

2 Kuwait and India hold fifth foreign office consultations



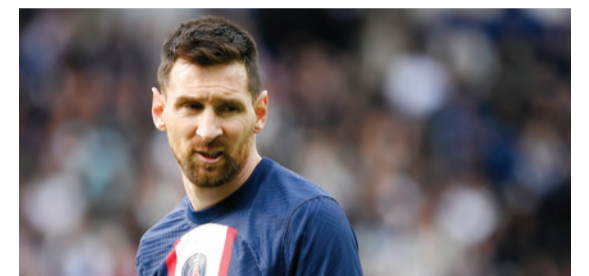
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Assembly elections set for June 6

Registration of candidates likely to begin on Friday



By B Izzak

KUWAIT: The government on Wednesday approved an Amiri decree setting June 6 as the date for fresh parliamentary elections, after HH the Amir dissolved the National Assembly two days ago. At an extraordinary Cabinet meeting, the government also announced election day as a public holiday to allow the largest number of voters to cast their votes.

HH the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, who has been delegated some of HH the Amir's powers, is expected to issue the decree, which becomes effective immediately after its publication in the official gazette Kuwait Al-Youm. The government's decision to set the election date sooner than later appears to be an attempt to ensure a large turnout for the election before citizens embark on the annual summer exodus to escape the scorching heat, when temperatures soar up to 50 degrees Celsius.

The number of eligible voters for the Sept 22 polls was just under 800,000. The interior ministry updated voter lists in February, but no official figures have been released yet. Under Kuwait's election law,

registration of candidates begins a day after the publication of the Amiri decree setting the election date. Local media quoted unnamed official sources as saying that the decree is expected to be published on Thursday, which means that the registration of candidates will start on Friday.

The government has set up a ministerial committee headed by Interior Minister Sheikh Talal Al-Khaled Al-Sabah that includes members from all ministries concerned with the polls. Registration of candidates will continue for 10 days. Withdrawal of candidates starts the same day but continues until seven days before the election date.

HH the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah dissolved the 2020 National Assembly in August last year over prolonged disputes between the government and MPs. Kuwaiti citizens elected on Sept 29 an Assembly dominated by the opposition. But the entire election process was annulled by the constitutional court on March 19 because the Amiri decree inviting people to vote was found to be violating the constitution.

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Penalty points lead to suspension of 860 driving licenses

KUWAIT: The traffic department announced that 860 driving licenses were suspended during the first quarter of this year for exceeding the number of penalty points. Public Relations and Traffic Awareness Officer Lt Col Abdullah BuHassan said the Director of the Traffic Department Maj Gen Yousuf Al-Khaddah asked all traffic departments in the six governorates to be strict in suspending driving licenses that exceed the number of penalty points.

He said 90 traffic violations are included in the points system, explaining the first suspension will be for three months if the violator exceeds 14 points, the second suspension will be for six months if the violator exceeds 12 points, while the third suspension will be for nine months for exceeding 10 points. The fourth suspension will be for a year for exceeding eight points, and finally the license will be revoked permanently for exceeding six points.

BuHassan said when the license is suspended, it will show on the Kuwait Mobile ID app, which means the violator is not allowed to drive. Approval by the department director is required when the license is revoked permanently. The violator must then undergo traffic tests as if they are applying for the first time.

BuHassan said the use of the mobile phone while driving gets a penalty of two points, while the highest number of points for a violation is four points, including for reckless driving, running a red light and speeding over a maximum of 30, 40 or 50 kilometers as per the road's speed limit. He said traffic points that do not reach the total that requires suspension will be dropped from the system one year after the payment of the fine.

BuHassan said the traffic department receives any grievances about violations, be they direct and indirect, and in case there is any mistake or maliciousness in issuing a citation, it will be removed by the director of the violations investigations department and will not be registered in the system.

Kuwait eyes workers from new labor exporting countries

KUWAIT: First Deputy Prime Minister and Interior Minister Sheikh Talal Al-Khaled Al-Sabah gave instructions to take steps that help open recruitment of expatriate workers from new countries other than those that have large communities in Kuwait. "The instructions include coordination with the foreign ministry to sign memoranda of understanding with new labor-exporting countries," the Public Authority of Manpower said on Wednesday.

These steps are meant to help address labor shortages in certain fields, it added, noting that these measures are in line with the state's efforts to address the demographic imbalance problem "by diversifying labor sources to meet the labor market's needs".

PAM will receive an official labor committee from the Philippines late May to discuss matters related to sending specialized labor to Kuwait. PAM will coordinate with concerned authorities to take the necessary procedures regarding the matter, as bringing workers from the Philippines will likely resume after the discussions. It has been reported that the Philippine delegation will request eight hours of work daily and one day of rest weekly for domestic workers, and overtime pay if work exceeds this limit.

Meanwhile, the Central Agency for Public Tenders has approved a request by the health ministry to award

three tenders to provide medical support services to all governorates at a cost of KD 57.1 million. The first contract is for the provision of nurses to Hawally health zone at a value of KD 14 million. The second contract includes the Sabah health zone and the Capital and Jahra governorates at a value of KD 20.3 million. Both contracts were awarded to the lowest bidder.

The third contract includes the governorates of Farwaniya, Mubarak Al-Kabeer and Ahmadi, which was awarded to the third lowest bidder, conforming to the conditions and specifications, at a value of KD 22.8 million. "The ministry is in the process of receiving new batches of Indian, Bangladeshi and Filipino nurses to appoint them in health centers that will be opened in the new areas, as well as to fill any shortages in existing hospitals and centers," sources revealed to Kuwait Times.

Iran seizes second Gulf oil tanker as US tensions rise

DUBAI: Sanctions-hit Iran seized on Wednesday a second oil tanker in less than a week as tensions rise in the commercially vital Gulf waters. A fleet of high-speed Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps Navy (IRGCN) craft surrounded the Greek-owned Niovi as it travelled empty from Dubai to Fujairah, another port in the United Arab Emirates, the US military said.

The Panama-flagged vessel's seizure in the Strait of Hormuz comes six days after a similar incident also in the Gulf, which lies between Iran and the Arabian Peninsula and carries at least a third of the world's seaborne oil. "A dozen IRGCN fast-attack craft swarmed the vessel in the middle of the strait," said a statement from the Bahrain-based US Fifth Fleet.

"The IRGCN subsequently forced the oil tanker to reverse course and head toward Iranian territorial waters off the coast of Bandar Abbas, Iran," it said.

Iran has confirmed the seizure "following an order from the judiciary", the judiciary's Mizan Online news website said. The Gulf has witnessed a spate of incidents since 2018, when then US president Donald Trump pulled out of a nuclear agreement and reimposed crippling sanctions on Iran. On Thursday, helicopter-borne Iranian navy commandos boarded onto the deck of a Marshall Islands-flagged oil tanker, the Advantage Sweet, in the Gulf of Oman. It was then moved to Bandar Abbas, TankerTrackers.com said.

The two seizures come after the United States captured a Greek-managed tanker carrying Iranian oil, maritime security firm Ambrey said. The Niovi's capture also followed a warning from Greek authorities of heightened risk after the US seizure, Ambrey added. "Greek authorities had issued a warning that Greek shipping was at an increased risk from Iran after the detention of a Greek-managed Suezmax tanker carrying Iranian oil," it said. Iran has responded with tit-for-tat measures in the past after seizures



This US Navy handout screenshot of a video shows fast-attack craft from Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps navy swarming Panama-flagged oil tanker Niovi as it transits the Strait of Hormuz on May 3, 2023. — AFP

of Iranian oil shipments. US sanctions target Iranian oil and petrochemical sales in a bid to reduce Iran's energy exports.

"What we are seeing now is the return to a very familiar pattern of US sanctions pressure and Iranian counterpressure that led to frequent attacks against shipping and energy infrastructure during"

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Raisi meets Assad, hails Syria 'victory'

DAMASCUS: Visiting Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi on Wednesday hailed Syria's Bashar Al-Assad for overcoming sanctions and achieving "victory" in the country's 12-year-long civil war, in which Tehran has been a major ally. The Syria conflict has killed more than 500,000 people, displaced millions and battered the country's infrastructure and indus-

try. While the frontlines have mostly quietened in recent years, large parts of the country's north remain outside government control.

"Syria's government and people have gone through great difficulties, and today we can say that you have overcome all these problems and achieved victory despite the threats and sanctions imposed on you," Raisi told Assad, according to a statement from the Syrian presidency and Iran's IRNA news agency.

Tehran has provided economic, political and military support to Syria, helping Damascus claw back most of the territory it lost at the start of

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DAMASCUS: Syrian President Bashar Al-Assad receives his Iranian counterpart Ebrahim Raisi at the presidential palace on May 3, 2023. — AFP



Local

South Africa celebrates national day, ambassador woos investors

Envoy lauds Kuwait-South Africa bilateral relations



KUWAIT: (From left) South African Ambassador to Kuwait Dr Manelisi Genge and the Minister of Education Dr Hamad Al-Adwani cut the cake along with other diplomats and top officials. South African Embassy celebrated its national day at the Salwa Al-Sabah Ballroom, Marina Hotel on May 2, 2023. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat



By Chidi Emmanuel

KUWAIT: The South African Ambassador to Kuwait, Manelisi Genge, hailed Kuwait-South Africa bilateral relations as cordial and friendly. The ambassador was speaking at a special event to mark South African National Day, the day when South Africans from all backgrounds and ethnicities, genders, and creeds went to the polls to participate in South Africa's first democratic and free elections.

The Embassy of South Africa hosted a successful

event to celebrate the big day. The ambassador reflected on the role and contribution of South Africa's foreign policy. He further elaborated on the excellent state of bilateral cooperation that South Africa and Kuwait share across varied fields. The National Day event showcased South African products, cuisine, entertainment and businesses.

The envoy said that South Africa has a business presence in Kuwait. Some of the South African products were showcased during the event. "For all South Africans across the globe, our hearts

beat as one as we renew our common loyalty to our country and our commitment to its future. South Africa and Kuwait admire democratic principles, its vibrant economy, and its rich cultural heritage," the ambassador said as he lauded the efforts of Kuwaiti leaders in promoting peace and development in the region.

In his goodwill message, the ambassador reaffirmed the embassy's commitment to assist foreigners who want to invest in South Africa. "South Africa has lots of investment opportunities in sectors such

as tourism, telecommunications, railways, shipping, iron and steel, and solid minerals," the ambassador said, hinting that the government is working out various attractive incentives to lure investors.

He urged foreign investors to join the other companies and experience an eco-friendly and market-friendly environment. "Take this ample opportunity and make a jolly trip to South Africa and see the lush vegetation, beautiful beaches, and captivating cultures. South Africa provides a ready market for goods and services," Genge said.

News in Brief

Interpol red notice suspect arrested

KUWAIT: Kuwait's Interior Ministry said on Tuesday a male suspect accused of "premeditated murder" on Interpol's red notice has been arrested. Preparations are underway to extradite the individual to his home country in cooperation with Kuwait's Foreign Ministry, read a press statement by the ministry. The arrest of the suspect was carried out in a collaborative and information-sharing effort between Kuwait's interior ministry and Interpol. Also on Wednesday, the General Department of Criminal Investigation represented by the Department of Protection of Public Morals and Combating Human Trafficking, announced that it had arrested three men and four women of different nationalities who were carrying out immoral acts in Mahboula in return for sums of money. This was done by intensifying security measures and monitoring outlaws. They were referred to authorities to take the necessary legal measures against them.

Kidnap suspect denied release

KUWAIT: While the security services and the Public Prosecution continue to investigate the case of the disappearance of citizen Mubarak Al-Rashidi, the renewal judge decided today to continue the detention of the person accused of kidnapping him, provided that he appears before the judge again in two weeks. An informed source said that the accused continues to deny the charge attributed to him. Investigations to uncover more details about the case are still ongoing. Rashidi was reported missing a few weeks ago, and since then the case has been a matter of public opinion as security personnel are still on the look for the missing citizen.

Store without license shut down

KUWAIT: Kuwait Municipality inspectors issued 15 violations to several stores in Khaitan for not adhering to the municipality's terms and controls, the municipality announced Wednesday. The inspection campaign was led by the Municipality's Department of Auditing and Follow-up of Municipal Services in Farwaniya Governorate in Khaitan, in cooperation with the Ministry of Interior. The Department of Public Relations in the Kuwait Municipality confirmed that the inspectors in the governorate will continue their field tours to monitor violators of the laws and regulations in force and take legal measures against them. In related news, Hawally Municipality inspectors closed down a store selling gifts and accessories without a license. They issued a warning to the building owner for using it contrary to the purpose it was licensed for. Head of Hawally Municipality Branch Ibrahim Al-Sabaan said 18 citations were issued for not renewing licenses, using an area not mentioned in the license, and warnings were issued for encroaching on state property for removal.

Kuwait, India hold 5th foreign office consultations

NEW DELHI: Kuwait and India held their 5th Foreign Office Consultations (FOC) on Tuesday in New Delhi. Assistant Foreign Minister for Asia Affairs of Kuwait (AFM) Ambassador Sameeh Essa Johar Hayat headed the Kuwaiti delegation while the Indian delegation was led by Vipul, Joint Secretary (Gulf). Ambassadors from both countries as well as officials from other ministries also participated in the FOC, a press release issued by India's external affairs ministry said.

Ambassador Hayat called on Meenakashi Lekhi, India's minister of state for external affairs and culture. She recalled the historic and friendly relations between both countries and underlined the need to further strengthen and diversify the relationship. Ambassador Hayat handed over a letter from Sheikh Salem Abdullah Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, minister of Foreign Affairs of Kuwait addressed to India's External Affairs Minister Dr S Jaishankar.

During the consultations, both sides undertook a comprehensive review of various aspects of bilateral cooperation and exchanged views on regional and international issues of mutual interest. The significance of high-level visits, particularly the early convening of the Joint Ministerial Commission at EAM/FM level was emphasized. While expressing satisfaction over the traditionally strong bilateral ties, the sides agreed to diversify cooperation in various areas, particularly trade and investment, education, science and high-technology, health, tourism etc.

The Indian side thanked the Kuwaiti side for ensuring the welfare of the large Indian community in Kuwait and looked forward to further facilitation and streamlining of some of the consular issues affecting the community. Both sides agreed on the importance of effective implementation of the bilateral MoU on



NEW DELHI: Kuwaiti and Indian officials undertook a review of various aspects of bilateral cooperation and exchanged views on regional and international issues of mutual interest. — KUNA photos



Ambassador Sameeh Essa Johar Hayat (left) with India's Minister of State for External Affairs and Culture Meenakashi Lekhi in New Delhi on Tuesday.



Ambassador Sameeh Essa Johar Hayat (left) meets India's Joint Secretary for Gulf region Vipul.

Domestic sector workers to ensure safe and legal migration, the release said.

The sides also discussed UN and other multilateral issues of mutual interest, including UN Security Council reforms and agreed to continue the discussions. The Indian side conveyed that it looks

safety of diplomatic facilities and their staff and punish those involved in this attack. It voiced Kuwait's solidarity with and support to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and all security and legal measures it may take to protect the safety of its diplomatic missions.

In a similar statement, Secretary General of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Jassem Al-Budaiwi, condemned the attack Wednesday. Budaiwi affirmed that all GCC countries stand by condemning this terrorist act, praising Saudi Arabia's humanitarian and diplomatic role in Sudan. He also stressed the need to respect international agreements and diplomatic norms that guarantee safety of diplomatic mission's headquarters, calling on all parties in Sudan to take the necessary measures to protect diplomats and diplomatic headquarters.

Deadly violence broke out in Khartoum on April 15 between Sudan's de facto leader Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, who commands the regular army, and his deputy turned rival Mohamed Hamdan Daglo, who commands the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF). The attack on the Saudi office comes as the conflict in Sudan continues, undermining efforts to firm up a truce and trapping millions of civilians.

At least 550 people have been killed and 4,926 wounded, according to the latest health ministry fig-

forward to welcoming Kuwait as a Dialogue Partner in Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) soon under its presidency. The FOC is expected to impart the necessary momentum in bilateral relations. It was agreed to hold the next FOC in Kuwait at a mutually convenient time, the release further added.



KHARTOUM: People walk as smoke billows in the Sudanese capital Khartoum, on May 3, 2023. — AFP

ures Wednesday, which are likely to be incomplete. Tens of thousands of Sudanese have fled to neighboring countries in an exodus that has sparked warnings of a humanitarian "catastrophe" with implications for the entire region. — Agencies

Local

Airfares in summer surge by 30% amid soaring demand

Turkey's popularity unchanged despite earthquake

By Majd Othman

KUWAIT: As most people try to run away from the heat affecting Kuwait during the summer, travel is becoming more common than ever among citizens and residents. High ticket prices burden the travelers according to their destination every year. Whether a country is a touristic destination or not is not the only factor influencing the prices, but also the increasing demand from travelers to a country even if it is not a tourist country. Fees charged for excess baggage per kilo weigh heavy on travelers' pockets.

While some agencies don't declare changes in price during the summer season, others said there was a 30 percent surge in price increases compared to the summer of 2022. Regarding the most booked destinations for citizens this year for the up-coming summer season, Turkey and Europe are still occupying the list of most booked destinations among citizens and residents. Meanwhile, the United States came back to take a place among most demanded destinations between citizens according to Abdullah Al-Mansouri, owner of a travel agency.

Mansouri told Kuwait Times that after the United States reduced its precautionary measures due to the COVID-19

pandemic, citizen's demand over traveling to the country started to increase again. He said that Japan placed high on most demanded destinations during the first quarter of the year as the country made an effort to attract visitors. But because it is not the best destination for vacation in the summer, the demand dropped for the coming season but it's still one of the most demanded destinations.

The price of the tickets witnessed a slight drop for all destinations in general whether for Europe, the Middle East or Turkey, as it went down by 4 to 5 percent, compared to summer of 2022. Regarding the effect of the demand on the price increase for tickets or services provided by airline companies, a ticket agency officer who asked not to be named said fees charged on excess baggage per kilo differs between seasons.

He told Kuwait Times that some airlines could increase the price of one extra kilo from KD 1 to KD 10 due to the high demand in the summer, while some airlines don't allow people to travel with excess baggage at all. Some agencies and airlines don't wait until the summer to raise prices, but they begin to increase their prices earlier as many people book their flights a couple of months early to avoid the price increase.

The travel agency officer said that the number of the passengers on the airplane also affects the price of the tickets. The price of a flight with vacant seats would stay low until the time of the flight, while if the flight is almost full, the price of the tickets would increase from KD 70 to KD 300-400.

The ability of travelling depends on the financial liquidity of the traveler. Some people say they postponed their travel plans due to the price increase of the tickets for the next summer season, especially expats who might prefer to travel to their home countries when the prices come down. Kuwait Times asked people about their favorite destinations and the reason behind their preference, Alia Mohammad said that she wanted to try a new destination this year, as she never visited Switzerland before. She stressed that it is a place where you can find peace and enjoy nature, with amazing views located across the country.

"Although a vacation in Switzerland costs more than other countries, it is a country that you can't get enough of, if you prefer nature," she said. Abdullah Meshaal, described his favorite destination as his second home. "In the last couple of years, Turkey was for me like a second home, while I visited most of its



places and I know every inch of it, and even if I visited another country during summer season, I have to end up traveling to Turkey."

Regarding if the recent earthquake affected his decision, he told us: "It didn't affect my decision to visit Turkey. I have a house there and also I don't think this is a reason not to visit a country, it could

happen anywhere." According to travel agencies, the demand on booking for Turkey in this next summer season rose dramatically. "My friends recently visited Turkey due to the big drop in the prices in the country during the period that followed the earthquake. The prices of the services and places dropped to almost 50 percent during that time," said Meshaal.

New democratic festival begins with election call

By Yousuf Al-Mutairi

KUWAIT: Kuwait's democratic experience since 1963 and in its current form is considered a unique one in the Middle East and a very important example for the entire region.

The role of a national assembly member is not limited to their job description, rather it is to pass and create legislations that shape the political, social and economic life of the country. Kuwaitis, therefore, consider the National Assembly one of the basics of their civil life and a reflection of Kuwaiti people's views. That's because the assembly adopts the opinions of citizens in critical, national and international issues that need a supporting opinion, especially when it comes to humanitarian issues or standing up for the oppressed.

The National Assembly gets its power from the 1962 constitution, which regulates the relationship between the governor and the governed. In its 183 articles, the constitution guarantees that all that concerns people, whether Kuwaitis or expats living in Kuwait, in regards to education, health, freedom of opinion, scientific research, is provided to everyone without exception or discrimination based on origin, language, gender or color. The constitution also imposes responsibilities on everyone without bias.

Because Kuwait's constitution is considered the organizer of the state's relationship with the individuals and the guarantor of their rights, the emphasis on its existence and continued adherence to its articles has been notable in all speeches of the political leadership out of its belief in the people's right to live in a democratic atmosphere under one constitution that treats all equally without discrimination.

According to Kuwait Constitution and the elections law, the National Assembly is made of 50 members of parliament representing the nation from five constituencies in which all Kuwait's areas are represented. Every Kuwaiti who reaches the age of 30 and can read and write and is not convicted in an



honor violation crime can run as a candidate for the assembly in any constituency of his choice, provided that he is registered in the elections register which is opened annually in February and closed in March.

Today, with the issuance of the call for the 2023 parliamentary elections on June 6, the race to Abdallah Al-Salem chamber began as hopefuls declare their candidacy through social media.

This means that Kuwait will live a democratic festival until June 6, during which Kuwaitis will enjoy political gatherings and listen to their candidates before casting their vote.

Amir's representative heads to UK for King Charles III coronation

KUWAIT: Representing His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and his accompanying delegation are to leave for the UK on Thursday to attend King Charles III's coronation ceremony. The coronation of King Charles III will be attended by 2,000 people, compared to 8,000 guests who crammed into Westminster Abbey for Queen Elizabeth II's crowning in 1953.

Tens of world leaders are invited to the coronation, including the French President Emmanuel Macron, Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese, German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier, President of the Philippines Ferdinand Marcos Jr and Pakistan Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif.

Royals heading to the coronation will include King Abdullah II and Queen Rania of Jordan, King Felipe VI and Queen Letizia of Spain, Crown Prince Frederik and Crown Princess Mary of Denmark, Crown Prince Fumihito and Crown Princess Kiko of Japan, Crown Prince Haakon and Crown Princess Mette-Marit of Norway, King Willem-Alexander and Queen Maxima of The Netherlands, Prince Albert II and Princess Charlene of Monaco, King Philippe and Queen Mathilde of Belgium, King Carl XVI Gustaf and Crown Princess Victoria of Sweden and King Maha Vajiralongkorn and Queen Suthida of Thailand. — Agencies

Kuwait Times sponsors 'Planet to Plate' event

KUWAIT: Kuwait Times, the first English daily in the Arabian Gulf, is sponsoring 'Planet to Plate', a planet-friendly event where chefs will prepare dishes with locally sourced organic ingredients and indulge in a guilt-free experience. The event will take place on Saturday, May 6, 2023 at ARGAN Bedaya in Sabah Al-Salem. Join us for a culinary journey into the world of sustainability. Star chefs Aziz Dashti, Adla Al-Sharhan, Heba Al-Enizi and chef Kunal Bapna from Asha's and Mohammed Hendawi from AmitiNoura will be working their magic to make your kitchen more sustainable.

Listen to Eng Sharifa Al-Jaber, Wadha Al-Nahum and Ali Al-Amir on how their initiatives are tackling food waste, while technology pioneers Dr Dalal Al-Gnaws, Eng Waleed Roy and Eng Hamad Al-Kulaib discuss the future of food. Do you want



your shopping to be sustainable? Then support our many vendors who have dedicated their businesses to promoting environmentally friendly, sustainable



and ethical products. Performances will be held by schools that focus on saving our planet. The event is organized by Sustainable Living.

NBK, Municipality ink deal for beach development

KUWAIT: National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) signed a cooperation agreement valuing KD 3 million with the Kuwait Municipal for development and beautification of Shuwaikh Beach spanning an area of 1.7 km. The agreement was signed at NBK's HQ in the presence of Isam Al-Sager, Vice-Chairman and Group CEO and Eng Ahmed Al-Manfouhi, the Director-General of Kuwait Municipality, as well as officials from the bank and the Kuwait Municipal. Under the agreement, NBK made a donation of KD 3 million, which was approved by the Council of Ministers, to finance the Shuwaikh Beach Development and Beautification Project over an area starting from Watiya Beach to KPC.

The project includes 4 integrated main areas providing all the needs of beachgoers such as picnicking, doing sports, swimming and recreation as follows: First area: includes playgrounds and entertainment areas, as well as a large green area; Second area: includes an extended sandy beach area with wooden benches in the middle; Third area: includes a closed garden with green landscape and dense trees providing large shaded areas; Fourth area: includes walking and cycling tracks with trees in the middle.

The development will include entire restructuring so that the design, implementation and materials used are in line with NBK's sustainability principles. It is expected that design and construction phases until the final delivery of the project will take around two



years, given the long area covered by the project. All the designs of the walkway, along the vast waterfront, are made to accommodate green areas that dominate the landscape and making up the largest area, in addition to walking, jogging and cycling tracks. These long tracks are surrounded by trees that provide some shaded areas. The design also incorporates various playgrounds and kids' entertainment areas, in addition to the vast grassy areas that beachgoers can use for picnics. Beachgoers can also enjoy a fully serviced beach, as well as wooden seating areas.

NBK is committed to supporting Kuwait's national initiative to promote environmental, social and economic prosperity, in line with the Country's recent pledge to become carbon neutral by 2060 through its progress towards achieving its environmental goals and contributing to strengthening the efforts of the banking sector to accelerate the transition to a carbon-free economy. All the designs and materials used in the project are eco-friendly, reflecting NBK's commitments to help reduce carbon emissions and achieve carbon neutrality by 2060. To this end, all light poles along the beach are designed to



be equipped with and fully powered by solar energy cells, without any electrical supply.

The bank also ensured that a major amount of the raw materials used in the project are from recycled materials, as well as recycling most of the project's outputs, which reduces any harmful environmental impacts of the project, making it an exemplar for project implementation in Kuwait. It is worth mentioning that the amount of NBK's CSR contributions including investments, initiatives, and charitable donations during 2022 amounted to KD 23 million; growing by over 45% year-on-year, compared to 2021.

NBK is keen to support Kuwait's sustainable economic development and climate action plan, as well as protect the environment, reflecting its strategy to embed ESG standards in all its activities and businesses to maximize added value for all stakeholders. The bank is also committed to supporting Kuwait's national initiative to promote environmental, social and economic prosperity, in line with the Country's recent pledge to become carbon neutral by 2060 by progressing towards its environmental goals and supporting the banking sector's endeavors to accelerate the transition to a carbon-free economy.

KIPCO supports 'EDUCON 2023' hosted by AUK



KUWAIT: KIPCO – Kuwait Projects Company (Holding) – was the Premier Sponsor of the IEEE Global Engineering Education Conference, EDUCON 2023, hosted by the American University of Kuwait. The support comes as part of the company's efforts to promote quality education and learning.

The conference, which took place from May 1-4, is the fourteenth in a series that rotate in Europe and the MENA region. This is the first time that it is held in Kuwait. The event catered to more than 200 researchers, industry representatives, members of academia and students participating from 50 countries. The workshops and technical sessions focused on aspects of engineering education.

Speaking at the opening of the event, KIPCO's Group Senior Vice President - Corporate Communications and Investor Relations Eman Al-Awadhi said:

"Education is an important pillar of KIPCO's portfolio, and the establishment of AUK in 2003 marked our entry into this sector. Since then, we have been contributing to the education of young people in Kuwait through our network of K-12 schools and this university, shaping the future of the country through the quality of learning that we offer. We pride ourselves on upholding a culture of freedom of thought and expression, respect for individual rights and cultural diversity in our institutions."

She added: "Throughout the years, we have strongly supported AUK's efforts to engage with the education community and leave its mark in the field. We are delighted that EduCon is being hosted here this year, where participants will not only have the opportunity to present their work and exchange ideas, but also present the latest research topics in engineering education."

Basic education conference to improve outputs

KUWAIT: The College of Basic Education announced that it will organize the first international conference on scientific education next Tuesday, titled "Sustainable Educational Development in light of Kuwait Vision 2035", with the participation of elite academics from the State of Kuwait and abroad.

The vice president of the conference, Prof Dr Abdullah Al-Ghassab said in a press conference held Tuesday on this occasion that the upcoming conference on May 9 and 10 aims to enhance the quality of education, especially since the College of Basic Education is the largest educational institution in the country in terms of the number of students. Ghassab, who also holds the position of Assistant Dean for Academic Affairs at the college, added that the conference aims to attract qualified people from abroad to achieve high-quality educational outputs that meet the goals of sustainable educational development.

He stated that the conference was held with the long-term goal of establishing an educational system for the College of Basic Education that's at a high level of efficiency and effectiveness, thus contributing to the educational and academic preparation of the graduates of the Public Authority for Applied Education and Training. The conference will be held under the auspices of the Minister of Education and Minister of Higher Education, Dr Hamad Al-Adwani, and will include four scientific sessions and two workshops in which former academics and decision-makers will give lecture to share important information and experiences with Kuwaiti academics. — KUNA



KUWAIT: Dr Abdullah Al-Ghassab (right) is seen with other officials. — KUNA

Sign language teacher becomes life mentor for deaf students

Need for intermediary interpreters on the rise in Kuwait: Teacher



KUWAIT: Bader Doukhi is seen in an old group photo with his students at Amal school.

KUWAIT: A strange scene it might be when a sixty-year-old person, casually dressed, arrives at a famous coffee shop and met by silent adoration. The term might be the best to describe 12 years of intermediary interpretation by one Bader Doukhi and his company of individuals with hearing loss. This curious sight had brought KUNA into the picture to see what was happening exactly and the findings were plentiful.

Doukhi had been teaching the group sign language since they were his students at the Amal school, which he retired from years ago. However, this did not mean that the bond between teacher and students ended, they remained close to this day, meeting on a regular basis for chitchat and brainstorming means to resolve issues facing the deaf in Kuwait. Abdulmohshen Al-Shimmari, a high-school student, owes a lot to his mentor. He said that Doukhi was one of the motivators for him to seek education in the US in the future, revealing that he was eager to become a director in television and film to relate the struggles of the deaf community in Kuwait.

Another student is Jaber Al-Kanderi who became deaf at the age of two after a car hit him. This led to a malfunction in the auditory nerves and led him to become the way he is. "There is an increasing need for intermediary interpreters and they should be included in every government facility," conveyed Kanderi in sign language. Companies providing sign-language services were also appreciated in cooperation with the state, if possible, said Kanderi.

He indicated that the lack of intermediary inter-



Bader Doukhi and Abdulmohshen Al-Shimmari meet in a cafe. — KUNA photos



Bader Doukhi and his students pose during a visit to the National Assembly in this file photo taken in January 2023.

preters might lead to grave consequences on all levels of life especially in case of accidents or medical emergencies when communicating with a deaf person was crucial.

While there is struggle for those with hearing loss, Doukhi interpreted the story of Abdul-Ilah Al-Rushaid who was tingled by artistic tendencies since he was young. Rushaid hoped that his talent would turn heads and bring attention to the vast talents of the deaf community. Rushaid became a member of the Kuwait arts association in 2006 and managed to open an exhibition in Spain in 2007.

Back to Doukhi, the intermediary interpreters indicated that sign language evolved like any other language, noting that the language saw some rapid advances during the COVID-19 pandemic. He reiterated that interpreters in Kuwait must be updated on the newest sign language terms to serve the estimated 5,000 hearing-challenged individuals according to statistics by Public Authority for Disability Affairs (PADA). Doukhi and his students might be a prime example of a band of brothers that are meeting life challenges headfirst, reflecting a strong desire to "keep on keeping on" no matter what occurs. — KUNA

Kuwait Information Prize honors US Internet pioneer

KUWAIT: His Highness Sheikh Salem Al-Ali Al-Sabah Information Prize recognized in its 16th edition, Wednesday the American Internet expert

Dr Vinton Cerf with the highest appreciation award (Medal of Information).

The honoring came in recognition of his achievements that contributed to serving humanity and his distinguished role in the development and spread of global Internet policy and standards, the Chairman of the Board of Trustees of the Award Sheikhha Aida Salem Al-Ali Al-Sabah said in a statement.

Dr. Cerf will be receiving the Medal of Informatics during the annual ceremony that will be held under the patronage of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah at Bayan Palace. Sheikhha Aida Al-Sabah praised Dr. Cerf's great contributions to the development of the Protocol of Data Transfer Control (Internet Protocol), one of the foundations for establishing and operating the Internet and designing its digital structure.

Vinton Cerf, born on June 23 1943, is an American Internet pioneer and is recognized as one of "the fathers of the Internet", sharing this title with co-developer Bob Kahn. He has received honorary degrees and awards that include the National Medal of Technology, the Turing Award, the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the Marconi Prize, and membership in the National Academy of Engi-



Dr Vinton Cerf



Sheikha Aida Salem Al-Ali Al-Sabah

neering. The Informatics Medal is considered one of the important milestones in the history of the award and one of the most prominent points in its journey since 2001, during which it recorded its global presence as one of the largest Arab and international non-profit organizations. It grants an award of appreciation to persons or agencies for their great achievements and important technical activities across the world. — KUNA

KFAS opens applications for 'Kuwait Prize'

KUWAIT: The Kuwait Foundation for the Advancement of Sciences has called on researchers from Kuwait and the rest of Arab countries to apply for the Kuwait Prize for the year 2023, given by the foundation annually in fields of fundamental sciences, applied sciences, economic and social sciences, as well as humanitarian sciences. Applications will be accepted until June 30 of this year.

Acting director of the foundation Dr Saleh Al-Uqaili said: "The Foundation launched this award in 1979 in implementation of the directives of the wise leadership of the country to honor Kuwaiti and Arab scientists who have made outstanding achievements and original contributions in their research career."

He also mentioned that the Kuwait Prize, which is one of the most important Arab and regional awards, aims to contribute to building a solid base for science, technology and innovation, encouraging researchers, promoting their scientific contributions and advancing the development process in the Arab world.

For the 2023 Kuwait Prize Cycle, KFAS invites universities, scientific and research institutions, and eligible individuals, to nominate Kuwaiti and Arab scientists for the Prize in multiple fields. The first is the fundamental sciences, specifically chemistry. The category includes but is not limited to: organic and inorganic chemistry, biochemistry, analytical chemistry and medicinal chemistry, physical chemistry, theoretical chemistry and quantum chemistry.

The second category, applied sciences, focuses on Hydrology, which includes but is not limited to: hydrogeology, remote sensing to water resources, ecohydrology, hydrochemistry, hydrometeorology, hydromorphology, water quality improvement and aquatic resources management.



Dr Saleh Al-Uqaili

The third field, economics and social sciences, focuses on psychology, including: social psychology, educational psychology, developmental psychology, clinical psychology and psychopathology, experimental psychology and cyberpsychology.

The fourth category, which is humanities, arts and literature, focuses on the subject of Compar-

ative and World Literatures, including but not limited to: cultural and literary relations across national borders, history of world literary relations, literature and other disciplines such as the fine arts/visual arts, sociology, philosophy, as well as studies in world literatures. Emerging Interdisciplinary Sciences is the fifth category, artificial intelligence and robotics, including but not limited to: expert systems, internet of things, industrial internet of things, machine learning, data analytics, large data mining, natural languages processing, neural networks, fuzzy logic, automation and cyber security.

The nominee must be from an Arab nationality and have proof of Arabic origin, such as an Arabic birth certificate, a valid Arabic passport, or a relevant document. A copy of one of these documents must be included in the application file. The nominee must also be a recognized specialist and researcher in the announced subfield or in a closely related field and must hold a PhD degree.

The work submitted should be innovative, significant in the announced subfield, and published during the past twenty years. "Submitted work includes research published or accepted for publication in peer-reviewed scientific journals, authored or translated books, or a published chapter in a book, provided that the book has an approved international numbering," the foundation clarified.



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Myanmar junta pardons over 2,000 political prisoners

New autopsies in Kenya cult case confirm murder

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KOUFROUN: Aid kits destined to Sudanese refugees who crossed into Chad are prepared for distribution in Koufroun, near Echbara. — AFP

Clashes in Sudan as UN aid chief visits

Griffiths on an urgent mission to find ways to bring relief to millions of Sudanese

KHARTOUM: Persistent fighting between Sudan's rival generals undermined efforts to firm up a truce Wednesday, as a senior UN official arrived for talks on providing relief to millions of trapped civilians. The visit by top UN humanitarian official Martin Griffiths comes one day after neighbouring South Sudan announced that the warring sides had agreed "in principle" to a seven-day ceasefire.

Deadly violence broke out on April 15 between Sudan's de facto leader Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, who commands the regular army, and his deputy turned rival Mohamed Hamdan Daglo, who commands the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF). At least 550 people have been killed and 4,926 wounded, according to the latest health ministry figures Wednesday, which are likely to be incomplete.

Tens of thousands of Sudanese have fled to neighbouring countries in an exodus that has sparked warnings of a humanitarian "catastrophe" with implications for the entire region. On Wednesday, Griffiths arrived in Port Sudan on the Red Sea coast on an urgent mission

to find ways to bring relief to the millions of Sudanese who are unable to flee.

"Just arrived in Port Sudan to reaffirm the UN's commitment to the Sudanese people," he said on Twitter. Earlier, the foreign ministry of neighbouring South Sudan announced that Burhan and Daglo "have agreed in principle for a seven-day truce from May 4th to 11th".

The two sides have yet to formally confirm the new ceasefire. The two men have agreed multiple truces since the fighting began but none has effectively taken hold. The current truce was extended on Sunday by a further 72 hours and is due to expire on Wednesday at 2200 GMT.

Mounting condemnation

Despite the truce efforts, witnesses reported warplanes over north Khartoum on Wednesday and fierce clashes near the state broadcaster's headquarters in the capital's twin city of Omdurman. "We heard again loud gunfire and anti-aircraft firing at a fighter jet this morning," a resident of south Khartoum said.

included France, Portugal, Slovenia, Spain and Romania, Europol said.

Operation Eureka "now stands as the largest hit involving the Italian poly-criminal syndicate to date", the agency said in a statement.

Italian authorities said assets and property worth 25 million euros had been seized in Italy, Portugal, Germany and France. Belgian prosecutors said some 150 addresses were raided in eight European countries, in searches that involved 1,400 police officers in Italy and more than 1,000 in Germany. The operation was focused on a criminal network led by several 'Ndrangheta families based in the town of San Luca, in the southern Italian province of Reggio Calabria.

A feud between rival clans from San Luca was responsible for a 2007 massacre in Germany, when six people were killed outside a pizzeria in the town of Duisburg. That crime for the first time helped raise public awareness of the 'Ndrangheta outside Italy.

The network hit on Wednesday "was mainly devoted to international drug trafficking from South America to Europe, as well as Australia", Europol said. They had links with Colombia's "Gulf Clan" crime group and an Albanian-speaking group operating in Ecuador and across Europe, it said. The investigation also revealed an offer to sell a container of weapons via Pakistani intermediaries to Brazilian paramilitaries, in exchange for cocaine to be delivered to the Calabrian port of Gioia Tauro.

Holidays in San Luca

A spokesman for the Belgian federal prosecutor's office said it had launched the European investigation and had been working on the case for "four, five years", in cooperation with other EU states. Italian authorities confirmed they had begun their investigations in June 2019, at the request of the Belgians, focusing on one San Luca family active in the Belgian town of Genk.

ing, "causing a threat to more lives." Most of the deaths occurred in Western Province which borders Lake Kivu, it said, adding that the floodwaters had swept away homes and infrastructure and led to road closures. "I was at home with my children but we escaped successfully before it collapsed," said Jane Munyemana, a resident in the town of Rubavu in Western Province.

"We plan to remove the floodwaters and sleep in it tonight but we are worried that it may rain again and destroy whatever is remaining," she told AFP. Other parts of East Africa have been battered by rains and flooding, including Uganda where six people have been reported dead.

'Massive landslides'

"Relief efforts began immediately, including helping to bury victims of the disaster and providing supplies to those whose homes were destroyed," Rwanda's minister in charge of emergency management, Marie Solange Kayisire, told RBA.

Multiple hospitals have been hit, humanitarian facilities looted and foreign aid groups forced to suspend most of their operations. Saudi Arabia said the premises of its cultural centre in Khartoum were attacked on Tuesday "by an armed group which damaged equipment, cameras and seized some of the mission's property".

The kingdom condemned the raid, calling for de-escalation and an end to the violence. Video posted by the RSF showed damage inside the premises of the presidential palace in Khartoum. More than 430,000 civilians have fled their homes, the United Nations said, including 100,000 who have sought refuge in neighbouring countries. Only 16 percent of Khartoum's hospitals remain fully functional, the UN added.

The failure of the warring generals to abide by their commitments in efforts to end nearly three weeks of fighting has drawn mounting international criticism. "The two generals, even though they accept the ceasefire, at the same time they continue fighting and shelling the city," complained Ismail Wais of East African regional bloc IGAD.

He said the persistent fighting "compounds and complicates the political, security and humanitarian situation on the ground making it harder to resolve." Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi warned on Tuesday that the fighting in neighbouring Sudan was affecting "the entire region". Griffiths had earlier called for civilians and aid workers to be protected. "Ensure safe passage for civilians fleeing areas of hostilities. Respect humanitarian workers and assets," he said on Twitter. Violence has also engulfed the Darfur region, with at least 99 people killed in fighting, according to Sudan's doctors union.

Of the more than 330,000 people displaced inside Sudan, over 70 percent were reported to be from West and South Darfur states, according to the International Organization for Migration. Darfur is still scarred by a war that erupted in 2003 when then-strongman Omar al-Bashir unleashed the Janjaweed militia, mainly recruited from Arab pastoralist tribes, against ethnic minority rebels. The Janjaweed—whose actions led to war crimes charges against Bashir and others—later evolved into the RSF. —AFP

Anti-mafia swoop nets suspects across Europe

ROME: Police across Europe launched a vast, coordinated operation against Italy's notorious 'Ndrangheta mafia on Wednesday, arresting more than 130 people and seizing millions of euros in dozens of searches.

"It is likely the biggest operation ever carried out in Europe against the Calabrese mafia," said a spokesman for Belgium's federal prosecutors' office, Eric van Duyse, which initiated the operation. European policing agency Europol said 132 alleged members of the 'Ndrangheta had been taken into custody during an "action day" involving 10 countries -- eight in Europe plus Brazil and Panama.

They are accused of crimes including mafia association, drug trafficking, arms trafficking, money laundering and tax fraud, following a probe that has uncovered the global reach of the wealthy organised crime group.

The 'Ndrangheta is Italy's most powerful and wealthy mafia, controlling the bulk of cocaine flowing into Europe and operating in more than 40 countries across the world. It has successfully expanded well beyond its traditional domains of drug trafficking and loan sharking, now using shell companies and frontmen to reinvest illegal gains in the worldwide legitimate economy.

Large hit

The majority of the arrests were in Italy, according to authorities there, with the others concentrated in Germany and Belgium. More than 2,770 police officers were involved in the operations in 10 countries, which also

115 perish as flooding hits Rwanda

KIGALI: At least 115 people have died as floods and mudslides swept through northern and western Rwanda after torrential rains, the state-run broadcaster said Wednesday, warning that the toll could rise. "The rain that fell last night caused disaster in the Northern and Western Provinces," the Rwanda Broadcasting Agency (RBA) said on its website.

"Currently, the provisional figures published by the administration of these provinces say that 115 people have been declared dead." Images on RBA's Twitter account showed houses engulfed in rivers of mud, roads cut off by landslides and flooded fields. The broadcaster said the floodwaters were still ris-



BRUSSELS: (L to R) Belgium's Federal Judicial Police Director-General Eric Snoeck, FGP Limburg Sophie Lever and Federal magistrate Antoon Schotsaert hold a press conference focused on a large-scale European operation which took place across several countries earlier this morning, in Brussels. —AFP

A Belgian police officer told a news conference in Italy how he and his team befriended suspects at a port in Belgium before being "invited to join them on their holidays in San Luca". That friendship allowed them to gather key evidence against them, he said.

The inquiry initially focused on international drug trafficking but was later widened to include money laundering, particularly in the catering, tourism and real estate sectors, and the arms trade, Italian authorities said.

Based in Calabria, the region that forms the tip of Italy's boot, the 'Ndrangheta is considered one of the world's most powerful crime syndicates due to its grip on the cocaine import market. It has extended its reach across all parts of the world, and it has long surpassed Sicily's Cosa Nostra as Italy's biggest mafia organisation. —AFP

She called on local residents to increase patrols, especially at night, so people could be moved to safer ground when it rains heavily. "When the floods started, there were massive landslides which caused trees to fall and bury the road down here. Our plantations were also washed away. We have a big problem down here," one woman in Northern Province told RBA.

In neighbouring Uganda, six people died in the west of the country when landslides struck their homes after days of torrential rain, according to the local Red Cross. It said five of the dead belonged to the same family and were from a single village.

Images shared by the Red Cross showed local farmers perched on steeply terraced hillsides digging through the fresh mudslide and homes buried up to their rooftops in mud. East Africa often suffers from flooding and landslides during the rainy seasons, although several countries in the Horn of Africa have been in the grip of the worst drought in decades. —AFP

Islamic Jihad announces truce after rocket fire

GAZA CITY: Palestinian militant group Islamic Jihad announced a truce around Gaza Wednesday, after militants traded fire with Zionist entity following the death in Zionist custody of a hunger striker from its ranks. Mediators from Qatar, Egypt and the United Nations intervened to broker a return to calm from 4 am (0100 GMT), sources in Islamic Jihad and fellow militant group Hamas told AFP.

Zionist entity did not immediately confirm the agreement. The Zionist army said the last warning sirens sounded near the Gaza border at around 5:30 am (0230 GMT). Witnesses in the blockaded Palestinian territory told AFP that several rockets were fired at Israel around this time.

"One round of confrontation has ended, but the march of resistance continues and will not stop," said Tariq Salmi, a spokesperson for Islamic Jihad in a statement. "Our brave fighters have proven their loyalty and commitment to defending their people," he added.

Hamas chief Ismail Haniyeh demanded that Zionist entity return the hunger striker's body to his family. "We stress - and as we have informed all the mediators who intervened - the necessity of handing over the body of the martyr Khader Adnan to his patient family," Haniyeh said in a statement.

Adnan, 45, from Jenin in the occupied West Bank, died early Tuesday after an 87-day hunger strike following his arrest by Zionist entity over ties to Islamic Jihad. A string of high-profile hunger strikes during at least 13 stints in Israeli custody had turned Adnan into a national hero, and revitalised hunger striking as a form of protest among Palestinians incarcerated in Zionist jails.

From Tuesday morning, around 100 rockets were fired by militant groups from Gaza towards Zionist entity, according to Islamic Jihad. In response, the Zionist army said it carried out a number of air strikes on Gaza early Wednesday, targeting "weapons manufacturing sites, outposts, military complexes and an underground terror tunnel" belonging to Hamas. —AFP

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International

Young Palestinians in Lebanon dream of a future abroad

Lebanon hosts an estimated 250,000 Palestinian refugees: UNRWA

SHATILA CAMP: In Lebanon's impoverished Palestinian refugee camps, young people say they dream of leaving a struggling country where their families took refuge generations ago and where their futures remain bleak. Nirmeen Hazineh is a descendant of survivors of what Palestinians call the Nakba — the “catastrophe” — when more than 760,000 Palestinians fled or were forced from their homes by the 1948 war over the Zionist entity's creation.

She proudly considers herself from Jaffa — now south of Tel Aviv — and talks as if she has lived there all her life, instead of in the ramshackle Shatila refugee camp south of Beirut. “Emigration has become the main solution for young people,” said Hazineh, 25.

“Whoever you speak to, they'll tell you ‘I want to leave’, whether legally or illegally, it doesn't matter.” Lebanon has been grappling with a devastating economic crisis since late 2019. Most of the population is now in poverty, according to the United Nations, and many Lebanese have quit the country for better prospects abroad.

Hazineh is a sociology graduate but is not allowed to practise in her field, as Lebanon bars Palestinians from working in 39 professions, including as doctors, lawyers and engineers. Instead she helps to raise awareness of the dangers of drugs, which add to the daily misery of Shatila.

“There is a kind of despair among young people in the camp,” said Hazineh, who despite the difficulties maintains a radiant smile. She said she wanted to live “in a country that respects me, that gives me a chance, a job”.

Camp horrors

Tiny Lebanon hosts an estimated 250,000 Palestinian refugees, according to UNRWA, the UN agency for Palestinian refugees, while almost double that number are registered for the organization's services. Most Palestinians, including more than 30,000 who fled the war in neighboring Syria after 2011, live in one of Lebanon's 12 official camps, now bustling but impoverished urban districts.

Shatila is a warren of tumbledown homes where tan-

gled electricity cables criss-cross tight alleyways. Once a stronghold of Yasser Arafat's Palestine Liberation Organization, Shatila became synonymous with horror in September 1982, when Christian militiamen allied with Zionist entity massacred between 800 and 2,000 Palestinians there and in the adjoining Sabra camp.

The PLO moved to Tunis that year, and later in the 1980s, pro-Syrian militias waged war on the Palestinian leader's remaining supporters in the camps. Portraits of Arafat still line the streets, along with Palestinian flags and posters of militants killed in violence in the Zionist-occupied West Bank.

Walid Othman, 33, says he spends his spare time in political activism with the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, which is banned in Zionist entity. His grandparents fled the village of Nahf, in the Acre region, 75 years ago. His parents were then driven from Lebanon's Tal al-Zaatar refugee camp, which Christian militiamen razed early in the country's 1975-1990 civil war. Othman said he would have liked to study political science and dedicate his life to “defending the Palestinian cause on an international level”. But he had to stop his studies because of “the difficult economic situation” and instead became a blacksmith.

'No prospects'

In Lebanon, Palestinians “denied right to own property... further complicates employment and income generation activities”, said Dorothee Klaus, director of UNRWA affairs for Lebanon. Lebanon says restrictions on Palestinians are justified by their right to return to their country.

In neighboring Syria, some 400,000 Palestinians are registered with UNRWA, where they have access to the job market. In Jordan, more than half of the around 10 million population is of Palestinian origin, while some 2.3 million Palestinians are registered with UNRWA but have the same rights as Jordanians. “With no prospect of meaningful future”, Palestinian refugees in Lebanon have “attempted to migrate whenever possible”, Klaus said. But their travel

demonstrate that our agents and officers bring incredible capabilities to bear every day as they work to keep our communities safe,” he said in a statement Tuesday night.

Horrifying scene

Capers had previously described a horrifying scene when authorities arrived at the victims' residence after receiving a call about “harassment” at around 11:30 pm Friday. Bodies were strewn from the front door to an inside bedroom, where two deceased women were found lying on top of two traumatized children who survived the massacre. Friday's attack quickly became fodder for the acrimonious debate on immigration in the United States. Texas Governor Greg Abbott drew criticism after referring to the suspect as having “killed five illegal immigrants,” though their immigration status was not immediately clear and Abbott later said at least one victim “may have been in the US legally.”

The victims were all originally from Honduras. Honduran Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Tony Garcia told AFP that one of the victims would be buried in the United States, while the other four would be repatriated in the coming days, according to their families' wishes.

Oropesa had been deported from the United States at least four times since 2009, according to CNN. The Texas killings appeared to be the latest in a series of US shootings spawned by normally banal interactions: A teenager mistakenly knocking on the wrong door, a cheerleader accidentally stepping into the wrong car, someone driving into the wrong driveway, a ball rolling into a neighbor's yard. There have been more than 180 mass shootings — defined as four or more people wounded or killed — so far this year in the United States, according to the Gun Violence Archive. With more firearms than inhabitants, the United States has the highest rate of gun-related deaths of any developed country: 49,000 in 2021, up from 45,000 the year before. — AFP

The recent seizures also follow a tightening of sanctions on the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps last week by Tehran's Western rivals. Iran then announced countermeasures including financial sanctions and entry bans targeting EU and UK individuals and entities. Tensions have escalated since the US withdrawal from the accord on Iran's nuclear activities. Marathon efforts to relaunch the agreement with major powers have stalled.

“The risk to shipping and energy infrastructure in the wider region will persist as long as the issue of Iran's nuclear program remains unresolved,” Soltevedt said. In 2019, the Revolutionary Guards seized the British-flagged oil tanker Stena Impero in the Strait of Hormuz for allegedly ramming a fishing boat, and released it two months later. In 2021, Iran released a South Korean oil tanker it had held for months amid a dispute over billions of dollars seized by Seoul. And in May 2022, Iran seized two Greek tankers after a Russian-flagged tanker carrying Iranian crude was seized a month earlier near Athens. The two vessels were both released in November. — AFP

SANA said. “Just as the Islamic republic stood by the Syrian government and nation in the fight against terrorism, it will also stand by its Syrian brothers in the field of development and progress,” Raisi said, according to the presidency website.

The visit comes just weeks after Iran's landmark, Chinese-brokered agreement to restore ties with regional rival Saudi Arabia, which has sparked a flurry of diplomacy in the Middle East. Security forces were heavily deployed in key parts of the Syrian capital, while billboards with portraits of the two presidents reading “welcome” in Arabic and Persian lined the airport road.

Syrian and Iranian flags also flew along the road to the Sayyida Zeinab mausoleum south of Damascus, a pilgrimage site for Shiite Muslims which Raisi was expected to visit. At the height of Syria's war, the revered shrine became a symbol of a bloody sectarian fault line, targeted by Sunni jihadists and used as a rallying call by Shiite armed groups.

The last Iranian president to visit Damascus was Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in Sept 2010. Assad has officially visited Tehran twice since the war broke out, the last time in May 2022. The regional atmosphere following the Saudi-Iran rapprochement has made Raisi's visit “more appropriate”, said Damascus-based analyst Osama Danura. — AFP



BEIRUT: In this picture taken on April 19, 2023, boys play with a football along an alley at the Shatila camp for Palestinian refugees in the southern suburbs of Beirut. — AFP

documents “may not be recognized”, and they may be “required to file visas related to stateless persons”, she added.

Mohammad Abdel Hafiz, whose family also hails from near Acre, lamented that Palestinians in Lebanon “don't even enjoy the most basic rights”. “Everybody is born in a country, while we are born where our heart is,” said the 29-year-old, who volunteers for the Palestinian civil de-

fence in Shatila. As he zips through its alleys on his moped, he dreams of leaving, but his chances of getting a visa to a Western country are slim. And he is haunted by the memory of three young camp residents who drowned when a boat carrying would-be migrants sank off the Lebanese coast last year. “They died because they wanted to have a future,” Abdel Hafiz said. “Here, our aim is just to survive.” — AFP

Texas slayings suspect arrested

WASHINGTON: A man accused of massacring five neighbors after they asked him to stop firing his rifle in his yard was captured Tuesday after a days-long manhunt, Texas law enforcement said. Francisco Oropesa had eluded authorities since the shooting Friday in the small town of Cleveland in southeastern Texas.

“We now have this man in custody,” San Jacinto County Sheriff Greg Capers told reporters at a press conference Tuesday night. “He was caught hiding in a closet underneath some laundry.” The 38-year-old Mexican national is accused of attacking his neighbors after they allegedly asked him to stop shooting his semi-automatic AR-15 rifle because the noise was keeping a baby awake. The victims were between the ages of nine and 31, with several other residents in critical condition after multiple gunshot wounds.

Capers said the surviving family members could “rest easy” now that Oropesa was behind bars. Authorities deployed hundreds of law enforcement officers to look for the suspect and offered an \$80,000 reward for information leading to his capture.

FBI special agent Jimmy Paul told reporters Tuesday night that a call to the bureau's tip line ultimately led law enforcement to Oropesa, who was arrested north of Houston at around 6:45 pm local time (2345 GMT). “I just want to thank the person who had the courage and bravery to call in the suspect's location,” he said.

US Customs and Border Protection Commissioner Troy Miller also thanked law enforcement officials for apprehending “the suspect of Friday's brutal murders in Texas ... without incident”. “Tonight's actions clearly

New autopsies in Kenya cult case confirm murder

MOMBASA: Autopsies carried out on dozens of bodies found in mass graves linked to a Kenyan cult that practiced starvation have found that some of the victims were strangled, beaten or suffocated, the authorities said. The discovery of mass graves last month near the Indian Ocean coastal town of Malindi has shocked Kenyans, with children accounting for more than half of the 109 victims who were allegedly incited to starve to death by self-styled pastor Paul Nthenge Mackenzie.

Experts carried out 30 autopsies on Tuesday, adding to 10 post-mortems performed a day earlier, with chief government pathologist Johansen Oduor saying that while starvation appeared to be the main cause of death, some victims appeared to have been murdered.

Out of 40 bodies in total, four — including two children — showed signs of suffocation, he said. A third child appeared to have been hit in the head with a blunt object, he told reporters late Tuesday. A fourth child was choked to death, he said, adding: “we could clearly see marks of someone who has been strangled and breaking of some bones in the neck.”

“We are certain that the child was strangulated.” The 40 bodies include at least 16 adults and 18 children, with experts unable to determine the age of six people because of severe decomposition of their remains.



MALINDI: Roseline Asena (R) and her son Lewis Kodack look at photos of their relatives, believed to be victims of the so-called “Shakahola forest massacre”, before arraignment of the main suspect, self-proclaimed pastor Paul Nthenge Mackenzie, outside the Malindi law court. — AFP

“Most of them died because of starvation in that 20 of the autopsies we did (on Tuesday) had features of people who died with starvation,” Oduor said. Mackenzie is due in court in Kenya's second-largest city of Mombasa on Friday, with police asking to detain him for 90 days while they investigate what has been dubbed the “Shakahola forest massacre”. He and 17 other suspects will face terrorism charges over the deaths, with Mackenzie also accused of murder, kidnapping, cruelty towards children among other crimes in court documents seen by AFP.

Ezekiel Oduor, a wealthy and high-profile televangelist, is also facing charges in connection with the same case and will appear in court on Thursday. Oduor is suspected of murder, aiding suicide, abduction, radicalization, crimes against humanity, child cruelty, fraud and money laundering. — AFP

Iran seizes second Gulf oil tanker...

Continued from Page 1

the Trump administration, said Torbjorn Soltevedt of risk intelligence firm Verisk Maplecroft. “The message Iran is sending is the same now as then,” he told AFP. “Tehran is prepared to put a cost on US efforts to curb its oil exports.”

Video footage released by the Fifth Fleet showed at least 11 small boats approaching the Niopi on Wednesday. Iran has harassed, attacked or hampered the navigation of 15 foreign-flagged merchant vessels in the past two years, the US Fifth Fleet said, calling Tehran's actions “contrary to international law and disruptive to regional security and stability”. “Iran's continued harassment of vessels and interference with navigational rights in regional waters are unwarranted, irresponsible and a present threat to maritime security and the global economy,” it added in a statement.

Raisi meets Assad, hails...

Continued from Page 1

the conflict and positioning itself in a leading role as Assad seeks to focus on reconstruction. Both countries remain under heavy Western sanctions. Assad told Raisi that Syria-Iran ties “were stable and steady during difficult times despite heavy political and security storms that struck the Middle East”, according to the statement. Iran “did not hesitate to provide political and economic support (to Syria), and even offered blood,” Assad added.

Raisi's visit is the first by an Iranian president to Syria since the war broke out, and comes at a time when more regional capitals are re-engaging with the internationally isolated government in Damascus. The large Iranian delegation includes the ministers of foreign affairs, defense, oil, roads and urban development as well as telecommunications.

Assad and Raisi signed memoranda of understanding on “long-term strategic cooperation”, covering fields including in oil, aviation, railways and agriculture,

Nine killed in shooting at Belgrade school

BELGRADE: Eight students and a security guard were killed during a school shooting in Belgrade on Wednesday, officials said, with police accusing the detained 13-year-old suspect of plotting the attack for a month and making a kill list. The incident rocked the Balkan nation, which has not seen a school shooting of this magnitude for decades and where one cabinet minister called it the “biggest tragedy” to occur in the Serbian school system in recent history.

“Eight children and a security guard were killed, while six children and one schoolteacher were wounded,” the interior ministry said. Belgrade police chief Veselin Milic identified the dead students as seven girls and one boy, born between 2009 and 2011. The shooting occurred at 8:40 am (0640 GMT) at an elementary school in Belgrade's downtown Vracar district. Serbian elementary schools go up to eighth grade, educating children aged seven to 15.

Police moved quickly to seal off the neighborhood as parents rushed to the scene, where students were visibly distraught as they waited outside the school. Milan Nedeljkovic, president of the Vracar district, said the school's security guard likely prevented more deaths by putting himself in the line of fire. The guard “wanted to prevent the tragedy and he was the first victim”, Nedeljkovic told reporters outside the school.

“Probably the tragedy would be even bigger if the man did not stand in front of the boy who was shoot-



BELGRADE: A parent escorts her child following a shooting at a school in the Serbian capital on May 3, 2023. — AFP

ing,” he added. Authorities later identified the suspect as Kosta Kecmanovic, a 13-year-old student, saying that he was armed with two pistols, one in his backpack and one that he used. The suspect “planned the shooting for a month and made a list of kids he planned to kill,” Milic told a press conference. “The sketch looks like something from a video game or a horror movie, which indicates that he planned in detail, by classes, whom to liquidate,” he added.

Interior Minister Bratislav Gasic said the suspect's father, who owned the alleged weapons used in the shooting spree, was also under arrest. “The father claims that the arms were locked in a safe with a code, but apparently the kid had the code, as he managed to take the pistols and three magazines with 15 bullets each,” said Gasic. Hours after the incident, officials said an array of resources were being deployed to assist students, families and faculty connected to the shooting. — AFP

Assembly elections set for June 6...

Continued from Page 1

The court also scrapped the 2022 Assembly and reinstated the 2020 house. HH the Amir again dissolved the reinstated 2020 Assembly on Monday, setting the stage for fresh polls. Scores of former MPs led

by speaker of the 2020 National Assembly Marzouq Al-Ghanem have announced they will run in the polls. So far, about 50 former MPs and former members of the annulled 2022 Assembly have said they are running.

Local media and experts have predicted the upcoming elections to be the most decisive in Kuwait's 60-year parliamentary democracy, as Kuwaiti citizens appear to be increasingly frustrated with non-stop political wrangling that has almost brought economic development in the country to a standstill.

International

Myanmar junta pardons more than 2,000 political prisoners

‘Any release of prisoners is of course welcome for individuals and their families’

YANGON: Myanmar's junta pardoned more than 2,000 political prisoners to mark a Buddhist holiday on Wednesday, triggering tearful reunions outside jails but also demands that the many others behind bars be released.

The military has arrested thousands of protesters and activists since its February 2021 putsch that ended Myanmar's brief democratic experiment and plunged the country into turmoil. Protesters and journalists were among the 2,153 people freed, AFP reporters said, a tiny fraction of those targeted in the military's brutal and sweeping crackdown on dissent.

"There are many prisoners... left in the prison," said Phoe Thar, a student who was jailed in December 2021 for taking part in a flash mob demonstration. "I want to ask people to stay strong for those prisoners," he told AFP outside Yangon's Insein prison.

About 100 people had gathered outside the sprawling, colonial-era complex following the announcement early Wednesday, AFP reporters said. As a yellow bus pulled out of the gates, some in the crowd held pieces of paper up to the windows, signs bearing the names of their relatives.

One man reunited with his weeping family outside the prison took his baby into his arms. Ma Ye Ye was waiting to see if her son, who was jailed in 2021, would be freed. "He was arrested for nothing," she said, requesting a pseudonym for fear of retaliation. "He just walked through a security gate and soldiers arrested him."

"I was thinking this morning that it would be really good if my son was to be released on this Buddha day," said Ma Khin, another woman waiting in the crowd, who also requested a pseudonym. "Then I received phone calls from my relatives that there would be an amnesty... I don't

know if he will be on the list, but it's my duty to come and wait for him."

Those pardoned had been jailed under Section 505 (a) of the penal code, which outlaws any action deemed to undermine the military. The law carries a maximum jail term of three years. On Wednesday, the military said it ordered the pardons "for the peaceful mind of the people and on humanitarian grounds."

Those who re-offend will have to serve the remainder of their sentence with an additional penalty, it added. Myanmar typically grants amnesty to thousands of prisoners to mark national holidays or Buddhist festivals. Local media reported that prisoners were also released from jails in Pyaw, northwest of Yangon, and in Myeik in the far south.

'No concession'

"Any release of prisoners is of course welcome for the individuals and their families, but this does not represent any sort of concession by the regime," said Richard Horsey of the International Crisis Group. "It is a ritual to release prisoners on Buddhist holidays, but thousands of political prisoners remain incarcerated for opposing the regime, and arrests continue."

More than 21,000 people have been arrested since the military ousted a civilian government led by Aung San Suu Kyi in 2021, according to a local monitoring group. More than 17,800 were still behind bars, according to the group's latest figures, published Tuesday. Suu Kyi is one of those in detention since the coup.

At least 170 journalists have been arrested during that time, according to the United Nations. Myanmar ranked 173 out of 180 in the latest World Press Freedom Index by Reporters Without Borders.

In December, the junta wrapped up a series of



YANGON: A man celebrates with a relative after being released from Insein Prison in Yangon on May 3, 2023. Myanmar's junta announced it had pardoned 2,153 prisoners jailed under a law that criminalises encouraging dissent against the military. — AFP

closed-court trials of 77-year-old Nobel laureate Suu Kyi, jailing her for a total of 33 years in a process rights groups condemned as a sham. Outside Insein prison on Wednesday, Khin Sandar Win knew her husband would not be among those released.

A former regional minister, he had been jailed by

a closed-door junta court for 15 years for corruption. But she was hoping to see a journalist acquaintance of hers benefit from the amnesty. "Today is his mother's funeral day," she said. "His mother will be cremated this afternoon. I really want him to be released and to see his mother's face for the last time." — AFP

Dead rivers, flaming lakes: India's sewage failure

NEW DELHI: Mohammed Azhar holds his baby niece next to a storm drain full of plastic and stinking black sludge, testament to India's failure to treat nearly two-thirds of its urban sewage. "We stay inside our homes. We fall sick if we go out," the 21-year-old told AFP in the Delhi neighbourhood of Seelampur, where open gutters packed with plastic and sickly greyish water flow alongside the narrow lanes.

"It stinks. It attracts mosquitoes. We catch diseases and the kids keep falling sick," he added. "There is no one to clean the filth." India at the end of April was projected to have overtaken China as the world's most populous country, according to the United Nations, with almost 1.43 billion people.

Its urban population is predicted to explode in the coming decades, with over 270 million more people forecast to live in its cities by 2040. But of the 72 billion litres of sewage currently generated in urban centres every day, 45 billion litres—enough to fill 18,000 Olympic-sized swimming pools—aren't treated, according to government figures for 2020-21.

India's sewerage system does not connect to about two-thirds of its urban homes, according to the National Faecal Sludge and Septage Management Alliance (NFSSM). Many of the sewage treatment plants in operation don't comply with standards—including 26 out of Delhi's 35 facilities, according to media reports. Coupled with huge volumes of industrial effluent, the sewage is causing disease, polluting India's waterways, killing wildlife and seeping into groundwater.

Ecologically dead

Although India has made major progress in reducing child mortality, diarrhoea—caused mostly by contaminated water and food—remains a leading killer. More than 55,000 children under five died of diarrhoea across India in 2019, according to a study published last year in the scientific journal BMC Pub-



NEW DELHI: In this photograph taken on April 26, 2023, people walk along a street next to a sewage canal filled with garbage at Seelampur neighbourhood in New Delhi. — AFP

lic Health. The Yamuna in Delhi is one of the world's filthiest rivers and is considered ecologically dead in places, although people still wash clothes and take ritual baths in it. It often billows with white foam, and facilities processing drinking water from the river for Delhi's 20 million people regularly shut down because of dangerous ammonia levels.

Despite some bright spots, as well as efforts to plant more trees alongside rivers, the situation elsewhere is often no better in big cities including Mumbai and Chennai. In Bengaluru, massive Bellandur Lake has on occasion caught fire when methane, generated by bacteria feasting on sewage in the oxygen-depleted water, ignited.

'Water crisis'

Mridula Ramesh, author of a book about India's water woes who lives in a "nearly" net-zero-waste home, said properly treating sewage into useable water would help solve the crisis. According to the World Bank, India is one of the most "water-stressed"

countries in the world, with plummeting water tables and increasingly erratic monsoon rains.

Chennai nearly ran out of water briefly in 2019, and other cities may see similar calamities in the coming years due to excessive groundwater pumping and rainfall volatility. "India is headed for a water crisis. Sewage can so easily be co-opted to fight that and help us to a very large extent solve the problem in our cities," Ramesh told AFP.

This could be achieved with decentralised treatment plants partially funded by the private sector or non-governmental organisations, with some of the fully treated sewage reused or released into local lakes. "India's water is so seasonal. Many cities in India get 50 rain days... but sewage is available every day because you go to the bathroom every day... It's such a powerful weapon," she said. For Khalil Ahmad, standing by the revolting open drain in Seelampur as flies buzz around, a solution can't come soon enough. "Children keep falling sick... If they don't get treatment and medicine, the children will die," he told. — AFP

Thai front-runner for PM hails baby as secret power

BANGKOK: One of the front-runners in Thailand's general election hailed her newborn son as her "secret power" Wednesday as she presented the baby to the media after giving birth just two weeks before polling day. Paetongtarn Shinawatra, daughter of billionaire ex-premier Thaksin Shinawatra, vowed to get back on the campaign trail for the May 14 vote after giving birth on Monday. The 36-year-old has been first or second in surveys of voters' preferred choice of prime minister and her Pheu Thai party—the latest incarnation of the political movement founded by her father—is leading most opinion polls.

"I believe that good things come with babies, so this is a blessing for my family," she told reporters at Bangkok's Praram 9 hospital. "My children are my secret power to work and to live life." A heavily pregnant Paetongtarn was a near-constant presence at campaign rallies in searing tropical heat until just a week before giving birth.

The baby, named Pruthasin Sooksawas and nicknamed "Thasin" in honour of her father, is Paetongtarn's second. She described her emotions on delivering him safely, after his heart rate fell during labour. "Once I heard his cry, my tears fell. I felt relief that he was safe. I am glad he is safe," she said.

There was less joyful news Wednesday for Paetongtarn in the polls, where the leader of the rival opposi-

tion Move Forward party, Pita Limjaroenrat, overtook her as voters' preferred prime minister. The latest round of the closely-watched poll by the National Institute of Development Administration (NIDA) put Pita on 35 percent, ahead of Paetongtarn on 29.

In party preferences, Pheu Thai still leads Move Forward—a left-leaning reformist movement—by 38 percent to 34, but the gap is narrowing. Napsa Waitoolkiat, a political analyst at Naresuan University, said the pregnancy and birth might help win over swing voters. Emilie Pradichit, of feminist human rights organisation Manushya, said she had sent out a strong message in a patriarchal society. "By actively participating in the electoral process, while also sharing about her pregnancy, she is breaking barriers," she told AFP. "It challenges the notion that pregnancy and motherhood are incompatible with political careers."

Return of Thaksin?

Pheu Thai has said it is targeting a landslide to try to secure the PM spot—which under the junta-scripted constitution requires the support of the military-appointed senate. But Paetongtarn said she would not rule out alliances to build a governing coalition. "I'm open to the parties that are going to support our policies and our conditions," she said. It is the second election since the 2014 coup that ousted Paetongtarn's aunt Yingluck from power. Pheu Thai won most seats at the last poll in 2019, but coup leader Prayut Chan-O-cha stitched together a coalition to hold on to power.

The baby's birth has increased speculation about a possible return to Thailand by Thaksin, who lives in exile to avoid corruption charges he says are po-



BANGKOK: Pheu Thai Party candidate Paetongtarn Shinawatra (R), youngest daughter of former Thai prime minister Thaksin Shinawatra, presents her newborn son Thasin (C) in an incubator with her mother Pojaman Na Pombejra (L) and sister Pintongta Kunakornwong (2R). — AFP

litically motivated. Paetongtarn said her father, 73, wants to return to Thailand but not to get involved in politics again.

"He always says he wants to return home to raise his grandchildren. He never said he wants to return home to be PM," she said. Thaksin, still much loved in Thailand's poor rural areas for his populist welfare policies, is loathed by the powerful military and royalist elites. For two decades, Thai politics has been dominated by a tussle between the Shinawatras and this royalist-military establishment. Parties linked to the family have won most seats at every election since 2001, but seen two prime ministers removed by coups and two by court orders. — AFP

Taiwan urged to learn from Russia, Ukraine conflict

TAIPEI: A retired US general on Wednesday urged Taiwan to heed lessons from Russia's war in Ukraine and bolster its unmanned drone defences, with the island facing increasing military threats from China. Democratic Taiwan lives under constant threat of invasion by China, which views the island as part of its territory to be reclaimed one day—by force, if necessary. Retired US Marines lieutenant general Steven Rudder was part of a delegation of American defence contractors in Taipei on Wednesday to discuss the development of military hardware—including unmanned aerial systems (UASs)—with Taiwanese companies.

Speaking on the sidelines of the defence industry forum, Rudder told reporters that Taiwan—along with the rest of the world—"is learning from" Russia's war in Ukraine. "We've seen smaller UASs take a very prominent role and we've seen ground forces in distributed manners are able to create a factor of defensive firepower within an urban environment in ways that we haven't explored before," he said.

This technology "allows you to create coverage in areas where you don't have conventional forces". Street-to-street urban warfare has been part of a wider Ukrainian counteroffensive since Russia invaded the country last year—which has deepened fears a continent away that Beijing could follow through on threats to annex Taiwan.

Taipei's military last year incorporated urban warfare into its annual war games, with reservists guarding sandbagged trenches in drills aimed at blocking enemies from gaining access to the capital. A growing number of Taiwanese civilians have also attended urban warfare workshops to learn combat skills. "The current geopolitical situation in the region has created an urgency for (US-Taiwan) defence industrial cooperation," said Max Lo, head of the Taiwan National Drone Industry Association, during the forum. — AFP

Rohingya team to visit Myanmar for refugee return plan

COX'S BAZAR: A Rohingya delegation will visit Myanmar on Friday as part of efforts to revive a long-stalled plan to return the stateless minority to their homeland, refugees and Bangladeshi officials said. Bangladesh is home to around a million Rohingya, most of whom fled a 2017 military crackdown in neighbouring Myanmar that is now subject to a UN genocide investigation.

Both countries signed an agreement to return them later that year but little progress has been made since, and the United Nations has repeatedly warned that conditions were not right for their repatriation.

The delegation will visit a site close to the Bangladesh border, where Myanmar's military regime plans to resettle more than 1,000 Rohingyas in a pilot project. "We will be shown the camps built by the Myanmar government for the Rohingyas. We will see the facilities there," Badiul, a Rohingya community leader and member of the delegation, told AFP on Wednesday. Bangladesh refugee commissioner Mizanur Rahman will lead the delegation of 20 Rohingya refugees, a senior government official told AFP, speaking on condition of anonymity due to the sensitivity of the issue. "They will go there in the morning and will come back late afternoon," he said, adding the team would visit a reception centre, transit centre and resettlement camp built to house the incoming refugees. — AFP

Business

THURSDAY, MAY 4, 2023



KUWAIT: National Investments Company Chairman Bader Nasser Al-Kharafi (second from right) addresses the general assembly meeting.

NIC to distribute 28% cash dividend at 28 fils per share

Al-Kharafi: NIC exemplifies high professionalism and has consistently achieved the best results

KUWAIT: The National Investments Company (NIC) held its ordinary general assembly on Monday (1/5/2023) at its headquarters in Al-Khaleeja Complex, with an attendance rate of 73.65 percent. The assembly was authorized by the shareholders in person and electronically.

The Chairman of the Board Bader Nasser Al-Kharafi kicked off the meeting by welcoming all shareholders, thanking them for their continuous support and precious trust, which is always the primary motivator for the company and a key reason for its stability.

Attendees have approved the agenda suggested by the Board of Directors. In his speech, Al-Kharafi said that by the end of last year, 2022, National Investments Company achieved profits of KD 8.7 million; therefore, the board has recommended distributing a 28 percent cash dividend of the capital at 28 fils per share (after subtracting the treasury shares) for the financial year ended 31 December, 2022, to shareholders registered in the Company's records per the applicable maturity dates and rules.



Al-Kharafi also thanked shareholders for their trust, which positively impacted the company's systematic strategy at the level of the investment sector, achieving encouraging indicators at all levels despite local and global challenges that affected the performance of companies, banks, and business sectors in general.

"The Board of Directors has always supported the company's executive management and their ongoing efforts characterized by high professionalism, and do appreciate all efforts paid to achieve the best results and successes, as well as the commitment to following the company's strategy while enhancing the confidence of its customers and shareholders, which would not have been achieved without the tireless and sincere efforts of the management and all employees of the company," highlighted Al-Kharafi.

Positive indicators

Al-Kharafi also confirmed that 2022 was a positive year for NIC, as the company has gone on with its sustainability approach in achieving annual profits and remarkable growth in all fundamental financial indicators, noting that it achieved favorable rates in terms of profitability indicators and return on both average assets and average shareholders' equity, improving asset quality indicators and succeeding in maintaining reasonable rates of cost and revenue at the same time, despite economic challenges and unprecedented crises. NIC's total assets amounted to KD 271 million by the end of 2022. Total assets managed by the National Investments Company have increased to approximately KD 1.15 billion, compared to KD 1.088 billion in the same period in 2021. The total shareholders' equity of the parent company reached



Bader Nasser Al-Kharafi

- Distributing the cash dividends reflects NIC's solid financial position
- 2022 was a positive year as NIC has continued its sustainability approach in achieving annual profits and remarkable growth in all financial indicators
- Total assets under management increased to approximately KD 1.15 billion
- Shareholders have benefited from the exceptional results and growth in financial indicators and market shares while providing the best and most advanced services to enhance customer satisfaction



Fahad Abdulrahman Al-Mukhaizim

- The positive results achieved by the company during the financial year ended 31 December, 2022 confirm its commitment to enhancing shareholder value
- The National Investments Company plans to move forward with the comprehensive digital transformation plan by expanding the application of intelligent solutions
- A remarkable increase in market share was achieved, as well as investment banking activities and services through diversified operations worth more than \$2 billion

KD 199 million, and other comprehensive revenues amounted to KD 9.4 million.

General performance of Boursa Kuwait

Al-Kharafi also explained that 2022 witnessed several economic and political events and variables, whose effects were reflected in the performance of Boursa Kuwait's indices. Looking at the performance of the stock exchange during the first quarter of 2022, we find that it was exceptionally positive, as the general market index has recorded the highest quarterly gains ever, amounting to about 15.7 percent. The revenues of the Premier Market index for the same quarter amounted to about 18.6 percent. These gains were supported by many positive catalysts and data, most notably the rise in global oil prices and companies' positive annual financial results. The market performance during the second and third quarters was significantly negative. The three stock market indices suffered sharp losses following intense selling pressure that affected most of the stock exchange's shares in general and the leading stocks, which continued until the late third quarter and was reflected in the performance of the indices.

During the last quarter of 2022, the stock market indices have witnessed a slight relative improvement, despite the volatile trading that accompanied that period, after declining for two consecutive quarters, as the transactions of the period saw the return of selective buying that affected a broad segment of leading stocks, as well as medium and small, which reflected positively on the performance of the indices and made them recover relatively from losses.

A year of achievements

The National Investments Company



ny has received awards from renowned global and regional bodies and financial institutions as a tribute and testimony of appreciation from these platforms for the excellence of the company's performance. Awards included the Most Innovative Real Estate Development Company in Kuwait from International Finance, Al-Wataniya Fund received Best Investment Product and Enterprise Risk Management Excellence Award from Global Banking & Finance, and Best Investment Banking Company from World Finance.

A year of excellence

Fahad Abdulrahman Al-Mukhaizim, Board Member and CEO of National Investments Company, said that the positive results achieved by the company during the fiscal year that ended December 31, 2022, came as an affirmation of its commitment to enhancing shareholder value.

This was reflected in improving the efficiency and solidity of its financial position, in addition to implementing its successful strategy towards achieving apparent growth in the company's profitability, which positively affected all economic indicators and succeeded in attracting a wide range of investors in various funds and investment portfolios, as the company achieved a growth of more than 37 percent in the number of new portfolio clients from individuals and local and international companies during the year and other various investment opportunities during the year 2022.

He stressed the outstanding performance of the company's investment funds during 2022, another testimony of the executive management adopting effective strategies and being capable of applying accurate and tight work methods and practices while achieving distinguished financial returns and confirming NIC's

leading position. Al-Wataniya Fund has distributed attractive cash dividends to unit holders of 24 fils per unit for the results of the second half of 2022.

Al-Mukhaizim pointed to increased market share achieved by providing various services such as acquisitions, IPOs, and mergers supervised by the investment banking team during 2022, with a value of approximately \$2 billion.

During the year 2022, the company's consulting team was the lead coordinator, listing advisor, joint placement manager, and subscription agent in several deals, such as the listing of Ali Alghanim Sons Automotive, which exceeded covering more than 11 times the offering value, to be the fastest listing process in Boursa Kuwait's Premier market. Also, the subscription to increase the capital of National Consumer Holding Company and Alrai Media Group, and an investment advisor for the merger of Boubyan Petrochemical Company, Educational Holding Group, Safat Investment Company, and Capcorp Investment.

Al-Mukhaizim also reviewed the performance of the company's Alternative Investment Department, where it made several direct investments in well-positioned companies within various sectors, such as the financial technology sector and real estate investment sector in the regions of Europe and America. In addition, the investment in Silver Lake VII Fund and the investment in the HPS Investment Partners Trust Fund, through which the management could continue diversifying investment portfolios and access a range of outstanding credit opportunities in global markets.

The real estate investment sector also witnessed a significant improvement, as occupancy rates in the company's properties and properties managed by it were

raised to unprecedented rates of 100 percent in some properties, compared to its situation during the pandemic period in 2020 and 2021.

Al-Mukhaizim added that digital transformation remains a crucial element of NIC's strategy. The company is always keen to implement new smart solutions to achieve a qualitative leap in the innovative investment services and products provided to its clients in a manner that enhances the principle of sustainability and contributes to the development of the investment sector regionally and, thus, the growth of the Kuwaiti economy. To this end, the company has updated the digital IPO management service and focused on developing and updating the service with the Civil Information Authority, banks, and authorized clearing agencies. The electronic trading program NICTRADE has been updated to include advanced options for clients.

The company has also introduced the electronic real estate system to enable tenants to follow up on all matters related to their units, such as maintenance requests and electronic payment, allowing real estate owners to follow up on their assets and financial flows. The size of real estate portfolios has been increased by some additional properties managed by the sector, accompanied by an increase in revenues of 4.5 percent.

Prudent governance

National Investments Company is committed to modernizing the governance system in line with the requirements of the Capital Markets Authority and the governance procedures related to the investment sector, in addition to managing risks effectively and efficiently by adopting mechanisms through which the international standards on risk management applied by prestigious financial institutions are used, which is a vital part of the requirements of corporate governance and prudent management of the company's assets and the assets of its clients.

Acknowledgment

In conclusion, Al-Kharafi expressed his sincere gratitude to board members, executive management, and the team for their ongoing efforts to achieve this performance and growth aligned with the strategic plan. I would also like to thank the Capital Markets Authority, Boursa Kuwait, Central Bank of Kuwait, and the Ministry of Commerce and Industry employees for their tremendous efforts to achieve the targeted development.

We pray for blessings, safety, and

Business

stc announces KD 86.6m in revenues with KD 8.2m net profit for Q1 2023

KUWAIT: Kuwait Telecommunications Company (stc), a world-class digital leader providing innovative services and platforms to customers and enabling the digital transformation in Kuwait, announced its financial results for the three months period ended 31 March 2023, highlighting the most significant achievements, financial and operational performance in addition to the social initiatives made by the company during the first three months of 2023.

its customer experience by relying on its solid infrastructure."

Commenting on stc's financial position as of March 31, 2023, Dr Abdulrahman said: "stc's total assets reached KD 435.7 million by the end of March 2023, while total shareholders' equity increased by 2 percent reaching KD 219.7 million. Whereby, stc has a strong solvency position among its peers in the Middle East.

With regards to stc's CSR framework, Dr Abdulrahman commented: "Q1 2023 witnessed a number of community and interactive activities aimed at promoting a culture of social responsibility and developing the concept of sustainability within the local community. In line with the company's integrated CSR program, stc launched a series of campaigns and initiatives in collaboration with various charitable organizations, as well as institutions in the government and private sectors respectively. The objective of these various initiatives was to make effective and positive contributions in the society while engaging with different sections of the community and spreading awareness on important causes that affect the community.

stc's CSR program has focused on activating sustainable development partnerships with the public and private sectors and strengthening the relationships with local communities in addition to increasing community awareness of the concept of social responsibility. We are proud of the steady growth and diversity of stc's corporate social responsibility framework, which addresses core issues across our main pillars: education, health, sports, environment, entrepreneurship and youth development."

Commenting on stc's major milestones during the first quarter of 2023, Eng Maziad Al-Harbi, stc's CEO stated: "stc's robust results which were achieved in both the individual and the enterprise sectors through its subsidiaries specialized in the ICT and business solutions have contributed in enhancing its financial and operational performance. Whereby, stc achieved outstanding results during the first three months of 2023, which enabled the Company to maintain its competitive position in the ICT sector.



Dr Mahmoud Ahmed Abdulrahman

Eng Maziad Al-Harbi

and digital operating model which would enable the Company to deliver the latest innovative solutions in the ICT sector. Whereby, stc's total revenue reached KD 86.6 million in the first three months of 2023 with growth rate of 12.7 percent compared to KD 76.8 million during the same period in 2022. This increase is attributed to stc's services and smart packages designed to cater the demands of most segments of our individual customers. Not to mention stc's emphasis on the providing digital services to the enterprise segment and delivering integrated technical solutions to companies from all sectors in addition to driving its operations into new areas of sustainable growth through a series of innovative initiatives aimed at improving its operational efficiency, delivering the best services and products that meet its customer's needs, as well as supporting the company's advanced infrastructure with the best and widest 5G coverage."

Al-Harbi added: "These outcomes resulted in a growth of EBITDA by 6.4 percent to reach KD 21.6 million in the first quarter of 2023 compared to KD 20.3 million in the same period of 2022. As a result, the company's net profit during the three months period ended 31 March 2023 reached KD 8.2 million compared to KD 7.7 million during the same period in 2022. stc's customer base reached approx. 2.4 million customers at the end of March 2023".

Al-Harbi noted: "at stc, we are committed to constantly update our financial and operational plans in order enhance the Company's ability and reach the optimal as well as the most efficient cost optimization process. This, in turn, would aid stc keep abreast with the latest developments in the telecommunications sector to boost profitability levels in addition to achieving the desired financial and operational results, which enables the Company to maintain the liquidity of its cash flows."

- Revenue increased by 12.7 percent to reach KD 86.6 million
- EBITDA increased by 6.4 percent to reach KD 21.6 million
- stc's customer base increased by 16.4 percent to reach 2.4 million customers
- Net profit increased by 7.3 percent to reach KD 8.2 million

Commenting on the announcements of these results, Dr Mahmoud Ahmed Abdulrahman, stc's Chairman, stated: "stc achieved a number of financial and operational achievements during the first three months of 2023 through offering a package of integrated offers and digital services to its customers from the individual and enterprise sectors. This comes from stc's concern to meet the needs of its customers in light of the competition that the ICT and telecommunications sectors are witnessing in Kuwait, not to mention the increasing demand for the digital communications and IT services. Supported by its corporate strategy and the strategic expansion process, stc is keen to keep pace with the rapid changes in the telecommunications sector especially that of the enterprise sector, to sustain its market share by upgrading its services and enhance

Throughout 2023, stc was keen to update its digital transformation strategy in order to encounter the latest developments in the telecommunications sector and support the Company to provide a variety of high quality services aimed at meetings the needs of its individual and enterprise customers as well as exceeding their expectations. Accordingly, stc strives for capturing all the available potential opportunities that would support the key pillars of its corporate strategy focused on leading the ICT sector in Kuwait. This is driven by stc's future vision of the digital solutions through creating unparalleled dazzling opportunities to deliver the most advanced and best-in-class services in order to expand its presence in the individual and enterprise sectors and build a strong customer base in addition to increasing its market share."

Commenting on the announcement of company's financial results for the three months period ended March 31, 2023, Eng Maziad Al-Harbi said: "stc managed to generate good financial results leveraging its internal capabilities to meet the anticipation of the company's shareholders and enrich its product portfolio through the implementation of a productive

The financial results for three months period ended 31 March 2023	
Revenues	KD 86.6 mn
EBITDA	KD 21.6 mn
Net Profit	KD 8.2 mn
Earnings per share	8 fils per share
Assets	KD 435.7 mn
Shareholders' equity	KD 219.7 mn
Book value per share	220 fils per share
Customer base	2.4 mn customers



KUWAIT: Aleid Foods Company holds ordinary and extraordinary general assembly on Wednesday.

Aleid Foods to distribute 5% cash dividends

KUWAIT: Aleid Foods Company's Ordinary and Extraordinary General Assembly approved the recommendation of the Board of Directors to distribute 5 percent cash dividends of the par value per share (5 fils per share), and the distribution of a 10 percent grant of shares of the authorized capital, for the fiscal year ending on December 31, 2022, for shareholders registered in the company's records

In the meeting held on Wednesday at its headquarters, Aleid Foods Ordinary General Assembly also approved all the items on its agenda, the most important of which was the approval of the governance and auditing committee's reports for the fiscal year ending on December 31, 2022, and the approval of deducting 10 percent of the profits for the voluntary reserve account in the amount of KD 262,722 to support the company's financial position, in addition to approving the transfer of KD 553,907 from the voluntary reserve to a retained earnings account.

Aleid Foods Company Extraordinary General Assembly discussed the items listed on its agenda, and the increase of the company's authorized, issued, and paid-up capital from KD 16,924,806/600 to KD 18,617,287/200 was approved, in addition to approving the amendment of clause No 5 of the Memorandum of Association and Article No 5 of the corporate charter.

Aleid Foods Company CEO Mohammad Al-Mutairi stated that Aleid Foods Company achieved the highest revenues in its history in 2022, which was

distinguished by an increase in the company's financial performance indicators compared to 2021, with a recorded increase in net operating revenue of 23.34 percent, amounting to KD 28,199,327, which came as a result of the company's determination and plans to develop and diversify its sources of income and balancing the financial returns of its various business sectors, and that is among the company's priorities to achieve continuous growth.

Al-Mutairi affirmed Aleid's commitment to reinforcing its share and enhancing its position as a safe and sustainable investment, hence why it was keen on including rewarding dividend distribution for the fourth consecutive year.

Al-Mutairi added, today Aleid Foods stands solid as it prepares for the new phase of "Launching and Initiation" in 2023, by focusing on supporting and developing the new companies and projects that were launched in the past two years to achieve Aleid's ambitions in attaining leadership in the food sector at local and regional levels. Concurrently supporting the company plans to achieve its Regional Expansion Strategy Goals 25, activated in 2022 with the opening of the Aleid Foods - Dubai and the establishment of Aqtar Al-Khhleej Company in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia by activating the company's operations in these vital cities and solidify its position as a key player in their markets in addition to enabling it to enter new markets and cities according to its future plans.

Al-Mutairi concluded by extending his thanks and appreciation to the company's Board of Directors and its team for their trust in the ambitious Regional Expansion Strategy Goals 25 set by the executive management to keep pace with the company's continuous growth aspirations, which positively reflected on maintaining the company's position in the local and regional markets and enhancing its capabilities to satisfy clients, partners and consumers alike and ensure sustainable returns to investors and shareholders.

WTI fell by 5.3 per cent to \$71.66 at market close on Tuesday. The world's biggest benchmarks posted two consecutive weekly declines before this week as a crisis at regional banks in the US led to the collapse of First Republic Bank, the second-largest failure in US history since the 2008 global financial crisis when Washington Mutual imploded.

The US has had three other failures this year that include Silicon Valley Bank, Signature Bank and cryptocurrency-focused lender Silvergate Capital.

The financial turmoil has raised concerns about credit conditions in the US, which are expected to deteriorate for consumers and businesses over the coming six months to their worst level since the COVID-19 pandemic, a survey of chief economists at 15 of America's biggest banks showed last month. The American Bankers Association said its Credit Conditions Index fell to 5.8 in the second quarter, from 12.5 in the first quarter. - Agencies

Oil drops after plunging 5% on recession fears

LONDON: Oil prices continued to drop on Wednesday after the world's biggest benchmarks plummeted 5 per cent a day earlier as a crisis at mid-sized banks in the US rattled markets and raised concerns about a recession and lower crude demand. Brent, the benchmark for two thirds of the world's oil, was 1.89 per cent lower at \$73.90 a barrel at 11.22pm Kuwait time on Wednesday, its lowest level since March. The US benchmark oil contract, WTI, traded under \$70 per barrel Wednesday for the first time since OPEC+ cut output a month ago in a bid to bolster prices.

Brent settled 5 per cent lower at \$75.32 while

The Board of Directors of **Kuwait Telecommunications Company (stc)** is pleased to announce to its shareholders that the company has achieved a net profit of KD 8.2 million (earnings per share 8 fils) for the three months period ended 31 March 2023.

Q1 - 2023

Total Revenue

▲ 12.7%

86.6

KD Million

Q1 - 2023

EBITDA

▲ 6.4%

21.6

KD Million

Q1 - 2023

Net Profit

▲ 7.3%

8.2

KD Million

Q1 - 2023

EPS

▲ 7.3%

8

Kuwaiti fils per share

31 March 2023

Subscribers

▲ 16.4%

2.4

Million

Business

Gulf Bank holds Q1 2023 earnings webcast

Bank's loan book performing well, remains the core driver of bank's growth



Waleed Mandani

- Despite the challenging start of the year 2023 with the world economic uncertainty, political tensions and tight monetary policies, the Kuwaiti economic environment remained stable.
- Our loan book is performing well, and it remains the core driver of the Bank's growth. This growth is supported by low cost of risk, robust asset quality and comfortable capital position.

KUWAIT: Gulf Bank held its investors webcast on Tuesday (May 2, 2023) to present and discuss the Bank's financial performance for Q1-2023. The webcast was organized by EFG Hermes and presented by Waleed Mandani, Deputy and Acting Chief Executive Officer of Gulf Bank, and David Challinor, Chief Financial Officer of Gulf Bank. The discussion was moderated by Dalal Al-Dousari, Head of Investor Relations at Gulf Bank.

Operating environment

Waleed Mandani commenced the webcast with key updates regarding Gulf Bank's operating environment for Q1-2023. Mandani stated, "During the first quarter of this year, the Central Bank of Kuwait has raised the discount rate by another 50 basis points, bringing the discount rate to 4 percent, which is higher than the pre-COVID level of 3 percent. This most recent move and previous rate actions by the Central Bank of Kuwait were not in tandem with the US Fed interest rate hikes, indicating the independence and resilience of the Kuwait economy, supported by its stable and strong fundamentals. This plays out well with Gulf Bank's Kuwait-focused strategy and is evident from our first quarter results for 2023. We have demonstrated excellent progress in our strategy to drive growth and maintain good asset quality." Mandani added: "We have demonstrated excellent progress in our strategy to drive growth and maintain good asset quality. Our loan book is performing well, and it remains the core driver of the Bank's growth. This growth is supported by low cost of risk, robust asset quality and comfortable capital position."

It is also worth noting that during the first quarter of 2023, Gulf Bank had partnered with KAMCO Invest, as a lead manager, in the issuance of United Real Estate Company's KD 80 million bonds. This was the largest Kuwaiti dinar denominated bond issuance within the real estate sector.

Solid financial performance

Mandani summarized Gulf Bank's Q1-2023 results with six key messages:

1. Net profit grew by 15 percent for the first quarter of 2023, to reach KD 17.3 million in comparison to KD 15 million reported in the first quarter of 2022.
2. Return on average equity increased to 9.9 percent for the first quarter of 2023 up from 9.2 percent during the same period last year.
3. Gross customer loans reached KD 5.1 billion, an increase of KD 286 million or 6 percent compared to the first quarter of 2022. This growth was mainly supported by our consumer segment.
4. The quality of our loan book remains resilient, as our non-performing loan ratio (NPL) for the first quarter of 2023 is at 0.8 percent, together with a strong NPL coverage ratio of 692 percent including total provisions and collaterals.
5. The relaxed capital regulatory minimums that were introduced in 2020 are now completely restored to their pre-COVID levels starting from first of January 2023. With that, at the end of the first quarter of 2023, our Tier 1 ratio had a buffer of 187 basis points, and our capital adequacy ratio had a buffer of 207 basis points. These buffers have allowed the Bank to grow its businesses in line with its strategy.
6. Gulf Bank remains an 'A' rated bank by major credit rating agencies. Our current position stands as follows:
 - Moody's Investors Service maintained the Long-Term Deposits Rating of "A3" with a "Stable" outlook.

- Capital Intelligence affirmed the Bank's Long-Term Foreign Currency Rating of "A+" with a "Stable" outlook.
- Fitch Ratings affirmed the Bank's Long-Term Issuer Default Rating at "A" with a "Stable" outlook, with Viability Rating of 'bbb-'.

Increasing profitability

Gulf Bank's CFO, David Challinor, discussed Gulf Bank's Q1-2023 results in details by saying: "Net profit grew from 15.0 to 17.3. The increase of 2.3 was mainly driven by an increase of 2.6 in net interest income which was driven by strong loan growth from last year coupled with the impact of the rate hikes. Also, higher non-interest income of 2.3 due to improved fee and dividend. This was offset by an increase in our operating expenses of 1.6 and total provisions and impairments of 0.9."

Challinor highlighted on the Return on Equity and said: "Return on Equity improved by 0.7 percent to reach 9.9 percent. It's also worth noting that Q1 2023 represented the 7th consecutive quarter of profit expansion."

Gulf Bank's financial position

Challinor also explained Gulf Bank's financial position. He presented the Bank's mix of assets and highlighted its changes over the last 12 months by saying: "Our total assets increased by 328 or 5 percent to reach 6.8 billion. This was largely driven by a 257 or 5 percent increase in Net Loans." He continued: "Loans and Advances to customers grew by a 286 or 6 percent year on year, supported by both our Corporate and Consumer segments although at a much faster pace from the Consumer segment as we recorded very strong growth of 12 percent year on year."

On Customer deposits, Challinor stated: "Customer Deposits declined by 2 percent year on year to reach 4.2 billion. We saw our CASA ratio decline to 35.3 percent in first quarter of 2023 versus 41 percent of last year, however, remains stable in comparison to December 2022. The decline is due to migration to term deposits due to the higher rate environment."

On medium-term borrowing, Challinor said: "We have increased our medium-term borrowings by 120 percent year on year which resulted in further diversification of our funding profile and improvement in overall duration."

Regulatory capital

On Gulf Bank's capital, Challinor said: "Our Tier 1 ratio was 13.9 percent, which is above our regulatory minimum of 12 percent. Our Capital Adequacy Ratio of 16.1 percent is well above our regulatory minimum of 14 percent."

Challinor also indicated that as of 31 March, 2023, the Bank's risk weighted assets grew by 6 percent, mainly driven by year-on-year growth in the loan book.

On the Bank's leverage ratio, Challinor said: "Our leverage ratio as of 31 March, 2023 was 9.3 percent, which is at similar levels to same period of last year, and well above the 3 percent regulatory minimum."

Regarding the liquidity ratios, Challinor stated: "Our quarterly average daily Liquidity Coverage Ratio, which was 279 percent, and the Net Stable Funding Ratio was 109 percent. It's worth noting that both ratios are still well above regulatory minimums of 100 percent." He also added: "Also, the previous relaxed regulatory minimums for the Liquidity Ratios and Capital Adequacy Ratio have now been completely restored back to the pre-COVID levels at the start of Q1 2023."



David Challinor

- The low level of cost of risk was a result of exceptional quality of our loan book that continues to remain resilient in a higher rate environment.
- The significant tightening and refinement of our credit policy during COVID and beyond has placed the Bank in a very strong position in this higher rate environment.

Q&A

Following the management presentation of Gulf Bank's performance for Q1-2023, the call was open for participants' questions. Dalal Al-Dousari, head of Investor Relations at Gulf Bank, moderated the Q&A session.

Margins

The Q&A session started with a question about margins and if there is any pressure to increasing funding cost and CASA Challinor responded: "The NIM was pressured in Q1, and we saw a drop on a consecutive quarterly basis, even though year on year it increased. In Q1, all the various regulatory liquidity ratios were reinstated to their pre-COVID levels. So, for example, the Loan to Deposit ratio, which was at 95 percent for the full year 2022, was lowered to the pre-COVID maximum of 90 percent. This caused upward pressure on the cost of deposits, particularly at the one-year tenure, as banks in market offered very attractive rates to customers to move to the new regulatory ratios." Challinor added: "The good news is we did see the monthly growth in interest expense slow during the quarter so our view would be we are potentially getting close to a top in the cost of funds, at current discount rate levels. There hasn't been a CBK discount rate increase since January, so it remains to be seen whether there will be more increases in 2023. We have our retail book continuing to reprice for loans moving past the 5-year tenure so that will act to increase the overall asset yield of the portfolio and support margin expansion. Also, our CASA levels have remained stable this quarter at 35 percent." He also added: "I think, as I said on the Q4 2022 call, we should expect to see some level of margin expansion in 2023 but the exact quantum and specific timing across quarters is very difficult to say in this environment."

Loan book growth

A question was raised regarding the loan book growth and whether to expect the pace of growth to slow down with the rate hikes Challinor commented: "I think it's useful to discuss the retail and corporate books separately." Challinor added: "On the retail side, we grew our book by 0.8 percent in Q1 against a system that showed zero growth. Clearly the higher rate environment is curtail growth in the market. But our strategy remains, which is to grow faster than the market in retail, which we did in 2022, and we are continuing this trend into 2023. So, our outlook is that we expect to continue to outperform the market in retail, albeit at a lower headline pace than what we saw in 2022 due to a slowing market." He also added: "On the corporate side, we saw limited drawdowns from existing customers, and given where rates are at, some customers paid down existing debt. I've said before the strategy with corporate is one of optimization, so we're looking to improve the overall return on the book including generating more fee income which we did in the quarter."

Improved asset quality

A question was raised regarding credit cost and asset quality and the driver of the improvement and if there is any pressure on provisions. Challinor commented: "In Q1 we took total specific provision of KD 14.2m and had strong recoveries of KD 7 million which resulted in a net credit cost of KD 7.2 million. This translates into a cost of risk of 56 basis points. So, the net credit costs continue to be very low and the trend from

2022, where we saw a full year 50 basis point cost of risk, is continued." Challinor continued: "Now, in terms of the Specific Provision of KD 14.2 million about half related to provisioning requirements in respect of the ageing of existing NPLs. The other half related to additional conservative measures we decided to take given the uncertainty of the higher rate environment. So specifically, we fully provided all impaired retail loans that were currently in the 50 percent provision bucket and wrote them off from an accounting perspective. But clearly any collections on these in the future will be booked as recoveries. And we also increased coverage on a corporate loan. So, the important point is the KD 14.2 million in Q1 is not indicative of what I would see as the future run rate for the quarterly specific provision, as half of it related to what I believe were one-off conservative measures." He also continued: "When we look at how the loan book is currently performing, the good news is, despite the higher rate environment, the quality of the loan portfolio continues to remain very resilient. Not only are all the asset quality metrics in excellent shape, but the underlying NPL generation in Q1 was only KD 6 million which on a portfolio of KD 5.2 billion of customer loans, and given where rates now are, is an exceptional great result. In fact, this level of quarterly NPL generation is lower than any time in at least the last three years and is half the average quarterly generation for the 2022 year. Also, the stage 2 percentage also continues to be very low at only 4.8 percent. And our buffer over IFRS 9 provisioning requirements of KD 139 million or 46 percent is now the highest it's ever been since the introduction of IFRS 9."



Dalal Al-Dousari

Operating expense

A question was raised regarding cost to income ratio trend. Challinor commented: "Operating expenses were up 8 percent year on year, but they were down 8 percent from Q4 2022. In fact, the Q1 23 number of KD 21.4 million is lower than what we saw in Q2 22." He continued: "The cost to income ratio is currently at 46 percent which is down from the fourth quarter 2022 level of 47.8 percent. We're likely to have less volume related costs in 2023 but we still have the transformation ongoing. I've said before, following the completion of the transformation we will look to extract cost and efficiency benefits. Having said that, we continue to optimize the cost and revenue base in order to help drive meaningful improvements in operating profits," he added.

Business collaboration

A question was raised on the latest update on proposed business collaboration with ABK. Mandani commented: "The most recent disclosures Gulf Bank made in relation to the potential collaboration between Gulf Bank and ABK was on November 23, 2022. The disclosure stated that Gulf Bank obtained the approval of the Central Bank of Kuwait regarding the engagement of McKinsey & Company as the Bank's consultant to carry out the feasibility study." He added: "We will disclose any future material information in this regard as and when it becomes available."

Lulu Hypermarket joins in S African National Day celebrations

KUWAIT: Lulu Hypermarket Kuwait joined the South African Embassy in Kuwait to celebrate the South African National Day on May 2, 2023. The event was held at the Salwa Sabah Al-Ahmad Ballroom at Marina Hotel. During this occasion The Embassy in Kuwait organized an exhibition to showcase the various South African products available in Kuwait. Lulu Hypermarket attended the exhibition and showcased its range of imported South African products.

Lulu Hypermarket Kuwait has its own procurement sourcing center in South Africa, which allows them to import more than 1,000 South African products from over 100 brands. These products include groceries, fresh produce, and many other items. On this occasion, Mohamed Haris, the Director of Lulu Hypermarket Kuwait, conveyed his national day wishes to the Ambassador of the Republic of South Africa to Kuwait Dr Manelisi Genge. The participation of Lulu Hypermarket in the event was well-received by attendees, who appreciated the opportunity to learn more about South African products available in Kuwait.

Commenting on the event, Director said, "We are honored to be a part of the South African National Day celebrations in Kuwait. At Lulu Hypermarket, we are committed to providing our customers with high-quality products from around the world. Our procurement product sourcing center in South Africa allows us to import a wide range of South African products, which are popular with our customers in Kuwait." The participation of Lulu Hypermarket Kuwait in the South African National Day celebrations highlights the growing cultural and economic ties between South Africa and



Kuwait. With its extensive range of imported South African products, Lulu Hypermarket Kuwait is playing an important role in promoting trade and commerce between the two countries.

Non-oil sectors gain traction in Saudi, UAE

ABU DHABI: Business activity in the non-oil private sector economies of Saudi Arabia and the UAE continued to improve in April on higher output and new orders. The reading for Saudi Arabia, the Arab world's largest economy, on the Riyadh Bank purchasing managers' index hit 59.6 in April, from 58.7 in March. This was well above the neutral 50 mark that separates growth from contraction, as new orders in the kingdom rose at their fastest pace in more than eight and a half years.

New orders increased at the fastest rate since September 2014 as stronger domestic demand offset a slight drop in export sales, while job creation also continued in April, marking the 13th consecutive monthly rise in total employment numbers.

Customer demand was buttressed by rising tourism numbers and higher consumer spending, as well as new business opportunities related to major infrastructure projects in the kingdom, according to businesses surveyed.

Despite growing cost pressures — due to both input prices and staff wages rising again, while raw materials appreciated due to the recent weakness in the US dollar — future output expectations were still optimistic.

Increased government spending, as part of the kingdom's investment strategy under Vision 2030, is helping to boost non-oil gross domestic product growth and job creation. Saudi Arabia's non-oil economy will continue to gain traction, with a growth of 5 per cent expected in the non-oil private sector this year. This will be supported by higher government capital expenditure, Public Investment Fund projects, robust credit growth, the continued development of the retail and entertainment sectors and employment gains among Saudis and residents, according to Fitch Ratings.

Meanwhile, business activity in the UAE's non-oil private sector registered a "robust improvement" last month, driven by the fastest growth in new business since November 2021.

The seasonally adjusted S&P Global purchasing managers' index of the Arab world's second-largest economy, climbed to 56.6 in April, from 55.9 in March, as businesses raised output sharply and increased their inventories and staffing levels to meet improved customer demand driven by receding cost pressures. — Agencies

Lifestyle

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KUWAIT: Chairman of the board of directors of Gulf Cables Asaad Al-Banwan (left) and Vice Chairman Eng Bader Nasser Al-Kharafi during the general assembly meeting.



The General Assembly meeting of the Gulf Cables & Electrical Industries Group Co. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat

Gulf Cables to distribute cash dividend of 60 fils per share

Company continues its growth momentum despite economic challenges

KUWAIT: The Gulf Cables & Electrical Industries Group Co (KSCP) at its ordinary general assembly meeting approved the distribution of cash dividends of 60 fils per share to shareholders registered with the company in accordance with the rules in force at Boursa Kuwait. Chairman of the Board of Directors Asaad Al-Banwan said: "The company continued its successful path due to efforts by the executive management and based on the implementation of the plans and directives of the board of directors, which were based on a number of objectives. This strategy took into account the rapid economic changes global and local economies are facing and ensures our steady progress on the path to achieving sustainable profitability."

Vice Chairman of the Board of Directors at Gulf Cables Bader Nasser Al-Kharafi said after the board meeting: "The company has become, as its shareholders aspire, a diversified investment system that operates within the framework of a holding entity. The company continued its planned expansion in accordance with the strategic plan approved by the board of directors and approved by the general assembly."

Al-Kharafi added that despite the challenging local and global economic conditions, the group's growth momentum continued on the business front. "The company has achieved a quantum leap in its performance through the diversification of its income sources, as many tools and companies that cover different sectors, whether operational or service based, fall under its umbrella, which ensures its financial as well as operational stability," Al-Kharafi explained.

Al-Kharafi added "the company, as promised to its shareholders, has achieved a large part of its strategic objectives that guarantee its sustainable profitability within the framework of integrated financial stability".

Financial performance

Gulf Cables achieved a total revenue of KD 113 million for the year 2022, with a growth rate of 39 percent, compared to a total of KD 81.3 million achieved in 2021. The group's total revenues consist of three main components — cable sales, investment revenues and service providing revenues.

Book value

The total equity of Gulf Cables' shareholders increased in 2022 to reach KD 227.8 million compared to KD 227 million at the end of 2021, which led to an increase in the book value of a share to KD 1.093 compared to KD 1.086 at the end of 2021. According to Al-Kharafi: "Total revenues from cable sales amounted to KD 99.3 million, compared to KD 65.5 million for the year 2021, as the parent company achieved sales related to cable products at a value of KD 77.1 million, compared to KD 50.3 million for the year 2021, with an annual growth rate of 53.4 percent." He said the subsidiary company in the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan (Gulf Cable and Multi Industries Com-

pany) achieved sales of KD 22.2 million, compared to KD 15.2 million in 2021, with an annual growth rate of 46.5 percent. "This growth in cable revenue is due to higher demand from the private sector following the recovery from the COVID pandemic and growth in export sales at our subsidiary," Al-Kharafi added.

HEISCO acquisition

Al-Kharafi clarified that the group's strategy regarding the acquisition of 28.3 percent of the shares of the shipping company HEISCO is flourishing through the reflection of the good and positive performance of the company on the group's share of profits, by achieving a share of the company's results for this year at a value of 1.6 percent worth KD 1 million, and cash dividends for the year 2021, amounting to KD 1.0 million.



"Our investment in HEISCO reflects the group's plan to diversify its investment portfolio and sources of income and focus on investing in companies of an industrial and operational nature to ensure the achievement and sustainability of the group's vision," he explained, pointing out that the book value of the group's ownership stake on Dec 31, 2022 amounted to KD 30.5 million, compared to KD 29.9 million on Dec 31, 2021.

National investments

Gulf Cables has raised its stake in ownership of the National Investments Company during 2022 to reach about 27.0 percent, compared to 25.4 percent at the end of 2021. This is in continuation and realization of the group's absolute belief that the group becomes a major shareholder in this type of unique investment opportunity that is characterized by its stable nature and diversified assets that achieve the highest possible rate of return, distinguished by high quality and diversified services with highly efficient management.

The group's ownership in National Investments Company reached this year a share of KD 2.1 million, as well as cash dividends for the year 2021 amount-

ing to KD 9.6 million. It is worth noting that the book value of the group's ownership stake on Dec 31, 2022 amounted to KD 54.9 million, compared to KD 55.0 million on Dec 31, 2021.

Joint venture with Riyadh Cables and Electrical Industries Company

Gulf Cables with a total capital of KD 5.0 million determined the main purpose of the company, which is the manufacture of electrical and electronic wires and cables, with the group contributing 50 percent of the capital of the new company.

The establishment of the company comes to achieve the goals and plans of the group represented in promoting its products and future aspirations through obtaining the latest technologies related to the manufacture of high-voltage cables in accordance

Company, with profits amounting to KD 14.9 million and KD 4.1 million respectively, with a total of KD 19.0 million recorded. Directly in the retained earnings account, the group also obtained dividends from its investments during the year amounting to KD 6.7 million, compared to KD 1.6 million in 2021," Al-Kharafi explained.

Future outlook

Looking to the future, Al-Kharafi said: "We are confident of our ability to achieve the desired growth through the strategy set by the board of directors, as the group keeps pace with modern technology in the industry. Within this framework, the group signed a contract to purchase a new production line for low and medium voltage cables, which will reflect positively on the speed of production and the size of the parent company's production capacity starting from 2024, as it will in turn meet the expected growth of the markets and increase the size of the local and regional presence of the group."

Loan reduction

The total value of term loans and Islamic financing facilities decreased by KD 28.2 million to reach KD 43.9 million at the end of 2022, compared to KD 72.1 million at the end of 2021.

Upgrade continuation

Al-Kharafi pointed out the group's management systems, policies and procedures will continue to be updated regularly and adopt new global digital transformation technologies to gain more flexibility and competitiveness and enhance efficiency across the group's companies and sectors.

Customer needs and the first market

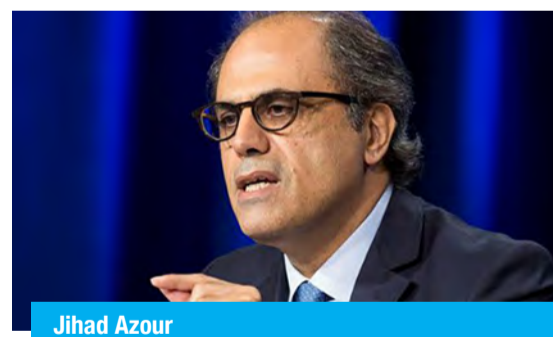
"The company is keen to understand and fulfill the needs of their customers, as well as make every effort to satisfy them by focusing on quality and developing staff in a way that supports achieving the best returns and maximizing the value of shareholder equity," Al-Kharafi said. He drew attention to the group's presence among the premier market companies on Boursa Kuwait. "It is an elite market for the best listed companies that are characterized by high liquidity and medium to large market value, in addition to providing a high degree of transparency and commitment by the companies of this market."

Exceptional vision

Al-Kharafi explained the importance of continuing the company's unique culture with regards to "innovation-driven entrepreneurship, which is the main pillar of our continuous success year after year, keeping pace with the group's vision, which is based on investing expertise, financial and human resources and assets, which in turn increases the streams of income and enhances the growth of revenues and profitability of the group."

Exceptional profit

"Significantly, this year the investments achieved an exceptional profit, mainly due to the profits resulting from the exit from our investment in Egyptian Kuwaiti Holding Company and Kuwait Gate Holding



Jihad Azour

Middle East, North Africa growth set for 'soft patch': IMF

DUBAI: Middle Eastern and North African economies are headed for a slowdown this year, the International Monetary Fund said Wednesday, warning impoverished countries including conflict-hit Sudan will continue to suffer high inflation.

Growth will hit a "soft patch", down from last year's 5.3 percent to 3.1 percent in 2023, the IMF said in its regular regional outlook. "The decline in growth is an acceptable result in the context of addressing the most difficult economic problem that we suffer from in a large number of countries in the world"—inflation, said Jihad Azour, the IMF's Middle East and Central Asia director.

The report covers 32 countries and territories from the wealthy, resource-rich Gulf to North Africa and war-torn Yemen as well as Central Asia and Pakistan. It said low-income countries in those regions would recover from last year's contraction of 0.6 percent to modest growth of 1.3 percent, while inflation would ease from 83 percent to a still-high 46 percent.

However, Azour said the drop "is not sufficient compared to the needs of these countries", which include Sudan, Yemen, Mauritania, Somalia and Djibouti. The economic impact of fighting in Sudan, which broke out last month between rival generals and has paralyzed the country, is hard to assess, he told AFP. "It is difficult to predict, especially since this conflict erupted a short time ago, and it is not clear how it will develop." Sudan's long-term problems and "additional burdens" imposed by the con-

flict make it "difficult to maintain a degree of economic stability given the already weak economic structure", Azour said.

"What we can see so far is that there's an additional toll on neighboring countries in terms of refugees, and there are additional risks and uncertainties also on other countries," the IMF official later told journalists at a news conference. Headline inflation in the regions covered by the report would remain unchanged at 14.8 percent, while real GDP growth for oil-exporting countries would slow from last year's 5.7 percent to 3.1 percent, the IMF said, attributing the decrease to a cut in crude production.

The OPEC+ cartel slashed production by two million barrels per day in October. Major oil powers announced a further cut of one million barrels per day last month.

"The extension of the OPEC+ agreement to reduce oil production had an impact on the oil-exporting countries," Azour said. He also said closer diplomatic ties across the region, including a March agreement by heavyweight rivals Saudi Arabia and Iran to resume ties, lower "tension" and were "a good thing for the economy". "All breakthroughs are positive, as they reduce risks on the one hand, and open new horizons for economic movement and investment on the other hand." —AFP

US pick Ajay Banga confirmed as next World Bank president

WASHINGTON: The World Bank confirmed Ajay Banga was selected as its next president on Wednesday, taking charge at a pivotal time for the development lender as it looks to better address climate change. "The Board looks forward to working with Mr. Banga on the World Bank Group Evolution process," the bank wrote in a statement published shortly after the board voted to approve his leadership for a five-year term. He will take over the role from David Malpass on June 2. The World Bank president is traditionally an American citizen chosen by the United States.

Banga will bring vast experience running large organizations and deep knowledge of the digital economy. Raised in India, he would bring a firsthand understanding of the challenges that developing countries face. "Ajay is uniquely equipped to lead the World Bank at this critical moment in history," President Biden had said in a statement. —AFP



Ajay Banga

Indian airline Go First files for bankruptcy

NEW DELHI: Debt-laden Indian budget airline Go First has filed for bankruptcy protection, blaming "faulty" engines from US aerospace company Pratt & Whitney for the grounding of about half its fleet. Go First was India's fifth-biggest domestic carrier as of March, with 6.9 percent of the market share, according to government figures.

The carrier has been locked in a dispute with its exclusive supplier of engines for its Airbus A320neo fleet over issues it said had cost it \$1.32 billion in lost revenues and additional expenses. Its bankruptcy was a necessary step due to the "ever-increasing number of failing engines supplied by Pratt & Whitney's International Aero Engines", which had led to the grounding of 25 aircraft, Go First said in a statement on Tuesday.

It went on to accuse Pratt & Whitney of failing to comply with an arbitration order directing it to release spare leased engines that would have allowed a return to full operations. The engine-maker said in a statement that it was complying with the arbitration ruling and was continuing "to prioritize delivery schedules for all customers". Go First, owned by Indian conglomerate Wadia Group, said on its website that it had cancelled flights scheduled from May 3 to May 5 for "operational reasons". Local media reports said Go First check-in counters were deserted at airports in New Delhi and other cities. —AFP

Lifestyle

Colombia grapples with Escobar's hippopotamus legacy



Escobar's legacy

A hippo -- descendant from a small herd introduced by drug kingpin Pablo Escobar -- is seen in the wild in a lake near the Hacienda Napoles theme park. — AFP photos



A man walks past a mural of deceased drug lord Pablo Escobar at the Pablo Escobar neighbourhood in Medellin, Antioquia department, Colombia.



A hippo -- descendant from a small herd introduced by drug kingpin Pablo Escobar -- is seen in the wild in a lake near the Hacienda Napoles theme park.



A wild hippo -- descendant from a small herd introduced by drug kingpin Pablo Escobar -- eats grass as it roams near houses in Doradal, Antioquia Department, Colombia.

In their homeland in Africa, they are responsible for more human deaths than almost any other animal, but in Colombia, hippopotami have become loved members of the local community and a tourist attraction. However, in a town close to the city of Medellin, this legacy of the late drug baron Pablo Escobar, is increasingly posing a problem, and one that experts think may soon turn deadly.

Several months ago, one of hippos burst into a school yard in Doradal with both pupils and parents present. "The mothers get scared when they see an animal of that size," teacher Dunia Arango told AFP. This time, the uninvited guest chomped at some fruit trees before moving off into the adjacent fields. But a bloated hippo have set up home in a lake just 20 meters (yards) from the school.

"There are about 35 children playing that could approach them and provoke a tragedy," said David Echeverri, an official from the local environment authority. "While they may look very calm, at any moment, given their highly unpredictable behavior, they can attack, as has happened before," he added.

John Aristides, 33, remembers very well that afternoon in October 2021 when he was fishing on the banks of a creek when a hippopotamus "lunged

at me and hit me on the head with its lips." He slipped trying to get away and was bitten on the arm. "It grabbed me and threw me two meters," he added. "It didn't tear off my arm because they have very wide teeth." But Aristides still spent a month in hospital recovering.

That is the closest Colombia has come to a fatal en-

counter but "if we don't do anything, then we expect to have thousands of hippopotami wandering around" in the future, said Echeverri, who two weeks ago buried a hippo that had been hit by a driver. After cocaine king Escobar was gunned down by police in 1993, his private ranch and collection of exotic animals, including hippos, were left to nature in an area of abundant vegetation and where there are no predators.

The hippo numbers exploded and there are now 160 of the two ton beasts wandering freely around this part of northwestern Colombia. A study by the National University estimated that the local population of hippopotami could rise to a thousand by 2035. Biologists say local fauna such as the manatee, classified as an endangered species by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature, have been displaced. Last year, the environment ministry declared hippos an "invasive species," opening the door to a possible cull, one of several solutions being sought to the potentially growing problem.

'Expensive and ineffective'

Fisherman Alvaro Diaz, 40, takes tourists hippopotamus watching by canoe on the Magdalena, the longest river in Colombia. When he notices the hippos are bothered, he keeps his group at least 30 meters away. "We see them very often ... we live peacefully with them," he insisted. Diaz believes, however, that the hippo population needs to be controlled through castrations and contraceptive devices. The local environment body has tried both, but Echeverri claims they were "expensive and ineffective." Echeverri says killing them "without pain, in a technically correct manner, is not easy either" given that it would involve capturing and se-



A mural reading "Medellin, money or lead" is seen at the Pablo Escobar neighborhood in Medellin, Antioquia department, Colombia.



dating them first. In a bid to save the hippos, Antioquia state, where Doradal is, announced a plan to transport 70 hippopotami to wild sanctuaries in Mexico and India.

The plan just needs approval from national authorities in all three countries. Echeverri believes this project is "possible and necessary" given he has already led a project to capture seven hippos and send them to zoos inside Colombia. Farmers complain of damage to their crops, but locals have grown fond of the animals. "Don't take them all. It's already become our culture to live with them and it's great to have this population with us," said Arango, keeping one eye on her pupils. — AFP



Hippos — descendants from a small herd introduced by drug kingpin Pablo Escobar — are seen in the wild in a lake near the Hacienda Napoles theme park.

Teapots, towels, tea bags: UK in coronation retail boost

Commemorative plates, towels and tea bags are vying for attention in shop windows near Buckingham Palace, ready for the first coronation of a British monarch in 70 years. "We've ordered about three times more (memorabilia) than usual," Sador Zok, a salesman in charge of coronation merchandise at online souvenir retailer Cool Britannia, told AFP. Zok expects demand to rise as Charles III's crowning approaches on Saturday. Elsewhere, the coronation has presented an obvious marketing opportunity.

The upmarket department store Fortnum & Mason, which supplies the royal family with its tea, is selling a special organic coronation Darjeeling for the coronation for £19.95 (\$24.90) per 200 grams. "We chose Darjeeling because we understand that King Charles drinks this with a spoonful of honey," said Otilie Cunningham, one of the brand's managers. "We decided to only select organic tea gardens in Darjeeling due to His Majesty's passion for organic agriculture."

Ceramics company "Emma Bridgewater", pop-



People look at a merchandise shop selling royals souvenirs, in Windsor. — AFP photos



A hat with the portrait of Britain's King Charles III is displayed in the front window of a shop, in Windsor.



A mug with the portrait of Britain's King Charles III is displayed in the front window of a shop.

ular with royal collectors, has produced a wide variety of tableware for the occasion ranging from £12 to £28 for a mug, tea or coffee cup. All of its pieces are hand-decorated, the manufacturer says, adding that sales have started off on a high note and are expected to be better than for Queen Elizabeth II's Platinum Jubilee last year.

The coronation will also see sales of some six million coins and medals minted for the event, millions of pounds worth of jewelry, flags and banners as well as 10,000 teapots, according to forecasts by consultants the Centre for Retail Research. The cost-of-living crisis will take a back seat, with Britons and tourists expected to spend more than £245 million on souvenirs

alone—and more than £1.4 billion if the wider celebrations are included, it added.

"Lots of people buying souvenirs will be older people... less affected by the cost of living crisis—they own their houses, have a pension," said CRR director Joshua Bamfield. In the souvenir shops behind the palace, customers come in to browse an eclectic mix of royal memorabilia, looking to spend "£15 to £20", according to store manager Ismayil Vadakkethil.

The items include protective gloves embossed with the royal coat of arms, Union Jack decorated paper towels and streamers and a "monarchy forever" T-shirt featuring the king. "My mother is a fanatic royalist, she's got a glass cabinet with all of these royal

things," said Australian Julie Whitehead, 63. "So I'm going to pick up the King Charles ones for her because her cabinet is full of Queen Elizabeth ones," she added. But while King Charles items sell well, so do souvenirs featuring the monarch's late mother, who remains very popular with royal souvenir hunters.

"I prefer the queen," said Amélie Zerr, a 40-year-old French tourist, adding she was looking for a "small, kitschy souvenir" and had her heart set on a mug and a coaster. The customers have changed in recent times, Vadakkethil has noticed. "Recently I've noticed that it's not just tourists coming in. People who work next door, in the offices, the Londoners themselves, they come into the shop," he added. — AFP

Lifestyle

'Super Mario' is year's first film to pass \$1 billion globally

The Super Mario Bros. Movie easily held its first-place position on North American movie screens this weekend while its accumulated global total pushed past the \$1 billion mark, analysts said Sunday.

The video game-based film earned an estimated \$40 million for the Friday-through-Sunday period in the United States and Canada for a domestic total so far of \$490 million, industry watcher Exhibitor Relations reported.

With overseas earnings now at \$532 million, it accumulated global total has hit \$1.02 billion.

That makes "Super Mario" -- a joint project of Universal, Nintendo and Illumination studios -- the year's first film to pass the billion-dollar mark and only the 10th animation ever to do so, according to the Hollywood Reporter.

Second place, for the second straight weekend, went to bloody horror film "Evil Dead Rise" from Warner Bros., at \$12.2 million. Lily Sullivan and Alyssa Sutherland play sisters battling a demonic crew known as the Deadites.

In third was "Are You There God? It's Me, Margaret," a new comedy-drama from Gracie Films and Lionsgate Films, at \$6.8 million. Analyst Da-

vid A. Gross called that only "a fair opening" for a coming-of-age film, while adding that "reviews and audience scores are sensational."

Based on the beloved Judy Blume novel of the same name, it stars Abby Ryder Fortson as Margaret Simon, a sixth-grader navigating the challenges of that awkward age. Rachel McAdams and Kathy Bates also star.

Still strong in its sixth weekend out, Lionsgate's neo-noir "John Wick: Chapter 4" placed fourth at \$5 million. Keanu Reeves plays the titular hitman.

And showing the enduring lure of the "Star Wars" franchise, Disney's re-release of "Return of the Jedi" placed fifth, taking in \$4.8 million.

The film starring icons Mark Hamill, Harrison Ford and Carrie Fisher marks its 40th anniversary in late May. It sold more than 80 million tickets in its initial run.

Rounding out the top 10 were:

- "Dungeons & Dragons: Honor Among Thieves" (\$4.1 million)
- "Air" (\$4 million)
- "Ponniyin Selvan: II" (\$3.7 million)
- "The Covenant" (\$3.6 million)
- "Sisu" (\$3.3 million). — AFP



Lionel Richie gets coveted seat at British king's coronation

US star Lionel Richie is among the celebrities handed invitations for King Charles III's coronation, according to Buckingham Palace, which has kept the guest list tightly under wraps.

Richie, 73, already confirmed as one of the headline acts at a star-studded concert in the grounds of Windsor Castle the day after, will be present in London's Westminster Abbey for the May 6 coronation, the palace said in a statement.



Lionel Richie

The four-time Grammy Award-winning singer has sold more than 125 million albums worldwide.

In 2019, he became the first global ambassador for Charles's charitable Prince's Trust which supports struggling 11 to 30-year-olds get their lives on track.

A full list of invitees has not yet been published but other celebrities attending, according to a partial list issued by officials Monday, included Edward Enninful, editor-in-chief of British Vogue.

Also invited are Kelly Jones, lead singer of the band Stereophonics, and restoration and recycling champion Jay Blades, presenter of the hit BBC television series "The Repair Shop".

An unnamed group of Nobel prize winners also made the list for the event on Saturday which has seen numbers slashed from the

8,000 invited to his mother's coronation in 1953 to just 2,000.

Rather than stuff the abbey with aristocrats as for previous coronations, Charles has reportedly been determined that the ceremony reflects modern British life.

He is said to have chosen "meritocratic not aristocratic" criteria that have seen invitations sent to representatives of charitable organisations supported by the King and Queen Camilla.

Others included are recipients of the British Empire Medal who have been honoured for good works such as English schoolboy Max Woosey, who raised hundreds of thousands of pounds for a hospice by sleeping in a tent in his garden for three years. — AFP

Final portrait: Zimbabwean banker cashes in with tombstone art

Pick a portrait of yourself, have the picture hand-carved on a gravestone of your own design -- and pay for the monument before you die. That is how a former banker in Zimbabwe, Tafadzwa Machokoto, found an unusual formula for making a hugely successful business.

Four years ago, the 35-year-old holder of a computer science degree quit a job with a leading bank, joining the army of Zimbabweans trekking to neighbouring South Africa in search of a better life.

A year later, after a not-so-rosy stint, he returned to live in Rugare, a rundown district of the capital Harare where the big business is making



Denzel Karombe uses a drill bit and tapping stone to etch a portrait at his workstation in Rugare township Harare.



Denzel Karombe a 19-year-old school leaver who engraves portrait artworks onto polished black granite tombstones for Nyumba Yanga a tombstone-making business uses a drill bit and tapping stone to etch a portrait at his workstation in Rugare township Harare, Zimbabwe. — AFP photos



Denzel Karombe shows off the detailed etchings made by a drill bit and tapping stone.



Denzel Karombe uses a drill bit and tapping stone to etch a portrait at his workstation in Rugare township Harare.



Jessica Magilazi a Zimbabwean based in the diaspora, polishes a tombstone bearing a portrait of her mother which her family recently commissioned with Nyumba Yanga.



Jessica Magilazi a Zimbabwean displays the passport photo used to create the artwork on the tombstone bearing a portrait of her mother.

tombstones. Competition in the funeral sector is ferocious, and Machokoto -- pardon the pun -- quickly learned that he had to think outside the box. His idea: have artisans delicately chisel portraits of the dead on tombstones.

"We need to remember our loved ones not only by their name but also by their face," said Machokoto, flanked by a mason carving a portrait into black granite at a roadside yard.

He and business partner Brian Haruperi offer people options for designing their own tombstone, choosing a portrait they want, crafting the epitaph and paying for the service before they pass on.

Engraved portraits of the dead are a common sight in graveyards in Europe and elsewhere, though they are usually etched by laser.

For a similar idea to work in Zimbabwe, the pair had to pitch hand-crafted labour and overcome entrenched traditions and taboos.

Funeral styles in this southern African nation are often conservative, and it is typically the responsibility of the bereaved -- not the deceased -- to choose the monument.

But, Machokoto said, many people are swayed by the portrait -- and the idea of saving their loved-ones part of the funeral costs ahead of time.

Clients make a down payment of 50 percent, and pay 10 percent of the balance every subsequent month.

Lasting image

"A lot of people are in awe when they see" the portrait, Machokoto said.

One client is Jessica Magilazi, a 43-year-old Zimbabwean based in South Africa where is a domestic worker. She lost her mother when she was still an infant.

Her family had no picture of the mother except for the mugshot she had used in her passport.

They settled for that for the tombstone. "When I look at the portrait it's like I am seeing my mother in real life," said Magilazi, who had travelled from Gqeberha (formerly Port Elizabeth) for the unveiling of the tombstone at her mother's grave in Highfield township.

"Those who will come after us will have an idea of how she looked," she said.

Thriving business

Machokoto's business is called Nyumba Yanga -- "My House" in the Malawian Chewa language, a nod to the Malawian railway workers who initially began the township.

It sells 20 to 30 tombstones a month at an average price of US\$350 -- a fortune in a country where the average monthly salary is around \$230.

The most expensive tombstone he and Haruperi have sold is a US\$5,000 "custom-made,

dome-shaped, three-metre (10-feet) -long structure" ordered by a Zimbabwean diplomat for his late mother. The business employs 12 full-time stoneworkers and several part timers, and attracts clients from across southern Africa and as far afield as Britain.

"We had to be innovative and that way we have managed to overtake many who were in the business before us," Machokoto said.

The artists they use are school-leavers in a township ravaged by unemployment and drugs, whom they train from scratch to carve and inscribe. "I didn't learn art formally," said 19-year-old Denzel Karombe as he chiselled out a portrait from a black-and-white photograph. — AFP

Sports

Lakers overpower Warriors 117-112 as Davis leads defensive masterclass

Knicks beat Heat 111-105, square series

News in brief

Kuwait skating team in UAE

KUWAIT: Kuwait's figure skating team will participate in the 2023 UAE International Championship in the Emirati city of Al Ain on Thursday, and will last for three days. The championship will attract 267 female players from Arab and foreign countries, with the Kuwaiti team including Hessa Al-Saraawi, Sarah Al-Lahou, Dalal Al-Bader, Leah Al-Qabandi, Lara Al-Barrak, Sama Juragh, Juri Al-Mulla, Laila Al-Farsi and Dana Al-Mutlaq. Kuwait Winter Sports Club Chairman Fahed Al-Ajmi, speaking to KUNA, stressed the importance of participation of Kuwaiti players in this tournament to enhance their performance levels, saying that the Kuwaiti team will arrive in the UAE on Thursday. Al-Ajmi explained that the Kuwaiti team is completely prepared for the event thanks to recent intensive training, praising the players' commitment and keenness. — KUNA



Kuwait's figure skating team

Ex-boxing champ arrested

LOS ANGELES: Former world heavyweight boxing champion Deontay Wilder was arrested in Los Angeles early Tuesday for possession of a concealed weapon, police said. The Los Angeles Police Department said Wilder was detained in the early hours of Tuesday after being stopped by police while driving his Rolls Royce car in Hollywood. He was subsequently booked on suspicion of carrying a concealed firearm in the vehicle. He was released at around 6:35 am after making bail set at \$35,000, the LAPD and Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department said. According to the TMZ.com entertainment news website, Wilder was pulled over by police who alleged the windows of his car were illegally tinted and his license plate was obstructed. Officers subsequently reported smelling "burnt marijuana" coming from the vehicle and conducted a search, which uncovered a firearm. TMZ cited unidentified sources as saying Wilder was "cooperative and nice" throughout the incident. — AFP

Leeds appoint new manager

LONDON: Leeds have sacked manager Javi Gracia and appointed Sam Allardyce for the rest of the season as they bid to avoid relegation from the Premier League. Having already removed director of football Victor Orta, the club announced the departure of Spaniard Gracia on Wednesday along with his backroom staff. Gracia, who only arrived at Leeds in February, leaves the club after four defeats in five Premier League games - they are outside the drop zone on goal difference with four games remaining. "Leeds can confirm Javi Gracia will leave the club after 12 games in charge," a club statement said. "Zigor Aranalde, Mikel Antia and Juan Solla, who joined alongside Gracia, will also leave the club. "We thank Javi and his team for their efforts under difficult circumstances. "The remaining four games of the season will be overseen by experienced head coach Sam Allardyce." — AFP

Los Angeles down Union

LOS ANGELES: Los Angeles FC booked their place in the final of the CONCACAF Champions League on Tuesday after defeating Philadelphia Union 3-0 in their semi-final second leg to secure a 4-1 aggregate victory. Midfielder Timothy Tillman opened the scoring for Los Angeles after 13 minutes, bundling home from close range after Union goalkeeper Andre Blake's superb diving reflex save from an Ilie Sanchez header. That left Los Angeles in control after entering the second leg with a slender advantage after grabbing an all-important away goal in last week's 1-1 first-leg draw in Philadelphia. Philadelphia's hopes of hauling themselves back into the tie fizzled with a limp second-half display and their task got harder on 59 minutes when Olivier Mbaizo saw red after a second yellow card. Los Angeles made the game safe in the 82nd minute when striker Carlos Vela picked out Kwadwo Opoku inside the area and the Ghanaian blasted an emphatic finish high into the net. — AFP

SAN FRANCISCO: Anthony Davis led a defensive masterclass as the Los Angeles Lakers defeated the Golden State Warriors 117-112 on the road to take a 1-0 lead in their NBA Western Conference playoff series on Tuesday. The eagerly anticipated showdown between the two Californian glamour clubs lived up to the billing as the Lakers held off a thrilling late Golden State rally to take a crucial early advantage against the NBA champions in the best-of-seven series.

The Lakers appeared to be cruising to victory after opening up a 14-point lead with less than six minutes remaining in the fourth quarter after a clinical defensive performance at San Francisco's Chase Center. But the Warriors came roaring back with a flurry of three-pointers and Stephen Curry knotted the score at 112-112 to complete a 14-0 Golden State run with Imin 38sec remaining.

Yet just when it looked as if the Warriors were building unstoppable momentum, the Lakers regrouped to snatch victory. A D'Angelo Russell layup edged them back in front at 114-112 before a LeBron James free throw increased the Lakers lead to three. Jordan Poole then missed a game-tying 27-foot three-point effort with 9.7sec left on the clock before the Lakers drew two free throws for German international Dennis Schroder to make the game safe.

"We know this team - they're the defending champions. No lead is safe against them, they can get hot at any moment," Davis said of the Warriors. "But this is just a mindset for our team, knowing we can beat this team, it's a confidence-booster for us. "We've been able to get this one in game one, but we haven't done anything yet." Davis finished with 30 points, 23 rebounds, five assists and four blocks while James chipped in with 22 points, 11 rebounds, four assists and three blocks.

'An elite defender'

Russell and Schroder added 19 points each while Austin Reaves finished with 10. But it was Davis's all-round performance that stole the show for the Lakers, with the 6ft 10in (2.08m) eight-time All-Star marshalling an immense defensive effort. "He's an elite defender," Lakers coach Darvin Ham said. "He's doing exactly what I anticipated him to do. He's playing like one of the top five NBA players that he is." Ham however was quick to bring his team back to earth after a gripping win. "The biggest thing for us is not to get too happy, to stay humble and respect our opponent, but also know there is a ton of work



SAN FRANCISCO: Draymond Green #23 of the Golden State Warriors drives to the basket during the game against the Los Angeles Lakers during Game One of the Western Conference Semi-Finals of the 2023 NBA Playoffs on May 2, 2023. — AFP

left. "It's not the first to one, it's not the first one with the greatest individual performance. We've got to keep stacking performances."

Curry led the Golden State scoring with 27 points including six three-pointers while Klay Thompson had 25, also with six from beyond the arc. Warriors coach Steve Kerr said his team had finished stronger but just couldn't "get over the hump." "I thought we were the fresher team down the stretch - you saw the run we made," Kerr said. "We were right there. We gave it a great fight. Just couldn't get over the hump. So we'll be ready for game two."

Game two in the series takes place in San Francisco on Thursday. In Tuesday's other playoff game, Jalen Brunson scored 30 points as the New York Knicks defeated the Miami Heat 111-105 to square their Eastern Conference playoff semi-final series at 1-1. Brunson shot 10-of-19 from the field including six from three-point range as the Knicks finally overpowered a gutsy Miami line-up playing without injured talisman Jimmy Butler.

A tense duel that saw the lead change hands 16 times was finally settled in the fourth quarter as the Knicks stitched together a 12-3 run midway through the period that included a Brunson three-pointer. It gave New York a 99-96 lead and that rally proved decisive as they held on down the stretch to close out the win before a raucous Madison Square Garden. Brunson had berated himself after Sunday's game one loss, describing his performance as "horrific" after missing all seven of his attempts from three-point distance.

The 26-year-old playmaker was happier with his contribution on Tuesday. "A little bit better," Brunson said. "I've still got to be better on both sides of the ball. I'm happy we won, and we can learn from the win, but we've got to continue to get better." Brunson was given offensive support from Julius Randle, who finished with 25 points. RJ Barrett added 24 and Josh Hart 14. Miami's scoring was led by Caleb Martin with 22 points while Gabe Vincent finished with 21. The series now moves to Florida with game three set for Miami on Saturday. — AFP



Joel Embiid

Sixers' Joel Embiid named NBA's most valuable player

LOS ANGELES: Philadelphia 76ers star Joel Embiid was named the NBA's Most Valuable Player on Tuesday, comfortably winning a ballot ahead of the Denver Nuggets' two-time award winner Nikola Jokic. Embiid, who finished runner-up behind Jokic the past two seasons, earned the accolade after a dazzling regular season campaign that saw him average 33.1 points, 10.2 rebounds and 4.2 assists in 66 games.

Embiid beat out fellow MVP finalists Jokic and Milwaukee's Giannis Antetokounmpo in a preferential ballot. Results revealed Tuesday showed Embiid garnered 73 first place votes, with Jokic 15 and Antetokounmpo 12. "I don't know really where to start, it's been a long time coming," a delighted Embiid told the TNT network on Tuesday after his award. "A lot of hard work, I've been through a lot. And I'm not just talking about basketball, I'm talking about life, my story, how I got here and what it took for me to be here. "It feels good. I don't know what to say. Amazing."

The towering 29-year-old Cameroonian power forward helped the Sixers finish third in the Eastern Conference, but has sat out Philadelphia's last two playoff games after suffering a knee injury in the game three first round defeat of Brooklyn last week. Tuesday's MVP honor cements Embiid's status as one of the elite players in the NBA, the latest milestone on a journey that began when he was discovered at a basketball camp run by Cameroonian compatriot and former NBA player Luc Mbah a Moute. After playing a single season of US college basketball, Embiid was chosen by Philadelphia with the third overall pick in the 2014 NBA Draft.

A foot injury meant he missed the entirety of the 2014-2015 season, and further surgery in 2015 ruled him out of the 2015-2016 campaign. He finally made his regular season debut for the Sixers in October 2016, notching 20 points, seven rebounds and two blocks in a defeat to the Oklahoma City Thunder. While Embiid's talent was apparent from the outset of his NBA career, it is under Philadelphia coach Doc Rivers, who took over the Sixers in 2020, that he has flourished. Rivers has built his team and game plan around the 7ft (2.13), 280-pound (127-kilo) big man, and was also instrumental in Embiid's improved fitness. — AFP

Alcaraz earns Zverev revenge, Medvedev out of Madrid Open

MADRID: World number two Carlos Alcaraz breezed past Alexander Zverev 6-1, 6-2 to reach the Madrid Open quarter-finals on Tuesday. Third-ranked Daniil Medvedev crashed out against Russian compatriot Aslan Karatsev, 7-6 (7/1), 6-4, while Stefanos Tsitsipas eased through against Bernabe Zapata Miralles 6-3, 6-1. In the women's competition world number two Aryna Sabalenka was forced to sweat by Mayar Sherif but eventually came through 2-6, 6-2, 6-1 to reach the semi-finals.

Top-seeded Spaniard Alcaraz, who also beat Zverev in last season's Madrid final, gained revenge for the German's triumph when they met later in the 2022 French Open quarter-finals. Two-time Madrid winner Zverev, 26, was blown away in the opening set. He improved a little in the second but not sufficiently to trouble Alcaraz, who moved his opponent around at will.

"I played at a great level, I didn't let him dominate, I went on the attack the whole time, and above all, I returned really well," said Alcaraz, who won in one hour 22 minutes. "I played a complete game, and that's how we have this result—but it's not a normal result against (Zverev)." The US Open champion dropped just two points in the first set in his near-immaculate service games, and put strong pressure on the German's serve. — AFP

Cambodia set for SEA Games with Chinese flavor

PHNOM PENH: Cambodia will welcome thousands of athletes from across the region when the Southeast Asian Games begin on Friday with an opening ceremony at a new stadium built and paid for by China. The capital Phnom Penh will stage the 32nd edition of the biennial SEA Games, the first time Cambodia plays host. More than 11,000 athletes, coaches and delegates from 10 other countries will descend on the country for the Games, which run until May 17.

Regional glory is up for grabs but competitors will also have one eye on the Asian Games in China in September-October and next year's Paris Olympics. Southeast Asia's finest will take part in a host of competitions including athletics, swimming, badminton and football, as well as more obscure sports such as Kun Bokator, an ancient Cambodian martial art. The Games will welcome world-class athletes such as pole-vaulter Ernest John Obiena and weightlifter Vanessa Sarino, both from the Philippines.

But fellow Philippine weightlifter Hidilyn Diaz, a Tokyo Olympic gold medalist, will not compete. Another notable absentee is swimmer Joseph Schooling, Singapore's 2016 Olympic gold medalist, who pulled out in March saying he was "not at the level" to do his best. The Games usually take place every other year but because of the pandemic the previous edition, in the Vietnamese capital Hanoi, was just 12

Today's matches

English Premier League	
Brighton v Man United	22:00
beIN Sports Connect	
Spanish League	
Sevilla v Espanyol	20:30
beIN Sports HD 1	
beIN Sports HD 2 English	
beIN Sports Connect	
Girona v Real Mallorca	20:30
beIN Sports HD 2	
beIN Sports Fr 5 HD max	
beIN Sports Connect	
Athletic de Bilbao v Real Betis	23:00
beIN Sports HD 1	
beIN Sports HD 2 English	
beIN Sports 1 FR	
beIN Sports Connect	
Rayo Vallecano v Real Valladolid	23:00
beIN Sports HD 2	
beIN Sports HD 3 English	
beIN Sports Fr 5 HD max	
beIN Sports Connect	
Italian League Serie A	
Empoli v Bologna	21:45
beIN Sports Fr 6 HD max	
AD SPORTS Premium 2	
Udinese v Napoli	21:45
beIN Sports 2 FR	
AD SPORTS Premium 1	

months ago. The hosts topped the medal table, ahead of Thailand and Indonesia.

China influence

Cambodia and Prime Minister Hun Sen hope the Games will have benefits beyond the two weeks the country plays host. "The Games will not only promote sports but also boost Cambodia's tourism in the post-COVID-pandemic era," said tourism minister Thong Khon, who is also president of the National Olympic Committee. Cambodia has never staged the Games before, in part because of violence and instability that plagued the country throughout the back-end of the 20th century. Hun Sen's government is keen to showcase the country's stability and has gone all-out in whipping up local fervor. A successful event and a creditable medal haul could help boost national sentiment two months ahead of parliamentary elections. — AFP



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

Sports

Delhi trump Gujarat in low-scoring IPL battle

Aman hit maiden fifty in clash billed as David v Goliath

AHMEDABAD: Indian batsman Aman Khan's defiant 51 and inspired bowling helped Delhi Capitals edge out holders Gujarat Titans by five runs in a low-scoring Indian Premier League thriller on Tuesday. Aman hit his maiden fifty to lift his team from a precarious 23-5 to 130-8 in a clash billed as David v Goliath between bottom-placed Delhi and table-toppers Gujarat in Ahmedabad. Gujarat pace spearhead Mohammed Shami's bowling figures of 4-11 - his IPL best - went in vain but was named man of the match. Delhi bowlers led by left-arm quick Khaleel Ahmed and Ishant Sharma limited Gujarat to 125-6 despite an unbeaten 59 by skipper Hardik Pandya and Rahul Tewatia's seven-ball 20.

"Our bowlers were absolutely amazing," Delhi skipper David Warner said. "Our bowlers were amazing. Our batters struggled but credit to the way Shami bowled. We just find ways to lose wickets in clumps. I don't know what's happening with our batting." The left-handed Tewatia, called "iceman" for his ability to hit sixes in pressure situations, smashed Anrich Nortje for three straight hits over the fence in the 19th over but fell in the 20th. Ishant returned fig-

ures of 2-23 and held his nerve in the final over with Gujarat needing 12 to win and falling short.

Gujarat, who had a fairytale IPL debut after they won the crown last season, remain strong to make the play-offs with six wins in nine matches. Delhi, coached by Ricky Ponting, are have registered their third win in nine matches to keep their play-off hopes alive. It was Aman's 44-ball knock that made Delhi fightback as he put on key partnerships including fifty-plus stands with Axar Patel (24) and Ripal Patel (23) to give his team a total, which ultimately made them win their third match in nine outings.

Aman smashed three fours and three sixes in his 44-ball knock before falling to Rashid Khan's leg spin. Shami got Phil Salt for a first ball duck and then Rilee Rossouw, for eight, in his two overs before a double strike in his third. In reply, Khaleel struck in the first over and soon Gujarat were in deep trouble when South African big-hitter David Miller fell for a duck. Pandya attempted to turn it around in a 62-run partnership with Abhinav Manohar, who made 26, but the effort was not enough as Delhi defended their lowest total ever.—AFP



AHMEDABAD: Gujarat Titans' Rashid Khan (left) dives to field the ball as Delhi Capitals' Axar Patel runs to save his wicket during the Indian Premier League (IPL) Twenty20 cricket match between Gujarat Titans and Delhi Capitals on May 2, 2023. —AFP

Where football and politics mix: Chile's 'Palestino' club

SANTIAGO: Thousands of miles away from conflict in the Middle East, the Palestinian flag flies on a cold autumn night at a football stadium in the Chilean capital, Santiago. Hundreds of fans have come out to support their team, the Palestinian Sports Club—a professional football club which plays in the green, black, red and white colors of the Palestinian flag.

The left sleeve of the team's jersey sports a Palestinian map—as it appeared before the creation of Zionist entity exactly 75 years ago. Politics is never far away at the club created by Palestinian expats in 1920. "More than a team, an entire people," proclaims the club's logo. "We even have songs: 'Gaza resists/Palestine exists,'" fan Rafael Milad, a 29-year-old businessman, told AFP. "Palestine is 100 years old, older than the Zionist entity," he added, using the team's nickname.

'Palestine is Palestine'

At the beginning of the 20th century, Christian Arabs from the towns of Bethlehem, Beit Jala and Beit Sahur arrived in distant Chile and founded a

South American community that today numbers around half a million people—the largest outside the Arab world. They became successful textile merchants, and their descendants entered the political sphere: 35 have been ministers or congressmen. Three decades after it was formed in 1920, the club made its professional debut. "Palestine is Palestine and Palestine is Palestino. We are always very concerned with the cause," said Roberto Bis-hara, a former club player.

The team has won two national titles (1955 and 1978) and made it to a semifinal in the Copa Libertadores in 1979. In 2014, the team changed the number 1 on the back of their jersey to the elongated shape of the Palestinian territory before 1948, but were fined and banned from wearing it by the Chilean football association after a complaint. Once, the players also caused controversy when they wore the keffiyeh, a traditional headdress worn by Middle Eastern men, onto the pitch.

In 2019, the club arranged giant screens for the fans in Ramallah to follow an international duel against Argentina's River Plate. Today the squad no longer has players of Palestinian origin. The last was Nicolas Zedan, who left the club in 2021. But the team continues to represent "all those Palestinians who are there having a hard time. Each Palestino triumph... is a small joy among the suffering they have every day," Miguel Cordero, a 49-year-old lawyer of Palestinian origins, told AFP.

Olmo steers Leipzig to German Cup final

FREIBURG IM BREISGAU: RB Leipzig forward Dani Olmo scored one and set up three more first-half goals as the German Cup holders returned to the final, with a 5-1 win at Freiburg on Tuesday. In a rematch of last year's final, which Leipzig won on penalties, Freiburg started brightly but two goals in 90 seconds put them squarely on the back foot. Olmo headed Leipzig in front from a Dominik Szoboszlai cross after 13 minutes and assisted Benjamin Henrichs shortly after.

The Spain forward teed up Szoboszlai and France winger Christopher Nkunku to give the visitors a commanding 4-0 lead at half time. Leipzig were reduced to ten men early in the second half when last-man Josko Gvardiol pulled down Roland Sallai outside the box but were unable to mount a comeback.

Freiburg scored a late goal through Michael Gregoritsch, but Szoboszlai scored again from the spot in injury time for a dominant win. Promoted to the first-division for the first time in 2016, Leipzig have now appeared in four of the past five German Cup finals. In search of their first German Cup title, Freiburg coach Christian Streich named a defensive line-up, surprisingly omitting top scorer Vincenzo Grifo for France defender Kiliann Sildillia.

Freiburg looked dangerous early and went close

through Japan winger Ritsu Doan, but Leipzig smashed in two goals in quick succession, prompting Streich to remove Sildillia for Grifo after just 18 minutes. The change failed to stop the rot, Leipzig making it three after 37 minutes when Olmo set up Szoboszlai to slot in his side's third. Having lost only twice at home in the league this season, against Bundesliga heavyweights Bayern Munich and Borussia Dortmund, Freiburg continued to push forward. Grifo found striker Gregoritsch in the box, but the giant Austrian dragged his shot just wide of the post.

Nkunku, Leipzig's top scorer this season in the league with 13 goals, made it four in first-half injury time when he collected another Olmo pass and blasted past Freiburg 'keeper Mark Flekken. With 13 minutes gone in the second half, Gvardiol looked to stop a Freiburg chance but fouled Sallai with the goal beckoning, receiving a straight red in the process, meaning the Croatian will miss the final in early June.

Leipzig manager Marco Rose made a number of changes, taking off Olmo and Nkunku and bringing on the defensive cavalry. Buoyed on by a passionate home crowd and with a numerical advantage, Freiburg pushed for an unlikely comeback but could only muster a Gregoritsch header with 15 minutes remaining. Leipzig won a penalty deep into injury time and Szoboszlai scored from the spot to seal a dominant win for the visitors.

Leipzig's pressing and verve was reminiscent of the club's 2-0 demolition of Borussia Dortmund in the quarter finals and the Red Bulls will be heavily

Women too

When not at the stadium, fans gather to watch matches at a clubhouse, also in Santiago, which boasts some 4,600 members. The venue flaunts a historic Palestinian map, a mural with the figure of leader Yasser Arafat and plays Arabic music in the background.

Francisco Munoz, 48, is perhaps the team's most colorful fan. He frequently goes to the stadium dressed up as an Arab "sheikh" and his home is a shrine to the team. "I was at a conference... where I saw the Zionists taking people out of their homes without warning and killing them. There I began to have sympathy" for the cause, he said. In Chile generally, "there is no confrontation (with the community)", except with very extreme sectors", said Sabas Chahuan, Palestino vice president.

Contrary to the situation faced by women in the occupied Palestinian territories, where they can face pushback for activism against gender discrimination, according to the UN, the Palestino team works actively on promoting its female division. "I'm here in football, which used to be for men only, and I think of Palestinian women. It would be nice if they had the freedom to express what they feel," says Isabel Barrios, coordinator of the women's team created almost 25 years ago and winner of the league title in 2015. The Chilean club finances football schools for boys and girls in the Palestinian territories. —AFP

World of pressure as Tendulkar's son steps out of shadow

NEW DELHI: Being the offspring of a cricket legend is hard but Sachin Tendulkar's son Arjun is quietly starting to make his mark—albeit with the ball not the bat. Last month the 23-year-old left-arm fast bowler played for the first time in an IPL match—for his dad's old outfit Mumbai Indians—and returned solid if not spectacular figures of 0-17. For context, by the time his dad was the same age he was captain of India, had 10 Test centuries—his first aged only 17 - and was on his way to achieving god-like status at home.

Sachin went on to become the top-scoring Test batsman of all time and when he retired in 2013 it was a national tragedy. Indian media and fans are salivating at the idea of another Tendulkar wearing the Indian colors. However, Arjun still has a long way to go to prove that he has the ability to play regularly in the IPL, never mind for his country.

And with a father like his, the weight of expectation is huge. "Just being a Tendulkar will turn the spotlight on you," veteran cricket journalist Ayaz Memon told AFP. "Along with that comes a whole world of pressure, you can't escape. "So that's what young Arjun has lived through all his life. The expectations multiply and the scrutiny will get harsher and harsher." Arjun was signed by Mumbai Indians in 2021 but the recent home match against Kolkata in front of a packed, ecstatic crowd was the first time he had played.

When captain Rohit Sharma told him to bowl it was such a big moment that Sachin was in tears, according to former West Indies cricketer and commentator Ian Bishop. It was in the next game that Arjun made his mark. He took his debut wicket—a feat even his father couldn't achieve during his IPL career—and defended 20 runs in the final over. That spoke of his nerve as much as his ability. A nervous Sachin watched his son's last-over heroics and later tweeted: "And finally a Tendulkar has an IPL wicket!"

Working on pace

The euphoria was soon forgotten, however, when in Mumbai's next match he was smashed for 31 runs in an over, with social media full of accusations of nepotism. Arjun played one more match and took one more wicket before being benched. Rohit admitted the decision was tough but said it was more about selecting a side to suit the conditions, rather than Arjun's performance. —AFP



FREIBURG IM BREISGAU: Leipzig's French defender Mohamed Simakan (left) and Freiburg's German midfielder Noah Weisshaupt vie for the ball during the German Cup (DFB Pokal) semi-final football match SC Freiburg v RB Leipzig on May 2, 2023. —AFP

avored in Berlin in five weeks' time. Five-time winners Eintracht Frankfurt travel to three-time winners Stuttgart in Wednesday's second semi final. Freiburg host Leipzig again on Saturday in the league in a crucial match in the sides' battle for Champions League football with four league matches remaining. Leipzig sit two points and one place behind Freiburg in fifth with a better goal difference. Freiburg, along with third-placed Union Berlin, have never played Champions League football. —AFP



Arjun Tendulkar

Classifieds

Hospitals & Clinics

Hospitals

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

Clinics

Kaizen center	25716707
Rawda	22517733
Adaliya	22517144
Khaldiya	24848075
Kaifan	24849807
Shamiya	24848913
Shuwaikh	24814507
Abdullah Salem	22549134
Nuzha	22526804
Industrial Shuwaikh	24814764
Qadsiya	22515088
Dasmah	22532265
Bneid Al-Gar	22531908
Shaab	22518752
Qibla	22459381

Change of Name

I am RAJENDRA GOPALJI SUTHAR, Resident of Bankoda Tehsil Aspur District Dungarpur. I am known and recognized by both names Rajendra Gopalji Sharma and I want to change my name to Rajendra Gopalji Suthar and I am Indian Passport holder No. M4249815 (**#3519**) **4/5/2023**

I, TASNIMA, holder of Indian Passport No. U0747486 having permanent address Dungarpur, Rajasthan, India 314001 residing in Kuwait at present, hereby declare that henceforth my name will be read as given name TASNIMA and surname COCHIN. (**#3518**) **3/5/2023**

I, PALA HARIBABU, holder of Passport No. P9481361, do hereby change my name to Ali (as given name) MOHAMMED (as surname) for all purposes. I will henceforth be known in the name, ALI MOHAMMED and I also undertake to carry out this name change in all my documents. (**#3521**) **3/5/2023**

I, RASHIDA, holder of Passport No. L5937183, do hereby change my name to RASHIDA (as given name) KUTUBUDDIN (as surname) for all purposes. I will henceforth be known in the name RASHIDA KUTUBUDDIN and I also undertake to carry out this name change in all my documents. (**#3522**) **3/5/2023**

Automated enquiry about the Civil ID card is 1889988

Barca on the brink of title

Elche relegated from La Liga; Madrid slip up



BARCELONA: Barcelona's Brazilian forward Raphinha (left) collides with Osasuna's Spanish goalkeeper Aitor Fernandez during the Spanish league football match between FC Barcelona and CA Osasuna at the Camp Nou stadium on May 2, 2023. — AFP

BARCELONA: Jordi Alba struck a late winner for Barcelona in a 1-0 win over 10-man Osasuna on Tuesday to move the Catalans a step closer to their first La Liga title since 2019. Xavi Hernandez's side climbed 14 points clear of second place Real Madrid, who lost 2-0 at Real Sociedad. The visitors had debutant Jorge Herrando sent off in the first half for a professional foul on Pedri, as they sat deep and tried to frustrate hosts Barcelona.

Visiting goalkeeper Aitor Fernandez kept the leaders at bay in the second half but eventually substitute Alba, who has had reduced minutes this season, sliced home a volley to snatch a late victory. "We're going to wait and see, but it's a giant step forward," said Xavi. "We suffered too much. We missed some very clear chances, the kind where you can just push it in. "And then came Jordi's goal, which sometimes makes it better to win like that." Osasuna coach Jagoba Arrasate rotated heavily to rest players ahead of the Copa del Rey final against Madrid on Saturday, while Barca started with the same side which crushed Real Betis at the weekend.

The Catalans failed to carve out many clear opportunities in the first half against their defensive opponents. The best chance fell to Pedri after left-back Alejandro Balde found him a few yards out from goal but he did not connect with the ball well, scuffing a shot wide. Osasuna were reduced to 10 men before the half hour mark when Herrando pulled down Pedri as he ran in on goal. Xavi brought on Ansu Fati after 35 minutes for Gavi, who appeared to take a knock, and the forward came close at the start of the second half but Fernandez denied him.

String of saves

Frenkie de Jong should have sent Barcelona ahead but fired straight at the goalkeeper from six yards out when Pedri found him. Barcelona's frustration grew when Fernandez saved from Fati again and substitute Ousmane Dembele sent a shot wide from close range. La Liga's top scorer Robert Lewandowski had another quiet night at the office. When the Polish forward did find the net it was ruled out for offside. Eventually the breakthrough came with five minutes to go, with substitute Alba volleying home his second goal of the season after De Jong headed the ball into his path, sparking vigorous celebrations. If Barcelona earn two more points from their last five games, they will be champions.

Madrid beaten
Former Madrid winger

Takefusa Kubo and Ander Barrenetxea netted the goals for Real Sociedad against Los Blancos, tightening their grip on fourth spot and Champions League qualification. Madrid defender Dani Carvajal was sent off after an hour for a second yellow card to make matters worse for Los Blancos, who face Osasuna in the Copa del Rey final on Saturday. "It's not the best way to prepare for games," said Madrid coach Carlo Ancelotti.

"A defeat always hurts, it lowers your dynamic, the good feelings, so it's not the best way to prepare for what's to come. "In the players' heads obviously is more, the Copa final, the Champions League semi-finals, that has an effect. "When you don't have good concentration, you end up giving away gifts." The Italian played a makeshift side because of injuries and suspensions, and he also left striker Karim Benzema behind in the Madrid capital ahead of Saturday's cup finale.

Kubo struck at the start of the second half for the hosts after Eder Militao gave the ball away in a dangerous area. Carvajal was dismissed for a foul on Real Sociedad forward Mikel Oyarzabal, giving Madrid an uphill struggle. Madrid goalkeeper Thibaut Courtois did well to parry a deflected Barrenetxea strike, but he could not keep out the forward's next effort, surprising the Belgian at his near post. If third place Atletico Madrid beat Cadix on Wednesday, they can move second. Real Sociedad are eight points clear of fifth-place Villarreal, who have played one fewer game.

Elche relegated

Meanwhile, Bottom of the table Elche were relegated from La Liga on Tuesday with a 2-1 defeat at Almeria ensuring they cannot climb higher than 18th. Leo Baptistao and Adri Embarba struck to take Almeria provisionally 14th, five points clear of the relegation zone, with Ezequiel Ponce pulling one back late on for the visitors.

Elche, 20th with just three wins all season, had delayed relegation at the weekend with a thumping 4-0 win over Rayo Vallecano. The east coast club were promoted back to La Liga in 2020, finishing 17th and 13th in the two subsequent seasons. Elche sacked coach Francisco Rodriguez in October, replacing him with Jorge Almiron, who lasted less than a month. Pablo Machin took over but Elche sacked him too in March, appointing current incumbent Sebastian Beccacece, who could not keep them up. — AFP

PSG to discipline Messi over Saudi Arabia trip

PARIS: Lionel Messi faces being suspended by Paris Saint-Germain after travelling to Saudi Arabia earlier this week without the club's permission, a source with knowledge of the matter told AFP on Tuesday. The source said that Argentina's World-Cup winning captain, who is out of contract at the end of the season, would be banned for "several days", while various media in France reported that he would be hit with a two-week suspension.

"He cannot train, cannot play, and will not be paid while disciplinary measures are in place," the source added. Another club source indicated that the sev-

en-time Ballon d'Or winner would "probably" be sidelined for a fortnight, noting that "nobody is more important than the club".

Messi, who will turn 36 in June, played in PSG's 3-1 home defeat by Lorient in Ligue 1 on Sunday. He then travelled to Saudi Arabia to fulfill commitments as part of a contract with the country's tourist office. As a result Messi missed a training session penciled in for Monday following the weekend defeat, before the PSG squad were given a day off on Tuesday. The source with knowledge of the matter said that the Argentine would not take part in training on Wednesday either.

PSG are due to return to league action away at struggling Troyes on Sunday, a game that Messi may now miss. If he were to be sidelined for two weeks he would also sit out a home match against Ajaccio on May 13. The disciplinary measures make the prospect of Messi staying in the French capital after his two-year deal expires at the end of this season even more remote. Having at one point looked set to extend his stay for another year, a source close to the club told AFP last month that he was now "much more likely" to depart at the campaign's end.

Messi arrived from Barcelona in 2021 but has struggled to reproduce his best form in Paris, scoring 31 goals in 71 appearances in all competitions. He was recently jeered by a section of the PSG support, who see him as a symbol of all the club have done wrong in focusing on superstar signings while failing to build a genuinely competitive team. Messi has scored 20 goals in all competitions this season and is the leading assist-provider in Ligue 1, with 15.

However, his form since leading Argentina to World Cup glory in Qatar has declined along with that of the team. PSG's insipid performance against Lorient brought a sixth defeat in 17 Ligue 1 matches in 2023. They remain five points clear of Marseille at the top of the table with five games left, and are therefore still on course for a record 11th French title. However, they were knocked out of the Champions League in the last 16 by Bayern Munich and also went out of the French Cup at the same stage to Marseille. — AFP



Lionel Messi

Arsenal cruise back to the top

LONDON: Martin Odegaard fired Arsenal back to the top of the Premier League (EPL) as the Norway midfielder's double inspired a 3-1 win against woeful Chelsea on Tuesday. Mikel Arteta's side lost control of the title race after last week's 4-1 defeat at Manchester City. But the Gunners signaled their intention to push City all the way to the wire with a much-needed first win in five games. Odegaard's brace was followed by a Gabriel Jesus strike as the hosts raced into a three-goal before half-time at the Emirates Stadium.

Noni Madueke's second half goal was no consolation for Chelsea's wretched performance. Arsenal are now two points clear of second placed City and while Pep Guardiola's men remain favorites to win the title, the north Londoners have at least applied a little pressure on the champions. City will go back into first place if they beat West Ham at home on Wednesday in the first of their two games in hand on Arsenal. "The first 60 minutes, I thought we played really well. That was everything I want to see from our team," Arteta said.

"Speed, quality, movement, two beautiful goals, we connected with our crowd and created an incredible atmosphere. "We wanted to earn the right to be top of the league. We are happy to be there." After 10 weeks at the top, Arsenal were knocked down to second place by City's win at Fulham on Sunday. Three successive draws, including two blown two-goal leads, and the calamitous loss at City have led Arsenal to be written off as title race

chokers. But Arteta insisted this week that the title was still winnable and his players responded to the Spaniard's rallying cry.

Troubled Chelsea were ideal opponents for Arsenal to get back on track before a tricky trip to Newcastle on Sunday. The Blues have now lost all six games since Frank Lampard returned as caretaker boss to replace the sacked Graham Potter. Languishing in 12th place, Chelsea are on a nine-game winless run in all competitions and face the prospect of failing to finish in the top half of the table for the first time since 1996. "We were too nice to play against in all aspects in the first half. Not good enough," Lampard said. "It's tough because you want to win games, but it's our job, we'll work on it."

Rampant Arsenal

Former Arsenal forward Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang made his first Chelsea start since the Blues lost 1-0 to the Gunners in November. But Aubameyang, whose four-year spell with Arsenal ended acrimoniously in 2022, never had a chance of exacting revenge on his old team before being hauled off at half-time. Arsenal were in complete control from the start and Odegaard gave them a deserved lead in the 18th minute. Left in acres of space, Granit Xhaka's low cross eluded Chelsea's lackadaisical defenders and Odegaard guided a superb curling finish past Kepa Arrizabalaga from just inside the penalty area.

Ben Chilwell threatened a Chelsea equalizer, but Aaron Ramsdale made a fine save to preserve the lead.

That near-miss was a false dawn for abysmal Chelsea as the Gunners turned the screw with a second goal in the 31st minute. Once again, Chelsea allowed Xhaka time to cross into the area and



LONDON: Chelsea's Spanish goalkeeper Kepa Arrizabalaga concedes the first goal during the English Premier League football match between Arsenal and Chelsea on May 2, 2023. — AFP

Odegaard took full advantage of slack marking from Raheem Sterling to fire past Kepa from 12 yards. Arsenal scented blood against spineless, disinterested opponents and the third goal duly arrived three minutes later.

Ben White's cross was chested down by Jesus and when Xhaka's shot was blocked, it was Jesus who stabbed home from close-range. Arsenal were

rampant and Thiago Silva hooked Gabriel's header off the line, while Kepa saved from Xhaka and Bukayo Saka. Chelsea awoke from their slumber just long enough to reduce the deficit in the 65th minute. Mateo Kovacic's defense-splitting pass found Madueke and he deftly slotted past Ramsdale for his first league goal since signing from PSV Eindhoven in January. — AFP