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CHARLES III CROWNED KING

Amir sends congratulations • Crown Prince meets British monarch



LONDON: HH the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets King Charles at Buckingham Palace on May 5, 2023. — KUNA



LONDON: Britain's King Charles III, wearing the Imperial State Crown, and Queen Camilla, wearing a modified version of Queen Mary's Crown, wave from the Buckingham Palace balcony after viewing the Royal Air Force fly-past on May 6, 2023 after their coronations. — AFP (See Page 13)

LONDON: Charles III was crowned monarch of the United Kingdom and 14 Commonwealth realms on Saturday at Britain's first coronation for 70 years, during a ceremony steeped in a millennium of ritual and spectacle. After a lifetime as heir to his late mother Queen Elizabeth II, Charles, 74, became the oldest sovereign yet to be crowned at London's Westminster Abbey.

At 12:02 pm (1102 GMT), Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby placed the solid-gold St Edward's Crown on Charles's head as a sacred and ancient symbol of the monarch's authority. Welby also crowned Charles's wife, Queen Camilla, 75. Cries of "God Save the King" rang out from the 2,300-member congregation, which included foreign royalty and political leaders.

Representative of HH the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, on Saturday attended the coronation of King Charles III at Westminster Abbey. He was accompanied by Foreign Minister Sheikh Salem Al-Abdullah Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

HH the Amir Sheikh Nawaf on Saturday addressed a cable of congratulations to King Charles III on his coronation. HH the Amir sent the cable in his name and on behalf of the people of Kuwait. He praised the solid and historic relations between Kuwait and the UK and affirmed his aspiration to strengthen further the bonds of friendship and promote cooperation between the two countries in various domains in the shadow of the Kuwait-UK strategic partnership. HH the Amir wished King Charles all the best and the UK and North Ireland optimum progress and prosperity. HH the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal and HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Al-Nawaf Al-Sabah sent similar cables to King Charles.

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KD 20 per blood bag for expats; NY clinic opens Kuwaiti ward

KUWAIT/NEW YORK: Health Minister Dr Ahmad Al-Awadhi issued a decision on Saturday to collect fees from expatriates, including residents and visitors, for blood transfusions. The new fees include charging KD 20 for each bag of blood given to an expat resident in Kuwait, and KD 40 for each bag given to a foreigner on a visit visa. Patients who find blood donors are exempt from the fees, according to the new decision.

Public health facilities will also collect fees from expatriates for up to 37 lab tests related to blood transfusions, which range between KD 0.5 and KD 15 for expat residents and between KD 5 and KD 70 for visitors. Later Saturday, the health ministry issued a clarification, saying apart from Kuwaiti citizens, these fees will not be collected from expatriate patients in emergency or urgent cases, cancer patients, children and other humanitarian cases. Fees for bags of blood will be collected only from expats undergoing non-emergency scheduled operations, the ministry said, reiterating that patients who find donors for every blood bag used are exempt from the fees. The decision is made to preserve the state's strategic reserves of blood, the ministry explained.

Meanwhile, Kuwait's Consul General in New York Azzam Al-Asfour and head of the Kuwait health office in Washington Dr Faisal Al-Safi inaugurated a ward for Kuwaiti patients at Montefiore Hospital in New York late Friday. The hospital's initiative came in appreciation of the strong relations with Kuwait and Kuwait's continuous trust in the hospital for treating Kuwaiti patients, Montefiore President Dr Philip Ozuah told KUNA.

Asfour said New York is a center for specialized and experienced hospitals where Kuwaiti patients tend to receive medical care. He voiced deep appreciation to the hospital for opening a specialized ward for Kuwaiti patients, noting this step will certainly enhance health cooperation further between the two sides. — Agencies

61 hopefuls file to run in Assembly polls

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: Thirty-one candidates registered to run in the upcoming parliamentary elections on Saturday, the second day of registration, bringing the total of hopefuls who have filed papers so far to 61. The candidates on Saturday include nine former MPs and seven members of the 2022 Assembly which was scrapped by the constitutional court. In the first two days, as many as 19 former MPs and 15 members of the 2022 Assembly have registered to run in the elections.

The number of candidates has so far been relatively low, as 185 candidates registered in the first two days for the Sept 2022 elections. There was only one woman on the first day of registration compared to eight on the first day of registration in the September polls. The reason could be attributed to the fact that Friday and Saturday are the weekend days in Kuwait. In statements made after registration, candidates stressed that ongoing political crises have paralyzed development in the country and called for cooperation during the next Assembly term.

"Kuwait is passing through extraordinary political conditions which have negatively impacted political and economic stability in the country" former MP Saleh Ashour said after



KUWAIT: Candidates arrive at the interior ministry's electoral affairs department to register for the upcoming parliamentary election on May 6, 2023. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

54 dead after ethnic clashes in Indian state

IMPHAL, India: The death toll after ethnic clashes in India's remote northeast rose to 54 on Saturday, with fresh violence overnight despite authorities rushing in troops to restore order. Thousands of soldiers were sent to Manipur state after a protest march by a tribal group turned violent on Wednesday. Authorities imposed an Internet blackout and issued shoot-at-sight orders in "extreme cases" in an effort to contain the unrest.

The situation remained tense after a fresh bout of violence on Friday night, hours after the state's top police officer warned that rioters had stolen arms and ammunition from police stations. Hospital morgues in the state capital Imphal and Churachandpur district further south had reported a combined total of 54 dead, according to local media.

"16 bodies were kept in the morgue of the Churachandpur district hospital while 15 bodies were in Jawaharlal Nehru Institute of Medical Sciences in Imphal East district," Press Trust of India news agency reported, citing an unnamed local official. "The Regional Institute of Medical Sciences at Lamphel in



IMPHAL: In this picture taken on May 4, 2023, smoke billows from a vehicle allegedly burned by Meitei community tribals protesting to demand inclusion under the Scheduled Tribe category. — AFP

Imphal West district reported 23 dead."

Manipur director general of police P Doungel told reporters Friday that security forces were bringing the situation under control. Army patrols had "gone a long way to quell the thing off", he said. But he added that some police stations had been overrun by "miscreants" who stole arms and ammunition, and issued a public appeal for their return.

Security forces and the Manipur government have yet to issue an official death toll for this week's violence. India's law minister Kiren Rijju told

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COVID no longer a global health emergency: WHO

GENEVA: The COVID-19 pandemic, which for over three years has killed millions of people, wreaked economic havoc and deepened inequalities, no longer constitutes a global health emergency, the WHO said Friday. It is "with great hope that I declare COVID-19 over as a global health emergency", WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus told reporters, estimating that the pandemic had killed "at least 20 million" people — nearly three times the under seven million deaths officially recorded.

The move came after the WHO's independent emergency committee on the COVID crisis agreed during its 15th meeting on Thursday that the crisis no longer merited the organization's highest level of alert. But, Tedros warned, the decision did not mean the danger was over, cautioning that the emergency status could be reinstated if the situation changes. "The worst thing any country could do now is to use this news as a reason to let down its guard, to dismantle the systems it has built, or to send the message to its people that COVID-19 is nothing to worry about," he said.

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US and Kuwait forces hold joint emergency response exercises

Drone attacks, car explosions simulated; Mini drills to be held regularly



Kuwaiti military personnel observe the drill held at US Camp Arifjan, about 60 kilometres south of Kuwait City, on May 4, 2023. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat



US military personnel participate in a mock drone attack exercise, at the US Camp Arifjan, about 60 kilometres south of Kuwait City, on May 4, 2023.



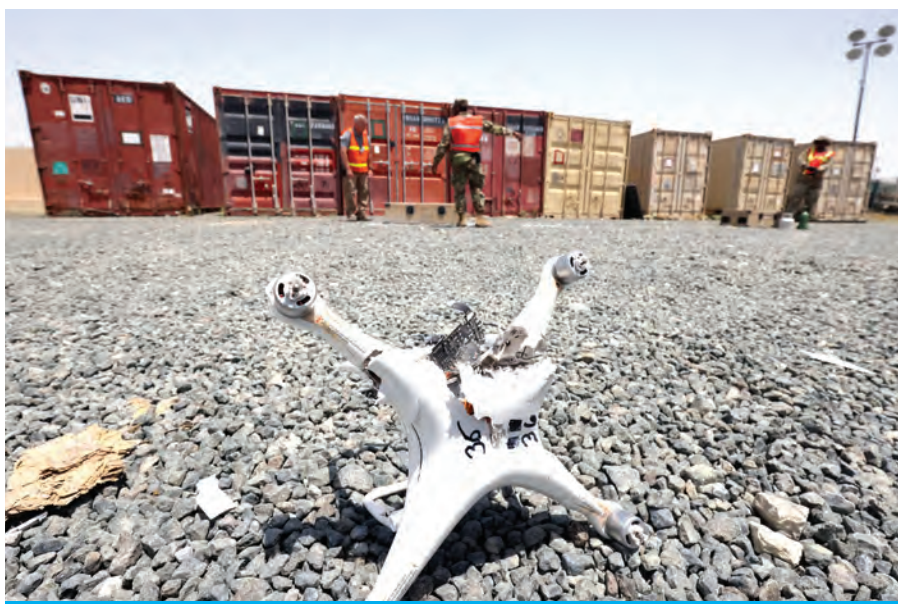
By Majd Othman

KUWAIT: In cooperation with ministries of defense and interior and Kuwait Fire Force's ordnance and explosive disposal department, the US military area support group at Camp Arifjan held on Thursday five emergency response rehearsal exercises to counter terrorist attacks.

Commander of the Area Support Group and Supervisor of Al-Qaeda operations at both Camp Buehring and Camp Arifjan Col Martin Wolgemut said five joint exercises were conducted as a result of planning over three to four months in cooperation with Kuwaiti ministries.

Wolgemut said in a press statement this was a good opportunity to see the ability and readiness of the Kuwaiti side to respond quickly in arriving at the scene and dealing with loss of life, injuries and explosives, and their ability to transfer them to hospitals. "We held five joint exercises on major emergency events with the participation of 400 to 500 American soldiers and 50 to 60 Kuwaiti soldiers, including an attack by a drone, which was dealt with and responded to with a Patriot missile on the northern side of the base, which led to a large number of casualties," he said. "As for the second training, it was a car explosion at the front gate, in addition to the discovery of another rigged car outside the gate."

Wolgemut stressed the response of the Kuwaiti explosives unit was very quick, as it dealt with the two incidents with great efficiency. "The Kuwaiti forces participating in the training are highly prepared to



This photo shows a drone after being damaged in a mock drone attack exercise, at the US Camp Arifjan, about 60 kilometres south of Kuwait City, on May 4, 2023.

face any security emergency or terrorist act, and have already asked for more joint exercises," he said. "Air Defense Commander Brigadier General Khaled Ali Al-Hafez came with his team to watch the training at the Patriot site. We have to work together to confront emergencies that occur on the edge of the base, and I am very happy with the Kuwaiti response, which was perfect. We have trained together for a very long time," he added.

Regarding the essential differences between trainings that take place in the United States and those in Kuwait, Wol-

gemut said there are no major or fundamental differences — it is a common language that they understand, on how to work and train together. "There are a few differences, but I think the joint exercises are going very well, better than expected," he said.

Wolgemut pointed out they will send reports on the exercises to the ministries of interior and defense in which they will provide a detailed description of the areas of strength in the exercises, in which the performance was outstanding, in addition to shedding light on the areas that require



Kuwaiti military personnel are seen during the exercise held at the US Camp Arifjan.

the two sides to work on developing. He added in agreement with the ministries of interior and defense, a joint small training will be held between the two sides every three months, which could be a drone attack, bombing or shooting in the building. A large and expanded training between the two sides will be held once a year, he said, explaining the diversity of the training gives an indication of the existence of a clear-cut plan to develop the capabilities of the Kuwaiti side.

"Car bombs are among the most common terrorist acts in the world, and that

is why American and Kuwaiti firefighting and ordnance and explosives disposal teams work together and evaluate each other's performance," Col Wolgemut said.

Wolgemut said the continuous development of facilities at the base and its infrastructure in the form of very large projects reflects the fact that American forces will remain in Kuwait for a long time, indicating that training is one of the most important elements of cooperation between the two countries. He pointed out many Kuwaiti military personnel receive their training in the United States.



KUWAIT: Turkish nationals living in Kuwait line up to vote for the presidential elections at the Turkish embassy in Kuwait City, on May 5, 2023. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat



A Turkish national living in Kuwait casts her ballot.



A Turkish national living in Kuwait displays his passport as he waits in line to vote for the presidential elections at the Turkish embassy in Kuwait City.

Turkish diaspora cast their vote in critical election

KUWAIT: Turkish nationals living overseas recently started casting their votes as thousands headed to polls, while Turkish authorities continuously worked for a smooth process, hiring diplomatic couriers and planes to bring the ballots home.

The Supreme Election Council (YSK) of Türkiye arranged polling stations abroad for more than

3.4 million eligible voters in 73 countries and 151 locations where Turkish diplomatic missions serve. Voting at the diplomatic missions will end on May 9, while voters can vote at customs gates at the borders until May 14. More than 4,600 ballot boxes were placed at 46 customs gates for around-the-clock voting.

There are more than 4,000 eligible voters in Kuwait. Voting will go on for three days, between 5-7 May 2023. Turkish Embassy, has taken all necessary measures, and all arrangements are in place to ensure smooth polling process.

Interest of Turkish citizens living abroad in the elections steadily increases in each election. The turnout, which was 18.94 percent in the Presiden-

tial Elections held in 2014, rose to 50.09 percent in 2018. This rate is expected to increase even more in the Presidential Elections and the 28th Term Parliamentary Elections Diplomatic couriers and members of the "transportation commissions" of the electoral body (YSK) will accompany the transportation of the votes cast abroad to Türkiye.

Diplomatic couriers will be formally handed the ballots cast abroad after signing the necessary paperwork and will be required to carry them on their person in passenger seats. Law enforcement officials will escort their transportation to the YSK after flights land. Representatives of political parties will also be present in the process of transportation.



Turkish ambassador to Kuwait Tuba Nur Sonmez casts her vote.

Lebanon seeks stronger ties with Kuwait amid crisis

TRIPOLI: Officials in Lebanon are eyeing closer cooperation with Lebanese diaspora in Kuwait. Representatives from Lebanon's banking and commerce sector, including Tripoli's Chamber of Commerce, Industry and Agriculture and met Saturday with the Chairman of the Lebanese Business Council in Kuwait and CEO of the Kuwaiti Financial Center "Markaz" Ali Hassan Khalil and Secretary General of the Lebanese Business Council in Kuwait and Head of the Ad-

ministrative Staff of the Arab Planning Institute in Kuwait, Karim Adel Darwiche.

"The resurrection of Lebanon from its current economic reality won't take place without the support of its children in other countries. (We count on them) to raise the morale of Lebanese producers and rebuild them psychologically, socially and economically," Lebanese Consultant Mokbel Malek told state media. Khalil said the visit was "exploratory" and will be followed by more visits aimed at deepening cooperation between private sector companies in both Lebanon and Kuwait. The visit comes a day following a meeting between Lebanese and Kuwaiti top officials where they explored means of boosting the solid relations between the two countries, in addition to regional and international topics. — Agencies

Committee to study vehicle insurance policy

KUWAIT: The Chairman of the Higher Committee for the Insurance Regulatory Unit issued a decision to form a joint coordinating committee to study the effects of increasing the prices of mandatory vehicle insurance policies. The committee will prepare its final report for the Prime Minister, the Minister of Interior, and the Minister of Commerce and Industry within a maximum period of 30 days, subject to extension, starting from the date of May 4.

Members will include representatives from the Ministry of Interior and the Insurance Regulatory Unit headed by the Vice-President of the Insurance Regulatory Unit, Abdullah Nabil Al-Sinan.

The committee seeks to target five main results including: Determining the legally competent authority to regulate the rules, controls, terms, conditions, and tariff rates of the insurance premium and the civil liability insurance policy arising from vehicle accidents. It will also examine and study the extent of conflict - if any - between the provisions of the unified document and its executive regulations and their amendments. The committee will look into the bases and effects of adjusting tariff rates for the premium package of the civil liability insurance policy arising from vehicle accidents. It will also aim to agreeing on the technical procedures to be followed in applying the draft unified document after the amendment, if any, including but not limited to the procedures for technical examination, procedures for transferring vehicle ownership, the duration of the registration, procedures for installment of vehicle plates, approving paper insurance schedules in the transitional period, and approving annotation on the vehicle registry in case the document is issued electronically.

Local

Food waste, recycling in focus at sustainable living event

Participants highlight solutions, alternatives to safeguard environment



KUWAIT: Ali Al-Amir recycles and composts organic waste to feed earthworms for better soil. -- Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat



Aziz Dashti, a graduate of Colorado University and a participating chef, shows how to cook using sustainable ingredients.



Khaled displays wooden toys for children made using all-natural wood and natural oil.



Rawan Al-Naemi's work focuses on finding sustainable and eco-friendly alternatives to single-use products.



Sana'a Al-Qemlas, one of the founders of Omniya project, says her project aims to reduce the impact of plastic on the environment.



Environmental specialist Samia Al-Duaij is seen at the event.

By Ghadeer Ghloom

KUWAIT: Sustainability is a critical issue that concerns the well-being of our planet and its inhabitants. As our population grows and consumes more resources, we face an urgent need to raise awareness about sustainability and encourage individuals, businesses and governments to take action.

Sponsored by Kuwait Times and Kuwait News, a 'Savor the Taste' event took place at ARGAN Bedaya on Saturday to encourage sustainable living habits in Kuwait. The event focused on raising awareness about sustainability and educating ourselves and others about the consequences of our actions.

We must understand the impact that our daily habits, such as consuming water, energy and other resources, have on the environment. We must learn about how our actions contribute to climate change, pollution and environmental degradation. One of the areas that has been identified as a major contributor to sustainability is food waste, which creates a major problem in our modern society. Thus, encouraging sustainable living with regards to food waste is an important step towards a more sustainable future.

The event, part of the 'Planet to Plate' exhibit, included several participants who embraced sustainable habits, encouraging people to rethink their

unsustainable consumption. "The event aims to raise awareness on a particular issue that Kuwait unfortunately does not have a very good recognition of, which is food waste and the impact of food production on the planet," environmental specialist Samia Al-Duaij told Kuwait Times. When food goes to waste, all the resources that were used to produce it, such as water, energy and land, go to waste as well. By reducing food waste, we can reduce the environmental impact of food production.

Duaij highlighted the issue of unsustainable food consumption. "In terms of food production, agriculture is one of the most carbon-intensive industries globally, including cutting down the Amazon rainforest to turn the land into agricultural land to grow cattle fodder. So, we are not even growing food for humans, but for animals. You are removing trees and sources that absorb carbon. You are encouraging unsustainable growth in cattle industries. In Kuwait, we already face an issue of food waste, as the average person discards 95 kilograms of food annually," she explained.

The event highlighted this issue to the public. Sustainable vendors were invited to make people rethink their choices and offer them sustainable alternatives. Panel discussions were also held, where experts on food waste and food technology were in-

vited to talk about solutions and the future of food in 30 years. Chefs were also invited to cook using sustainable ingredients and show people how to cook sustainably without wasting food.

Kuwait Times met some of the participants at the 'Savor the Taste' event, including Aziz Dashti, a graduate of University of Denver and a participating chef, who showcases sustainability in cooking and providing the best ways to use fruits and vegetables by reducing the amount of food waste. Rawan Al-Naemi focuses on finding sustainable and eco-friendly alternatives to everyday use and single-use products. Naemi displayed products that could reduce food waste in our kitchen, ecofriendly toys for children and ecofriendly lunch packs.

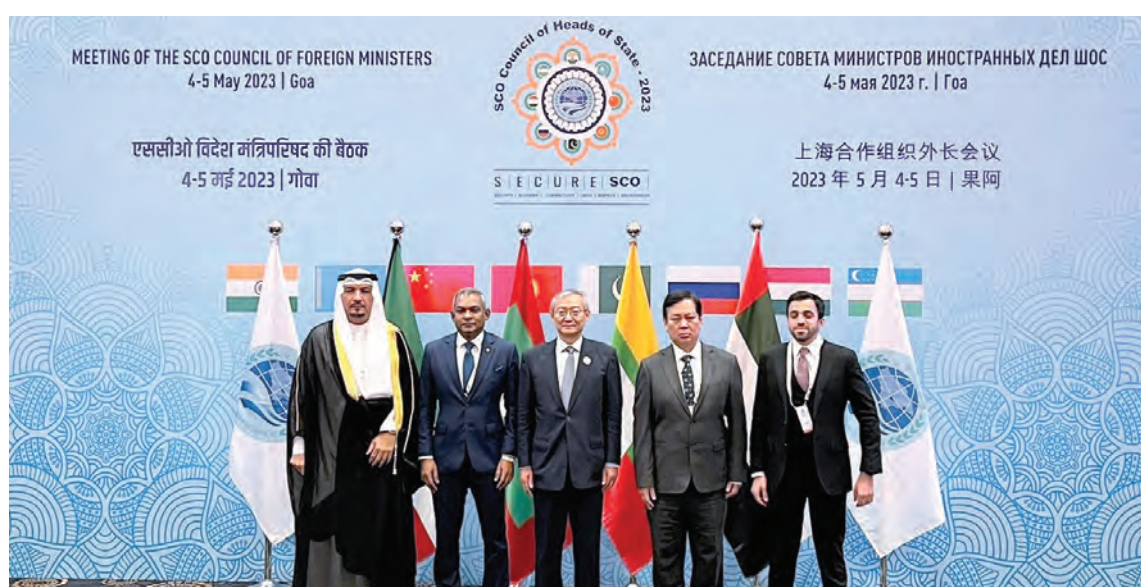
Ali Al-Amir works on recycling and composting organic products such as coffee, tea, eggshells and paper to feed earthworms that consume these products and improve the soil. Amir focused on promoting ecofriendly solutions by managing and recycling organic waste and spreading awareness about sustainable practices, with the goal of building a more sustainable future.

Khaled displayed wooden toys for children that use all-natural wood and natural oil, making the products completely natural. Also, the packaging is 100 percent recycled, which supports sustainability. Abdullah

Al-Juma'a sells organic foods and beverages in glass containers rather than plastic, like Ali and Fatima, two other participants at the event who completely avoid plastic in packaging their food products.

Kuwait Times also spoke to Sana'a Al-Qemlas, one of the founders of the Omniya project that revolves around securing a sustainable and livable future. "We are creating a system that serves society and the state. The idea of this project is that we created an app that registers points for users who donate plastic bags. There will be a rewards system very soon for the point collectors. Our aim is to reduce the impact of plastic on the environment, and people who adhere to this will be rewarded. We are trying to make this behavior part of people's lives through this app," she said.

"To raise awareness about sustainability, we must engage with a wide range of people, businesses and governments. We must communicate the urgency and importance of addressing sustainability issues and offer practical solutions to help people take action," Qemlas said. Through the app, she believes Omniya can make significant progress in creating a more sustainable world for future generations. Qemlas added Omniya is mainly supported by the private sector. "The private sector seems to be believing in sustainability and working on it," she pointed out.



NEW DELHI: Kuwait Ambassador to India Jassim al-Najem (left) is seen with SCO leaders. — KUNA

Kuwait to join SCO as dialogue partner

NEW DELHI: The State of Kuwait signed an MoU to join the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) as a dialogue partner. The signing took place on the sidelines of the meeting of SCO foreign ministers meeting held on May 4-5 in Panaji city of western Indian state of Goa. In an exclusive statement to Kuwait News Agency (KUNA), Kuwait Ambassador in New Delhi Jassim Al-Najem said that Kuwait's joining of SCO as a dialogue partner is the first step towards joining the organization as a full member in the future.

This move is in line with Kuwait's key foreign policy objectives, because trade, economic cooperation, global supply chain and food and energy security are among the areas that Kuwait attaches great importance to. He stressed that the accession of some Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries as dialogue partners to the SCO confirms the growing importance of the organization.

Kuwait's joining in the SCO will enable it to play a greater role in cementing cooperation among Asian countries. He stated that Kuwait's goals in enhancing internal and external security are in line with the goals of the SCO and it seeks to benefit from the experience of the organization's members to address global issues, and it is keen to participate in anti-terrorism strategies.

He added that Kuwait stresses the role of institutions and individuals around the world in enhancing food security and stopping hunger in various countries. As part of Kuwait's contribution to alleviating the disruption of global supply chains and the food and energy insecurity that humanity faces due to the Covid pandemic and regional conflicts, Kuwaiti leadership has worked and is still working with a group of partners in the region to build flexible supply chains and address food and energy crises, he said.

Ambassador Al-Najem thanked Secretary-General of the SCO Zhang Ming in a speech he delivered after signing the MoU and granting Kuwait the status of a dialogue partner in the organization, explaining Kuwait's aspiration to work with SCO to achieve security and stability in the region. The SCO is an intergovernmental organization established in Shanghai on June 15, 2001 and currently consists of eight member states including Russia, China, Uzbekistan, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan and India, and four observer states including Afghanistan, Iran, Belarus and Mongolia. It is the largest regional organization in the world in terms of area and population. It aims to build a multicentric global system consistent with the rules of international law and the principles of mutual respect that meet the interests of each country and taking into account their mutual needs and aspirations. The UAE, the Maldives and Myanmar have signed MoUs to join the organization as dialogue partners. — KUNA

UNGA to work with Kuwait on sustainability

KUWAIT: The United Nations seeks "alliance" and "cooperation" on achieving 2030 UN Sustainable Development Goals (UNSDGs), Security Council reforms and finding solutions to global crises, a visiting UN official said. Both Kuwait and Austria's ambassadors to the UN had been nominated, earlier this year, to spearhead efforts to introduce reforms to the Security Council. President of the 77th Session of the UN General Assembly (UNGA), Csaba Korosi, mentioned in an interview with KUNA and Kuwait TV.

"I came here to seek alliance and seek cooperation of Kuwait for this huge impactful transformation of humanity with the participation of the United Nations ... transformation for sustainability," indicated Korosi, affirming that such collaboration was needed to address all challenges whether caused by natural disasters or manmade conflicts.

Korosi indicated that the Kuwaiti government was very forthcoming when it came to cooperation with the UN on various issues, expressing the desire to continue coordinating with Kuwait on a multitude of matters. On Kuwait's 60th anniversary of celebrating its membership in the UN, the president commended the Gulf country's role in the international organization, noting that Kuwait knew the value of the UN and its importance to people around the globe.

He said that Kuwait's liberation from the Iraqi invasion was partly due to extensive collaborative efforts at the UN and other international organizations. "Kuwait is not only a consumer of the benefits of the multilateral cooperation ... You are a huge contributor. Kuwait is known in the United Nations as a force of moderation, as force of mediation, as a force of providing a platform for sorting out some of the debated issues including some of the very difficult humanitarian issues," stated Korosi who thanked the Gulf State on the behalf of the UN members for its crucial humanitarian role worldwide.

In regard to his meeting with Kuwait's Foreign Minister Sheikh Salem Abdullah Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, the UNGA President revealed that issues of security, stability, and cooperative nature related to the region were discussed. Crises in Syria, Yemen, Ukraine, Sudan and the plight of the Palestinian refugees were also touched upon, added the official. He went on to say challenges to the 2030 UN 17 Sustainable De-

velopment Goals (UNSDGs) and the debt crisis facing many countries were also discussed during the meeting with Sheikh Salem.

On human rights in Kuwait and the Gulf region, Korosi said: "I see a very encouraging progress in the Gulf countries particularly when it comes to the education of the young ... I see very encouraging tendencies of the empowerment of the women. I would like to congratulate your country (Kuwait) ... You are a very progressive country within the GCC when it comes to the involvement of women not only in the education sector, but in broader public life."

Returning to the 2030 UNSDGs, Korosi warned that the world was way off track when it came to achieving the sustainable development goals. Next September, the UN would be holding in New York the Sustainable Development Goals Summit to see what the world has achieved so far and finding solutions to matters that are pending the full implementation of the plan, he pointed out. Understanding the situation and moving forward to achieve the UNSDGs is very important, asserted Korosi who indicated that alarming development such as the COVID-19 pandemic had hindered the progress of this ambitious global strategy. Speaking on the recent conflict in Sudan, the President of the UNGA took a chance to thank Kuwait for providing humanitarian aid to the fellow Arab country, saying that the Gulf country was one of the first and most efficient in delivering support to those in need. — KUNA

Obaid Al-Otaibi passes away

KUWAIT: The Ministry of Information mourned the late broadcaster Obaid Al-Otaibi, who passed away on Saturday after a long struggle with illness. In a statement, the ministry's spokesperson Anwar Murad conveyed the Minister of Information Abdulrahman Al-Mutairi's condolences to the deceased family. Murad said that the deceased was a creative journalist and distinguished by his dedication to media field. — KUNA



News in Brief

Man with liquor
bottles arrested

KUWAIT: Hawally security officers arrested an individual in possession of suspected 1818 locally made liquor bottles and 788 imported ones. In other news, the General Administration of Residence Affairs Investigation was able to bust a local alcohol factory in Jahra Governorate, which is run by six men and four women of different nationalities. All suspects with the illicit material were referred to concerned authorities for further legal action.

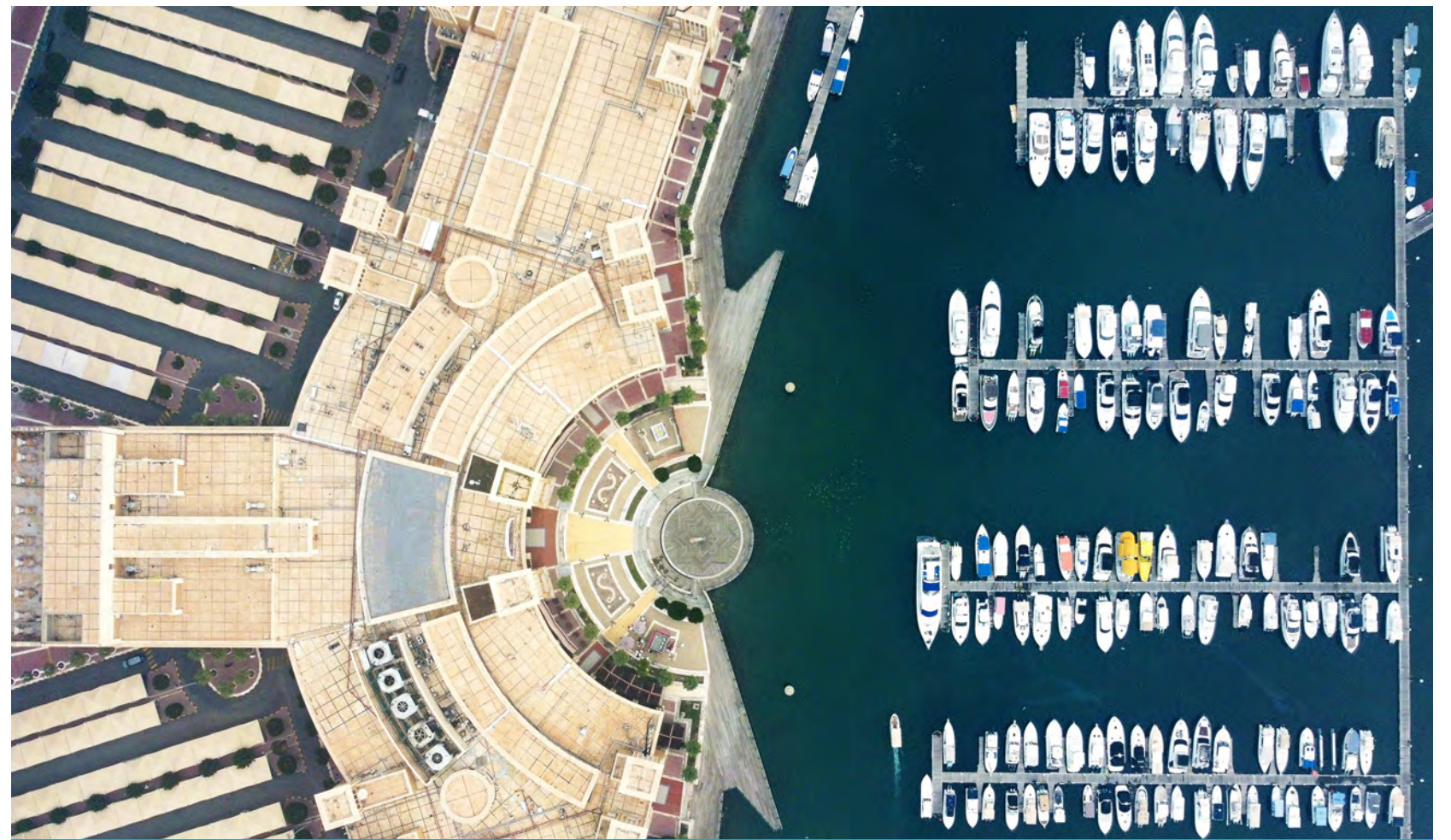
Company seized for
selling residencies

KUWAIT: A fake company was seized for trading residencies in exchange for sums of money in Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh area. The seizure was part of an operation carried out by the General Administration of Residence Affairs Investigations in cooperation with the Public Authority for Manpower. Eighty nine people whose residency permits were issued as workers for the company were issued notices of violation and have been included in the prohibited list. Those in charge of the company have been referred to authorities for further action. Authorities were also able to detain six people who have violated the residency law in Hawally and all violators were sent to the concerned authorities for further legal action.

MoI arrests
wanted person

KUWAIT: The Operations and Patrols Department organized a security and traffic campaign that targeted reckless driving sites and resulted in the towing of eight vehicles that violate safety regulations and from which overwhelmingly loud sounds are emitted. The campaign was part of the interior ministry and the Jahra Governorate Security Directorate's continued efforts in addressing the acts of recklessness in the area. "Sixty-three various traffic violations were issued, and a wanted person was arrested," the public relations department at the interior ministry announced.

Photo of day



KUWAIT: This photo shows an aerial view of Souq Sharq and the boats docked at its harbor in Kuwait City. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

Seeking help, managing stress key for good mental health

Medical student promotes wellness for Mental Health Awareness Month

By Faten Omar

KUWAIT: May is recognized as Mental Health Awareness Month in many countries around the world. This month aims to raise awareness about mental health issues and reduce the stigma surrounding it. Mosaab Dhari, a Kuwaiti medical student and founder of 'Med talks', finds this an opportunity to promote the importance of mental health and encourage people to seek help when needed.

Dhari revealed one in four people suffer from a mental illness. He said mental health involves several aspects such as emotional, psychological and social well-being, and they affect how people feel, think, and act in their day-to-day lives. He called on people to check on their friends and family who are suffering in silence.

On how to maintain good mental health, he said: "Usually people think of health as an absence of disease, but to achieve a good level of mental health,

we need to have healthy ways of thinking and experiencing and interacting with other people with our emotions." He explained some people have an issue with conveying their emotions, stressing that in daily life, a lot of tools can help a person achieve a healthy state of mind, such as meditation, journaling and expressing gratitude. But sometimes they need help in this journey through therapy, even if they are not suffering from mental or psychological illnesses.

"Many variables can affect any person's mental health. One of the biggest factors is childhood experience, both bad and good. Childhood not only helps to shape our personalities and characters, but can also influence our insecurities. Threats from school, work and family also contribute to our mental well-being," he pointed out.

Dhari affirmed that fixing basic issues is a must. "It can be achieved by sleeping well, eating healthily and exercising, which can contribute to our mental health as much as our physical health. Other than that, we can journal by writing about our experiences and emotions. The effects of writing down have been scientifically proven to be beneficial," he noted.

"Expressing gratitude also helps by reminding ourselves of the positive aspects of our lives, while meditation and mindfulness can help combat dai-



ly stress," Dhari added, calling on people who are struggling with negative thoughts or emotions and suffering from previous trauma or negative past experiences to seek help from friends or family. If this is not enough, therapy is always an option.

LAPA revives Greek heritage through dance

KUWAIT: In celebration of the International Dance Day and multiculturalism in Kuwait on April 29 of each year, the Greek Embassy, in cooperation with "LAPA", revived a traditional Greek folkloric evening in Kuwait.

The Greek Ambassador to Kuwait Konstantinos Piperigos, Chargé d'Affaires of the European Union Mission to the country Gediminas Varanavicius, Cultural Attache at the Embassy of France Eya Ben Azouz and Member of the Board of Directors of "LOYAC" Fetouh Al-Dalali were present.

The evening, organized by the LAPA Dance Department, comes within the framework of the exhibition "Alexander the Great in Kuwait" by the Greek artist Efthymios Warlamis, which was held for three months at the "CAP" Gallery, under the patronage of Pavlos Trochopoulos.

The evening, which was hosted by LAPA at its headquarters, was preceded by a training workshop on Greek folkloric performance and dance, with the participation of the Traditional Greek Folklore Ensemble. The evening included folk dance performances that sailed the audience towards northern Greece, the birthplace of Alexander the Great, known as "Dhul-Qarnayn".

It mixed wonderful music, exceptional performance, traditional costumes, the passion of young talents for history and heritage, in addition to their eagerness to present a distinguished performance that dazzled the audience, which included Arab and foreign ambassadors and diplomats, lovers of Greek culture, and those affected by the history of Alexander the Great and the greatness of his career.

The celebration was marked by the participation of well-known Greek artists from Vergina, Greece, where the tomb of King Philip II, father of Alexander the Great, and the summer palaces of the legendary Macedonian commander were discovered.

Visiting professor in the Department of History at Kuwait University, Dr Hassan Badawi, presented the celebration, where he talked about the collection of archeological discoveries found in the tomb of King Philip II, such as the golden crown and statues of his son Alexander the Great.

"Macedonia region is located in northern Greece,



Pavlos Trochopoulos



Greek Ambassador to Kuwait Konstantinos Piperigos.

and it is one of the richest areas in natural resources in the country. It is also an attractive destination for tourism. The helmet industry in it constitutes the identity of the people indigenous to the region and for women in particular, within the context of preserving the Greek heritage. Trochopoulos delved into his country's rich and vast heritage, saying: "Vergina belongs to the province of Imathia, where King Philip II established his kingdom. One of its most important features and characteristics is the traditional dress of women, as it belongs to the ancient Greek dress in the Macedonian Kingdom."

"The helmet worn by women from the era of Alexander the Great is considered the distinctive dress for the women of the region, as it is a symbolic indication of the daring of women in the days of Alexander the Great, as they advanced in battles, carried weapons, fought and defeated the enemy, after the warriors lost their courage. Alexander the Great gifted the helmet of warriors to women, and it is still a living heritage today," he clarified.

Praising the historical relations between Kuwait and Greece, Trochopoulos said: "Tonight, I wore the traditional Kuwaiti costume, as a token of loyalty, gratitude and appreciation to the Kuwaiti people and Kuwaiti women for their hospitality and love. We are concerned with preserving the legacy of Alexander the Great, and we have common denominators with peoples who understand the meaning of Life, the value of history and heritage, and Kuwait's relationship with the legacy of Alexander the Great, a strong relationship that contributed to the success of our exhibition over a period of three months."

At the end of the evening, a short film was shown about the precious contents of King Philip II's tomb, which have unlimited historical value, and its geographical location in Vergina. The attendees participated in learning some steps and techniques related to the arts of Greek folklore.



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Philippines police rescues over 1,000 trafficking victims

Zionist forces kill two Palestinians

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Sudan warring sides to start talks

KHARTOUM: The US and Saudi governments confirmed direct talks between the warring Sudanese army and the Rapid Support Forces would start in Jeddah on Saturday, even as fighting showed little signs of abating in the Sudanese capital.

A joint US-Saudi statement welcomed the "start of pre-negotiation talks" and urged sustained global support to quell fighting.

"The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the United States urge both parties to take in consideration the interests of the Sudanese nation and its people and actively engage in the talks toward a ceasefire and end to the conflict," the statement said.

Hundreds have died in nearly three weeks of fighting between forces aligned with Sudan's de facto leader Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, who leads the regular army, and his deputy-turned-rival Mohamed Hamdan Daglo, who commands the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF).

Multiple truces have been reached since the fighting erupted on April 15, but none has been respected. The army confirmed late Friday it had sent envoys to Saudi Arabia to discuss "details of the truce in the process of being extended" with its paramilitary foes. Burhan had given his backing to a seven-day ceasefire announced by South Sudan on Wednesday, but early on Friday the RSF said they were extending by three days a previous truce brokered under US-Saudi mediation.

The US-Saudi statement noted the efforts of other countries and organisations behind this weekend's

talks, including Britain, the United Arab Emirates, the League of Arab States, the African Union and other groups. In Khartoum, witnesses reported continued air strikes and explosions on Friday, including near the airport. The fighting raged despite a threat of sanctions from US President Joe Biden against those responsible for "threatening the peace, security, and stability of Sudan" and "undermining Sudan's democratic transition".

The north African country suffered decades of sanctions during the rule of autocrat Omar al-Bashir, ousted in a palace coup in 2019 following mass street protests. "The violence taking place in Sudan is a tragedy -- and it is a betrayal of the Sudanese people's clear demand for civilian government and a transition to democracy. It must end," Biden said.

The conflict has killed about 700 people so far, mostly in Khartoum and the western Darfur region, according to the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project. The UN children's agency, UNICEF, warned Friday that "the situation in Sudan has become fatal for a frighteningly large number of children". Spokesman James Elder said UNICEF had received reports from a trusted partner -- not yet independently verified by the United Nations -- that 190 children were killed and 1,700 wounded during the conflict's first 11 days.

He said the figures had been gathered from health facilities in Khartoum and Darfur since April 15, meaning that they only cover children who actually made it to facilities in those areas.



KHARTOUM: Sudanese Army soldiers walk near tanks stationed on a street in southern Khartoum, on May 6, 2023, amid ongoing fighting against the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces.— AFP

"The reality is likely to be much worse," Elder said. Aid workers have struggled to get much-needed supplies to areas hit by violence.

According to the International Medical Corps, at least 18 aid workers have been killed amid the fierce urban fighting. The UN Human Rights Council said it would hold a special session next Thursday "to address the human rights impact of the ongoing conflict". US Director of National Intelligence Avril Haines said Thursday that

Washington expected the conflict to continue for a long time. The fighting was "likely to be protracted as both sides believe that they can win militarily, and have few incentives to come to the negotiating table", she told a Senate hearing. Nearly 450,000 civilians have already fled their homes since the fighting began, the International Organization for Migration said, including more than 115,000 who have sought refuge in neighbouring countries.— AFP

Iran executes Swedish-Iranian dual national

TEHRAN: Iran on Saturday hanged Swedish-Iranian dissident Habib Chaab for "terrorism", drawing condemnation from Sweden, in the Islamic republic's latest use of the death penalty against dual nationals. Chaab had been held in Iran since October 2020 after he vanished during a visit to Turkey before going on trial in Tehran, which does not recognise dual nationality.

Convicted of "corruption on earth" for heading a rebel group, he was condemned to death in December and Iran's

supreme court upheld the sentence in March. "The death sentence for Habib Chaab... nicknamed Habib Asyud, the head of the Harakat al-Nidal terrorist group... was carried out today, Saturday morning," the judiciary's Mizan Online website reported. Swedish Foreign Minister Tobias Billstrom, whose country currently holds the European Union's rotating presidency, denounced the execution as "inhuman".

"The death penalty is an inhuman and irreversible punishment and Sweden, together with the rest of the EU, condemns its application in all circumstances," Billstrom wrote on Twitter. He added that Stockholm had contacted Tehran "and demanded that the sentence not be carried out".

Chaab had been accused of staging attacks since 2005 "under the protection of... the Mossad and Sapov" — the Zionist and Swedish spy agencies, respectively. Prosecutors in Iran allege other leaders of Harakat

al-Nidal are based in Denmark, the Netherlands and Sweden, with the group receiving financial and logistical support from Saudi Arabia. Iranian state television had aired a video of Chaab in which he claimed responsibility for a 2018 attack on a military parade in Ahvaz, the capital of the southwestern province of Khuzestan, that authorities said killed 25 people and wounded almost 250.

In the footage, Chaab admitted to working with Saudi intelligence services. Such confessions are frequently condemned by rights groups based outside of Iran as "forced", arguing they are often obtained under duress. The Oslo-based Iran Human Rights group also denounced Chaab's reported execution, saying he had been "subjected to torture following his abduction" and calling for a "strong response by the international community to this extrajudicial killing".—AFP



Habib Farjollah Chaab

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International

Zionist forces kill two Palestinians

Pair were involved in the shooting attack in Avnei Heftz

RAMALLAH: Zionist troops killed two Palestinians on Saturday in the occupied West Bank, the Palestinian health ministry said, as the army claimed to have targeted the perpetrators of a "shooting attack". "Two martyrs, shot by the occupation (Zionist forces) arrived at Thabet Thabet government hospital," in the city of Tulkarm, the health ministry said in a statement. In a separate statement, the ministry named the two men as Hamza Khreish and Samer al-Shafei, both 22, and said that one other person was injured in the raid.

The Zionist army said the pair were "involved in the shooting attack in Avnei Heftz on May 2, 2023 during which a Zionist civilian was injured". "The two gunmen were shot and killed after attempting to flee the scene," an army statement said, adding that two others were arrested in the operation. "Two M-16 rifles, military vests and magazines" were confiscated during the raid, the army said. Hundreds of mourners later gathered for the funerals of the two men whose bodies, shrouded in the Palestinian flag, were carried through the streets of Tulkarm. Avnei Heftz is a settlement in the West Bank deemed illegal under international law, although Zionist entity disputes this.

The Tulkarm Brigade, a local militant group linked to the Al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigade, the armed

wing of the ruling Fatah party, claimed the two men as members. The group also took responsibility for the Avnei Heftz attack, calling it a "revenge operation," according to a statement. A comprehensive strike was called in the Tulkarm governorate by local authorities in response to the operation. On Thursday, Zionist security forces shot dead three Palestinians blamed for killing a British-Zionist woman and two of her daughters last month in the West Bank.

Palestinian Islamist group Hamas, which controls the Gaza Strip, said all three men killed in what it termed an "assassination" were from its ranks, hailing them as "heroes of resistance". Earlier in the week Zionist entity traded air strikes and fire with Islamic Jihad militants in Gaza following the death in Zionist custody of Khader Adnan, a Palestinian prisoner on hunger strike. The latest violence brings to 108 the number of Palestinians killed in the Zionist-Palestinian conflict so far this year.

Nineteen Zionists, one Ukrainian and one Italian have been killed over the same period, according to an AFP count based on official sources from the two sides. These figures include combatants as well as civilians, and, on the Zionist side, include three members of the Arab minority. Zionist entity has occupied the West Bank since 1967. — AFP



WEST BANK: People mourn the death of two Palestinians killed by Zionist troops in a morning raid on Tulkarm in the occupied West Bank, during their funeral in the same city, on May 6, 2023. — AFP

India gives frosty reception to Pakistan envoy on rare visit

BENALIM: India gave a frosty reception Friday to Pakistan's foreign minister during the first official visit by a senior official from its arch-rival neighbour since 2016. The South Asian neighbours have fought three full-fledged wars since they were created at the partition of the Indian subcontinent in 1947.

Relations between the nuclear-armed countries have remained tense in recent years with both sides trading barbs over the disputed territory of Kashmir, with Friday no exception. Pakistan's top diplomat Bilawal Bhutto Zardari was in the Indian coastal resort state of Goa, for a Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) meeting of foreign ministers.

His address to the gathering urged members to refrain from "weaponising terrorism for diplomatic point scoring", drawing a rebuke from his Indian counterpart S. Jaishankar. "Pakistan's credibility is depleting faster than its foreign reserves," Jaishankar told reporters after the conference ended, in a jab at the country's ongoing economic crisis.

Bhutto's address "reveals the mindset of that country", he added. "His position was found out and called out." India regularly accuses Pakistan of supporting insurgents in Indian-administered Kashmir—allegations Islamabad denies. Pakistan suspended trade and diplomatic ties with India in 2019 when New Delhi imposed direct rule on the part of Muslim-majority Kashmir it controls and enforced a heavy security lockdown.

Both countries withdrew their top diplomats and several consular staff were expelled or withdrawn in tit-for-tat measures. The most recent visit to India by a high-ranking Pakistan diplomat was in 2016 by Sartaj Aziz, then the senior foreign affairs adviser to the prime minister. — AFP

Iran, Syria vow to strengthen ties as Raisi wraps up visit

DAMASCUS: Iran and Syria agreed to boost ties and develop economic relations, with a focus on reconstruction, as the Islamic republic's President Ebrahim Raisi on Friday concluded a landmark visit to Damascus. Tehran has been a key ally to Damascus throughout Syria's long-running civil war, offering vital economic and military assistance that has helped the Syrian government claw back most of the territory it lost at the start of the conflict.

During late-night talks Thursday, Raisi and his Syrian counterpart Bashar al-Assad discussed "ways to develop and strengthen bilateral relations" and "emphasised existing cooperation in the field of reconstruction", according to a joint statement released Friday. Raisi concluded his two-day trip early Friday and had described the visit, the first by an Iranian president to Syria since 2010, as a "turning point" in bilateral relations. The visit positions Tehran in a leading role in Syria's reconstruction, with Assad seeking to focus on reviving his country's devastated economy and infrastructure, despite Western sanctions on both countries.

The pair also expressed a "willingness to take any action to develop commercial-economic relations". On Thursday, Raisi said Iran and Syria had signed 15 "cooperation documents" that would allow "both countries to open a new chapter in economic relations". He also praised Syria for "achieving victory" in the country's war and invited Assad to officially visit Tehran. The Syrian conflict was sparked by the repression of peaceful protesters in 2011 and has



DAMASCUS: Handout picture shows Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi (L) greeting a group of women during his visit to the holy shrine of Sayyida Zaynab in the southern suburbs of Damascus. — AFP

killed more than 500,000 people and displaced millions. Large parts of northern Syria remain outside government control.

Raisi's visit comes weeks after Iran and arch-rival Saudi Arabia agreed to restore ties, prompting regional capitals to re-engage with the internationally isolated Damascus and Tehran governments.

"Iran and Saudi Arabia are two great nations," Raisi said during an interview broadcast on Syrian television on Friday evening, according to an official Arabic translation provided by state news agency SANA. The restoration of ties between the countries would change and "bring order" to the region, Rai-

si said. "We refuse to consider Saudi Arabia as an enemy or be hostile to it". On Sunday, Arab League foreign ministers will hold an emergency meeting, discussing the conflict in Sudan and Syria's readmission to the bloc, after it was suspended in 2011 for its brutal crackdown on protesters.

Raisi also said during his interview that Iran was playing a mediating role in Russian-facilitated talks aiming to normalise ties between Syria and Turkey. Moscow has encouraged renewed diplomatic relations between its Syrian ally and Ankara, which has supported rebels and the opposition in a bid to remove Assad from power. — AFP

Charles III crowned king...

Continued from Page 1

HH Sheikh Mishal met King Charles at Buckingham Palace on Friday, where he delivered the best wishes of HH the Amir Sheikh Nawaf on the eve of the king's coronation. He also recalled the UK's special status to Kuwait's leadership and people, congratulating the king on the occasion and praising his role in strengthening bilateral relations. The king in turn thanked HH the Crown Prince on the gesture, which he said reflected the depth of ties between the two countries.

US President Joe Biden, represented at the abbey by First Lady Jill Biden, tweeted his congratulations and paid tribute to the "enduring friendship" between the United States and Britain. French President Emmanuel Macron, who did attend the ceremony, said: "Proud to be with you on this historic day." Further away in the Pacific nation of Vanuatu, hundreds gathered to celebrate on the volcanic island of Tanna, where Charles' late father Prince Philip is venerated as a local deity.

Trumpet fanfares sounded along with gun salutes across Britain and beyond. Returning to Buckingham Palace in the day's second horse-drawn parade, the royal family appeared on the balcony to applause and more chants of approbation from tens of thousands of well-wishers braving a spring downpour. Some had

camped out for days. A ceremonial fly-past was scaled down due to the weather. As well as being the first coronation since that of Queen Elizabeth II in 1953, it was the first of a king since 1937. It was only the second to be televised and the first in color and streamed online. Not everyone joined in the celebration, however. Shortly before the coronation, London police arrested dozens of protesters using new powers rushed onto the statute book to crack down on direct action groups. The Metropolitan Police deployed some 11,500 officers for one of its biggest ever security operations. The force had warned that it would have an "extremely low threshold" for protests, and controversially planned to use mass facial recognition technology to monitor the crowds.

Much of the Anglican service, in which Charles pledged "I come not to be served but to serve", would have been recognizable to the 39 other monarchs crowned at Westminster Abbey since William the Conqueror in 1066. But while many of the intricate rituals and ceremony to recognize Charles as his people's "undoubted king" remained, the sovereign sought to bring other aspects of the service up to date. Female bishops and choristers participated for the first time, as did leaders of Britain's non-Christian faiths, while its Celtic languages — Welsh, Scottish Gaelic and Irish Gaelic — featured prominently. A gospel choir sang for the first time at a coronation while a Greek choir intoned a psalm in tribute to Charles' late father, Prince Philip, who was born on the island of Corfu. As king, Charles is supreme governor of the Protestant Church of England and has described himself as a "committed Anglican Christian". — Agencies

Thursday that testing and tracing efforts have "declined significantly around the world, making it more difficult to track known variants and detect new ones".

Vaccines, which were developed at record speed and began being rolled out by late 2020, remain effective at preventing severe disease and death, despite the parade of new and more infectious COVID variants that have appeared. But while indisputably a towering scientific feat, the vaccines also laid bare greed and gaping inequities, as wealthy countries hoarded the jabs, as poorer countries were left struggling for months to get hold of a single dose.

An antivax movement on steroids and massive misinformation campaigns over social media meanwhile turned vaccination into a charged political issue, leaving many with access to the jabs unwilling to take them. The pandemic also exposed staggering inequality in access to healthcare and services, from the long lines of Brazilians waiting to fill oxygen canisters for loved ones gasping for air, to the funeral pyres that crammed New Delhi's sidewalks and car parks as the bodies piled up in early 2021. Even today, the emergence of new variants threatens to reignite the emergency.

Tedros has also warned of the ongoing impact of Long COVID, which provokes a long line of often severe and debilitating symptoms that can drag on for months or years. This condition has been estimated to impact one in 10 people who contract COVID, suggesting that hundreds of millions of people could need longer-term care, he cautioned. — AFP

61 hopefuls file to run in...

Continued from Page 1

registering to contest in the first constituency. "The responsibility of the next Assembly is to restore trust and confidence among citizens," he said. Former MP and ex-minister Hussein Al-Huraiti said there is a real crisis between the National Assembly and the government. "This crisis has paralyzed the country and obstructed development" said Huraiti, who is running in the first constituency.

Former MP Khalil Al-Saleh said Kuwait has retreated as a result of political instability. "The country is experiencing a state of political instability as there were three general elections in the past three years," Saleh said. Former MP Mubarak Al-Hajraf expected there will be "a battle between the forces of corruption and the forces of reform and the people will emerge victorious".

Former MP Faisal Al-Kandari, who registered to run in the fifth constituency, said Kuwaiti people are frustrated and exhausted because of the continued political crises which marred Kuwaiti politics for most of the past two decades. "Let's shun disputes and differences... People are frustrated and exhausted and the country is retreating. We should begin a new era and focus on achieving the people's aspirations" Kandari said.

Former lawmaker Hamad Al-Matar said people no longer feel safe in their own country because of instability. "Kuwait and its people are fed-up and citizens feel insecure... We must vote to achieve stability," said Matar. This is Kuwait's second parliamentary elections in just under nine months and the 10th since 2006 as a result of political crises that saw the Assembly dissolved by HH the Amir or revoked by the court for as many as eight times.

Former MP Saadoun Hammad, who registered to contest in the third constituency, added more pessimism as he expected the next Assembly to be revoked by the constitutional court over procedural mistakes in the Amiri decree that dissolved the Assembly. The Assembly elected in Dec 2020 was dissolved in August 2022, barely after 18 months of its four-year term because of non-stop political disputes between the government and MPs and even among lawmakers themselves.

Snap polls were held in Sept 2022 in which the opposition won a landslide victory. But the constitutional court in March annulled the election process over wrong constitutional procedures. It also revived the 2020 Assembly which was dissolved by HH the Amir. But HH the Amir again dissolved the reinstated Assembly in early May and decided to go back to the people to elect their representatives with the hope to resolve the political impasse. "We need cooperation to achieve political stability and uplift the living standard of the people," said veteran former MP Ahmad Lari after registering to contest in the first constituency.

COVID no longer a global health...

Continued from Page 1

The UN health agency first declared the so-called public health emergency of international concern (PHEIC) over the crisis on January 30, 2020. That was just weeks after the mysterious new viral disease was first detected in China and when fewer than 100 cases and no deaths had been reported outside that country. But it was only after Tedros described the worsening COVID situation as a pandemic on March 11, 2020, that many countries woke up to the danger.

By then, the SARS CoV-2 virus which causes the disease had already begun its deadly rampage around the globe. Still struggling to understand what they were up against, countries scrambled to respond, making it up as they went. And worldwide, the disease had as of May 3 officially claimed more than 6.9 million lives, and sickened more than 765 million others, according to WHO, which has said the true figures are likely far higher.

The UN health agency said last week that COVID deaths globally had plunged 95 percent since January, but the disease still killed 16,000 people worldwide last month alone. Despite the lingering danger, the pandemic has faded from mind in many if not most countries. Tedros warned

alight vehicles and houses in parts of the city. Burnt out vehicles were seen on streets otherwise empty due to the imposition of a round-the-clock curfew. Defence officials said Friday that additional troops had been brought into the state by road and air.

Tribal groups were protesting against demands by the state's majority Meitei community to be recognized under the government's "Scheduled Tribe" category. Indian law gives tribes falling under that designation reserved quotas for government jobs and college admissions as a form of affirmative action to address structural inequality and discrimination.

Manipur is part of India's remote northeast, a region linked to the rest of the country by a narrow land corridor that has seen decades of unrest among ethnic and separatist groups. The northeast is home to dozens of tribal groups and small guerrilla armies whose demands range from greater autonomy to secession from India. At least 50,000 people have lost their lives in the conflicts since the first insurgency broke out in Manipur in the early 1950s. Over the years these conflicts have waned, with many groups striking deals with New Delhi for more powers. — AFP

54 dead after ethnic clashes...

Continued from Page 1

reporters Saturday that "many lives have been lost" after days of clashes alongside damage to property. The Internet blackout has impeded the flow of information from Manipur and details of the latest clashes remain sparse. An Indian army unit based in neighboring Nagaland state said 13,000 people had sought shelter from the violence.

"My sons convinced me to escape to safety," Pishakmacha Thokchom, 53, told AFP from one of the relief centers set up in Imphal East district. "But they stayed behind and I'm now deeply worried for them," she added. Vijaya Thingajam, 47, sheltering at the same center, told AFP he had fled in a panic after a group began firing guns. "We abandoned all our belongings and fled for our lives," he said.

On Thursday, security forces fired tear gas in Imphal to disperse protesters, some of whom had set

International

Afghan foreign minister woos neighbors on rare visit abroad

UN reaffirms 'commitment to stay' in Afghanistan

ISLAMABAD: The foreign minister of Afghanistan's Taliban government, which is not recognised by any other nation, held talks Saturday with his counterparts from Pakistan and China during a rare visit abroad. Amir Khan Muttaqi is barred by international sanctions from leaving Afghanistan but was granted an exemption for a trip to Islamabad just days after the United Nations secretary-general again condemned the Taliban government's curbs on women. China and Pakistan are Afghanistan's most important neighbors, with Beijing eyeing the vast untapped mineral resources that lie across their tiny shared border, and Islamabad wary of huge security risks along their much longer common frontier.

With the minister for commerce and industry in tow, the Afghan delegation is one of the most high-profile to travel abroad since the Taliban seized power in August 2021 following the withdrawal of US-led foreign forces and collapse of the Western-backed government.

"The biggest significance of this summit is that at this moment, as we understand it, no regional economic future is possible without the stability of Afghanistan," said Maria Sultan, director general of the South Asian Strategic Stability Institute.

"It is also important that a formal relationship should be established, and this is only possible if there is working reconstruction of the diplomatic track," she told AFP. The visit comes amid a flurry of diplomacy about—but not necessarily involving—Afghanistan's new rulers. 'Counter-productive'—Earlier this week, UN chief Antonio Guterres told a meeting of envoys from the United States, Russia, China and 20 other countries and organ-

isations that "millions of women and girls are being silenced and erased from sight" in the country.

Taliban government officials were not invited, however, an omission a representative called "counter-productive". Also this week, a meeting in India of foreign ministers of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation—of which Kabul has observer status—discussed Afghanistan without the presence of any representatives.

On Friday, the UN reaffirmed its "commitment to stay" in Afghanistan in a review in light of the Taliban government banning local women from working for the world body there. In a statement issued from Kabul, the United Nations' mission in Afghanistan reiterated its condemnation of the ban, which "seriously undermines our work, including our ability to reach all people in need". "We cannot disengage despite the challenges," it said. The Taliban government has firmly rejected criticism of the curbs on women, calling them an "internal social issue". Afghanistan is facing one of the world's worst humanitarian crises, international aid agencies say, with its 38 million population hungry and three million children at risk of malnutrition. Since returning to power, the Taliban authorities have imposed an austere version of sharia law that the UN has labelled "gender-based apartheid". Teenage girls are barred from secondary school, while women have been pushed out of many government jobs, prevented from travelling without a male relative and ordered to cover up outside the home, ideally with a burqa.

Chinese Foreign Minister Qin Gang, making his first visit to Pakistan since being appointed in December, will



ISLAMABAD: Chinese Foreign Minister Qin Gang addresses a joint press conference along with his Pakistani counterpart Bilawal Bhutto Zardari (not pictured) at the foreign ministry in Islamabad on May 6, 2023. — AFP

also hold bilateral talks with his Pakistani counterpart Bilawal Bhutto Zardari. China has been Pakistan's key defensive ally since the Cold War and also its most vital economic partner through loans and infrastructure projects totalling billions of dollars.

Meanwhile, the UN reaffirmed its "commitment to stay" in Afghanistan on Friday, in a review assessing its operations in the country in light of the Taliban banning women from working for the world body. The United Nations announced on April 4 that the Taliban had barred Afghan women from employment in UN offices

countrywide, a prohibition that had previously only affected NGOs but spared the UN.

The UN mission in Afghanistan, UNAMA, subsequently launched the review, and concluded Friday that it was committed "to stay and deliver on behalf of the men, women and children of Afghanistan," Farhan Haq, a spokesman for the secretary-general, told reporters.

It also launched an appeal "to our donors to keep funding this assistance people need," he said. In a statement issued from Kabul, UNAMA reiterated its condemnation of the ban, which "seriously undermines our work, including our ability to reach all people in need." However, "we cannot disengage despite the challenges," it said, noting that it had conducted "extensive consultations with multiple Afghan stakeholders, including civil society and women's groups, member states and donors."

"We continue our focused, principled and constructive engagement with all possible levels of the Taliban de facto authorities to obtain a reversal of this ban and ensure the safety of all UN and aid personnel," it said. UN entities on the ground in Afghanistan will "continue to discuss appropriate working modalities," Haq said, adding that "humanitarian operations continue to be undertaken." Since the ban, UNAMA has asked all of its Afghan staff, both men and women, to work from home, but other agencies in the country "have had different ways of handling the situation," he noted.

Since ousting a foreign-backed government in 2021, the Taliban authorities have imposed an austere version of sharia law that the United Nations has labelled "gender-based apartheid." — AFP

Aftershocks shake Japan after quake kills one

TOKYO: Aftershocks shook Japan a day after a powerful earthquake left at least one person dead, with officials assessing damage Saturday from the jolt that destroyed several buildings. The 6.5 magnitude quake hit the central Ishikawa region mid-afternoon on Friday at a depth of 12 kilometres (seven miles), according to the Japan Meteorological Agency. More than 50 aftershocks, some of them strong, had occurred by Saturday morning, the agency said,

as it warned that heavy rain could trigger landslides in the area. At least 29 people had been injured, Japan's disaster management agency said Saturday. "Our staff are out checking damage from the quake," an official from Suzu in Ishikawa prefecture, the hardest-hit city, told AFP. Two people trapped inside destroyed buildings were rescued, he said, and around 50 people had moved to evacuation centres set up at schools and the city hall.

TV footage showed a grocery shop strewn with broken wine bottles and other products that had fallen from shelves. Some residents were seen clearing rubble in the rain after their wooden houses were partially destroyed. "I asked a carpenter for a makeshift fix of the house, and the house is now covered with a blue tarp to protect it from rainwater," one man told public broadcaster NHK. Water outages

affected more than three dozen households in Suzu, officials said Saturday, adding that the city had provided temporary public supplies after running water had turned brown in parts of the region.

The quake registered an upper six on the Japanese Shindo seismic scale, which goes up to a maximum of seven. Earthquakes are common in Japan, which sits on the Pacific "Ring of Fire", an arc of intense seismic activity that stretches through Southeast Asia and across the Pacific basin. The country has strict construction regulations intended to ensure buildings can withstand strong quakes and routinely holds emergency drills to prepare for a major jolt. A 6.9 magnitude quake struck a fishing village in the same region in 2007, injuring hundreds and damaging more than 200 buildings on the Noto peninsula—a scenic area on the Sea of Japan coast. —AFP

Eight killed in Serbia's second mass shooting

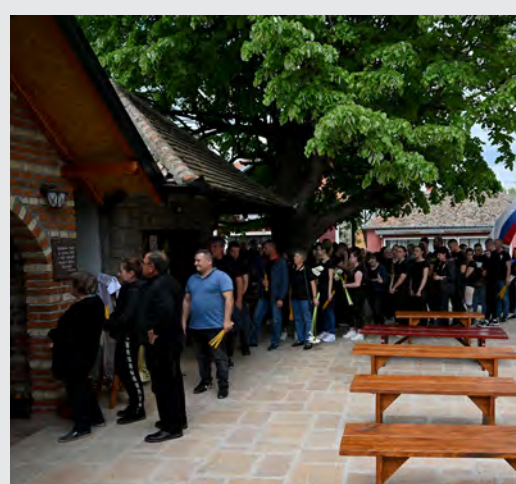
MLADENOVAC: Serbian police said Friday they had arrested a man suspected of killing eight people and injuring at least 14 others in the country's second mass shooting this week, following a manhunt through the night.

The back-to-back shootings have left Serbians horrified, spurring vows from President Aleksandar Vucic to launch a massive crackdown to remove hundreds of thousands of guns from the Balkan country. The latest shooting erupted around midnight near Mladenovac—about 60 kilometres (37 miles) south of the capital Belgrade—when a 21-year-old gunman armed with an automatic weapon opened fire from a moving vehicle, according to state-run RTS television.

The shooting spree spread across three separate villages in the area. It prompted a manhunt through the night as police combed the woods near Belgrade, with a helicopter circling overhead with a spotlight appearing to search for the fugitive gunman. "Following a wide search, police arrested UB," police said in a statement, using only the suspect's initials. "He is suspected to have killed eight and injured 14 people overnight. The injured are hospitalised."

The police said the man had been arrested near the central city of Kragujevac—roughly 90 kilometres from the scene of the attacks. According to RTS, the suspect was arrested at the home of a relative and was in possession of four hand grenades and a large amount of illegal weapons and ammunition. The incident happened less than 48 hours after the worst school shooting in Serbia's recent history, when a 13-year-old killed nine people, including eight fellow students, at a school in downtown Belgrade on Wednesday. The shootings have left the country in a state of deep shock, with thousands flocking to makeshift memorial sites while others have queued to donate blood.

The latest incident is believed to have begun at around midnight. The state broadcaster said the suspected shooter first opened fire at a schoolyard in the village of Dubona, killing a police officer and his sister along with others in the area. The gunman then moved onto the nearby villages of Mali Orasje and Sepsin, according to RTS. "We heard gunshots in the evening, but I thought it was fireworks, children fooling around. It did not even occur to me that something like this could happen," said Zvonko Mladenovic, a Dubona resident. —AFP



MALO ORASJE: People queue to light candles ahead of a funeral service for five young men killed, in the village of Malo Orasje near the town of Mladenovac, about 60 kilometres (37 miles) south of Serbia's capital Belgrade, on May 6, 2023, in the aftermath of a drive-by shooting. — AFP



MABALACAT CITY: Rescued trafficked people from Asian countries waiting for their turn to be documented by authorities after a police raid in Manila. — AFP

Philippines police rescues over 1,000 trafficking victims

MANILA: Philippine authorities have rescued over a thousand people from several Asian nations who were trafficked into the country, held captive and forced to run online scams, an official said Saturday.

International alarm has grown in recent months over internet scams in the region often staffed by trafficking victims tricked or coerced into promoting bogus crypto investments. Michelle Sabino, a spokeswoman for the Philippine national police force's anti-cyber-crime group, said officers raided a cluster of buildings Thursday in Mabalacat city, about 90 kilometres north of Manila. A total of 1,090 people were rescued who had been recruited to run online scams. Sabino said the victims were forced to target unsuspecting people in the United States, Europe and Canada. Their passports were confiscated and they were made to work up to 18 hours a day, with salary deductions for interacting with colleagues or taking extended breaks.

"You're like a prisoner without a cell. You're not even allowed to talk to your roommates," Sabino told AFP. "They're not allowed to leave outside the bounds of the gate. After 18 hours of work, they're brought to their dormitory." The victims were mostly Chinese nationals, Vietnamese, Filipinos and Indonesians, police said in a separate statement. Authorities also rescued people from Malaysia, Thailand, Taiwan, Myanmar, Hong Kong and Nepal.

Sabino said the workers were trained to entice strangers into buying cryptocurrency or depositing money into bogus bank accounts after establishing fake romantic relationships. "They will build up a promise of a good future together. Let's buy a house, buy a car, let's invest money or let's do business together," she said. At least 12 suspected ringleaders of the scheme have been arrested and are set to be charged with human trafficking. They include seven Chinese nationals, four Indonesians and a Malaysian, Sabino said. —AFP





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Business

SUNDAY, MAY 7, 2023

Chinese fashion giant Shein denies low prices due to forced labor

Shein is 'an on-demand manufacturer': Pernot-Day

PARIS: Chinese cut-price fast-fashion giant Shein defended its business model in an interview with AFP, saying demand-based production accounted for its low prices and not forced or cheap labor. Founded in China in 2008, Shein has swiftly claimed a top place in the global fast-fashion marketplace, offering young social-media-savvy customers low-priced collections that turn over at a steady clip.

The Singapore-based firm's strategy chief Peter Pernot-Day told AFP that Shein is "an on-demand manufacturer... the global pioneer of this technology" during a visit to Paris to attend the opening of a Shein pop-up store. Testing products with a small run and spooling up production if there was demand meant Shein has eliminated "inventory risk", Pernot-Day said, wiping out "the most significant component of garment cost". Shein's sales rose 60 percent in 2021 to \$16 billion worldwide. Bloomberg reported—just behind Swedish high-street name H&M. With 11,000 employees worldwide and counting, Shein has big plans for further expansion.

"It's important to have teams that are in the countries and geographies and regions where we are doing business," Pernot-Day said. The "localization" strategy includes building a 40,000-square-metre (430,000 square feet) new warehouse in Poland allowing faster deliveries to the European market.

"There will be more," he added. Online, Shein plans to create a digital marketplace that will allow shoppers to buy other products from other brands through its platform. Pernot-Day said the fashion and lifestyle shopping experience would resemble a "digital grand magasin", referring to Paris' swanky department stores.

Rising iPhone sales help Apple beat forecasts

SAN FRANCISCO: Apple said iPhone sales and money made from services powered quarterly earnings that beat forecasts, despite inflation pressure and the slowing global economy.

The iPhone maker's bottom line capped a successful earnings season for US tech giants, with Meta, Google and Amazon also beating expectations after suffering a painful spell of lower sales and profits. The smartphone titan reported a profit of \$24 billion on revenue of \$94.8 billion in the first three months of this year. The overall revenues for the period were lower than a year before, though this was expected and Apple's shares were up about one percent in after-market trading.

"We are pleased to report an all-time record in services and a March quarter record for iPhone despite the challenging macroeconomic environment," Apple chief executive Tim Cook said in an earnings release. Sales of iPhones were up two percent and tallied \$51.3 billion in the quarter, according to earnings figures.

"The iPhone base has well over a billion active devices... We feel great about the size of it and the rate that it's growing," Cook told analysts after the earnings result. Analysts said this was at least in part due to the reopening of China after a long period of

US trade deficit falls in March on rise in exports

WASHINGTON: The US trade gap narrowed in March as exports of goods including industrial supplies rose, according to government data released, but trade flows could weaken going forward.

As the world's biggest economy shows signs of cooling, analysts have said they expect softening in trade as consumers pull back on spending—adding to the impact of cooling external demand.

In March, the overall trade deficit stood at \$64.2

Stocks jump as jobs data soothes US recession worries

NEW YORK: Data showing that the US economy added more than a quarter of a million jobs last month soothed recession worries Friday, bringing a rebound in stocks including for troubled mid-sized American banks. Just a day before, equities took a lashing over worries surrounding the economic impact of interest rate hikes—including on smaller US lenders.

But the world's biggest economy added 253,000 jobs last month, up from a revised 165,000 figure in March, the US Labor Department said. The numbers

'Still learning'

But relentless expansion of sales and production is exactly what NGOs and some governments hold against Shein, saying its low costs cannot be compatible with fair treatment of labor or the environment. Pernot-Day insisted that doing away with the risk of being left with unsold inventory and warehousing accounted for its ability to offer extremely low prices, such as T-shirts for just 4.99 euros (\$5.50).

"We are able to accurately measure... demand and only produce enough garments to meet that," he said. Shein's efforts to green its image include a second-hand clothing business in the United States, materials research and integrating recycled materials in its products.

While acknowledging "fair criticism" that its product pages offer consumers little detail about recycled content and other traceability factors, "we're trying to enhance how we describe and categorize our products," Pernot-Day said. He insisted that Shein is "very connected digitally" with suppliers' information about sourcing. The company carried out up to 300,000 chemical tests this year alone, Pernot-Day said, adding that it worked with Oritain, a product analysis firm that also works with the US government.

"We're still learning," he added. "The challenge is that we have a lot of suppliers, lots of products".

Pernot-Day also maintained that Shein has "no suppliers in Xinjiang" in northwestern China, where aid groups have accused it of using forced labor by Uyghur people. US lawmakers recently asked the SEC financial watchdog to require an independent investigation into allegations of forced Uyghur labor

COVID-19 restrictions that hurt economic growth. Though Apple has made noise with its expansion into India, China remains the iPhone maker's crucial supplier and a key market.

Apple was deeply affected by the years of Chinese COVID-related closures and is only now seeing its complex supply chain returning to normal.

India is 'major focus' The company founded by Steve Jobs is making a very publicized push into India, with Cook himself attending the country's first Apple Store openings last month.

"India is an incredibly exciting market. It's a major focus for us. I was just there, and the dynamism in the market, the vibrancy, is unbelievable," Cook said. The country is home to the second-highest number of smartphone users in the world and efforts there help to deflect attention from the company's dependence on China. Sales of Macs slipped to about \$7.2 billion as belt-tightening around the world hit the entire personal computer market.

Shipments of Apple Macs and MacBooks, which are in the premium segment of the market, shrank more than 40 percent in the quarter, research firms IDC and Canalis have reported. Even though iPhones have been the heart of Apple's money-making machine, the company has made a priority of bringing in more revenue from content and services sold to users of its devices. Apple said revenue from services stood at \$20.91 billion, defying predictions that demand for streaming entertainment would fall steeply with the end of COVID restrictions.

Though the pile has diminished over recent years, Apple has \$57 billion in cash on hand, which fuels

billion, narrowing more than expected by \$6.4 billion from February, according to the Commerce Department. Exports rose by \$5.3 billion to \$256.2 billion in March, while imports slipped by \$1.1 billion to \$320.4 billion.

"Trade flows will likely continue to see the effects of slower growth prospects domestically and abroad over coming months," said Rubeela Farooqi, chief US economist at High Frequency Economics. As weakening external demand and a strong dollar bogs down exports, while flagging domestic demand brings imports lower, economist Matthew Martin of Oxford Economics added: "We anticipate trade will pose a drag on GDP growth for the remainder of the year."

US economic growth slowed to an annual rate of 1.1 percent in the first quarter, while the full impact of the Federal Reserve's interest rate hikes to rein in

show that the jobs market remains strong despite banking sector upheaval, higher borrowing costs and uncertainty surrounding a potential government default. "The key takeaway from the report is that it substantiates why the Fed isn't inclined to cut rates soon," said Briefing.com analyst Patrick O'Hare, referring to the US Federal Reserve.

But at the same time, continued strength in the labor market "lends some hope to the idea that a soft landing for the economy is still possible," he added. The Fed hiked interest rates on Wednesday by another quarter percentage point, as it seeks to bring down inflation. But the central bank signaled it could pause at its next meeting, as concern over the impact of higher interest rates mounted, particularly following the collapse of three mid-sized banks in March and the failure of another one this week.

On Friday, Chicago Fed president Austan Gools-



PARIS: Global Head of Strategy and Corporate Affairs at Chinese fashion brand Shein, Peter Pernot-Day, poses during a photo session at the Shein offices in Paris on May 4, 2023. — AFP

at several brands including Shein. But the company uses a US government forced labor blacklist "to look at our supply chain and understand whether or not the companies are in there," Pernot-Day said. And when allegations are made of copied goods being

sold on Shein, "if it is (proved), we remove it from sale, if not, we won't," he added, although "this is a difficult legal question". "We've seen a reduction of the number of complaints against us" for intellectual property violations, Pernot-Day said. — AFP



BEIJING: People look at iPhone 14 models at an Apple store at a mall in Beijing.

market speculation that Cook will swoop in to buy up companies or invest further in services.

Apple also authorized an additional \$90 billion stock buyback which will be welcomed by Wall Street as it pumps up the share price and the company's profit potential. Asked about the future of artificial intelligence, as apps like ChatGPT take the world by storm, Cook insisted it was "very important to be deliberate and thoughtful in how you approach these things."

"There's a number of issues that need to be sorted... but the potential is certainly very interesting," he added. Apple has largely refrained from joining the AI arms race that has seen its big tech rivals roll out new products to the alarm of some governments and regulators. — AFP

inflation and unrest in the banking sector threaten to weigh on the outlook ahead. Among categories, Thursday's Commerce Department data showed the rise in exports was largely driven by goods such as industrial supplies and materials, mainly crude oil and fuel oil, alongside autos and parts.

Imports of goods such as semiconductors and certain petroleum products slipped, but that of consumer goods like pharmaceutical-related items rose. Noting that "the strength in exports was driven entirely by petroleum products," Martin of Oxford Economics said the trade deficit would have widened in March excluding these goods. "It's unlikely the strength in petroleum products repeats next month," he added. The US goods deficit with China declined to \$22.9 billion in March, and that with the European Union dropped as well. — AFP

bee said that it remains "way too premature" to say if the Fed will hike rates again in June. But he noted in an interview with Fox Business that regional banks' troubles—even if they do not spiral into a crisis—will likely weigh on the economy.

Europe's main equity markets also closed with solid gains. In Asia, Hong Kong stocks finished half a percent higher after paring early gains, with tech and property companies among the big winners. Shanghai, however, shed nearly half a percent as fears of China's uneven recovery set in, and a less-than-stellar earnings season failed to impress.

Oil prices jumped, with the main US contract rising back above \$70 per barrel, lifted by the strong jobs data. "We're seeing some decent gains today on concern that OPEC+ might consider further production cuts," said market analyst Michael Hewson at CMC Markets. — AFP

BuzzFeed, Vice woes signal crisis in digital-only media

NEW YORK: With the closure of BuzzFeed News and bankruptcy looming at Vice, the once promising world of free digital media finds itself at a crossroads, seeing ad revenues dry up at the same time as disappointed investors begin walking away. BuzzFeed, one of the OG new media disruptors, announced in late April that it would shutter its news division. Translation: 180 jobs lost.

As for Vice, the company—once a darling that attracted major funding from Disney and Fox, among others—has canceled its signature show Vice News Tonight, laid off 100 people, and is reportedly on the verge of declaring bankruptcy. The two media groups have different profiles and goals, but one thing they have in common is a reliance on advertising dollars to fund their operations.

But in tough economic times, advertising is one of the first things to go, and tech giants now account for 70 percent of all digital ad revenues, with Google and Facebook leading the way. "I think the free model—trying to build high volume, and then sell ads on that basis—hasn't worked out nearly as well as hoped," says Rick Edmonds, a media business analyst at the Poynter Institute, a non-profit journalism research organization. Ben Smith, the onetime editor-in-chief of BuzzFeed News, is more unequivocal. "It's the end of the marriage between social media and news," he told The New York Times. At the start of the 2010s, Vice and BuzzFeed—along with the Daily Beast and the Huffington Post—were the standard bearers of a new generation of media outlets that were completely online and ready to battle the traditional purveyors of news.

The model quickly seduced investors. "These outlets expanded way beyond their capacity, because they were attracting an enormous amount of venture capital," says Dan Kennedy, a professor of journalism at Northeastern University in Boston. "Venture capitalists told themselves a fairy tale, which was if Vice and BuzzFeed News and all the rest are going to generate this much traffic, there must be a way to monetize all that traffic." In 2017, Vice Media was valued at \$5.7 billion—more than the market capitalization of The New York Times at the time. But when progress is slow in coming, investors "get impatient," Edmonds says.

As interest rates rose over the past year, tighter lending conditions have made venture capitalists more tight-fisted, and "everybody called in their chips," explains Aileen Gallagher, chair of digital journalism at Syracuse University's Newhouse School of Public Communications. Vice and BuzzFeed had already struggled to attract new investments for several years and were forced to resort to taking on debt to stay afloat. Neither was turning a profit. Fortress Investment Group, Vice's main creditor, could take the media company if it declares bankruptcy, according to The New York Times.

In 2021, BuzzFeed went public, but the move quickly proved disastrous—the company, once valued at \$1.5 billion, only raised \$16 million. In this tumultuous environment, free news websites attached to major groups like Vox (Vox Media), Mashable (Ziff Davis) and The Daily Beast (IAC) have fared better, helped in part by economies of scale and majority shareholders with long-term vision. — AFP

Business

US hiring shows surprise surge as unemployment falls to 3.4%

253,000 jobs added in April, but job gains in private sector ease

WASHINGTON: Hiring in the United States picked up pace in April and unemployment returned to a multi-decade low, government data showed Friday, signaling labor market resilience despite higher interest rates to tackle inflation. The unexpected surge comes amid banking sector upheaval, higher borrowing costs and uncertainty surrounding a potential government default. The world's biggest economy added 253,000 jobs last month, up from a revised 165,000 figure in March, said the Labor Department.

Meanwhile, the jobless rate ticked back down to 3.4 percent, a level last seen in January and before then, the late 1960s. "Employment continued to trend up in professional and business services, health care, leisure and hospitality, and social assistance," the Labor Department said in a statement. Pay gains accelerated as well, with average hourly earnings rising 0.5 percent to \$33.36, data showed. Compared with a year ago, the figure is up 4.4 percent. President Joe Biden hailed the figures, saying in a Twitter post: "My plan to invest in America is working."

Slowing trend?

While job gains in March were initially pegged at 236,000, the numbers were revised in the latest report—alongside a similarly big downward revision

to February's figures. "The aggregate revision is split roughly evenly between February and March, with most of the downshift in the private services sector," said Ian Shepherdson, chief economist at Pantheon Macroeconomics.

Within the sector, the shift was concentrated in leisure and hospitality, as well as professional and business services components. But he added: "The trend in private payrolls is slowing, even after allowing for the unexpectedly big April print."

For now, economists say the employment report does not change their views that the central bank will hold interest rates steady in June after a series of hikes. The expectation—following 10 rate hikes—is that the Federal Reserve will hold rates "at the current level for some time" while waiting for the full effects of policy to ripple through the economy, said economist Rubecela Farooqi at High Frequency Economics.

More cooling needed—To rein in stubborn inflation, the Federal Reserve has lifted the benchmark lending rate ten consecutive times since early 2022, with higher lending costs making it pricier to borrow funds for big-ticket purchases or business expansion. Analysts are closely eyeing the job market for signs that the economy is cooling enough for the central bank to pause its cycle of increases.

"For the Fed, this report clearly is not weak enough," said Shepherdson of Pantheon Macroeconomics.

But if a broader downward trend in payrolls continues, numbers will enter a range in which central banker officials can "back away" from their position that the labor market is too tight, opening the door to lower rates, he added. On Wednesday, the Fed lifted interest rates another quarter-point to the highest range in around 16 years, while noting that tighter credit conditions for households and businesses are likely to weigh on the economy.

Although it hinted at the possibility of halting further increases as the economy cooled and first quarter GDP growth slowed to an annual rate of 1.1 percent, the latest figures could complicate matters. "The Fed's pause was a hawkish one, and if job growth and earnings don't moderate from the April pace, rate hikes could be back in play," warned economist Nancy Vanden Houten of Oxford Economics.

But this is unlikely, with Vanden Houten noting that her expectation is for job growth to slow as the US economy enters a "mild recession." This comes as the impact of rate hikes and a tightening in lending standards weigh on the economy and the labor market in the second half of the year, she said. —AFP



ANNAPOLIS: In this file photo taken on May 16, 2022 a "Now Hiring" sign at T J Maxx in Annapolis, Maryland.— AFP

Gulf Bank's Datathon: Registration opens until May 9

KUWAIT: Gulf Bank will be closing registrations for the second Gulf Bank "Datathon" competition on May 9, to prepare the final list of participants for the competition that is set to happen on May 12, 2023, at Al-Shaheed Park, Phase Two (Multi-Purpose Hall).

In cooperation with INJAZ Kuwait, the Bank has introduced the competition to youth segments aged 14-18 years for the first time in Kuwait, with the aim of teaching the students how to use Google Analytics through a workshop, and to participate in a five-hour competition.

The bank will offer three valuable prizes to the winning projects, where the Data Modeling and Visualization category winners will receive a prize of KD 1,000 (all ages), the Data Visualization category winners will receive a prize of KD 500 (all ages), and the Digital Analytics category winners will receive a prize of KD 500 – which is specifically designated for youth aged 14 to 18 years.

The Chief Data & Innovation Officer at Gulf Bank, Mai Bader Al-Owaish, commented saying: "At Gulf Bank, we believe that by providing this distinguished data platform, we will contribute to encouraging digital innovations – enabling specialists and interested parties to actively participate in the innovation of new technologies. This also contributes towards providing the best digital experiences to the Kuwaiti society." Al-Owaish indicated that the competition provides a wonderful platform for data enthusiasts to learn and apply their skills in data science. Considering that the "Datathon" is one of the many steps that contribute to providing society with a new set of skills and challenges, aimed at helping the next generations of digital content creators in the country. The competition also contributes towards enhancing the national economy through data and digital services. And as



part of its preparations to launch the second "Datathon" competition, Gulf Bank recently organized a Datathon Event Series entitled "Paths To A Career In Data Science", in cooperation with Coded Human Recourses Development Company, which was moderated by Mai Bader Al-Owaish.

The seminar discussed the paths available for young people looking to pursue a career in data science, as well as Gulf Bank's role in helping students and graduates build their career paths. Through providing them opportunities to directly communicate with data science pioneers and professionals and benefit from their expertise.

Furthermore, the workshop will witness the participation of Assistant Professor of Computer Engineering at the Public Authority for Applied Education and Training, Dr. Ahmad Al-Baqsmi, and Gulf Bank's Manager of the Digital Analytics Unit, Najla Al-Meshari as well as Data Scientist, Mariam Bazzi. The "Datathon" is a competition open to all participants who seek to learn and apply data science tools and techniques, and work towards finding solutions with innovative concepts and ideas.

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

Speaking earlier at the meeting, Tucker insisted the proposal to split the bank was not beneficial. "We concluded that the alternative structural options would materially destroy value for shareholders, including putting your dividends at risk. This remains our unanimous view today," he said. But Ping An, which owns more than eight percent of HSBC, argued that the lender lags behind international peers and that a recent improvement in performance was tied mainly to rising interest rates, which it claims have peaked.

The US Federal Reserve this week hinted that it would pause a policy of lifting borrowing costs aimed at cooling inflation. The European Central Bank on Thursday delivered a smaller interest rate increase than recently as higher borrowing costs begin to take their toll, but said it had "more ground to cover" in fighting red-hot price increases. "It is necessary for HSBC to push for structural reform to fundamentally address HSBC's underlying market competitiveness issues," Michael Huang, chairman and CEO of Ping An Asset Management, said recently.

Ping An had called on HSBC to engage in a "strategic restructuring" that would see it create a separately-listed bank headquartered in Hong Kong. Huang said the proposal would allow the bank to retain control over a separate Asia business, adding that management had "exaggerated many of the costs and risks" associated with a split. HSBC was among a number of major banks to cancel dividends early in the Covid-19 pandemic after an order from the Bank of England, a move that riled some Hong Kong investors. Some retail investors had cited the dividends cancellation as a reason to back the spin-off proposal. Friday's shareholder meeting faced disruption from climate protesters, a common feature this year at annual general meetings being held by major UK companies. "You are happy to profit while the world burns. HSBC stop the greenwash," one protester shouted as the meeting got underway and before security removed some demonstrators. —AFP

KFH participates in AAOIFI Sharia Board Conference

KUWAIT: Kuwait Finance House (KFH) Group is participating as the main sponsor in AAOIFI Annual Sharia Board Conference, organized by the Accounting and Auditing Organization for Islamic Financial Institutions (AAOIFI) in cooperation with the Central Bank of Bahrain, to be held in Bahrain on May 7 and 8.

KFH's participation stems from its keenness to develop the Islamic banking industry and to continue supporting the advancement of financial products and services in accordance with sharia, as the conference is one of the most prominent gatherings of sharia scholars and decision-makers to discuss various topics and developments in the Islamic financial industry worldwide.

The conference gathered scholars, leaders, and experts in the Islamic financial industry as well as senior officials of central banks and supervisory authorities. Through six panel discussions, the conference will discuss the sharia aspects related to the Islamic financial industry within the framework of sharia governance for its institutions. It will also feature several live and virtual dialogue sessions over two days, in which a group leaders of the Islamic financial industry will present their visions for the development of Islamic banking, navigating challenges to uphold sharia principles in transactions, while addressing the issues at hand.

KFH Group's participation in the conference represents an opportunity to exchange ideas, visions, and concepts with leaders' specialists in the Islamic banking industry, and to review the most important issues and topics in Islamic banking that require practical solutions and applications, especially that the Islamic banking sector needs continuous research and development efforts to address various issues facing its development. Established in 1991 in the Kingdom of Bahrain, AAOIFI is one of the leading international non-profit organizations supporting Islamic financial institutions, with significant professional achievements, mainly the issuance of 100 standards to date in the fields of accounting, auditing, business ethics and governance.



Canada added 41,000 jobs in April, beating forecasts

OTTAWA: The Canadian economy gained 41,000 jobs in April while the unemployment rate remained stable at five percent, close to a historic low for the fifth consecutive month, Statistics Canada announced Friday. Job growth, which was higher than analysts had forecast, increased in April as in March

Tunisia must control its trade deficit with Turkey, China: Study

TUNIS: Faced with limited foreign currency resources due to the blockage of foreign financing, the Tunisian state is called upon to focus its efforts on its domestic front through the control of the external balance of payments deficit and the trade balance, especially with China and Turkey, economists and professionals recommend.

The trade deficit with these two countries, which benefit from trade agreements to the detriment of Tunisia, amounts to nearly 2.7 billion dinars out of a total of 3.8 billion dinars of the country's overall deficit. This situation is not new, especially since the indicators of the National Institute of Statistics (INS) for the year 2022 showed that the value of Tunisian imports from Turkey reached, in November 2022, nearly 4.7 billion dinars, while Tunisian exports to this country did not exceed one billion dinars.

Tunisia's trade deficit with Turkey increased to 3.6 billion dinars, exceeding the country's total net external financing during 2022, estimated at 3.4 billion dinars, according to the latest data from the Ministry of Finance published in its latest report on the execution of the state budget for February 2023. The issue of Tunisia's trade deficit with China and Turkey has been the subject of several studies, including one prepared by the Tunisian Observatory of the Economy and published on January 25, 2022.

This study showed that this deficit has exhausted the country's foreign exchange reserves and constitutes a real threat to local production. The observatory also showed a downward trend in Tunisian imports to the European Union (EU) country in favor of China, Turkey and other countries. However, the question that arises concerns the impact of these imports on the country's economy.

According to the observatory, the occupation of China and Turkey of advanced ranks in the ranking of supplier countries of Tunisia threatens a number of sectors, which are still losing their share of the domestic market.

The Tunisian Confederation of Industry, Trade and Handicrafts (UTICA) stressed that the reform must be based on integrated scientific approaches. It called in this sense to avoid wasting more time and resources and to stop the excessive recourse to external debt for consumption needs to the detriment of investment. The employers' confederation warned against the excessive recourse to imports of what the country is capable of growing or manufacturing locally as well as against the carelessness and lack of firmness in the face of the extent of the informal sector to the detriment of the organized sector and structured companies.

It is also essential, according to UTICA, to remove all obstacles to the freedom to work and produce, to support the private initiative and facilitate the launch of productive projects with a view to achieving one project creator per family, in order to alleviate the burden of unemployment, revive economic activity and create a new societal dynamic.— Agencies

(by 35,000 jobs) and for the eighth consecutive month. Gains were observed mainly in part-time work, the first notable increase since October.

Employment increased in the private sector while the number of self-employed workers remained unchanged. It increased in several sectors such as wholesale and retail trade, transport, as well as in IT, culture and leisure. The average hourly wage increased by 5.2 percent compared to last year, reaching Can\$33.38 in April (22.5 euros). According to Statistics Canada, there were 1.1 million unemployed people in April, with most having been out of work for 13 weeks or less. The proportion of long-term unemployed, those who had been unemployed for 27 weeks or more, was down. — AFP



HSBC bank branch in Hong Kong.

German factory orders suffer biggest decline since 2020

Germany considers electricity price cap for industry

FRANKFURT/BERLIN: German industrial orders suffered their biggest fall in March since 2020, official data showed Friday, fuelling fears that Europe's biggest economy is entering a sharp downturn. New orders, which give a foretaste of industrial output, suffered a surprise drop of 10.7 percent compared with the previous month, according to provisional figures from federal statistics authority Destatis.

It was the biggest decline since April 2020, when the coronavirus pandemic had just started its march round the world, prompting lockdowns and border closures. Orders had been rising in recent months, bolstering hopes that Germany had weathered the fallout from the Ukraine war and resulting energy crisis better than feared.

But the latest data rang alarm bells anew about the state of the economy, with LBBW bank economist Jens-Oliver Niklasch calling the plunge a warning for investors. "This figure destroys what had been a good start to the year for German industry, and is a real recession signal," he said in a research note.

The decline could be seen in most areas of the manufacturing sector, Destatis said.

Foreign orders were down by 13.3 percent, and domestic orders by 6.8 percent on the previous month, it said. But the economy ministry said that new orders had been "very volatile" in recent times, and that key indicators of sentiment were continuing on an upward trend that started late last year.

Many economic indicators had started rebounding after falling last year in the wake of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, lifting hopes that Germany could avoid a recession. However the picture has been darkening again recently, with the economy narrowly dodging a recession in the first quarter, against expectations for a rebound, while exports also dropped in March.

Meanwhile, Germany's Economy Minister Robert

Habeck on Friday presented plans to cap the price of electricity used by energy-intensive industries to insulate the sector against sharp cost increases, but the proposal immediately sparked criticism. The cap, which would be set at 0.06 euros (\$0.07) per gigawatt hour (GWh), would apply until 2030 and cover at least 80 percent of companies' electricity usage.

Energy costs rose sharply in the wake of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, as Moscow dwindled critical gas supplies to Europe. The electricity price for non-residential customers averaged 0.18 euros without taxes in the second half of 2022, according to the German statistics agency Destatis.

The leap in costs for heating and electricity have weighed on industry with Germany experiencing anemic growth in the months since the outbreak of the conflict. Berlin announced a 200-billion-euro package in November to protect consumers and businesses from sky-high energy costs through April 2024. The measures had "stabilised energy-intensive industry but we must not squander this achievement", Habeck said at a press conference.

The new cap would ensure that "critical branches of industry" remained based in Germany and Europe, Habeck said. The Green party minister described the proposal as a longer-term "bridge" solution until renewables capacity has been increased and prices have come down. A "clearly defined" group of energy-intensive industries would have access to the low-cost electricity, according to the plan, including sectors such as chemicals, steel and glass manufacturing. Beneficiaries would see the difference between the market price for electricity and the cap reimbursed, with the total cost of the project running to between 25 and 30 billion euros, according to the economy ministry's estimates. The VCI chemicals lobby welcomed the



The production line at a Volkswagen factory in Zwickau. German industry had already been suffering from the effects of global trade tensions before the pandemic.

price cap in a statement as a "clear game changer for our international competitiveness".

The proposal however faces resistance from within the government coalition, a three-way alliance between the Social Democrats, Greens and the liberal FDP.

"I take a very critical view of the industrial electricity price," Finance Minister Christian Lindner wrote in the Handelsblatt daily earlier this week.

The idea was "economically unwise", said Lindner, whose party the FDP has championed Germany's balanced-budget orthodoxy. Habeck's proposals could also raise concerns in Brussels that Germany is unfairly subsidizing its industry. The ministry said it would "enter into a constructive discussion with the European Commission on all competition-related issues", while calling for a broader "European strategy to strengthen energy intensive industries". —AFP

ABK holds its Q1 2023 analyst conference call

KUWAIT: Al-Ahli Bank of Kuwait (ABK) recently held its analyst conference call pertaining to the financial results of quarter 1 of 2023. The digital meeting was organized by Arqam Capital and presented by Acting Group CEO Abdulla Al-Sumait, Group Chief Finance Officer Shiamak Soonawalla, and Chief Strategy Officer Abdulaziz Jawad. The discussion was moderated by Senior Manager of Investor Relations in Kuwait Yaaqoub Al-Mulla.

The call involved an extensive presentation of the group's performance and financial indicators during the first quarter of the year and shed light on ABK's most prominent strategic plans.

Noteworthy growth

Commenting on ABK's performance, Al-Sumait said, "We have, once again, delivered noteworthy growth for our shareholders in quarter 1 of 2023. Our strong performance is a direct result of the hard work and dedication of our employees combined with our focus on delivering value to our customers and shareholders. We have continued to see growth in our key markets and are confident in our ability to keep momentum for the remainder of the year."

ABK has successfully persisted its sustainable approach in achieving growth and profits in most key performance indicators across its operations as well as demonstrated a continuous improvement in asset quality. Al-Sumait shared that ABK has also maintained positive ratios in terms of profitability, Return on Average Assets (ROAA), Return on Average Equity (ROAE), improving asset quality ratios as well as coverage ratio.

Al-Sumait said, "We are well above both our current 9.5 percent minimum CET1 and 13 percent minimum Capital Adequacy Ratio (CAR) - Central Bank of Kuwait (CBK) requirement. Furthermore, the CAR was about 15.6 percent at the end of the first quarter of 2023."

He explained that the results of the first quarter demonstrate ABK's success in promoting operational growth, stressing his confidence in maintaining the same momentum for the remainder of 2023. The Acting CEO stated, "We have also continued to make significant progress in our digital transformation efforts which have enabled us to streamline our operations and provide a better customer experience. Looking ahead, we remain committed to driving innovation and growth in our business through the launch of an array of new services which contribute to strengthening our position amongst competing banks in Kuwait."

Corporate social responsibility

Al-Sumait concluded his participation in the call



Abdulla Al-Sumait

Shiamak Soonawalla

Abdulaziz Jawad

with an affirmation of the group's ongoing dedication to corporate social responsibility where he emphasized that ABK continues to play a leading role in partaking in a series of social and humanitarian initiatives in both Kuwait and abroad.

Continued growth

Soonawalla moved on to highlight that the results of the first quarter of 2023 reflect the success of the Group in achieving continued business growth. He pointed out, "The Group continues to benefit from its unique position amongst Kuwaiti banks in terms of geographical spread of operations. This diversification provides a strong competitive advantage and gives a significant degree of resilience to Group earnings."

He added, "The Group's geographical footprint supports revenue generation, loan distribution, and deposit collection. Our international operations, comprising the United Arab Emirates and our ABK-Egypt subsidiary contributes about 39 percent of operating income and 35 percent of total assets."

Soonawalla continued, "The Group has achieved a net profit of KD 10.8 million for the first quarter of the year, a 30 percent increase in the bottom line profit over the comparable quarter of 2022. Earnings per share for quarter 1 of 2023 reached 4 fils, an increase of 33 percent compared to 3 fils in the previous year."

Financial indicators

The CFO shared that net operating profit increased by 5 percent to total KD 22.3 million. Furthermore, there was a 4 percent improvement in operating income to KD 43.2 million broken down to 50 percent in commercial banking, 43 percent in retail banking, and 7 percent in treasury. The Non-Performing Loan (NPL) ratio stood at 1.45 percent, NPL coverage at 365 percent while loan provision-recorded KD 192 million.

Soonawalla stated that the Group continues to enjoy high liquidity levels at the end of the first quarter of this year with a Net Stable Funding Ratio of 108 percent and a liquidity ratio of 336 percent. Net loans and advances exceeded that of the corresponding quarter in the previous period by 11.6 percent and witnessed a total assets increase of 4.1 percent. As a result, customer deposits in quarter 1 of 2023 remained strong at KD 4.1 billion.

Edy Mahmud told a press conference. "The trend... is at the five percent level, indicating that Indonesia's economic growth is still stable," he said. Indonesia bounced back from the coronavirus pandemic last year, posting its highest level of growth since 2013 on the back of soaring export prices and the lifting of travel restrictions.

But the record-high commodity prices caused by Russia's invasion of Ukraine have started to ease, and countries including Indonesia have kept tightening monetary policy.

"We think the economy is set to struggle over the coming quarters," said Gareth Leather, senior Asia economist at Capital Economics. "Our forecast that global growth will struggle and that commodity prices will remain subdued suggest that exports will stay weak." Leather predicted Indonesia's annual growth would fall from 5.3 percent last year to 4.8 percent this year. — AFP

Indonesia economic growth keeps pace ahead of slowdown

JAKARTA: Indonesia's economic growth kept pace in the first quarter of the year, official data showed Friday, ahead of an expected slowdown that analysts said would be triggered by lagging exports and high interest rates. Southeast Asia's largest economy expanded 5.03 percent on-year in the period running from January through March, slightly up from 5.01 in the previous three months, Statistics Indonesia said.

The continued growth was driven by household spending, metal and mineral exports, and returning tourists, Statistics Indonesia official

He continued, the total interest income stood at KD 95.8 million in the first quarter of 2023, reflecting a strong growth of KD 40.3 million to 73 percent over the first quarter of 2022. Fees and commissions income contributed KD 7.9 million while other non-interest income sources contributed 8 percent (mainly investment and foreign exchange income). Soonawalla said, "The Group's operating expenses reflect continued investments in key business initiatives, digital technologies and processes. This enables the Group to offer the best-in-class services to its customers and optimize resources to improve operational efficiency."

He claimed that the Group remains committed to its conservative approach in managing credit exposures and provisioning and continues to benefit from its unique position amongst Kuwaiti banks. He added, "The Group total assets reached KD6.1 billion in March 2023, a 4.1 percent increase compared to March 2022. Loans and advances and investment securities increased by 11.6 percent and 12.7 percent respectively compared to March 2022. The ROAE for the current quarter improved to 6.1 percent from 3.9 percent in the comparable quarter of 2022. Also, 15.6 percent the total CAR remained strong and stable where interim profits are not factored in the computation of the 2023 quarter ICAR."

A strong brand

The Group Chief Finance Officer mentioned that the increase in retail deposits reflects the Group's sustained focus on the deposit-gathering aspects of the business thus leveraging ABK's longstanding ability to capitalize on the Group's strong brand, customer appeal and credit ratings. Soonawalla expressed his optimism with regards to the continued improvement in ABK's operating environment for the remainder of the year. He said, "ABK's net interest income has generally benefitted in the rising interest rate scenario. That said, the timing and extent to which increases in local interest rates would follow international benchmarks remains to be seen."

Jawad continued the meeting by providing updates on the overall global and regional macroeconomic and operating environment. He said, "So far this year, we have witnessed the failure of three American banks as well as a Swiss bank. This makes the global banking industry outlook slightly indefinite. This, accompanied by the ongoing war between Russia and Ukraine and high inflation rates, have together declined demand and inclined the risk of a recession." On the monetary policy front, Jawad stated that the Federal Reserve (Fed), along with other central banks around the world were trying to defeat inflation by rapidly raising the interest rates.



Maersk profits fall as post-COVID shipping boom fades

COPENHAGEN: Danish shipping giant Maersk reported a hefty drop in first-quarter earnings, hit by a decline in freight volumes after the surge seen as the global economy rebounded from the COVID-19 pandemic last year. For the first three months of the year, Maersk had a net profit of \$2.3 billion, down from \$6.8 billion a year earlier. The result fell short of analyst expectations, as Maersk also reported a 26 percent drop in revenue to \$14.2 billion.

A survey by Bloomberg saw analysts expecting revenue to come in at \$14.5 billion and net profit at \$3.5 billion. In February, the shipping company reported a net profit of \$29.2 billion for last year, the highest earnings ever reported by a Danish company, on soaring demand with the end of pandemic shutdowns that had crippled economies worldwide.

But it had noted that the logistics market had begun to "normalize". The first-quarter results "reflect the normalization of global demand and supply, characterized by the inventory corrections seen in Western economies over the past two quarters", Maersk said, leading to "significantly lower profitability of the three main businesses".

In the Ocean division—by far its largest, covering shipping activities—turnover fell by 36.6 percent to \$9.9 as a result of lower freight rates and volumes caused by the slowdown in demand. Maersk said that easing supply bottlenecks and consumer demand had led to an "inventory overhang," but that it expected a "more normal business environment" in the second half of the year. — AFP



DENPASER: A woman walks past clothes for sale at a mall in Denpasar on Indonesia's resort island of Bali on May 5, 2023. — AFP

Lifestyle



Photo shows Toyota Corolla cars in a traffic jam beneath the kot-e Sangi bridge in Kabul. — AFP photos



An Afghan taxi driver stands beside his Toyota Corolla car along a road, beneath the kot-e Sangi bridge in Kabul.



Afghan boys travel in a Toyota Corolla taxi in Kabul.

Afghanistan's enduring love affair with the Corolla

Little is certain in Afghanistan - armies invade and retreat, governments rise and fall - but when the key of a Toyota Corolla turns in the ignition, the engine can be relied upon to roar to life. A humble Japanese runabout with a reliable albeit unglamorous reputation, the Toyota Corolla is said to be the world's most popular car, with over 50 million trundling off production lines since 1966.

Sturdy, uncomplicated and affordable, it is finely tuned for a nation where roads dissolve into punishing terrain, repairs rely on frayed supply chains, and a "make do" mentality has emerged from decades of hardship. "These cars have always been there for people," says mechanic Mohammad Aman. "If you travel with these cars, they can take you anywhere." "The Corolla is quick, their metal is bold, they work well," the 50-year-old told AFP. Other cars "are flimsy like paper" by comparison, he insists.

In Afghanistan, Corollas are virtually ubiquitous. Fleets of the suburban mainstay sell on forecourts overlooked by rusted Soviet troop carriers. Corolla taxis with pummeled bodywork jounce past humvees immobilized since US forces withdrew in 2021. Even hauling up a mountain in a 4X4 you may be overtaken by a careening Corolla driver. And Afghans everywhere emblazon their vehicles with English-language tributes romanticizing the brand: "Happiness is a Toyota feeling", "Toyota sets the standard" and "Beautiful Corolla" have become the unofficial slogans of Kabul's grinding traffic jams.

'Special craze'

Corollas flooded Afghanistan after the withdrawal of Soviet forces in 1989

and the subsequent collapse of the USSR - before which Moscow's state-owned Lada brand dominated the market. They have had a background role in national history ever since. When Washington launched air strikes after the 9/11 attacks, Taleban founder Mullah Omar fled his Kandahar hideaway in a white Corolla.



Afghan mechanics repair a Toyota Corolla car at a market in Kabul.

lah Omar fled his Kandahar hideaway in a white Corolla.

It was buried in 2001 but triumphantly excavated last year "still in good condition", a Taleban government spokesman said, adding it should be publicly displayed as a "great historical monument". Over the Taleban's 20-year insurgency, the Corolla became the vehicle of choice for car bombers. Expendably cheap and camouflaged in plain sight, they were packed with explosives and rammed into targets with devastating effects. In 2022, after American forces had pulled out, Tale-

ban authorities boasted about a new Afghan-designed sports car: a supposed symbol of progress. But under its sleek, aerodynamic exterior were the mechanical innards of a modest Corolla. Everywhere, sprawling families cram into the car, with passengers

the incongruous coat of arms of a district in central Germany. But all their roads have led to Afghanistan, where "people have a special craze for Toyota", Nazar insists.

'Top and fantastic car'

Such is Afghans' faith in the car that the capital's largest repair market is not served by paved roads. Shuhada-e Salehin is a jungle of interchangeable spare parts where Corollas are praised for their workaday dependability. "Some people's rides are simple, but some have a passion for making them fancy," explains mechanic Aman.

Begrimed with engine grease, his colleagues peer under the hood of an impossibly battered 1991 wagon - its paintwork cracked like a dry riverbed, the back wheel chocked with a stone, a peeling "fantastic Corolla" decal stuck to the window. Next door, others fiddle with tendrils of wiring in the footwell of a Corolla adorned with cursive verse: "HighSpeed Toyota. Top and fantastic car in the world. Compatible with all condition."

A dull green model nearby is improbably branded "Dramatic Classic Car". Out in Kabul's afternoon traffic, 27-year-old cab driver Naqeebullah pilots a sun-bleached Corolla three years his senior as he scouts for fares. He estimates 80 percent of vehicles on the road match his. "All cars have failed to show results apart from the Toyota Corolla," he puts it simply. Swaying from his rearview mirror is a prayer card. "Glorified be the one who has made this means of transport subservient to us," it reads. — AFP

Web Summit, the world's biggest annual technology conference.

Dantas grew up in a favela in Guarujá, a seaside city in the southeastern state of Sao Paulo. He got his start directing music videos for "ostentation funk" artists, a sex-and-bling-heavy subgenre that emerged in Sao Paulo in the 2000s. "I like telling stories and connecting with young people from the hood," he says. His audience soon exploded. His 2015 video "Baile de Favela," for funk artist MC Joao, racked up more than 100 million views.

It hit the height of mainstream success when Olympic medalist Rebeca Andrade, Brazil's most famous gymnast, used it in the soundtrack for her floor routine at the Tokyo Games in 2021. Forbes Brasil named KondZilla to its list of the country's most influential people under 30 in 2017. Today, he runs a business empire that includes a record label, TV and film production company, music news site, and an institute to train talented young artists. His TV series "Sintonia" is the most widely watched Brazilian show on Netflix, and his most-watched music videos each have more than a billion views.

Favela connection

Despite his stage name - a reference to movie monster Godzilla - Dantas is a small, laid-back man with a gleaming smile. At the Web Summit conference, he patiently signed autographs, posed for pictures and took time to speak with fans seeking his

advice. He says one of the keys to his success has been the democratization of technology, which has allowed people in Brazil's impoverished favelas to consume and produce whatever content they want on their cell phones. "When we have the chance to choose what we consume, we don't pick the story of the firefighter in New York. We pick stories that look like ours, that we can identify with," he said.

Dantas is known for his savvy at reading the market, and adapting as it changes. "One minute, you're on top. The next, you fall. Everything changes

fast, and you have to adapt," he said. One of his key transitions was launching "light" versions of songs, replacing the "indecent" language that permeates the genre with safe-for-work lyrics, he said. He credits that with expanding his subscriber numbers from six million in 2016 to 22 million in 2017.

Old school

Dantas says he was always interested in music and visual media. He got his professional start at 18, after his mother died. He received some money from her pension and life-insurance policy, which he thought about using to buy an apartment and get out of the favela, he said. Instead, he took a risk: he used the money to pay for production equipment and professional training. He turned out to have a flair for directing irresistible, visually seductive music videos - and discovering new talent.

To help promote the next generation of "KondZillas," Dantas launched a "Creators School" last year to train video and music artists from his hometown favelas. But in business terms, he sees people over 50 as his next growth market, he said - an unusual statement at a tech conference, especially from someone in an industry obsessed with youth, TikTok and trends. "They say the first generation that will live past 100 has already been born," Dantas said in his talk. "I'm aiming at them." — AFP



Brazilian filmmaker KondZilla Dantas attends the second day of the Web Summit Rio 2023 at the RioCentro Expo Center in Rio de Janeiro. — AFP

Rising star rides Mexican music's wave of success

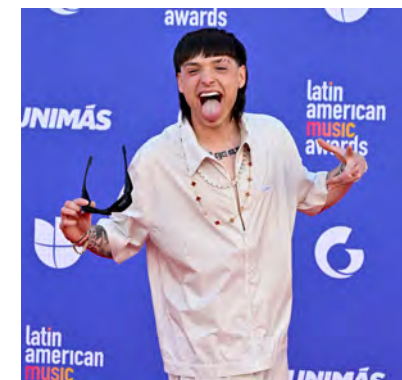
A fast-rising young Latin music star is helping a Mexican musical genre that has courted controversy by glamorizing drug traffickers to take global charts by storm. Peso Pluma, who takes his nickname from the Featherweight boxing category, currently has several songs in both Billboard magazine's Hot 100 US chart and streaming giant Spotify's global Top 50. The 23-year-old was recently invited to sing "Ella Baila Sola" (She Dances Alone) - his hit collaboration with the group Eslabon Armado - on NBC's "The Tonight Show" hosted by Jimmy Fallon.

Peso Pluma is part of a new generation of singer-songwriters of the "corrido" genre that became popular during the Mexican revolution of 1910-1917 to tell an alternative story to the official narrative. These days it is also known for rap-infused "narcocorrido" ballads about drug traffickers. Corrido's success abroad reflects the growing popularity of a broader genre known as regional Mexican that encompasses various subgenres including banda, norteno and mariachi.

Also enjoying Hot 100 chart success, Puerto Rican megastar Bad Bunny has teamed up with Grupo Frontera, a regional Mexican band from the United States, to sing "Un x100to," a romantic cumbia. According to Billboard magazine, it is the first time that two regional Mexican songs have simultaneously reached the top five of the Hot 100.

'Sociocultural phenomenon'

It is all the most surprising given that Peso Pluma - real name Hassan Emilio Kabande Laija - was unknown to most Mexicans until recently. He spurns the traditional macho image of cowboy boots and hat, preferring rap and reggaeton style baggy clothes, sneakers and designer caps. Peso Pluma's success is not a "fleeting" fashion, but part of a "sociocultural phenomenon," said Alejandro Grageda, head of collaboration between artists and labels at Spotify Mexico.



Mexican singer Peso Pluma arrives for the 8th annual Latin American Music Awards at the MGM Grand Garden Arena in Las Vegas, Nevada. — AFP

Most of his listeners are 20-something members of "Generation Z," immigrants or first-generation Americans who grew up listening to a mixture of their parents' traditional music and songs from their new country, Grageda told AFP. The Latino population in the United States grew from 9.1 million in 1970 to 62.1 million in 2020, according to official figures. Although corrido has already been made popular by established groups such as "Los Tigres del Norte," the boom has been fueled by digital platforms, according to music and culture specialist Julian Woodside.

"Peso Pluma's reach in a digitized global industry is unheard of for a Mexican artist," he said. It also reflects the "Latinization of the American entertainment industry," he said. "This new Mexican generation that often grew up in the United States has networks, ties and the expertise to develop promotion strategies," Woodside said. Grageda at Spotify Mexico sees the potential for "a genre that can become as or more important than reggaeton."

Narco culture

The "narcocorrido" subgenre has been criticized for glorifying Mexico's powerful drug cartels with rags-to-riches stories. Peso Pluma has admitted that he wrote several songs at the request of drug traffickers. "It's not that we're supporting or apologizing for them. It's just work," he said in an interview in October. In some videos Peso Pluma even brandished firearms and sang lyrics about infamous drug lord Joaquin "El Chapo" Guzman's Sinaloa Cartel. "Talking about Sinaloa is also part of the marketing to attract a certain type of person," said Juan Antonio Fernandez, a historian and music specialist at the Autonomous University in the northwestern cartel-stronghold. —AFP

KondZilla, entrepreneur of Brazilian favela funk

They say everything he touches turns to gold: KondZilla, the man behind the most popular YouTube channel in Latin America, has revolutionized Brazilian funk music, taking favela beats to a massive online audience. The 34-year-old entrepreneur, who grew up in the slums himself, launched his "KondZilla Channel" in 2012. At the time, the music industry had barely taken notice of Brazilian funk, a Rio de Janeiro-born hip-hop style known as the fuel for all-night-and-into-the-next-day parties in the favelas.

Today, KondZilla - whose real name is Konrad Dantas - has more than 66.5 million subscribers on YouTube, and favela funk is mainstream music in Brazil. "The big multinational record labels were ignoring that segment of the market," Dantas told AFP in an interview. "The only way to get this content out there was YouTube," he said after giving a talk this week at the Rio edition of

Lifestyle

Every morning, Jacques-Andre Istel has breakfast in bed at the center of the world. Istel is founder, mayor and postmaster general of Felicity, a stretch of California's Sonora Desert where for nearly four decades he has been building a museum of, y'know... the whole of human history. "This doesn't exist anywhere else on this planet," the 94-year-old told AFP.

What started in 1986 with two small houses has grown into an amphitheater of Istel's dreams; 2,600 acres (1,052 hectares) where the passage of time is marked by a sundial that uses the arm of God - as painted by Michelangelo in the Sistine Chapel - to cast its shadow. Nearby sits a bit of an old staircase that used to be part of the Eiffel Tower, its steps ascending into the void. The town's post office, which Istel has operated since December 1987, collects and distributes mail for a handful of residents and tourists. The \$1 stipend checks sent by the US Treasury every year are uncashed and framed.

Istel was elected mayor of Felicity shortly after it was founded in a three-vote landslide. The ballots were cast by Istel, his wife Felicia, after whom the town is named, and the invisible dragon that stars in Istel's storybook about the center of the world. (A supervisor from Imperial County, in which Felicity sits, declared all three ballots valid, noting that a dragon's vote was recognized "for the first and only time in California history".)

The 'center' of the world

Visitors to Felicity - dozens of tourists stop by every day between October and April - enter between symmetrical houses and are faced with a pyramid. This is - officially - the middle of, well, everything. Honestly. There's paperwork to prove it: Supervisors in Imperial County declared it so. Istel acknowledges with a twinkle in his eye that he's using a bit of creative license. "The center of the world can be anywhere," he smiles. Beyond the pyramid, 723 red granite panels stretch out in thematic branches, exploring history, geography,



Visitors look at panels at the Museum of History in Granite, in Felicity, California.

politics, science, fashion and culture. Here, a panel tells the story of slavery in the United States; there, one examines the life of Alexander the Great. One slab deals with the sacrificial rites of the Vikings, while another logs America's eating habits.

Skydiver

Istel was born in 1929 into a privileged family in the French capital. He left the country as the Nazis were preparing to march on Paris, and wound up in the United States. "I'm here thanks to the Germans," he says. "My family fought against them for three generations. My father left for England with [Charles] De Gaulle, my brother left the French Army for Canada and enlisted in the Royal Canadian Air

Force and eventually died, and my mother and the rest of us kids came to America."

After a degree in economics, the young Istel went into the family banking business on Wall Street. But in a seemingly emblematic bit of top-sy-turviness, he wound up as a professional skydiver, the kind of career swap disappointment that usually seems to happen the other way around. Seeking thrills outside of a job he did not really enjoy, he got his pilot's license, and did his first parachute jump.

A trip to Europe introduced him to the then-unfamiliar activity of skydiving, an idea Istel brought back to the United States, where the company he cofounded helped popularize the idea of recreational skydiving, becoming

known in some quarters as the "Father of American skydiving." Contracts with the military and a roaring civilian business made the firm a success, and provided the nest egg for what later became Felicity.

In a study lined with memories from a very full lifetime - a diploma from Princeton, pre-war furniture and family photographs - Istel says his museum is not a legacy for himself, but a gift to all of humanity. Perhaps it will become a place of pilgrimage for generations to come; or maybe in seismically-active California it will be destroyed in a catastrophic earthquake, he muses. "The silver lining in that case is that archaeologists of the future will unearth a great find," he says. And if they never find it? Well, that's just how things

work out sometimes. "Everything is forgotten," he says. Now well into his tenth decade, Istel shows no sign of slowing down (breakfast in bed is a decades-old custom for him, not a sign of old age). He swims daily and skips jauntily up the 49 steps that lead to the chapel in Felicity. There is, after all, still so much to do - almost 200 panels are yet to be carved. And who knows? There's still all that desert space to fill. The magnitude of the task might keep a lesser man awake at night. But not Istel. "I sleep well. But I do think about the next panels," he says. "At Felicity we don't do things by halves. We do them properly or we don't do them at all." — AFP



An aerial view of the tiny town of Felicity, home of The Church on the Hill and a 21-foot-tall stone-and-glass pyramid marking the "Official Center of the World." The tiny town of Felicity, which borders Yuma, Arizona and Mexico, was founded by French-American Jacques-Andre Istel, 94, and is the home of Istel's passion project, the Museum of History in Granite. — AFP photos



An aerial view of the tiny town of Felicity, home of The Church on the Hill (left), The Museum of History in Granite (center) and a 21-foot-tall stone-and-glass pyramid marking the "Official Center of the World".

Nicaraguan paradise draws Americans and Europeans

Tucked away in a southern corner of Nicaragua, far from the political persecution of the opposition by President Daniel Ortega, a tiny colony of Americans and Europeans have carved out a new home on the Pacific, lured by the area's natural beauty, security and tranquility. San Juan del Sur, on the Pacific coast 140 kilometers south of Managua on the border with Costa Rica, is an ideal place to retire or set up a business.

While Ortega's political opponents are thrown in jail or forced into exile - a "continuum of repression," in the words of a recent Amnesty International report - this little corner of tropical paradise attracts foreigners to enjoy its bars, restaurants, whale watching

and landscapes. Many expats first visited as tourists before deciding to stay permanently, while other more recent arrivals were attracted by lax Covid-19 vaccine rules.

American Christina Alty came 10 years ago to surf and has since set up an estate agency. "I like the lifestyle of Nicaragua in general, it checks all my boxes for all the outdoor things that I enjoy: the beaches, the hiking, the scenery," said Alty. Her clients "just enjoy the different lifestyle change. "It's a lot slower pace of life here than wherever they came from," added the 37-year-old mother of two children who study in a bilingual school in the town of 17,000 inhabitants. While Alty strolls along the beach, tourists lounge on chairs, lie on the sand, play sports or enjoy a dip in the sea.

The space to be children

Two bilingual schools combine formal education with open air classes. "We are in a very natural environment, we're four kilometers from the center of San Juan del Sur, we're surrounded by mango, almond and plum trees," Jaime Lynn Hunter, director of the Adelante school, told AFP. "And I think

parents like to send their children here because they don't feel enclosed, they have the necessary space to stretch, run and be children," added the 38-year-old, who has lived in the town for 13 years. The school has 170 pre-school and primary pupils.

It was established in 2016 to teach English to local children with the cooperation of US and Japanese NGOs. The pupils, 30 percent of whom are foreign, follow the Nicaraguan curriculum but classes alternate between Spanish and English from one week to the next. "We're delighted that our children are safe here and can study in an outdoor setting, not with gates and closed doors, and they don't need to be afraid of anything more serious such as shootings, which you see a lot these days" in US schools, said Hunter.

Arriving in 2010 to work as an English teacher, Hunter married a Nicaraguan and now has two children. "What I like here is that they still play in the street, they still go to the park. Children here are still children and this makes me think of when I was a child, when I would go out and play until it got dark." Hunter said she has always been treated well by the local

population. "When I came here, I saw people that had nothing, but they were prepared to give me everything," she said. The other bilingual school, San Juan del Sur Day School, has 175 pupils with 43 percent coming from 17 different foreign countries, including the US, Britain and Russia.

'A beautiful country'

Every year, around 30 cruise ships from the US, Canada and Europe dock at the port in San Juan del Sur, according to the tourism ministry. In the mid 19th century, thousands of east coast Americans passed through this small town during the US gold rush, on their way to California. One of them was writer Mark Twain, who shares a monument with Nicaraguan poet Ruben Dario in a town square. It remains a popular destination for tourists today. "I like surfing and there's also beaches nearby to surf," said British tourist Mark Guitler. "It's a beautiful country, it has great weather here, I really like the people, I really like the ocean. I mean, what more could I ask for?" — AFP

Pasta la vista! Dumped spaghetti piles puzzle US town

US police have an unusual case to crack: why were several hundred pounds of pasta illegally dumped next to a stream in a New Jersey town? The macaroni mystery unfolded in Old Bridge, near New York City, late last month when a resident posted pictures of the oodles of noodles on Facebook. The photos showed no sauce, no parmesan, and no meatballs - just piles and piles of spaghetti, macaroni and alphabet shapes beside a creek in the woods. "Fifteen wheelbarrow loads," to be exact, town business administrator Himanshu Shah told AFP in a statement Friday.

He said employees from the public works department and police officers were dispatched to the scene after seeing the images circulate online. "We would estimate several hundred pounds of uncooked pasta that was removed from the packaging and then dumped along the creek," Shah added. That was sure to raise eyebrows in New Jersey, where about 17 percent of the population identify as having Italian ancestry.

Workers were able to load all of the food in under an hour and properly dispose of it, he explained. "It looks like it was only there for a short time but moisture did start to soften some of the pasta," said Shah, who added that the police were investigating. Local media reported that the town of 65,000 people was abuzz with speculation about who might be responsible - a restaurant perhaps, or a canceled caterer? Social media users were quick to share their pasta puns. "We should send the perpetrators to the state penne tentiary," someone quipped on Reddit. — AFP



Picture of a sculpture of a turtle seen at the main entrance of the Pacific coastal town of San Juan del Sur, Nicaragua. Drawn to the natural beauty, security and tranquility, dozens of Americans and Europeans have settled down in a coastal town in Nicaragua, far from the country's political strife. — AFP photos



Tourists board a boat in the Pacific coastal town of San Juan del Sur, Nicaragua.

Lifestyle



Britain's Queen Camilla and Britain's King Charles III travel in the Gold State Coach, back to Buckingham Palace from Westminster Abbey in central London on May 6, 2023, after their coronations. The set-piece coronation is the first in Britain in 70 years, and only the second in history to be televised. — AFP photos



Britain's King Charles III and Britain's Queen Camilla travel in the Gold State Coach, built in 1762, back to Buckingham Palace from Westminster Abbey in central London on May 6, 2023, after their coronations.

Thousands cheer on Charles III as UK coronation party begins

Thousands of people turned central London red, white and blue on Saturday, with a sea of Union Jack flags lining the streets for the coronation of King Charles III. While the coronation service was itself a somber and sober affair, a celebratory atmosphere filled the British capital and beyond, despite wet weather. Crowds across the capital cheered in unison as the crown was placed on King Charles III's head at 12.02 pm.

On The Mall outside Buckingham Palace, the most fervent royal fanatics got the party started hours before the ceremony began, with some camping out for days to secure a prime spot for the historic event. As the royal procession passed on the way to Westminster Abbey, a forest of arms rose as people captured images of the king with their mobile phones. Street vendors joined the hardcore supporters in the clamor to see the monarch's golden coach, with one man bellowing out "God Save the King". "We've been here since five (am)", said proud fan Alison Marschall, as she showed off her video of the procession.

'Good vibe'

But not everyone was in a celebratory mood, with scores of republican protest-



The Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby places a modified version of Queen Mary's Crown onto the head of Britain's Camilla, Queen Consort during the Coronation Ceremony inside Westminster Abbey in central London, on May 6, 2023.

ers - many dressed in yellow and waving banners saying "Not my king" - gathered at Trafalgar Square. "I'm here because I want to protest against this outdated monarchy, I want to protest because you shouldn't be head of state based on who you were born from," said republican Jane, in her 30s.

Hours earlier, London's Metropolitan police arrested several organizers from the anti-monarchy group Republic, in

a move denounced by Human Rights Watch as draconian and "alarming". At Whitehall, the road leading to Westminster Abbey, crowds cheered and waved flags when the carriage with the king and queen passed by. Emma Cuthbert, 40, said seeing the procession was "brilliant", adding "I've come a long way to see this, so I'll be staying here all day."

Among the early birds on The Mall was Caryl Hall, 55, and her teenage children. "I'm excited. There's a good vibe, good atmosphere - friendly, happy, patriotic," said Hall, draped in a flag with a plastic crown on her head. "It was hard to wake up the teenagers but this is part of history," added the South African, who was standing on a stool to get a good view. Dave Giddings travelled from Scotland with his wife and son. "It's being part of the future. It's an important thing," said the 41-year-old, sporting a gold crown and Union Jack sunglasses.

'History'

Torrential downpours on Friday failed to dampen spirits, with more bad weather forecast throughout Saturday. Hillary, 72, and her daughter Jo, 47, caught an early train to join the crowds. "It's living history. He is never going to be the queen (Elizabeth II) but he is our king and today we

just want to celebrate," said Hillary, who only gave her first name.

The pair were loaded up with Union Jack hats, flags and picnic chairs, but in true British fashion were worried about the weather forecast. Many have flown in from abroad, including Christine Wilen, a retired nurse from Niagara Falls in Canada. "I made the trip for the coronation," the 55-year-old, kitted out in the colors of her native Canada, told AFP. "I'm very excited to be here, to be part of this history. I've always been a monarchist," she added.

Recent polls indicate waning support for the royals, especially among younger people, but plenty of monarchists of all ages turned out Saturday, including Londoner Caba Mendes, 21. "It's a great day for the country, I can't wait," he said while holding his phone with a selfie stick for the procession on The Mall. Helen Rimmer, who travelled from Cumbria, northwest England, on Friday night, secured her spot on Whitehall at 4:45 am. "It's a very special occasion, especially for our country and the Commonwealth. It's the atmosphere, just everything about it really. It's just a big celebration. It's great." — AFP



Britain's Prince Harry, Duke of Sussex (second left) and Britain's Prince Andrew, Duke of York (right) leave after attending the coronations of Britain's King Charles III and Britain's Camilla.



Britain's Prince William, Prince of Wales touches St Edward's Crown on the head of his father, Britain's King Charles III, during the King's Coronation Ceremony inside Westminster Abbey in central London on May 6, 2023.

King Charles's reign rings in the changes

From the national anthem to coins, stamps, prisons and warships, many everyday aspects of life in Britain have changed between the accession of King Charles III and his coronation on Saturday. The change in monarch triggered a wave of changes throughout Britain and the other Commonwealth realms where he is also head of state. Gradually, Charles will make his mark on banknotes, passports, postboxes and theatres, with some changes timing for the coronation.

National anthem

Britain's national anthem is now "God Save the King", with male-version lyrics that had not been sung since 1952 - catching many people out. It is also a national anthem in New Zealand and the royal anthem in Australia and Cana-

da. The new version was officially sung for the first time at a memorial service for Queen Elizabeth II on September 9, 2022, the day after her death. Many were visibly checking the lyrics.

Opera singer Katherine Jenkins made the first recording. The Welsh mezzo-soprano was recording in a rural church on September 9 when the BBC got in touch. It was broadcast that afternoon. "We prayed for King Charles III and then I sang it," she said. "It was really, really emotional." Jenkins said she "really had to think about" the new words, "singing it with a sense of looking forwards and continuity".

Passports

The first British passports in Charles's name will be issued from mid-2023. Those in Elizabeth's name remain valid until expiry, meaning some will be used until 2033. All passports therefore currently still read: "Her Britannic Majesty's Secretary of State Requests and requires in the Name of Her Majesty all those whom it may concern to allow the bearer to pass freely without let or hindrance, and to afford the bearer such

assistance and protection as may be necessary." Similar text appears inside Australian, Canadian and New Zealand passports. More than a million Australian passports printed before Elizabeth's death will be used up before the revised text comes in.

Coins and banknotes

The first coins bearing the king's head entered circulation in Britain in December. He approved the portrait by British sculptor Martin Jennings. The Royal Mint released 4.9 million 50-pence coins which celebrate the life of Queen Elizabeth on the reverse. Charles is depicted facing left, as per tradition looking the opposite way to his predecessor. A second 50p coin celebrates the coronation, featuring Westminster Abbey and Charles wearing a crown, while a special £5 coin depicts the coronation regalia. Elizabeth's portrait appeared on several currencies, including coins of the East Caribbean dollar, Canada, Australia and New Zealand. The first Bank of England notes featuring Charles are set to enter circulation by mid-2024. The designs otherwise remain unchanged. But Australia's central bank

will replace Elizabeth on the \$5 note with a design honouring Indigenous culture. Stamps - Britain's Royal Mail released the first postage stamps featuring the new monarch's image on April 4. The portrait is adapted from Jennings' portrait. Stamps featuring Elizabeth will be sold until they run out. A special set of coronation stamps entitled "A New Reign" celebrates causes championed by the king. The four stamps depict the coronation, diversity and community, the Commonwealth, and sustainability and biodiversity.

New postboxes will feature the CIIR cipher, for Charles III Rex. The first Isle of Man post box bearing the cipher was unveiled on April 27 at the Postal Headquarters in the capital Douglas. Theatres, troops and twang - Her Majesty's Theatre in London's West End, where "The Phantom of the Opera" has been running since 1986, will revert to becoming His Majesty's on Saturday. In the military, new recruits now metaphorically take the king's shilling to sign up, and adhere to the king's regulations once in the ranks or board one of His Majesty's ships. — AFP

Charles, Camilla: Crowning moment in long love story

After decades of devotion and 18 years of marriage, King Charles III will finally see his goal realized when his "darling wife" Queen Camilla is crowned at his side on Saturday. She was the non-negotiable part of his life, despite their long relationship challenging Britain's institutions and triggering strong public resistance. But at London's Westminster Abbey, Camilla will be anointed and crowned as queen, in the presence of world leaders. Never truly in her element in the public eye, is the woman who lived for so long in the shadows worried about the global spotlight of the coronation?

"Anyone would be anxious on an occasion of this sort of importance," her son Tom Parker Bowles told The News Agents podcast. "I'd be terrified if I had to sort of walk out wearing ancient robes," the food writer said. "She's 75, it's hard to do it. But she never complained." Parker Bowles said the couple were "doing amazingly". His 74-year-old stepfather was a "good, kind, intelligent man who cares deeply about his roles", he said. However, the road to the coronation has not been easy.

Vilified

In the 1990s, Camilla was the most hated woman in Britain, blamed by Princess Diana for the break-up of her own marriage to Charles. Diana nicknamed Camilla the "rotweiler". Charles and Diana's younger son Prince Harry, now estranged from the monarchy, branded her a "villain" who played the long game to get the crown.

But Charles never wavered in his devotion to her. The couple first met in the 1970s. Close to aristocratic circles, Camilla Shand was relaxed in his company, amusing and reassuring the then-insecure prince. However, while Charles went off to serve in the Royal Navy, Camilla fell for the playboy army officer Andrew Parker Bowles, tying the knot in 1973, leaving Charles feeling empty and devastated.

Their marriage crumbled amid Parker Bowles' extra-marital affairs. In 1981, Charles wed Diana Spencer, the daughter of an earl, in what was branded a fairytale marriage. He was 32; she had just turned 20. Camilla was among the wedding guests. Hopelessly mismatched, Charles and Diana soon drifted apart. Prince William was born in 1982 and Harry in 1984. As the marriage disintegrated, Charles fell back on Camilla and they rekindled their relationship.

Home and dry

Britain's tabloid press went to town, in 1993 publishing transcripts of intimate phone conversations secretly recorded four years earlier. The conversation veered between being reincarnated as a tampon and discussing motorway directions. After that humiliation, some wondered whether Charles would ever become king. Camilla divorced in 1995; Charles in 1996. Diana's death in a 1997 Paris car crash saw Charles's popularity plummet. Camilla retreated further into the shadows.

It took years of carefully orchestrated public relations work to pave the way towards even public acceptance of Camilla - let alone the possibility of marriage. Queen Elizabeth II was long hostile towards their relationship, but ended up accepting she was the right one for Charles. A compromise was found allowing the couple to marry in April 2005: a civil ceremony followed by a religious blessing. At the wedding reception at Windsor Castle, Queen Elizabeth - in a speech peppered with horse racing references - said: "My son is home and dry with the woman he loves."

Soulmates

Charles and Camilla are "soulmates", said royal expert Richard Fitzwilliams. "Similar age, a similar sense of humor, similar friends... everything that he and Diana did not have in common," he told AFP. He said Camilla had a "strong sense of duty" and "regards her role as to support Charles". Having come through a barrage of attacks and never spoken out, "she's tough", Fitzwilliams noted. Tom Parker Bowles added: "My mother has strong views on many things but she keeps them quiet." At the time of their marriage, it was announced that Camilla would eventually take the lesser title of princess consort rather than queen. — AFP

Sports

Booker propels Suns over Nuggets; Celtics top Sixers

In Eastern Conference, Tatum scores 27 points

News in Brief



Kuwait center's championship

KUWAIT: Rider Madhi Al-Khamis from Kuwait Riding Center won the center's championship as riders from the local clubs participated. Al-Khamis completed the sixth round at a height of 130 cm in 33.21 seconds without faults, followed by riders Abdallah Al-Omar, Saad Al-Suleiman and Enaz Al-Enaz. Kuwait Riding Center Board Member Ahmad Al-Awadhi awarded the winners their prizes. The fifth round was won by rider Saad Al-Salman, while the 110 cm event was won by Mohammad Ghuloum and the 100cm event was won by Fai Al-Quoud.



Special Olympics delegation

KUWAIT: Kuwait's Ambassador to Egypt Ghanim Saqer Al-Ghanim received the Special Olympics delegation. The team are preparing for the world games 2023 to be held in Berlin next month. The Ambassador welcomed the delegation and urged Kuwait riders to exert all efforts so as achieve their goal of hoisting Kuwait flag in this international arena. Meanwhile, head of the show jumping delegation Fahad Al-Sahli appreciated the reception and the ambassador's interest in supporting the delegation during the training camp. He also lauded the riders' enthusiasm. The delegation includes riders Nawaf Al-Qassar and Basmah Al-Busairi, trainers Mohammad Al-Kandary and Sarah Bu Hamdi and Deputy Chairwoman of the Kuwait Special Olympics Board Huda Al-Khaldi.

Injured Nadal out of Rome

BARCELONA: Rafael Nadal on Friday withdrew from next week's Rome tournament, casting serious doubts over his fitness for the French Open as well as potential questions over the rest of his career. The 22-time Grand Slam winner has not played since suffering a hip injury at the Australian Open in January. In all, he has competed in just four matches in 2023, winning only once. The French Open, which the 36-year-old has won on a record 14 occasions, starts in Paris on May 28. Nadal said his injury situation has improved in the past few days but not sufficiently to be able to compete next week in the Italian capital where he has been champion 10 times. — AFP

England's Sciver-Brunt retires

LONDON: Katherine Sciver-Brunt retired from international cricket on Friday after a superb 19-year career in which she took more wickets than any other woman for England. Sciver-Brunt, who made her international debut in 2004, amassed 335 wickets in 267 appearances for England. The fast bowler helped England's women to three Ashes series victories and three World Cup wins, two coming in ODIs and one in T20s. Only India's Jhulan Goswami (355) has more dismissals than Sciver-Brunt in all women's international formats. Sciver-Brunt, 37, quit playing Tests last year and also stepped away from ODIs. She has now elected to walk away from England altogether, despite contemplating staying on for the T20 portion of this summer's multi-format Ashes series. — AFP

Hatton, Clark share lead

WASHINGTON: England's Tyrrell Hatton made an eagle and two birdies in his last four holes to grab a share of the lead after Friday's second round of the PGA Wells Fargo Championship. Hatton matched his low round of the season with a six-under par 65 to stand on eight-under 134 after 36 holes at Quail Hollow in Charlotte, North Carolina. The 31-year-old Englishman shared the halfway lead in the \$20 million event with Americans Wyndham Clark and Nate Lashley. Back-nine starter Hatton's closing heroics included a 33-yard birdie putt at the par-3 sixth, a 26-foot eagle putt at the par-5 seventh and a 31-foot birdie putt at the ninth. — AFP

LOS ANGELES: Devin Booker scored 47 points and Kevin Durant added 39 as the Phoenix Suns clawed back into their NBA Western Conference semi-final series on Friday with a 121-114 victory over the Denver Nuggets. The Suns, who dropped the first two games of the best-of-seven series in Denver, held firm at home despite the injury absence of veteran point guard Chris Paul. Phoenix were up by 15 at halftime, but the Nuggets - led by a triple-double of 30 points, 17 rebounds and 17 assists from two-time NBA Most Valuable Player Nikola Jokic - didn't back down.

They edged ahead three times in the third quarter, but every time the Suns had an answer. "It's that time of year," said Booker, who added six rebounds, nine assists, three steals and a blocked shot. "We dropped a couple of games on their home floor and we just want to protect ours." Phoenix scored the first nine points of the fourth quarter and never trailed in the final period as they pulled within 2-1 in the best-of-seven series. Durant, who missed eight of his first nine shot attempts, made just 12 of 31 from the field but sunk 14 of 16 free throws and had 11 points in the fourth quarter.

Jamal Murray led Denver's scoring with 32 points and Michael Porter Jr added 21 and 12 rebounds, but the Nuggets couldn't contain Booker and Durant and the Suns will have a chance to level the series when they host game four on Sunday. In the Eastern Conference, Jayson Tatum scored 27 points to lead six Boston players in double figures as the Celtics beat the 76ers 114-102 in Philadelphia to take a 2-1 lead in their series.

Jaylen Brown added 23 points and Al Horford scored 17 for the Celtics, who regained home-court advantage with a second straight victory after dropping game one in Boston. An emotional night in Philadelphia saw Sixers center Joel Embiid accept his Most Valuable Player trophy from NBA commissioner Adam Silver in a pregame ceremony. Chants of "M-V-P" rang out for Cameroon's Embiid, who celebrated with his parents as he held his toddler son. Ar-



PHOENIX: Devin Booker #1 of the Phoenix Suns drives to the basket during Game Three of the Western Conference Semi-Finals of the 2023 NBA Playoffs against the Denver Nuggets on May 5, 2023. — AFP

thur - who was clad in a "My dad is the MVP" T-shirt.

The Celtics cut short the celebrations, however, powering to a quick 14-4 lead. Tatum, who scored just seven points in game two, bounced back with a vengeance adding 10 rebounds five assists, two steals and a blocked shot. The Sixers, however, kept it close and led by one after the first quarter. Embiid scored 30 points with 13 rebounds and four blocked shots in his second game back from a sprained knee. But teammates James Harden and Tyrese Maxey struggled. Harden connected on just three of 14 shots on the way to 16 points while Maxey scored 13 points on 4-for-16 shooting.

Awareness and poise
Philadelphia were down by seven at halftime and

never led after the break. "We knew we could win," Tatum told broadcaster ESPN. "This is a great team, the crowd's electric, you love being in that environment. "But we are not surprised. To win a championship you've got to win one on the road. We'll take it." "The guys just kept an awareness and a poise," said Celtics coach Joe Mazzulla, who said he expects game four in Philly on Sunday to be an "absolute war".

Celtics forward Grant Williams got a scare in the fourth quarter, when a falling Embiid accidentally stepped on his head on a loose ball play. Williams was bloodied, but made light of the incident. "I'm just thankful he didn't fully lean his weight on it because he definitely got me pretty badly, but then I think he felt like he landed on something so he picked his foot up," Williams said. — AFP

Alcaraz celebrates birthday in style

MADRID: Defending champion Carlos Alcaraz celebrated his 20th birthday on Friday by reaching the Madrid Open final, likening himself to "a bull" in his straight sets win over Borna Coric. The world number two was at his best to defeat the Croatian 6-4, 6-3. He will face Germany's Jan-Lennard Struff, the world number 65, who had originally been knocked out in qualifying before winning a reprieve, in Sunday's final.

Alcaraz said he called upon some of the inner motivation which helped him triumph at the US Open in New York last year when he captured his maiden Grand Slam crown. "There was a moment when I repeated what I repeated at the US Open, that I'm a bull, and that I could do it, and it helped me," he explained. Alcaraz, reaching his fourth Masters 1000 final, broke for a 3-2 lead in a tight first set and served it out.

He broke for 2-1 in the second set and after world number 20 Coric immediately hit back, did so again for a 3-2 lead, which he consolidated. Alcaraz sealed the match with another break when Coric went long, ensuring he reached the final only dropping one set en route, against Emil Ruusuvuori.

The top seed was able to celebrate with a birthday cake, offered to him by the tournament organisers after his victory. The only dampener for Alcaraz was news that Spanish compatriot and 22-time major winner Rafael Nadal would miss next week's Italian Open through injury. Nadal hasn't played since the Australian Open in January due to a hip injury and is now a serious doubt for the French Open in three weeks' time and where the 36-year-old has been champion on 14 occasions.

'World wants Nadal'

"I hope to see him at Roland Garros 100 percent.

Flags and fireworks as Cambodia kicks off SEA Games

PHNOM PENH: Cambodia kicked off its first ever hosting of the Southeast Asian Games on Friday, in a historical ballyhoo of singing, dancing, flag-waving and fireworks. The evening's festivities welcomed athletes from across the region to the biennial multi-sport event while trumpeting the country's rich history and thanking its long-ruling leader for recent modernization.

Prime Minister Hun Sen's ruling Cambodian People's Party is keen to build excitement and patriotic fervour around the SEA Games, with a successful event and good medals haul likely to boost national sentiment two months ahead of parliamentary elections which the CPP will almost certainly win. "For me, this event is very wonderful. We have been waiting for this for 64 years," said Seng Meng Hong, a 24-year-old attendee.

The SEA Games were first held in Bangkok in 1959. "I'm so happy that the government could organize such an event so the Cambodian people can come and support the national athletes," Meng Hong added. Tickets to the Games have been given away for free—and demand has been high. Inside the Morodok Techo National Stadium on Friday, a clear and balmy evening, all of the venue's 60,000 seats were packed.

Built and paid for by China, the stadium looms over the open, wooded parts of Phnom Penh's far



MADRID: Members of the tournament staff hold a cake for Spain's Carlos Alcaraz, for his 20th birthday, as they pose after winning Croatia's Borna Coric during their 2023 ATP Tour Madrid Open tennis tournament singles semi-final match on May 5, 2023. — AFP

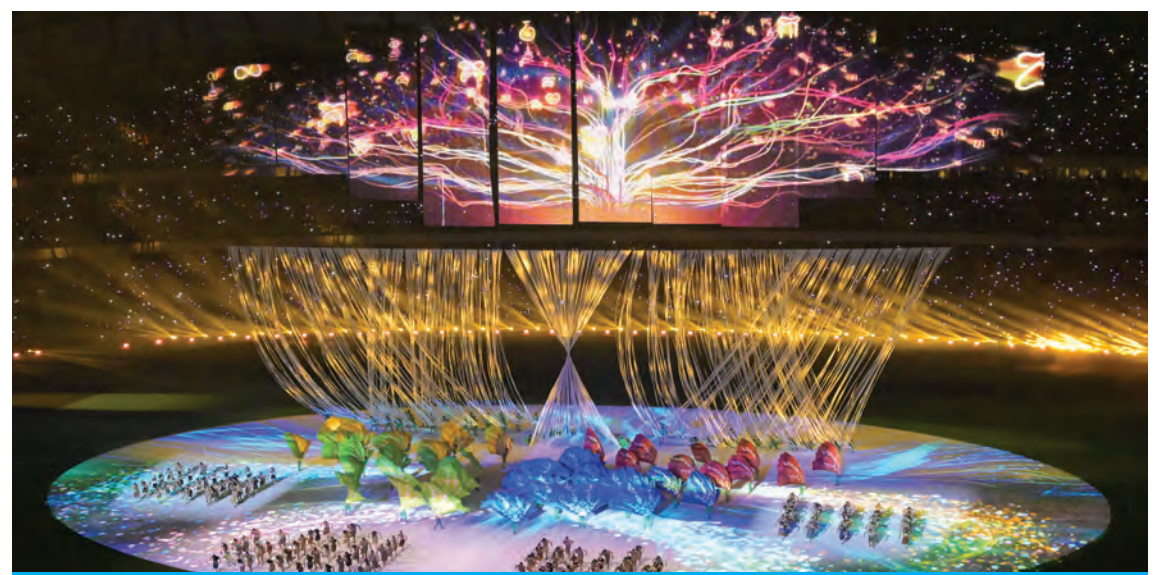
The world wants to see him at 100 percent," said Alcaraz. Struff, 33, made only his second career final by defeating Russia's Aslan Karatsev who had beaten him in qualifying last weekend. However, having been allocated a place in the main draw after injury pull-outs, Struff avenged that loss in Friday's semi-final. He came from a set down to see off 121st-ranked Karatsev 4-6, 6-3, 6-4 and become the first 'lucky loser' to go all the way to a Masters final.

Struff, whose only other final appearance resulted in a runner-up finish in Munich in 2021, claimed victory on a fifth match point. He fired 37 winners including 15 aces in his two-hour 19-minute win. "It's amazing," Struff said. "I played one final before in Munich but there was no crowd because of Covid." Struff and Alcaraz have met twice before - the German winning in straight sets at the French Open in

2021 before the flamboyant Spaniard claimed a five-setter at Wimbledon last year.

'I have to go for it'

"We played an amazing match at Wimbledon and I was very close to beating him but he pulled off unbelievable shots," Struff said. "This is going to be different. This is in Spain, in Madrid. I think he is 20-0 on Spanish clay courts, so it is going to be very tough. I have to go for it otherwise I will have no chance." Struff, who upset fifth-ranked Stefanos Tsitsipas in the quarter-finals, was the third lucky loser to reach the semi-finals at a Masters 1000 event, joining Thomas Johansson in Toronto in 2004 and Lucas Pouille in Rome in 2016. The Madrid women's final between the world number one Iga Swiatek and number two, Aryna Sabalenka, takes place on Saturday. — AFP



PHNOM PENH: Performers take part in the opening ceremony of the 32nd Southeast Asian Games (SEA Games) at the Morodok Techo National Stadium on May 5, 2023. — AFP

outskirts like a crash-landed spaceship. But its two dramatically cresting pylons also evoke the keel and stern of Chinese trading junks which plied the capital city's waterways hundreds of years ago. Almost all in attendance wafted themselves with handheld fans or brandished Cambodian flags—when not participating in an impeccably observed Mexican wave. All stood for the national anthem when soldiers in ceremonial uniform performed a flag-raising ceremony.

The main production—a riot of golden finery, elegant costumes and spear-toting warriors—told the

story of the kingdom, from its founding myths through the Angkor period. Athletes demonstrated Kun Bokator, the national martial art making its debut at this year's Games. Skipping ahead to mention a bleaker period, a speaker noted only the end of "the dark era of the genocidal Pol Pot" in 1978 and thanked Cambodian leaders since then for "prosperity and peace". The most senior of those leaders were in attendance. Along with dignitaries including the prime minister of Vietnam and the president of Laos, Hun Sen entered the stadium to great applause. — AFP

Sports

Champions Napoli return home as city revels in victory hangover

Napoli win their first Serie A title in 33 years

NAPLES: Napoli's champions returned home Friday after winning their first Serie A title in 33 years, greeted at their training camp by hundreds of jubilant fans following a raucous night of partying in Naples. Waving blue-and-white flags, singing songs and honking horns, ecstatic fans went wild at the sight of the players' white bus returning to the team's training centre in Castel Volturno, northwest of Naples. The returning heroes who brought Napoli its third Scudetto in its history Thursday night arrived by plane from Udine at the nearby Grazzanise Air Base, where fans wearing "Champions of Italy" T-shirts were similarly on hand to greet them.

The boisterous celebrations are set to run into the weekend, at least until Napoli's next home fixture against Fiorentina on Sunday evening. Naples had been abuzz all day, still giddy with joy after nearly all-night celebrations for Napoli's first Serie A title in over three decades. "It was the most beautiful night," enthused Francesca Raucci, who said her head finally hit the pillow at 4:00 am. "It was a unique emotion, there was a flood of people, they were hugging each other, dancing."

Throughout the night, Naples' narrow streets were filled with the sounds of cheering, chants, fire-crackers and flares, cars and scooters honking their horns, their passengers waving flags and banners. Amid the celebrations, however, hundreds of people were injured and one man died of gunshot wounds in what Mayor Gaetano Manfredi said was "a settling of scores" unrelated to the festivities. Napoli's 1-1 draw at Udinese Thursday evening had secured



CASTEL VOLTURNO: Fans of SSC Napoli gather outside the club's training centre in Castel Volturno, north of Naples, to welcome Napoli's players. — AFP

the Scudetto for Luciano Spalletti's side, their first since the era of Diego Maradona, who led the team to victory in 1987 and 1990.

Fans had prepared for weeks to celebrate, as Napoli built up an increasingly unbeatable lead against nearest-placed rivals Lazio. Blue flags and bunting adorned every possible surface of the city centre, as did images of Maradona and star striker Victor Osimhen, whose goal on Thursday pushed southern

Italy's biggest club over the line. Emanuele Canzano, 42, was among those who did not get much sleep, but on Friday morning set off for work happily in his Napoli jersey.

His newborn son also went to sleep in Napoli pyjamas. "We waited 33 years, he only waited ten days!" Canzano said, laughing. Garbage collectors were busy cleaning up debris Friday morning, and one street vendor in a cowboy hat continued to

try to drum up business, shouting "Flags, jerseys, scarves - Go Napoli!" A total of 203 people were treated in the city's hospitals overnight, according to health authorities, 22 of them for serious injuries. There were knife wounds, people injured by fire-crackers or suffering from smoke inhalation, and one cocaine overdose.

King Diego

Napoli's victory made the front pages of all Italy's major newspapers Friday, while the local Il Mattino ran a bumper special edition under the headline: "Naples Sings". "Under the sign of King Diego" read another of its headlines, demonstrating the enduring love for the Argentine great in this city. Maradona, who died in 2020 at the age of 60, led Napoli to their first two titles earning the eternal adoration of the club's fans. Many of those celebrating - including coach Spalletti - described how Maradona was watching over the team.

Retired midfielder Alemão, who helped win the title with Napoli in 1990, said he was sad his friend was not alive to celebrate this week. Seeing Napoli win "would have made him really happy - it would have completed his party," the 61-year-old Brazilian told AFP in an interview in his hometown of Lavras in the southeastern state of Minas Gerais. Back in Naples, local Giuseppe Posticione was headed to work amid streets littered with bottles and other reminders of the party. "After 33 years it was magnificent," the 46-year-old said of the victory. "Sunday at the stadium will be great, and we'll be there." — AFP

Could PSG throw away French title?

PARIS: Paris Saint-Germain are a club in turmoil, where the coach was already under pressure before this week's suspension of Lionel Messi and a protest by fans outside Neymar's home. The season is already widely seen as a failure for the Qatar-owned club, after they were dumped out of the Champions League by Bayern Munich in the last 16 and from the French Cup at the same stage. Even though they are top of Ligue 1, five points clear of Marseille with five matches remaining and on course to retain the crown and become French champions for a record 11th time, the campaign seems to be plunging new depths. Last Sunday's insipid 3-1 loss at home to Lorient means Christophe Galtier's team have lost six of 17 Ligue 1 matches in 2023, a veritable collapse for a side who did not lose a game in any competition before the World Cup. The day after the Lorient loss, Messi did not turn up for training, instead travelling to Saudi Arabia without PSG's permission to fulfil commitments as part of a contract with the country's tourist office. The seven-time Ballon d'Or winner has since been suspended by the club and is set to play no part this weekend against Troyes.

Another slip-up, against opponents who have not won in four months and are heading for relegation, is unthinkable for PSG and could seal Galtier's fate. In any case, the coach appears unlikely to be in charge next season with sweeping changes expected over the summer. Events are being followed closely by disaffected supporters. Several hundred protested on Wednesday outside the club's offices as well as in front of Neymar's house in the Paris suburb of Bougival. "We have had enough of mercenaries," they chanted.

PSG dismissed those events as the "intolerable and insulting actions of a small group of individuals", but it all adds to the sense of a club in disarray. Their closest challengers, Lens and Marseille, two captivating teams who play with an intensity PSG come nowhere close to matching, face each other this weekend. The priority for both is securing second place and automatic Champions League qualification. PSG's next two opponents—they play Ajaccio after facing Troyes—are both certainties for relegation and will surely not be able to handle Kylian Mbappe. —AFP

Osimhen, Kvaratskhelia rubbing shoulders with Diego Maradona

NAPLES: Victor Osimhen and Khvicha Kvaratskhelia stand alongside Diego Maradona as Napoli greats after powering southern Italy's biggest football club to just their third Serie A title. Osimhen and summer signing Kvaratskhelia, 22, have struck up a devastating partnership this season which has been central to Napoli winning their first league crown since 1990 and fulfilling the dreams of a generation of supporters. Osimhen has become one of the most devastating centre-forwards in European football, clattering in goals left and right and leading the team through the example of his immense hard work both on and off the ball. The 24-year-old has netted 22 times in 26 league appearances, three more than his nearest rival for this year's 'Capocannoniere', or league top scorer, with five games remaining.

Injury on international duty has slowed down the Nigeria forward's scoring rate but between returning from a thigh injury in mid-October and the most recent round of African Cup of Nations qualifiers last month he averaged a goal a game. Osimhen scored 23 times in 23 matches in all competitions over that period, propelling Napoli to the brink of a historic Scudetto and becoming a bona fide fan idol even before he scored the goal that secured the title on

Thursday. Cakes, coffees and Easter eggs began to be made in his honour while children around the city wear face masks similar to his own.

Cardboard cut-outs of him and Kvaratskhelia pop up alongside long-standing murals of Maradona around Naples, as do separate depictions of Napoli's new dynamic duo. "You can boot the ball at him or in behind him and he always manages to get hold of it," said Napoli coach Luciano Spalletti earlier this month. "He's also a fan favorite so when he plays he creates a wave of enthusiasm for the whole team... Players like him are just made of something different."

Dynamic duo

But although Napoli and Naples are currently on top of the world, Italian football hasn't been the world's richest and most powerful for decades, and the idea of players of their quality staying for the seven years Maradona did now feels like a fantasy. Between them Nigeria striker Osimhen and Kvaratskhelia have scored just under half of Napoli's 69 league goals, the Georgian wing wizard also setting up 10 and providing the kind of individual brilliance which already has the world's top club's circling.

Perhaps put under too much pressure to deliver in his first season in a major championship, Kvaratskhelia's form has wobbled in recent weeks but both he and Osimhen have shone so brightly this season questions over their futures are already being asked. Napoli are one of the few Serie A clubs on a stable financial footing but owner Aurelio De Laurentiis is eventually going to want to cash in on his most valuable playing assets. —AFP

Rashid, Noor lead Gujarat to 9-wicket Rajasthan rout

JAIPUR: Afghanistan spinners Rashid Khan and rookie Noor Ahmad ran through the Rajasthan Royals as Gujarat Titans sealed an easy nine-wicket win in the IPL on Friday. Khan and Ahmad took five wickets between them as Rajasthan were bowled out for just 118 in the 18th over of their innings after Rajasthan captain Sanju Samson won the toss and decided to bat first. Royals were rocked early and lost both openers - England's Jos Buttler (eight) and Yashasvi Jaiswal (14) - by the sixth over. Samson, who hit a fluent 20-ball 30, was their top scorer and his dismissal in the seventh over left Rajasthan reeling at 60-3.

Khan took three wickets to remove Ravichandran Ashwin (two), Riyan Parag (four) and West Indian Shimron Hetmyer (seven) to finish with an impressive 3-14 in his four-over spell. He was ably supported by 18-year-old wrist spinner Ahmad who dismissed Devdutt Padikkal (12) and Dhruv Jurel (nine), to finish with 2-25 in three overs. "I let Rashid handle the business of dealing with the spinners, with Noor. They speak the same language (Pashtun), and nobody is better than Rashid," said Gujarat skipper Hardik Pandya.

Khan now has 18 wickets in the tournament this season and he admitted he was happy to be back on form having gone wicketless for 54 runs against Kolkata last week. "It was a bad day for me. I bowled a few bad deliveries which were punished," said the star leg spinner. "I just went back, and talked with the video analyst. I pitched it a little bit fuller." New Zealand bowler Trent Boult (15) was Rajasthan's second-highest scorer before he was dismissed by Mohammed Shami.

India's Shami and Ireland's Josh Little took two wickets in eight tight overs between them. Gujarat opener Shubman Gill (36) was removed by leg-spinner Yuzvendra Chahal in the 10th over before skipper Hardik Pandya hit an explosive 15-ball 39 not out with three sixes to wrap the game up in the 14th over. Opener Wriddhiman Saha was also unbeaten on 41. The win put reigning IPL champions Gujarat Titans three points ahead at the top of the table after 10 games. Samson described it as a "tough night" and said that fourth-placed Rajasthan will "have to pull our socks up". "With 120 to defend, that was a bit too much to ask for." — AFP



NAPLES: People walk past a mural depicting (from left) late Argentinean football legend Diego Maradona, current Napoli's Georgian forward Khvicha Kvaratskhelia, and current Napoli's Nigerian forward Victor Osimhen, in the Forcella district in Naples. — AFP

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
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Clinics

Kaizen center	25716707
Rawda	22517733
Adaliya	22517144
Khaldiya	24848075
Kaifan	24849807
Shamiya	24848913
Shuwaikh	24814507

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

Change of Name

I, Nazia Can, R/o. H. No. 81/3, near Ameenya High School, Islampur, Baina, Vasco-Da-Gama, South-Goa, hereby change my name from Nazia Nurulla Khan to Nazia Can. Hereafter in all my dealings & documents, I will be known by the name Nazia Can. **(C 3523) 5-5-23**

changed my name to Koteswar Babu (as given name) Narayana Nellore (as surname) for all purposes. I will henceforth be known in the name Koteswar Babu Narayana Nellore. I also undertake to carry out this name change in all my documents. **(C 3523) 5-5-23**

I, Koteswar Babu Kondeti (old name), holder of Indian Passport No. L3463636, having permanent address D. No:13/38-A, Kothapalli, Kanchelu, Rajampeta, Anamaya Dist. Andhra Pradesh, India, presently residing in Kuwait, hereby declare that I have

changed my name to Rajendra Suthar for all purposes. I will henceforth be known in the name Rajendra Suthar and I also undertake to carry out this name change in all my documents. **(C 3519) 4-5-23**

Urawa secure Asian title

Urawa beat Al Hilal, lift trophy for a third time



SAITAMA: Urawa Red Diamonds players celebrate with the trophy after their victory against Al Hilal in the second leg of the AFC Champions League final at Saitama Stadium on May 6, 2023. — AFP

SAITAMA: Urawa Red Diamonds coach Maciej Skorza said the wait was worth it after the Japanese side won the Asian Champions League on Saturday - almost nine months after reaching the final. Urawa lifted the trophy for a third time after beating Saudi Arabia's defending champions Al Hilal 1-0 at home in the second leg of the final, giving them a 2-1 aggregate win one week after drawing the opener 1-1 in Riyadh.

The final marked the end of a 2022 competition that began in March last year and was delayed by the winter World Cup in Qatar and travel complications arising from the pandemic. Urawa beat South Korea's Jeonbuk Motors in the semi-finals in August last year but Skorza - who only arrived at the club in January - was happy to finally finish the job.

"From the beginning of our preparation at our

training camp, I was thinking about it and trying to prepare the team for this very difficult stage," said the Pole. "It's just amazing - it's difficult to find a way to describe this feeling." An own goal by Al Hilal's Andre Carrillo early in the second half made the difference in front of almost 55,000 fans in Saitama, north of Tokyo. Al Hilal dominated possession in the first half but Urawa held firm and forced the lead when Marius Hoibraten's 48th-minute header forced Carrillo into a mistake amid strong winds.

The final whistle sparked wild celebrations among a crowd known for being Japan's most boisterous supporters. Urawa captain Hiroki Sakai, who was named player of the tournament, said the fans had created "a special atmosphere" and urged his teammates to give them more to celebrate in the months to come. "Whether they continue to support us is all

up to us," said the defender. "We still have league and cup games to come and if we keep winning then they will support us, but we can't take them for granted."

Busy schedule

Al Hilal were looking to win a record fifth continental title and a third in four seasons. The Saudi side were without injured captain Salman Al Faraj and suspended star winger Salem Al Dawsari, who was sent off late in the first leg for kicking out at Urawa's Ken Iwao. Coach Ramon Diaz refused to blame his team's busy schedule, which saw them lose 5-3 to Real Madrid in the Club World Cup final in February. "This is normal when you play for Al Hilal," said the Argentine, whose club have been linked with a multi-million dollar move for Lionel Messi. "It was a tough game and we have played many tough

games in a short space of time, but this is our destiny. We can't do anything about it." The two teams were meeting in the final of Asia's premier club competition for the third time in six years. Urawa won in 2017 but Al Hilal came out on top two years later.

The Saudis had early chances through Odion Ighalo and Michael but Urawa's Shinzo Koroki, who scored his team's goal in the first leg, hit the crossbar with a flying volley midway through the first half. Urawa goalkeeper Shusaku Nishikawa kept his team in the game and the home team defended with calm assurance once they took the lead in the second half. "As a defender you're trying to keep a clean sheet - if you keep a clean sheet, you won't lose," said Sakai. "I believed that my team-mates would score, and after we got the goal, all I had to do was do my job." — AFP

Messi apologizes for trip to Saudi



Paris Saint-Germain's Argentine forward Lionel Messi

PARIS: Lionel Messi on Friday apologized for going on an unauthorized trip to Saudi Arabia that led to Argentina's World Cup-winning captain being suspended by his club Paris Saint-Germain. "I want to apologise obviously to my teammates and to the club," Messi said in a video posted on Instagram to his 458 million followers. He was suspended by the Qatar-owned club after failing to turn up for training on Monday, a day after their 3-1 home defeat by Lorient in Ligue 1.

Instead, the seven-time Ballon d'Or winner travelled to Saudi Arabia without PSG's permission to fulfill commitments as part of a contract with the country's tourist office. "I honestly thought we were going to have the day off after the match as had happened in the previous weeks," he said. "I had organized this trip to Saudi Arabia having cancelled it previously. This time I couldn't cancel it. I am sorry for what I did and I wait to see what the club decides to do."

The affair has made it increasingly unlikely that Messi will remain at PSG beyond this season, when his two-year contract with the club expires. A source with knowledge of the disciplinary procedure told AFP that Messi would be sidelined for "several days", and he is therefore set to play no part in PSG's match against Troyes this weekend in Ligue 1. Various media in France said he would be suspended for two weeks, although AFP has not been able to confirm those reports. — AFP

City close in on EPL coronation; Chelsea win

LONDON: Manchester City moved a step closer to being crowned Premier League champions with a 2-1 win against Leeds on Saturday as Chelsea finally won for the first time under caretaker boss Frank Lampard. Just hours after the pomp and ceremony of the coronation of King Charles III in London's Westminster Abbey, City underlined their desire to extend their own reign as they chase a fifth Premier League title in six seasons.

Ilkay Gundogan scored City's goals in the first half, before missing a late penalty that set up a tense finale when Rodrigo got one back for Leeds. City held on to climb four points clear of second placed Arsenal. In tribute to the King, the national anthem was played before kick-off at all four afternoon Premier League games.

But it is Pep Guardiola who lords it over the Premier League and the City boss is on the brink of a leading his team to a third successive title. Arsenal can close the gap on City to one point if they win their tricky trip to third placed Newcastle on Sunday. However, Guardiola's men will have a game in hand on Arsenal after that fixture and need three wins from their last four matches to be certain of retaining the title. Relentless City have won their last 10 league games and are unbeaten in 20 matches in all competitions.

Defeat in Sam Allardyce's first match in charge left Leeds one place above the relegation zone on goal difference. With Tuesday's Champions League semi-final first leg at Real Madrid on Tuesday in mind, Guardiola made seven changes to his starting line-up. City went ahead in the 19th minute after pinning Leeds deep inside their own half in a blistering start. Riyad Mahrez was the catalyst with an incisive pass that picked out Gundogan and the German midfielder netted with a fine low finish from just inside the penalty area.

It was the same pair at the heart of City's second goal eight minutes later. Mahrez cut his pass back to Gundogan, who took a touch before sweeping a clinical strike into the far corner from 20 yards. After Gundogan hit the post with a penalty awarded for Pascal Struijk's foul on Phil Foden, Guardiola was furious that Erling Haaland did not take the spot-kick. Guardiola's angst grew when Rodrigo punished a mistake from Manuel Akanji to slot home in the 85th



MANCHESTER: Leeds United's Spanish goalkeeper Joel Robles (left) punches the ball next to Manchester City's Norwegian striker Erling Haaland during the English Premier League football match between Manchester City and Leeds United on May 6, 2023. — AFP

minute, but Leeds couldn't complete the comeback.

Chelsea end losing streak

Chelsea won for first time in Lampard's second spell in charge, beating Bournemouth 3-1 to end a six-match losing streak. Conor Gallagher headed Chelsea into a ninth minute lead, diverting N'Golo Kante's cross beyond Neto. Chelsea's fans responded with ironic chants of 'we are staying up' in reference to their unusually low league position.

Matias Vina equalised with a 21st minute curler, but Benoit Badiashile volleyed in Hakim Ziyech's free-kick for his first Chelsea goal in the 82nd minute. Joao Felix's 86th-minute strike wrapped up Chelsea's first victory in 10 matches in all competitions. Chelsea are up to 11th place but are still in dan-

ger of finishing in the bottom half of the table for the first time since 1996. Harry Kane moved into second place in the Premier League's all-time scoring list as his goal sealed a 1-0 win against Crystal Palace.

The England captain broke the deadlock in first half stoppage-time with a powerful header from Pedro Porro's cross. Kane climbed ahead of Wayne Rooney onto 209 Premier League goals, with Alan Shearer's record of 260 in his sights next. Sixth placed Tottenham are six points adrift of the top four after winning for the first time in five games. Toti Gomes' first goal for Wolves - a ninth minute header from Ruben Neves' corner - sealed a 1-0 win against Aston Villa. In Saturday's late game, Liverpool hosted Brentford looking to close the gap on fourth placed Manchester United. — AFP