals as the Seattle Sounders won 4-1 at Sporting Kansas City, while the Columbus Crew thrashed a depleted Atlanta United 6-1. MLS's decision to play through the international break weakened several teams but Morris, not called up for the United States' CONCACAF Nations League games, used the opportunity to fire a strong reminder of his quality.

After Kansas City had taken a fifth-minute lead through William Agada, Morris slid in a low cross from Leo Chu to bring Seattle level in the 23rd minute. Chu was the provider again, nine minutes after the interval, slipping Morris in and the striker provided a clinical finish. Sporting had defender Ben Sweat sent off for a second bookable offence in the 63rd minute, and within six minutes the game was put beyond them.

Morris completed his hat-trick, turning in a Nicolas Lodeiro cross from close range, and then completed the rout with a header from another pinpoint Chu cross. Atlanta United went into Saturday's game at Columbus unbeaten and on a high after last week's 5-1 mauling of Portland. But they were without seven first-team players, away on international duty, including Argentine World Cup winner Thiago Almada.

The Crew were 1-0 up at the break but ran away with the game in the second half, with forward Christian Ramirez scoring twice. MLS Cup champions LAFC were buoyed by the quick return from international duty of Gabon's Denis Bouanga, who scored the game-winner in a 2-1 victory over Dallas. Timothy Tillman fired LAFC ahead in the third minute, but Dallas - reduced to 10 men after Ema Twumasi was sent off in the 35th - pulled level on Nkosi Tafari's karate kick in the 73rd.

After watching Carlos Vela's penalty attempt bounce off the crossbar, LAFC finally seized the victory in the 84th when Bouanga's shot from a tough angle on the left edge of the penalty area deflected off defender Sebastien Ebeagha's leg and into the Dallas goal. — AFP

Classifieds

Hospitals & Clinics

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

Clinics

Kaizen center	25716707
Rawda	22517733
Adaliya	22517144

Khalidiya	24848075
Kaifan	24849807
Shamiya	24848913
Shuwaikh	24814507
Abdullah Salem	22549134
Nuzha	22526804
Industrial Shuwaikh	24814764
Qadsiya	22515088
Dasmah	22532265
Bneid Al-Gar	22531908
Shaab	22518752
Qibla	22459381
Ayoun Al-Qibla	22451082
Mirqab	22456536
Sharq	22465401
Salmiya	25746401

Change of Name

I, Katcha Chalapathi (old name), R/O D. No:1/40, Garala Madugu Village, Apparajupeta Post, Pullampet Mandal, Annamaiah District, A.P, hereby changed my name as Kicha Chalapathi S/o Kicha Krishnaveni (new name). 24-03-2023

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Nuggets stifle NBA-leading Bucks

Phoenix Suns snap three-game skid



PHOENIX: Giannis Antetokounmpo #34 of the Milwaukee Bucks loses the ball during the second half of the NBA game at Footprint Center in Phoenix, Arizona. — AFP

LOS ANGELES: Nikola Jokic and the Denver Nuggets made a statement Saturday, downing Giannis Antetokounmpo and the Milwaukee Bucks 129-106 in a battle of NBA conference leaders. In a game touted as a potential NBA Finals preview, two-time and reigning NBA MVP Jokic scored 31 points, handed out 11 assists and pulled down six rebounds, and the Nuggets held East leaders Milwaukee to 40 second-half points with the kind of dominant defensive display they've been accused of lacking this season.

Jamal Murray, who made five three-pointers and scored 26 points for Denver, said it all started on the defensive end - and not just in a third quarter in which the Nuggets out-scored the Bucks 34-19. "I thought we played great defense all game," Murray said. "We had a good start, even though they went on a run I thought we were consistent all game with our defense and we found transition points." Antetokounmpo, who won MVP hon-

ors for two straight years before Jokic, scored 31 points, but just seven in the second half.

He was a force at the rim before the interval, finishing with five dunks, although the dunk that reverberated through Ball Arena was 36-year-old Nuggets veteran Jeff Green's slam over Antetokounmpo to open the fourth quarter. "They just had us in the second half," said Bucks coach Mike Budenholzer, whose team was coming off a lopsided victory in Salt Lake City in a tough high-altitude back-to-back. The third quarter was pivotal in Miami, where the Brooklyn Nets out-scored the Heat 39-18 in the period, on the way to a 129-100 victory that moved them past Miami and into sixth place in the East.

Mikal Bridges scored 27 points, Cam Johnson scored 23 and Spencer Dinwiddie chipped in 15 for Brooklyn, who snapped a five-game losing streak to at least temporarily put themselves in position for direct entry to the playoffs. Max Strus scored 23 points off the bench for Miami, but was scoreless in

the second half. Tyler Herro scored 23, but the Heat had no answer as the Nets started warming up late in the second quarter. Down by double digits early, the Nets cut the deficit to four at halftime and held Miami to 31 second-half points.

Categorically outplayed

Their 31-6 scoring run in the third quarter pushed them to a 104-87 lead going into the final period. "We took a punch from them early on the road, we didn't flinch, which was good," said Nets coach Jacque Vaughn. "That third quarter was pretty impressive on both ends of the floor." Heat coach Erik Spoelstra said his team's troubles started long before the third quarter. "We just got categorically outplayed tonight," Spoelstra concluded. The Phoenix Suns snapped a three-game skid with a 125-105 victory over the Philadelphia 76ers. Devin Booker scored 29 points for Phoenix, who were tied midway through the third quarter.

They pulled away late, withstanding a 37-point performance from Tyrese Maxey. Joel Embiid added 28 points and 10 rebounds for the Sixers, who lost for the second time in as many days after falling at Golden State on Friday. In other games, Kevin Huertner scored 27 points to lead the Sacramento Kings in a 121-113 victory over the Utah Jazz. Domantas Sabonis scored 16 points and grabbed 15 rebounds for his 60th double-double of the season for the Kings.

The New Orleans Pelicans drained 21 three-pointers in a 131-110 victory over the Clippers in Los Angeles. And the Atlanta Hawks maintained their hold on eighth place in the East with a 143-130 victory over the Indiana Pacers. The Hawks held on for the victory after guard Trae Young was ejected during a timeout in the third quarter after he launched a ball at the referee in frustration at being called for an offensive foul. John Collins scored 21 points to lead eight Hawks players in double figures. — AFP



TANGIERS: Brazil's goalkeeper Weverton (right) punches the ball ahead of Morocco's defender Nayef Aguerd (center) during a friendly football match between Morocco and Brazil on March 26, 2023. — AFP

Morocco overpower Brazil, first time ever

TANGIERS: Morocco stunned Brazil 2-1 in a friendly international on Saturday as the north African side recorded a first ever win over the five-time world champions. Midfielder Sofiane Boufal, a former Southampton star, but now playing with Al Rayyan in Qatar, gave Morocco the lead after 29 minutes, scoring with a powerful turn and drive from a pass by Bilal El Khannous. Brazil skipper Casemiro levelled in the 67th minute when his weak shot was fumbled by goalkeeper Yassine Bounou.

But on-loan Sampdoria midfielder Ab-

delhamid Sabiri struck the winner with a volley in the 79th minute as Morocco showed that becoming the first Arab or African nation to reach the World Cup semi-finals last year was no fluke. "I wouldn't say we lacked understanding, it's about putting into practice the ideas of a new coach," said Manchester United's Casemiro. "I think we played a good game and did everything as far as possible to win." Only 10 of the 23-man squad that took Brazil to a disappointing quarter-final exit at the World Cup made the trip to Morocco for the game.

The injured Neymar was again missing with his number 10 shirt passing to Real Madrid youngster Rodrygo. Brazil also had a new manager in the dugout with interim coach Ramon Menezes having replaced Tite

who stepped down after the World Cup last-eight exit at the hands of Croatia. The Brazilian Football Confederation (CBF) hopes to be able to announce the name of its new coach before the start of qualifying for the 2026 World Cup in September.

According to Brazilian media, the CBF's first choice is Carlo Ancelotti, currently in charge of Real Madrid. However, he is not expected to make a decision on his future before the end of the European season. Before kick-off at the Ibn Batouta stadium, both teams paid tribute to Pele, who died last December at the age of 82. Until Saturday, Morocco had suffered defeats in their only two other meetings with Brazil - 2-0 in a 1997 friendly and 3-0 in the group stages of the 1998 World Cup in France — AFP

Qatari banker submits a new bid for United

LONDON: Manchester United have received a second Qatari bid to buy the English football giants, British media reported Saturday. The Press Association and the Guardian, among others, said Sheikh Jassim Bin Hamad Bin Jassim Bin Jaber Al Thani, the chairman of Qatar Islamic Bank, had placed a second round offer overnight. British billionaire Jim Ratcliffe made a revised bid on Thursday as Finnish entrepreneur Thomas Zilliacus entered the race to own the Old Trafford club.

Bidders were initially told they had until 2100 GMT on Wednesday to submit new offers, but reports say that has been extended. No figures have been revealed but one or more of the initial bids were understood to be in the region of £4.5 billion (\$5.5 billion). That would make Manchester United—who have not won the Premier League for a decade—the most expensive sports club in history, although it would be short of the £6 billion valuation reportedly placed on United by its current US-based owners, the Glazer family. Sheikh Jassim and Ratcliffe, the founder of chemicals giant INEOS, remain the front runners to buy United should the Glazers give up control of the club.

Zilliacus entered the race on Thursday, with a bid he said will give fans the chance to own 50 percent of the club. "My bid is built on equality with the fans," Zilliacus, founder and chairman of investment company Mobile FutureWorks, said in a statement. The Glazers have angered many United supporters by saddling the club with huge debts since they took over in 2005. They appeared ready to cash out

at an enormous profit when they invited external investment in November.

However, they could yet shun the option of selling a controlling stake in the club, with other parties understood to be interested in a minority shareholding. The Times reported US hedge fund Elliott Investment Management, which sold AC Milan for \$1.3 billion last year, has made a bid for a minority stake. A first round of bidding took place last month and it has been reported there are as many as eight separate potential investors in the club.

Sheikh Jassim is bidding for 100 percent control, aiming to return the club to its "former glories". A source close to Sheikh Jassim's bid had earlier told AFP he remains confident his bid is "the best for the club, fans and local community". Ratcliffe, a boyhood United fan, wants to buy the combined Glazer shareholding of 69 percent. The 70-year-old told the Wall Street Journal this week he was not interested in paying "stupid prices" for one of football's most iconic clubs. Ratcliffe, who already owns French club Nice, said his interest in United would be "purely in winning things", calling the club a "community asset". He visited Old Trafford last week along with INEOS representatives, a day after a delegation from Sheikh Jassim's group toured the club's stadium and training ground.

A Qatari purchase of United would boost the sporting profile of the Gulf state months after it hosted the 2022 World Cup, but it would also be controversial. Sheikh Jassim is the son of a former Qatari prime minister, raising concerns over the potential growth of state influence in the Premier League. Reigning Premier League champions Manchester City's fortunes have been transformed since a takeover from Sheikh Mansour, a member of Abu Dhabi's ruling family, in 2008. — AFP