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Traffic snarls and closed roads after heavy rain floods Kuwait

Interior minister inspects roads • Schools remain open • MoH urges caution



KUWAIT: (Left) Lightning flashes over Kuwait City during a thunderstorm on March 26, 2023. (Right) Vehicles are stuck in a traffic jam on March 27, 2023. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat (See Page 3)

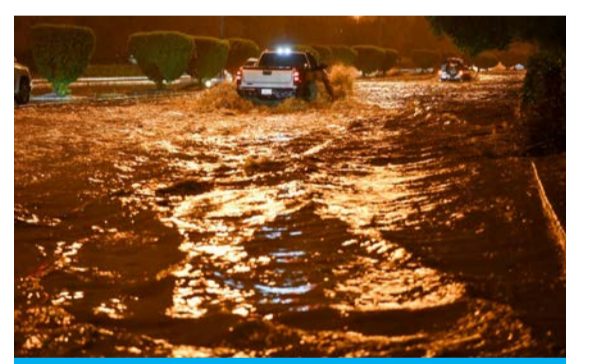
By Ahmad Jabr & Agencies

KUWAIT: Kuwait on Monday witnessed closed roads and monster traffic jams after a heavy downpour flooded major highways and areas across the country late Sunday and paralyzed life in the holy month of Ramadan. All state efforts were stymied by the heavy thunderstorm, after the weather department had forecast scattered rain. According to the Kuwait Meteorological Department, rainfall reached up to 36.5 mm in Rabiya, 22.5 mm in

Jahra and 13.8 mm in Salmiya. Kuwait is experiencing its relatively short spring season, in which weather is known for being moderate, with some weather fluctuations occurring, and rain may fall accompanied by thunderclouds. During this time of the year, Kuwait is affected by the so-called "Sarayat" season, which is characterized by radical and sudden changes in weather. According to Meteorologist Abdulaziz Al-Qarawi, rain is expected to return Thursday night. Videos and pictures of sub-

merged streets flooded social media soon after the thunderstorm. The interior ministry announced major roads were closed including the Maghreb Road intersection with Fourth Ring Road, the Fourth Ring Road intersection with Ghazali Road (towards Shuwaikh Port), Canada Dry Road intersection with Airport Road (towards Kaifan) and Jahra Road intersection with Ghazali Road (towards City Center). The interior ministry later announced the reopening of Maghreb and Fourth

Ring Roads in both directions after draining the rainwater. First Deputy Prime Minister, Interior Minister and Acting Defense Minister Sheikh Talal Khaled Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah inspected the roads to check traffic and security conditions after the rain. The minister was briefed on security deployment of police patrols and the mechanism of dealing with accumulated rainwater. Kuwait has previously suspended schools the day after heavy rains, but the education ministry preferred



Cars traverse a flooded road on March 26, 2023. — KUNA

Continued on Page 6

RAMADAN KAREEM

Loving the All-Loving God

By Hassan T Bwambale

The most pleasing human emotion is love and the most beautiful form of love is to love Almighty God. Love between the worshipper and the Creator feels so satisfying and it fills your heart, especially when you know that Allah loves you. Among the names and attributes of Allah is Al-Wadoud, meaning "The Most Loving, The Most Affectionate, The Beloved, The Loving-Kindness."

To love Almighty Allah is more than simply pronouncing your love for Him; it is acting upon this love by obeying Him, worshipping Him, liking what He likes, and disliking what He dislikes. Almighty Allah says what can be translated as: "And (yet), among the people are those who take other than Allah as equals (to Him). They love them as they (should) love Allah."

Continued on Page 6

10,000 residency violators deported in three months

KUWAIT: The interior ministry's trilateral committee's latest moves to deal with unskilled workers and visa traders resulted in the arrest of around 10,000 violators of residency and labor laws. In cooperation with residency affairs detectives, all violators were deported within three months, with around 3,000 of them arrested last

Yousaf becomes Scotland's first Muslim leader

EDINBURGH: Humza Yousaf on Monday won the race to become Scotland's new leader, the youngest and first from a minority ethnic background, charged with reviving a faltering independence movement after Nicola Sturgeon's long tenure. Yousaf emerged victorious with 52 percent of Scottish National Party (SNP) members' preferentially ranked votes, following a divisive leadership battle triggered by Sturgeon's surprise resignation announcement last month.

He is set to be sworn in as first minister on Wednesday, becoming the first ethnic minority leader of a devolved government and the first Muslim to lead a major UK party. He is also Scotland's young-

month. The raids targeted masseurs, fishermen, farmers and scrap workers.

The trilateral committee affirmed its continuation of pursuing violators in the labor market, including in the fields of construction and farming, as 600 violators were caught in the past month and the beginning of this month during the camping season. The committee indicated some agencies are selling visas for more than KD 2,000 to some nationalities, stressing that some of these fake companies have been busted lately.

Meanwhile, the Public Authority of Manpower will introduce a new mechanism to receive complaints with regards to transfers between companies, particularly of new workers entering the country. The mechanism aims at confronting purchasing of visas by

est leader, taking the helm months after Rishi Sunak became the youngest UK prime minister in modern times when he entered Downing Street aged 42.

The 37-year-old vowed to continue pursuing the SNP's central policy — independence for Scotland — which Sturgeon has championed since the party lost a 2014 referendum on the issue by 10 points.

"The people of Scotland need independence now, more than ever before, and we will be the generation that delivers independence for Scotland," Yousaf said in his victory speech.

He added his "immediate priority" was protecting Scots from Britain's cost-of-living crisis and

Humza Yousaf

Continued on Page 6

Saudi, Iran FM's plan to meet during Ramadan

RIYADH: The Saudi and Iranian foreign ministers have vowed to meet before the end of the holy month of Ramadan to implement a landmark reconciliation deal, the two countries said Monday. Saudi Prince Faisal bin Farhan and his Iranian counterpart Hossein Amir-Abdollahian held their second phone call in less than a week and discussed "a number of common issues... in light of" the surprise agreement brokered by China announced on March 10, the official Saudi Press Agency reported.

"The two ministers also agreed to hold a bilateral meeting between them during the current month

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Volunteers launch 'Iftar Saem' campaigns, distribute meals

Campaigns strengthen relationship with Allah

By Ghadeer Ghoulm

KUWAIT: During the holy month of Ramadan, Muslims' generosity manifests clearly through widespread iftar meals, where people share food to break their fast. Motivated by Islamic values that encourage people to give selflessly and spread kindness and goodwill, many Muslims volunteer in "Iftar Saem" campaigns, while others cook meals, pack them in boxes and deliver them to mosques or other places where fasting Muslims can be found.



Ali Salah Karam, Director and founder of a humanitarian volunteering team



Suhaila Al-Qattan



Bibi Al-Ayoub



Mohammad Masoud

Director and founder of a humanitarian volunteering team Ali Salah Karam expressed the rewarding feelings that come with sharing iftar with others. "Giving things to other people for develops a feeling of love and unity. Seeing others smiling despite the simplicity of the things we share with them and knowing that such actions are seen by Allah motivates us to keep this work



going. It's also influenced by the prophet's teachings, which is to love for others what we love for ourselves," he said.

According to Karam, the real value of sharing a meal with others lies in the spiritual reward of generosity. Another motive behind sharing meals, said Karam, is creating positive habits among others, which spreads goodwill and gives people the opportunity to get to know each other and make friends. The process of distributing meals, he said, is organized among the volunteers, ensuring that they are given out equally and fairly.

Suhaila Al-Qattan, who volunteers with humanitarian organizations that deliver aid locally and to neighboring countries, expressed her satisfaction and pride. "When you help others, it gives you a sense of happiness and serenity because you have alleviated someone's pain or eased their struggle. You will feel comfortable and confident and look forward to Allah's love and acceptance. We take nothing in return of such actions, but we will definitely be rewarded in the afterlife. We not only help people in Kuwait, but we also distribute

aid to neighboring countries through campaigns in Jordan, Syria and Egypt," she said.

Going the extra mile

Mohammad Masoud buys meals from restaurants at his own expense and gives them out to others. He told Kuwait Times about the rewarding feeling he gets out of doing such things. "I get very happy and excited when I do something kind to others, because it is rewarding spiritually and religiously. My friends and I make a personal effort as we buy meals from restaurants and take them to people for iftar. We are not supported by any organization; it is basically a personal effort. We distribute around 500 meals monthly in Farwaniya and Hawally governorates," he said. Bibi Al-Ayoub gives away home-cooked meals to Muslims breaking their fast, focusing mainly on visitors of small mosques. "I prepare the meals with my own hands and deliver them to the people in my own car. I do not receive any help from any organization or sector, but some good people and friends join me sometimes and help deliver the meals. I usually go to humble mosques in Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh," she said.

Kuwait's IICO signs agreement to assist 750 Jordan students

AMMAN: Kuwait's International Islamic Charity Organization (IICO) and the Hayat Education Fund Association on Monday signed an agreement to launch loan program at a value of \$140,000, to finance academic education for about 750 male and female students. The agreement was signed by the IICO's Jordan Director Mustafa Awwad and secretary of the Hayat fund, Ibrahim Bayoud, in the presence of the Charge d'Affaires at the Kuwait embassy in Jordan, Counselor Dr Mubarak Al-Hajri and embassy's consul Fahad Al-Anzi.

The agreement embodies the slogan "Kuwait is beside you" which finances student education in universities. Dr Al-Hajri told KUNA and stressing the importance of Kuwait extending to help around the world through charitable institutions and associations, which contribute to achieving sustainable development. IICO's Jordan Office Director Mustafa Awwad said the agreement comes as one of the developmental interventions to find solutions needed by individuals and families with limited income in Jordan, due to the increase in the number of students who cannot afford to pay the university fees required of them. — AFP

Arab League, UN ink deal to tackle illegal drugs

CAIRO: The Arab League and United Nations have signed as part of regional framework program for Arab countries 2023-2028, a deal to prevent and reduce the dangers of illegal drugs in Arab societies. The plan deal was signed on behalf of the League by its Secretary-General, Ahmed Abul-Gheit, and on behalf of the United Nations, the Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations and Executive Director of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, Ghada Waly.

Abul-Gheit stressed in a speech on this occasion that confronting the drug threat requires a comprehensive plan in which the efforts of state institutions join forces with civil society initiatives. He added, "This confrontation cannot be achieved effectively without being based on a sound understanding of this complex social scourge and an in-depth study of the dimensions of this deviation in its various intersections with other scourges that may affect the social structure."

The League's chief pointed out that the spread of drugs is usually linked to certain gaps and urgent problems in the economic and social structure, and is the cause of exacerbating these problems and exacerbating them in an intractable way. He reaffirmed the full support of the League to enhance the efforts of member states aimed at implementing the program and the action plan, in a way that contributes effectively to continuing efforts to implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, curbing the phenomena of terrorism, organized crime and drugs, and protecting the security, stability and well-being of societies.



KUWAIT: Al-Saad Foundation for Knowledge and Scientific Research launches a field training program for middle and high school students. — KUNA photos

Al-Saad launches training program for students

KUWAIT: The Al-Saad Foundation for Knowledge and Scientific Research has launched a field training program for middle and high school students participating in the Sheikhha Fadia Al-Saad Al-Sabah scientific competition, which includes a field visit to the GE technology center in Kuwait. The director general of the competition Dr Aisha Al-Holi said in a press release on Monday that the aim of the visit is to gain technological expertise and skills so as to benefit from consultations and inquiries with GE specialists about the mechanism of implementing scientific projects and how to develop them.

She said that field visits contribute to enhancing the spirit of work, achievement, innovation, increasing scientific and cultural awareness in the participants as they discuss various topics that contribute to their qualification and practical skills. Al-Holi stressed the competition's interest in training, organizing scientific and cultural

visits and events to enhance the development of students' practical and intellectual abilities and identify many advanced industrial technologies in addition to identifying quality control methods.

She pointed out the importance of fruitful cooperation between civil society institutions and the private sector to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals in order to achieve the 'New Kuwait 2035' vision, activate cooperation with the concerned authorities (success partners) and pay attention to talented young people in the fields of science and technology.

Director General of the center said the center is keen to cooperate with educational and academic institutions and concerned authorities to provide a summary of GE's experiences and the latest technical developments that it has reached. Al-Rashed added that cooperation with the Sheikhha Fadia Al-Saad Al-Sabah scientific competition aims to support the efforts of the competition in attracting more girls and women to the fields of Science, Technology and engineering. She pointed to the role of the center in qualifying and preparing Kuwaiti competencies and cadres in order to provide the participants with the opportunity to gain additional valuable information to enable them to complete their projects in an optimal manner.— KUNA



In my view

Ramadan: Month of prevention



Dr Khalid Al-Saleh

Local@kuwaittimes.com

Do you have health problems? Do you suffer from psychological issues? Is your soul anxious? Are you worried about your psychological, physical and spiritual health? Then take the opportunity of the month of Ramadan. Ramadan is a maintenance stop and a month of prevention for the human being's physical, psychological and spiritual elements.

The question then — is fasting a necessity for human beings? The answer is yes, and the Creator of all people obligated it: "O ye who believe! Fasting is prescribed for you, even as it was prescribed for those before you, that Ye may ward off (evil)" (2-183). So, fasting is a human need in which the three human being's elements are protected, as if fasting is part of the Almighty Creator's instructions, who gave everything its creation, then guided them.

Fasting is a protection for us in order to maintain the functions of our components efficiently, so let us benefit from the month of fasting. If you were suffering from a health problem or wish to strengthen your body, improve its functions and reduce fat, then consult your doctor to make fasting work for you and you will succeed. You have a full month to maintain your organs; just commit to the correct fasting as prescribed by Allah for you. Stop your cravings for food, organize what you eat at sundown, and make movement and activity companions of fasting, and you will see how your cells' performance will improve.

If you are suffering from psychological frustrations, anxiety or boredom, then you will see in this month of mercy how you will be protected by fasting. Get closer to Allah and follow His orders, particularly getting in touch with family. There are benefits for the soul, like being good with your parents, seeing your relatives and being in touch with your loved ones. With every contact between souls, you will feel that all what accumulated on you in the form of fatigue throughout the year disappears, and your self-confidence increases, and the hope in what is coming appears again.

Only, do not escape from the month of fasting or distance yourself from Muslims, as fasting people in this month feel for each other, and each gets their strength from the other. The poor get their needs covered, and the rich spend from the money of Allah, so they become relaxed. The entire Muslim world communicates, so people are assured about each other.

If your soul is tired and your belief is full of doubts about your Creator, do not run too far. Listen to the verses of Allah that are recited day and night. Pay attention to their meaning and this month of Quran will become a mercy for your soul and a guide for it, so you know that you are created within a vast world and endless universe, and that you and nature around you and the universe above it are only signs that indicate a great Creator who has the best attributes, and that our brain and science with all what it achieved are not able to put life in a cell that is not visible and are not able to recover a grain of sugar that went into the gut of a fly.

"O Mankind! A similitude has been coined, so listen to it (carefully): Verily those on whom you call besides Allah, cannot create (even) a fly, even though they combine together for the purpose. And if the fly snatches away a thing from them, they will have no power to release it from the fly. So weak are (both) the seeker and the sought" (22:73).

There is no month like Ramadan, when you see souls are open for faith and thirsty for the great words of Allah that touch the scholars' minds and the souls of people and reassures them. The month of Ramadan is an opportunity for those in doubt, and those who did not see the light of Allah to get to know their Creator, and for their souls to settle down after making them tired for a very long time.

With the month of Ramadan, we prevent the body's ills and avoid deviations, and protect against the doubts of the soul, so praise He who said: "O you who believe! Observing As-Saum (the fasting) is prescribed for you as it was prescribed for those before you, that you may become Al-Muttaqun (the pious)" (2-183). Allah, our Creator, Lord and Guide says best.

Local

Deputy FM receives German, Nepal envoys



KUWAIT: Deputy Foreign Minister Ambassador Mansour Al-Otaibi on Monday met the ambassador of Germany to Kuwait Hans Christian Freiherr von Reppnitz. During the meeting, they reviewed and discussed the distinguished bilateral relations between the two friendly

countries and a number of regional and international issues. Also, Deputy Minister of Foreign received the ambassador of Nepal Durga Prasad Bhandari on the occasion of the end of his term as ambassador.

During the meeting, the deputy minister praised the role of the ambassador and his contributions during his tenure in strengthening Kuwaiti-Nepalese relations, wishing him all the best in his future career. — KUNA photos



Citizens decry road conditions following recent rainy weather

‘Our ultimate aspiration is to have decent roads’



KUWAIT: Kuwait witnessed unstable weather and heavy rainfall on Sunday. — KUNA photos

By Faten Omar

KUWAIT: Kuwait witnessed unstable weather and heavy rainfall on Sunday, which made roads take a serious battering, with loose gravel damaging the windshields and headlights of vehicles moving on the roads. In recent years, the Kuwaiti government has invested in improving its drainage systems and upgrading its road infrastructure to mitigate the impact of heavy rainfall on its roads, but it appears that the efforts are not enough during periods of heavy rain.

A number of citizens and residents expressed their outrage over Sunday's flooding after the amount of rainfall reached 5.64 millimeters, according to the

meteorological department of the Directorate General of Civil Aviation. "I am a victim of the roads of Kuwait. I spend most of my salary on fixing my cars due to bad roads and now my car is submerged in Salam due to heavy rains and the government's negligence," Huda Al-Ali said. "Who will compensate me for my car repairs? Who will compensate my family if I die as a victim of corrupt roads?"

Mohammad Al-Harran called on the government to pay attention to what's happening in Kuwait, noting that there are broken streets, potholes and flooded roads. "The rains revealed the corruption by some companies, and we hope action is taken. These are shocking scenes, a clear crime of negligence and

corruption, and fake preparations for the rainy season by some officials," Saoud Al-Rukaibi said.

Regarding flexible working hours, Anwar Al-Hwaj said: "They applied flexible working hours, but our streets are not flexible at all. Is it possible that since last night, 12 hours ago, roads are still closed and the problem has not been resolved? We are now late for our flexible working hours."

Sultan Al-Sarram said: "It was better to cancel work and schools after the heavy rain. Since the morning, roads have been closed for hours, and so far, we have not moved a meter on the Fifth Ring Road. Main roads are blocked due to rain. The problem is that this crisis repeats every year and our gov-

ernment has not found a solution. There is a continuous failure, and the first victim is the citizen!"

Staying home until the roads are clear was Muhammad Ashour's solution. "I saw the roads are closed, so I decided to go back home. I thought to wait for half an hour or an hour, but the situation did not change. And no one said anything about the closed roads. The government should have considered today (Monday) an official holiday. People are not able to attend their shifts. The current situation needs a helicopter!" Meanwhile, Nawaf said sarcastically: "Why are people upset? Is it the Ministry of Public Works' mistake that they want to create artificial rivers and lakes around the streets of Kuwait and its areas?"

Kuwaitis urged to be cautious after US deadly storm

WASHINGTON: Kuwait Embassy in US has called on Kuwaiti citizens in the southern United States to follow the directives of local authorities as a result of the powerful hurricane that struck the states of Mississippi and Alabama in the past two days, which resulted in killing 26 people, a large number of injuries, and extensive damage to infrastructure and property.

In a statement, the embassy said, "we call on the attention of Kuwaiti citizens in the southern states to take caution and to take the necessary measures to deal with the hurricane that struck the states of Mississippi and Alabama." The embassy expressed "wishes of safety to all" reassuring that "there are no Kuwaiti citizens affected by this hurricane."

Kuwait Embassy stressed "the need and importance of following the directives issued by local authorities, especially in the areas affected by the hurricane." The embassy also called on "citizens to communicate with embassy staff and with the consulates general when necessary." The statement concluded with emergency phones designated to all citizens: +1 202 262 0758 +1 310 279 3644 +1 917 242 68888. — KUNA



ROLLING FORK: A car sits on top of a damaged house in Rolling Fork, Mississippi, after a tornado touched down in the area, on March 26, 2023. Kuwait Embassy in US has called on Kuwaiti citizens in the southern United States to follow the directives of local authorities as a result of the powerful hurricane that struck the states of Mississippi and Alabama. — AFP

front of courts, that is until the orphan is of legal age and is able to act on their own behalf.

The orphanage's name underwent several changes to adapt to its nature. It became the orphanage affairs department indicating a more organized and systemized way of managing affairs, and later became the minors affairs department as linguistically the word orphanage does not encompass all minors whose finances need protecting.

In 1983, late Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, issued a law changing the department into a public authority presided over by the Minister of Justice. The authority's General Director, Hamad Al-Barjes, commented that the authority has underwent significant transformations during

the past few years. He further clarified saying that recently decisions aiming to remove obstacles and enabling the authority from performing its duties effectively and efficiently were taken.

Al-Barjes stated that a strategy is currently in the works to help improve performance in correspondence to Kuwait's 2035 vision adding that they are aiming to accelerate pace of procedures especially as number of beneficiaries, which reached 49,000 beneficiary by the end of 2022, continues to increase. He also affirmed their keenness on continuing to update investment strategy to ensure that minors' finances grow by an average of 10 percent, avoiding risks, and employing the use of instruments corresponding to Islamic law. — KUNA

Academic activities continue after rain

KUWAIT: The Ministry of Education said that study would continue normally despite the formation of partial ponds at some schools due to the downpour on Sunday evening. All educational facilities are safe and fine after the heavy rains, Spokesman of the Ministry Ahmad Al-Weheidah said in a press release tonight.

Affirming the keenness of the Ministry on the safety of students, and the teaching and administrative staff, he said the Ministry is in contact with the Meteorological Department of the Directorate General of Civil Aviation. Forecasts of the Meteorological Dept. show that the weather will improve gradually, he noted, adding that there was no need of suspending study.

Impacts of downpour

In another development, Kuwait National Guard (KNG) and Kuwait Fire Force (KFF) said their emergency teams offered support to the other state agencies in dealing with the ponds resulting from the heavy rains on Sunday evening. The ponds resulted in traffic jams at some areas, including sections of Al-Ghazali Highway, and the intersections of Al-Maghreb Highway and the Fourth Ring Road, the KNG said in a statement.

The KNG emergency teams helped the traffic department in easing the jams and draining the accumulated water, according to the statement. Similarly, the KFF activated its emergency plan in response to the downpour and addressed 57 reports of minor accidents. High levels of water inundated some roads and basements at some buildings, and some motorists got stuck on the roads, the KFF Public Relations and Media Department said in a press release.

The KFF teams managed to rescue 45 persons safely, the statement said, noting that nobody was injured in such incidents. First Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Interior and Acting Defense Minister Sheikh Talal Khaled Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah and KFF Chief Lt-Gen Khaled Al-Mekrad keep following up the emergency response effort in collaboration with other competent agencies. — KUNA

Orphanage a testament to humanitarian efforts

KUWAIT: The establishment of Kuwait's first orphanage back in 1938, during the reign of Sheikh Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, stands as a testament to the state's keenness on caring for orphans and disenfranchised minors. The main objective behind the establishment of an orphanage is to safeguard and manage the orphan's finances through investments or even defense in

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Kuwait charity, UNHCR to help Rohingya refugees

KUWAIT: Tanmeia Charitable Society launched its new relief campaign for Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh, in cooperation with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in Kuwait. Deputy Chairman of the Board of Directors and Director General of the Association, Dr Nasser Al-Ajmi, highlighted in a statement the ongoing crises that are haunting the Rohingya refugees, such as the fire that broke out nearly two weeks ago in one of the largest refugee camps. The blaze destroyed more than 3,000 tents inhabited by more than 15,000 people, in addition to 35 mosques and 21 educational centers.

Ajmi added that the campaign aims to implement relief projects that will improve the immediate lives of refugees and fulfil their basic needs, while ensuring their access to health services, housing and food. The campaign is essential, "especially when we know that nearly one million and 700,000 Rohingya live in miserable camps in Bangladesh, far from their hometowns in Rakhine state in Myanmar," said Ajmi.

This is the fourth cooperation between Tanmeia and the UNHCR, said Ajmi, describing the UN body as a cooperative and experienced partner. He called on all philanthropists in Kuwait to help those in need regardless of their physical location. The UNHCR's Representative to Kuwait Nisreen Rubaiaan said she appreciated the society's role in supporting the UN body.

"Our partnership with the Kuwaiti private and charitable sector has resulted in helping about half a million Rohingya refugees during the past three years," she said. "More than 75 percent of the targeted refugees are women and children under the age of 18, which makes them exposed to greater risks of abuse, exploitation and gender-based violence."

"The risks have multiplied recently following a fire in the refugee camps, which damaged more than 9,500 shelters, in addition to damaging more than 1,500 facilities, including hospitals, distribution points, education centers and a UNHCR registration center. The donors' generosity and support reflect their keenness to help the needy in various parts of the world, which is an affirmation of Kuwait's pioneering role in the field of humanitarian work," she said. — KUNA



KUWAIT: This archival photo shows Arab houses and narrow streets in old Kuwait. (Source: 'Kuwait' by Ralph Shaw, London, 1976. Prepared by: Mahmoud Zakaria Abu Al-Ella, researcher in heritage at the Ministry of Information.)

Bangladesh Embassy marks Independence Day

Envoy commemorates freedom fighters, including three million martyrs

KUWAIT: Bangladesh Embassy in Kuwait observed "The great Independence and National Day" at the Chancery on Sunday, March 26, 2023, with due fervor and festivity. Presided over by Minister of Labor and Charge d'Affaires Mohammed Abul Hossain, the event was also attended by embassy officials, members of the community and representatives of the print and electronic media.

The program began with the hoisting of the national flag ceremoniously by Minister and Charge d'Affaires Abul Hossain. Later on, Charge d'Affaires along with other officers of the embassy placed a floral wreath before the portrait of the Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. Special Dua and Munajat were offered for the salvation of the soul of the Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the members of his family, the freedom fighters who laid down their valuable lives for the independence of the country, the wounded free-



KUWAIT: Embassy officials and other people at the event offer prayers for those who sacrificed their lives for the independence of the country.

dom fighters and for continued peace and progress of the country.

The discussion session of the program started with a recitation of verses from the Holy Quran. Messages from the President, Prime Minister, Foreign Minister and State Minister for Foreign Affairs of Bangladesh were read out by high officials of the em-

bassy. During the program, a short video documentary on the occasion of the great Independence and National Day was displayed. Later, leaders and members of the Bangladesh community and various socio-cultural organizations delivered their valuable speech and highlighted the significance of the day.

Minister and Charge d'Affaires Abul Hossain in his closing remarks paid deep homage to the Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and his family members. He also paid tribute to three million martyrs, two hundred thousand women and all the freedom fighters for their extraordinary contributions and great sacrifices during the Liberation War in 1971. He also highlighted the development of Bangladesh under the leadership of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina. Charge d'Affaires urged upon the expatriate community to work together with utmost sincerity and integrity to improve the image of the country.



Bangladeshi Minister of Labor and Charge d'Affaires Mohammed Abul Hossain raises the national flag of Bangladesh.

CONDOLENCES

Kuwait Times

management and staff

convey our deepest condolences
to our colleague

Mohammed Sami Ka'war

on the sad demise of his

Uncle

May Allah Almighty bestow His mercy on him



Police fire tear gas as fresh protests erupt in Kenya Page 7

Protest-hit Zionist entity faces 'general strike' over govt reform

Page 6



NEW DELHI: Police detain activists and supporters of India's Congress party during a protest against conviction of Congress party leader Rahul Gandhi in a criminal defamation case, in New Delhi on March 27, 2023. —AFP

Gandhi's expulsion rocks Indian parliament

Opposition MPs wave 'Democracy in danger' placards in parliament

NEW DELHI: India's parliament was adjourned twice on Monday after lawmakers held rowdy protests and threw paper at the speaker following the expulsion from the house of top opposition figure Rahul Gandhi. Gandhi lost his parliamentary seat on Friday after being convicted in a case that critics say shows how the rule of law is under threat in the world's largest democracy under Prime Minister Narendra Modi. The speaker called off proceedings less than a minute after opposition MPs wearing black erupted in shouting, some of them throwing bits of paper at him. "I want to run the House with dignity," Speaker Om Birla said.

The session resumed several hours later only to be abandoned again after about 10 minutes as opposition MPs chanted anti-Modi slogans and waved "Democracy in danger" placards. It was the latest in a string of stoppages in recent weeks in India's often

raucous parliament among lawmakers representing India's 1.4 billion people.

Opposition MPs have been demanding a probe into potential links between Modi and the business empire of tycoon Gautam Adani, which has been hit by allegations of accounting fraud. Debates have also descended into shouting matches over comments made by Gandhi in Britain in early March that Indian democracy is "under attack". Opposition lawmakers from different parties also staged protests in New Delhi on Monday, the latest in a series of recent demonstrations.

Piyush Goyal, trade minister and a member of Modi's ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), on Monday accused the opposition of "cheap politics" and "trying to mislead people". Gandhi "has no right to consider himself above the law of the country", Goyal told reporters.

Scion

Gandhi, 52, is the leading face of the opposition Congress party, once the dominant force of Indian politics, and is the scion of India's most famous political dynasty. But Congress has for years been repeatedly crushed in elections by Modi's BJP and its nationalist appeals to India's Hindu majority.

The lower house of parliament ruled Gandhi ineligible to sit as an MP on Friday, a day after he was sentenced to two years for defamation. He is appealing. The conviction stemmed from a remark made during the 2019 election campaign when Gandhi had asked why "all thieves have Modi as (their) common surname". His comments were portrayed as a slur against the prime minister and against all those with the same surname, which is associated with the lower rungs of India's caste hierarchy.

A BJP spokesman said Thursday the court acted with "due judicial process" in arriving at its ruling in the case, one of several Gandhi is facing. Legal action has been widely deployed against opposition party figures and institutions seen as critical of the Modi government during its nine years in power.

Domestic and international media have also come under growing pressure. Last month, tax inspectors raided the local offices of Britain's BBC. The Editors Guild of India said the raids demonstrated a "trend of using government agencies to intimidate or harass press organizations that are critical of government policies".

On Saturday, Gandhi, who recently completed a walk across India that was hailed as a success by commentators, said he would "do whatever I have to do to defend the democratic nature of this country". —AFP

Mississippi prepares for more storms

ROLLING FORK: Storm-ravaged Mississippi struggled on Sunday with the aftermath of a huge tornado that tore across the southern US state, killing at least 25 people, with devastated communities bracing for a fresh bout of extreme weather.

Search-and-rescue workers surveyed the damage of shredded homes, flattened buildings and smashed cars in Rolling Fork, a small town all but wiped out by nature's wrath. After President Joe Biden freed up disaster aid, the National Weather Service (NWS) warned residents of Mississippi and neighboring Alabama of potential new "supercell thunderstorms" through late Sunday that could "produce a few strong tornadoes and very large hail."

The NWS gave Friday's tornado—which left a trail of havoc more than 100 miles (160 kilometers) long across the state—a rating of four out of five on the Enhanced Fujita scale, with ferocious winds of up to 200 miles (320 kilometers) per hour. Dozens of people have also been injured, and officials say the death toll could rise.

Under warm spring sunshine and cloudless blue skies, stunned residents walked among obliterated

homes, sifting through debris and comforting one another as crews fought fires, conducted searches and cleared emergency routes.

Before-and-after satellite images released late Sunday showed utter ruin across parts of Rolling Fork, with homes destroyed and trees ripped out of the earth. The American Red Cross moved into a National Guard building in Rolling Fork hours after the storm razed much of the town, home to around 2,000 people.

An area was set up as an infirmary and boxes full of food and medical supplies were shuttled in to support storm victims who had lost everything, said John Brown, a Red Cross official for Alabama and Mississippi. Anna Krisuta, 43, and her 16-year-old son Alvaro Llecha took shelter at the site, saying their house was in pieces.

'Heartbreaking'

The severe weather also left a man dead in Alabama when he was trapped under an overturned trailer, the sheriff's office in Morgan County said. Officials including US Secretary of Homeland Security Alejandro Mayorkas gathered in Rolling Fork Sunday afternoon, praising rescue efforts and pledging support "for the long haul." "It is heartbreaking to hear of the loss of life, to see the devastation firsthand," Mayorkas told a press conference held with Governor Tate Reeves and Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) head Deanne Criswell. —AFP

Six killed in suicide blast in Afghan capital

KABUL: A suicide attack on Monday near Afghanistan's foreign ministry killed six civilians and wounded several others, the interior ministry said. Security has dramatically improved since the Taliban stormed back to power in August 2021, ousting the US-backed government and ending their two decade insurgency, but the Islamic State group has proved an increasing threat.

The attacker was identified by Afghan forces who shot at him in front of a business centre near the foreign ministry, interior ministry spokesman Abdul Nafy Takor tweeted. "With his killing, the explosives carried by the attacker also exploded which killed six civilians and wounded a number of others," he said.

Italian NGO Emergency, which operates a hos-

pital in the capital, confirmed it had received two dead and 12 wounded, including a child. No group has claimed responsibility for the attack. Monday's blast was the second attack near the foreign ministry in Kabul in less than three months, and the first since the Muslim holy month of Ramadan began on Thursday in Afghanistan.

On January 11, a suicide bomber blew himself up near the foreign ministry, killing 10 and wounding 53 people, according to the United Nations. The Taliban authorities, who have often tried to play down attacks challenging their rule, had said that five people were killed in that attack, claimed by IS.

The group has increasingly become a major challenge, killing and wounding hundreds of people in several attacks, some targeting foreigners or foreign interests in a bid to undermine the Taliban government.

At least five Chinese nationals were wounded in December when gunmen stormed a hotel popular with businesspeople in Kabul. That raid was claimed by IS, as was an attack on Pakistan's embassy in Kabul also in December that Islamabad denounced as an "assassination attempt" against its ambassador. —AFP



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International

Protest-hit Zionist entity faces 'general strike' over govt reforms

Netanyahu may temporarily back down from the judicial reforms

JERUSALEM: The hard-right government of Zionist entity Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu faced more protests and calls for a general strike Monday against its controversial push to overhaul the justice system. Netanyahu was due to address the nation later Monday, a day after sacking his defence minister who had broken ranks over the divisive issue, and after President Isaac Herzog again urged an immediate stop to the reform push.

Zionist media speculated that Netanyahu may temporarily back down from the judicial reforms, with Economy Minister Nir Barkat tweeting for ministers to "unite behind the prime minister and support him in pausing the legislation". Zionist entity's top trade union chief had Monday called a general strike over the package, which would weaken the powers of the judiciary and which demonstrators have for months declared as a threat to Zionist entity's democracy.

"I am calling a general strike," Histadrut chairman Arnon Bar-David said in a televised address. "We have a mission to stop this legislative process and we will do it," he added, vowing to "continue to fight". The Medical Association quickly followed suit, announcing "a full strike in the health system" that will impact all public hospitals.

The stoppage was also affecting flights at Ben Gurion International Airport near Tel Aviv, Liza Dvir, a spokeswoman for the Airports Authority, told AFP. The nationwide walkout was called hours after Herzog pressed for an immediate halt to the judicial programme, following demonstrations in Tel Aviv overnight. "For the sake of the unity of the people... I call on you to halt the legislative process immediately," Herzog said in a statement.

The plan to hand more control to politicians and diminish the role of the Supreme Court has ignited months of protests and sparked concern from Zionist entity's top allies including the United States. The White House noted that President Joe Biden recently told Netanyahu that "democratic

values have always been, and must remain, a hallmark of the US-Zionist relationship". Netanyahu's government, a coalition between his Likud party and extreme-right and ultra-Orthodox allies, has argued the changes are needed to rebalance powers between lawmakers and the judiciary.

'Everyone should strike'

Yoav Gallant, the former defence minister and staunch ally of Netanyahu, earlier called for a halt to the reforms. "The growing social rift has made its way into the (army) and security agencies," said Gallant. "It is a clear, immediate and tangible threat to Zionist's security."

Moments after Netanyahu sacked Gallant, demonstrators waving national flags seized a central highway in the coastal city of Tel Aviv. They blocked traffic and burned tyres, while some threw metal barricades and police deployed water cannon. "Last night we witnessed very difficult scenes," Herzog said. "Our security, economy, society—all are under threat." Rallies were also held Sunday in Jerusalem, the northern city of Haifa and Beer Sheva in the south.

The activist movement has announced a "national paralysis week", including protests outside ministers' homes. Zionists rallied outside parliament in Jerusalem on Monday, where demonstrator Keren Mimran said "everyone should strike today". "We are calling on the government to stop this mad reform," the 57-year-old high-tech worker told AFP.

Trevor Galor, who owns a tourism firm, said he "can't believe what's going on". "This reform... is completely crazy, and Zionist entity has become a very dangerous place to be in at the moment," said Galor, 52, holding an Zionist flag.

'Illegal' intervention

Gallant, a former general, was appointed in December as part of Netanyahu's coalition with extreme-right and ultra-Orthodox allies. Yuli Edelstein,



TEL AVIV: Protesters block a road and hold national flags during a rally against the Zionist government's judicial reform in Tel Aviv. — AFP

a Likud lawmaker who chairs the parliamentary committee for foreign affairs and defence, said "given the security situation, it's not the moment to change the minister of defence". Opposition leader Yair Lapid on Monday renewed his support for Zionists "who are standing up to the insanity of the coalition".

Lawmakers are scheduled to vote this week on a central part of the proposals, which would change the way judges are appointed. A parliamentary committee has amended the draft law to make it

more acceptable to opponents, but the opposition has ruled out backing any part of the reform package until all legislative steps are halted.

Netanyahu last week vowed to "responsibly advance" the reforms and "end the rift" they have caused. In response, Attorney General Gali Baharav-Miara on Friday accused Netanyahu of "illegal" public intervention on the process of adopting the judicial reforms. The premier is on trial over charges of bribery, fraud and breach of trust, which he denies. —AFP

Europe rights body warns UK over immigration bill

STRASBOURG: A new immigration bill in the UK that aims to stop migrants crossing the Channel illegally on small boats from France is "incompatible" with Britain's international obligations, Europe's top rights body said on Monday. In a letter addressed to both chambers of the UK parliament, the Council of Europe (COE) Commissioner for Human Rights, Dunja Mijatovic, urged lawmakers to vote against the bill proposed by Prime Minister Rishi Sunak's right-wing Conservative government.

It is now "essential" that lawmakers "prevent legislation that is incompatible with the UK's international obligations being passed", she said in the letter. The draft law intends to outlaw asylum claims by all illegal arrivals, while anyone who is deported after making the dangerous journey from France would be banned from re-entering the UK. Migrants would be returned to their home country or sent on to a "safe" destination such as Rwanda, under a hotly contested partnership agreed by London.

"By effectively preventing people arriving irregularly from having their asylum claims assessed, the bill would strip away one of the es-



CHELMSFORD: Britain's Prime Minister Rishi Sunak (C) and Britain's Home Secretary Suella Braverman (2ndR) walk with Community Support Officer Sonja Viner (L), Police Sergeant Sophie Chesters (2ndL) and Police Sergeant Matt Collins during a visit to Chelmsford. — AFP

sential building blocks of the protection system," said Mijatovic.

If passed, the bill would "add to the already significant regression of the protection of the human rights" of refugees, asylum seekers and migrants in the UK and "provide an incentive" to other states in Europe and beyond to adopt similar measures, she said.

UK interior minister Suella Braverman has acknowledged that the government "pushed the boundaries of international law" to draft the bill.

The Sunak government, which has been languishing in the polls, has been under domestic pressure to stop the large numbers crossing the Channel. Even after Brexit, Britain remains a member of the COE, which is a separate entity

from the European Union. London must abide by the European Convention on Human Rights which is overseen by the ECHR. Mijatovic said the bill would create "clear and direct tension" with the human rights standards established under the ECHR. Provisions in the bill indicating that the domestic legislation should supersede the ECHR risk "creating divergence with the case law of the ECHR", she said.

There have been suggestions that the UK could walk out of the ECHR but the Sunak government has insisted this is not on the agenda and has been in talks with the court. The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Volker Turk, said earlier this month he was "deeply concerned" by the legislation. — AFP

Yousaf becomes Scotland's ...

Continued from Page 1

reforming public services. "I will aim to lead Scotland and the interests of all of our citizens, whatever your political allegiance," Yousaf insisted, noting he would look to work "constructively" with the UK's Conservative government.

Yousaf, who was health minister in Sturgeon's cabinet, narrowly beat finance minister Kate Forbes to become SNP leader once party voters' second preferences had been added to their tallies. Ash Regan, a former minister in the cabinet, finished a distant third. Polling indicates that around 45 percent of Scots are currently in favor of Scotland leaving the United Kingdom, after 55 percent of Scots rejected such a move in a 2014 vote.

During campaigning Yousaf said too much time had been spent pointing out the UK government in London's failures and not enough on creating a vision for an independent Scotland. He has promised a civic movement to drive the campaign. He has a challenge to win over the wider Scottish electorate, with a UK general election expected within the next 18 months. According to Ipsos polling, Yousaf enjoyed a favorable opinion

among just 22 percent of the electorate, trailing Forbes on 27 percent.

Forbes, who won 48 percent of the votes in the contest, came under the spotlight for her conservative views as a member of the Free Church of Scotland, which opposes same-sex marriage and abortion. But Yousaf, who has close ties with Sturgeon, also faced scrutiny and criticism over his record in successive roles in the Scottish government.

Sturgeon, 52, has served as first minister since Nov 2014 but said last month that she felt unable to give "every ounce of energy" to the job. In her final months in office she faced uproar about a new law allowing anyone over 16 to change their gender without a medical diagnosis. The law would have allowed a transgender woman who was convicted of rape before she began transitioning to serve a prison sentence in a women-only facility. As debate raged, the UK government used an unprecedented veto to block the legislation.

The UK Supreme Court last year also ruled that the Scottish government could not hold a new referendum on sovereignty without London's approval. Several polls have since shown waning popular support for breaking away. But Sturgeon said she has "every confidence" that her successor will lead Scotland to independence. — AFP

Traffic snarls and closed roads...

Continued from Page 1

to keep schools open on Monday despite the road closures. "All educational facilities are safe and fine after the heavy rains," Spokesman of the Ministry Ahmad Al-Weheidah said in a press release, adding there was no need to suspend study. Pictures and videos from Sunday night through Monday morning showed Kuwait Fire Force, police, National Guard and army officers helping in pumping out water and removing submerged cars from flooded roads.

Despite these efforts, public anger mounted on social media Sunday, and again on Monday as closures to main highways such as Maghreb Road brought most roads around Kuwait to a crippling standstill. People took to Twitter and other social media platform to denounce the government's failure to prepare for the heavy rains despite earlier promises by officials to prevent this problem from recurring.

Long lines of vehicles extended for kilometers on various roads around the country, while traf-

fic inside overcrowded areas such as Hawally and Farwaniya was brought to a near complete halt. "I am a victim of the roads of Kuwait. I spend most of my salary on fixing my cars due to bad roads and now my car is submerged in Salam due to heavy rains and the government's negligence," Huda Al-Ali said. "Who will compensate me for my car repairs? Who will compensate my family if I die as a victim of corrupt roads?"

Many people called on the government to investigate possible corruption which may have caused delay in road infrastructure projects and led to the damages that roads are afflicted with every time it rains in Kuwait.

The ministry of health on Sunday urged people to be cautious during the bad weather conditions and avoid going out in public as much as possible, especially for people with asthma and other respiratory ailments. "The current weather conditions contain irritants that could trigger asthma symptoms," Health Ministry Spokesman Abdullah Al-Sanad warned. He also called for caution on the roads and making sure the necessary medications to deal with the change in weather are available, adding in case there is no response to the medicine, to go to the nearest health center.

ite cleric Nimr Al-Nimr — just one in a series of flashpoints between the two longstanding regional rivals.

The deal is expected to see Iran and Saudi Arabia reopen their embassies and missions within two months and implement security and economic cooperation deals signed more than 20 years ago. An Iranian official said on March 19 that Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi had favorably received an invitation to visit Saudi Arabia from King Salman, though Riyadh has yet to confirm. Amir-Abdollahian told reporters the same day that the two countries had agreed to hold a meeting between their top diplomats and that three locations had been suggested, without specifying which.

The detente between Saudi Arabia, the world's biggest crude oil exporter, and Iran, strongly at odds with Western governments over its nuclear activities, has the potential to reshape relations across a region characterized by turbulence for decades. — AFP

Loving the All-Loving God

Continued from Page 1

But those who believe are stronger in love for Allah." (Al-Baqarah 2: 165)

Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) also said what can be translated as: "Whoever attains three things will get the delight of faith: To love Allah and His Messenger more than anyone else, to love someone for the sake of Allah, and to hate returning to disbelief as you would hate to be cast into the fire (of Hell)." (Al-Bukhari # 16 + 6, 941 + Muslim # 43)

There are many ways to prove our love for Almighty Allah, here I will share only four of them. They are:

1. Reading the Noble Quran with understanding and reflection. Almighty Allah says what can be translated as: "Do they (the hypocrites), then, not reflect upon the Quran? Or are there locks on their hearts?" (Muhammad 47: 24)

Abdallah bin Ash-Shikhkheer (ra) said, "I approached the Prophet (peace be upon him) while he was praying, and his chest sounded like a boiling pot due to his weeping." (Shuaib Al-Arnaout said that its chain of narrators is saheeh (authentic) because it fulfils the conditions of Imam Muslim in grading as authentic chains of narrators, see Takhreej Al-Musnad # 16, 326)

2. Performing obligatory and voluntary prayers. The prayer no doubt strengthens our connection with the Majestic Allah, and more so the voluntary prayers because we stand for this prayer purely for the sake of Almighty Allah, even though it is not obligatory. It is a two-way love because the All-Loving Allah returns this love for the one who performs the voluntary prayers.

Abu Hurairah (RA) narrated that Allah's Messenger (PBUH) reported that Almighty Allah said in Al-Hadeeth Al-Qudsi (Allah's statements not in the Noble Quran) what can be translated as: "... And My servant does not draw near to Me with anything more loved to Me than the religious duties I have en-

joined upon him. And My servant continues to draw near to me with optional deeds until I love him. When I love him, I am his hearing with which he hears, and his sight with which he sees, and his hand with which he strikes, and his foot with which he walks. Were he to ask [something] of Me, I would surely give it to him..." (Al-Bukhari # 6, 502)

3. Remembrance of the Majestic Allah always, mentioning His name, praising Him, glorifying Him, thanking Him, asking for forgiveness, and being aware that He is watching over you.

Abdullah bin Busr (RA) narrated that a man asked the Messenger of Allah (pbuh): "O Messenger of Allah, indeed, the injunctions of Islam are too many for me (to observe), so tell me of something to cling to." He replied, "Your tongue should continue being moist with the remembering and mentioning of Allah." (Al-Albani rated it as saheeh (authentic) in Saheeh At-Tirmidhi # 3, 375)

4. Remain humble. Humility is equivalent to submission to Almighty Allah. We should abandon selfishness and pride in our human power, and stand humbled, meek, and submissive as servants of our Creator. Almighty Allah says what can be translated as: "And you should not ever walk on the earth proudly exultant. For never will you (human beings) be able to perforce the earth (with your steps). And never will you stretch up to the mountains in height." (Al-Isra'a 17: 37)

Abu Hurairah (RA) narrated that the Messenger of Allah (PBUH) said, "Charity does not decrease wealth, and Allah increases the honour of him who forgives, and no one humbles himself for Allah's sake except that Allah raises his status." (Muslim # 2, 588)

NOTE: Courtesy of the TIES Center: The TIES Center is one of the projects of Kuwait Society for Cultural Dialogue and is the social and educational hub for English speaking expats in Kuwait, and aims at empowering Kuwait's expats through social and educational services that promote a positive and productive role in society. It also facilitates opportunities for intra- and interfaith interactions that promote social solidarity.

Saudi, Iran FMs plan to meet...

Continued from Page 1

of Ramadan", which ends in the third week of April, SPA said. Iran's foreign ministry said the two men "discussed the latest status of the agreement between the two countries" and "talked about a joint meeting in the holy month of Ramadan". "They also discussed the constructive path of relations between the two countries," the Iranian statement said.

Neither statement specified the exact date or location of the highly anticipated meeting, which Saudi officials have said is the next step in restoring ties seven years after they were severed. Riyadh cut relations after Iranian protesters attacked Saudi diplomatic missions in 2016 following the Saudi execution of Shi-

International

Myanmar junta chief vows no let up in crackdown, then polls

'Serenity and stability are vital' before any election could go ahead

NAYPYIDAW: Myanmar's junta chief, flanked by tanks and missile launchers, vowed no let up in a crackdown on opponents and said Monday elections would be held, weeks after the military conceded it did not control enough territory to allow a vote.

Myanmar has been in turmoil since the military deposed Aung San Suu Kyi's civilian government more than two years ago after making unsubstantiated claims of electoral fraud.

The putsch sparked renewed fighting with ethnic rebels and birthed dozens of anti-junta "People's Defence Forces" (PDFs), with swaths of the country now ravaged by fighting and the economy in tatters.

The military will take "decisive action" against its opponents and ethnic rebels supporting them, Min Aung Hlaing told an audience of around 8,000 service members attending the annual Armed Forces Day parade in the capital Naypyidaw.

"The terror acts of NUG and its lackey so-called PDFs need to be tackled for good and all," he said, referring to the "National Unity Government", a body dominated by ousted lawmakers working to reverse the coup. The junta would then hold "free and fair elections" upon the completion of the state of emergency, he said. The military announced last month a six-month extension of a two-year state of emergency and postponed elections it had promised to hold by August because it did not control enough of the country for a vote to take place. "Serenity and stability are vital" before any election could go ahead, Min Aung Hlaing told the parade.

Russian jets

Armed Forces Day commemorates the start of resistance to the Japanese occupation during World

War II. It usually features a military parade attended by foreign officers and diplomats.

Workers made last-minute inspections of the parade ground early on Monday, the hulking statues of three of Myanmar's empire-building kings looming out of the dark. Planes later trailed smoke in the yellow, red and green of the national flag as Russian-made Yak and Sukoi Su-30 jets made several flyovers.

Marching bands played bagpipes and brass, at times duelling with each other, and state media images showed women lining the streets to garland marching soldiers with flowers.

New junta chief Min Aung Hlaing was inspecting the parade two years ago when troops launched a countrywide crackdown on those protesting against the coup that had ousted Suu Kyi's government.

Around 160 protesters were killed in the violence, according to a local monitoring group, sparking widespread international condemnation. Rights groups and opponents have since accused the military of torching villages and using air and artillery strikes as collective punishment for opponents.

Min Aung Hlaing slammed the "criticism and condemnation" levelled at the junta, accusing some countries of supporting terrorists. Officials from major junta allies and arms suppliers Russia and China attended, and India also sent a representative. New Delhi has defended its ties with the junta, saying India cannot avoid dealing with its neighbour because of cross-border issues such as organised crime.

The United States announced on Friday new sanctions targeting the supply of jet fuel to the junta. The situation in Myanmar is a "festering catastrophe" two years after the coup, United



NAYPYIDAW: Chinese military officers attend a ceremony to mark Myanmar's 78th Armed Forces Day in Naypyidaw on March 27, 2023. — AFP

Nations human rights chief Volker Turk said this month, adding that the military was operating with "complete impunity".

Diplomatic efforts to defuse the bloody crisis, led by the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, have made little progress. A Myanmar official said seven countries from the 10-nation bloc sent representatives to the parade, including Malaysia and Indonesia, who are among the group's most vocal critics of

the junta. More than 3,100 people have been killed in the military's crackdown on dissent since the coup, according to a local monitoring group.

More than a million people have been displaced by fighting, according to the United Nations.

The junta wrapped up a series of closed-court trials of Suu Kyi in December, jailing her for a total of 33 years in a process rights groups have condemned as a sham. —AFP

Police fire tear gas as fresh protests erupt in Kenya

NAIROBI: Police fired tear gas to disperse anti-government protests on Monday over the high cost of living, after the opposition vowed demonstrations would go ahead despite a police ban. Security was tight, with riot police stationed at strategic points in Nairobi and patrolling the streets, while many shops were shut and train services from the capital's outskirts into the central business district were suspended.

Veteran opposition leader Raila Odinga has urged people to take to the streets every Monday and Thursday, even after protests a week ago turned violent and paralysed parts of Nairobi. Police clashed with stone-throwing demonstrators in Nairobi's largest slum Kibera, where protesters set tyres on fire, defying a warning by the Inspector General of Police Japhet Koome who said Sunday that the rallies were "illegal" and would be banned.

The situation was calmer elsewhere in the city, with a heavy police presence in neighbourhoods where protests had taken place last week. During last Monday's clashes in Nairobi and opposition strongholds in western Kenya, a university student was killed by police fire while 31 officers were injured as running battles erupted between riot police and demonstrators.

More than 200 people were arrested, including several senior opposition politicians, while protesters—as well as Odinga's own motorcade—were hit with tear gas and water cannon.

'Mother of all demonstrations'

It was the first major outbreak of political unrest since President William Ruto took office more than six months ago after defeating Odinga in an election his rival claims was "stolen". Despite the police ban, Odinga called Sunday on Kenyans to join what he has described as "the mother of all demonstrations".

"I want to tell Mr Ruto and the IG Koome that we are not going to be intimidated," he said. "We are not going to fear tear gas and police." Odinga



NAIROBI: An opposition supporter throws a stone towards Kenya Police Officers using a slingshot during clashes in Nairobi, Kenya on March 27, 2023. Kenya's opposition leader Raila Odinga called on his supporters to participate in countrywide protests every Monday and Thursday to demand that President William Ruto lowers the cost of living while questioning last year's presidential elections results. —AFP

also accused Deputy President Rigathi Gachagua of orchestrating an operation to cause "mayhem" at Monday's rallies.

Nairobi residents were wary after the previous violence. "I may have to close too because I have seen most of my neighbours are closed," said Mercy Wangare, an Mpesa (mobile money) kiosk attendant at an electronics shop.

"I am just weighing the situation before I decide because the sight of these policemen patrolling around is a sign that it may not end up well." The Communications Authority of Kenya has sought to prevent television stations from broadcasting the demonstrations live, but the move was blocked by the High Court.

'Stop terrorising the country'

Ruto, who is currently on a four-day trip to

Germany and Belgium, has urged his rival to halt the action. "I am telling Raila Odinga that if he has a problem with me, he should face me and stop terrorising the country," he said Thursday.

"Stop paralysing the businesses of mama mboga, matatu and other Kenyans," he said, referring to women stallholders and private minibus operators. Many Kenyans are struggling to put food on the table, battling high prices for basic goods as well as a plunging local currency and a record drought that has left millions hungry. "If the leaders don't talk, it is us who are affected. They are rich people, it is who will sleep hungry," motorcycle taxi driver Collins Kibe told AFP. During the election campaign, Ruto portrayed himself as champion of the downtrodden and vowed to improve the lot of ordinary Kenyans. —AFP

China says Japanese held for espionage

BEIJING: China said on Monday that it was detaining a Japanese national on suspicion of espionage, after Tokyo urged Beijing to release one of its citizens. "Relevant Chinese authorities took criminal coercive measures this month against a Japanese citizen, in accordance with the law," foreign ministry spokesperson Mao Ning told a regular press briefing.

"This Japanese citizen is suspected of engaging in espionage activities, in violation of the criminal law and the anti-espionage law of the People's Republic of China," Mao said. "China is a country under the rule of law. All foreign nationals in China must abide by Chinese laws, and offenders are prosecuted according to law," she added.

Japanese government spokesman Hirokazu Matsuno told reporters earlier on Monday that Tokyo's embassy in China had been informed "this month that a Japanese man in his fifties was detained in Beijing". He gave no details on the man's identity, his alleged crime, or when he had been arrested.

"Ever since we learned about this case, the Japanese government has been strongly urging the immediate release of this Japanese national," Matsuno said. He added that Tokyo was also seeking consular access to the man, who has not been named publicly.

The man is an employee of the Japanese pharmaceutical firm Astellas, a spokesman for the company told AFP, declining to offer any further details. The company was working with Tokyo's foreign ministry to gather more information and take appropriate action, he added.

Local media described the man as a veteran expat in China who had worked in the country for two decades. Kyodo News Agency reported he was detained just before his planned return to Japan this month, and that he had previously been "a senior executive of the Japanese Chamber of Commerce and Industry in China". —AFP

Taiwan ex-president Ma arrives in China

SHANGHAI: Taiwan ex-president Ma Ying-jeou arrived in China on Monday on the first cross-strait visit by a current or former leader of the island in more than seven decades, a trip Taipei's ruling party called "regrettable". Ma's 12-day trip will not involve any official meetings, his office said, with his focus on paying tribute to his ancestors and promoting youth exchanges. "I hope to improve the cross-strait atmosphere through the enthusiastic interactions of young people, so peace can come to us faster and sooner," the 73-year-old said at the airport before his departure.

Ma arrived in Shanghai on Monday afternoon and was met at the airport by central government and city officials, China's official Xinhua news agency said. The former president's trip comes a day after Honduras severed diplomatic ties with Taiwan in favour of Beijing, which claims the self-ruled island as part of its territory and has vowed to retake it one day.

In a statement on Monday, President Tsai Ing-wen's Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) accused Ma of "endorsing" Beijing's Taiwan policy with his visit. "We should be more united... but it's regrettable that the KMT stands with the Chinese communists and ex-president Ma disregards public disapproval to visit China at this moment," the party said.

Taiwan and China split in 1949 after a civil war won by the Communist Party, with the defeated nationalist Kuomintang (KMT) party fleeing to the island. Ma is a senior leader of the KMT, which currently sits in the opposition in Taiwan and advocates for warmer ties with



SHANGHAI: Handout picture released from former president Ma Ying-jeou's office on March 27, 2023 shows former Taiwanese president Ma Ying-jeou (C) waving upon arriving at the Shanghai airport. — AFP

China, but denies being pro-Beijing.

Taiwan will hold a presidential election next year, with the KMT and DPP the main contenders for the position. Ma oversaw a dramatic improvement in cross-strait ties during his 2008-16 rule, which culminated in a summit between him and Chinese leader Xi Jinping in Singapore in 2015. Beijing has ramped up military, economic and diplomatic pressure on Taiwan under Ma's successor, Tsai, poaching nine of Taiwan's allies, leaving only 13 countries that diplomatically recognise the island. China and Honduras began formal diplomatic relations on Sunday, with Taipei accusing Beijing of using "coercion and intimidation" to lure away its allies.

At Taipei airport on Monday, a handful of demonstrators protested against Ma's visit, saying he had "betrayed Taiwan" by travelling to China. They were removed by police to an area outside the main airport building shortly thereafter. —AFP

Cuba says voter turnout ticked up in elections

HAVANA: Cuba's government managed to mobilize voters on Sunday for National Assembly elections, the results of which were a foregone conclusion, as it pushed back against a recent abstentionist trend in the communist-ruled nation. As many as eight million eligible voters selected from the 470 candidates on the ballot -- 263 women and 207 men—are vying for the 470 seats in the congress.

But what was really in play was the number of Cubans refusing to vote. The opposition had called on citizens to abstain, with one opposition Twitter account branding the vote a farce. Voting is not obligatory and abstention has risen steadily in recent years.

On Sunday the nation's 23,648 polling stations closed at 7:00 pm (2300 GMT), an hour later than initially announced by authorities. According to the latest provisional figures released by the National Election Council, as of 5:00 pm turnout stood at 70.33 percent.

That marked a modest increase from the 68.5 percent who voted in last November's municipal elections, the lowest turnout since the island's current electoral system was set up in 1976. Last September about 74 percent of eligible Cubans voted in a referendum on a new family code, down from the 90 percent turnout in the 2019 referendum on a new constitution.

Cuba's communist government does not allow opposition, so most parliamentary candidates



HAVANA: Electoral officials check the voters roll at a polling station in Havana. —AFP

are members of the Communist Party of Cuba (PCC). Candidates still must receive 50 percent of votes to be elected.

Voters had two choices: they could tick the names of any number of individual candidates, or they could select the "vote for all" option. "I voted for the unified vote because, despite the needs, the difficulties that this country can have, I could not imagine" abstaining, Carlos Diego Herrera, a 54-year-old blacksmith in Havana, told AFP. He said abstaining would be like voting "for those that want to crush us, the Yankees." Washington has imposed sanctions on the island nation since 1962, three years after the communist revolution that saw Fidel Castro take power after overthrowing US-backed dictator Fulgencio Batista. Student Rachel Vega, 19, also said she voted for all candidates, considering it "a step forward right now" that would "improve the situation in the country." —AFP

Business

TUESDAY, MARCH 28, 2023



FRANKFURT: Employees in the public transport sector demonstrate in front of the main railway station as they stage a strike in Frankfurt am Main, western Germany, on March 27, 2023. —AFP

'Mega-strike' disrupts travel in Germany

German workers demand wage hikes in the face of soaring inflation

BERLIN: A major strike brought much of Germany's air traffic, rail service and commuter lines to a halt on Monday as workers demand wage hikes in the face of brisk inflation. Workers at airports, ports, railways, buses and metro lines throughout much of Europe's top economy heeded a call by the Verdi and EVG unions for the 24-hour walkout.

"A labour struggle that has no impact is toothless," Verdi boss Frank Werneke told public broadcaster Phoenix. He acknowledged the stoppage would inflict pain on many commuters and holiday-makers, "but better one day of strain with the prospect of reaching a wage agreement than weeks of industrial action". Berlin's usually bustling central train station was mostly quiet on Monday morning, after the national railway cancelled long-distance and regional links across the country.

Arrival and departure boards at Frankfurt airport, the nation's biggest, and Munich airport showed rows of cancelled flights. Freddie Schwarze, who was on strike at Munich airport, said: "We are ready for more strikes in any case. We have started and we won't stop. That's for sure."

Georg Bachmaier, who works at the Feder-

al Waterways and Shipping Office, said he had joined the walkout because "we can no longer afford our lives".

"When we go shopping, we have to think do we buy this or not, we need the money to finance our lives and that's why we're here." As the industrial action was largely publicised, many commuters had switched to other modes of transport.

Cashier Steffi Wisser, 46, voiced understanding for the strike. "People must be made aware of the enormous work done by strikers," she said. For retiree Gloria Bierwald, 73, "the strike goes to far". "What the strikers are asking for is relatively exaggerated. I am of the opinion that people should be satisfied when they have a job."

Ill-tempered dispute

To prevent supply gaps, Transport Minister Volker Wissing had ordered states to lift restrictions on truck deliveries on Sunday, while asking airports to allow late-night takeoffs and landings "so stranded passengers can reach their destinations". Verdi represents around 2.5 million public sector employees, while EVG represents 230,000

workers on the railways and at bus companies.

The rare joint strike marks an escalation of an increasingly ill-tempered dispute over a pay packet to blunt the impact of surging inflation. Employers, mostly the state and public sector companies, have so far refused the demands, instead offering a rise of five percent with two one-off payments of 1,000 (\$1,100) and 1,500 euros, this year and next. Verdi is demanding a rise of 10.5 percent in monthly salaries, while EVG is seeking a 12-percent increase for those it represents.

'Massive impact'

Martin Seiler, head of human resources at state-owned rail company Deutsche Bahn (DB), has described the nationwide strike as "groundless and unnecessary" and urged the unions to return to the negotiating table "immediately". The German airport association, which estimated about 380,000 air travellers would be affected, said the walkout "went beyond any imaginable and justifiable measure".

Employers have accused labor representatives of contributing to a wage-price spiral that will only feed inflation, while unions say their members

have been asked to bear the burden of the soaring cost of living. As in many other countries, people in Germany are struggling with high inflation—it hit 8.7 percent in February—after Russia's invasion of Ukraine sent food and energy costs soaring.

Similar strikes have taken place in Britain, where public and private sector workers have taken industrial action as inflation remains stubbornly above 10 percent. Germany's "mega-strike", as local media have dubbed it, follows industrial action in recent months in several sectors, from the postal service to airports and local transport. A third round of salary negotiations for public sector workers began on Monday. Earlier in March, airports in Bremen, Berlin, Hamburg and Hanover cancelled more than 350 flights after security staff walked out. Bus and metro staff in Frankfurt also staged a strike.

Some unions, however, have succeeded in winning big pay increases. Postal workers obtained average monthly increases of 11.5 percent earlier in March, and in November IG Metall, Germany's biggest union, won hikes totaling 8.5 percent for almost four million employees that it represents. —AFP

Oilfield services sector in GCC bullish: Moody's

WASHINGTON: Moody's Investors Service said in a new report that it expects the oilfield services (OFS) sector in EMEA to benefit from rising upstream capital spending by global oil producers in 2023, especially in the Middle East, as high oil prices continue to provide incentives to develop and exploit reserves. This is on the back of a supply/demand imbalance in the oil market that has been building up since 2017 and a series of shocks that caused oil prices to spike in 2022 after Russia invaded Ukraine.

"We expect demand for OFS services provided by European and the Middle Eastern entities, such as Shelf Drilling, Ltd (Caa1 stable), PGS ASA (B3 stable), CGG SA (B3 stable) and Welltec International APS (Welltec, B1 stable), to remain robust in 2023," adds the rating agency. Industry fundamentals are strong. Demand for jackup rigs in the GCC region is rising. National oil companies' (NOCs) large capital spending programs, in particular in the Middle

East, will continue to drive the current jackup rig supply-demand imbalance.

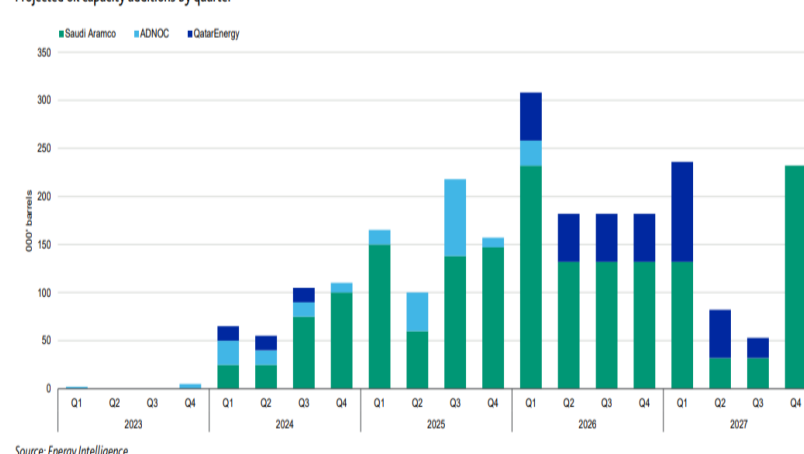
GCC NOC's strong operating performance, underpinned by a solid recovery of oil demand in 2021 and 2022, will continue to support long-term rig renewals led by Saudi Arabian Oil Company (Aramco, A1 positive).

We foresee continued growth in the contracted rig count in the GCC region this year following a jump to 131 rigs in 2022 from 115 in 2021. OFS providers' pricing power is improving. Higher day rates and increased utilization rates secured through new, longer and more favorable contracts will strengthen EMEA OFS providers' credit metrics during 2023.

Increased demand for OFS will enable the companies to improve their liquidity as well as reduce debt levels, as illustrated by Welltec's use of excess cash to repurchase debt. However, there is a risk that day rates could come under negative pressure if oil prices were to fall, given the current uncertain and vol-

Exhibit 5
GCC NOCs are making significant investments upstream in a bid to ramp up oil production

Projected oil capacity additions by quarter



Source: Energy Intelligence

atile operating environment, it added.

A supply-demand imbalance has been building up in the oil market since 2017. Following the collapse in oil prices in 2015-16, when Brent prices dropped to around \$40 a barrel (bbl) in January 2016 from more than \$115/bbl in February 2013 on the spot market, IOCs and NOCs reduced their capital spending. The companies made substantial cuts on the exploration side to protect their

balance sheets as some of these investments had become economically unsustainable. These actions resulted in a structural gap in the market which has led to an accumulated supply imbalance of 31 million barrels per day between January 2017 and December 2022. The gap widens further if we exclude the first six months of 2020 when demand tanked as a result of coronavirus-induced lockdowns.

"This announcement demonstrates Aramco's long-term commitment to China and belief in the fundamentals of the Chinese petrochemicals sector," said Aramco vice president Mohammed Al Qahatani. "It is an important acquisition for Aramco in a key market, supporting our growth ambitions and advancing our liquids to chemicals strategy. It also promises to secure a reliable supply of essential crude to one of China's most important refiners."

News of the Rongsheng deal came one day after Aramco announced it would partner with two other Chinese companies to build a refinery and petrochemical plant in the northeastern Chinese city of Panjin. That facility "is expected to be fully operational by 2026", Aramco said in a statement.

Speaking on Sunday at the China Development Forum in Beijing, Aramco CEO Amin Nasser said the firm, a leading source of income for the kingdom, was "doubling down on China's energy supply".

"We see a major win-win opportunity to build a

world-leading, integrated downstream sector in China, with special emphasis on the high conversion of liquids directly into chemicals as part of our broader liquid-to-chemicals business expansion plans," Nasser said. Aramco, which is mostly state-owned and said it earned record profits totaling \$161.1 billion last year, has pledged to achieve "operational net-zero" carbon emissions by 2050. That applies to emissions that are produced directly by Aramco's industrial sites, but not the CO2 produced when clients burn Saudi oil in their cars, power plants and furnaces. Nasser and other top Saudi officials have simultaneously called for further investment in fossil fuels—a position he reiterated on Sunday, saying Chinese leader Xi Jinping was in agreement.

"We agree with (Xi's) view that conventional energy sources and alternatives will have to work in parallel for decades to come," Nasser said. "China cannot achieve its climate change mitigation goals at the expense of energy security." — AFP

Saudi Aramco to take 10% stake in China petrochem

RIYADH: Saudi Aramco on Monday unveiled plans to acquire a 10-percent stake in a Chinese petrochemicals firm, a deal the Gulf energy giant said was evidence of its "long-term commitment to China". The agreement with Rongsheng Petrochemical comes as Saudi Arabia—the world's biggest crude exporter—increases political ties with top importer China including a recent Beijing-brokered reconciliation with Iran. Aramco said in a statement the deal stipulates the supply of 480,000 barrels per day of Arabian crude "under a long-term sales agreement" with Rongsheng.

Elon Musk puts Twitter's value at just \$20bn

SAN FRANCISCO: Elon Musk has put the current value of Twitter at \$20 billion, less than half the \$44 billion he paid for the social media platform just five months ago, according to an internal email seen by American news media. The email to employees referred to a new stock compensation program in the San Francisco-based company and the allocation of shares to employees of X Holdings, Twitter's umbrella company since Musk purchased it in late October.

The compensation plan values the platform at \$20 billion, slightly more than Snapchat's parent company Snap (\$18.2 billion) or Pinterest (\$18.7 billion), both of which are publicly traded, unlike Twitter. Musk, who is also the chief executive of Tesla Inc. and aerospace group SpaceX, said that Twitter would allow its employees to cash in shares every six months.

A query from AFP emailed to Twitter's communications department generated an automatic response in the form of a poop emoji. In the internal email, Musk describes the brutal contraction in Twitter's value. He says the platform faced such grave financial difficulties that at one point it was on the verge of bankruptcy. "Twitter was trending to lose -\$3B/year," Musk said in a message posted Saturday on the platform.

He cited a revenue drop of \$1.5 billion a year and a debt-servicing burden of the same amount—leaving it with "only 4 months of money." Musk, Twitter's majority shareholder, added simply: "Extremely dire situation." But he then said that "It looks like we will break even" in the second quarter of the year, with advertisers—many of whom fled the platform after the mercurial billionaire bought it—now beginning to return.

Since taking control, Musk has sharply cut the group's payroll from 7,500 employees to fewer than 2,000. He said in the email that he sees a "clear but difficult path" to a valuation of \$250 billion, without specifying how long that might take. — AFP



Elon Musk

Business

OAPEC presents its vision on blue hydrogen at gas experts session

Arab countries plan to invest in around 73 hydrogen projects

GENEVA: The General Secretariat of the Organization of Arab Petroleum Exporting Countries (OAPEC) participated in the activities of the tenth session of the United Nations Gas Experts Group, which was held at the United Nations headquarters in Geneva from March 23-24. Representatives of the member states of the European Economic Commission and representatives of the European Commission participated in the meeting.

Number of European and international institutions and organizations participated as well, including the International Gas Union, the Hydrogen Foundation in Europe, the International Gas Center in Geneva, and the World Health Organization, in addition to representatives of international oil companies, experts, and academics.

The General Secretariat put forward its vision on blue hydrogen, by presenting a paper in the hydrogen session entitled "Prospects for Blue Hydrogen and Blue Ammonia in the Arab Region", presented by Eng Wael Hamid Abdel Moti, an expert in gas industries in the organization, with representatives of the Hydrogen Council, the United Nations, and the Hydrogen Organization in Europe.

OAPEC representative explained that the Arab countries pay great attention to investing in hydrogen, to meet the expected future demand for it in major markets such as Europe and Asia, as well as to open a window for internal demand in some sectors such as the industrial sector and the transport sector.

He pointing out the increase in the number of hydrogen projects announced in the Arab coun-



GENEVA: Eng Wael Hamid Abdel Moti presents OAPEC's vision on blue hydrogen at the tenth session of the United Nations Gas Experts Group in Geneva.

tries at the beginning of 2023 to 73 projects with a diversified portfolio that includes the production and export of hydrogen, its transportation through pipelines, as well as its use in various types of transport applications.

He said that projects for the production of blue hydrogen produced from natural gas with carbon sequestration (and its derivatives blue ammonia) are of great interest to the Arab countries, which number is up to 13 projects, as the region is the least expensive in its production compared to the rest of the regions, which amounts to \$ 1.4 per kg, compared to \$2.5-3 per kg globally.

He added that the package of the blue hydro-



Delegates attend the tenth session of the United Nations Gas Experts Group in Geneva.

gen and blue ammonia projects that is being implemented, is the largest in terms of production capacity in the world, such as the blue ammonia production project with a capacity of 1 million tons annually within the "Taziz" integrated industrial system in the Ruwais complex in the United Arab Emirates, which is expected to be operational in 2025.

"Similarly, a blue ammonia production project in Qatar with a capacity of 1.2 million tons per year is expected to be operated in 2026 in addition to a global blue hydrogen production project in Jubail in Saudi Arabia with a capacity of 153,000 tons per year," he addressed.

The representative pointed out that these and other projects will enable the Arab countries to lead in the blue ammonia market, becoming its largest exporter by 2030. "The Arab countries have begun to produce and export several experimental shipments of blue ammonia to major markets such as Japan, South Korea and Germany," he said.

He concluded, "It should be noted that OAPEC has been participating in meetings of gas experts at the United Nations since 2016 in order to enhance cooperation with international institutions, present its vision on the most important developments in the gas and hydrogen industry, and exchange views on energy issues of common concern."

First Citizens to acquire collapsed Silicon Valley Bank

SAN FRANCISCO: US bank First Citizens said Monday it has agreed to purchase much of Silicon Valley Bank, whose collapse this month sparked global fears about the sector. SVB, a key lender to the tech industry since the 1980s, became the biggest US bank to fail since 2008.

Regulators seized it after a sudden run on deposits, creating Silicon Valley Bridge Bank. That entity will be taken over by First Citizens from Monday. First Citizens said it had agreed to purchase "substantially all loans and certain other assets, and assume all customer deposits and certain other liabilities of Silicon Valley Bridge Bank."

It said the 17 former branches of SVB will open on Monday as "Silicon Valley Bank, a division of First Citizens Bank." The transaction includes the sale of \$72 billion in assets at a discount of \$16.5 billion, the US Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation (FDIC) said in a statement.

Depositors of SVB will "automatically become depositors of First Citizens Bank," added the FDIC, which will continue to insure deposits. All of the entity's loans and deposits will now be managed by First Citizens, while the FDIC will retain some \$90 billion in securities and other assets.

SVB's collapse sparked a crisis of confidence among the customers of similarly sized US banks, with many withdrawing their money and depositing it into bigger institutions seen as too big for the government to not bail them out in a crisis. The FDIC said it estimates the cost of SVB's failure to its Deposit Insurance Fund (DIF) to be approximately \$20 billion.

Macron holds crisis meeting as more France protests loom

PARIS: President Emmanuel Macron summoned government ministers for a crisis meeting on Monday, as tensions ran high a day before another major day of strikes and protests against his pension reforms. Nearly two weeks after Macron rammed the new law through parliament using a special provision sidestepping any vote, unions have vowed no let-up in mass protests to get the government to back down.

They have called for another big day of action on Tuesday, the 10th such mobilization since protests started in mid-January against the controversial law, which includes raising the retirement age to 64 from 62. Macron, whose approval ratings in opinion polls are at a low point, said last week he accepted the "unpopularity" that came with the reform. His prime minister, Elisabeth Borne, meanwhile said that while there was no plan to drop the legislation, she was ready for fresh dialogue with unions.

"We have to find the right path... We need to calm down," she told AFP in an interview on Sunday. Starting on Monday, Borne has scheduled talks over three weeks, including with members of parliament, political parties, local authorities and unions. A state visit to France by Britain's King Charles III, which had been due to begin on Sunday, was postponed because of the current unrest.

'Very big move'

Instead of hosting the UK monarch for a day of pomp and ceremony, Macron was instead due to meet Borne, other cabinet ministers and senior



TEMPE, US: In this file photo taken on March 14, 2023, a Silicon Valley Bank office is seen in Tempe, Arizona. — AFP

Global worries

"This has been a remarkable transaction in partnership with the FDIC that should instill confidence in the banking system," Frank Holding Jr, chief executive of First Citizens, said in a statement according to Bloomberg. Along with the FDIC, the United States Treasury and Federal Reserve had set out plans to ensure SVB customers would be able to access their deposits, while the Fed introduced a new lending tool for banks in an effort to prevent a repeat of SVB's quick demise.

The turmoil also spread to Europe, where

lawmakers for the crisis talks at the Elysee from 1:15 pm (1115 GMT), the presidency said. Borne was to present the plan for consultations to the president at Monday's meeting, and then take it to Macron's allies and cabinet members, presidential sources said.

If unions accept her offer for talks, Borne is expected to put new measures on the table designed to ease the impact of the pensions law targeting physically demanding jobs, conditions for older workers and retraining. But early reactions were not promising for the prime minister.

Laurent Berger, the head of the moderate CFDT union, who has taken an unexpectedly hard line against the pension reform, said he would accept the offer of talks but only if the reform was first "put to one side". Berger called on the government to come up with a "very big move on pensions".

Left-wing firebrand Jean-Luc Melenchon said on Sunday that there was "a very simple way" to return to peaceful relations, and that was "to withdraw the law".

The protest movement against the pension reform has turned into the biggest domestic crisis of Macron's second mandate, with police and protesters clashing regularly in Paris and other cities since the reform was forced through.

'Highly disrupted'

Last Thursday, the previous major protest day, police reported 457 arrests across France and injuries to 441 police officers. Government spokesman Olivier Veran called Melenchon and his party "profiteers of anger", while Green party lawmaker Sandrine Rousseau accused Macron and Interior Minister Gerald Darmanin of stoking the unrest.

According to Paris mass transit operator RATP, metros and suburban trains will be "highly disrupted" on Tuesday. Rubbish collectors in the capital are continuing their strike, with close to

troubled Swiss lender Credit Suisse was taken over by UBS. Most recently, shares in long-troubled Deutsche Bank fell heavily on Friday on the lender's surging cost of default cover, reigniting fears about a widening banking sector crisis. Despite global contagion fears, central banks have pushed on with monetary tightening as they focus on fighting inflation—even though the troubles in the banking sector have been linked to their rate hikes.

SVB took a \$1.8 billion loss in the sale of a bond-heavy portfolio whose value dropped dramatically due to the rate hikes. — AFP



PARIS: French Junior Minister for Transport Clement Beaune arrives for a crisis meeting on the eve of another major day of strikes and protests against the government's controversial pension reform, at the Elysee Palace in Paris on March 27, 2023. — AFP

8,000 tons of garbage piled up in the streets as of Sunday. France's civil aviation authority has told airlines at Orly airport in Paris, as well as the Marseille, Bordeaux and Toulouse airports, to cancel 20 percent of flights for Tuesday and Wednesday. French police have meanwhile come under severe criticism for heavy-handed tactics during recent demonstrations.

The Council of Europe said on Friday that peaceful protesters and journalists had to be protected from police violence and arbitrary arrest. On Sunday the IGP, the internal affairs unit of the French police, said it had launched 17 investigations into incidents since the protests began. — AFP

Saudi achieves self-sufficiency in dairy products

RIYADH: Saudi Arabia has been able to achieve self-sufficiency in dairy products and its derivatives in less than half a century. The kingdom is among the top dairy exporting countries not only in the Middle East but also in the world, which came as result of the balanced development plans and policies, especially in the agricultural and livestock sectors.

According to the current statistics revealed by the National Committee of Dairy Producers in the Federation of Saudi Chambers (FSC), the volume of dairy consumption has recorded an increase during the holy month of Ramadan by 15 percent.

The milk production in Saudi Arabia reached more than 7 million liters per day, or more than 18 million bottles daily. The number of trucks that transport and distribute the dairy products daily reached more than 10,000, while the number of retail stores that receive dairy products daily is 38,000. Regarding workers, the statistics showed that the number of Saudi workers in the dairy companies reached more than 10,500. The dairy sector contributed more than SR7 billion to the national economy.

Dairy companies in Saudi Arabia are working according to the integrated production chain model, starting from raw materials until the final product. This model is only implemented in a few countries in the world. The operation process of these companies includes bringing the best breeds of milk-producing cows, which guarantee high production and quality. This is in addition to securing the best and finest types of green fodder and grains from several reliable international sources.

Dairy companies in the Kingdom apply strict control procedures in several aspects, most notably in preserving, storing, transporting and distributing fresh milk. The companies link all distribution sites and centers, refrigerated distribution cars and display refrigerators in sales outlets to an informational e-system. The dairy sector comes on top of the national food security list in terms of nutritional value as well as added value to the GDP. — Agencies

German business morale improves again in March

BERLIN: German business confidence climbed for the sixth straight month in March, a key survey showed Monday, but analysts warned that recent banking turmoil could still rattle Europe's biggest economy. The Ifo institute's monthly confidence barometer, based on a survey of about 9,000 companies, jumped to 93.3 points, up from 91.1 points in February. The improvement was better than expected, with analysts surveyed by Factset predicting a reading of 91.2 points. "Despite turbulence at some international banks, the German economy is stabilizing," said Ifo president Clemens Fuest.

Lower energy prices and the reopening of China's economy have boosted confidence in recent months, as Germany proved more resilient than initially feared to the fallout from the Ukraine war. But the economy is not out of the woods yet, said ING bank economist Carsten Brzeski. "We fear that the latest financial turmoil will reach the real economy in the coming months," he said, in a nod to recent stress in the global banking system.

The impact was already visible in Germany's closely-watched ZEW investor confidence survey last week, which fell for the first time in six months following the collapse of several US regional lenders and the forced UBS takeover of Credit Suisse. "The Ifo index can react with a delay of one to two months to unexpected events and financial market turmoil can clearly affect the real economy over time," Brzeski warned. — AFP

Business

Economists expect US recession, above-target inflation this year

Chances of Fed achieving a so-called 'soft landing' high

WASHINGTON: The United States will likely enter a recession this year and face high inflation well into 2024, a majority of economists predicted in their response to a semiannual survey. More than two-thirds of respondents to the National Association for Business Economics (NABE) Policy Survey also see inflation remaining above four percent at the end of this year. The survey summarized the responses of 217 NABE members, and was conducted between March 2 and March 10, the organization said in a statement. The US Federal Reserve has raised rates 4.75 percentage points in a bid to tackle rising inflation, which reached its highest level in decades last year.

Price rises slowed slightly to an annual level of 6.0 percent in February, which is well above the Fed's long-term target of two percent. Amid the gloomy economic forecast, there was also some good news, with just five percent of respondents believing the US is currently in the midst of a recession, "far fewer" than the 19 percent in its previous economic survey, the NABE president Julia Coronado said in a statement. Economists also slightly raised the chances of the Fed achieving a so-called "soft landing"—bringing down inflation while avoiding a recession—from 27 per-

cent in August to 30 percent in March this year.

The US Federal Reserve raised its benchmark lending rate last Wednesday, as it sought to strike a balance between curbing high inflation and averting further upheaval in the commercial banking sector. The quarter-point increase, which was in line with expectations, lifts the target range to 4.75-5.00 percent at the end of a two-day policy meeting.

Wednesday's decision underscores the Fed's determination to tackle inflation, which remains stubbornly above policymakers' long-term annual target of two percent. Unemployment, its other main responsibility, remains close to historic lows, adding to pressure on the central bank. The Fed also updated its economic projections on Wednesday, slightly lowering its 2023 GDP growth projections to 0.4 percent from 0.5 percent in December.

Median projections for the Fed's benchmark rate at the end of this year were unchanged, while inflation expectations rose slightly. The combination of hot economic data at the start of the year and uncertainty in the banking sector sparked by the collapse of Silicon Valley Bank led analysts to predict the Fed would continue with a more modest hike than previously predicted. —AFP



WASHINGTON: Federal Reserve Board Chair Jerome Powell speaks during a news conference at the Federal Reserve in Washington, DC. —AFP

Egypt, Jordan, Bahrain, UAE discuss producing first Arab electric vehicle

CAIRO: Egypt, the United Arab Emirates, Jordan and Bahrain discussed the localization of the technology of producing electric cars with local components from resources available in these countries. Officials from the four countries discussed funding sources, the ambitious project management method, the timeline, and the manufacturing, hoping that the first Arab e-car would be showcased during the UN Climate Change Conference (COP28) in UAE in November, according to reports.

The higher committee meetings of the Integrated Industrial Partnership met in Cairo at the headquarters of the Arab Organization for Industrialization (AOI) between Mar. 19 and 21.

They discussed boosting the partnership between the four countries and exploiting the capabilities and energies available to them. AOI Chairman Mokhtar Abdel Latif stressed the importance of strengthening cooperation with Arab countries and exploiting national manufacturing capabilities to deepen and increase local manufacturing rates and localize technology.

He noted the importance of achieving Arab industrial integration, increasing added value, and limiting imports, thus enhancing the strategic plan for the industrial development of the Arab countries and growing export opportunities and fields. During the talks, Abdel Latif underlined the importance of the speedy completion of executive procedures for the production of the joint Arab e-car to display it at COP28 and the completion of the production stages to cover the needs of Arab countries for these environmentally friendly cars.

He described the committee as the engine of Egyptian industry and it contributes to various fields of industrial renaissance, according to Egypt's vision for sustainable development in 2030. The AOI is interested in linking scientific research with industry and transforming research into innovative products and services that represent scientific solutions to social problems and challenges.

The AOI aims to boost the partnership between Arab countries by putting all its advanced manufacturing capabilities to serve and meet the needs, said Abdel Latif. The committee also held a meeting at the headquarters of the Arab American Vehicles (AAV), which is affiliated with the AOI in Egypt, with Chairman Osama Abdel-Aleem. The talks discussed the capabilities available in the four countries in producing an Arab e-car. The committee members inspected the production lines of the AAV company, lauding the technological capabilities available in the company. The committee then toured several AOI factories and private sector companies working in the automotive industry in Egypt. —Agencies

Gulf Bank continues to give back through distributing iftar meals

KUWAIT: As part of its Ramadan events and initiatives this year, Gulf Bank distributed Iftar meals to those in need around Kuwait, as part of its strategic partnership with Kuwait Food Bank, for the sixth consecutive year. On this occasion, the Manager of Corporate Communications at Gulf Bank, Lujain Al-Qenaei, said: "As part of Gulf Bank's continuous efforts to consolidate the principles of social sustainability, we are keen to participate in community events, and to bring joy and happiness to the hearts of those in need; especially during the holy month of Ramadan."

She added: "For more than sixty years, Gulf Bank has been an integral part of Kuwait's economic and social history, and has never abstained to harness all its capabilities to support the needy in society. And we are well aware of the good impact that these efforts have on the hearts of many families during this time." Al-Qenaei stated that Gulf Bank continues its strong commitment towards initiating sustainability programs, on all levels, especially social sustainability – by launching carefully selected initiatives that benefit the Bank as well as the community. This falls in line with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals and Kuwait Vision 2035.

She added: "As a financial institution, Gulf Bank is committed to supporting active Civil Society



Lujain Al-Qenaei



Organizations (CSOs), such as Kuwait Food Bank, due to its distinguished social and humanitarian role. We believe that the private sector has an important responsibility in raising awareness about these crucial issues."

Al-Qenaei expressed her appreciation and thanks to Kuwait Food Bank officials for their efforts in providing meals for distribution to those in need, and that the Bank looks forward to continuing to cooperate with them in various charitable projects that achieve community sustainability. Gulf Bank's vision is to be the leading Kuwaiti Bank of the Future. The Bank is constantly engaging and empowering its employees as part of an inclusive and diversified workplace in

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

KIBS honors 14th session of HBS program's graduates

KUWAIT: Under the patronage of the Governor of the Central Bank of Kuwait (CBK) and the Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Institute of Banking Studies (KIBS), KIBS honored the graduates of the executive education program "Strategic Leadership in a Changing World," by Harvard Business School. The program aimed to develop executive leaders in Kuwaiti banks and is a part of the Kafa'a initiative that was launched by CBK, sponsored by Kuwaiti banks and organized and executed by KIBS.

KIBS congratulated the graduates and encouraged them to continue learning to keep pace with the ever-changing developments in the banking and financial industry and its various challenges, including customer behavior and needs. KIBS added that its cooperation and support from CBK and Kuwait's banks will contin-



KUWAIT: KIBS holds honoring ceremony for the graduates of the executive education program 'Strategic Leadership in a Changing World,' by Harvard Business School.

ue to endorse education and training to grow the talent pipeline to benefit the national economy through various KIBS programs and the Kafa'a initiative.

KIBS remarked on its relationship with Harvard Business School that spans a period of fourteen years. The two entities worked to develop diverse and distinguished programs and contributed to the development and qualification of many executives and middle management in the State of Kuwait and the Gulf region. KIBS also noted

the constant support it receives from CBK and Kuwaiti banks in developing these programs and partnerships.

A number of participants in the program spoke about the valuable experience and the knowledge they obtained before expressing their gratitude for the support of CBK, KIBS and their employers for investing in them. Near the end of the closing ceremony, certificates were distributed to the participants and they were wished success, progress and prosperity.

Jack Ma makes rare public appearance in China

BEIJING: Jack Ma, the founder of tech giant Alibaba, made a rare public appearance in China on Monday after his fall from grace during a government crackdown over two years ago. Ma has kept a low profile since late 2020, when a speech he made attacking Chinese regulators was followed by Beijing pulling Alibaba affiliate Ant Group's planned IPO. A record fine of \$2.75 billion was then imposed on the company for alleged unfair practices. Ma has been spotted around the world over the past two years, including on the Spanish island of Mallorca, and was reportedly living in Japan for much of 2022.

But on Monday he visited a school founded by Alibaba partners in the eastern city of

Hangzhou, according to a post on the school's official social media account. Ma, a former English teacher, met staff and toured classrooms before talking about the challenges artificial intelligence (AI) might pose to education. "ChatGPT and similar technologies are just the beginning of the AI era. We should use artificial intelligence to solve problems instead of being controlled by it," the post quoted Ma as saying.

Ma was one of the most high-profile targets of a crackdown by officials on alleged anti-competitive practices by some of China's biggest names in tech, driven by fears that major internet firms controlled too much data and had expanded too quickly. Ant Group said in January Ma had ceded control of the fintech company, adjusting its ownership structure so that "no shareholder, alone or jointly with other parties, will have control over Ant Group". In a sign that the official grip may now be loosening, authorities said in December Ant had won approval to raise 10.5 billion yuan (\$1.5 billion) for its consumer finance arm. —AFP



BEIJING: Jack Ma, the founder of tech giant Alibaba, made a rare public appearance in China on Monday after his fall from grace during a government crackdown over two years ago.

Nine general health tips for Ramadan



Hydrate
before
eating

Before you break your fast, be sure to drink plenty of fluids to prevent dehydration. Water is the best source of hydration. Juice and milk work as well, but be wary of beverages that contain high quantities of sugar and calories.

Dates help break your fast

According to tradition, dates are eaten at the start of the iftar meal. Dates are a natural source of sugar, which helps to balance low blood sugar and fuel the body with much needed energy. Low blood sugar may cause headaches. Consuming two dates prior to your meal can help combat headaches and raise your blood sugar to an optimal level.



Enjoy a bowl
of soup



Soups are always an excellent choice to break your fast because they keep you hydrated and are packed with vitamins and minerals. Try to choose nutrient-rich soups such as vegetable, tomato or lentil and avoid cream-based soups. Cold soups such as Gazpachos make a great alternative to hot soups during warmer weather.



Eat your
greens

Vegetables are packed full of vitamins, minerals and fiber. Colorful salads are always healthier because they contain many different kinds of nutrients. Two servings of vegetables during each meal is a good rule of thumb. Try to incorporate a half a cup of raw or cooked vegetables, or one cup of leafy raw vegetables.

Choose
healthy
carbs



The iftar meal should contain healthy, complex carbohydrates. Some good choices may include brown rice, whole grain pasta, whole grain breads, potatoes and burghul. In addition to being a great source of energy, complex carbs are an excellent source of fiber and minerals.

Eat lean
protein



During iftar, consuming healthy lean proteins are very important. Healthy, complete proteins such as beef, milk, yogurt, eggs, cheese, fish, and poultry contain a variety of amino acids and are critical to maintaining and producing muscle mass. You can avoid consuming saturated fats by choosing lean proteins like fish, skinless chicken, turkey, or low-fat dairy products. For vegetarian options, try legumes, beans and nuts.



Don't rush your meal

There's no need to rush through a meal. Breaking your fast by eating too much at once, too quickly, can cause indigestion and other gastric problems. Slowly eating smaller portions is the best way to prevent weight gain and is better for your overall health. In general, you don't want to go over the amount you would normally consume for a typical lunch or dinner.

Avoid foods high in fat, sodium and sugar

Heaty meals that contain lots of saturated fat, sodium and sugar should be avoided whenever possible. Instead of preparing fried meals, try baking, steaming, grilling, stewing and roasting. Rather than using salt and sugar to flavor meals, use herbs and spices. For dessert, reach for a healthy piece of fruit that contains natural sugars rather than candies, cakes or other baked goods that contain refined sugar or artificial sweeteners.



Engage in a mild
exercise routine



During the first few days of fasting, you may be feeling fatigued. Don't push yourself to exercise too hard. Instead try a milder, low impact exercise routine. Try walking briskly just after the sun sets and right before dawn. Because Ramadan takes place in warmer months, you may want to avoid outdoor activity. --www.uclahealth.org

New Zealand wool handling ace is a G.O.A.T. among sheep

In New Zealand's close-knit shearing community, Joel Henare is regarded as a Lionel Messi, Tiger Woods or Jonah Lomu—a G.O.A.T. in the sheep sheds. Now 31, he first stepped into the bright lights of competitive shearing at the lambkin age of 12. Henare has since notched 132 competition victories in wool handling—the high-speed art of separating off-cuts from a sheared fleece.

In his discipline, he is considered to be the best. He begins his work with an artistic flick, spreading the matted fleece over a table, before expertly trimming, snipping and slicing unwanted parts in rapid succession. Within 60 seconds, he is on to the next one.

Henare dominated the field at this month's Golden Shears, a prestigious event that draws shearers and wool handlers from all over the world to Masterton, a provincial farming town with a population of 27,000. After notching his ninth open wool handling title in a row, drenched in sweat and panting, Henare put his success down to hard work, discipline and quick thinking. "You need to be fit in your body physically, but you also need to have the mental strength," he told AFP.

"Consistency is key. You

need to have your wits about you at all times." New Zealand, home to five million people and 25 million sheep, is one of the world's main wool exporters, last year sending US\$284 million worth overseas. Rising farming costs and falling wool prices have seen national sheep figures dwindle from a high of 72 million in the 1980s.

Yet their specialized skills mean shearers and wool handlers remain in demand despite falling sheep numbers,

Mark Barrowcliffe, president of New Zealand's Shearing Contractors Association, told AFP. "Shearing is facing many different challenges, including a labor shortage, so there will always be work for a well-trained wool handler or shearer," he added. Competitive shearing and wool handling is serious business in New Zealand, which even has a designated federation—Shearing Sports NZ—to oversee competitions.

Passing the crown

Professional shearers need dexterity and incredible stamina to clip hundreds of sheep—each weighing around 60 kilograms (132 pounds) -- during a typical eight-hour working day. Wool handling also demands a well-organized approach, Henare said, "to do it properly every time, not just up on stage, but anywhere you go in the world". Golden Shears organizers paint Henare as "the Jonah Lomu of shearing sports"—in-

voking the storied legacy of the New Zealand rugby great.

But this Greatest of All Time quit full-time shearing work four years ago and now competes just as a hobby. Techniques, tricks and tips on how to handle sheep and their wool are passed down through the generations in New Zealand's sheep sheds, and Henare hails from a dynasty. His grandmother was a champion wool handler on the plains of Otago. Two of

his great uncles were shearers who competed in Golden Shears finals in the 1960s.

Already young pretenders to Henare's status as a Golden Shears champion are emerging. Among them are teen shearing sensation Reuben Alabaster, who broke the solo world record last December by shearing 746 sheep in eight hours.

Alabaster said he was often worn out at the end of a competition, "but you just push through if it's a dream you're chasing". "It's amazing what your body can do," he added.

Like Henare, the 19-year-old grew up around sheep sheds, learning his trade since childhood from family members such as cousin Sheree Alabaster—the 2008 wool handling world champion. Shearing also comes down to training techniques. "It's all about positioning, some sheep sit better than others," said the teenager. "It's a lot nicer for the sheep if you're holding them right too. "Some just have an attitude and don't want to be shorn at all. "Even the best shearers in the world still get kicked."—AFP



In this file photo Joel Henare from Gisborne casts a fleece as he competes in the wool handlers section during the Golden Shears International sheep shearing competition at The Wool Shed in Masterton. — AFP photos



In this file photo a man shears a sheep during the Golden Shears International sheep shearing competition at The Wool Shed in Masterton.

Lifestyle



US actor Keanu Reeves arrives for the Los Angeles Premiere of "John Wick: Chapter 4" at the TCL Chinese Theatre in Hollywood, California, on March 20, 2023. —AFP photos



US actor Frank Grillo (R) and son US filmmaker Remy Grillo (L) arrive for the Los Angeles Premiere of "John Wick: Chapter 4."



(From left) Isaiah Crews and Terry Crews attend "John Wick: Chapter 4".

Latest 'John Wick' tops North America box office in a big, bloody opening



Canadian actor Shamier Anderson (L) and US actor Keanu Reeves (R) arrive for the Los Angeles Premiere of "John Wick: Chapter 4" at the TCL Chinese Theatre in Hollywood, California, on March 20, 2023.

Lionsgate's neo-noir action thriller "John Wick: Chapter 4" opened this weekend with North American ticket sales estimated at an impressive \$73.5 million, industry watcher Exhibitor Relations reported Sunday. Analyst David A. Gross called it "a superb opening," noting that each Wick sequel has managed to outdo its predecessors. Reviews have been mostly positive: "Would that all action films were so well and cleanly choreographed," the Washington Post gushed; but some reviewers saw the body count—more than 100 per bloody Wick movie—as a bit much.

"Chapter 4" owes its choreography largely to director Chad Stahelski, himself a former stunt man. Starring along with Reeves, in a tale that has the titular hitman fighting a powerful international crime group—are Donnie Yen, Bill Skarsgard and Laurence Fishburne. Last weekend's box office leader, "Shazam! Fury of the Gods" took in just \$9.7 million, slipping to second place, in what Variety called "one of the worst turnouts for a modern superhero movie." The DC/Warner Bros. film stars Zachary Levi, Asher Angel and Adam Brody.



US actor Laurence Fishburne arrives for the Los Angeles Premiere of "John Wick: Chapter 4."

In third spot was "Scream VI" from Paramount and Spyglass Media, at \$8.4 million for the Friday-through-Sunday period. Melissa Barrera, Jenna Ortega and Skeet Ulrich star in the horror flick. In fourth was yet another sequel, United Artists' boxing drama "Creed III," at \$8.37 million. Michael B. Jordan directs and plays the title character; his co-star Jonathan Majors was arrested Saturday for allegedly assaulting a woman in a domestic dispute.

And in fifth, down one spot from last weekend, was sci-fi thriller "65" from Sony and Columbia Pictures, at \$3.3 million. Adam Driver stars in a time-travel saga that juxtaposes space ships and dinosaurs. Rounding out the top 10 were:

- "Ant-Man and the Wasp: Quantumania" (\$2.4 million)
- "Cocaine Bear" (\$2.1 million)
- "Jesus Revolution" (\$2 million)
- "Champions" (\$1.5 million)
- "Avatar: The Way of Water" (\$1.4 million)—AFP



British actress Natalia Tena arrives for the Los Angeles Premiere of "John Wick: Chapter 4." —AFP



Actor Jonathan Majors.

Actor Jonathan Majors arrested for alleged assault

Rising Hollywood star Jonathan Majors was detained in New York over allegations of assault, police said Sunday. Police responded to an emergency call in Manhattan late Saturday night, determining in a preliminary investigation that there was a domestic dispute between a man, 33,

and a 30-year-old woman. "The victim informed police she was assaulted," police said in a statement to AFP.

The woman, whose relationship with the actor has not been clarified, was taken to a hospital with minor head and neck injuries in "stable condition." Majors's representative Carrie

Gordon, said in a statement published by the Los Angeles Times that the actor "has done nothing wrong."

"We look forward to clearing his name and clearing this up." Judicial authorities have not responded to AFP request for confirmation on whether the actor is still in custo-

dy. Majors has appeared recently in several major films, including "Creed III," Marvel's "Ant-Man and the Wasp: Quantumania" and "Magazine Dreams," a film presented at the Sundance Film Festival. —AFP

Thousands sing for peace in war-torn Ukraine

Choirs from across the world joined their voices to sing for peace in Ukraine Sunday, with nearly 300 singers gathering in Madrid where the initiative began a year ago. Under cloudless blue skies, singers from 46 choirs in and around the Spanish capital gathered outside the Reina Sofia art museum and began singing at midday (1000 GMT) in an event involving thousands of others across Europe and Latin America.

This year, choirs joined from 81 locations in nine countries, with 1,000 singers from Ukraine joining their voices with others from Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Denmark, Germany, Portugal and Venezuela. Standing in the museum square, they sang "Dona Nobis Pacem", the Hebrew slaves' chorus from Verdi's Nabucco and finally "Sing an Anthem For Our Peace", which was written specially by US composer Jim Papoulis.

The simultaneous event, which was broadcast live on YouTube, was organized by Choirs for Peace, an initiative started by Madrid choir a month after Russia's invasion of Ukraine whose first event drew over 25,000 singers. "We are here to support Ukraine and say we need peace now, that we have to stop this war," said Elvira Polyenova, a 48-year-old Ukrainian soprano who used to perform at Odessa opera house, and who sang the opening solo in "There is Peace."

"Music unites people.. so the choir

is a perfect instrument for spreading messages of peace and unity," said Mariano Garcia, choir director at Santiago Apostol church which started Choirs for Peace last year. "Although its power of influence is limited, we believe all choral music has the capacity to make us all a little more aware .. and might even reach those with the capacity to decide," he told AFP.

After seeing last year's event, Elena Redondo, 54, decided to join a choir so she could be part of this year's initiative. "We all forget there's not only this war in Ukraine but others all over the world, and we seem to get used to it. So events like this are an important wake-up call," she said. "Music changes many things, not only on a global level, but also on an individual level, it really changes the way you see things. I think it's important to join together with other voices." —AFP



Several choirs sing together in support of peace in Ukraine, in the centre of Madrid.



Several choirs sing together in support of peace in Ukraine, in the centre of Madrid. — AFP photos

Lifestyle

'Dungeons and Dragons' aims to recapture 80s film magic

More jokes and less reliance on computer effects—the makers of "Dungeons and Dragons: Honor Among Thieves" wanted their blockbuster to be a throwback to the classic family films of the 1980s. In transferring the beloved role-playing game to the big screen, directors John Francis Daley and Jonathan Goldstein said they wanted the mix of earnest fun and absurd comedy of their childhood favorites like "Raiders of the Lost Ark", "The Goonies" and "The Princess Bride".

They were also bored of overly serious fantasy fare. "We've seen stoic, humorless portrayals of fantasy characters in almost every other film and television show, and this was our reaction against that," Daley told reporters in Paris. The film stars Chris Pine as a reformed thief, with Hugh Grant as a slimy villain and "Bridgerton" heart-throb Rege-Jean Page in a scene-stealing turn as warrior Xenk, who is completely impervious to irony or sarcasm.

Pine has experience with cherished fantasy properties, having played Captain Kirk in the recent "Star Trek" reboots, but said he was unafraid of upsetting the "D&D" fanbase. "One should be wary of taking anything on, especially with the internet now being so angry and loud and acerbic," he told AFP. "But we made a really fun film and we've heard we've put enough in there for diehards, and even people who have never played are surprised how much they like it."

'Gelatinous Cube'

It helps that Dungeons and Dragons is a role-playing game in which players—to a certain extent—make up the story as they go along. "We weren't beholden to anything other than satisfying certain desires of audiences to see a Gelatinous Cube or an Owlbear," said Pine, referring to two of the game's more bizarre creatures. And the fact that it is a critical hit suggests they have pulled it off. IndieWire declared that its "heartfelt story, enchanting characters, dazzling visual effects, and fun-filled nature will allow the film to be a treasured classic".

The directors, who made their names as writers on comedy "Horrible Bosses" and "Spiderman: Homecoming", said the script was a priority. And that was "oddly not very common" in the world of blockbusters, said Daley. "Often you hear from studios: 'It's greenlit, let's get to work, we'll fix the script along the way.' And that's a really short-sighted way of working." Puppets and real-life effects were used where possible to recreate the feel of classic films. "Audiences have gotten a little tired of over-reliance on CGI (computer-generated images)," said Goldstein.



Chris Pine is such a genius because he isn't annoying or nauseating or too-good-to-be-true." Co-star Michelle Rodriguez, known for action franchises such as "Fast and Furious", was grateful for some softer scenes between the action set

pieces. "My favorite part was being able to grow some armpit hair and fight," she said. "But as I get older, it comes more naturally to be softer. The soft power of a woman is not exploited enough, especially in action movie world."—AFP

'Glaze' software aims to protect art from copycat AI

Researchers at the University of Chicago have released free "Glaze" software that they say can thwart efforts by generative artificial intelligence (AI) to copy an artist's style. The program makes tiny changes to digital images that, while invisible to human eyes, act as a "style cloak" when they are posted online, the team behind the project explained on their website.

If generative AI finds a Glaze-guarded image online, it is prevented from correctly analyzing and copying the style, the team said. Glaze was created at the behest of artists outraged that programs like Midjourney and Stable Diffusion, schooled on troves of images available online, could mimic their styles on command.

"AI has been evolving too fast, and there must be some guardrails or regulations around it," said Shawn Shan, the doctoral student in charge of the project. "The goal of this is to push back from a technical standpoint." The team behind Glaze worked with artists including the illustrator Karla Ortiz, who is among the plaintiffs in a US court case against several firms with image-producing generative AI services.

"If Karla uses our tool to cloak her artwork, by adding tiny changes before posting them on her online portfolio, then Stable Diffusion will not learn Karla's artistic style," the lab team said. "Instead, the model will interpret her art as a different style—for example, that of Vincent van Gogh." The creators of Glaze concede it is not a panacea, given how quickly AI evolves. The hope, the team said, is that Glaze and similar projects will protect artists at least until defensive laws or regulations can be implemented. Glaze has been available for free download since March 15.—AFP



Artist Karla Ortiz sees AI 'identity theft', not promise



Illustrator and content artist Karla Ortiz. —AFP photos



Ortiz says that being influenced by other artists' work is only one facet of human creativity, but critical to generative AI.



Karla Ortiz's website displays a design and illustration she created for the movie 'Doctor Strange'.



Illustrations done by Ortiz for 'Magic: The Gathering' playing cards.

For artist Karla Ortiz, the explosion in artificial intelligence that can stand in for flesh-and-blood artists is nothing more than identity theft. A native of Puerto Rico, Ortiz is a California-based designer, a concept artist and painter who has worked for videogaming giant Ubisoft, Marvel Studios, the Wizards of the Coast fantasy game publisher and has exhibited her work in galleries. But now her profession could be completely disrupted by generative AI, the technology behind apps such as Dall-E and ChatGPT, which in seconds can crank out original content—illustrations, poems, computer code—with only a simple prompt.

About a year ago, Ortiz discovered Disco Diffusion, an open source AI-based image generating tool, but it is not easy to use for those less tech savvy. At first, she thought it was an interesting experiment, but quickly she realized that the program was using the work of many of her friends without them knowing it. They asked to have their work removed, but to no avail, and they backed down. She told herself art theft is nothing new in their line of work.

"It's weird that this is happening, but whatever," she told herself at the time. But months later, with the introduction of even more powerful programs such as Midjourney and Stable Diffusion, which can generate images "in the style of" a chosen artist, she was brought face to face with the magnitude of the



Karla Ortiz shows her website, where some of her designs and illustrations are displayed.

phenomenon. Ortiz said she was shocked when she looked at how the programs were trained. "All the training data, all the training material, it's our work." In her studio, standing between her easel and her computer, Ortiz puts the final touches of oil paint on her latest work, "Musa Victoriosa," a woman surrounded by eagles, brandishing a laurel wreath.

This muse, which will be used to illustrate a copyright protection app, embodies artists defiant against technology. To those who argue that human artists also draw inspiration from others' work, Ortiz says they are missing the point. "Just because I

look at a painting that I love, it doesn't mean that I archive that influence and that it automatically becomes a part of how I paint," she said. "Influences can only get you so far in art," she added.

"The rest is your training, your life, your experiences, your thoughts of the day; that extra bit of humanity that filters inspirations and experiences together and creates your own voice and work," she said. She worries about young artists who need the time and experience to find their style but will be squeezed out by AI.

'Canary in the coalmine'

"How does a person break in now? And if you break in and you do develop a style, that's wonderful, but what stops anybody from training a model on your work?" Along with other artists, Ortiz filed a lawsuit in a California court against three generative AI companies, hoping one day to get the industry regulated.

This fight has strengthened bonds between creators, and not only designers, she said. "I'm seeing more writers and also voice actors being very concerned because of the technology that can take your voice and mimic it perfectly," Ortiz said. Silicon Valley investors "want to expand to pretty much every creative endeavor," she warned. "Our profession was automated first so we kind of became the canary in the coal mine."—AFP

UK's Prince Harry makes surprise showing at UK privacy case

Britain's Prince Harry on Monday made an unexpected appearance at London's high court when he arrived for a hearing in his claim against a newspaper publisher over allegations of unlawful information gathering. The publisher of the Daily Mail, Associated Newspapers, is bidding to end the high court claims brought by high-profile figures, including Harry and singer Elton John, over alleged unlawful activity at its titles. Harry, who now lives in California after quitting royal duties in 2019, was pictured arriving at the court in central London.

Others taking part in the legal action include actresses Liz Hurley, Sadie Frost, John's husband David Furnish and Doreen Lawrence, the mother of murder victim Stephen Lawrence. The group launched the legal action last year after becoming aware of "compelling and highly distressing evidence that they have

been the victims of abhorrent criminal activity and gross breaches of privacy" by Associated Newspapers Limited (ANL), according to a statement by law firm Hamlin released in October 2022.

Hamlin has alleged that the unlawful acts included hiring private investigators to secretly place listening devices inside cars and homes and the recording of private phone conversations. Associated Newspapers has described the allegations as "preposterous smears" and a "pre-planned and orchestrated attempt to drag the Mail titles into the phone-hacking scandal".

Britain's phone hacking scandal, which first blew up in 2006, saw journalists at the Rupert Murdoch-owned News of the World hack into the voicemails of royals, celebrities and murder victims. It triggered the closure of the mass-selling Sunday tabloid, a mammoth police investiga-

tion, a judge-led inquiry and criminal charges that gripped Britain for years.

'Defamatory'

A spokesperson for ANL also said the allegations were "unsubstantiated and highly defamatory claims, based on no credible evidence". A four-day preliminary hearing at the high court is being held from Monday and is set to include ANL's bid for the claims to be dismissed without a trial. Harry, the younger son of Britain's King Charles III, has long had a difficult relationship with the media. His mother Princess Diana died in a car crash in Paris in 1997 after she and her companion, Dodi Fayed, left the Ritz Hotel pursued by paparazzi photographers. In 2019 while on a tour of South Africa with his wife Meghan, he linked media intrusion to Diana's death and spoke of his fears of history repeating itself. "I will not be bullied into playing a game that killed my mum," he told television journalist Tom Bradby, accusing sections of the media of waging a "ruthless campaign" against Meghan.

"Everything that she (Diana) went through, and what happened to her, is incredibly important every single day, and that is not me being paranoid, that is



just me not wanting a repeat of the past," he said. Both Harry and Meghan have been involved in other recent legal action targeting British newspapers.

The couple, whose popularity ratings have plummeted, have dominated headlines in the past few years due to a string of interviews, a Netflix series and Harry's autobiography "Spare" in which they complained bitterly about their treatment as working members of the royal family. Buckingham Palace has not responded to the claims, while the late Queen Elizabeth II famously commented that "recollections may vary".—AFP

Sports

Miami Open: Andreescu and Sabalenka cruise into last 16

Sabalenka's power 'simply too much' for Bouzkova

MIAMI GARDENS: Former US Open winner Bianca Andreescu and world number two Aryna Sabalenka cruised into the last-16 of the Miami Open on Sunday with straight sets victories at Hard Rock Stadium. Sabalenka's power was 'simply too much' for Czech Marie Bouzkova, with the Belarusian breaking serve twice in the opening set on the way to a 6-1, 6-2 victory.

Any chance of a comeback from Bouzkova vanished when she was broken in the opening game of the second set and Sabalenka was in no danger on her serve, not facing break point at any time in the 66 minute encounter. "There were really great things from me," said an upbeat Sabalenka. "I felt like everything I was doing was right and I am super happy with the level," she added.

Sabalenka had been hampered by a groin injury in her previous match, receiving medical attention and wincing at moments in her win over Shelby Rogers, but she said the injury, while not resolved, had improved. "We are working on that. I would say I have the best team and I really trust them and believe that they can fix it. It definitely felt much better," she said. "My team did everything to make sure that I am not focusing on the leg and I am focusing on the match," she added.

Player reborn

Andreescu, who returned last year after a seven month 'mental health break' looks a player reborn and she oozed confidence as she enjoyed a 6-4, 6-4 victory over American Sofia Kenin. The 22-year-old Andreescu, the 2019 US Open winner, has been impressive so far having beaten Emma Raducanu and world number 10 Maria Sakkari in the previous rounds. In a match with few rallies, Andreescu dom-

inated with her serve game, with a 70% first serve percentage and it was not until mid-way through the second set that Kenin caused any real problems.

Kenin, the 2020 Australian Open winner, broke Andreescu to cut the lead to 4-3 but despite the improved forehand from the Floridian, Andreescu kept her cool and won with her first match point. "These victories are definitely very sweet and I've had many tough matches against Sofia, so it feels really good to get through," said Andreescu who converted all three of her break points. "I definitely feel like I am getting better match by match, even physically. Like I'm feeling really good. I'm feeling very fresh," she added.

Andreescu will face Russian Ekaterina Alexandrova in the next round after she beat world number nine Belinda Bencic of Switzerland 7-6 (10/8), 6-3. In a good day for Russian women, qualifier Varvara Gracheva reached her second straight WTA 1000 fourth round with a straightforward 6-1, 6-2 win over Polish lucky loser Magdalena Frech. The 22-year-old Gracheva also made it to the last 16 as a qualifier at Indian Wells.

There will also be a strong Czech presence in the fourth round with Petra Kvitova, Barbara Krejckova and Marketa Vondrousova all winning on Sunday. Two-times Wimbledon winner Kvitova beat Donna Vekic 6-4, 7-6 (7/3), surviving a strong effort from the Croat in the second set. "She was always coming back after a (service) break, and it wasn't really easy already in the first set. ... It was very difficult, she played very well, she served very well," said Kvitova.

Krejckova, the 2021 French Open winner, beat American Madison Keys 7-6 (7/4), 6-3 and will face Sabalenka next while Vondrousova beat out-



FLORIDA: Aryna Sabalenka returns a serve to Marie Bouzkova of Czechia during the Miami Open at Hard Rock Stadium on March 26, 2023 in Miami Gardens, Florida. — AFP

of-form compatriot Karolina Pliskova 6-1, 6-2. Romanian Sorana Cirstea made it to the fourth round in Miami for the first time in a decade after beating Czech Karolina Muchova 7-5, 6-1. The 32-year-

old, now coached by Swedish former Australian Open winner Thomas Johansson, is enjoying a mini-revival after also reaching the same stage in Indian Wells this month. — AFP

Alcaraz powers into Miami Open last 16; Ruud ousted

MIAMI GARDENS: World number one Carlos Alcaraz moved into the last 16 of the Miami Open after beating Serbia's Dusan Lajovic 6-0, 7-6 (7/5) on Sunday as he remains on track for tennis' "Sunshine Double." The 19-year-old Spaniard, who beat Daniil Medvedev to win the title in Indian Wells last week, looked in top condition as he outclassed Lajovic in the first set to keep his Miami title defence on track. But the Serb was able to provide some tension towards the end of the second set, breaking to make it 5-5 with Alcaraz paying the price for a sloppy return.

Alcaraz was 6-2 up in the tie-break, but Lajovic won the next three points before the Spaniard's big back-hand winner settled the 91-minute contest. "Everything was under control or I thought it was but, you know, in the match it's never easy," Alcaraz said. "The nerves came out. I made a few mistakes that I hadn't done during the whole match. So it was tough to win the match. But I'm really happy with the level that I'm playing and it was a good match," he added.

Alcaraz will face Tommy Paul in the last 16 and the American goes into that game on the back of a 12-match winning streak against Spanish players including wins over Alcaraz and Rafael Nadal last year. "I lost the first and only match that I played against Tommy. I know that he's a really talented and really tough player, so I have to play at my best and let's see what's going to happen," said Alcaraz. With Nadal injured and Novak Djokovic barred from entering the US due to his refusal to take a COVID vaccine, Alcaraz is the face of this tournament and the crowd was noticeably bigger on the

Hard Rock Stadium court for his game.

In the front row of the crowd was Miami Heat NBA star Jimmy Butler who embraced Alcaraz after the match. Alcaraz said that dealing with his magnified profile is something he has yet to get fully used to. "I feel great seeing celebrities watching my matches. It's unbelievable. I feel a little bit nervous when I see a person like Jimmy and the celebrities when I was playing in the US Open," he said. "In a certain way, I can't believe that these people enjoy watching my matches. For me, it's crazy," he said.

Straight sets for Fritz

American Taylor Fritz rolled into the fourth round for the third consecutive year after clinching a 6-4, 6-4 win against Canada's Denis Shapovalov. In a hard-hitting encounter, with both players blasting from the baseline, Fritz did not face a break point during the 81-minute encounter. Fritz has already won one tournament in Florida this year, taking the title last month at Delray Beach and in the fourth round, the American will be up against 19-year-old Holger Rune in who beat Argentine Daniel Schwartzman 6-4, 6-2. As always at Miami, there is a large contingent of Argentine tennis fans and they were vocal in their support for Schwartzman.

But Dane Rune converted all four break points he earned in the hot afternoon sun. "My focus was really to step in every time I could and play my game. I think there were a few rallies where I didn't, but 95 per cent of the match was played on my terms, which was what I wanted," he said. Dutchman Botic van de Zandschulp triumphed for the third time in four meetings with Norway's world number four Casper Ruud, emerging with a 3-6, 6-4, 6-4 victory. The tight encounter, with a 75 minute third set, turned decisively towards Van de Zandschulp when he held to go 5-4 up with Ruud going wide at the end of a long rally.

The Dutchman sealed victory, when on match point, Ruud's soft volley found the net. Italian Jan-



FLORIDA: Carlos Alcaraz of Spain plays a backhand against Dusan Lajovic of Serbia in their third round match at Hard Rock Stadium on March 26, 2023. — AFP

nik Sinner continued his strong start to the year, defeating Bulgarian Grigor Dimitrov 6-3, 6-4. It was an error-strewn match in which players hit double the number of unforced errors to winners but Sinner handled Dimitrov's second serve well as he seeks his second Miami final appearance. Fourth-seed Daniil Medvedev moved into the fourth round after his scheduled third round opponent Alex Molcan of Slovakia withdraw from Monday's clash with a right hip injury. — AFP



ARIZONA: Celine Boutier of France imitates a 'selfie' as she poses with the winners trophy after a playoff win against Georgia Hall of England in the final round of the LPGA Drive On. — AFP

France's Boutier wins LPGA Drive On title

LOS ANGELES: Celine Boutier birdied the first playoff hole to edge Georgia Hall for the LPGA Drive On Championship title on Sunday at Superstition Mountain, Arizona. Boutier's third LPGA title is the most of any French golfer on the tour, surpassing Patricia Meunier-Lebouc and Anne-Marie Palli. "It's unbelievable," Boutier said. "I mean, I don't really know how to express it. Anne Marie is here today watching, and so I think it's very special. I definitely feel like I was trying not to think about it just because it's so crazy to think that I'm making history in any way."

Boutier had taken a one-stroke lead into the final round and carded a four-under par 68 to join Hall on 20-under 268. England's Hall had climbed up the leaderboard with a seven-under par 65 that featured an eagle at the par-five 13th and seven birdies. Hall had launched her day with back-to-back birdies at the first and second and birdied the par-five 18th for a one-shot clubhouse lead. But Boutier got up and down for birdie at the 18th in regulation to force the playoff, and birdied it again for the win.

Boutier admitted the playoff against her European Solheim Cup teammate was "not enjoyable." "I just feel like I'm not really confrontational and I really like Georgia," she said. "We were partners, like you said. So I feel like it was definitely a little bit sad that I had to go against her. "She had a great round today and it was great that she had such a low round and (was) able to go in the playoff." In the playoff, Boutier was again right of the green with her second shot while Hall's approach found the back bunker. Boutier chipped to about four feet while Hall fired out of the bunker 20 feet past the hole. After Hall's long birdie attempt missed, Boutier closed out her first playoff victory. — AFP

Andreescu finds her joy for tennis again

MIAMI GARDENS: Canada's Bianca Andreescu heads into Monday's last-16 of the Miami Open brimming with confidence and feeling she has finally refound her love for tennis. Andreescu burst onto the scene with a stunning US Open win as a teenager in 2019 and rose to number five in the world that year. But then her career stalled. Injury in 2020 sidelined her and then the COVID pandemic blocked any chance of regaining momentum and at the end of the following year she decided to take six months off.

"It was honestly me wanting to figure out if I really want to continue playing tennis because I was literally about to just drop my racquets and just say, screw this," she said on Sunday. "I wasn't happy at all. I wasn't happy basically for the full year of 2021 and I thought that if I continue like this, it's just going to get worse. "So I was like, OK, let's take a break. Hopefully that helps. And it really did. My heart did grow fonder for the sport

and now I appreciate it in a much different way than I did before that break," she said.

Tough Draw

In Miami, Andreescu has had a tough draw but has beaten two other former Grand Slam winners in Emma Raducanu and Sofia Kenin as well as seventh seed Maria Sakkari. On Monday she will face Russian Ekaterina Alexandrova for a place in the quarter-finals. Those results leave her unsurprisingly in a positive mood, but she says one of the keys to her overall happiness and balanced approach to the sport has been how she handles setbacks and defeats. "Obviously there were ups and downs, but for the most part, I was very, I guess, level throughout 2022, even with the losses.

"I was like, it's fine. I'll go have dinner with my team. I'll go watch a movie, whatever, and not lock myself in the room for three days like I used to," she said. Andreescu practices meditation and is more than comfortable talking about spirituality and mental well-being and she says her performances flow from her happiness. "I think everything physical comes from the mental side of everything, emotional, spiritual, all that. So I feel like it's mainly in my head. "I think that's been the toughest part because I

know if everything's good in my head, everything will be good physically," she said. Andreescu has talked in the past of feeling a little unwelcome in the locker-room as a youngster and she says she would be happy to help new players settle into the sport. One player she says she would particularly like to talk to is 2021 US Open winner Raducanu, who is experiencing similar difficulties to those the Canadian confronted.

"I would love to talk to her about what happened after US Open with all the success, all the media, stuff like that, how she dealt with it, how I dealt with it, how we can maybe help each other in that way," she said. "Also, I know that we both haven't been having, I guess, results we wanted. I don't want to speak on behalf of her, but I'm sure she wants to do better than she is, just kind of help each other out in that sense. How can we get better, basically?"

While there would no doubt be much the British player could learn from that conversation, one simple truth is that Andreescu has simply matured. "I feel like I had a lot of time to really settle down and just kind of figure out what's best for me," she said, reflecting on her return to form. "I know it wasn't going to come overnight. I mean, four years later, I hope that I can, you know, get another Grand Slam as soon as I can." — AFP



FLORIDA: Bianca Andreescu of Canada serves against Emma Raducanu of Great Britain. — AFP

Sports

England see off Ukraine in Euro 2024 qualifying

Ronaldo extends his international goals record to 122

PARIS: Harry Kane scored again as England made it two wins from two in Euro 2024 qualifying by beating Ukraine 2-0 at Wembley on Sunday, while Cristiano Ronaldo extended his international goals record to 122 with a double as Portugal thrashed Luxembourg. Captain Kane, who broke Wayne Rooney's all-time England goalscoring record in midweek, turned home his 55th international goal from Bukayo Saka's cross in the 37th minute.

In-form Arsenal winger Saka all but ended Ukraine's resistance three minutes later, turning from Jordan Henderson's pass and curling a sublime strike from outside the area into the top corner. The victory takes England three points clear at the top of the early Group C table after winning in Italy for the first time since 1961 on Thursday. "Two wins out of two is all we asked for at the start of the camp," midfielder Jude Bellingham told Channel 4. "We've followed up a really good result in Italy with another one tonight and when you do that, it feels rewarding."

Gareth Southgate's men produced an accomplished performance in their first home game since an agonizing World Cup quarter-final defeat by France last December. Kane missed one great early chance before he gave England the lead. Ukraine failed to muster a shot on

target and Conor Gallagher, Harry Maguire and Jack Grealish all went close to netting a third for the hosts late on. England, still waiting for a first major tournament title since 1966, return to qualifying action against Malta and North Macedonia in June.

The top two teams in each group will automatically book a place in next year's European Championship in Germany. Reigning champions Italy bounced back from their loss to England with a straight-forward 2-0 away win over Malta. Argentine-born forward Mateo Retegui followed up his debut goal against England by opening the scoring early on. Monza midfielder Matteo Pessina made it two before the half-hour mark and Italy comfortably saw out the victory.

Ronaldo scores twice

Ronaldo marked his record-breaking 197th international appearance in midweek with two goals against Liechtenstein and he repeated the trick as Portugal thumped Luxembourg 6-0. The 38-year-old diverted in Nuno Mendes' headed pass to give Roberto Martinez's men a ninth-minute lead. Goals from Joao Felix and Bernardo Silva put the game to bed inside 18 minutes, before Ronaldo slotted home his second from Bruno Fernandes' through ball in the 31st minute.

Ronaldo has now scored 11 goals against Luxembourg in his career. Late strikes from substitutes Otavio and Rafael Leao, who also missed a penalty, rounded off a fine performance from Portugal who are already clear at the top of Group J.

"It's important to play as a team, to open up the game with the ball," said new Portugal coach Roberto Martinez, who has restored Ronaldo to the starting line-up after he was dropped during the 2022 World Cup. "We work so the players understand what we want and it's been a good start, but we have to improve and work much more together." Elsewhere in the group, Iceland bounced back from their opening defeat by Bosnia and Herzegovina by thrashing Liechtenstein 7-0. Slovakia moved into second place behind Portugal with a 2-0 win over the Bosnians.

Denmark shocked

Denmark blew a two-goal lead to crash to a surprise 3-2 defeat in Kazakhstan. The Euro 2020 semi-finalists appeared to be cruising to victory in the Group H match as Atalanta youngster Rasmus Hojlund netted twice in the first half after scoring a hat-trick against Finland on Thursday. Kazakhstan had started their bid to qualify for a first ever major tournament with a home defeat by Slovenia.



LUXEMBOURG: Portugal's forward Cristiano Ronaldo celebrates after scoring his team's first goal during the UEFA Euro 2024 group J qualification football match between Luxembourg and Portugal on March 26, 2023. — AFP

But Bakhtiyor Zaynutdinov's 73rd-minute penalty gave the hosts hope of a famous turnaround in Astana.

Midfielder Askhat Tagybergen crashed a long-range drive past a helpless Kasper Schmeichel with four minutes of normal time remaining to equalize. Substitute Abat Aymbetov provided

the golden moment for Kazakhstan—who have already at least secured a Euro 2024 play-off spot through the Nations League—leaping to power a header into the top corner in the 89th minute. He was later sent off for a second yellow card but by then had already grabbed all three points. — AFP

Burns routs Young 6&5 to win WGC Match Play final

WASHINGTON: Sam Burns captured the biggest title of his career by winning the WGC Match Play Championship on Sunday, routing Cameron Young 6&5 in an all-American final. World number 15 Burns took a \$3.5 million top prize at Austin Country Club in Texas by making eight birdies in the last 10 holes to dispatch 17th-ranked Young, last year's British Open runner-up. "What a week. Man, I'm so tired," Burns said. "It was fun playing Cam. I know he didn't have his best stuff." It was the fifth career PGA title for Burns, who won all seven of his matches to become the first player to capture the WGC Match Play in his debut since Australian Geoff Ogilvy in 2006.

"I just tried to stack one good swing after another," Burns said. "Really have tried to put the hard work in and it's nice to see it paying off on the golf course." Burns dethroned top-ranked defending champion Scottie Scheffler in 21 holes in morning semi-finals while Young, last year's PGA Rookie of the Year, ousted third-ranked Rory McIlroy in 19

holes. "Felt like I found something this morning at the end of my match with Scottie and kind of was able to carry that on this afternoon," Burns said.

"It's huge. I haven't played my best golf the past couple months and was really struggling with my swing the past couple weeks." Young, who chased his first PGA victory, settled for his sixth runner-up showing. "Frustrating to lose today," Young said. "Out here you have to make a bunch of birdies and I just didn't quite do it." In the final, Young won the second hole with a five-foot birdie putt but Burns dropped his approach inches from the hole for a birdie to claim the fifth and pull level.

Burns nearly holed out from 45 yards and birdied to win the par-5 sixth then took the par-3 seventh when Young missed a six-foot par putt and captured his fourth consecutive hole with a 20-foot birdie putt at the eighth, seizing a 3-up advantage. Burns sank a 12-foot birdie putt to win the 10th for a 4-up lead and made a 24-foot birdie putt at the par-3 11th, although Young tied the hole with a 22-foot birdie putt. Young found water to lose the par-5 12th and fall 5-down then plunked his ball into water shy of the 13th green and moments later surrendered the match.

McIlroy, who will overtake Spain's Jon Rahm to become world number two, led after every hole in defeating top-ranked Scheffler 2&1 in the third-place match to claim bragging rights ahead of the



AUSTIN: Sam Burns of the United States kisses the trophy after winning the World Golf Championships-Dell Technologies Match Play on March 26, 2023. — AFP

Masters in two weeks at Augusta National. "It's nice to walk away with a win after the disappointment of this morning not being able to put Cam away," McIlroy said. "Overall it has been a really good week, something to really build on going into Augusta." McIlroy can complete a career Grand Slam with a Masters triumph. — AFP

Sciver-Brunt powers Mumbai to WPL title

MUMBAI: England's Nat Sciver-Brunt on Sunday hailed the "special group of girls" of Mumbai Indians after her unbeaten 60 powered them to a seven-wicket victory over Delhi Capitals in the final of the inaugural Women's Premier League. Mumbai restricted Delhi to 131-9, a total they overhauled with three balls to spare at their Brabourne Stadium home after a key 72-run third-wicket stand between Sciver-Brunt and skipper Harmanpreet Kaur (37).

Kaur was run out in the 17th over but Sciver-Brunt raised her third half-century of the tournament to anchor the team home with Amelia Kerr, who made 14 not out, for company in an unbeaten stand of 39. Sciver-Brunt hit the winning boundary as the Mumbai dugout erupted in celebrations as the women added to the record five IPL crowns of the men's team for the franchise owned by Nita Ambani, wife of India's richest man, Reliance Industries billionaire Mukesh Ambani.

"It (the win) means everything. At the start of the competition I didn't know what to expect," player of the match Sciver-Brunt said. "Coming together with a special group of girls with the Mumbai Indians, really special to be standing here." Kaur said: "It feels like a dream, for everyone here. So many people were asking when will the WPL come and that day is here, and we are so happy and proud."

England pace bowler Issy Wong and West Indies off-spinner Hayley Matthews set up the victory as they claimed three wickets each to flatten the opposition after Delhi elected to bat first. Mumbai lost their openers inside four overs but Kaur and Sciver-Brunt soaked up the pressure as players from the men's team led by Rohit Sharma looked on along with a nearly packed house at the 20,000-capacity stadium. The stand was broken with Kaur's run out after she attempted to steal a single only to fall well short at the non-striker's end but there was no stopping Sciver-Brunt.

Delhi crumbled under pressure despite a late blitz from Shikha Pandey (27 not out) and Radha Yadav (27 not out) lifted the team from a precarious 79-9 to bat out the innings. Wong rattled the opposition



MUMBAI: Mumbai Indians' Nat Sciver-Brunt plays a shot during the 2023 Women's Premier League (WPL) Twenty20 cricket final match between Delhi Capitals and Mumbai Indians on March 26, 2023. — AFP

top-order and then Matthews demolished the Delhi batting as she returned figures of 3-5. Delhi looked down and out before number eight Shikha put on an unbeaten 52-run 10th-wicket stand off just 24 balls with Radha to take the total past 100. — AFP

'Pretty crazy' as South Africa beat Windies in record T20 run chase

CENTURION: South Africa set a new record for chasing in international T20 cricket when they scored 259 for four to beat West Indies by six wickets at Centurion on Sunday in a game described as "pretty crazy". Johnson Charles smashed a 39-ball century for the visitors as they posted an imposing 258 for five, the joint sixth-highest total in T20 internationals.

However, Quinton de Kock responded with 100 from 44 balls, a maiden T20I century, while fellow opener Reeza Hendricks hit 68. "It was pretty, pretty crazy. When we came off halfway, we thought we had enough," said West Indies skipper Rovman Powell. "But credit to Quinton de Kock and Reeza Hendricks. They applied pressure from ball one." South Africa captain Aiden Markram (38 not out) saw his side home with seven balls to spare. The previous highest run chase was Bulgaria's 246 to beat Serbia in 2022 while Australia made 245 to beat New Zealand in 2018.

"It was quite special. Reeza was the silent assassin. When I got out he said, 'We just did something really special and we should be proud of what we've done'," said De Kock whose innings was laced with nine fours and eight sixes. "We have played together for so long. We know what he can do." De Kock shared an opening stand of 152 in 10.5 overs with Hendricks to set up the win. Hendricks' 28-ball assault on the West Indies bowlers featured 11 fours and two sixes. De Kock clubbed three sixes off successive balls from Sheldon Cottrell in a second over which yielded 29 runs.

South Africa scored 102 runs in the six-over power play, a record in matches between Test nations. Asked how he approached his innings, De Kock said: "Just pick the right options and play with a bit of hope. Playing at Centurion, we know we can get a lot of runs here." Thirty-five sixes and 46 fours were hit as the Centurion ground lived up to its reputation as a high-scoring venue with its true pitch, fast outfield and boundaries that proved too short in the thin air of the South African highveld, particularly for the West Indian power-hitters. The powerfully-built Charles made 118 off 46 balls, hitting 11 of his team's 22 sixes as well as 10 fours. — 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

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

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I, SYED AAHIL (old name), S/o SHAIK MAHA-BOOB BASHA, resident of D.No. 2/361, Sastri Nagar, Akkayapalli, Kadapa City, YSR Kadapa Dist, hereby declare that I have changed my surname as SHAIK AAHIL (new name) hereafter for all purpose in future. (C #3190)

I, AZIZ, holder of Passport No: L5937953, do hereby change my name to AZIZ (as given name) MAIMOON (as surname) for all purposes. I will henceforth be known in the name AZIZ MAIMOON and I also undertake in all my documents. (C #3191) - 28-03-2023

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Bulls spoil LeBron's return

Cavs clinch NBA playoff berth; Lakers fall to Bulls



LOS ANGELES: Andre Drummond #3 of the Chicago Bulls pulls down a rebound against Anthony Davis #3 of the Los Angeles Lakers during the first half at Crypto.com Arena on March 26, 2023.— AFP

LOS ANGELES: The Chicago Bulls spoiled superstar LeBron James's return from a 13-game injury absence on Sunday, beating the Los Angeles Lakers 118-108 to tighten their hold on the final Eastern Conference play-in spot. As the push to the post-season headed into its final two weeks, the Cleveland Cavaliers clinched their first playoff berth since 2018 with a 108-91 victory over the Houston Rockets.

Jarret Allen tied his season high with 24 points, pulled down 14 rebounds and blocked three shots, while All-Star guard Donovan Mitchell added 22 points for the Cavs, who are assured of one of the top six places in the Eastern Conference to avoid the play-in tournament for the seventh- through 10th-placed teams.

It's the first time since 1998 that the Cavaliers have reached the playoffs without James, whose 20-year NBA career has included two stints with his hometown team, where he won one of his four titles in 2016. James said Sunday that the chance to challenge for a fifth title overall, and a second with the Lakers, had driven his rapid return from a torn tendon in his right foot. All eyes were on the 38-year-old forward at Crypto.com Arena, where he came off the bench for just the second time in his career—the only other occasion coming in December 2007 when he was with Cleveland.

James checked in to a standing ovation with the Lakers, up 12-9 in the first quarter, going through his traditional hand-chalk toss before taking the floor. He led the Lakers with 19 points in 27 and a half minutes on court. Troy Brown and Malik Beasley added 18 apiece while Anthony Davis scored 15. But the Bulls crashed the party, Zach LaVine scoring 32 points and DeMar DeRozan adding 17 points and 10 assists as Chicago gave themselves a three-game cushion over the Washington Wizards for the 10th place in the East.

"They came out with a sense of urgency tonight," Lakers coach Darvin Ham said. "We came out a little flat,



turned the ball over early. We weren't aggressive enough, physical enough." The Lakers, who had gone 8-5 in James's absence, saw their three-game winning streak end. They slipped from eighth to ninth in the Western Conference, half a game ahead of Oklahoma City and half a game behind New Orleans and Minnesota. James said seeing his teammates claw out wins in his absence had spurred his injury return.

"It definitely changed my mindset on me coming back and trying to be a part of this. Well, I don't even want to say changed my mindset. It just enhanced what I was trying to do as far as my workouts, as far as my treatment and everything." Elsewhere, Jaylen Brown scored 41 points and pulled down 13 rebounds to lead the Boston Celtics to a 137-93 home rout of the San Antonio Spurs. Leading scorer Jayson Tatum's injury absence was no problem for the Celtics, who kept the pressure on Milwaukee in the race for top seed in the East.

Morant leads Grizzlies

Ja Morant returned to the Memphis starting lineup after coming off the bench in his first two games since suspension, scoring 27 points to lead the Grizzlies in a 123-119 victory over the Hawks in Atlanta that pushed Memphis' winning streak to six games. The Dallas Mavericks' downward spiral continued with a 110-104 loss to the Hornets in Charlotte, where Mavs star Luka Dončić received his 16th technical foul of the season, which will trigger an automatic one-game suspension.

After failing to make a basket in the first quarter Dončić finished with 40 points, but it wasn't enough to stave off a second loss in three days to the hapless Hornets—who are second-to-last in the Eastern Conference. In the day's final game, the Minnesota Timberwolves beat the Golden State Warriors 99-96. The game was decided with 11 seconds left when Karl-Anthony Towns took advantage of Kyle Anderson's steal from Draymond Green to drain the winning three-pointer.— AFP

Most unwanted? How sports treat Russia problem

PARIS: International sports bodies are taking wildly varying stances on allowing Russian and Belarusian athletes and teams to compete while the war in Ukraine continues. With the Paris Olympics fewer than 500 days away, the International Olympic Committee (IOC) says it wants to continue its ban "on flag, anthem, colors or any other identifications" from the two countries but is seeking a pathway to let their athletes compete. That strategy will be discussed again this coming week when the IOC executive board meets. Here, AFP Sport looks at how sports are handling the dilemma.

Athletics

While World Athletics on Thursday lifted the ban on the Russian track and field federation for state-sponsored doping, its athletes remain barred from competition while Moscow's invasion of Ukraine continues. The body's president Sebastian Coe said "the unprecedented sanctions" imposed on Russia and Belarus by countries around the world "appear to be the only peaceful way to disrupt and disable Russia's current intentions and restore peace".

Tennis

Russian and Belarusian players are allowed to compete on the main ATP and WTA tours but not under their flags or country names. They are banned from the Davis Cup and BJK Cup tournaments. Players from Russia and Belarus were also banned from Wimbledon last year although Moscow-born Elena Rybakina, competing for Kazakhstan, won the women's singles title.

Football

Russia was thrown out of 2022 World Cup qualifying and are banned from Euro 2024 qualifying which started this week. Instead Russia played a friendly in Iran. Belarus are not banned from Euro qualifying but they must play home games at neutral venues while their clubs are still allowed to enter European tournaments. Denis Rogachev, the head of the Russian Football Union, said "negotiations are underway" to play in the Central Asian championship in June and that "a negotiation process is underway with UEFA and FIFA on a phased return".

Gymnastics

The sport has not yet lifted the ban on Russians and Belarusians, which means none have so far qualified for Paris or this year's World Championships in October. The next opportunity for teams and individuals to book a place for the worlds, where Olympic places will be up for grabs, are the European Championships in Turkey in April. Russians and Belarusians were not included in the European draw on Tuesday, the cutoff point for competing. Switching to Asia could offer an Olympic pathway to Russians.

Boxing

Russian fighters were allowed to compete at the recent women's world boxing championships in India, a move which prompted a boycott by countries including United States, Ukraine, Canada, Sweden and Britain.— AFP

Conte's turbulent Spurs reign ends in familiar fashion

LONDON: Antonio Conte's volatile Tottenham reign came to an almost inevitable end on Sunday as the intense Italian parted ways with the club "by mutual agreement" after 16 months in charge. Conte, 53, arrived to take charge of the under-achieving Premier League outfit in November 2021. After spending much of his time making veiled complaints about chairman Daniel Levy's failure to back him sufficiently in the transfer market, it already seemed certain Conte would depart when his contract expired at the end of this season.

But the Italian appeared to make his position less tenable with an astonishing rant at his players after Tottenham blew a two-goal lead in a damaging 3-3 draw at bottom club Southampton earlier this month. Although they re-



Antonio Conte

mained fourth in the Premier League after that debacle, Spurs are in serious danger of missing out on Champions League qualification—fifth-placed Newcastle are two points behind, with two games in hand. Levy reportedly became concerned about Conte's mood swings this season. There were claims the squad were tired of their manager's acerbic tongue, while fans bemoaned his perceived negative tactics.

The chairman would surely have preferred to keep Conte to avoid the upheaval triggered by a coaching change at such a critical time of the season. But the manager's stinging criticism of his underachieving stars made his relationship with Levy more tricky. To some, it appeared Conte was so fed up with Tottenham's inconsistency that his remarkable rant was an act of self-immolation designed to force his exit.

The club were dumped out of both the FA Cup and Champions League earlier this month as Conte's problems spiraled. He had only recently returned to the touchline after a spell back in Italy recovering from gall-bladder surgery and his patience ran out after Tottenham threw away a 3-1 lead with just 13 minutes remaining at Southampton. "It's the right moment to speak because for me this is unacceptable," Conte said. "For another time

we showed we are not a team. I see selfish players. I see players that don't want to help each other and don't put their heart in."

Alarm bells

Tottenham have been regarded as English football's biggest underachievers for decades and Conte failed to break the cycle of frustration and reprimand. Without a major trophy since the 2008 League Cup and not crowned champions of England since 1961, Spurs remain flawed even in a period in which they have benefited from the presence of the club's record goalscorer, Harry Kane. When pushed on the reasons for the club's continued failure to succeed under a string of different managers, Conte was scathing. "Tottenham's story is this," he said. "Twenty years there is the owner and they never won something. 'Why? Because they are used to it here. They don't play for something important. They don't want to play under pressure.'"

Conte arrived at Spurs with a well-earned reputation as a serial winner. The former Italy coach won three Serie A titles as Juventus boss, led Chelsea to their most recent Premier League crown in 2017 and ended Inter Milan's 11-year wait to become Italian champions in 2021. Initially the signs were encouraging for Conte, and for Tottenham as well. He guided them to an impressive top-four finish last season, coming from behind to pip north London rivals Arsenal to Champions League qualification.— AFP