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NOTICE
Happy National and Liberation Days to all our readers! Kuwait Times will not publish its print edition on February 25 and 26, 2024. Readers can stay informed with breaking news and information via KuwaitTimes.com and our digital media channels on Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, TikTok, LinkedIn and Threads.



Kuwait slams Zionist occupation

Kuwaiti envoy breaks down while expressing Palestinian suffering at ICJ

Iraqi Premier receives Bader Al-Kharafi



BAGHDAD: Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammed Shia Al-Sudani receives Zain Vice Chairman and Group CEO Bader Al-Kharafi.

BAGHDAD: Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammed Shia Al-Sudani received Zain Vice Chairman and Group CEO Bader Al-Kharafi. During the meeting, Sudani stressed the Iraqi government's efforts to promote the local economy and promised to remove all obstacles that face investors and support the private sector.

Meanwhile, Kharafi said Zain Group is committed to delivering the best solutions to its clients in Iraq, who have reached 18 million subscribers, and to the Iraqi market in general. Zain Group plans to increase its investments in Iraq and expand its current projects, he said, adding that \$500 million have been allocated for investment in technology, leading to a great positive impact on the Iraqi economy and enhancement of service quality.

THE HAGUE: Kuwait on Thursday submitted its oral argument before the International Court of Justice in The Hague to issue its advisory opinion on the legal consequences arising from the violations of the Zionist occupying power in the occupied Palestinian territories, in accordance with the request of the United Nations General Assembly to the Court based on the UN resolution on "(Zionist) practices affecting the human rights of the Palestinian people in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem."

Ambassador of Kuwait to Netherlands Ali Al-Thefeeri, Permanent Representative of Kuwait to the United Nations in New York Tariq Al-Bannai and the Assistant Foreign Minister for Legal Affairs Tahani Al-Nasser presented the pleadings before the ICJ. Thefeeri broke down during his speech

and was forced to stop his address several times as he questioned why the Zionist entity is allowed to commit crimes against Palestinians without being held to account. "Why does the victim continue to be portrayed as the killer? Why does (the Zionist entity) always escape punishment?" he asked.

The ICJ is holding hearings all week on the legal implications of the Zionist entity's occupation since 1967, with an unprecedented 52 countries giving evidence. While any ICJ opinion would be non-binding, it comes amid mounting international legal pressure on the Zionist entity over the war in Gaza. The hearings are separate from a high-profile case brought by South Africa alleging the Zionist entity is committing genocidal acts during its current Gaza offensive.

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NEWS IN BRIEF

3-month ultimatum for biometrics

KUWAIT: The ministry of interior announced a three-month ultimatum from March 1, 2024 to June 1, 2024 for citizens and expats to register their biometric scans, noting that failure to do so within the specified period would result in suspension of interior ministry transactions after the deadline. The scan can be registered at Avenues Mall, 360 Mall, Kout Mall, Assima Mall, the airport and land border checkpoints, as well as security directorates at governorates around Kuwait. People can travel without registering the scan and then register it upon return, the ministry added.

Indians largest expat community

KUWAIT: Kuwaitis make up 31.7 percent of Kuwait's total population, while non-Kuwaiti residents make up 68.3 percent of the population; an average of 1 to 3, according to statistics released by the Public Authority for Civil Information as of the end of 2023. India continues to have the largest expatriate community in Kuwait, making up 21 percent of the population, followed by Egypt (13 percent), Bangladesh (6 percent) and the Philippines (5 percent). (See Page 3)

Islamophobia soars in UK

LONDON: Anti-Muslim hate incidents in the UK more than tripled following the outbreak of the war in Gaza, a monitoring group said Thursday. Tell MAMA recorded 2,010 such cases in the four months since Oct 7. Tell MAMA said that 901 cases occurred offline while 1,109 were online. Most of the offline incidents took place in London. They included abusive behavior, threats, assaults, vandalism, discrimination, hate speech and anti-Muslim literature. Women were the target in 65 percent of cases, the group said. — AFP

ChatGPT cranks out gibberish

SAN FRANCISCO: ChatGPT spewed nonsensical answers to users' queries for hours Tuesday into Wednesday before eventually returning to its senses. OpenAI, which makes the world-leading generative artificial intelligence tool, said a software tweak had "introduced a bug with how the model processes language". It wasn't until more than 16 hours had passed that OpenAI updated the page with a message that ChatGPT was operating normally. — AFP

Govt denies plans to change electoral districts, vote system

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: The government denied on Thursday reports circulating on social media claiming that the government was planning to change the electoral constituencies and the voting system. Government spokesman Amer Al-Ajmi said that the government has not studied any bill to change the electoral districts and "has no intention to change them".

"The upcoming elections will be held with the same electoral constituencies and based on the sin-

gle-vote system," Ajmi said in a statement to state-run KUNA news agency. Kuwait is divided into five electoral constituencies, with each constituency electing 10 MPs to the 50-seat parliament. Every Kuwaiti voter in these constituencies is allowed to elect only one candidate, although the number of seats available in each constituency is 10.

The dissolved house had been reviewing draft laws aimed at changing the constituencies and also amending the single-vote system introduced by the government in 2012. HH the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah dissolved the National Assembly on Feb 15 over remarks made by some MPs deemed offensive to HH the Amir.

Under Kuwaiti law, fresh elections must be held within two months of the date of dissolving the Assembly. The government has not yet set a date for the elections, which must be held before April 15. The government on Wednesday suspended until Oct 1



Amer Al-Ajmi

the election law which calls to set up an independent election commission, saying that it was not possible to implement the law that was passed by the Assembly several months ago. The government then reissued the old election law with some amendments.

Eye-watering onion prices leave sour taste

By Antonio Coelho

KUWAIT: Since before the start of the New Year, Kuwait has been grappling with unexpected onion shortages, leading to a surge in onion prices. This situation has particularly affected many Asian expatriates living in Kuwait, as onions play a crucial role in their cuisine. Major exporters like India have banned onion exports due to adverse weather conditions affecting crops in many Indian states.

For Asian expatriates, onions are a staple ingredient, used in everything from simple meals to meat dishes and biryanis. The sudden increase in onion prices has posed a burden on expatriates, especially lower-income families who heavily rely on onions for their daily meals.

In response to this shortage, the government is exploring alternatives for importing onions and considering subsidies to ease the financial strain on consumers. Additionally, there are plans to encourage local farmers to cultivate onions to stabilize the local market.

A manager of a local supermarket, Muthu Koya, explained that India halted onion exports due to poor crops, leading to insufficient stocks for local consumers. He noted India



KUWAIT: Onions are seen at a supermarket. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

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Zionists strike Rafah as truce talks underway

GAZA: The Zionist entity launched deadly air strikes on Rafah on Thursday, after threatening to send troops in to hunt for Hamas fighters in the southern Gaza city where around 1.4 million Palestinians have sought refuge. Major powers trying to find a way to end the destructive Zionist-Hamas war have so far failed, but a US envoy was in the Zionist entity Thursday in the latest attempt to secure a truce deal.

International concern has spiraled over Gaza's escalating civilian death toll and the desperate humanitarian crisis sparked by the war. The war has also triggered mounting violence in the occupied West Bank, where three Pales-

tinians opened fire on cars in a traffic jam on Thursday, killing one person and wounding eight. The attackers were shot dead at the scene, near a Zionist settlement east of Jerusalem.

Zionist far-right politicians quickly called for more citizens to carry weapons and for even greater restrictions on Palestinian West Bank residents, while Hamas urged an escalation in attacks. More than four months of relentless fighting and bombardment have flattened much of Gaza and pushed its population of around 2.4 million to the brink of famine, according to the United Nations.

Alarm has centered on Gaza's southernmost city of Rafah, where hundreds of thousands of displaced civilians are living in crowded shelters and makeshift camps where disease threatens. The Zionist entity has warned that, if Hamas does not free the remaining captives held in Gaza



GAZA: A man sits amid the debris of destroyed houses in the aftermath of Zionist bombardment in Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip on Feb 22, 2024. — AFP

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Local

PM receives heads, members of public benefit associations

Govt attaches priority to strategic sectors: Deputy PM

KUWAIT: His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Dr Mohammad Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah received Thursday separately at Bayan Palace the president and members of ISSNAD Urban Development Company, Kuwait University Faculty Association, Kuwaiti Society of Lawyers, Kuwait National Integrity Society, and the supreme supervisory committee of the 23rd national conference: "From Kuwait We Start and in Kuwait We End".

Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Kuwait Anti-Corruption Authority Mohammad Al-Otaibi confirmed that the members of the Board of Directors of the Association met with HH the Prime Minister to discuss many topics in the field of integrity and combating corruption. Al-Otaibi said in a statement that this visit comes after the announcement of the result of the Corruption Perceptions Index for the year 2023, in which the State of Kuwait advanced from previous years.

His Highness the Prime Minister listened to several issues raised in the local community, commending the constructive ideas and proposals put forward during the meetings by specialists, which are in the best interest of the nation and its citizens.

The Kuwaiti government attaches much significance to strategic sectors, mainly including civil aviation,

Deputy Prime Minister, Defense Minister and Acting Interior Minister Sheikh Fahad Al-Yousef Al-Sabah affirmed Thursday. The minister made the remark to KUNA during his meeting with Directorate General of Civil Aviation board members, adding that the country's civil aviation development coincides with government's plans to develop the capabilities of this vital sector.

The new Terminal 2 of Kuwait Airport is paid much attention by His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Dr Mohammad Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah, he added.

Separately, Kuwaiti Minister of Foreign Affairs Abdullah Al-Yahya met on Thursday with Director General of the Foreign Ministry's West Asia and North Africa Department Wang Di on the occasion of his official visit and his accompanying delegation to Kuwait. They discussed the deep-rooted friendly relations between China and Kuwait at all levels and mutual cooperation in the context of existing strategic partnership, as well as joint coordination to serve common interests at various international forums. During the meeting, they tackled the latest developments at regional and international levels, including updates in the Gaza Strip. Ongoing efforts to end the demarcation of the maritime borders between Kuwait and Iraq were also discussed during the meeting. — KUNA



KUWAIT: His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Dr Mohammad Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah receives Mohammad Al-Otaibi and the members of the Board of Directors of the Anti-Corruption Authority on Thursday.

KJA holds ordinary general assembly, approves reports

KUWAIT: Kuwait Journalists Association's ordinary general assembly approved the administrative and financial reports of the board of directors for 2022 and approved the estimated budget for 2023, as well as the auditors to audit the accounts of 2023. That took place during a meeting held on Tuesday at KJA's temporary premises in Shuwaikh.

KJA Chairman Adnan Al-Rashed, Secretary Jassem Kamal and Treasurer Duhairan Abaalkhail, along with board members Owayed Al-Enezi, Abd Al-Rahman Al-Alyan and Rabaah Makki Jumaa attended the meeting.

Director of Private Societies Department at the Social Affairs Ministry Eman Al-Enezi, Head of the Cultural Societies Departments Bedour Bunashi, Senior Social Researcher Fawziya Al-Otaibi, Secretary of Occupational Societies

Department Alyaa Al-Mutairi, accountant Ahmad Taqi, programmer Amal Mohammad, Secretary of the Directorate Director Hiyam Al-Enezi, Supervisor of Clerks Hanaa Al-Sharaa, Secretary of Cultural Societies Mahdi Bushehri as well as Buzai Auditors' representative, senior auditor Ahmad Abu Huwaili, attended the meeting.

The KJA board of directors approved the names of the new members, as Adnan Al-Rashed started the meeting with a request to select Fatima Hussein as honorary president of KJA. The board formation was then adopted as follows: Adnan Al-Rashed, Chairman; Jassem Kamal, Secretary; Duhairan Abaalkhail, Treasurer; Rabaah Makki Al-Jumaa, member, KJA Director; Yousuf Al-Shihab, member; Owayed Al-Enezi, member; Abd Al-Rahman Al-Alyan, member.



KJA Chairman Adnan Al-Rashed, Secretary Jassem Kamal and Treasurer Duhairan Abaalkhail, along with board members Owayed Al-Enezi, Abd Al-Rahman Al-Alyan and Rabaah Makki Jumaa following the meeting.

Women's Society, NCCAL celebrate National Days

KUWAIT: Kuwaiti Voluntary Women's Society for Community Development, in cooperation with the National Council for Culture, Arts and Letters (NCCAL), organized the National Heritage Cultural Festival at Kuwait's National Library and Sadu House.

In a statement, Chairman of the Association's Board of Directors Sheikh Fadiya Saad Al-Abdullah Al-Sabah affirmed on Thursday, their keenness to participate annually in the national celebrations, with activities such as a symposium, a national exhibition, and various artistic segments.

She added that for the second year, the celebrations coincide with the national holidays, with the aim of strengthening national unity, instilling the Kuwaiti values in children, stressing the importance of hard work in order to build a better future for upcoming generations. — KUNA

Embassies send congratulatory messages

Austrian Embassy

Marian Wrba
Austrian Ambassador



On the occasion of Kuwait's National Day and the anniversary of its liberation, I extend heartfelt congratulations on behalf of Austria to His Highness the Amir and the citizens of Kuwait. The ongoing armed conflicts in the Middle East and Europe impact both Kuwait and Austria. We share the belief that collaboration is essential to overcome these difficult times. Therefore our two nations mutually agreed to engage in regular exchanges of perspectives and assessments, enhancing our cooperation that has prospered over the past 62 years of diplomatic relations. My best wishes for a happy and prosperous future of the Kuwaiti people under the wise guidance of His Highness the Amir!

Canadian Embassy

Aliya Mawani
Canadian Ambassador



On behalf of Canada and Canadians it is my honor to extend warmest congratulations to His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, and to the government and people of Kuwait on the occasion of Kuwait's National and Liberation Days. Canada and Kuwait are partners - bound together by common values and strong people to people ties. Our country is proud to have played a part in Kuwait's liberation and to now have members of the Canadian armed forces based at our Operational Support Hub in Kuwait, enabling security, stabilization and humanitarian engagement throughout the region. We look forward to deepening ties on all fronts in the coming years and we wish Kuwait and its people peace and prosperity, now and always.

French Embassy

Claire Le Flécher
French Ambassador



On the occasion of the National Day and Liberation Day of the State of Kuwait, and on behalf of France, I would like to extend my warmest congratulations and best wishes to His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, as well as the government and people of Kuwait. On this special day, I am pleased to share the joy of the Kuwaiti people and I wish to our dear Kuwaiti friends a beautiful celebration. This year marks the thirty-third anniversary of the liberation of Kuwait and the end of the Gulf War. France was an active member of the coalition forces that helped liberate Kuwait. Having been allies, and having fought side by side in the war created very special ties, which go beyond ordinary links of friendship between two countries. In line with this special relationship, France is engaged to deepen its cooperation with Kuwait, based on trust, common values and mutual respect.

Japanese Embassy

Morino Yasunari
Japanese Ambassador



On the occasion of the 63rd National Day of the State of Kuwait and the 33rd anniversary of its liberation, I would like to express my sincere congratulations and best wishes for the further development and prosperity of Kuwait and its people under the wise leadership of HH the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. We are proud that Japan was one of the first countries to recognize the independence of Kuwait and establish diplomatic relations in 1961. Japan-Kuwait relations date back to even before 1961, in 1957, a Japanese company 'Arabian Oil Company (AOC)' was granted oil concession in Kuwait. Since then, the two friendly countries have enjoyed very strong ties over the years based on mutual respect and common interest. I believe there is more room to take these strong relations to even wider spheres of cooperation that could include health, environment, water, food and other infrastructures.

European Union

Anne Koistinen
EU Ambassador



On behalf of the Delegation of the European Union to the State of Kuwait, I would like to extend my warmest congratulations and greetings to His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, the Kuwaiti government and the Kuwaiti people on the 63rd National Day of Kuwait and the 33rd Anniversary of Kuwait's Liberation. Since I arrived to this beautiful and welcoming country last year, I have experienced first-hand Kuwait's hospitality, generosity and genuine spirit. The European Union deeply values Kuwait's friendship, which is based on mutual respect and constructive collaboration. I look forward to working together with Kuwaiti government and people to address global challenges, foster sustainable growth, and promote peace and prosperity around the world. I wish all the people of Kuwait a happy National Day and a happy Liberation Day, and all the best on your journey towards New Kuwait."

Italian Embassy

Lorenzo Morini
Italian Ambassador



The Italian Ambassador designate to Kuwait, Lorenzo Morini, congratulated the State of Kuwait on the occasion of the country's National Day and Liberation Day. Morini said in a statement: "On my behalf and on behalf of the Italian Government and people, I am pleased to extend my warmest and heartfelt congratulations to His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, to HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Mohammad Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah and to the Kuwaiti government and the friendly people of Kuwait, on the occasion of the celebration of the 63rd National Day and the 33rd Liberation Day." Ambassador Morini stressed that there is great Italian interest in Kuwait, especially since Italy views Kuwait as an advanced model of stability, tolerance and democracy. He pointed to the depth of the historical relations linking the two countries, which have developed into a long-term dynamic partnership in all fields, describing it as of great importance in advancing the course of bilateral relations between Kuwait and Italy to broader horizons, adding that these distinguished relations extend beyond historical and cultural ties and go back decades to include various fields: economic, development, investment, political, archaeological and defense. Morini concluded wishing Kuwait, its people and its leadership continued stability, peace and prosperity.

Armenian Embassy

Sarmen Baghdasarian
Armenian Ambassador



On behalf of myself and the Armenian people, it is with great pleasure that I extend my heartfelt congratulations and warmest regards to His Highness the Amir of the State of Kuwait Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, as well as to the friendly government and people of Kuwait, on the occasion of the 63rd National Day and the 33rd Liberation Day of the State of Kuwait. We are honored to share in the celebration of this significant day, which symbolizes a rich history marked by achievements and progress, paving the way for a brighter future for your gracious nation. I express my hope that the bilateral cooperation between our countries will continue to thrive in the years ahead, characterized by the same spirit of positivity and sincerity, and that our bilateral relations will experience sustained growth and progress. As we mark this occasion, I extend my best wishes to the friendly people of Kuwait, wishing them security, prosperity, and enduring peace.

Azerbaijan Embassy

Emil Karimov
Azerbaijan Ambassador

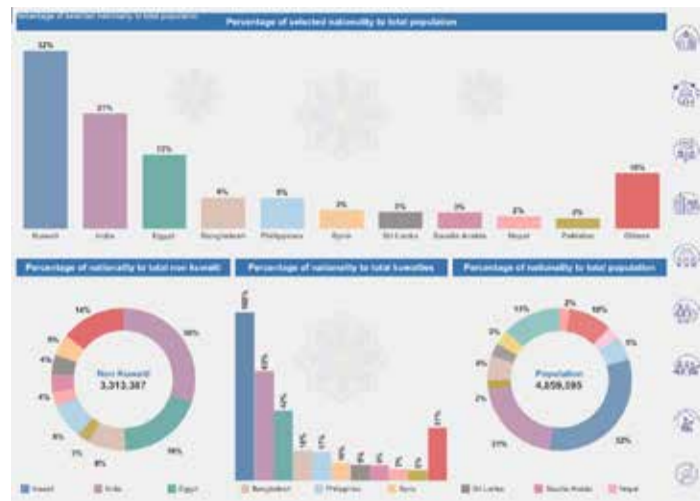
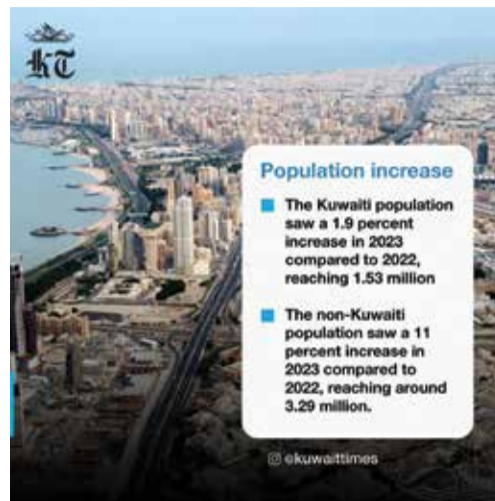


On the occasion of Kuwait National and Liberation Days, I extend heartfelt congratulations to the esteemed government and the people of Kuwait. As we celebrate the 63rd National Day and the 33rd Liberation Day, it is a moment of pride and reflection on Kuwait's journey towards freedom. May God's blessings shower upon the honorable Kuwaiti people, guiding them towards prosperity, unity, and continued success. I offer prayers for the well-being and happiness of the Kuwaiti citizens, hoping that this occasion brings abundant blessings, peace, and progress to their country. Hope to reaffirm our commitment to the enduring friendship between our countries. With sincere wishes for Kuwait's continued progress, stability, and security, I express solidarity and support to the government and the people of Kuwait. May they be shielded from all adversities.

Local

Expatriates still make up two thirds of population as some communities grow

Indians continue to form the largest expat community in Kuwait



By Ahmad Jabr

KUWAIT: Some of the largest expat communities in Kuwait witnessed a surge in population last year, showing a recovery to near pre-COVID numbers as non-Kuwaiti residents continue to make up two thirds of the total population.

Kuwaitis make up 31.7 percent of Kuwait's total population while non-Kuwaiti residents make up 68.3 percent of the population; an average of 1 to 3, according to statistics released by the Public Authority for Civil Information as of the end of 2023. The Kuwaiti population saw a 1.9 percent increase in 2023 compared to 2022, reaching 1.53 million, while the non-Kuwaiti population saw a 11 percent increase, reaching around 3.29 million.

Indians on top

India continues to have the largest expatriate community in Kuwait, making up 21 percent of the population. Notably, the number of the Indian community has surged to 1,000,726 by the end of 2023, reaching the highest level since 2019 when it stood at 1,058,862.

Egypt follows India with the sec-

ond highest expatriate community in Kuwait (third largest overall), making up 13 percent of the population. The number of the Egyptian community dropped slightly from 655,234 in 2022 to 644,442 in 2023; still far from the record 696,082 figure registered in 2019.

Meanwhile, Bangladesh's community increased from 256,849 in 2022 to 274,794 in 2023, making up 6 percent of the total population. The Philippines follows Bangladesh with the fifth largest community in Kuwait, making up 5 percent of the total population. However, their numbers have dropped to 267,259 in 2023 compared to 274,777 in 2022, following the ban on Filipino workforce issued last year. Saudi Arabia, Sri Lanka, Syria (3 percent each), Nepal and Pakistan (2 percent each) round up the top 10 communities in Kuwait.

Labor force

A significant portion of the rise in the non-Kuwaiti workforce in Kuwait is attributed to the increase in domestic workers, which saw a 16 percent annual increase to approximately 811,000 workers, constituting around 25 percent of the total expatriate population compared to 22

percent at the end of 2019.

According to the Public Authority for Civil Information statistics, the total labor force made up 61 percent of Kuwait's total population by the end of 2023, while the percentage of expatriate workers compared to the total expatriate population reached 75 percent. Indians make up 30 percent

of total workers, followed by Kuwaitis and Egyptians (16 percent each), then Bangladeshis and Filipinos (9 percent each). Among expatriate workers, Indians make up the largest percentage (35 percent), followed by Egyptians (19 percent), Bangladeshis (11 percent), Filipinos (10 percent) and Sri Lankans (6 percent).



Acting Chief of Staff Major General Ghazi Al-Shammari and Commanding General of US Army Central, Lieutenant General Patrick Frank. — KUNA photos

Kuwait, US forces conclude joint drills

KUWAIT: Kuwaiti land forces and American Task Force Spartan concluded joint drills in Adera field north of the country, said the Chief of the General Staff on Thursday.

The drills were first launched on February 11. In a press release, the General Staff mentioned that attending drill conclusion were Acting Chief of Staff Major General Ghazi Al-Shammari and Commanding General of US Army Central, Lieutenant General Patrick Frank. The drills aim to bolster coordination, improve readiness and augment joint military cooperation between the two nations. — KUNA



Kuwaiti land forces and American Task Force Spartan hold joint drills.

Gynecologists to get training in AI technology

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: Head of Gynecology and Obstetrics Department at Jahra Hospital Dr Hanan Al-Husseini said future plans include training in artificial intelligence technology and qualify them to deal with expected changes in the future.

She said in a press statement that within the recommendations of the 26th Gynecology and Obstetrics conference that "we seek to apply artificial intelligence in several specialties such as test tube babies, mother

and fetal science, follow up pregnant woman during delivery and advanced gynecological endoscopy".

She said that among the recommendations is the study of telemedicine which allows contacts with international expertise and present medical services remotely in the field of training, treatment and the use of AI. Dr Al-Husseini said that among the recommendations is the necessary cautious gradual introduction of the use of AI in various women specialties while affirming non-reliance on it at the present time and rely on the human element which is the foundation of healthcare.

She said that President of the Islamic Organization for Medical Sciences Dr Mohammad Al-Jarallah and Dr Khalid Al-Mathkour contributed to the preparation of AI uses recommendations, and they affirmed that it is not possible to dispense with and should be relied on in taking sharia (legal), ethical and medical decision and technology must not be singled out to take medical and health decisions.



A group picture of the officials.

English language festival attracts huge participation

KUWAIT: Under the patronage and in the presence of the Acting Dean of the College of Education, Dr Issa Al-Balhan, the Social and Cultural Committee at the College of Education organized the English Language Festival under the supervision of Dr Nadia Al-Riahi on Wednesday in the lobby of the College of Education in Sabah Al-Salem University City.

The event included an exhibition in which a number of government

and private agencies participated to qualify the English language. A group of publishing houses and writers as well as students of the College of Education participated in presenting their student projects in this field.

In this regard, Dr Nadia Al-Riahi stated that the aim of this festival is to develop and enhance students' skills in English language and guide them to the competent authorities in this field.



Officials during the English Language Festival held in the lobby of the College of Education in Sabah Al-Salem University City.

In my view

Embracing patriotism: A soulful exploration of Kuwait's essence

By Mariam Ahmed Al-Ayyoub

Local@kuwaittimes.com

In the heart of Kuwait, where the golden sands meet the azure skies, a realm echoes with the whispers of a resilient history and the vibrant pulse of a nation. Beyond the conventional narratives of patriotic fervor, a controversial journey unfolds — an exploration marked not only by words but by questioning actions and critically addressing the intricate issues that shape our beloved nation.

As the sun sets over Kuwait City, painting the skyline in hues of orange and pink, it illuminates not just the architecture but also the spirit of a people who have weathered storms and stood tall in the face of adversity. But is this resilience truly a testament to patriotism, or is it a result of systemic issues that demand scrutiny? True patriotism in Kuwait, it is argued, requires a deeper understanding — an acknowledgment that mere resilience might not be enough to tackle the underlying challenges faced by its citizens.

While speeches may resonate in the halls of power, the true heartbeat of patriotism, skeptics argue, is often drowned out by the noise of grand gestures. A walk through Kuwait's bustling streets reveals not just a symphony of charitable deeds but also a cacophony of systemic issues — economic disparities, social inequalities, and environmental concerns that charitable actions alone cannot rectify. Are these deeds genuine expressions of compassion or convenient distractions from addressing more profound issues?

Patriotism in Kuwait, as critics suggest, transcends beyond fostering unity and understanding. It demands a critical examination of the societal divides that persist. In a celebration of diversity, is Kuwait truly addressing the systemic challenges that impede the harmonious coexistence of its people? Some argue that the narrative of unity might be masking underlying tensions that are left unaddressed.

Expressing true patriotism, skeptics contend, requires more than investing in education; it necessitates a robust critique of the education system itself. Is the current system fostering critical thinking, or is it perpetuating narratives that serve the status quo? Can an enlightened Kuwait truly emerge without dismantling educational structures that might contribute to the perpetuation of societal challenges?

Kuwait's rich heritage, according to some, is not just a relic of the past but a complex entity requiring introspection. Preserving cultural traditions is vital, but are these traditions inclusive, or do they contribute to marginalization? Some argue that a more controversial approach to heritage preservation involves reevaluating which aspects truly contribute to national identity and which might perpetuate exclusivity.

In the quiet moments when the gentle sea breeze whispers through Kuwait's palm trees and the call to prayer resonates in the air, critics argue that the depth of Kuwaiti patriotism reveals not just unwavering commitment but also the potential for dissent. Is challenging the status quo an act of betrayal, or is it a demonstration of true love for the nation — a willingness to address uncomfortable truths and provoke dialogue for meaningful change?

In essence, Kuwaiti patriotism, when viewed through a controversial lens, becomes a complex tapestry of questions, critiques, and challenges. It invites not just celebration but also introspection — a controversial exploration that challenges conventional notions and seeks to redefine what it truly means to love and uplift a nation.

As we delve deeper into this controversial exploration of Kuwait's patriotism, it becomes evident that the nation's journey is inherently tied to a willingness to confront uncomfortable truths. The controversies that arise are not meant to undermine the love for Kuwait but to strengthen it by fostering an environment where open dialogue and critical self-reflection lead to tangible, positive change.

Critics argue that questioning the conventional narratives surrounding patriotism is not an act of defiance but a form of deep devotion — a commitment to building a Kuwait that addresses its challenges head-on. This controversial perspective challenges citizens to move beyond complacency and actively engage in shaping a future that aligns with the principles of justice, equality, and sustainability.

Moreover, skeptics propose that engaging in controversy is not a betrayal of the nation but a demonstration of profound loyalty. It signals a willingness to protect Kuwait from within — to ensure that its core values are not eroded by systemic issues or unaddressed challenges. The controversial lens provides a powerful tool for Kuwaiti citizens to examine their societal structures critically and work collaboratively to build a nation that lives up to its full potential.

While conventional expressions of patriotism might rely on symbols and traditions, the controversial exploration urges Kuwaitis to be the architects of their own patriotism — a patriotism rooted not just in love for the nation but in a commitment to making it better. This paradigm shift challenges citizens to view controversies not as obstacles but as opportunities for growth and positive transformation.

In conclusion, Kuwait's controversial exploration of patriotism is not a negation of its love for the nation; instead, it's an affirmation of the deep-seated passion that compels citizens to actively shape the Kuwaiti narrative. Through this controversial lens, Kuwait's journey becomes dynamic, evolving, and resilient — a testament to the strength that arises from confronting challenges and steering the nation toward a brighter, more equitable future.

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Ambassador Al-Hazeem with Ambassador Jorge Silva Lopes.

Portugal praises Kuwait's peace initiatives

MADRID: The Portuguese Ministry of Foreign Affairs has praised Kuwait's efforts to achieve peace and understanding through political and humanitarian mediation to resolve conflicts. This came in a statement by the Director General of Foreign Policy at the Portuguese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ambassador Rui Vinhas, during a reception hosted by the Embassy of Kuwait in Lisbon on the occasion of Kuwait's 63rd National Day and 33rd Liberation Day. The Portuguese official affirmed Portugal's appreciation of Kuwait's indiscriminate humanitarian and peace-seeking policies, especially during the world's current unrest in Ukraine and the Middle East. He extended his well wishes and congratulations to His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and to the people of Kuwait. The Director General expressed his satisfaction with the level of friendly ties Portugal and Kuwait share, emphasizing the Portuguese Government's aim of enriching the relationship further.

Though geographical distance separates Kuwait and Portugal, they both share values concerning freedom and the goal of realizing worldwide peace. Therefore, Portugal's bilateral relations with Kuwait are precious regarding the economy, tourism, and investments in the two countries, he added. During the reception, the Kuwaiti Ambassador to Portugal, Hamad Al-Hazeem, extended his congratulations to His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal, his government, and the Kuwaiti people on the occasion of national celebrations. Ambassador Al-Hazeem wished prosperity and progress to Kuwait and its people, expressing his gratitude to Portuguese officials and friendly embassies partaking in the celebration. In a similar statement, the Portuguese Director General, Al-Hazeem, reiterated the same sentiments regarding the strong and friendly bilateral relations the two countries share, hoping for a prosperous future that strengthens their ties. High-profile political, economic, and cultural officials, as well as embassy members from foreign and Arab missions, attended the Lisbon reception. — KUNA

Photo of the day



KUWAIT: Buildings are lit up in Kuwait City in the colors of the Kuwait national flag as the country gears up for celebrating National and Liberation days.



Light installations decorate streets in Ahmadi as Kuwait celebrates its 63rd National Day and the 33th Liberation Day. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat

Kuwait embassies, consulates mark National, Liberation Days



RIYADH: Kuwait Embassy in Saudi Arabia celebrates Kuwait's National and Liberation Days. — KUNA photos



Kuwait Ambassador to Saudi Arabia Sheikh Sabah Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah praises the large presence of dignitaries during the celebration.

KUWAIT: Kuwait's embassies and consulates in Saudi Arabia, Cambodia, Turkey and South Korea marked Thursday the 63rd National Day and 33rd Liberation Day. The embassy in Cambodia held a reception in attendance of Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, Sok Chenda Sophea, as the celebration's guest of honor.

Kuwait Ambassador to Saudi Arabia Sheikh Sabah Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah praised the large presence of dignitaries and officials attending Kuwait national celebrations at the embassy, which he described as evidence of unity and interdependence of the two peoples and a reflection of the close Kuwaiti-Saudi relations. Sheikh Sabah made the remarks to KUNA and during the occasion of the 63rd anniversary of Independence and the 33rd anniversary of Liberation Day, wishing the best for the leadership of the two countries, and security and safety upon the Kuwaiti and Saudi peoples.

The ceremony was attended by Saudi Deputy Amir of the Riyadh Region, Prince Mohammad bin Abdul Rahman, and a number of excellences, and heads of diplomatic missions in the Kingdom. Sheikh Sabah extended his warmest congratulations and blessings to His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and to His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Dr. Mohammad Sabah Al-Salem, and to all Kuwaiti people.

For his part, GCC Secretary General, Jassem Al-Budaiwi, who also attended the ceremony said that he witnessed a brilliant Gulf gathering at the ceremony, which reflects on the status it holds in Saudi and Gulf countries. Al-Budaiwi added that such presence proves a strong cohesion among gulf countries and indicates solidarity and belief in the common destiny, expressing his wishes for prosperity to the State of Kuwait.

The ceremony held by the embassy began with the national anthem of Kuwait and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, then a speech by the Ambassador of the State of Kuwait, a visual presentation of Kuwaiti-Saudi relations, and the presentation of a souvenir to the Deputy Amir of the Riyadh Region as the guest of honor.

Kuwait's consulate in Turkey commemorated the national anniversaries with a number of high officials and diplomats in attendance. Consul General in Istanbul, Mohammad Al-Sharji, congratulated His Highness the Amir of Kuwait Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Dr. Mohammad Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah, and the Kuwaiti people, wishing the country everlasting security and growing progress and prosperity.

He spoke highly of the cooperation and depth of relations between two nations across various fields, as well as the close coordination on regional and international issues. The Consul General took the opportunity to recall solidarity and sacrifices of friendly nations during liberation of Kuwait in 1991, highlighting the notable Turkish role. He also took note of the humanitarian role of Kuwait in the aftermath of the devastating earthquake of 2023, and the relief air bridge it extended as per the instructions of its political leadership.

As for celebrations taking place in Kuwait's Embassy in Seoul, the South Korean capital, they were attended by Korean Minister of Ministry of Land, Infrastructure and Transport Park Sang-woo, government officials, private sector representatives, as well as various notable personalities and diplomats. Ambassador Theyab Al-Resheedi addressed the congregation saying that this an opportunity to renew belonging to one's homeland, and evoke the memory of martyrs.

He hailed supportive role of Korea during the liberation, stating that it will remain ingrained in hearts and minds of Kuwaitis. Ambassador Al-Resheedi touted the high-level communication between the two, exemplified in the exchange of visits and meetings.

Commending the long-lasting relations, the Korean Minister spoke of the partnership between the two nations in developmental projects. The minister called Kuwait an important supplier of energy, contributing to stability and growth of industrial sector in South Korea. He hoped that Korea would play a more vital role in bigger projects, especially relating to Kuwait 2035 vision of sustainable development, digitization and food security. — KUNA



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Palestinians send radio messages to loved ones

Taliban execute two convicted murderers in football stadium

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Russia claims gains in Ukraine as two-year mark approaches

UK announces new sanctions against Russia over Ukraine war

MOSCOW: Russia claimed on Thursday its forces had advanced further in east Ukraine, piling pressure on Kyiv days before the two-year anniversary of the conflict. Ukraine has faced intense pressure on its eastern front in recent months as it grapples with ammunition shortages and hold-ups to much-needed Western military aid.

The Russian defence ministry said Thursday it captured Pobeda ('victory' in Russian), a small frontline village about five kilometres (three miles) west of Donetsk city. "On the Donetsk front, units of the 'Southern' group of troops liberated the village of Pobeda and improved their position along the front line," it said.

The capture, if confirmed, would mark another step westwards for Moscow, which last week seized the former Ukrainian stronghold of Avdiivka after months of battle. Ukraine said in a briefing later Thursday that it was "holding back enemy forces" in Pobeda, but did not explicitly refute Moscow's claim.

"Russians are concentrating their main activity on the Donetsk region," Ukraine's senior commander in the area Oleksandr Tarnavsky acknowledged, without elaborating. The capture of Avdiivka last week, after the nearby town of Marinka fell to Russian forces in December, marks a turning point for Moscow after over a year of deadlocked fighting. Russia has for months been ramping up arms production and driving massive human resources into its offensive, at what Kyiv says is an enormous human toll.

Kherson bridgehead

As Russia claimed advances in the east, Ukraine said its forces had struck

a Russian training ground in the south, on the Moscow-controlled eastern bank of the Dnipro river. Kyiv has managed to hold a thin bridgehead on the eastern bank of the river in the southern Kherson region since last year, but its forces have not made further progress inland.

The strike, which took place Wednesday, targeted a range where Russian storm troops were training, military spokeswoman Nataliya Gumenyuk said. Around 60 Russian troops were "killed or seriously wounded" when three strikes hit the training ground near the village of Podo-Kalynivka, she told AFP.

Russia claimed to have taken back the Dnipro river bridgehead earlier this week, but Ukraine has repeatedly rejected this. "Our marines are firmly holding the bridgehead," Ukrainian leader Volodymyr Zelensky said Thursday, calling Russia's claims "disinformation".

Ukraine carried out a separate strike on a training ground near the Russian-controlled town of Volnovakha in the eastern Donetsk region on Tuesday, resulting in numerous casualties. Russia did not officially acknowledge that strike, but authorities in one region said they were looking into reports of casualties among the 36th Motorised Rifle Brigade.

"We will bring full and reliable information about the fate of the soldiers directly to each family," Zabaykalsky region governor Alexander Osipov said Wednesday.

Meanwhile, UK announced more than 50 new sanctions against Russia on Thursday to mark the second anniversary of Moscow's invasion of Ukraine, which falls this weekend. The sanctions target munitions manufacturers, electronics



LONDON: (From L) Chair of the Association of Ukrainians in Great Britain (AUGB) Petro Rewko, Bishop of the Ukrainian Catholic Church of London Kenneth Nowakowski and Ukrainian writer Olesya Khromeychuk speak during a press Conference at the Ukrainian Catholic Cathedral, in London, on February 22, 2024 ahead of the second anniversary of the invasion of Ukraine by Russia. — AFP

companies, and diamond and oil traders and aim to "diminish" Russian President Vladimir Putin's weapons arsenal, the foreign office said.

They also seek to cut off funding for Russia's war by clamping down on metals, diamonds, and energy trade—key sources of Russian revenue, the ministry added. "Our international economic pressure means Russia cannot afford this illegal invasion," British foreign minister David Cameron said in a statement.

"Our sanctions are starving Putin of the resources he desperately needs to fund his struggling war." Saturday marks

the second anniversary of Russia's full-scale invasion of its neighbour. More than 10,000 civilians have died in the conflict and almost 20,000 more have been wounded, according to the United Nations. "Two years on, we stand united in support for Ukraine," added Cameron. "Together, we will not let up in the face of tyranny. We will continue to support Ukraine as it fights for democracy—for as long as it takes."

Thursday's sanctions target 14 individuals and entities linked to manufacturing munitions such as rocket launch systems, missiles, and explosives, the foreign office

said. They include Sverdlov State Owned Enterprise, the largest enterprise in the Russian ammunition industry.

A Turkish company that has been supplying electronics to the Russian military, three Chinese firms and two entities in Belarus were also sanctioned. Sanctions were also imposed against oil trader Niels Troost, two Russian diamond companies and five senior executives of owners of Russia's top producers of copper, zinc and steel, among others. The UK has sanctioned a total of 2,000 individuals, companies and groups under its Russia sanctions regime. — AFP



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Kuwait National Day & Liberation Day,
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Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah,

His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh
Dr Mohammed Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah,

The Government of Kuwait,
and all the citizens and residents of Kuwait

May this nation be blessed and continue to flourish in peace, joy, and prosperity.

International

Palestinians send radio messages to loved ones in Zionist jails

'Dear dad, I can't wait for you to come back to take me to school'

RAMALLAH: Palestinians with relatives in Zionist prisons have been deprived of visiting rights during the Zionist-Hamas war, opting instead to send messages to loved ones on a radio programme. "Hello, this message is for my brother Islam. How are you, my brother?" said one greeting sent via a Palestinian radio show called Messages for the Prisoners.

"Your house is ready. When you get out, you will be all set to find someone to marry!" The show on popular Palestinian station Radio Ajyal, based in the city of Ramallah in the occupied West Bank, features personal messages from families that often end with the sentence: "We hope you will hear these words."

Campaigners say the number of Palestinian prisoners in Zionist jails has swelled to around 9,000, from about 5,200 before Hamas's October 7 attack on Zionist entity that triggered the war. After waves of arrests and tough restrictions on detainees followed the attack, the radio station has been inundated with messages from relatives. In response, it has extended the show by more than an hour.

"We get messages from everywhere" as many families "no longer have any

news of their loved ones in prison," said Walid Nasser, Radio Ajyal's editor-in-chief. "Dear dad, I can't wait for you to come back to take me to school," said one of the messages, which are often read by children and sometimes marked by a suppressed sob.

"Everything is fine at home, everything is fine at university, don't worry," said another message. The show's host, Maysam Barghouti, who reads out some of the messages herself, said many families "are looking for hope to hold on to." "The show is really the only means to communicate with a loved one or to get information."

'No news'

Zionist prison authorities announced a "state of emergency" after October 7 to prevent potential involvement of inmates in any further unrest, cutting off visiting rights and barring phone calls. The October 7 attack resulted in the deaths of about 1,160 people in Zionist entity, mostly civilians, according to an AFP tally of official Zionist figures.

Hamas militants also took about 250 Zionists and foreign hostages -- 130 of

whom remain in Gaza, including 30 presumed dead, according to Zionist entity. Zionist's retaliatory campaign has killed at least 29,410 people, mostly women and children, according to the latest count by Gaza's health ministry.

Amid the war, radios have also been banned in prisons, but the families, as well as Radio Ajyal staff, hope that inmates are still somehow able to tune in. The Palestinian Prisoners Club advocacy group said visits by the International Committee of the Red Cross have also stopped. Both the ICRC and Zionist entity declined to comment.

While some Palestinians are detained without known charges, the most common grounds for arrest range from online calls for violence to alleged militant activity. Prison conditions have deteriorated since the start of the war, several rights groups have said based on official Zionist data and accounts from former inmates.

"My brother has been in prison for 22 years, and the last three months have been the most difficult for all of us," said Ihsan Kamal, whose brother Saed was sentenced to 38 years for attacking Zionists. "My parents used to visit him once



RAMALLAH: Palestinian radio presenter Maysam Barghouti, 36, sits at Radio Ajyal, a station based in the occupied West Bank city of Ramallah that features personal messages from families of prisoners held in Zionist jails. — AFP

a month," Kamal said. "Now, we have absolutely no news, and we hear that the situation is terrible in the prisons."

Rights groups say at least nine Palestinians have died behind Zionist bars since October 7. The Association for Civ-

il Rights in Zionist entity has called on judges to visit prisons where Palestinians are held to inspect their conditions. The Supreme Court has announced that judges would go to jails, but no visits have yet been reported. — AFP

Campaigning begins for Iran's legislative election

TEHRAN: Candidates running for seats in Iran's legislature launched Thursday their election campaigns, one week ahead of polls expected to tighten conservatives' grip on power. Voters are due to cast their ballots on March 1 to pick new members of Iran's parliament, as well as the Assembly of Experts, a key body in charge of appointing the country's supreme leader.

The upcoming election will be the first since months-long nationwide protests rocked Iran following the September 2022 death in police custody of Mahsa Amini, a 22-year-old Iranian Kurd. She had been arrested earlier for allegedly violating the Islamic republic's strict dress code for women.

Large billboards and election posters have sprung up in Tehran and other cities to announce the start of campaigning, urging people to take part. But the first official day of campaigning on Thursday did not see a large number of banners erected in favour of individual candidates or their coalitions.

Iran's supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei has urged people to head to the polling stations. "Everyone should participate in elections," he said on Sunday. "It is important to choose the best person, but the priority is for people to participate."

Some 15,200 candidates have been approved by jurists in charge of the vetting process to compete for the legislature's 290 seats, according to the official IRNA news agency, a record figure since the 1979 Islamic revolution.

"Most of the candidates, particularly in small



TEHRAN: People walk past an electoral campaign poster bearing a portrait of a parliamentary candidate during the first day of election campaign in Tehran, on February 22, 2024, ahead of next month's elections. — AFP

constituencies, are doctors, engineers, civil servants, and teachers who are not affiliated with any political group," journalist Maziar Khosravi told AFP. By allowing such a large pool of candidates to run, the government "wants to create local competition and increase participation" to help attract voters, he added.

Only between 20 and 30 of the reformist candidates who submitted applications have been approved to run in the upcoming election, reformist politicians said. Iran's current parliament, elected in 2020, has been dominated by conservatives and ultra-conservatives after many reformists and moderates were disqualified. The country at the time saw a voter turnout of 42.57 percent—the lowest since the Islamic revolution. — AFP

One killed, eight hurt in shooting near West Bank

MAALE ADUMIM: Three Palestinian gunmen killed one person and wounded eight, including a young pregnant woman, Thursday near a Jewish settlement in the occupied West Bank, Zionist police said. The shooters were "neutralized", police said, and an AFP photographer later saw two bodies at the scene of the attack on a highway east of Jerusalem, where five cars were riddled with bullets.

Zionist's internal security service Shin Bet identified the gunmen as Mohammed Zawahrah, 26, his brother Kathim Zawahrah, 31, and Ahmed al-Wahsh, also 31.

Among those wounded was a 23-year-old pregnant woman who was in critical condition, said the Magen David Adom emergency response service and Shaare Zedek Medical Center. Violence was already on the rise across the West Bank prior to the Gaza war sparked by Hamas's October 7 attack, but has escalated since then to levels unseen in nearly two decades, with hundreds killed in recent months.

Zionist's far-right National Security Minister Itamar Ben Gvir visited the site of Thursday's attack where he told journalists: "The enemies... want to hurt us. They hate us." He argued that "we need to distribute more weapons" and that "our right to life is superior to the freedom of movement" of residents governed by the Palestinian Authority under president Mahmud Abbas.

"There should be more restrictions and we should put barriers around villages and limit the freedom of movement" of people from the West Bank, Ben Gvir added. Palestinians have complained of worsening

Zionist-imposed restrictions in the West Bank since the outbreak of the war in the Gaza Strip.

Zionist's far-right Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich called for a "firm security response... and colonisation" by building thousands of new housing units in settlements like Maale Adumim and across the West Bank. "Our enemies must know that any harm done to us would result in more construction, more development and even more control over the entire country," he said on X, formerly Twitter.

Palestinian militant group Hamas called for an escalation in such attacks. "Our people will continue to resist the occupation throughout our country, Palestine, until the occupation is defeated," Hamas said in a statement.

"We call on our revolutionary youth and the free, committed Palestinian people to escalate the confrontation with the occupation and its settlers." The attack near Maale Adumim came after two people were shot dead last Friday at a bus stop in southern Zionist entity near the town of Kiryat Malakhi.

The West Bank has seen frequent Palestinian attacks on Zionists and near-daily raids by the Zionist military that often turn deadly. Zionist troops and settlers have killed at least 400 Palestinians in the West Bank since the Gaza war broke out, according to the Palestinian health ministry in Ramallah. — AFP

Zionist captured the West Bank—including east Jerusalem, which it later annexed—in the Arab-Zionist war of 1967. Around 475,000 Jewish settlers currently live in the occupied West Bank, in settlements considered illegal by the United Nations and most of the international community.

The West Bank's Palestinian population is about 2.9 million. The Palestinians claim the territory as the heartland of a future independent state, a goal being discussed by the international community as the Hamas-Zionist war rages into a fifth month. — AFP

Arab American voters vow to 'punish' Biden

DEARBORN, Michigan: It's common to hear residents chatting in Arabic just as often as English in this Detroit suburb's stores or mosques, those buildings themselves often sporting bilingual signage out front. But no matter the language, residents in this Arab American and Muslim stronghold in the Midwestern state of Michigan are convinced President Joe Biden, as he steadfastly stands by the Zionist entity in its war in Gaza, is not listening to them.

"Vote for Palestine. No Biden," political organizer Samra'a Luqman says in English, passing out fliers outside a mosque after prayers. "Don't vote for Biden," the activist with Yemeni origins adds in Arabic. "Of course," respond many passersby. As the Gaza Strip death toll climbs, residents here — once firmly in the Democratic fold — are turning against the president in a crucial swing state he won by just 150,000 votes in 2020.

Some are hoping to pressure Biden to back off from his the Zionist entity support and call for a

ceasefire. Others, like Luqman, say they would never vote for him. "He's committing the genocide. He's funding it," Luqman, a campaign leader with a group called Abandon Biden, tells AFP. A campaign is underway by Luqman and others urging voters to vote "uncommitted", or write in "Free Palestine" on their ballots in the state's primary next week — a symbolic gesture, since Biden faces no serious challengers for the Democratic nomination.

"This is a campaign about pressuring our current president who can do something about the mass killing of children," says Abbas Alawieh, a former Democratic chief of staff on Capitol Hill and member of the Listen to Michigan campaign group. "In this community there are a lot of people who are directly harmed by war," the Lebanese-born Alawieh tells AFP. Biden, he says, "is threatening to lose this community. Not just in November, but perhaps for a generation to come."

Concern has mounted amid the high civilian toll in the Zionist entity's campaign, now at 29,313 people dead, according to the health ministry in Gaza. Listen to Michigan began as a pressure campaign, but some voters say their frustration with the president is permanent. Voting for Biden was the "worst mistake of my life", says Mohamed Alemara, a 23-year-old medical student of Iraqi descent. "You don't kill 30,000 of our people and expect us to vote for you." — AFP

In June 1967, the Zionist entity crushed some of its Arab neighbors in a six-day war, seizing the West Bank including east Jerusalem from Jordan, the Golan Heights from Syria, and the Gaza Strip and Sinai Peninsula from Egypt. The Zionist entity then began to settle the 70,000 sq km of seized Arab territory. The UN later declared the occupation of Palestinian territory illegal. Cairo regained Sinai under its 1979 peace deal with the Zionist entity.

The ICJ has also been asked to look into the consequences of the Zionist entity's "adoption of related discriminatory legislation and measures". Secondly, the ICJ should advise on how the Zionist entity's actions "affect the legal status of the occupation" and what are the consequences for the UN and other countries. The ICJ rules in disputes between states and its judgements are binding, although it has little means to enforce them. However, in this case, the opinion it issues will be non-binding although most advisory opinions are in fact acted upon. — Agencies

Zionists strike Rafah as truce...

Continued from Page 1

by the start of Ramadan on March 10 or 11, it will keep fighting during the holy month, including in Rafah. The Zionist entity has already been bombing the city, which was again hit overnight and where early Thursday AFP reporters heard multiple air strikes. "I woke up to the sound of a huge explosion like an earthquake — fire, smoke, blasts and dust everywhere," said Rami Al-Shaer, 21, who told AFP he and others pulled wounded family members from the rubble.

Gaza's Civil Defense agency reported "a number" of people were killed, while elsewhere in Rafah residents walked amid the rubble of the city's Al-Faruq Mosque, after strikes. "At night, we were surprised by a call asking us to evacuate because the surrounding area was being targeted," said Mohamad Abu Khosa, adding that the army had targeted the mosque with two missiles. Another 97 people were killed across the Palestinian territory in the past 24 hours, the health ministry said.

War cabinet member Benny Gantz said the Zionist entity's operation in Rafah would begin "after the evacuation of the population", although his government has not specified where civilians could go. Gazans have said nowhere in the territory is safe. The Zionist entity's campaign has killed at least 29,410 people, mostly women and children, according to the latest count by Gaza's health ministry.

Mediators including the United States, Qatar and Egypt, who have tried and so far failed to broker a

ceasefire and hostage release deal, made a new push for an agreement. Brett McGurk, White House coordinator for the Middle East and North Africa, held talks with Zionist Defense Minister Yoav Gallant, after meeting with other mediators in Cairo who had met Hamas chief Ismail Haniyeh earlier this week.

US State Department spokesman Matthew Miller said Washington hopes for an "agreement that secures a temporary ceasefire where we can get the hostages out and get humanitarian assistance in". Zionist Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has insisted the army will fight on until it has destroyed Hamas — but his failure so far to bring home all the captives has led to mounting protests and calls for early elections.

A poll of hundreds of Zionists, published Wednesday, showed a majority do not think "absolute victory" is a likely outcome. With Arab support, the United States has called for a pathway to a Palestinian state — something the Zionist entity's parliament has overwhelmingly rejected.

The UN humanitarian agency said aid to Gaza is being gravely hampered by the "intense hostilities, limitations on the entry and delivery of aid, and growing insecurity". Volunteer Mohammad Al-Oukshia at NGO World Central Kitchen in Rafah said the group was trying to provide "nutritious meals to displaced people" and was hoping to expand to northern Gaza, where famine fears are most acute.

In the southern Gaza city of Khan Yunis, medical charity Doctors Without Borders (MSF) said a Zionist tank had fired on a house sheltering their employees and families. Two relatives of MSF staff were killed and six others wounded, it said, condemning the strike in the "strongest possible terms". — AFP

preparing even a simple dish.

Roger, a Filipino resident, shared his strategy of buying a small quantity of onions, hoping that prices would fall in the coming days. He highlighted the trade-off, mentioning that for 200 fils more, he could buy a frozen chicken. Some residents are adapting to the onion shortage by exploring alternative ways to prepare dishes with minimal or no onions.

Last week, the ministry of commerce pledged cooperation from food outlets to maintain the prices of essential food commodities before the beginning of Ramadan. Consumers are hoping the ministry will continue to ensure price stability and affordability throughout the holy month.

Eye-watering onion prices...

Continued from Page 1

is now importing onions from neighboring countries. At a Salmiya supermarket, Indian expat Kutub Batliwala expressed dissatisfaction with the quality of onions on sale, mentioning that they were not fit for consumption — wet, moist, some rotten and emitting a foul stench. Despite the high price of 645 fils a kilo, he emphasized the necessity of onions in

Kuwait slams Zionist occupation...

Continued from Page 1

In January, the ICJ ruled in that case that the Zionist entity must do everything in its power to prevent genocide and allow humanitarian aid into Gaza, stopping short of ordering a ceasefire.

The UN General Assembly has asked the ICJ to consider two questions. Firstly, the court should examine the legal consequences of "the ongoing violation by (the Zionist entity) of the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination". This relates to the "prolonged occupation, settlement and annexation of the Palestinian territory occupied since 1967" and "measures aimed at altering the demographic composition, character and status of the Holy City of Jerusalem".

International

Five dead after cargo ship hits bridge in southern China

Dozens of rescuers dispatched including reinforcements from Shenzhen

BEIJING: Five people were killed when an empty cargo ship struck a bridge in southern China on Thursday, causing part of it to collapse, authorities and state media reported. The container vessel was travelling between the cities of Foshan and Guangzhou when it rammed into Lixinsha Bridge at around 5:31 am (21:31 GMT), state broadcaster CCTV said.

The boat "came into contact with... the bridge pillars, causing the roadway above to collapse", according to CCTV. The collision sent five vehicles tumbling off the bridge and either into the water or onto the ship below, the Guangzhou maritime affairs bureau said. The bureau initially stated that two people had died and three people were missing.

A CCTV reporter later cited the bureau as saying that "all of the three missing people have been found without any vital signs". The deceased included the driver of an empty bus, the driver of an electric scooter, and three people in a small goods vehicle, CCTV said.

The broadcaster added that the collision occurred "due to improper operations by the crew" of the ship, named the Lianghui 688. Photos published by CCTV on Friday morning showed the red and white vessel lodged at a diagonal angle between two of the bridge's pillars as water cascaded out of severed pipes on to its deck, where some debris was visible.

Footage showed rescue personnel in orange jumpsuits racing in dinghies across a murky waterway towards a high bridge with a yawning gap in its middle. Other patrol boats flashed their lights as they circled the area where the collapse took place, though the cargo ship appeared to have been towed away. CCTV reported that dozens of rescuers were dispatched to the scene, including reinforcements from the nearby tech hub of Shenzhen. Two other people were res-



GUANGZHOU: A general view shows a section of the collapsed Lixinsha bridge over a waterway in Guangzhou, in southern China's Guangdong province on February 22, 2024. Five people were killed and three others remained missing after an empty cargo ship struck a bridge in southern China on February 22, causing part of it to collapse. - AFP

cued and taken to hospital where they remain in a "stable condition", the broadcaster said.

It added that a member of the ship's crew was "lightly injured" in the incident, and the vessel's owner had been brought under "control". The region where

the collision took place is a major industrial and manufacturing area crisscrossed by a dense network of shipping routes.

Similar accidents have occurred in China before, including in 2012 when a newly built cruise liner

bumped into a bridge in the eastern city of Wenzhou, causing no casualties. In 2007, nine people were killed when a cargo vessel struck a 1,600-metre-long bridge in southern Guangdong province, causing a section of it to collapse. - AFP



Senegal's President Macky Sall

Senegal president to go on live TV after weeks of turmoil

DAKAR: Senegal's outgoing President Macky Sall was to appear live on national television on Thursday and could reveal his plans for elections after their unprecedented delay triggered weeks of crisis. Sall faces a growing clamour to set a date for the vote after he abruptly called off the February 25 presidential election with just three weeks to go.

Under pressure at home and abroad to call the ballot as soon as possible, he will take part in a televised interview with three media organizations at 7:00 pm (19:00 GMT), the presidency said. "The only thing the Senegalese expect from President Macky Sall speaking today is for him to unequivocally announce the date of the presidential election," ex-prime minister Aminata Toure said on X, formerly Twitter.

Sall announced the delay hours before official campaigning was due to begin, with parliament backing the move despite strong opposition and setting a new election date for mid-December. The opposition denounced Sall's move as a "constitutional coup", saying his party feared defeat at the ballot box.

The delay plunged the traditionally stable West African country into its worst political crisis in decades and sparked unrest that has left four people dead. Adding to the uncertainty, the top constitutional body last week overturned the delay and called for the vote to be organized "as soon as possible".

Sall, whose second term runs out on April 2, responded that he would "without delay carry out the consultations necessary" to do so. No information has officially been released since then about any discussions. But the president called during Wednesday's cabinet meeting for "all the arrangements" to be made "for the presidential election to be organized well on a date which will be set very soon", according to the presidency. It added that this would be "after consultations with politicians, civil society officials and representatives of key actors".

'Dialogue'

Sall also said he wanted "dialogue" to calm tensions and asked the justice ministry to finish drawing up draft legislation to follow through on "the will for reconciliation and forgiveness". Hundreds of detained opposition and civil society members were released last week. However, civil society groups have called another rally for Saturday in the capital Dakar to keep up the pressure, after mobilizing several thousand people last weekend. Imprisoned opposition candidate Bassirou Diomaye Diakhane Faye, who is among 19 contenders for the presidency, on Wednesday accused Sall of dragging his feet.

His criticism echoed that of most of the other candidates who accused Sall in a joint statement of "ill will". Faye said in a statement he would only agree to talks on setting an election date "without delay" and before the end of Sall's term. Sall, who has been in power since 2012, said he called off the vote over disputes about the disqualification of potential candidates and concern about a return to unrest seen in 2021 and last year. - AFP

Bolsonaro faces police questioning over Brazil 'coup'

BRASILIA: Brazil's former president Jair Bolsonaro is due to face questioning by police Thursday over allegations he and allies plotted a coup to keep him in power in the months around his failed 2022 reelection bid. Investigators say the far-right ex-army captain led a plot to falsely discredit the Brazilian election system and prevent the winner of the vote, leftist President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva, from taking power.

Bolsonaro, who denies the accusations, said Wednesday he would only answer questions from federal police if his lawyers were first given access to the investigation files. "No one attempted a coup in Brazil. That is the great truth," he told radio station CBN Recife. Earlier this month, police carried out dozens of search and seizure raids targeting Bolsonaro and his allies and confiscated the former president's passport. Bolsonaro, who led Brazil from 2019 to 2022, says he is the victim of "persecution."

Several of his former ministers and other allies have also been summoned for questioning Thursday, according to Brazilian media reports. The interrogation comes three days before a pro-Bolsonaro rally in Sao Paulo, where he plans to defend himself against the accusations. It will be the sixth time Bolsonaro has faced questioning by federal police in a series of corruption and abuse of office investigations since he left office.

Draft decree

A week after Lula took office on January 1, 2023, thousands of Bolsonaro supporters stormed the presidential palace, Congress and Supreme Court, urging the military to intervene to overturn what they called a stolen election.

Bolsonaro, who was in the United States at the time, denies responsibility, and has even suggested the protesters were not really his supporters. But he faces growing scrutiny over his actions in the months before and after the October 2022 elections, from

Taliban execute two convicted murderers in football stadium

GHAZNI: Taliban authorities publicly executed two men convicted of murder in a football stadium in eastern Afghanistan on Thursday, according to an AFP journalist at the scene. Both men were executed by multiple gunshots to the back in Ghazni city after Supreme Court official Atiqullah Darwish read aloud a death warrant signed by Taliban Supreme Leader Hibatullah Akhundzada.

"These two people were convicted of the crime of murder," Darwish said. "After two years of trial in the courts of the country, the order has been signed." Thousands of people gathered in the stadium to witness the executions. Families of the convicted men's victims were present, including women and children, and were asked if they wanted to grant the condemned a last-minute reprieve, but they declined in both cases. Relatives were also offered to carry out the execution themselves, in line with Taliban government implementation of Islamic law, but members of the security forces killed both men after they refused. The executed were identified as Said Jamal and Gul Khan, both guilty of knife murders in September 2017 and January 2022 respectively, according to a Supreme Court statement.

The statement said Akhundzada had conducted an "extraordinary investigation" into their

cases. The Taliban administration in Kabul has not been officially recognized by any other government since it took power in 2021 and installed its strict interpretation of Islamic law. Akhundzada ordered judges in 2022 to fully implement all aspects of Islamic law — including "eye for an eye" punishments known as "qisas".

his public efforts to discredit the electronic voting system — claims for which he never provided evidence — to what investigators say was a behind-the-scenes plot against democracy.

Police say Bolsonaro edited a draft presidential decree that would have declared a state of emergency, called new elections and ordered the arrest of Supreme Court Justice Alexandre de Moraes, the head of Brazil's Superior Electoral Tribunal. They also released a video of a July 2022 meeting where a shouting, swearing Bolsonaro ordered cabinet ministers to help him discredit the election system.



BRASILIA: (FILES) Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro makes a statement for the first time since Sunday's presidential run-off election, at Alvorada Palace in Brasilia. - AFP

Animosities with judge

Moraes is also the lead judge on the case investigating the alleged coup plot — a situation Bolsonaro's lawyers tried to fight in court, arguing he should recuse himself. The Supreme Court denied the request.

Moraes also rejected an attempt by Bolsonaro to postpone his questioning, ruling the president had the right to remain silent but not to change the date. As president, Bolsonaro regularly attacked Moraes, who has become a hate figure for the Brazilian far-right. Bolsonaro, 68, has faced mounting legal trouble since leaving office. In June, the electoral tribunal barred him from running for office until 2030 over his attacks on the election system. - AFP

Regular floggings

Islamic law, or sharia, acts as a code of living for Muslims worldwide, offering guidance on issues such as modesty, finance and crime. However, interpretations vary according to local custom, culture and religious schools of thought.

Taliban scholars in Afghanistan have employed one of the most severe interpretations of the code, including capital and corporal punishments little used by most modern Muslim states. Hundreds of millions of dollars were spent building a new judicial system under the last foreign-backed government, a combination of Islamic and secular law with qualified prosecutors, defence lawyers and judges.

However, many Afghans complained of corruption, bribery and the slow delivery of justice. Public executions were common during the Taliban's first rule from 1996 to 2001. Thursday's executions are believed to be the third and fourth death penalties meted out since the Taliban authorities returned to power. The first two had also been convicted of murder.

There have been regular public floggings for other crimes, however, including theft, adultery and alcohol consumption. The last reported execution was carried out in June 2023, when a convicted murderer was shot dead in the grounds of a mosque in Laghman province in front of some 2,000 people. - AFP

Sweden sees lowest population growth in over two decades

STOCKHOLM: Sweden's population grew by 30,200 people to 10.5 million last year, the smallest population increase in absolute terms since 2001, official statistics showed Thursday, as the country has sought to curb immigration.

A combination of "a decrease in the number of births, a lower number of immigrations as well as a higher number of emigrations are the reasons for the lower population increase during 2023 compared to previous years," Statistics Sweden said.

According to the agency, 94,500 people immigrated to Sweden last year, an eight percent decrease from the previous year, while 73,400 people emigrated from the country, a 45 percent increase. The coalition government, led by Ulf Kristersson of the Moderate Party but relying on the support of the anti-immigration Sweden Democrats, has pledged to limit migration since coming to power in 2022.

At the same time, the fertility rate in the Scandinavian country is at an all-time low, at 1.45 children per woman last year, according to the statistics agency. A total of 100,100 births were recorded last year. Experts say that if the trend continues, the working population will eventually start to shrink, putting a strain on the country's welfare system. Nordic countries still have some of the highest fertility rates in Europe, according to Eurostat's most recent data.

In 2021, Sweden's fertility rate was 1.67 children per woman, above the EU average of 1.53 and significantly higher than countries in southern Europe such as Spain, which had a fertility rate of 1.19. Those rates are well below the threshold of 2.1 that experts say is needed to maintain population levels. - AFP

French navy downs two more drones over Red Sea

PARIS: The French navy has shot down two drones over the Red Sea where Yemen's Houthi rebels have been attacking ships, the defence ministry said Thursday, in the second such incident this week. The navy, which has two frigates deployed in the area, detected a threat in the night of Wednesday to Thursday and "destroyed two drones", it said.

It said earlier this week it had downed two other drones overnight Monday to Tuesday. On Monday, the European Union formally launched a naval mission to protect Red Sea shipping from the Iran-backed Houthis who control much of war-torn Yemen.

The rebels have been harassing the vital shipping lane since November in a campaign they say is in solidarity with Palestinians in Gaza during the Zionist entity-Hamas war. France's Languedoc previously shot down two drones in the Red Sea in self-defence in December, the foreign ministry has said.

The European Union aims to have its mission — called Aspides, Greek for "shield" — up and running in a "few weeks" with at least four vessels, an official said last Friday. The United States is spearheading its own naval coalition in the area and has conducted retaliatory strikes on Houthi targets in Yemen, as has Britain.

The dozens of Houthi attacks have roiled shipping in the Red Sea, leading some companies to take alternative routes including a two-week detour around

Business

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 23, 2024

'New Kuwait' vision eyes transition to a productive, technology-driven economy

Country makes great strides in key development indicators

By Omar Al-Nakib

KUWAIT: The Kuwait of today is almost unrecognizable from the fledgling state of the 1960s, when the newly-independent country took its first tentative steps on the path of social and economic development. Helped by the proceeds from the country's great oil endowment, the sixth largest in the world in 2023, and under the stewardship of the Al-Sabah alongside the region's only elected legislature, Kuwait's transformation has been remarkable.

Through a succession of national development plans, Kuwait stands today having made great strides in human development, in education outcomes, per capita income, health and life expectancy, and in economic and financial sector development. A pioneer on many fronts since even before its independence in 1961, including in establishing the world's first sovereign wealth fund (KIA), launching the Arab Gulf's first stock exchange and the region's first extension of political rights to women, Kuwait has a proud history and pedigree.

Today, under the auspices of the New Kuwait vision 2035 strategy, efforts are underway to diversify the country's economy, to broaden and deepen the non-oil productive base, advance the social development of Kuwaiti citizens, including in education, and modernize the country's infrastructure. In short, it is a strategy to transition Kuwait from a rentier economy to a productive, technology-driven one. To that end, the government unveiled in 2023 and recently updated its four-year economic plan, emphasizing the imperatives of increasing the prominence of the private sector, encouraging entrepreneurship, stimulating foreign investment and rebalancing the role and penetration of the public sector in the economy.

Social justice, security and sustainability is the driving ethos, with the government especially cognizant of the urgency to reform the institutional framework and the public finances especially. In the latter, without reforms to augment revenue streams outside of oil and rationalize public expenditures, by restraining the ballooning wage and subsidy bill, for instance, Kuwait will likely continue to face year after year of fiscal deficits that would risk depletion of the state's General Reserve Fund entirely and cause liquidity shortages.

Since 2014, the government has balanced its budget only once, in FY22/23 when, thanks to soaring oil prices following Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the state was able to record a fiscal surplus of KD 6.4 billion (11.5 percent of GDP).

The challenges facing Kuwait extend beyond the public finances. Economic activity more broadly remains heavily anchored to the oil sector, whose output is tied to OPEC+ production policy (oil GDP accounted for 55 percent of total GDP in 2022). The oil exporters' group is currently managing a third round of crude oil production cuts since November 2022, with Kuwait's output this quarter pared back by 135 kb/d to 2.41 mb/d, a level which, if extended via a rollover of OPEC+ cuts through to the end of the year, would be the lowest in more than a decade.

Non-oil economic activity, meanwhile, has in recent years tended to underperform both in relation to Kuwait's regional peers and its historic trend. Non-oil GDP growth averaged 4.5 percent y/y in the 2000-2019 period, according to the IMF, and has since slowed to an annual average of just 1.1 percent using official national data. The authorities are rightly looking at advancing development of the non-oil sector as a matter of priority, with a particular fo-



cus on manufacturing (refining and petrochemicals), tourism and entertainment, transport and logistics, financial services and renewables. In manufacturing, government efforts came to fruition in 2023 with the commencement of full operations at the KD 4.9 billion Al-Zour refinery, which, with a capacity of 615 kb/d, is the Middle East's largest refinery. The refinery will be instrumental in helping Kuwait advance its export products up the value chain. Similarly, a new international airport, port and railway line are in the works with potentially substantive productivity and revenue benefits for the country.

Away from infrastructure investments, regulatory reforms targeting the business sector, labor market, foreign investment, public sector institutions and, importantly, schools and higher education, are also in the offing and should, in time, unlock even greater socio-economic benefits for the country. The challenges are not insubstantial, but the solutions and the roadmap are known. Kuwait has the opportunity, the financial means, the human capital and the historical pedigree to fulfill its national ambitions.

Note: Omar Al-Nakib is senior economist at National Bank of Kuwait

Turkey central bank keeps rate at 45%

ISTANBUL: Turkey's central bank maintained its key interest rate at 45 percent on Thursday, marking the end of its monetary tightening cycle after eight consecutive months of hikes. It was the first rate decision delivered by the bank's newly appointed governor Fatih Karahan, a former economist at the Federal Reserve Bank of New York and US online retail giant Amazon.

The bank said that "the current level of the policy rate will be maintained until there is a significant and sustained decline in the underlying trend of monthly inflation." Turkey's annual inflation rate held stable in January at nearly 65 percent, but month-on-month consumer price increases jumped sharply following a huge minimum wage hike. The monthly inflation rate in January climbed to 6.7 percent, from 2.9 percent in December, following a 49-percent rise in the minimum wage that went into effect in January.

Inflation remains a pressing issue for President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's government ahead of local elections in March. His ruling AKP party is trying to win back control of major cities, including Istanbul and the capital Ankara, currently held by the main opposition party. Turkey's central bank, which has raised its key rate from 8.5 percent to 45 percent since June, said last month that the level was sufficient to start easing the cost of living crisis. Karahan said in his first public appearance on February 8 that there was no need for a further rate hike but warned the central bank would review its decision if the inflation outlook deteriorated, opening the door to maintaining the tightness needed to achieve price stability.

The central bank said on Thursday that "monetary policy stance will be tightened in case a significant and persistent deterioration in inflation outlook is anticipated." Analysts rule out further hikes in the near future. Liam Peach, senior emerging markets economist at London-based Capital Economics, said in a note that an extended interest rate pause was likely over the coming months. "With inflation likely to end the year at 30-35 percent, there is still a possibility that the central bank starts an easing cycle before the end of the year, which many analysts are expecting," he said.

"But our baseline view remains that interest rates will stay on hold throughout this year and that rate cuts won't arrive until early next year." During a rally in western province of Denizli, Erdogan said: "We will breathe easier with the rapid fall of inflation by the end of this year." Karahan took over the job after Turkey's first woman central bank governor Hafize Gaye Erkan resigned at the beginning of this month, less than a year into her tenure. — AFP

TSMC expands out of hotspot Taiwan with Japan plant

KIKUYO: Surrounded by fields of carrots and cabbages, workers are putting the finishing touches to a factory opening on Saturday that is a milestone for both US ally Japan and Taiwanese chip giant TSMC.

The \$8.6-billion facility in the southern Kumamoto region showcases TSMC's efforts to make some of its strategically crucial chips elsewhere than hotspot Taiwan, as well as Japan's push to revive its once-dominant semiconductor sector. The self-ruled island is a silicon superpower but worries have grown about the global chip supply chain because of growing military and diplomatic pressure from China, which claims Taiwan.

The plant is "the most significant TSMC international investment to open in many years", said Chris Miller, Tufts University associate professor and author of "Chip War: The Fight for the World's Most Critical Technology". "It will also solidify the political relationship between Taiwan and Japan at a time when Taiwan is looking to make sure it's got powerful friends that can help it stand up to Chinese pressure," Miller told AFP.

Firms like Toshiba and NEC helped Japan dominate in microchips in the 1980s but competition from South Korea and Taiwan saw its global market share slump from over 50 percent to around 10 percent. Now the government wants to bring back the glory days and is making available up to 4 trillion yen (\$26.7 billion) in subsidies to help triple the sales of domestically

produced chips to more than 15 trillion yen by 2030.

The new TSMC plant in the town of Kikuyo, for which the government pledged over 40 percent of the costs — Sony and Denso are also on board — is just the first. With "strong" Japanese government support, TSMC this month announced a second, \$20-billion facility — for more advanced chips — and is reportedly eyeing a third and even a fourth plant. Others getting state funds include Kioxia, Micron, and Rapidus, a joint venture involving IBM and Japanese firms for state-of-the-art 2-nanometre logic chips. Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company — which counts Apple and Nvidia as clients — produces half the world's chips, used in everything from smartphones to cars and missiles.

But concerns about China's intentions for Taiwan have intensified in recent years. TSMC's customers — and governments concerned about critical supplies — have called for the firm to make more chips off the island. The company is building a second factory in the US state of Arizona and plans another in Germany — its first in Europe. But Japan has the advantage of being geographically closer, has a wealth of experience in the sector and, for the Kumamoto plant at least which took 22 months to build, is fast.

"I have seen many factories being built by various companies, but TSMC was built with remarkable speed," Taro Imamura, a local official in Kikuyo, told AFP. By contrast in the United States,



Japan is looking to revive its semiconductor industry, which once dominated the sector.

which itself has announced subsidies of \$52.7 billion to boost its own sector, the Arizona plant has been delayed and has seen disputes with unions.

"Everyone in town, from children to the elderly, now knows the words 'chips' and 'TSMC,'" Imamura said at Kikuyo's town hall, where a banner reads "We welcome TSMC workers". Regional lender Kyushu Financial Group estimates the economic impact of the plant will be 6.9 trillion yen in Kumamoto in the next decade. Kyushu, of which Kumamoto is a part, has been known as "Silicon Island" since the 1960s, and is home to more than one-third of Japan's semiconductor companies.

But as with other sectors in ageing Japan, there are worries about finding enough workers, particularly with local students either leaving or prefer-

ring other areas than chips. Students are "more interested in software", said Kenichiro Takakura, associate professor at the National Institute of Technology's Kumamoto College. Another professor, Kazuyuki Nakamura at the Kyushu Institute of Technology, said students also see the highly cyclical chip industry as high-risk. "The industry looked glorious back in my days... but it became less popular along with Japan's decline," said the former NEC employee, who runs four-day clean room training for semiconductor workers.

One of Nakamura's students, Keita Oda who plans to pursue a master's degree in semiconductor research, is keen at least. "Chips are a big part of everyday life," the 22-year-old said. "So I want to work on the industry's front line." — AFP

ECB books first loss since 2004 as rate hikes bite

FRANKFURT: The European Central Bank said Thursday its series of interest rate hikes had led it to a loss in 2023, its first in nearly two decades, with no swift return to profit expected. The Frankfurt-based institution lost 1.3 billion euros (\$1.4 billion) last year, after breaking even in 2022.

Last year's loss would have been far greater if the ECB had not deployed the full 6.6 billion euros it had set aside in the past to soak up losses. The loss, after "almost two decades of substantial profits", reflects the "necessary policy actions" taken to combat inflation, the ECB said in a statement.

The ECB began raising borrowing costs at an unprecedented rate in July 2022 after Russia's war in Ukraine pushed up energy and food costs. It has

held rates steady since October in the face of cooling inflation and a stuttering eurozone economy, leaving the benchmark deposit rate at a record four percent. The higher rates have "resulted in increased interest expenses" paid to eurozone members' national central banks, the statement said.

At the same time, interest income on bonds hoovered up by the ECB over years of crisis-fighting has failed to keep pace. Those assets have largely fixed rates and long maturities, and were bought back when borrowing costs were ultra-low. "The ECB is likely to incur losses over the next few years, but is then projected to return to making sustained profits," the bank said, adding that the financial performance would not impact its work.

"The ECB can operate effectively and fulfil its primary mandate of maintaining price stability regardless of any losses," it said. The ECB has said it expects to keep rates at their current levels until it sees convincing evidence that inflation is returning to the two-percent target.

Eurozone inflation slowed to 2.8 percent in January, down from 2.9 percent in December.



Economists expect the ECB to begin slashing rates in the coming months. President Christine Lagarde has previously suggested the first cut could come in the summer. The ECB said the 2023 loss would be carried forward on its balance sheet, to be offset against future profits. The last time the ECB swung to the red was in 2004, when it ran up losses of 1.6 billion euros in part due to a weak dollar and yen. — AFP

Business

Youth appetite for gold rises as Chinese economy loses luster

Lackluster recovery hitting youth as unemployment soars

SHUNDE, China: The sound of gentle tapping filled a jewelry workshop in southern China as a craftsman hammered pine leaf patterns onto a soft slab of gold in the style of old ink paintings. Elaborate traditional pieces created by master goldsmiths have always been popular in China, bought as gifts for special occasions like the Lunar New Year or simply as investments.

But jewelers are now having to consider a new and fast-growing consumer base — younger people, who are increasingly keen to buy gold, seeing it as a safe investment in uncertain economic times. Key to gold's current popularity is China's lackluster post-COVID recovery, which is hitting young people especially hard as youth unemployment soars and traditional investment options such as property suffer, analysts say.

"In the past, only the older generation would buy gold jewelry," Tan Ruikun, master craftsman with legacy jewelry giant Chow Tai Fook, told AFP on a recent visit to the workshop in Guangdong province.

"Young people are different now, they will also buy it because of its ability to retain value." Sitting at cubicles and frowning with concentration, his colleagues twisted loops of gleaming metal into intricate patterns and peered through microscopes to add sparkling gems to gold pendants — the latter a style developed after feedback from younger customers. "If younger elements are added in the design, it will appeal to young people even more," explained Tan.



BEIJING: This photo taken on Feb 5, 2024 shows a customer browsing gold jewelry on display at a Chow Tai Fook store in Beijing. — AFP photos

rising popularity of gold, Nikos Kavalis of Metals Focus told AFP. "The last few years have seen attitudes change dramatically," he said. That reflects Chow Tai Fook's recent consumer research, which suggested Gen Z was more attracted to buying gold than any other age group under 40. "Pure gold jewelry continues to serve as a safe haven for Chinese consumers amid recent economic conditions," the report noted.

Gold jewelry was among the best-performing consumer goods in China last year, as the post-pandemic recovery lost its shine in the face of flagging domestic consumption and declining business confidence.

A long-running property sector crisis and more recent stock market rout have further dented investors' options. The market in central Shanghai where AFP met Zhang, the freelancer, was buzzing with customers before the Lunar New Year. Global gold prices hit an all-time high in December, so "people may see it as a more stable value of assets", she said.

Feng Ning, a 24-year-old medical industry worker, had similar motivations. "When I started earning my own money... I bought other luxury products, but they would depreciate a lot when you want to exchange them for cash," she said. "My friends (and I) have switched to choosing gold." One small shop in the labyrinthine market was notably busier than others, with

almost every inch of its counters crowded. The reason, said another store owner, was that it was famous on the Instagram-like platform Xiaohongshu — attracting younger customers.

Chow Tai Fook has also leveraged social media to adapt to this new interest, managing director Kent Wong told AFP. The 95-year-old company is keen to position itself as more than just a brand for the old, wealthy and traditional. Typical jewelry pieces include enormous dangling necklaces made of nine descending pigs, a symbol of fertility given as part of wedding customs in southern China. But gold consumption in China last year was driven by "products lighter than 10 grams, or cheaper than RMB 2000 (\$278)", according to the World Gold Council (WGC), reflecting the smaller budgets of millennial and Gen Z customers. Xiaohongshu users share videos of glass bottles full of gold beans or other charms, showcasing their savings as they add to their treasure pile. Legacy jewelers have cabinets full of such golden amulets, but they also design bigger pieces aimed at young consumers. A phenomenon noted by both the WGC and Wong was "guochao" — translated as "national wave" or "China chic" — the rise of brands that celebrate Chinese cultural identity. "Young people are becoming more and more confident about Chinese culture," said Wong. — AFP



FOSHAN, China: This photo taken on Jan 26, 2024 shows a jewelry craftswoman heating a gold flower to shape the petals at a master studio in Foshan, in southern China's Guangdong province.

In a bustling Shanghai jewelry market, 30-year-old freelancer Zhang Jie told AFP that "it's hard for young people to save money". Buying gold means "the money is still with you in a different way", she said. Millennials and Gen Z are "becoming a huge driving force" in the

Union calls new local public transport strike across Germany

BERLIN: The main union representing public transport workers in Germany on Thursday called for renewed bus, tram and underground strikes across the country, heaping further woes on travelers. Verdi, which represents 90,000 workers in the sector, called on a "strike wave from Monday February 26 to Saturday March 2". Services in each state would be halted on different days, with local employees deciding on the length of the strikes.

The main day of the walkout will be Friday, March 1. It's the latest industrial action to hit Europe's largest economy, which has faced repeated walkouts on local public transport, long-distance trains and airports since late 2022. Workers are pushing for higher salaries and improved conditions as soaring inflation erodes real wages.

In its negotiations with transport bosses, Verdi is seeking a reduction in working hours, increased holiday entitlement and other benefits. Transport workers represented by the union had already staged a strike on February 2, but negotiations since then had "not produced any results", said the union's deputy chairwoman Christine Behle. "We have not yet achieved a real breakthrough anywhere."

A labour shortage in public transport is imposing greater pressure on staff, which urgently needs to be relieved, she said. Strikes will take place in all German states except Bavaria. The latest strike to hit the German transport sector came earlier this week, when ground staff at airline Lufthansa staged a one-day walkout. While some sectors in Germany received hefty pay rises last year, tensions with employers remain high as inflation has persisted. Unions' bargaining power has been strengthened by serious labour shortages, but bosses are pushing back against demands at a time when the German economy is stumbling. The government on Wednesday slashed its growth forecast for 2024 to 0.2 percent from 1.3 percent previously, warning the economy was in "rough waters". — AFP



شركة الصفاة للاستثمار
AL SAFAT INVESTMENT COMPANY

KUWAIT BOURSA WEEKLY REPORT

WEEK ENDED ON 22 FEBRUARY 2024

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No.	Ticker	Sector	Price Movement & Performance										Valuation Multiples *				
			Open Price	Close Price	Week High	Week Low	Range	Volume	WTD Change	WTD %	YTD %	Support Level	Resistance Level	P/E	P/B	Yield	Beta
101	National Bank of Kuwait	Banking	970	975	986	966	20	17,292,824	-2	-0.20%	9.06%	974	984	14.5	1.80	3.6%	1.03
102	Gulf Bank	Banking	288	294	296	285	11	45,531,530	6	2.08%	4.63%	285	294	14.1	1.30	3.2%	1.28
104	Al Ahli Bank of Kuwait	Banking	279	264	282	262	20	8,176,934	31	13.30%	13.30%	260	292	14.2	1.00	2.8%	0.98
106	Kuwait International Bank	Banking	159	163	163	158	5	30,209,322	4	2.52%	8.67%	160	164	16.8	0.61	2.3%	1.11
107	Burgan Bank	Banking	199	207	207	198	9	20,473,904	8	4.02%	20.35%	202	212	20.5	0.70	3.7%	1.37
108	Kuwait Finance House	Banking	788	801	805	776	29	50,733,190	15	1.91%	10.33%	799	814	20.9	2.01	2.1%	1.17
109	Boubyan Bank	Banking	620	641	641	615	26	12,879,314	21	3.39%	6.83%	616	644	33.8	2.50	0.9%	1.17
201	Kuwait Investment	Financial Services	198	198	203	192	11	66,508,249	3	1.54%	55.91%	178	200	11.6	0.92	2.5%	2.00
204	National Investments	Financial Services	291	288	295	278	17	19,496,665	-2	-0.69%	20.50%	283	296	93.5	1.33	9.7%	2.03
205	Kuwait Projects	Financial Services	111	131	132	109	23	137,077,598	21	19.09%	24.76%	126	132	31.8	0.73	0.0%	1.02
212	Arzan Financial Group	Financial Services	229	218	230	216	14	55,749,456	-9	-3.96%	3.81%	208	228	32.3	1.51	1.8%	1.17
222	Aayan Leasing and Investment	Financial Services	176	176	179	173	6	12,627,135	2	1.15%	1.15%	171	180	9.5	1.20	4.2%	1.57
252	Al Imtiaz Investment	Financial Services	56	56.1	56.7	55.5	1.2	4,510,930	0.0	0.00%	-0.71%	55.5	57.1	-	0.38	0.0%	1.32
401	Kuwait Real Estate	Real Estate	240	224	242	223	19	44,138,960	-15	-6.28%	9.27%	220	237	18.1	1.50	1.3%	1.12
404	Salhia Real Estate	Real Estate	446	465	467	446	21	5,498,954	36	8.39%	8.39%	460	480	15.8	1.41	3.1%	0.51
413	Mabaneeh	Real Estate	840	813	841	805	36	12,595,908	-21	-2.52%	-3.56%	811	838	16.5	1.73	1.6%	0.96
418	The Commercial Real Estate	Real Estate	106	112	115	105	10	31,388,508	6	5.66%	9.80%	108	113	21.8	0.67	2.7%	0.62
501	National Industries	Financial Services	234	238	241	233	8	25,430,088	5	2.15%	16.67%	232	239	21.8	1.13	2.0%	1.65
505	Gulf Cable	Industrials	1,518	1,510	1,518	1,499	19	1,278,177	-4	-0.26%	15.27%	1,490	1,513	15.9	1.40	4.0%	1.03
506	HEISCO	Industrials	841	844	845	830	15	2,586,371	3	0.36%	2.93%	832	846	23.4	2.13	2.4%	0.90
514	Boubyan Petrochemical	Basic Materials	594	624	625	582	43	8,126,537	32	5.41%	6.67%	604	633	13.2	1.28	9.8%	0.94
603	Aglity	Industrials	605	622	622	588	34	16,180,402	15	2.47%	22.20%	618	640	18.6	0.88	0.0%	1.55
605	Zain	Telecommunications	514	512	520	510	10	18,225,174	-2	-0.39%	0.99%	512	528	10.3	1.78	6.8%	0.63
623	Human Soft Holding	Industrials	3,380	3,302	3,384	3,281	103	1,188,035	-63	-1.87%	-2.85%	3,286	3,315	10.1	3.33	11.5%	0.64
642	ALAFCO	Industrials	206	207	210	203	7	2,832,473	1	0.49%	15.00%	206	210	-	0.91	0.0%	1.21
654	JAZEERA	Consumer Discretionary	1,185	1,136	1,185	1,116	69	2,147,303	-49	-4.14%	-18.21%	1,100	1,204	40.1	9.65	2.5%	1.31
813	GFH Financial Group	Financial Services	80.4	79.9	80.5	79	1.6	17,996,938	-0.6	-0.75%	4.72%	79.7	81.1	8.8	0.91	6.3%	1.37
821	Warba Bank	Banking	189	188	189	187	2	14,217,257	-1	-0.53%	1.08%	188	196	23.3	0.99	1.5%	1.11
822	Kuwait Telecommunications	Telecommunications	588	590	594	587	7	2,283,187	27	4.80%	4.80%	577	595	18.1	2.43	5.9%	0.70
823	Mezzan Holding	Consumer Staples	609	610	621	598	23	3,434,899	-2	-0.33%	6.09%	605	618	14.9	1.76	2.0%	0.50
824	Integrated Holding	Industrials	530	491	539	490	49	4,590,034	-30	-5.76%	-3.73%	485	499	36.8	2.13	2.9%	0.71
827	Boursa Kuwait	Financial Services	1,995	1,980	2,000	1,965	35	1,021,210	-16	-0.80%	14.85%	1,971	2,035	25.6	6.51	4.3%	1.39
830	AL GHANIM	Consumer Discretionary	1,120	1,095	1,120	1,089	31	2,366,934	-22	-1.97%	3.69%	1,069	1,123	11.5	3.96	6.3%	0.73

* As of end of week closing

Business

NBK offers customers exclusive 20% discounts at X-cite online

To be always closer to customers and share with them celebration of national days



Bader Al-Janah

We always strive to provide the best exclusive offers tailored to serve customers' needs

Service excellence and top-notch customer experience are embedded in NBK's culture

KUWAIT: National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) always strives to enhance customer banking experience with valuable offers and rewards. In this context, NBK has announced an exclusive discount of 20 percent on their purchases at X-cite, on the occasion of celebrating the national days.

According to the offer, NBK Visa cardholders will get a 20 percent discount at X-cite capped at KD 30 for one-time use per customer on National & Liberation days on Feb 25 and 26.

The offer will be available on X-cite website and in-app only, with minimum spends of KD 20 made using the following eligible NBK Cards:

- NBK KWT Visa Infinite Credit Card
- NBK-Kuwait Airways Visa Infinite Credit Card
- NBK-Kuwait Airways Visa Signature Credit Card
- NBK Visa Infinite Credit Card
- NBK-KPC Visa Infinite Credit Card
- NBK Visa Signature Credit Card
- NBK Avios Visa Signature Prepaid Card

Commenting on this offer, Bader Al-Janah, Head of Card Products, Consumer Banking Group at National Bank of Kuwait said: "Coinciding with national days celebrations, we are keen to be closer to customers and share with them their joy.



To this end, we are providing valuable exclusive offers tailored to meet the needs of their different segments and ages, as we are tirelessly working to keep pace with their changing needs and live up to their evolving expectations."

"NBK maintains solid relationships with leading institutions across different sectors, which we leverage to enhance customer banking experience by delivering top-notch offers, discounts

and benefits for unmatched banking experience," he added. "Service excellence and top-notch customer experience are embedded in NBK's culture. We maintain close communication with customers to identify their needs and expectations, and work to fulfill these needs by delivering top-notch services and exclusive offers that even go beyond their expectations for a highly luxurious banking experience," he noted.

"Partnering with National Bank of Kuwait to offer this exclusive discount on Xcite electronics products for the national holidays reflects our commitment to delivering outstanding value and service to our customers. Through this collaboration, we aim to enrich the celebration for our customers by enhancing their shopping experience with us," Saleem Hammad, Senior General Manager – E-commerce, Alghanim Industries said.

NBK Credit Cards offer the best payment method for the convenience and benefits they provide to customers, especially when using them in shopping including NBK Miles Program, NBK Rewards Program as well as Purchase Protection and Extended Warranty and getting the chance to various draws.

The Athlete's Foot opens new store in Shuwaikh 125 shopping complex

KUWAIT: The Athlete's Foot (TAF), the world's leading athletic lifestyle brand, franchised by Ali Abdulwahab Al-Mutawa Commercial Co (AAW) in Kuwait, announced on Thursday the opening of its 12th store in Shuwaikh 125 complex.

The Athlete's Foot in Shuwaikh 125 provides a wide selection of modern sports and lifestyle fashion apparel from global brands such as Nike, adidas, New Balance, Puma, On Running, The Giving Movement, ASICS, and many others. The store offers a unique shopping experience by housing SNKR Store, the brand's neighborhood concept boutique and the first sneaker specialty store in Kuwait. This marks the first SNKR Store "shop-in-shop" within an Athlete's Foot store. This new addition provides customers with the opportunity to explore the latest trends from two



iconic stores in athletic wear, offering an extensive collection of lifestyle, sportswear, footwear, and accessories for men, women, and children.

The Athlete's Foot's other locations include Al-Fanar Mall, Mishref Co-op, Kuwait International Airport Terminal 1 in both the departure and arrival areas, Marina Mall, The Avenues, The Gate Mall, The Promenade, The Walk Mall, Al-Khiran Mall and Al-Kout Mall. Additionally, they have an online store www.theathletesfoot.com.kw and a newly launched application.



KUWAIT: The Athlete's Foot's (TAF) new store in Shuwaikh 125 complex.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Mercedes cautious on 2024

STUTTGART: German luxury automaker Mercedes-Benz on Thursday said net profits dipped in 2023 on the back of flat car sales, high inflation and supply chain woes, with little improvement seen in 2024. The group reported that 2023 net profit fell 1.9 percent to 14.5 billion euros (\$15.7 billion). Revenue rose 2 percent to 153.2 billion euros but unit volumes were flat with 2,044,100 vehicles sold in 2023. "Tailwinds from net pricing, lower raw material prices and improved manufacturing costs were outweighed by higher inflation charges and supply-chain related costs," Mercedes said in a statement. — AFP

Rolls-Royce back in profit

LONDON: Rolls-Royce, the British maker of plane engines and other power systems, said Thursday that it rebounded into profit last year following major restructuring that involved sizeable job losses. The company swung to a net profit of £2.4 billion (\$3 billion) last year from a loss after tax of £1.3 billion in 2022, Rolls said in a statement. "Our transformation has delivered," said Tufan Erginbilic, chief executive of the group best known for its engines powering Airbus and Boeing commercial aircraft. — AFP

Repsol profit tumbles

MADRID: Spanish energy giant Repsol said Thursday its net profit dropped by 25 percent in 2023 as oil and gas prices fell and the company stepped up investments in low-carbon projects. The group booked a net profit of 3.17 billion euros (\$3.43 billion) last year, down from the record 4.25 billion euros earned in 2022 when Russia's invasion of Ukraine sent fossil fuel prices soaring. The company said the drop was due to volatile oil and gas prices which fell at the start of 2023 before rising in recent months. Profit was also pulled lower by record investments of 6.2 billion euros made last year as part of a plan unveiled in 2020 to spend 18.3 billion by 2025 to "decarbonize" activities and achieve net zero carbon emissions by 2050. — AFP

Nikkei breaks bubble-era record

TOKYO: Japan's blue-chip Nikkei 225 on Thursday finally broke through a record high set just before the country's asset bubble catastrophically burst in the early 1990s. At 12:31 pm (0331 GMT), the Nikkei was at 39,007.79, beating the record of 38,957.44 set on December 29, 1989. Japanese asset prices exploded in the 1980s, with Tokyo property prices hundreds of times more than in Manhattan and golf club memberships costing millions of dollars. But in the early 1990s came a crash as investors fled in panic, with the Nikkei roughly halving in 1990 and real estate prices falling even more. — AFP

In a doughnut in Japan, unlocking power of the Sun

NAKA, Japan: With its tangle of pipes and pumps leading to a metal pot the size of a five-storey building, Japan's JT-60SA machine looks to the untrained eye like a contraption from 1970s sci-fi. But inside it is a doughnut-shaped vessel where experiments done at millions of degrees could help unlock a carbon-free, inexhaustible and safe power source for the future: nuclear fusion.

"Fusion energy, the power behind the Sun and the stars, has been a great prize for energy research for decades, ever since it was first attempted in the 1950s and 60s to find some way to reproduce this power of the Sun here on Earth," project leader Sam Davis told AFP on a recent tour.

"Not only is (fusion) free from greenhouse gases and free from long-lived nuclear waste, but it's compact, doesn't cover the whole landscape, and can generate industrially useful quantities of power," the British-German engineer said. Unlike fission, the technique currently used in nuclear power plants, fusion involves combining two atomic nuclei instead of splitting one, generating vast amounts of energy.

The process is safe and there are no nasty by-products like fissile material for a nuclear weapon or hazardous radioactive waste that takes thousands of years to degrade, its proponents say. Taking 15 years to build in Naka, northeast of Tokyo, the JT-60SA is 15.5 meters (51 feet) tall and 13.7 meters (45 feet) wide, comprising a so-called tokamak vessel able to contain swirling plasma heated to millions of degrees. Inside the facility, which was inaugurated in December, the aim is to get nuclei of hydrogen isotopes to fuse into an atom of helium, releasing energy, and mimicking the process that takes place inside the Sun and stars.

"With only one gram (0.04 ounces) of a mixed fuel... we can obtain an energy equivalent to eight tons of oil," said Takahiro Suzuki, deputy project



NAKA, Japan: This picture taken on Jan 22, 2024 shows a section of JT-60SA, the world's biggest experimental nuclear fusion reactor at Naka Fusion Institute in Naka city of Ibaraki Prefecture. — AFP

manager for the Japan side of the joint project with the European Union. But despite decades of efforts, the technology remains in its infancy and is very expensive.

Currently the largest such facility in operation, the JT-60SA is the little brother and guinea pig of the International Thermonuclear Experimental Reactor (ITER) being built in France.

According to media reports, ITER—a project run by six countries and the European Union — is years behind schedule and could end up costing as much as 40 billion euros (\$42.3 billion), far more than first projected. The holy grail of both projects, as well as others around the world, is to develop technology that releases more energy than is needed to fuel it — and at a large scale and for a sustained period. The feat of "net energy gain" was managed in December 2022 at the National Ignition Facility at Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory in the United States, home to the world's largest laser. — AFP

US Fed divided on risk of cutting rates too soon

WASHINGTON: The US Federal Reserve was divided in January over the risks of cutting interest rates too soon or too late, although most members voiced concern about moving early, according to minutes of the meeting published Wednesday.

At the January meeting, the Fed voted unanimously to hold interest rates at a 23-year high, keeping monetary policy tight in a bid to bring inflation down to its long-term target of two percent.

During the deliberations the Fed, which has penciled in three interest rate cuts this year, continued discussions about when might be the best time to

start cutting rates, with members divided over the risks of moving too fast or too slow, minutes of that meeting showed. "Most participants noted the risks of moving too quickly to ease the stance of policy and emphasized the importance of carefully assessing incoming data," the Fed said.

"A couple of participants, however, pointed to downside risks to the economy associated with maintaining an overly restrictive stance for too long," it added. The divisions suggest the Fed's rate-setting committee is likely to be less united as it looks to unwind its tight monetary policy stance than it was when it moved to rapidly hike rates to tackle surging inflation in 2022. However, most analysts do not expect any change to the Fed's interest rate at its next interest rate decision in March, and many do not expect it to move following the meeting in May either. Futures traders now assign a probability of less than 35 percent that the Fed will cut rates by May 1, according to CME Group data, pushing back expectations of an interest rate cut until June. — AFP

China may miss all key climate targets for 2025: Report

BEIJING: China may miss all of its main climate goals for 2025, a new report showed Thursday, as the world's largest emitter increased its reliance on carbon-intensive industries to bolster a flagging economy. China has pledged to bring its emissions of carbon dioxide to a peak by 2030 and to net zero by 2060.

Under the Paris climate agreement, Beijing has also committed to a series of stepping-stone targets, such as ensuring 20 percent of its energy comes from alternatives to fossil fuels and cutting the carbon intensity of its economy by 2025.

But the country's energy-guzzling rebound from the COVID-19 pandemic means "all of these targets are severely off track after 2023", according to a report by the Finland-based Centre for Research on Energy and Clean Air. Carbon emissions from China's power industry rose 5.2 percent last year as Beijing burned more coal to sate soaring electricity demand, the report published on the Carbon Brief website said.

Adverse weather conditions added to the problem as a series of droughts pushed hydropower production to its lowest levels in over two decades.

Consequently, Beijing needs to achieve a "record fall" of four to six percent in emissions to reach its stated carbon intensity target - the amount of carbon emissions per unit of economic output - for 2025. However, China could still hit some of next year's goals if it continues to build on record renewable energy installations last year, the report added. China has struggled to sustain its economic rebound since it jettisoned strict pandemic-era health controls at the end of 2022. The world's number two economy grew at 5.2 percent last year, one of its slowest rates in decades. — AFP

Weekender

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 23, 2024



Sayed Taleb Al-Qallaf explains the process of building a dhow at a workshop in Diwaniyat Al-Qallaleef.

Preserving Kuwait's maritime heritage

By Zainab Dashti

The traditional craft of dhow building is an important part of Kuwait's history, and it is being kept alive in the humble and lively workshop of Diwaniyat Al-Qallaleef on Arabian Gulf Street. Before the discovery of oil, explained Sadeq Al-Qallaf, Kuwait's economy was dependent on trade and pearl diving. This was made possible by the expertly crafted traditional wooden ships (booms) that allowed merchants, sailors and pearl divers to travel by sea. Recognized by their family name, the shipwrights behind these booms are known as the "qallaleef".



Zainab Dashti is a filmmaker from Kuwait. She works at Kuwait Times making short documentaries and occasionally writes articles.



Sadeq Al-Qallaf busy in the workshop.



Sayed standing next to a replica of the 'Bayan'.

"When the English arrived, they were astonished," builder Sayed Taleb Al-Qallaf told Kuwait Times. "They asked the great ship masters, where is the blueprint for this boom?" Sayed said, lifting a flat golden semi-circular instrument that looks like a protractor — a 'hindaza'. It has a single string attached to it at the end. "This is our blueprint," he said.

Sayed walks over to a miniature ship he's building, roughly 1 metre wide and 1 metre high, and lines the flat edge of the instrument against the base of the ship. The string dangles vertically straight down the middle, proving it is angled correctly. He proceeds to slide the instrument all the way down along the base, and even though the semi-circle was moving and turning, the string never once left its central spot. "This is our map," said Sayed. A qallaf doesn't need a blueprint, only a hindaza and a piece of string, he pointed out.

The qallaleef built ships of different sizes for different uses. Sayed walked out of the workshop to the next room, filled with almost a hundred miniature ships. This is where the finished dhows are stored to be sold. Long ago, Kuwait had no water, explained Sayed. He points to a ship, "They call this boom may." The qallaleef built this to travel to the Shatt Al-Arab in Iraq, pick up water and then come back to give out to the population. It was equipped with tanks and pathways for the water to be drained and stored. People would line up at the shore as the ship arrived to refill their water sacks.

There's also the 'shoue' for pearl diving, as well as the 'jalboot' and 'sam-book', said Sadeq. There's the 'saffar' and the large 'baghlah' for travelling long distances, and the 'batteel' for both diving and travel. Sayed pointed to the last ship in the room — this one was different and larger than the others, roughly 2 metres long. It's painted white with gold-rimmed windows and blue doors.

"A 100 years ago, they built this for Sheikh Ahmad Al-Jaber. It was called 'Bayan'," Sayed said, adding Sheikh Ahmad used it to call back the pearl divers at the end of the diving season. He pointed to the front deck of the ship. "There's a cannon here. He fired it to signal the diving season is over, and they came back." He proudly points to a picture hung outside the room showing Sayed greeting former Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, with another replica of the masterfully crafted 'Bayan' in front of them. "This is me shaking his hand," Sayed said. "I said this is your father's ship and gave it to him."

There is one final ship in the last room at the end of the diwaniya — a grey rectangular block with a flat surface. "1946," Sayed said. "World War II. The English came to Haji Ahmad, the great master, our grandfather." According to him, they asked him to build 1,000 of them. They would line them up one after the other so tanks could roll over them and be transported over water. "They called her 'dooba'," Sayed said, holding up the contract that was signed between the English and Haji Ahmad, framed next to the dooba.

Sayed walks through the step-by-step process of building a traditional dhow. First, you start with three pieces



Sayed explains how the 'hindaza' works.

of wood. A long wooden strip lying flat on the floor makes up the base called the 'bees'. Then two strips attached at either end of it and angled upwards are called the 'meel sadr' and 'meel tufar'. Then comes the 'shalameen', pieces of wooden strips imported from India that vertically stick up from the base, making the structure look like a ribcage.

serve their craft. The building remains to this day, facing the shore right next to Seif Palace. "We are going to pass, and others will come after us. And others will pass and more will come," he said. Our ancestors gave us our profession, he continued, "Which we will give to our children. And their children will give to their children."



Abdullah Al-Qallaf learns from Sayed.

After that, wooden planks are attached horizontally to the shalameen, running all the way to the top, covering and completing the base. The surface of the boom is then placed, and the base is finalized. "Everything has a name," said Sayed, pointing to each individual piece that makes up the surface of the boom and naming them — 'quwayem', 'neem', 'chlab', 'khiyeesat', 'sdairy', etc. The final step is attaching the mast and then the sails, which Sadeq was doing.

Sadeq tied the ropes and told the story of the diwaniya; in the past, the qallaleef would sit and gather on the shore inside one of their ships. One day the Amir saw them and ordered for a diwaniya to be built for them, so the builders could have a place to gather and pre-

Abdullah Al-Qallaf, the youngest of the three in the room, stands next to Sadeq and Sayed, building his second-ever ship. He started learning the craft of his ancestors a year ago. "I'm surprised at how difficult it is," he said. "The level of detail all without a map shocked me." Abdullah spends three months crafting one ship, learning gradually the tricks of the trade from Sayed. Using only a hindaza, a piece of string and chalk to mark dimensions, Abdullah hopes to continue building many more ships and preserve the craft of his grandfathers.



Weekender



Antique store showcasing collected old stuff.



Yom Al-Bahhar village

Rediscovering Kuwait's rich heritage and patriotism

By Passant Hisham



Museum showcases rare photos and collectibles of pioneering football players of Kuwait.

In a nostalgic remembrance of the alluring old times, whispering tales of the past through its antique shops, old houses and traditional crafts, Yom Al-Bahhar village invites visitors to breathe in authentic Kuwait in every corner. During a visit by Kuwait Times, visitors and shop owners shared their appreciation of the beauty in the history that has aged.

While wandering into the place, a distant voice could be heard singing what seemed like a national song, but the words couldn't quite be deciphered. When turning around to see where the voice was coming from, it was noticed that it emanated from a middle-aged woman. That's when it was observed that the woman was chanting the national anthem of Kuwait, with her children repeating it with her.

Such a random incident made the realization that places like this not only revive history, but also foster a sense of patriotism. "Yom Al-Bahhar evokes scenes from ancient Kuwait, reflected in the attire of people adorned in their national dress, the vintage toys that children used to play with in the past, the presence of old shops and traditional foods that have nearly faded from history," the woman said, describing the place.

She said the purpose of her visit was to teach her children about their ancestors' efforts in shaping their history. "Now with the rapid developments in the world and the openness to different cultures, our children are more often familiar with the history of other countries than with that of their homeland. So, from time to time, it's crucial to remind them of their origins," the woman added.

Another woman, Om Mohammad, who was sitting alone enjoying the blissful outdoor weather in the village while watching her children playing, said her children have grown bored of the modern lifestyle of visiting extravagant malls in Kuwait, which drew her to visit Yom Al-Bahhar. "By vis-

iting places like Al-Mubarakiya and Yom Al-Bahhar, we can add greater value to our children by teaching them about their heritage and how the families of Kuwait used to live in the past," she said. She believed the simplicity evident in every detail of the place enhances children's sense of satisfaction, contrasting with visiting the malls, which foster feelings of materialism.

his home, from which some items were transferred to this store. "I was very keen to display in my shop the objects that were widely used in old Kuwaiti households: a roof fan dating back to 1942, an old gramophone, old radios, TVs, cameras, clocks and more. Here, everything your eyes fall upon is ancient," he remarked.

Drawn to a cultural museum inside the village, Kuwait



Passant Hisham, an Egyptian journalist equipped with an educational background in media and business, is driven by a passion for storytelling through the creation of multimedia content.



Store displaying Kuwaiti pottery.



Photos of Kuwaiti rulers on a wall.



Models of old dhows of Kuwait.



A heritage troupe performs a traditional Kuwaiti dance at Yom Al-Bahhar village. - Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat

Kuwait Times also spoke to various shop owners. The owner of a store with a banner showing his name as "Collectibles", Hani Al-Asousi, a member of the board of directors of the Kuwait Society for Heritage, shared childhood memories of collecting items, which eventually led to the establishment of a large museum at

Times spoke to Fahad Al-Abduljalil, Chairman of the Kuwait Society for Heritage, and Nawal El-Failakawi, in charge of the museum. They shared that the museum of Yom Al-Bahhar educates people about a new topic in Kuwait every three months. Previous topics covered Kuwait's maritime heritage, the history of Kuwaiti

women, the ministry of information, Kuwait's independence, and now, the history of football in Kuwait. "We are showcasing rare photographs of pioneering players and collectibles relevant to their championships, such as trophies, medals, books, magazines and newspapers," they said.

The last stop was at a store that displayed small ship models. Abdulrahman Al-Qallaf explained the importance of shipbuilding in Kuwait's history. "In the past, shipbuilding was the only method of trade and boosting the economy of Kuwait. However, the craft has been overlooked with the rise of the oil industry," he said. Qallaf added that his family tries its best to provide workshops to teach people how to practice this craft, to preserve it from extinction.

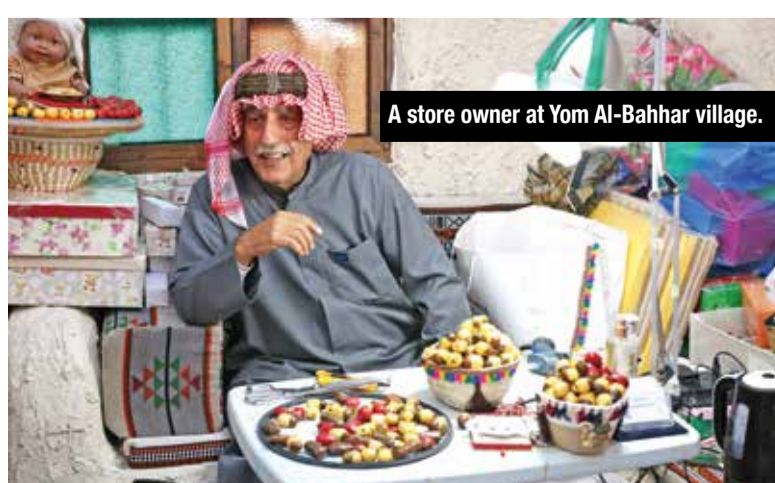
As the day drew to a close, the echoes of history lingered in the air of Yom Al-Bahhar village, leaving an abundance of knowledge and memories preserved in one place.



A store owner at Yom Al-Bahhar village.



A man pours traditional Arabic coffee.



Visitors enjoying their time at Yom Al-Bahhar.



First series of the Kuwaiti dinar.



Second series of the Kuwaiti dinar.



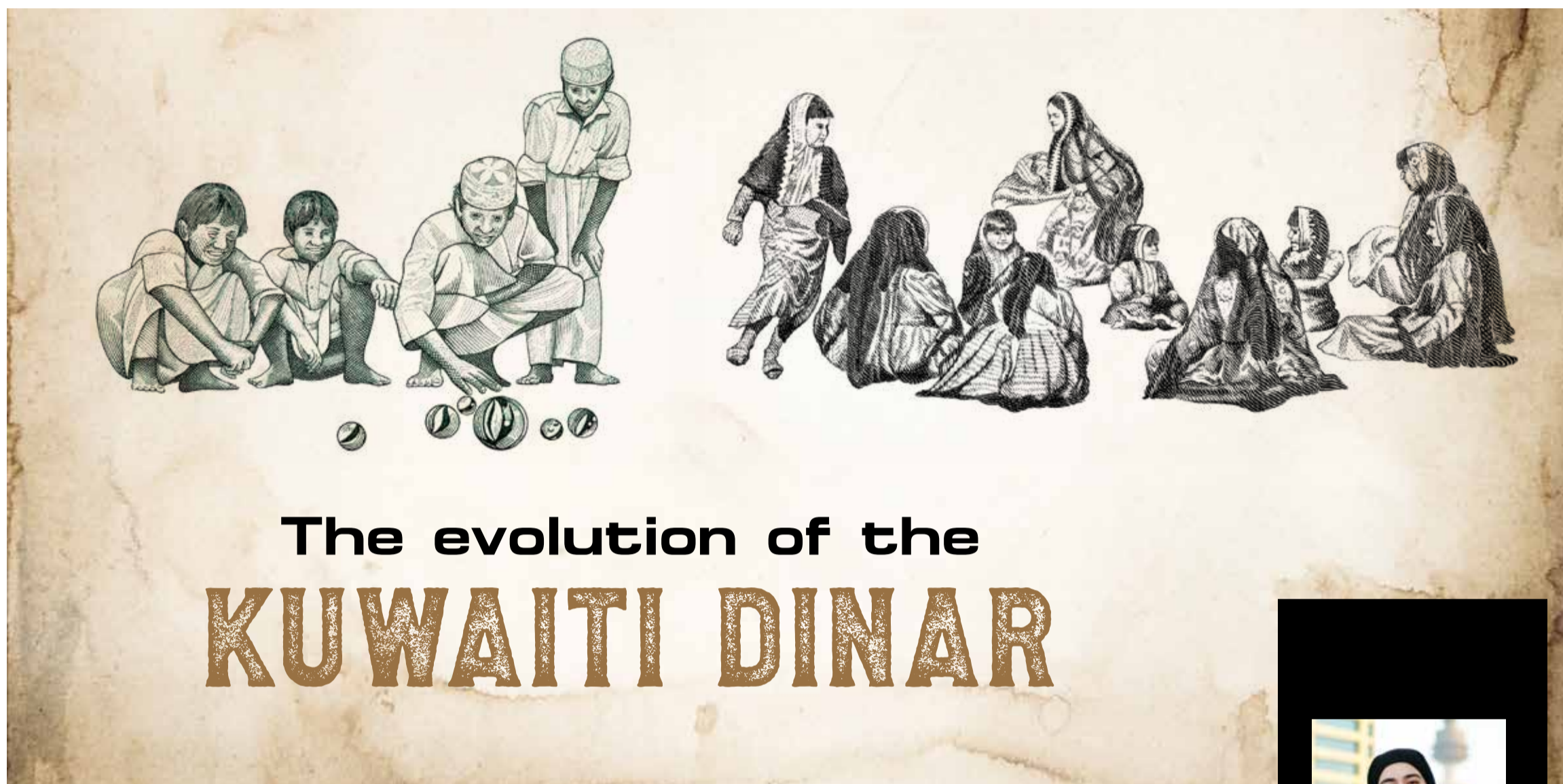
Third series of the Kuwaiti dinar.



Fourth series of the Kuwaiti dinar.



Fifth series of the Kuwaiti dinar.



By Ghadeer Ghloum

Although Kuwait may be small compared to other countries, its currency holds considerable power, adding an intriguing allure that captivates many people. Kuwait Times explored the history of the Kuwaiti currency's evolution with owner of Heritage Coin Center Bassem Al-Ibraheem (Bu Jarrah).

Establishment of the Kuwaiti currency

According to Ibraheem, in 1866, Sheikh Abdullah Al-Sabah, the fifth ruler of Kuwait, introduced the first national currency known as the "Kuwaiti piastre". The Kuwaiti piastre lasted only for three months and a few days, making it a rare and historically significant currency. Three to six hundred official Kuwaiti piastres were issued at that time; hence, one of these limited pieces is worth approximate KD 9,000 today.



Bassem Al-Ibraheem holds the third and fourth series of Kuwaiti dinars.

— Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat

Foundation of a dedicated Kuwaiti currency

Ibraheem added that in 1950, as Kuwait experienced a surge in population following the discovery of oil and economic prosperity, then Amir Sheikh Abdullah Al-Salem Al-Sabah wanted to es-

tablish a national currency. However, his counselors highlighted the importance of a supporting financial sector and legal framework for a currency.

Consequently, the Amir sent delegations to investigate global and Arab monetary systems instead of proceeding with establishing a currency. Nine years later, the reliance on the Indian rupee by Kuwait and other GCC countries prompted India to issue separate rupees tailored for the GCC countries. This prompted Kuwait's monetary council to work on a dedicated Kuwaiti currency.

Introducing the Kuwaiti dinar

Ibraheem elaborated that law no. 41 established a monetary council led by Sheikh Jaber Al-Sabah in 1960, and in the following year, the Kuwaiti dinar was finally introduced. Each 1,000 fils was equal to 1 Kuwaiti dinar, and each 100 fils was called a dirham. During that time, Sheikh Jaber expressed his vision

for the Kuwaiti dinar to become one of the world's strongest currencies, aiming to strengthen regional economies. On May 26, 1961, the Kuwaiti dinar replaced the rupee, with denominations including the quarter, half, one, five and 10 dinars. The 20-dinar note was introduced in 1986.

Emergency currency after invasion

Ibraheem concluded that following the Iraqi invasion that led to the looting of the Kuwaiti treasury and banks, the third series of the Kuwaiti currency was canceled, and a fourth series was introduced with adjusted color tones and enhanced security elements such as watermarks, UV features and ministerial signatures. The fourth series came as an emergency currency and was swiftly circulated post-liberation, serving for approximately two years before being succeeded by the fifth and sixth series, the latter of which remains in use today.



Ghadeer Ghloum, proficient in English language and literature and mass communication, is presently juggling her love for reading, writing and Instagramming with her role as a reporter at the Kuwait Times.



A form of currency used in Gulf countries in the 1800s.



Kuwaiti coins from 1961.



The Kuwaiti piastre.

WHAT'S ON IN KUWAIT

- **Event: Winter Garden Market**
Place: Al-Shaheed Park
Date: February 22-26, 2024
Time: 10 am to 10 pm
- **Event: 'Between War and Peace' exhibition**
Place: Qurain Martyr's Museum
Date: February 24-26, 2024
- **Event: The Yemeni Folklore Bank**
Place: The Walk Mall
Date: February 26, 2024
- **Event: Live Music night**
Place: Liv UP
Date: February 21-26, 2024

- **Event: COMFEST CON**
Place: Arena
Date: February 22-24, 2024
- **Event: Al-Farsi Kite**
Place: Bneider
Date: February 23-27, 2024
- **Event: Petting event**
Place: Zue
Date: February 25-26, 2024
- **Event: Cars & Coffee**
Place: Green Island
Date: February 23, 2024
Time: 8:30 am to 11 am

- **Event: Korean Bazaar**
Place: Madang
Date: February 24, 2024
Time: 2 pm to 8 pm
 - **Event: 'Sharing is Caring' Bazaar**
Place: Designz Interiors - Shuwaikh Industrial
Date: March 1, 2024
- FIREWORKS AND DRONE SHOWS**
- **Event: Fireworks**
Place: Al-Kout fountain
Date: February 25, 2024
Time: 8 to 9 pm

- **Event: Fireworks**
Place: Al-Khiran Mall
Date: February 22- 24, 2024
Time: 8 pm
- **Event: Fireworks**
Place: Al-Mikshat
Date: February 25, 2024
- **Event: Drone show**
Place: The Walk Mall
Date: February 26, 2024
Time: 10 pm

Sports

England bring in Robinson, Bashir for fourth India Test

Pitch in Ranchi is expected to be spin-friendly

RANCHI: Fast bowler Ollie Robinson was named in the England team for the fourth Test against India in Ranchi starting Friday with spinner Shoaib Bashir also getting the nod. The 30-year-old Robinson last played for England in the third Ashes Test at Headingley in July, where he bowled just 11.2 overs before being sidelined for the remainder of the series with a back spasm.

He replaces Mark Wood, who has played in two of the India Tests, while Bashir comes in for Rehan Ahmed. The 20-year-old Bashir made his Test debut in the second match against India at Visakhapatnam after missing the opener because of a visa delay.

England suffered a 434-run defeat in the third Test and trail 2-1 in the five-match series. The pitch in Ranchi is expected to be spin-friendly and England skipper Ben Stokes wants the rookie Bashir, a tall off-spinner, to utilize the conditions to his advantage.

"We do like to look at the pitch two days out and one day out because that's how we like to pick our XIs," said Stokes, who a day earlier said he had "never seen anything like" the Ranchi wicket. The surface appears to have deep cracks down one side but looks flat on the other.

"Someone like Bash, who releases the ball from such a high release point, the extra bounce that he gets we feel is going to bring us more into the game," said Stokes. All-rounder Stokes came into the series purely as a batsman after knee surgery last year but he bowled in the nets Wednesday, offering the kind of boost the tour-

ists need after the heavy defeat in the third Test. He was non-committal on Thursday about the chances of him bowling in Ranchi, saying "maybe, maybe not".

Anderson 'raring to go'

Stokes was more effusive on the subject of pace spearhead James Anderson, who will play his second straight match after a break of just five days at the age of 41. Anderson is four short of 700 Test wickets, but returned with just one wicket in the previous match.

"If you're a young fast bowler, Jimmy Anderson is the one person who you want as your role model," Stokes said of the man dubbed the "swing king" for his ability to seam the ball both ways. "Not only the amount of wickets he's got but the fact he can keep going at his age," said Stokes, adding that Anderson was "raring to go and feeling as fresh as a fiddle".

England have put their weight behind struggling senior batsmen Jonny Bairstow and Joe Root to come good in the final two Tests, with the team's attacking "Bazball" philosophy under scrutiny like never before.

Bairstow, a solid middle-order batsman set for his 99th Test, has managed just 102 runs so far. "If batters have a tough time over a short period it will come under scrutiny. I don't look at it like that, I look at what Jonny has contributed for a long period of time, since I've been captain," said Stokes.

"He has money in the bank, he's a quality



RANCHI: England's captain Ben Stokes (C) attends a practice session with teammates at the Jharkhand State Cricket Association (JSCA) Stadium in Ranchi on February 22, 2024, on the eve of the fourth Test cricket match between India and England. — AFP

player. He's someone who has been very integral to what we have done." England XI: Ben Duckett, Zak Crawley, Ollie Pope, Joe Root, Jonny Bairstow, Ben Stokes (capt), Ben Foakes, Ollie Robinson, James Anderson, Shoaib Bashir, Tom Hartley. — AFP

Ireland's Beirne prepares for Wales Test

PARIS: He may have a Welsh wife and even enjoyed a spell playing in the country but there will be no room for sentiment on Saturday for Ireland lock Tadhg Beirne as he bids to help his side make it three wins from three Six Nations matches with victory over Wales.

The 32-year-old second row has been in outstanding form, especially in the opening 38-17 hammering of France, and fully earned being rested for the 36-0 defeat of Italy a fortnight ago. His evolution into becoming a stalwart of Andy Farrell's Ireland side stemmed from making a bold move in 2016 to Welsh region Scarlets, after failing to break through at Leinster.

Not only did he help Scarlets win the 2017 Pro 12 title — ironically beating his present province Munster — but such was his form his then director of rugby Wayne Pivac tried to get him to stay on. This was with a view to Beirne becoming qualified for Wales, due to the residency rule at the time.

Pivac was subsequently to take over at the helm of the Wales national team before being fired and Warren Gatland returned. "I only ever wanted to play for Ireland, that was the reality," said Beirne last year.

"And when it became a talking point that there was an opportunity to play for Ireland, the only thing I wanted to do was come back and play for Ireland. "So I didn't have a conversation with Warren (Gatland) but I did have a conversation with Wayne before I left Scarlets and he tried to encourage me to stay because he did say the World Cup was the following year (2019) and I'd be qualified for it and all that. "But I think I'd made my decision before that, I wanted to wear green for the World Cup not to be in red."

'Real standard bearer'

Beirne has had little reason to regret his call, although sparingly used by Joe Schmidt in the national team, he has become a regular since Farrell took over after the 2019 Rugby World Cup. Easily to spot on the pitch due to his blue scrum cap Beirne produced a huge performance in the opening victory over France in Marseille.

His reassuring presence alongside the inexperienced Joe McCarthy helping his team-mate's man of the match display. "Tadhg is an incredible player," said his Munster teammate and Irish great Conor Murray.

"He spent a lot of time in Wales playing, probably did the hard road to get to where he is now and he's fully deserving of the plaudits he's getting." Beirne is renowned for being a good teammate to have around when it is down time — he took to baking biscuits on the British and Irish Lions tour of South Africa in 2021.

"I know Tadhg really well," said Murray. "An incredibly laid back, relaxed fellow right up until to kick-off, and then as soon as he puts the blue scrum cap on he turns into something else. "His form has been incredible over the last few years and he's a huge asset to us."

For Ireland's defence coach, and another former Scarlets back-rower Simon Easterby, Beirne is always thinking on his feet. "He had time away from Ireland for a couple of years in Wales and I think he was able to grow as a person but also as a player," said Easterby.

"He's such a good rugby brain. He's got real smarts about him. "He's tough and just the sort of player in your team that is looked upon as a real source of inspiration and a real standard bearer in terms of performances." And what about his Harriet's loyalties come Saturday? "My wife might be Welsh, but she'll be wearing green," he said. — AFP

Funeral procession for Kenyan marathon prodigy Kiptum

ELDORET: Hundreds of people gathered in the Kenyan athletics hub of Eldoret on Thursday for a funeral procession in honor of marathon prodigy Kelvin Kiptum, who died earlier this month when his car crashed into a tree.

His coffin, encircled with flowers, was carried in a hearse through the streets of the town in the Rift Valley of western Kenya, some watching in silence, others singing hymns. Kiptum was killed on February 11 at the age of 24, just a few months after he smashed the world marathon record.

"It is difficult to accept this happened," Athletics Kenya executive committee member Barnaba Korir said. "It is a big void in Kenyan athletics." A married father of two, Kiptum will be laid to rest on Friday at his home in Chepkorio, near Eldoret, a day after a requiem mass.

The procession snaked its way through roads lined with fans and athletes as it headed towards Iten, the legendary high-altitude training region. "We have to accept that Kiptum is no longer with us," cleric Philip Chumo said as the coffin was loaded into the black hearse.

"He is here in spirit." Local sports official Purity Koima said Kiptum was loved by everyone. "We lost so many athletes here in Iten but Kiptum's death has hit everyone hard," she said.

'Severe head injuries'

Police said Kiptum was driving near Eldoret

Drifting with purpose: Sports car enthusiasts rally in Afghanistan

KABUL: Mechanic Zabiullah Momand revs his sports car engine outside his garage in Afghanistan's capital Kabul before letting it settle back to a purr, the cherry red twin-turbo machine pristine in a dented Mercedes Benz skeleton.

"I own the only 2JZ engine in Afghanistan," he told AFP, standing next to the car he modified himself — a Frankenstein of a gutted Mercedes body, fitted with a canary yellow roll cage and 420-horsepower engine plucked from a Toyota Supra.

A far cry from the ubiquitous Toyota Corollas that clog Kabul's traffic-choked streets, Momand's speedster is part of a fleet of cars imported or modified by a small but growing cadre of motorsports devotees in Afghanistan.

After decades of war, motorists are taking advantage of newfound security to pit their souped-up cars against each other in races, or show off drifting skills. A community of enthusiasts grew in the past decade, several drivers said, but there has been a leap in interest in the past two years.

While more events are taking place, the venues are a long way from resembling the professional tracks lined with crowds and advertisements that bankroll prizes found in other countries. "We are short of facilities," said Hashmatullah Rahbar, who started an organization dubbed the National Sports Car Racing Federation of Afghanistan, which is in the process of being officially recognized by the country's sporting authorities.

In February it hosted its first event, the Victory Cup tournament, in a push

to formalize motorsports in the country. "It is with our own commitment... that we have continued our activities using our personal money so as to not be slowed down in pursuing our goal."

Curiosity

The tournament was postponed twice and doesn't have sponsorship or a cash prize, but while Rahbar said there isn't a culture of motorsports yet in the country, curiosity is growing. "It is my first time seeing such a thing," said Kabul resident Khalid Kaihan, who had stopped with a small crowd to admire the cars when Rahbar and a handful of buddies hit the Kabul streets ahead of the competition to promote the event.

"Sometimes individuals try to race their cars in the streets, but I have never seen an organized programme people could attend." Wearing a gold hat, a camera-wielding friend sometimes leaning out the window of his silver Chevrolet Camaro, Rahbar performed drifts around a central Kabul roundabout, and carved circles in the dirt next to a lake outside the city.

Horseriders and mendicant children gathered to watch, as well as Taliban members posing for pictures with the cars, AK-47s over their shoulders. Drivers said they get less bother at the Taliban government's many checkpoints than under the ousted republic.

"They used to call us macho, but now they just call us enthusiasts, they do not give us any trouble," Momand said. Taleban authorities policed the hundreds-strong crowd that jostled along a blocked off main Kabul road for the first drag races of the Victory



ELDORET: People gather next to the hearse carrying the coffin of Kenyan marathon runner Kelvin during his funeral proceedings in Eldoret, on February 22, 2024. — AFP

around 11:00 pm (2000 GMT) when his car veered off the road into a ditch and hit a tree. His Rwandan coach Gervais Hakizimana, 36, also died in the accident while another passenger, a woman, was injured.

"We found that the late Kelvin had severe head injuries and there were severe fractures which were mainly at the base of the skull," chief government pathologist Johansen Oduor said on Wednesday after an autopsy.

Toxicology tests were still under way, he added. Kiptum burst onto the marathon scene in

2022 and shattered the world record in Chicago in October last year. He ran in a time of two hours 35 seconds, slicing 34 seconds off the previous fastest time, set by his Kenyan rival, the marathon legend Eliud Kipchoge.

The young athlete had competed in only three marathons and recorded three of the all-time fastest seven times for the event. He was the favourite to take gold at this year's Paris Olympics, where he was expected to go head-to-head with Kipchoge for the first time. — AFP



KABUL: This photograph taken on February 16, 2024 shows Afghan motorsport enthusiasts watching drivers ride modified cars as they compete in a drag race during a car racing event in Kabul. — AFP

Cup event, sometimes swinging sticks to push back eager spectators spilling into the street with their phones out.

A handful of women also cheered on the drivers, as they enjoyed a rare opportunity for leisure in a country where women are broadly excluded from public life. Eighteen-year-old Zuhail Mohammadi said there was little opportunity for women to get behind the wheel, but that she hoped that might change one day. "I have been interested (in motorsports) from a young age," she said. "Hopefully, girls can also participate."

Pricey passion

Drivers don't get much chance to show off their rides, however. Not only is buying or building powerful cars a pricey passion, just taking them out for a spin is a drain on cash. "We usually don't drive our cars around much because they are very costly — they use more fuel than ordinary cars," said

sports car owner Amin Sangin. Their prized possessions often sit idle under corrugated sheds at a plot of land near the airport where Sangin and his friends gather and sometimes drift. But that hasn't stopped them and other enthusiasts from putting on races and exhibitions in the past two years, often paying thousands of dollars out of their own pockets.

Momand decided not to enter the Victory Cup competition, concerned about the lack of barriers around the ad hoc tracks to keep spectators safe after a recent serious accident left people injured. That, and he says no one could compete against his twin-turbo.

He prefers to drift and says the money and risk of knocking a new dent into one of his vehicles is worth it. "When you get out of the car and the spectators cheer like you were the best, it is all that matters for the boys." — AFP

Sports

Ex-Brazil star Dani Alves sentenced to four and a half years in jail for rape

Prosecutors called for a nine-year jail sentence followed by 10 years of probation

BARCELONA: A Spanish court on Thursday sentenced former Brazil international Dani Alves to four and a half years in prison after finding him guilty of raping a young woman at a Barcelona nightclub in December 2022. It also ordered the three-time Champions League winner to five years' probation after he serves his jail term, and demanded he pay 150,000 euros (\$162,000) in compensation to the victim.

"The victim did not consent and there is evidence that, beyond the complainant's testimony, permits the rape to be considered proven," the Barcelona court wrote in a statement. "The court considers as proven the fact that the defendant abruptly grabbed the complainant, threw her to the ground and preventing her from moving, while the complainant said no and wanted to leave."

Prosecutors had called for a nine-year jail sentence for the 40-year-old followed by 10 years of probation. Alves, who maintains the sex with the woman was consensual, will appeal the ruling, his lawyer told reporters outside the court.

One of the world's most decorated footballers who played for Barcelona and Paris Saint-Germain during a storied career, Alves went on trial earlier this month on charges of raping a woman at

the Sutton nightclub in the early hours of December 31, 2022.

His accuser — who testified behind a screen to protect her identity — said Alves had violently forced her to have sex in a private bathroom of the nightclub despite her begging him to let her go, causing her "anguish and terror", according to prosecutors.

Police officers who attended the woman told the court about the victim's state of agitation and "shock" when they arrived at the nightclub, as well as her anxiety that "nobody would believe her" if she filed a complaint.

'She could have left'

During the trial, his defence focused on trying to show that Alves was drunk when he met the woman. Alves, who was present in court throughout his three-day trial, testified that his sexual encounter with the woman was consensual and denied hitting her and grabbing her hair. "I am not that type of man, I am not violent," he told the court after his defence lawyer asked if he had forced her to have sex.

"If she wanted to leave, she could have left, she was not obligated to be there," he added. But the court ruled that the injuries found on the victim's knees were "the result of the violence used by Mr. Alves", and said her testimony had been

"consistent" throughout the proceedings. Spain's leftist government in 2022 passed new legislation — dubbed the "only yes means yes" law — that strengthens the country's penal code against rape by requiring explicit consent for sex acts, a move long demanded by assault survivors and women's rights groups.

No 'carte blanche'

The player's defence had argued that the young woman had danced "glued" to him at the nightclub, and there was "sexual tension" between the two. But the court ruled that "these attitudes... do not mean giving 'carte blanche' to... a subsequent aggression".

Alves initially denied knowing the woman in a TV interview but later acknowledged having sex with her, saying it was consensual. He told La Vanguardia newspaper in June that he had lied because he was afraid his wife would leave him.

The player has been in detention since he was arrested in Barcelona in January 2023. His requests to be released on bail have been repeatedly denied by the courts which considered him a flight risk. Brazil does not extradite its own citizens when they are sentenced in other countries.

Alves is widely considered one of the



BARCELONA: (FILES) Barcelona's Brazilian defender Dani Alves parades on a bus through the streets of Barcelona with the rest of his teammates to celebrate their 24th La Liga title, in Barcelona, on May 15, 2016. A Spanish court on February 22, 2024 sentenced former Brazil international Dani Alves to four and a half years in prison after finding him guilty of raping a young woman. — AFP

greatest defenders of all time, winning 42 trophies during a highly successful career. The peak of his career was with Barcelona between 2008 and 2016 when

he won 23 trophies. At the time of his arrest, he was contracted to Mexican club Pumas UNAM. He was sacked soon after being detained. — AFP



NAPLES: Barcelona's Polish forward #09 Robert Lewandowski (C) vies with Napoli's Brazilian defender #05 Juan Jesus (L) during the UEFA Champions League round of 16 first Leg football match between Napoli and Barcelona at the Diego-Armando-Maradona stadium in Naples. — AFP

Osimhen gives Napoli, Barca draw and new hope

NAPLES: Victor Osimhen was described as "a huge player" after marking his return for Napoli with a goal that gave the Italian champions a 1-1 draw with Barcelona and hope that a dreadful season might have reached a turning point.

Nigeria forward Osimhen rolled home the leveller with 15 minutes left of the first leg of their Champions League last 16 tie at the Stadio Diego Armando Maradona, in his first match since returning from the Africa Cup of Nations. The 25-year-old equalized Robert Lewandowski's 60th-minute opener, which seemed likely to be the decisive goal as Barca were for long periods the better team, with Napoli's first and only shot on target.

"He's a huge player for us," said Napoli skipper Giovanni Di Lorenzo to Amazon Prime Video. "He's come back with the right attitude. We knew he would though as he's a great player and professional. He'll give us a hand in the matches to come."

Osimhen had last played for Napoli in a 2-0 defeat at Roma just before Christmas, when he was one

of two players from his team to be sent off. His ninth club goal of the season came at a crucial time, not just in the match but in Napoli's campaign as they play under their third manager of the season in Francesco Calzona, their league title defence up in flames.

Calzona had less than 48 hours to prepare for his first match in charge after replacing Walter Mazzarri on Monday night, and Osimhen gave Napoli a chance of progressing despite a disjointed performance by his team.

Napoli head into next month's second leg in the Catalan capital knowing that with Osimhen in the team there is always a chance of a goal regardless of the overall team display. "It's a good starting point," added Di Lorenzo.

"We know that we need to do more but we've taken a step forward and now we have a chance in the return leg. It's all to play for."

For Barca meanwhile it was the latest misstep of a complicated campaign at the end of which coach Xavi will leave, assuming president Joan Laporta doesn't sack the coach before then. The away side had the better chances but couldn't put Napoli away and could yet pay for their wastefulness.

"We're a little disappointed with the result because we could have come out with a win," said Ronald Araujo to Movistar. "Napoli had a lot of the ball in the last 15 minutes but they barely created a chance. The Champions League is like that." — AFP

MLS chief blasts referees union over lockout

FORT LAUDERDALE: Major League Soccer commissioner Don Garber has hit out at referee union members after talks broke down leaving the league to start the new season without their top referees. Garber, speaking to reporters prior to the opening game of the season between Inter Miami and Real Salt Lake, warned MLS was "very prepared" to deal with the lockout of the officials.

The Professional Soccer Referees Association (PSRA) said on Saturday that 95.8 percent of their voting members had voted to reject the tentative deal they had reached with MLS's Professional Referees Organization (PRO).

"I can't remember in my near 40 years of sports of having a bargaining unit reach agreement and

not have their members support it," Garber told reporters, saying that over 20 bargaining sessions had been held before the deal was reached between negotiators.

"Very disappointing process. In my opinion, it was one that either was intentional or there's a disconnect between the members and their elected negotiators," he said. "It's not the way MLS was looking to start a season, but you can't really negotiate with an entity that, in my opinion, hasn't really negotiated with PRO fairly. So we'll see how all that plays out in the weeks to come," he added.

The referees' previous five-year labor deal expired in January. PSRA said the rejected deal fell "short of expectations, along with a lack of quality of life improvements." But Garber said it was not clear to him what the main issues were that needed resolving. "At this point, we don't even know what it is that they're looking for because we agreed (a deal) with their elected representation. "Not knowing what it is and how far PRO is apart from the PSRA, that is just not something that I can say is normal in a bargaining unit right now," he said. — AFP

Messi the creator as Miami win in MLS opener

FORT LAUDERDALE: Lionel Messi created both goals as Inter Miami made a winning start to the new Major League Soccer season with a 2-0 victory over Real Salt Lake on Wednesday. The Argentine World Cup winner, who played the entire game, put aside any concerns about his early season fitness with an excellent performance for the bookmakers' title favorites.

"He looked loose, fine and showed a lot of speed," coach Gerardo Martino said of Messi, who missed the back end of last season for Miami with injuries and was also sidelined for part of the pre-season. The other three members of Miami's former Barcelona quartet, debutant Luis Suarez, midfielder Sergio Busquets and left-back Jordi Alba, all started in front of a capacity crowd.

Against a cautious Salt Lake side, Messi went close to opening the scoring in the 18th minute with a curling free-kick from 30 yards out which was headed off the line by Justen Glad. He then brought huge cheers from the crowd when, on the edge of the box, his route was blocked by a player down on the floor, but he chipped the ball over him and let loose a shot



FORT LAUDERDALE: Inter Miami's Argentine forward #10 Lionel Messi controls the ball during the MLS football match between Inter Miami and Real Salt Lake at Chase Stadium in Fort Lauderdale, Florida. — AFP

which was blocked. But Miami got in front when Spaniard Sergio Busquets found Messi and the eight-times Ballon d'Or winner cleverly slipped the ball through to Finnish forward Robert Taylor, whose low shot beat RSL keeper Zac MacMath. — AFP

Classifieds

Clinics & Hospitals

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

Hospitals

Sabah Hospital	24812000
Amiri Hospital	22450005
Maternity Hospital	24843100
Mubarak Al-Kabir	25312700
Chest Hospital	24849400
Farwaniya Hospital	24892010
Adan Hospital	23940620
Ibn Sina Hospital	24840300

Change of Name

I, Nilan Krish holder of Passport no V7778630 issued at Kuwait Indian permanent address 1 22 Mariyamman Koil street, Madur Post, Kallakurichi, Pin: 606206, Tamil Nadu, India. Now residing in Kuwait hereby declare that henceforth my name will be read as (given name) Nilankrish and (surname) Balu. (# 5165 22/2/2024)

I, IZZAT MANHA, holder of Indian Passport No. V7783368 having permanent address Kerala, India 678506 residing in Kuwait at present, hereby declare that henceforth my name will be read as (given name) IZZAT MANHA and (surname) ALAMEEN. (#5164 21/2/2024)

I, ANAM LOGDE, holder of Indian Passport No. T8757472 having permanent address at Adi, post: Kolmandla Tal: Mhasla, Di: Raigad, Maharashtra, pin: 402105, residing in Kuwait at present, hereby declare that henceforth my name will be read as (given name) ANAM MUZAFFAR and (surname) LOGDE. (# 5163 21/2/2024)



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LIVERPOOL: Liverpool's Irish goalkeeper #62 Caoimhin Kelleher (L) saves the ball shot by Luton Town's English midfielder #18 Jordan Clark (R) during the English Premier League football match between Liverpool and Luton Town at Anfield in Liverpool. — AFP

Injury-hit Liverpool produce 'fireworks' to blow away Luton

Victory takes Klopp's men four points clear of Manchester City

LIVERPOOL: Jurgen Klopp said his injury-ravaged Liverpool produced "fireworks" to come from a goal down to beat Luton 4-1 and open up a four-point lead at the top of the Premier League on Wednesday. Chidozie Ogbene had given the Hatters a shock first-half lead against a Liverpool side missing Mohamed Salah, Darwin Nunez and Diogo Jota among others.

Dutch international duo Virgil van Dijk and Cody Gakpo turned the game on its head in two minutes just before the hour mark before Luis Diaz and Harvey Elliott secured the win. Victory takes Klopp's men four points clear of Manchester City and five ahead of third-placed Arsenal, but having played a game more than both their title rivals.

"How the stadium and team together changed that game is exceptional," said Klopp. "We just have to be calmer in the decisive moments. Once we became calmer there were fireworks. My word they

were fantastic goals. It is a fantastic night."

Liverpool's squad was already stretched by injuries prior to loss of Curtis Jones, Jota and Nunez in the first-half of Saturday's 4-1 win at Brentford. Salah scored on his return from a hamstring injury at the weekend, but was forced on as a substitute earlier than planned and suffered a setback that kept him out.

Klopp was already without Alisson Becker, Trent Alexander-Arnold, Joel Matip and Thiago Alcantara due to injury and the Reds were forced to work harder for the three points than they would have wished just days before Sunday's League Cup final against Chelsea. However, Salah and Nunez could be fit in time to feature at Wembley.

"We have to see, but I said it before the game as long as we have 11 players we will go for it," added Klopp. Luton held Liverpool 1-1 when the sides met at Kenilworth Road in November and have made a habit of ruffling the feathers of the Premier League's

elite on their return to the top flight.

However, the visitors barely posed a threat other than when they went in front on 12 minutes. Tahith Chong burst into the Liverpool box and when his powerful shot was parried by the legs of Caoimhin Kelleher, Ogbene headed in at the far post. All of Liverpool's chances before the break fell to Diaz, but the Colombian was wasteful with his six shots on goal.

'A big one!'

Klopp was whipping up the Anfield crowd at every opportunity and his side finally opened the floodgates on 56 minutes. Captain Van Dijk led by example as he shrugged off his marker to power in Alexis Mac Allister's corner.

"The reaction shown today was outstanding and something we need for the rest of the season," said Van Dijk. "Today was a big one!" Mac Allister was the creator again seconds later as

Luton again switched off from a dead ball.

Conor Bradley's throw-in picked out the Argentine midfielder and his volleyed cross was headed in by Gakpo. Only some heroics from Thomas Kaminski denied Gakpo and Van Dijk their second goals of the night as Liverpool continued to surge forward, even with the lead.

And an animated Klopp could finally relax 19 minutes from time when Diaz this time kept his composure to slot home his 10th goal of the season. Elliott then rounded off the scoring on his 100th Liverpool appearance by blasting a loose ball into the top corner.

Defeat leaves Luton still in the relegation zone on goal difference. "In the second half we played into their hands and their counter pressing was incredible, we experienced that full throttle football," said Luton boss Rob Edwards. "We knew today was going to be a really big task. We showed for long periods we are a good team and we can compete." — AFP

Ronaldo scores as Al Nassr ease into Asian CL quarters

RIYADH: Cristiano Ronaldo guided Al Nassr into the quarter-finals of the Asian Champions League on Wednesday as the Saudi Arabian side defeated domestic rivals Al Fayha 2-0 on aggregate.

Nassr, who won last week's first leg 1-0 thanks to a Ronaldo goal nine minutes from time, were the better side at Al Awwal Park and took the lead on 17 minutes through Portuguese winger Otavio. The former Porto star, who joined Nassr last summer, headed home from close range to score in his second successive game for the club. His compatriot, Ronaldo, looked set to endure a frustrating night personally, with the Portugal captain having a number of penalty appeals turned down and, not long into the second half, a goal disallowed for offside.

Ronaldo, 39 earlier this month, was also booked in first-half stoppage time for a late challenge, with Nassr manager Luis Castro then given a yellow card for protesting the decision too vehemently. However, the Nassr skipper would have the final say, when four minutes from time, he latched onto yet another Marcelo Brozovic through ball.

Fayha goalkeeper Vladimir Stojkovic really should have dealt with the situation but could only kick his attempted clearance off the onrushing Ronaldo. The ball fell invitingly for Ronaldo to tap into the empty net.

It marked the former Manchester United, Real Madrid and Juventus forward's 10th goal in his past nine matches for Nassr. Ronaldo, a five-time winner of the UEFA Champions League, is competing for the first time in its Asian equivalent.

In the night's other West Asian tie, 2003 champions Al



RIYADH: Nassr's Portuguese forward #07 Cristiano Ronaldo runs with the ball past Fayha's Serbian goalkeeper #88 Vladimir Stojkovic during the AFC Champions League football match between Saudi Arabia's Al-Nassr and Saudi Arabia's Al-Fayha at the Al-Awwal Park Stadium in Riyadh. — AFP

Ain came from a goal behind at home to Nasaf Qarshi to win 2-1 in stoppage time and seal their spot in the quarter-finals. The UAE side, the only Emirati club to lift the trophy, were a goal down five minutes into the second half at the Hazza bin Zayed Stadium, when they failed to deal with an inswinging corner, leaving Nasaf forward Bobur Abdikholikov to prod the ball across the six-yard box. Teammate Akmal Mozgovoy finished at the far post. With last week's first leg in Qarshi ending goalless, the Uzbekistan side had stolen a march on reaching the last eight.

Yet Al Ain needed only four minutes to draw level. Togolese striker Kodjo Laba kept his eye on a looping loose ball in the Nasaf penalty area to acrobatically volley home. The drama, though, was saved for the second minute of injury time. Nasaf goalkeeper Abduvohid Nematov somehow contrived to punch a cross from the left to Sofiane Rahimi. The Al Ain playmaker took one touch before drilling home his effort to take the home team through 2-1 on aggregate. — AFP

Galeno stuns timid Arsenal with late Porto winner

PORTO: Arsenal manager Mikel Arteta bemoaned his team's lack of cutting edge as Galeno's sublime stoppage-time goal earned Porto a 1-0 win in the first leg of their Champions League last-16 tie on Wednesday.

Appearing in a first knockout match in Europe's premier club competition for seven years, Arsenal struggled to break down an organized Porto defence before Galeno's stroke of brilliance in the 94th minute.

The defeat ended Arsenal's eight-game unbeaten run against Portuguese opposition and the Gunners with plenty of work to do in the return leg in London on March 12. "We lacked threat. We lacked aggression, especially when we had the ball in the final third," Arteta told TNT Sports. "So we will tweak a few things to attack better. We can do better." Arsenal last made it to the Champions League quarter-finals in 2010, when they beat Porto in the last 16, but it is the Portuguese club who now have the upper hand. "I think it's a team that's very well-organized defensively and they break your rhythm all the time," said Arteta.

"We want to be in the quarter-finals, you have to beat your opponent and this is what we have to do at the Emirates." Arsenal failed to register a single shot on target as their recent goal spree came to a shuddering halt.

"When it's 0-0, you look up at the clock and it's 93 minutes gone, if you aren't going to win the game then don't lose it," said Arsenal midfielder Declan Rice. "It's a real kick in the teeth because we've conceded late but we know what to do. We're not going to let our heads drop."

Arteta stuck with the same starting line-up for the third game in succession following his team's 5-0 demolition of Burnley at the weekend. Porto defender Pepe, who turns 41 next week and is the oldest outfield player in Champions League history, made his 119th appearance in the compe-



PORTO: FC Porto's Brazilian defender #18 Wendell vies with Arsenal's Polish defender #15 Jakub Kiwior during the UEFA Champions League last 16 first leg football match between FC Porto and Arsenal FC at the Dragao stadium in Porto. — AFP

tion. By comparison, Arsenal's starters had combined for a total of 104 before kick-off at the Estadio do Dragao. While short on Champions League experience, Arteta has said his squad have the belief they can mix it with Europe's best.

The Gunners have started 2024 with five successive wins in the Premier League, scoring 21 goals in those games, and are firmly in the race for a first title in two decades. As well as reigning supreme in England for the first time since 2004, the north Londoners are convinced they can also conquer Europe, spurred on further by the prospect of a Wembley final. Arsenal have never won the Champions League — losing their only final appearance against Barcelona in 2006. Porto, European champions in 1987 and 2004, are a disappointing third in Portugal this term, but frustrated Arsenal throughout. They were happy to cede possession and allow Arsenal to dictate the tempo in the first half, but it was the hosts who created the best chance. Francisco Conceicao darted in from the right and slid over a cross that looped off a sliding Gabriel, with Galeno rifling against the far post and then steering the rebound wide after the ball came right back to him. — AFP