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Ramadan KAREEM

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3-month amnesty for visa violators

Expats residing illegally can leave without paying fines, or pay to regularize status

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: The interior ministry on Thursday announced a three-month amnesty for residency violators, allowing expats living illegally in the country to legalize their stay after paying fines or to leave Kuwait without paying any fines. The ministry said the amnesty, which starts on March 17 and continues until June 17, was issued on the occasion of the holy fasting month of Ramadan and HH the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah becoming the ruler of the country.

Under the amnesty, expatriates living illegally in Kuwait can legalize their stay by obtaining a new residency but only after settling their fines. Residency fines are KD 2 per day with a maximum of KD 600, the interior ministry said in a statement.

Illegal residents who cannot pay the fine can leave the country from any exit point without paying any fines. However, they are allowed to return to the country after undergoing new procedures, the ministry said.

Violators who do not leave the country or legalize their stay during the amnesty period will not be granted residency and will be deported to their home countries. They will not be allowed to return to Kuwait. In addition, they will be penalized in accordance with the law, the ministry said.

Violators who are facing administrative obstacles or are embroiled in court cases are required to apply to the residency affairs department, which will assess their cases and see if they fulfill conditions to be granted residency in accordance with the law, the ministry statement said. Tens of thousands of expats are believed to be living illegally in Kuwait, but the ministry has not announced their numbers. The last time Kuwait issued an amnesty for illegal expats was in early 2021.

RAMADAN KAREEM

Essence of Ramadan

By Yeasmin Mohammed Ibrahim

Ramadan is indeed a remarkable time for introspection and spiritual growth. Consider the wisdom behind Allah's choice of designating a specific month for fasting. Imagine if Allah had asked us to fast in any month of our choice, as long as we are fasting for 30 days. But because Ramadan is the only month for fasting, we're collectively observing this obligation. We synchronize our efforts, breaking fasts, praying and fostering good together. What a beauty! This brings in the spirit of Ramadan. It's a time for unity and reflection.

While Ramadan isn't about indulgence, many, myself included, have unintentionally turned it into a month of feasting. It is the month of fasting. The month to not eat as much as we usually eat. This can inadvertently detract from its spiritual essence. For some, particularly women, the responsibilities of household chores and societal expectations can make them feel as if Ramadan is the most stressful month of the year. We find women immersed in culinary creations and bringing out the hidden chef, deviating from the intended purpose of moderation and ibadah.

Question: What's the number one place that Allah hates? Yes, markets. We spend a lot of our time at grocery stores and markets at this time. But Allah wants to see us on the prayer rugs and around the Holy Quran instead. Our grocery bills are also the highest this month. Our bills must be the lowest, our food extravagance must be the most minor, and worship must be the highest compared to other months.

By staying away from markets, useless talks, useless activities, halal food and halal relations, we have only one thing to concentrate on: Our souls through taqwa - consciousness of Allah, fear of Allah born out of love for Him. A word mentioned 258 times in the Quran. Allah has placed high importance on this one word.

It's crucial to approach Ramadan with sincere intentions and realistic goals tailored to our individual circumstances. Allah understands the challenges we face, be it work commitments, health issues or family responsibilities. By setting achievable objectives, such as abstaining from at least two habitual sins like music or screen time and performing at least two simple acts of kindness, we can strive for spiritual growth and attain taqwa.

Let us use this sacred month to cultivate humility, kindness, and a deeper connection with our Creator, embodying the true essence of Ramadan. Let this Ramadan not just come and leave us like the past Ramadans of our lives.

Aid efforts barely enough for Gaza amid Zionist siege

GAZA: Efforts grew on Thursday to get more aid into the war-devastated Gaza Strip, where the UN warns of famine and desperate residents have stormed relief shipments. After mediators failed to reach a truce between the Zionist entity and Hamas militants for the holy fasting month of Ramadan, which started on Monday, fighting continued with at least 69 deaths over the previous 24 hours, the Hamas-run territory's health ministry said.

Hamas authorities reported more than 40 air strikes across Gaza, from Beit Hanun in the north to Rafah in the south, where most of Gaza's population has sought refuge and the Zionist entity is threatening a ground invasion. Among the latest casualties were seven people killed when Zionist troops opened fire on a group at an aid distribution point near Gaza City. The army had no immediate comment.

The charity vessel Open Arms, pulling about 200 tons of food aid, was nearing the Zionist entity's

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GAZA: An anguished Palestinian woman assists an injured man outside Al-Najjar Hospital in Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip following Zionist bombardment on March 13, 2024. — AFP

China blasts US TikTok vote as buyout eyed

BEIJING: China blasted Washington's "bandit" mentality Thursday after the US House passed a bill that would ban TikTok unless it splits from its Chinese owner, as former Trump treasury secretary Steve Mnuchin said he is preparing a buyout plan. The short-video app has soared in popularity worldwide but its ownership by Chinese technology giant ByteDance — and alleged subservience to Beijing's ruling Communist Party — has fueled concern in Western capitals.

On Wednesday, the US House of Representatives overwhelmingly approved a bill that would force

The logo of TikTok is displayed on the screen of an iPhone in front of US and Chinese flags in this photo illustration. — AFP

Washington should also "provide an open, fair, just, and non-discriminatory environment for foreign companies to invest and operate in the US", He added. "China will take all necessary measures to resolutely safeguard its legitimate rights and interests," he said.

At a separate press briefing, foreign ministry spokesperson Wang Wenbin said the vote "runs contrary to the principles of fair competition and international economic and trade rules". "If so-called reasons of national security can be used to arbitrarily suppress excellent companies from other countries, then there is no fairness and justice at all,"

Wang said. "When someone sees a good thing another person has and tries to take it for themselves, this is entirely the logic of a bandit."

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Syria war death toll over 507,000, 13 years on

BEIRUT: Syria's war has killed more than 507,000 people, a war monitor said Thursday ahead of the 13th anniversary of the conflict which has displaced millions at home and abroad. The government's brutal suppression of an uprising that erupted on March 15, 2011, triggered a full-scale civil war that drew in foreign armies and international jihadists.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, a Britain-based monitor, said more than 164,000 civilians, including more than 15,000 women and 25,000 children, have been killed. More than 343,000 combatants, including army soldiers, fighters from pro-Iran groups, Kurdish-led forces and Islamic State group jihadists, are also among the

QAMSHILI, Syria: People queue in front of a petrol station in this city in the northeastern Hasakeh province to fill their jerrycans with kerosene amid a shortage of cooking gas on March 13, 2024. — AFP

dead, added the Observatory, which has a network of sources across the country.

The overall figure has risen from around 503,000 last March, with the frontlines mostly quietening in recent years. Syrian President Bashar Al-Assad has gradually clawed back territory lost early in the fighting with help from allies Iran and Russia, but large swathes of the north remain outside government control. The United Nations has said that this year, 16.7 million people in Syria require some type of humanitarian assistance or protection, "the largest number since the beginning of the crisis in 2011".

The war has ravaged Syria's economy, infrastructure and industry, while Western sanctions have added to the country's woes. Syria is home to around 7.2 million internally displaced people, the UN says, with a devastating earthquake that struck Turkey and Syr-

ia in February last year compounding the problem. Ninety percent of the population is living in poverty, but UN humanitarian official David Carden said last week that funding challenges could affect aid deliveries and services.

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Kuwaiti women play pivotal role in social development

Minister commends Palestinian women in confronting injustice

NEW YORK: Minister of Social Affairs, Family, and Childhood Affairs Sheikh Feras Saud Al-Malik Al-Sabah said the Kuwaiti women played a central role in the development and protection of society at times of peace and war. In his address to the 68th Session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women at the UN General Assembly Hall on Wednesday, Sheikh Feras said the Kuwaiti woman proved to be influential in all aspects of life thanks to the care and protection she enjoys under the constitution of Kuwait.

"The constitution recognizes the important role of women in social, economic, and political development and bans all forms of discrimination against women." Laying the basic principles of freedom, justice, and equality for society, the constitution provides against discrimination based on gender, religious, or linguistic considerations," the minister pointed out. Kuwait, out of belief in these constitutional principles, has always been keen on empowering women in the political, economic, social, artistic, and sports areas through the adoption of relevant legislation and joining UN conventions.

Kuwait has advanced by 10 positions on the Global Gender Gap Index 2023 of the World Economic Forum, which benchmarks the national gender gaps on economic, political, education, and health-based criteria, Sheikh Feras went on. "Kuwait has also advanced from 123rd to 61st ranking on the Women Peace and Security Index (WPS Index) of Georgetown University's Institute for Women, Peace, and Security, which signals the political, economic, and social environments conducive to women's empowerment in the country.

"Women in Kuwait now account for 41 percent of the leading positions at the Central Bank of Kuwait,

26 percent of the leading positions in the banking sector, and 35 percent of the workforce at Kuwait banks," he added. The legislation in Kuwait provides for the protection of women against violence, the minister noted, praising the partnership between the Kuwaiti government and the UN Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) in this effort to improve the status of women.

Confronting injustice

Kuwait's Minister of Social Affairs, Family, and Childhood Affairs, Sheikh Feras Saud Al-Malik Al-Sabah, expressed his pride in the resilient model of the Palestinian woman, resisting all forms of injustice, persecution, and aggression. In light of attending the 68th Session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women, Minister Al-Sabah said in a statement to KUNA that Palestinian women pay the price for an unjust aggression that killed tens of thousands of their children.

The minister added that despite the war in Gaza, the Palestinian woman remains steadfast, commending her on her unwavering model with pride and appreciation. He noted that establishing the National Committee for Women, Peace, and Security comes as proof of Kuwait's belief in the priority and concern of women's issues in the work of the United Nations. He added that the committee is keen on developing a coordinated plan between state bodies to implement the United Nations Security Council resolution (1325) on women, peace, and security.

Kuwait-ESCWA partnership

In another development, Sheikh Feras met the Executive Secretary of the UN Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, Rola Dashti, on



Social Affairs Minister Sheikh Feras Saud Al-Malik Al-Sabah addresses the 68th Session of UN Commission on the 'Status of Women'. — KUNA photos



Social Affairs Minister Sheikh Feras Saud Al-Malik Al-Sabah is pictured with the Executive Secretary of the UN Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia Rola Dashti.

Wednesday to discuss the partnership between Kuwait and the ESCWA. The meeting took place at Kuwait's Permanent Mission to the UN on the sidelines of the 68th Session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women. The discussions dealt with issues of common concern, including the project to assess the economic cost of violence against women, the social protection project, and the efforts to improve Kuwait's record.

Sheikh Feras, who leads Kuwait's delegation to the ongoing session of the UN Commission, praised the ESCWA's cooperation in sharing information with Kuwait and serving their common interests. He noted that his ministry and the Supreme Council of Family Affairs work together to provide social protection for

women and empower them economically. The Ministry and the Council encourage women to engage in microenterprises and provide them with the necessary production requirements, he pointed out.

On her part, Dashti underscored the significance of cooperation with both government bodies to improve the efficacy of the labor market and build the capacity of female workers. On a separate occasion, Sheikh Feras hosted Algerian Minister of National Solidarity, Family, and Women's Affairs Kaouthar Krikou, who leads her country's delegation to the session of the UN Commission. They discussed the prospects of cooperation in social affairs, with an emphasis on efforts to improve the status of women. — KUNA

AI sparks concerns, discourse

KUWAIT: Recent leaps in artificial intelligence (AI) have sparked serious discourse on whether or not this technology will soon replace human beings in various tasks and jobs. For those touting human ingenuity and creativity, the old folktale of John Henry and the Railroad might provide inspiration. The story has it that Henry—an African American folk hero and railroad worker—competed against a steam-powered drill, trying to prove that man was much faster and stronger than a machine.

The legend concludes with him winning by sheer force and determination. Many might argue the authenticity of the story, but one cannot deny that humans have the imagination and consciousness that no current technology could sincerely duplicate or imitate. However, does the relationship between AI and humanity have to be one of competitiveness and rivalry, or might it be a synergistic relationship in line with other technological advancements in history; with infinite possibilities looming on the horizon?

Several ramifications

"Applications of AI technology have several ramifications in politics and business, but the idea of "creating content dynamically without involving human beings is a very traumatic change in the way we work," Bahrain's Ameen Altajer, CEO of the AI Company (INFINTEWARE), told KUNA in a series of interviews with experts and individuals tackling the topic at hand. Altajer, whose company has been providing products and services to clients across the globe for more than 15 years, said that AI applications would have an effect on several sectors, including the media and news.

In corporate spaces, like banks, AI technology is being put to use to perform language-based tasks, including drafting emails. This "takes a lot of the workload from human beings, so it has a lot of pros and cons," he said. Asked if AI would be able to venture off without the involvement of humans, Altajer said that there was a level of "symbiosis" between the technology and humans; however, AI was not at that stage where it could develop a sense of agency on its own without humans being in the picture. AI could make decisions, affirmed the expert, adding that the concept of machine learning involves specifying inputs and outputs via algorithms and data to imitate decision-making by humans without the machine knowing the practical details of the process.

AI and Language Learning Models

If prompted, AI—through the machine learning process—could distinguish between images of cats and dogs without really knowing the intricate details and differences of both species unless fed with more information, he explained. "There is no agency... no consciousness as far as we can understand and see," stated Altajer, but pointed out that AI, as a technology, would for sure change down the road.

On current uses of AI and Language Learning Models (LLM), he said that both technologies involve feeding a tremendous amount of data and text to provide convincing output that mimics humans. Altajer did express fear when it came to involving AI and other similar technologies in making powerful decisions, asking, "If we do not understand how those systems really work from the inside, are we okay with the idea of delegating the 'driving wheel' to them?"



CEO of Mirqab Medical Equipment Company Bader Al-Tameemi



CEO of the AI Company (INFINTEWARE) Ameen Altajer



Economic researcher and columnist for the Kuwait's Al-Qabas newspaper Mohammad Ramadan



Kuwaiti digital artist Dana Al-Rashid

In the case of information being implicitly biased, AI would be making decisions according to data regardless of circumstances, firing or hiring individuals, favoring certain races, hair colors, and whatnot if the data dictated so, he said.

Bringing the economy into the sphere of discussions, Mohammad Ramadan—an economic researcher and columnist for the Kuwaiti newspaper—said that recent advancements in AI had increased its usage across the board. "We see the usage in financial markets, trading, fraud detection, image recognition, military use, and self-driving cars," stated Ramadan about the vast utilization of AI.

AI taking over jobs?

On fears of AI taking over careers, Ramadan pointed out that "some people should be worried that AI will take their jobs, especially jobs that could be automated." According to a July 29, 2023, report by McKinsey Global Institute (MGI), a 1990-established organization aiding in economic and business decision-making, "by 2030, activities that account for up to 30 percent of hours currently worked across the US economy could be automated—a trend accelerated by generative AI."

Ramadan explained that the report's findings were no cause for plausible concern, indicating, "When the PC was invented, it had replaced the typing machines, other devices, or jobs that have been there, and this is called structural unemployment, where people lose their jobs due to market structure change." On the solution to such possible unemployment, the expert said that people could adapt easily by gathering different sets of skills and knowledge and creating new jobs and career paths.

Ramadan also spoke about the government's responsibilities towards the issue of AI, saying, "Government should not do anything except regulate AI to be more legally usable; video generated by AI could be almost realistic; voice could be realistic; chatbots could act like humans; so we do not know how that thing could develop." He indicated that various polls across the globe showed that a huge percentage of people feared that AI could be used fraudulently.

Economic landscape

Ramadan asserted that AI and humans could coexist in the economic landscape; however, between 2023 and 2030, the AI market size is projected to expand at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 37.3 percent, according to a report by the India-US-based market research and consulting company "Grand View Research," cited by several outlets, including Forbes. Ramadan estimated that the AI market and industry would reach about \$200 billion by 2030, reiterating that such a landscape would be shared by AI and humans, but the latter should "adapt to use AI to their benefit rather than do the jobs that AI perfectly



or effectively does."

AI technology is not only concerned with sectors like the economy; it also goes head-to-head with artists and creators, putting out what some AI devotees could subjectively call "art." Dana Al-Rashid, a Kuwaiti digital artist known for her style of socially driven miniature paintings, indicated that she was not averse to the use of technological tools to produce works of art.

"There is a misconception about digital art or the use of technologies such as programs and tablets... People think that the computer is doing the work for you... As in, you plug in some keywords and it comes up with art," said Al-Rashid, who pointed out that she used a variety of digital tools manually to enhance her artistic outputs to be more accurate and detailed. In regards to the ability of AI to produce art, Al-Rashid said that she was "very worried," adding that the current level of AI output might be flimsy, but it would surely improve as time progresses.

Some people with no aesthetic training think that AI-generated outputs "would make do," the Kuwaiti artist said. Al-Rashid added, "I am quite worried about it. I do art professionally. I illustrate for musicians. I write books, so AI would take on that job because some musicians would use AI to create album art for free." She indicated that she wanted to transition to becoming a full-time digital artist, especially since the Kuwaiti government is supportive of talented individuals and entrepreneurs.

"AI is going to affect so many jobs... I think it is going to be a very different world in the next few years," affirmed Al-Rashid, who warned against AI's alarming ability to duplicate any artistic style. She stressed, "AI art has to come from somewhere," revealing that the data provided by artists was the main source and reason current AI technology was able to produce so-called

"art," which is very worrisome and should be contested.

This very fact should be put under legal scrutiny to protect the rights of artists worldwide, Al-Rashid asserted. While the point of view of experts is well regarded, as it should be, AI usage eventually extended beyond the boundaries of intellectual debates, touching the lives of everyday individuals. "The first time I used AI was to draft an email asking to order ink. The email was three paragraphs long and filled with irrelevant information. I edited the email and sent it to my manager," stated Bader Al-Tameemi, CEO of Mirqab Medical Equipment Company.

The following day, Al-Tameemi received a phone call early in the morning inquiring about the longwinded email in which he explained his usage of AI. "After this, I be-

came a frequent user of AI, mainly in drafting emails and responses." Al-Tameemi professed. In his view of what AI consisted of, Al-Tameemi understood that AI was "software" made from many algorithms that were connected to databases. "It will search for any requested information and come up with an answer. The more specific details you provide in your question, the more accurate an answer you will get."

Asked if he thought AI was a valuable tool to be used in every aspect of life, Al-Tameemi replied, "Yes, it is a valuable tool that saves time and money." Whether he was offended that AI could carry out tasks much faster than humans could, Al-Tameemi made an analogy with the rise of computer technology, saying, "When the computer first came into the market, people had the same misconception (of losing jobs), but now it is used everywhere in our daily lives. I believe this also applies to AI."

AI replacing humans

Sharing a similar take, high school student Omar Al-Shatti said that AI has great potential to push human beings to be more productive and innovative. "AI is a useful tool that will make various daily chores quite easy," he touted, pointing out that "AI will replace humans in monotonous and tedious tasks, allowing people to focus on more creative ventures." Whether he used AI, Al-Shatti answered that he did research on topics of interest outside of the context of his school studies, saying that the vast capabilities of artificial intelligence made him stand in awe and appreciation of this technological leap. The AI and human ingenuity debate is full of inconclusive pieces of evidence and numerous variables, but it would surely continue to lie "between the pit of man's fears and the summit of his knowledge," to quote Rod Sterling, creator of the seminal sci-fi and supernatural television series "Twilight Zone." — KUNA

UN, Iraq officials discuss Kuwait's missing persons

BAGHDAD: Deputy Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General for Iraq for Political Affairs and Electoral Assistance Claudio Cordone discussed Wednesday with the Undersecretary of Iraq's Foreign Minister Omar Al-Barzanji ways to advance the file of missing Kuwaiti persons and property. "The United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) encourages intensified efforts to make swift progress and is ready to continue to assist in the process," Cordone wrote in his X account after the meeting.

Two days ago, Cordone met the head of the legal department at Iraq's Ministry of Defense, Maj. Gen. Khalid Ismail Al-Lami, and the director of the Human Rights Directorate at the Ministry of Defense, Dr. Thaeer Abdullah. The discussion focused on the importance of making progress on the Kuwaiti missing persons and property file and the UN's commitment to this humanitarian file. Iraq's foreign and defense ministries regularly urge the public to provide any information about the missing Kuwaiti persons, national archives, and property. — KUNA

Local

Zain's Iftar Hall welcomes worshippers daily at the Grand Mosque of Kuwait

Initiative comes back for 17th year with 42,000 meals served



Ali Shadad and Hamad Al Musaibeeh with Zain's volunteers and Grand Mosque officials.



Zain's Iftar Hall at the Grand Mosque.

KUWAIT: Zain announced the launch of its annual Iftar initiative to serve fasting individuals during the Holy Month of Ramadan, which comes back in its 17th year, this time in strategic partnership with the Grand Mosque of Kuwait. The company receives worshippers daily at the Mosque's main tent as part of its annual social campaign, Zain Alshuhoor, with a total of 42,000 meals served throughout the entire month.

The initiative's kick-off was attended by Grand Mosque Administration Director Ali Shadad, Zain Kuwait Corporate Relations Department Manager Hamad Al Musaibeeh, Zain and Grand Mosque officials, and members of the Zain Alshuhoor volunteer team. Zain's Iftar initiative, which comes back for the 17th year, is a main pillar of Zain's annual social program during the Holy Month. Meals are served daily at the Grand Mosque's main tent, along with meals distributed through trucks across Kuwait in strategic partnership with the Kuwait Food Bank. The total number of meals served via both partners reaches 42,000 for the entire month.

The Iftar initiative is directly supervised and organized by Zain's team. In addition, members of the Zain Alshuhoor volunteer team – that consists of Zain employees from across the company's divisions

and departments – support the initiative, reflecting the Zain family's commitment to bring about positive social impact in the community. The strategic partnership between Zain and the Grand Mosque not only encompasses the Iftar meals initiative, but also extends to many other programs and contributions that last throughout the Holy Month. These contributions include hospitality services for worshippers during the last ten days of Ramadan, Zain's Holy Quran Recital competition, and the Zain employees Holy Quran Recital competition.

This year, six of Zain's strategic community partners from both the public and private sectors join its annual Ramadan social campaign, Zain Alshuhoor. The campaign features a wide range of humanitarian, charitable, social, religious, health, and sports programs that continue throughout the Holy Month of Ramadan. Zain Alshuhoor is one of Kuwait's biggest and most successful community programs during the Holy Month. Every year, the company introduces a bigger, renewed version of the campaign that expands upon the previous year in its initiatives and programs. The campaign strives to share the blessings of this much-cherished month with the entire Kuwaiti people.



Initiative serves worshippers daily.

Nazaha takes part in UN program 'Empowering Women'

VIENNA: Kuwait Anti-Corruption Authority (Nazaha), represented by the Head of International Cooperation and Agreements, Anwar Al-Qadeeri, participated in the launch of the program "Empowering Women in Justice/for Justice." The launch took place during a high-level event that was organized by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime's (UNODC) Global Judicial Integrity Network and the Global Operational Network of Anti-Corruption Law Enforcement Authorities (GlobeE Network) under the umbrella of the UNODC.

The program aims to empower women professionals in law enforcement authorities, anticorruption agencies, and the judiciary by bringing them together with experts in these areas to share lessons learned, experiences, and practical career advice. Based on its active participation in international anti-corruption forums and its cooperation with GlobeE Network, Nazaha was chosen to participate in the pilot phase of this program.

Held at the United Nations Headquarters in Vienna, Republic of Austria, the high-level event coincided with the International Day of Women Judges. It was attended by the Executive Director of UNODC, Ghada Wali, and the Minister of Justice of the Republic of Austria, Alma Zadic. The event featured Ministers of Justice, judges, and founders of women's empowerment movements in the Republic of Ghana, the Republic of Serbia, the United States of America, the Republic of the Philippines, and Trinidad and Tobago. In her speech, Al-Qadeeri emphasized the pivotal role of women in justice, law enforcement, and combating corruption.

She highlighted the need for women to support each other in overcoming the challenges they face in their professional lives. Al-Qadeeri also highlighted Kuwait's efforts to empower women in the judiciary, citing that in September 2020, eight Ku-



Anwar Al-Qadeeri participates in the launch of the program "Empowering Women in Justice". - KUNA

waiti female prosecutors were sworn in, becoming the first female judges in the history of the State of Kuwait—a significant step toward empowering women in this field.

Furthermore, she highlighted the importance of men's role in empowering women, adding that Nazaha has fostered a positive environment for women to assume important positions. She mentioned that women at Nazaha have leading roles on the Board of Trustees and are heading vital sectors such as the Financial Disclosure Sector and the Prevention of Corruption Sector. She further pointed out that women constitute a large proportion of the workforce in Nazaha, including legal auditors, engineers, and others.

It is worth noting that Nazaha joined the GlobeE Network on October 12, 2021. It is a network that facilitates information sharing among front-line anti-corruption law enforcement officials. The network also provides knowledge resources and tools to track, investigate, and prosecute cases of cross-border corruption through secure communication channels. Nazaha has played an active role

since the establishment of GlobeE Network and participated in the technical discussions prior to the adoption of its charter.

Nazaha also chaired an international workshop organized by GlobeE Network and holds membership in its thematic working groups. Additionally, Nazaha was a facilitator in several sessions of these working groups. Nazaha has also contributed to the GlobeE Network's knowledge resources, such as the Compendium of Practices on Informal Cooperation in Transnational Corruption Cases and the Directory of Open Source Registries.

Nazaha continues to provide insights into the GlobeE Network in order to support law enforcement authorities in the fight against corruption. At the end of the event, Al-Qadeeri addressed her speech to the UNODC Executive Director, Ghada Wali, expressing hopes for the success of the program launch. She concluded by saying that the program will contribute to strengthening women's self-belief, helping them overcome challenges and stereotypes, and enabling them to advance in their careers and take up leadership positions. — KUNA

Kuwait's pavilion at Doha Expo attracts many visitors

DOHA: Kuwait's pavilion at the International Horticultural Expo 2023 in Doha is alluring several visitors and specialists, as well as those interested in the environment, to follow up with lectures in the presence of academics, a Kuwaiti official said. Speaking to KUNA in a statement, Sarah Al-Millam, the pavilion's head, said the pavilion has been holding lectures and symposiums aiming to raise awareness and enhance the environmental sustainability of visitors.

Al-Millam referred to the fact that the expo is paying much attention to modern agriculture, technology, innovation, environmental awareness, and sustainability, noting that the pavilion held multiple lectures in this regard. The Kuwaiti pavilion aims to highlight governmental and non-governmental initiatives on concerted efforts for a sustainable future and raise environmental awareness, she stated.

She expressed great appreciation to Sameera Al-Kandari, acting director general of the Kuwait Environment Public Authority and general commissioner at the expo, for all efforts made at the pavilion. The expo kicked off last October and will continue until March 28 in the Qatari capital, Doha. — KUNA



Sarah Al-Millam

Meteorologist predicts cooler evenings

KUWAIT: Kuwait's weather is expected to have warm mornings and cooler temperatures in the evenings, with chances of thunderous rain and dusty winds, said the Kuwait Meteorology Department on Thursday. The department director, Abdulaziz Al-Qarawi, said in a statement to KUNA that the weather maps' data indicated warm, humid winds in addition to cloudy skies during the weekend. The morning would be warm with light southeastern dusty winds and temperature highs between 26 and 29 degrees Celsius, accompanied by chances of rain.

Meanwhile, the evening would lean towards more southeastern winds and higher chances of thunderous rain and gusts of dust, with temperatures ranging between 15 and 18 degrees Celsius, added Al-Qarawi. Al-Qarawi mentioned that the weather on Friday morning would be warm and cloudy, with unstable winds ranging between 10-42 km/h and temperature highs between 25 and 27 degrees.

Friday evening would see cooler temperatures between 16 and 19 degrees Celsius with a chance of precipitation and fog, he added. Saturday morning would be warm and cloudy, with southeastern to northwestern winds and temperature highs ranging between 28 and 31 degrees. Meanwhile, Saturday evening would lean towards cooler temperatures between 15 and 18 degrees Celsius with cloudy skies and fog, Al-Qarawi said. — KUNA

MoI may amend rules for family, visit visas by June

KUWAIT: The Ministry of Interior is thinking of reviewing and introducing some amendments to the rules for granting family, commercial and tourist visas to the expats and the amendments will be announced by June this year, sources familiar with the matter said. The decision to review the conditions was taken following a security study which was conducted by the MoI and comes more than a month after the government announced the plan to open up the country.

The sources indicated that the amendment of the decision will mostly be issued before next June adding that the government will implement the decision on visas for certain, although some conditions may be introduced to make the plan fool-proof. The decision was originally taken in view of necessary social aspects, including facilitation and support for residents, as well as the revitalization

of commercial and tourism sectors of the country.

The sources pointed out that the amendments being made are related to the salary condition on the family visit visas where it is currently required that the breadwinner's salary should not be less than KD 400 while granting the visa to the father, mother, wife and children, and KD 800 for the rest of the relatives. "Some complaints have been raised with regard to the salary clause. Many ask if the one who will be issued a family visit visa is an infant, does he/she needs the breadwinner to have a salary of at least KD 400 as is the case for the father and mother. The sources explained that this condition may be revised.

They reported that there are attempts to circumvent certain clauses so that some families may be able to obtain a visit visa as it can come with a certificate from the sponsor that his salary is more than KD 800. Regarding the question of airlines, the sources pointed out that the condition of the national carrier, will remain the same, but with certain amendments. There could be exceptions for nationals of countries who do not have direct airline connections between them and Kuwait or where there are no flights for Kuwait Airways and Jazeera Airways for security reasons or others, the sources added.



KUWAIT: Kuwait's Minister of Foreign Affairs Abdullah Al-Yahya on Wednesday received a copy of credentials of newly appointed Ambassador to Kuwait Noshrevan Lomtadize. During the meeting, Al-Yahya wished the new ambassador success in his new post and more development for bilateral ties between the two friendly countries. — KUNA

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Ramadan health tips



Eat slowly

Chew food thoroughly and eat slowly to aid digestion and prevent indigestion. Eating slowly gives your body time to properly break down food and absorb nutrients, reducing the risk of digestive discomfort like bloating or gas.

Practice mindful eating

Be present and mindful while eating, savoring each bite and appreciating the flavors. Mindful eating helps you develop a healthier relationship with food, allowing you to enjoy your meals more fully and prevent overeating or emotional eating.

Balance carbohydrates

Opt for complex carbohydrates like whole grains to provide sustained energy release. Complex carbs are digested more slowly than simple carbs, providing a steady source of energy to fuel your body throughout the fasting period.

Include hydrating foods

Consume water-rich foods like cucumbers, watermelon, and soups to stay hydrated. Hydrating foods help replenish fluids lost during fasting hours and keep you feeling refreshed and energized throughout the day.



Kuwait Heritage



KUWAIT: File photo shows a side of one of the commercial streets in Kuwait in 1956. — A collection of Sayed Taleb Al-Alwai, provided by Mahmoud Zakaria, heritage researcher at the Ministry of Information.

Kuwait charity hands out Ramadan meals in Jordan

Arab Parliament calls for countering Islamophobia

AMMAN: The Ramadan Iftar (fast-breaking) meals campaign, titled "Kuwait is by Your Side," was launched by the International Islamic Charity Organization (IICO) on Wednesday in multiple governorates in Jordan. The launch was patronized and attended by Kuwait's Ambassador to Jordan, Hamad Al-Marri. Speaking to KUNA, the ambassador said that Kuwait aims to extend help to those in need with the desire to do good and to serve Islam and others with pride as Muslims.

The efforts that are being put forward are directives from the political leadership to show solidarity with the humanitarian conditions of refugees and those in need worldwide. The IICO drive, which was planned in cooperation with Jordanian authorities, included 700 food baskets, which would benefit around 4,000 Syrian refugees and those in need in

Jordan. This project is one of many humanitarian and relief projects that Kuwait has done for Syrian refugees and those in need in Jordan throughout the year.

Countering Islamophobia

In another development, Arab Parliament President Adel Al-Asoomi called for exerting more efforts to combat Islamophobia worldwide. Al-Asoomi said on Thursday, in a statement marking the International Day to Combat Religion Islamophobia, that it has become very dangerous for Muslims in foreign countries, where they face many types of racism and discrimination as a result of relating Islam to terrorism.

Al-Asoomi urged launching initiatives that aim at spreading a culture of tolerance and combating discrimination, stressing showcasing the real image of Islam and Muslims. He warned against the Islamophobia campaigns that ruined Islam's image by falsely connecting terrorist groups that have carried out many terrorist operations under the name of Islam. The statement pointed out the importance of this occasion to remind people that terrorism is not connected to a specific place or religion; however, recently, people started to link Islam to terrorism, which resulted in escalating hate toward Muslims.

Mideast peace

An Arab-European Conference gathering parties involved in the Middle East peace process is a necessity to achieve just peace for Palestinians, said the Arab League on Thursday. A statement by the Arab League said that this affirmation came during the Arab League Secretary General Ahmad Abdul-Gheit's reception of Spanish Foreign Minister Jose Manuel Albares, who is in Cairo as part of his regional tour. The statement added that there was an idea to hold a peace conference in Spain to achieve a two-state solution and find a political



GAZA: A Palestinian woman reacts as she hugs wounded relatives at the Kuwait Hospital in Rafah, in the southern Gaza Strip, following Zionist air strikes. — AFP

horizon for the Palestinians.

The latest developments in the Zionist occupation's military onslaught on the Gaza Strip were touched upon during the meeting, it indicated, saying that Abul-Gheit expressed gratitude towards Spain's humane and just stance with the Palestinians against the Zionist brutality. It went on to say that Abul-Gheit called for strong and effective measures to stop the Zionist inhumane military campaign against the Palestinians, affirming that the West had given a greenlight for Zionists to enact their evil deeds.

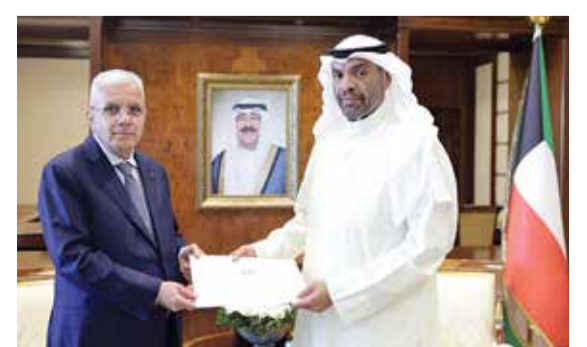
The statement also relayed the Spanish Foreign Minister's calls for a sustainable and immediate ceasefire to protect human lives in Gaza and elsewhere in Palestine. He also reiterated Spain's eagerness to recognize the independence of the state of Palestine, with Abul-Gheit calling upon him to reflect such sentiment within the EU. — KUNA



FM receives letter on Palestinian situation

KUWAIT: Kuwait Minister of Foreign Affairs Abdulah Al-Yahya received a written letter by his Palestinian counterpart Dr. Riyadh Al-Maliki about the current situation in Palestine and the Zionist occupation's continued violations. The letter was received during the Kuwaiti minister's meeting with Palestinian Ambassador to Kuwait Rami Tahboub, said a statement by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on Wednesday.

The statement reiterated Kuwait's firm position towards the Palestinian cause, condemning the Zionist occupation's attacks against the Palestinians. Al-Yahya underscored that the systematic crimes commit-



ted by the Zionist occupation violate global human rights and international laws, praying to Almighty Allah to protect the Palestinians from harm especially during the holy month of Ramadan. — KUNA



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North Korean leader unveils and 'drives' new battle tank

UK govt's new extremism definition sparks backlash

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MIAMI: Former US President Donald Trump (left), his daughter Ivanka Trump (center) and her husband Jared Kushner attend the Ultimate Fighting Championship (UFC) 299 mixed martial arts event at the Kaseya Center in Miami. — AFP

Poll tests Trump's 'Teflon Don' image

Republican tycoon looks as strong politically as he ever has

WASHINGTON: He was impeached twice, found liable in fraud and sexual abuse lawsuits, charged with dozens of felonies and declared politically dead again and again — but count Donald Trump out at your peril. Eight months ahead of the US presidential election, and days before he is due to stand trial for alleged 2016 campaign finance violations, the Republican tycoon looks as strong politically as he ever has.

After winning his party's primary contest without really breaking a sweat, the scandal-prone 77-year-old is on course to contest a third straight election, and his second showdown with Democratic President Joe Biden. Confident of avenging his defeat in 2020, Trump boasts polling leads in almost all of the swing states against Biden, who is only four years older but has struggled to allay concerns over his age.

Trump's detractors have watched with a mix of frustration, disbelief and awe over the years as the man whose downfall has been prognosticated ad nauseam has turned every scandal into campaign speech punchlines and fundraising dollars. For Princeton University political scientist Julian Zelizer, the fact that Trump re-

mains the only politician Republicans have thought worthy of leading them in the past decade is nothing short of "stunning."

"This is a unique moment where the party has embraced someone who has been in political trouble as president, legal trouble as post-president and who was a one-term president," he told AFP.

Deluged by lawsuits and buried under indictments from four different jurisdictions, Trump is frequently called "Teflon Don" — a nickname first used for mobster John Gotti — by US headline writers. Through it all, the onetime real-estate magnate has been able to keep his supporters onside by playing the part of the heroic outsider — targeted, in his words, by corrupt elites for his insurgent campaign to shake up politics on behalf of the forgotten millions.

The potency of Trump's victim narrative has been clear since his 2016 presidential campaign, when an old tape resurfaced capturing the ex-reality TV star boasting about using his celebrity status to get away with groping women. Opinion leaders penned his political obituary, concluding that he had killed off any hope of winning the White House — only to see

him ascend, phoenix-like, from the embers of scandal to defeat Hillary Clinton.

It is a playbook to which he has returned amid the legal woes overshadowing his 2024 campaign, with the now-familiar denunciations of a "witch hunt" orchestrated by Biden and his cabal of "Marxists and fascists." "They're not coming after me, they're coming after you — and I'm just standing in their way," is a regular applause line at Trump rallies, where the crowds who pack arenas to see the former president are as large and loud as ever.

Yet for critics, it is still too early for Trump to be picking out new curtains for the Oval Office. The tycoon may have sprung one of the biggest surprises in modern politics in 2016, but his "America First" movement has been blamed for Republican underachievement in almost every election since.

Nikki Haley — Trump's last standing opponent before he bagged the Republican nomination — repeatedly warned her party about his inability to broaden his appeal beyond his hard right, nativist base.

Bucking tradition, the 52-year-old withheld her endorsement when she bowed out after getting trounced in last

week's multistate "Super Tuesday" voting. Zelizer points out that come November, the man who has bragged that his supporters would eventually get "tired of winning" will face one of the few political foes he has never managed to beat.

And while Trump's legal troubles may not have impeded his march to the nomination, there is plenty of evidence in the polling that wavering voters would view a conviction in any of his criminal cases as disqualifying. His trial for covering up alleged hush money payments to a porn star in 2016 begins on March 25 in New York, and — if prosecutors get their way — Trump will face further court dates in Florida, Georgia and Washington. The ex-president — whose career-long stock-in-trade in legal disputes has been to force delays — is pinning his hopes on putting off some of these cases until an election victory that would greatly improve his chances of avoiding trial altogether.

But his chances of punting a verdict in New York into the post-election period are vanishingly small — meaning that, one way or another, his famous 'Teflon coating' will be put through its paces this year. — AFP

Biden blasts 'loser' Trump



US President Joe Biden speaks during a campaign event in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. — AFP

MILWAUKEE, US: President Joe Biden needed "loser" Donald Trump Wednesday, in his first battleground campaign stop since the two rivals secured their parties' nominations for what promises to be one of the most rancorous elections in US history. Speaking to supporters in Milwaukee in the crucial swing state of Wisconsin, the Democrat also blasted his hard-right Republican nemesis for describing immigrants as "vermin."

The return to the campaign trail came a day after incumbent Biden, 81, and Trump, 77, both won enough delegates to clinch their parties' nominations for a rematch in November.

"A lot of you helped me in 2020 and we made sure he was a loser. And we're going to make sure that happens again, right?" Biden told local supporters and volunteers in Milwaukee — the same city where Trump and his party will hold the Republican National Convention in July.

Biden has taken to repeatedly calling Trump a loser, knowing it rankles the defeated former president, who still refuses to acknowledge he lost four years ago. Wisconsin and Michigan, which Biden will visit on Thursday, were among the crucial states he flipped from Trump in their 2020 showdown and needs to win again to secure a second term. Biden took on Trump over immigration, a key issue in the election with the Republican resorting to increasingly hardline rhetoric as he bashes the Democrat over record numbers of people crossing the border from Mexico into the United States.

"We are a country of immigrants. They're not vermin," Biden said, referring to comments Trump made last year. Trump has also referred to immigrants "poisoning the blood of our country." Biden also addressed the issue of marijuana reform, which he called a priority in his State of the Union speech last week and which Democrats identify as important as they seek crucial young and ethnic minority voters.

Earlier in Milwaukee, Biden unveiled over \$3 billion in infrastructure investment to help "left behind" areas as he seeks to tout what he calls an "American comeback" for the economy. Biden embarked late last week on a tour of battleground states, buoyed by the fiery and well-received State of the Union address in which he again took aim at Trump.

The attacks underscored how bitter the next eight months of US politics promise to be, with the country's oldest ever pair of election candidates making no secret of the personal bitterness between them. Both men lashed out at each other after their nomination wins on Tuesday. — AFP

Ukraine steps up attacks as Putin urges Russians to vote

MOSCOW: Russian President Vladimir Putin on Thursday urged Russians to vote for him at a "difficult" time for the country, hours before polls open and as Kyiv launched a barrage of deadly attacks on Russian border regions.

The former KGB agent is set to extend his rule by another six years this weekend in a presidential election the Kremlin says will show that the country is fully behind his assault on Ukraine.

Ahead of the vote, Kyiv has ramped up its aerial

bombardment of Russian regions just across their shared border. At least two people were killed and nine wounded in the Russian region of Belgorod Thursday, and the Russian national guard said it was fighting off attacks from pro-Ukrainian militias in Kursk — the latest in a string of border clashes.

"I am convinced: you realize what a difficult period our country is going through, what complex challenges we are facing in almost all areas," Putin said in an address to Russians on the eve of the vote. "And in order to continue to respond to them with dignity and successfully overcome difficulties, we need to continue to be united and self-confident," he added.

All of Putin's major critics are dead, in prison or exile and authorities blocked the few genuine competitors who tried to stand in the March 15-17 contest. Alexei Navalny, Putin's most high-profile opponent over the last decade, died February in an Arctic prison colony.

worry for our young ones." The bicycle project was concocted by the national parks authority, Zimparks, and the International Fund for Animal Welfare, a charity. They hope it will tame tensions between the park and nearby farming communities. Deaths caused by wild animals in 2023 were down 26 percent on the previous year, but there are concerns the number might pick up again in 2024 as the tusked giants move further afield in search of water because of a drought exacerbated by the El Nino weather phenomenon.

"If left unattended, human-wildlife conflict poses a serious threat to the well-being of the communities and biodiversity integrity of the greater Hwange ecosystem," said Phillip Kuvawoga, IFAW landscape conservation director. The group is also setting up "predator-proof" livestock enclosures in villages where farmers complain donkeys and cattle are regularly mauled by big cats. Such initiatives help locals "appreciate the benefits of their wildlife heritage," said ZimParks director, Fulton Mangwanya. "Because the moment they don't see value in wildlife, you can be certain that it will be decimated through poaching and the like," he said.

With an estimated 100,000 animals, Zimbabwe has the second biggest elephant population in the

School kids cycle past elephant danger in Zimbabwe

HWANGE, Zimbabwe: Running into elephants or a pack of hyenas on the way to school is not an unusual experience for children living near a nature reserve in northwest Zimbabwe. Still, it can be dangerous. Wild animals killed 50 people and injured 85 more in the southern African country last year, and elephants are among the most dangerous. In order to shorten the amount of time kids are exposed on the route to school, park authorities have come up with an unconventional solution: bicycles.

Joaquim Homela, 12, is one of about 100 children who received a brand new two-wheeler that allows him to set off later, and avoid the pre-dawn hours when animals are most active. Until recently, he used to hurry on foot, accompanied by his grandmother. "Wild animals, particularly elephants as well as lions often roam around our villages," said the woman, Siphwe Moyo. "So we



HWANGE, Zimbabwe: A learner poses for a portrait after receiving a bicycle at Mabale Primary near Hwange National Park in Hwange. — AFP

world after Botswana — and it is growing. Thanks to conservation efforts, Hwange is home to 65,000 of them, more than four times capacity, according to ZimParks. Some can become aggressive, especially after interactions with farmers. Following the example of Botswana, Zimbabwe has approved the creation of a fund to compensate victims of wildlife, but it is yet to become operational. — AFP

International

UK govt's new extremism definition sparks backlash

Muslim, church leaders fear move could create 'division in society'

LONDON: The UK government on Thursday unveiled a new definition of extremism which will determine which organizations get public funds and meetings with officials, prompting criticism from various civic, political and religious groups.

The change comes weeks after Prime Minister Rishi Sunak warned of a "shocking increase in extremist disruption and criminality" that risked the country tipping into "mob rule".

Sunak's comments — made in a Downing Street address to the nation — follow months of controversial pro-Palestinian protests in British cities but were criticized by some as exaggerated and politically motivated. The marches protesting Zionist entity's military response to Hamas' attacks have attracted hundreds of thousands of people and have seen dozens arrested for anti-Semitic chanting and banners, promoting proscribed organizations and assaulting emergency workers.

The government has insisted the update to its 2011 definition of extremism — which applies to conduct that falls short of criminality — is "narrower and more precise". It was previously defined as "the vocal or active opposition to our fundamental values" such as "mutual respect and tolerance".

The new wording brands extremism "the promotion or advancement of an ideology based on violence, hatred or intolerance" that aims to "negate or destroy the fundamental rights and freedoms of others". It also intends to "undermine, overturn or replace the UK's system of liberal parliamentary democracy and democratic rights" or apply to those who "intentionally create a permissive environment for others to achieve".

Senior minister Michael Gove, responsible for the policy, will announce the change in the House of Commons Thursday morning, amid speculation he will use parliamentary privilege to name some

groups that will now be deemed extremist. The *Byline Times* media outlet said several prominent Muslim groups as well as far-right organizations were referenced in leaked draft plans it had seen.

The *Daily Mail* — typically supportive of Conservative policies — appeared skeptical about the new definition, cautioning an "authoritarian government of the future" could use it to "curb legitimate debate". In broadcast interviews, Gove insisted it was "not a restraint on free speech".

"It applies only to engagement with government," he noted, adding "individual extremist organizations have sought to take advantage of government patronage, money and influence". "We will keep these organizations at arms' length, so they can't benefit from access to government and its funds."

But the change sparked widespread criticism. Qari Asim, chairman of the Mosques and Imams Advisory Board, warned it could end up fuelling extremism and that the police may also be imposed inconsistently. "It will be applied subjectively," he told BBC radio, adding it risked creating "huge division in our society". "My fear is that potentially, this proposed definition will actually result in more extremism and people going underground and, as a result, being manipulated and exploited by those who are true extremists."

Lawmaker John Mann, the government's independent adviser on anti-Semitism, agreed that ministers should be prioritizing "bringing communities together". "I think that the government needs to listen to people who are advising that the politics of division will not work," he told the BBC. Church leaders too have aired concerns about its divisive impact. Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby said Wednesday that there was a danger "of hollowing out the centre... and driving people to one extreme or the other", adding that this was "very, very dangerous".



LONDON: (From left), Britain's Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Deputy PM Oliver Dowden, Britain's Prime Minister Rishi Sunak and Britain's Home Secretary James Cleverly reacting during the weekly session of PMQs in the House of Commons, in central London, on March 13, 2024. — AFP

Welby — who sits in the upper chamber House of Lords — has also criticized the government over its plan to send asylum seekers from the UK to Rwanda.

Sunak's ruling Conservative party has faced claims of Islamophobia in recent weeks, after a former deputy chairman accused London Mayor Sadiq Khan of links to Islamists. The prime minister has this week also been forced to apologize for report-

ed racist comments about a prominent black British MP by one of the party's biggest donors. Yasmine Ahmed, UK Director of Human Rights Watch, seized on the Conservatives' record in her criticism of "this unnecessary and unacceptable new definition".

"There is a fair case to be made that this government could now meet the threshold of an extremist organization," she added. — AFP

At NY airport, a migrant camp isolated from city

NEW YORK: Gusts of wind lash the runways of a former airfield in New York as migrant families with children slowly walk across, eyeing the city's world-famous skyline off in the distance. The field, described by aid workers as in the "middle of nowhere," is providing emergency shelter for 1,800 migrants, a potent symbol of the immigration crisis facing the American metropolis.

Asylum seekers flanked by hangars and runways tell AFP they want to "start over from scratch." Many of the migrants at Floyd Bennett Field come from Latin America and Africa, but some are from China and Russia. In large tents, with additional shared areas for eating and doing paperwork, up to 500 families sleep side-by-side in cramped, subdivided spaces.

"It's a bit difficult," says David Fernandez, 32, from Ecuador, describing cold, noisy conditions and the site's distance from the city. Manhattan's skyscrapers are visible from the runways, but still more than an hour away on public transport. There are no shops or other services in the immediate vicinity.

"We can't complain, because they're helping



NEW YORK: Migrants who arrived a few days ago from Eagle Pass, Texas, walk to the shelters at Floyd Bennett Field in the Brooklyn borough of New York. — AFP

us... We have a roof over our heads to rest under, and blankets," Fernandez says stoically, happy that his son, 11, and daughter, seven, got into a Brooklyn school.

In November the Fernandez family left their home in Ecuador, which has been gripped by drug violence. After almost two weeks journeying through Central America and a two-and-a-half day bus ride from Texas, they finally arrived in New York. "I have to stay in the camp until I can find a house and a job," says Fernandez, one of the 2.4 million to have illegally crossed from Mexico into the United States in 2023, creating a political divide between Democrats and Republicans in a presidential election year. — AFP

Dutch edge towards govt without Wilders as PM

THE HAGUE: Four months after far-right leader Geert Wilders swept to a stunning election win, the Netherlands appears poised for a breakthrough in forming a government — without the firebrand at the helm. The anti-Islam, anti-immigration Wilders announced Wednesday he was dropping — for now — a bid to lead the European Union's fifth economy due to a lack of broad support.

Kim Putters, the "informant" overseeing torturous coalition talks between four right-wing parties, sets out his recommendations in a hotly-awaited report later on Thursday. Party leaders have reportedly agreed to give up posts for themselves in favor of an "extra-parliamentary" cabinet made up of experts drawn from outside politics or loosely tied to parties.

Public broadcaster NOS said the normally dense coalition agreement would be shorter and less concrete — with the idea that parliament would have more say on individual policies. The last time the Netherlands had an "expert" government was in 1918 but the concept of a technocratic government is familiar to some other European countries, especially Italy.

Since the 1990s it has become common to call in unelected outsiders at times of crisis in Italian politics — notably in 2021 when European Central Bank Mario

Draghi became PM. It is not immediately clear how the system would work in the Netherlands, but Wilders is expected to take the lead in proposing a premier to replace current PM Mark Rutte.

The next step however is likely to be more talks between the four parties — Wilders' Freedom Party (PVV), farmers party BBB, centre-right Liberals VVD, and anti-corruption NSC. Negotiations between the four have been fractious throughout, with sniping on social media and major concerns over some of the PVV anti-Islam, anti-EU policy positions. Last month, NSC leader Pieter Omtzigt abruptly stormed out of the talks amid unbridgeable differences with Wilders, plunging the whole process into chaos.

But Putters appears to have smoothed ruffled feathers, gathering the four leaders at a country estate in the central Dutch countryside. Polls show that support for Wilders and his PVV party has only grown since his election win, when he clinched 37 seats out of 150 in the Dutch parliament.

Some surveys have him gaining as many as 50 seats if an election was held again, giving him an even more powerful position. "Do not forget: I will become prime minister of the Netherlands one day. With the support of even more Dutch," Wilders posted on X, formerly Twitter. "If not tomorrow, then the day after tomorrow. Because the voices of millions of Dutch will be heard!"

The far-right is increasingly performing well in elections in Europe but has struggled to translate votes into power as other parties refuse to work with them. In Portugal's elections this weekend for example, anti-immigration party Chega was the big winner, soaring to 48 seats from just 12 in last elections in 2022. — AFP

China blasts US TikTok vote...

Continued from Page 1

Mnuchin on Thursday said he is putting together a team of investors to buy TikTok from its Chinese owners, once the bill passed. "I think the legislation should pass and I think (TikTok) should be sold," Mnuchin told CNBC. Mnuchin, who served for four years as former president Donald Trump's treasury secretary, said that TikTok was "a great business and I'm going to put together a group to buy" the embattled app. "This should be owned by US businesses. There's no way that the Chinese would ever let a US company own something like this in China," Mnuchin said.

China has blocked Western online platforms such as Facebook and X (formerly Twitter) for years on its heavily-censored Internet. US lawmakers voted 352

in favor of the proposed law and 65 against, striking a rare note of unity in politically divided Washington. The White House has said President Joe Biden will sign the bill — known officially as the Protecting Americans from Foreign Adversary Controlled Applications Act — into law if it reaches his desk. But it faces a tricky path through the more cautious Senate, where some are wary of taking dramatic measures against an app with 170 million US users.

TikTok has consistently denied that it is under the control of China's Communist Party. Its CEO Shou Zi Chew has urged users to speak out against the vote, and several TikTok creators interviewed by AFP voiced opposition to the proposed ban. The app is at the center of long-running tensions between China and the United States, which have butted heads in recent years over technology, trade and human rights issues. Washington has cited national security concerns to limit the activities of some Chinese companies in the United States, as well as the export of certain technologies to China that it deems sensitive. — AFP

Aid efforts barely enough for Gaza...

Continued from Page 1

coast after departing Cyprus on Tuesday, the Marinetrade website showed on Thursday. Cyprus's foreign minister said a second, bigger vessel was being readied in Larnaca port for the maritime corridor which, senior United States administration officials have said, will later be complemented by a temporary pier off Gaza to be built by American troops.

Daily aid airdrops by multiple nations have been taking place this month, and Germany said it would join the effort. But the air and sea missions are "no alternative" to land deliveries, 25 organizations including Amnesty International and Oxfam said in a statement. "While a convoy of five trucks has the capacity to carry about 100 tons of lifesaving assistance, recent airdrops delivered only a few tons of aid each," they said.

Agnes Callamard, Amnesty's secretary general, added that the international community seems to have accepted that the war will drag on. "Why are you making an investment that is going to take two months?" she asked, referring to the Pentagon's timeline for setting up the temporary pier which, it said, could enable the provision of more than two million meals a day.

The Zionist entity has carried out a relentless campaign of bombardment and ground operations in Gaza, killing at least 31,341 people, most of them civilians, according to the territory's health ministry. The United Nations has reported difficulty in accessing Gaza's north with aid. On Tuesday, the Zionist military said the UN's World Food Programme had sent an initial six aid trucks directly into northern Gaza as part of a pilot project.

While efforts continue to get more assistance to the territory's 2.4 million people, the main United Nations aid agency in Gaza, UNRWA, said on Wednesday that a Zionist strike hit one of its food distribution warehouses in Rafah, killing an employee and wounding 22. The agency's chief, Philippe Lazzarini, said the attack "comes as food supplies are running out, hunger is widespread and, in some areas, turning into famine".

The Zionist entity said later a Hamas fighter was killed in a strike on Rafah and identified him as Muhammad Abu Hasna. Gaza's health ministry said he

was one of four people killed in the strike. Stephane Dujarric, spokesman for the United Nations secretary-general, told reporters that "the (Zionist) army received the coordinates... of this facility". It is the latest point of tension between the Zionist entity and UNRWA, the UN agency for Palestinian refugees, since the Zionist entity accused several UNRWA employees — out of around 30,000 it employs in the Middle East — of involvement in the attack that started the war.

Cypriot Foreign Minister Constantinos Kombos hosted a virtual meeting on Wednesday with United States Secretary of State Antony Blinken and other foreign officials to discuss the maritime corridor. "The ministers agreed that there is no meaningful substitute to land routes via Egypt and Jordan and entry points from the Zionist entity into Gaza for aid delivery at scale," they said in a joint statement.

They also called on the Zionist entity to open Ashdod port, north of Gaza, to complement the Mediterranean corridor. Senior officials would gather in Cyprus on Monday for "in-depth" briefings on the sea route, and would also discuss a possible "common fund" to support it, the statement said.

The Spanish charity vessel Open Arms left Cyprus for Gaza on Tuesday. It is towing a barge with 200 tons of aid, marking the first voyage along the sea corridor. Open Arms is a partner of the American charity World Central Kitchen founded by Jose Andres. He wrote on X, formerly Twitter, that a jetty to receive the aid had reached nearly 60 m in length. His post included images of a bulldozer working on a promontory whose location was not given.

The Zionist entity's army said the Open Arms vessel "underwent a comprehensive security check and was accompanied by (Zionist) officials to ensure that humanitarian aid alone reaches the Gaza Strip". By the shore in northern Gaza men including Eid Ayub waited. Whether by sea or air, the aid was not enough, Ayub said. "When this aid arrives, there's no entity to distribute it," he said, adding that merchants were taking advantage of shortages.

Around 1.5 million Palestinians have sought refuge along Gaza's southern border with Egypt in Rafah, where the Zionist entity has threatened to send in troops against Hamas. Rear Admiral Daniel Hagari, the Zionist military spokesman, late on Wednesday said "a significant amount" of those people, at least, would need to be moved "to a humanitarian island that we will create with the international community". — AFP

Syria war death toll over 507,000...

Continued from Page 1

Suhair Zakkout, Damascus-based spokesperson for the International Committee of the Red Cross, said 13 years of war have had "devastating consequences" on Syrians across the country, causing "unimaginable pain". "Syria has a full generation... who has only witnessed the loss, the displacement, the war, and they know nothing but these things," Zakkout said. Humanitarian organizations are working "to sustain the minimum level of the basic services" such as water and health so that "they don't collapse", Zakkout said.

UN-facilitated efforts towards a political process remain stalled. Special envoy Geir Pedersen said last month that Moscow and Damascus had rejected holding talks in Geneva, the venue for previous negotiations aimed at forging a new constitution for Syria. Last year, Syria returned to the Arab League, marking Assad's return to the regional fold after a suspension of more than a decade. — AFP



ARIHA, Syria: A Syrian youth buys bread at a market in this town in rebel-held northwestern Idlib province on the first day of Ramadan on March 11, 2024. — AFP

International

North Korean leader unveils and 'drives' new battle tank

Seoul and Washington wrap joint drills to improve deterrence

SEOUL: North Korea leader Kim Jong Un drove a "new-type main battle tank" while overseeing military training exercises, state media said Thursday, as Seoul and Washington wrap joint drills to improve deterrence.

Wearing a black leather jacket, Kim saluted ranks of camouflage-uniformed troops, and watched live-fire "training march" exercises from a field command post, flanked by top generals, images published by state media showed. After he reviewed the tank crews, Kim "mounted a new-type main battle tank, seized the control lever and drove the tank himself", the official Korean Central News Agency reported.

The KCNA report comes as Seoul and Washington hold the final day of their annual Freedom Shield exercises—involving missile interception drills and air assault, among others.

The nuclear-armed North has long condemned joint US-South Korea military drills, calling them rehearsals for an invasion. It has carried out weapons tests in the past as a response to previous joint exercises of this nature. Kim "expressed great satisfaction over the fact that the new-type main battle tank successfully demonstrated its very excellent striking power", the KCNA report said.

The North Korean leader also stressed the "importance of the role and duty of tankmen in modern warfare", as well as the "need to organize intensive exercises simulating an actual war".

Pyongyang last week warned that the South and the United States would pay a "dear price" over the Freedom Shield drills, and later announced that Kim had guided a large-scale artillery drill involving a unit that it said was capable of striking the South Korean capital. On Wednesday, South Korean Defense Minister Shin Won-sik visited the headquarters of the army's Special Warfare Command during the ongoing Washington-Seoul drills, which involved "mastering advanced combat skills".

This included "clearing operations" inside North Korea's "key facilities" in case of an attack by Pyongyang. "If Kim Jong Un wages war, you should become the world's strongest special warfare unit that quickly removes the enemy's leadership," Shin said during the visit.

So far this year, the North has declared South Korea its "principal enemy", jettisoned agencies dedicated to reunification and outreach, and threatened war over "even 0.001 mm" of territorial infringement. — AFP



North Korean leader Kim Jong Un (center) posing with personnel during a training competition between the combined forces of the Korean People's Army tank crews at an undisclosed location in North Korea. — AFP

NEWS IN BRIEF

Hunter Biden trial on June 3

WASHINGTON: A US federal judge on Wednesday set June 3 as the tentative date for the start of the trial of President Joe Biden's son Hunter on charges of illegal gun possession. District Judge Maryellen Noreika, in a court filing, set aside the weeks of June 3 and June 10 for a jury trial in Wilmington, Delaware, for the 54-year-old Hunter Biden. In October Hunter Biden pleaded not guilty to the gun charges. He also faces tax evasion charges in California. The judge in that case has said he is aiming for a trial to begin on June 20. — AFP

Quake hits Bosnia-Montenegro

PODGORICA, Montenegro: A 5.4 magnitude quake struck the border region between Montenegro and Bosnia early on Thursday, the US Geological Survey (USGS) said. The quake's epicenter was around 30 kilometers (19 miles) from the town of Niksic in western Montenegro, and 25 kilometers from the Bosnian town of Bileca. There were no immediate reports of damage or casualties. The tremor had a depth of about 7.6 kilometers and was felt as far away as the Bosnian capital Sarajevo, more than 200 kilometers (124 miles) away. — AFP

IAEA: Fukushima leak 'minor incident'

TOKYO: A leak last month at Japan's Fukushima nuclear plant was "a minor incident" unrelated to the release of treated wastewater, International Atomic Energy Agency head Rafael Grossi said on Thursday. Plant operator TEPCO reported the leak in early February at a part of the site that processes radioactive water. It said no sign of contamination had been detected outside the plant, which suffered a devastating meltdown in 2011. Grossi, on a three-day tour of Japan that included a visit to Fukushima, described the incident as "a splash from one side of the facility". — AFP

Armenians to discuss EU entry

YEREVAN: Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan on Thursday called for broad public dialogue on the prospect of applying for EU membership, as the ex-Soviet country's ties with Russia fray. Moscow's war in Ukraine has reignited the EU's drive to enlarge, with Brussels putting EU-aspirants Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia on a formal membership path after years of reluctance. Armenia's shift from Moscow highlights discontent over what the Caucasus nation's government has said was Russia's failure to protect it in the face of security threats from arch-foe neighbor Azerbaijan. — AFP

Former Fiji PM found guilty

SUVA: Former Fiji prime minister Frank Bainimarama was found guilty Thursday of illegally shutting down a sensitive police investigation, local media and a court official said. Bainimarama, a former military commander who became an elected leader, was convicted of perverting the course of justice while leading the South Pacific nation. The charges related to a police investigation into staff at Fiji's University of the South Pacific in July 2020, when Bainimarama was prime minister. — AFP

1 dead, 29 rescued after Australian gold mine collapse

SYDNEY: Search teams pulled a body from the rubble of a collapsed Australian gold mine on Thursday, after a major rescue operation earlier freed 29 workers trapped underground. A crew of 30 miners was working deep inside the Ballarat Gold Mine in the state of Victoria when it caved in on Wednesday evening.

While 29 of the workers were rescued within hours, a 37-year-old man was helplessly pinned by the tumbling rocks. Emergency services toiled through the night to dig the man from the debris, some three kilometers (1.9 miles) from the mine entrance.

His body was eventually pulled from the mine on Thursday morning. Union officials have raised questions about the mine's safety record—it collapsed in 2007 when owned by another company—and the site's current owner now faces a major workplace safety probe.

"My inspectors and investigators have been on site since last night," said Narelle Beer, executive director of the state's workplace safety regulator WorkSafe Victoria. "It will be a complex, detailed investigation. And we're very keen to understand how we can ensure that a tragedy like this never occurs again." Australian Workers Union state secretary Ronnie Hayden said the collapse was "devastating".

"But it's even more devastating because this should have been avoided," Hayden said the union would push state authorities to pursue a case under "industrial manslaughter" legislation. "Our members are angry. Our organizers are angry," he said. Union members had raised concerns about the mine's use of "air legging", a form of two-person manual drilling, the union boss said. "It seems to have fallen on deaf ears."

Ballarat Mayor Des Hudson said the incident would "ripple through the Ballarat Gold Mine organisation for days, weeks and months". "Not just through the recovery phase, but also through the investigation into what happened," he told AFP. "We are a community built on

Taiwan, China in joint search for 2 missing fishermen

TAIPEI: Taiwan and China are carrying out a joint search-and-rescue mission for two missing crew members after a Chinese fishing boat capsized Thursday near an outlying Taiwanese island, killing two, Taipei's coast guard said.

The coast guard dispatched four patrol vessels after it received a report around 6 am Thursday (2200

Thaksin makes first public appearance since release

CHIANG MAI: Thailand's former prime minister Thaksin Shinawatra visited his hometown in the kingdom's north on Thursday as he made his first public appearances since being freed early from a jail sentence for graft and abuse of power. The controversial billionaire, twice elected premier and ousted in a 2006 military coup, prayed at the Bangkok City Pillar Shrine before flying by private jet to Chiang Mai for a three-day trip.

After landing in Chiang Mai—his home city and traditional political power base—at around 9:40 am local time (0240 GMT) he was greeted by his younger sister and her husband before heading to a park and greeting supporters. "Seventeen years I've been waiting for him," Samniang Kongpolpam, who travelled from northeastern Surin province, told AFP at the park. Alongside him was Bangkok taxi driver Paisal, who had journeyed to



BALLARAT, Australia: This frame grab taken from video footage provided by Australian Broadcast Corporation (ABC) on March 14, 2024 shows security personnel at a gate of an Australian gold mine that collapsed on March 13, 2024. — AFP

gold. Gold still has a significant role to play in Ballarat."

Victoria police said the "rockfall" at the mine also injured a 21-year-old man, who was airlifted to hospital in a "serious condition". Twenty-eight workers took refuge in a safety pod, they said.

Ballarat Gold Mine told AFP on Thursday morning that it had "no statement at this time". Police confirmed on Thursday the mine was cooperating with their investigation. The Australian Workers Union raised safety concerns in 2021 under the mine's previous operator, an Australian subsidiary of Singapore-listed Shen Yao Holdings. An investigation by WorkSafe Victoria revealed flaws in the mine's safety plan and said that serious injury or fatalities could occur if emergency services relied on those plans for rescues.

GMT Wednesday) that the boat carrying six people had sunk 1.07 nautical miles southwest of the Kinmen Islands' Dongding islet. The joint operation, which includes six Chinese rescue ships, comes a month to the day after the Taiwanese coast guard's pursuit of a Chinese fishing boat in the area left two men dead, fuelling ongoing tensions between Taipei and Beijing.

"With the joint efforts of the search-and-rescue units of both sides and the Dongding Garrison", two crew members were rescued while two others "showed no signs of life", the coast guard said in a statement. Kinmen is a territory administered by Taipei but located five kilometers (three miles) from the Chinese city of Xiamen. On February 14, a Chinese vessel carrying four people capsized near Kinmen while being pursued by

the Taiwanese coast guard, throwing all on board into the water. Two of the crew died and two others were rescued and temporarily detained in Kinmen.

A survivor reportedly said the boat was "rammed", though Taiwan insists the coast guard was following legitimate procedures as the vessel had entered "prohibited waters". Beijing accused Taiwan of "seeking to evade their responsibilities and hide the truth" about the incident, while a Taiwanese coast guard official has said the boat involved was zigzagging, "lost its balance and capsized" while trying to evade a patrol vessel.

Since the February 14 incident, Taiwan's coast guard chief said an average of six to seven Chinese vessels have been in waters around Kinmen. — AFP

see the former politician he called "the PM of my heart".

Thaksin planted a sapling at the park to mark his visit, and released fish into a lake as a Buddhist act of "merit-making". While in the north, Thaksin will meet family and supporters and pray at the graves of his relatives. Earlier, scores of media camped out in front of the Bangkok shrine where Thaksin, wearing a blue shirt and a neck brace, prayed from around 5:00 am.

He was accompanied by his daughter Paetongtarn, now head of his Pheu Thai party, and her husband. Thaksin, 74, returned to the kingdom in August last year after 15 years of self-exile, and was immediately jailed for eight years on charges dating back to his time in power. But his sentence was cut to one year by King Maha Vajiralongkorn within days of his return, and last month the government said Thaksin was eligible for early release because of his age and poor health.

The former Manchester City owner's return to Thailand came shortly after Pheu Thai took power at the head of a coalition government that includes parties close to his old foes in the military.

The timing of his return led many to conclude a backroom deal had been struck to cut his jail time, a suggestion denied by the Pheu Thai-led government. Ramet



CHIANG MAI, Thailand: Thailand's former prime minister Thaksin Shinawatra (center) and his daughter Paetongtarn Shinawatra (centre right) wave during a visit to Chiang Mai on March 14, 2024. — AFP

Rattanachaweng, spokesman for the royalist Democrat party, said the public would be watching closely to see if Thaksin is being given special treatment. "He is on parole. If he gets something beyond regular regulations, the probation and corrections departments will have to explain themselves," Ramet said. — AFP

Business

FRIDAY, MARCH 15, 2024

World oil demand grows amid Red Sea shipping impasse: IEA

Paris and Frankfurt stock markets hit fresh record highs, oil prices jump

PARIS: Global oil demand is forecast to grow more than expected due to a brighter US economic outlook and rising fuel needs of ships rerouted away from the Red Sea, the International Energy Agency said Thursday.

Commercial ships have been taking longer and costlier journeys around the southern tip of Africa to avoid attacks by Yemen's Houthi rebels in the Red Sea, a vital international trade route.

The IEA said world oil demand growth is now forecast to increase by 1.3 million barrels per day (bpd) this year, 110,000 bpd higher than in its previous monthly market report. "Disruptions to international trade routes in the wake of turmoil in the Red Sea are lengthening shipping distances and leading to faster vessel speeds, increasing bunker demand," the IEA said, using a term for the fuel needs of ships.

Global demand is also driven by the "comparatively buoyant economy" of the United States where oil consumption is gaining momentum on rising petrochemical operations, the IEA added. The annual growth in demand, however, remains sharply lower than in 2023, when it reached 2.3 million bpd, on the back of energy efficiency gains and the use of electric vehicles, the Paris-based agency said. Total de-

mand is forecast to reach 103.2 million bpd in 2024 compared to 101.8 million bpd last year.

Meanwhile, the Paris and Frankfurt stock markets hit fresh record highs Thursday as investors eye interest-rate cuts from the Federal Reserve and European Central Bank as inflation cools. Paris struck an all-time peak above 8,200 points and Frankfurt reached a new summit past 18,000. Bitcoin hit a fresh record high at \$73,797. "Lower interest rates are conducive to company growth and economic growth helping indices higher," noted Fiona Cincotta, markets analyst at City Index trading group.

She cautioned, however, that "inflation is sticky, and data later today will shed light on the continued resilience of the jobs market and the consumer" in the United States.

Asian traders also moved cautiously. Hong Kong retreated for a second day after a recent rally, while Shanghai, Sydney, Jakarta and Wellington were also lower.

Tokyo rose on a weaker yen, though traders are awaiting a Bank of Japan meeting next week as speculation swirls that policymakers may begin moving away from an ultra-loose monetary policy—the opposite issue facing most Western economies.



FRANKFURT: Brokers are pictured at the stock exchange in Frankfurt, Germany. German stocks soared past 18,000 points on Thursday hitting a new record high, on growing expectations that central banks will begin cutting interest rates this year. — AFP

Singapore, Seoul, Taipei, Mumbai, Manila and Bangkok also rose. Investors are keeping tabs on China-US tensions after the House of Representatives overwhelmingly approved a bill that would force

TikTok's Chinese ByteDance owner to divest from the company or see the platform banned in the United States. China warned the decision will "inevitably come back to bite the United States".

Tech suffers

On Wall Street, share price pullbacks Wednesday for tech giants including Nvidia, Apple and Tesla weighed on the S&P 500 and Nasdaq, though the Dow ended slightly higher. Italy's competition authority on Thursday fined TikTok 10 million euros (\$11 million), saying the hugely popular video app had failed to sufficiently protect minors. That came as the European Commission sent formal requests for information to TikTok, Facebook, X and other online platforms to examine how they are countering artificial intelligence risks such as deepfakes. The EC on Thursday additionally sent a formal request for information from LinkedIn, Microsoft's networking platform for professionals, about how users' personal information is being used for targeting advertising. Oil prices ticked higher, having rallied more than two percent Wednesday in reaction to falling US stockpiles and news that Ukraine had hit Russian refineries. — AFP

SpaceX poised for third test launch of Starship

BOCA CHICA AND MEDFORD COLONIA, US: SpaceX plans on Thursday to attempt another launch of Starship, the world's most powerful rocket that is vital to NASA's plans for landing astronauts on the Moon later this decade—and Elon Musk's hopes of eventually colonizing Mars.

Two previous attempts have ended in spectacular explosions, though that's not necessarily a bad thing: The company has adopted a rapid trial-and-error approach in order to accelerate development, and the strategy has brought success in the past.

Blastoff from the company's launch site in southeast Texas is planned for 8:10 local time (1310 GMT) with weather 70 percent favorable, SpaceX said Thursday morning.

SpaceX will run a webcast on its website starting thirty minutes earlier. When the two stages of Starship are combined, the rocket stands 397 feet (121 meters) tall—beating the Statue of Liberty by a comfortable 90 feet. Its Super Heavy Booster produces 16.7 million pounds (74.3 Meganewtons) of thrust, almost double that of the world's second most powerful rocket, NASA's Space Launch System (SLS) — though the latter is now certified, while Starship is still a prototype.

Starship's third launch test in its fully stacked configuration is set to be its most ambitious yet.

Objectives include opening and closing Starship's payload door to test its ability to deliver satellites and other cargo into space. SpaceX also aims to re-light the ship's engines in space, and perform an onboard test that will help pave the way for future Starships to refuel one another in orbit.

Starship's planned trajectory sees it achieve orbit then make a controlled splashdown in the Indian Ocean, just over an hour after launch. SpaceX has



BOCA CHICA AND MEDFORD COLONIA, US: People gather as SpaceX Starship spacecraft prototype is being transported from the launch site ahead of the SpaceX Starship third flight test from Starbase in Boca Chica, Texas. — AFP

been developing prototypes of Starship since 2018, and early tests involved short hops of just the upper stage, which is also referred to as Starship.

The first "integrated" test came in April 2023. SpaceX was forced to blow up Starship within a few minutes of launch, because the two stages failed to separate. The rocket disintegrated into a ball of fire and crashed into the Gulf of Mexico, sending a dust cloud over a town several miles (kilometers) away.

The second test in November 2023 fared slightly better: The booster separated from the spaceship, but both then exploded over the ocean, in what the company euphemistically called a "rapid unscheduled disassembly." The FAA closed a probe into the incident last month after identifying 17 corrective actions SpaceX needed to make.

SpaceX's "rapid iterative development" strategy has paid off for the company in the past: Notably its Falcon 9 rockets that have come to be workhorses for NASA and the commercial sector, its Dragon capsule that sends astronauts and cargo to the International Space Station, and its Starlink internet satellite constellation that now covers dozens of countries.

But the clock is ticking down for SpaceX to be ready for NASA's planned return of astronauts to the Moon in 2026, using a modified Starship as the lander vehicle. Not only does SpaceX need to prove it can launch, fly and land Starship safely—it must eventually also show it can send multiple "Starship tankers" into orbit to refuel a main Starship for its onward journey to the Moon. — AFP

Retail sales in US rebound less than expected in Feb

WASHINGTON: US consumer spending warmed slightly in February, according to government data released Thursday, with retail sales regaining ground on the back of higher temperatures. Retail sales bounced 0.6 percent last month to \$700.7 billion after sliding 1.1 percent in January, said the Commerce Department.

The January decline was the biggest in almost a year, causing some concern as a significant spending slowdown could pour cold water on hopes that consumption continues being a key economic driver. From a year ago, retail sales were up 1.5 percent, said the Commerce Department. Sales at motor vehicle and parts dealers helped to support the uptick, rising 1.6 percent between January and February.

Excluding autos, retail sales rose by a smaller magnitude at 0.3 percent. Meanwhile, spending at furniture stores slipped, while sales at restaurants and bars were still up 0.4 percent. Gas station sales rose 0.9 percent in February. Analysts are expecting consumption in the first quarter will grow at a slightly slower rate than in the final months of 2023. If so, that would "quash fears -- for a while, at least -- of a hard landing triggered by January's retail data," said Pantheon Macroeconomics in a recent report.

"Still, the case for a gradual but sustained slowdown in growth in consumers' spending from 2023's robust pace is persuasive," Pantheon warned. — AFP

Spain govt drops 2024 budget bill, opts for extension

MADRID: Spain's left-wing government will not present a bill for the state's 2024 budget and will instead extend the current one for the rest of this year, a government source told AFP. The decision was taken following Wednesday's announcement of snap elections in the Catalonia region, which could spell problems for the government of Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez to muster the necessary parliamentary support to ensure the budget passes.

With the Catalan elections "the political conditions change" and "parliamentary arithmetic is key to advancing the state budget," admitted Juan Espadas, spokesman for Sanchez's Socialist party.

Speaking to Cadena Ser radio on Wednesday night, Treasury Minister Maria Jesus Montero said the government was trying to be "realistic" in light of the changing political panorama and would instead "work on the budget for 2025". The 2024 budget should have been approved by the end of last year but was delayed due to an extended period of uncertainty following last July's general election which resulted in a hung parliament.

Sanchez eventually secured a new four-year term in November following months of talks which involved the key support of two Catalan separatist parties, the hardline JxCat and its more moderate rival ERC. His minority government relies on a fragile network of parliamentary allies to pass legislation.

The 2023 budget was initially extended on Jan 1. Catalonia's snap elections, which will take place on May 12, will monopolize the attention of JxCat and ERC and likely condition any parliamentary support they might offer to Sanchez's Socialist party, which will also be contesting the regional vote. — AFP

Biden opposes US Steel sale to Nippon Steel

WASHINGTON: President Joe Biden said on Thursday he opposed the proposed sale of US Steel to Japan's Nippon Steel, in a move that could annoy Washington's close Asia-Pacific ally Tokyo. Biden's intervention comes less than a month before he is due to host Japan's Prime Minister Fumio Kishida for a state visit to the White House to underscore ties.

"It is important that we maintain strong American steel companies powered by American steel workers. I told our steel workers I have their backs, and I meant it," Biden said in a statement.

"US Steel has been an iconic American steel company for more than a century, and it is vital for it to remain an American steel company that is domestically owned and operated."

The deal remains under US federal security review. Biden's statement comes as the Democrat tries to woo US unions ahead of November's presidential election, in which he will compete for working class voters with Republican former president Donald Trump. US Steel is based in Pittsburgh in the key battleground state of Pennsylvania, which Biden will need to win again as he did in the 2020 election if he is to beat Trump. The two companies unveiled Nippon's planned \$14.1 billion acquisition of Pittsburgh-based US Steel in December but it immediately faced opposition from several quarters.



The White House said at the time that the deal should be closely investigated, warning that it could have national security implications. The firms in December asked the Committee on Foreign Investment in the United States (CFIUS) — an interagency body established to review foreign takeovers of US firms—to evaluate the deal. Unions have reacted with fury to the proposed deal, despite the combined company's vow to honor contract agreements between US Steel and the United Steelworkers (USW) union. In December the USW ripped the proposed

deal as reflective of a "greedy, shortsighted attitude" of US Steel, which dates to 1901, and questioned the ability of Nippon to honor contracts.

At the time the transaction also drew bipartisan howls on Capitol Hill, with Pennsylvania Democratic Senator John Fetterman calling the deal "absolutely outrageous." Trump-allied Ohio Senator JD Vance and two other Republicans asked Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen, who chairs CFIUS, to block the deal, calling domestic steel production "vital to US national security." — AFP

Kuwait's fiscal balance returns to deficit in 9-month FY23/24

Revenues fall 27% y/y to KD 15.5bn on lower oil prices and output

KUWAIT: Kuwait's Ministry of Finance data show that the government recorded a fiscal deficit of KD 1.7 billion for the first nine months of the current fiscal year (FY2023/24), after an exceptional surplus in the same period of the previous fiscal year. The deficit was due to a combination of much lower oil revenues and a broad surge in spending above historic trends. Given no big change in oil prices so far in 2024, and assuming the typical jump in spending towards the end of the fiscal year, a wider deficit is likely in the closing accounts of FY23/24. The switch back to a deficit highlights the public finances' continued exposure to volatile oil revenues and the structural impact of high current spending.

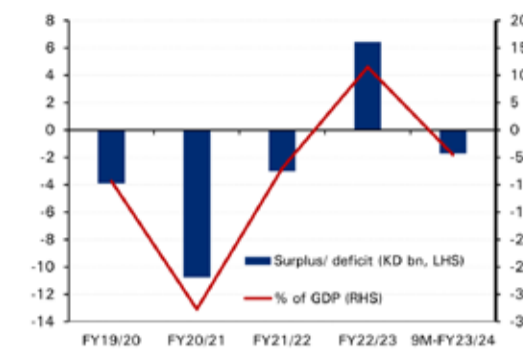
The fiscal deficit was around 4.5 percent of pro-rated estimated GDP in the first nine months (April-December) of FY2023/24, from a surplus of KD 10.1 billion in the same period of FY2022/23. Almost half of the year-on-year worsening in the balance was due to a drop in revenues linked to lower oil prices and OPEC+ production cuts, which were recently extended until mid-2024.

The rest was due to a surge in spending, which although expected due to a record size budget (including some exceptional items), came at a notably higher rate of allocations compared to previous years, which could be an indication of a change in bookkeeping practices. Still, a sizeable portion (KD 9 billion or 35 percent) of the budget expenditure allocation remains unused, and with the historical actual/budgeted spending ratio at around 95 percent, spending is likely to accelerate in the final months of the year. Together with a lower oil price average so far in the final quarter of FY23/24, the deficit is likely to widen to above KD 3 billion by the end of the fiscal year, exceeding our previous forecast of KD 2.2 billion.

Broad increase in current spending

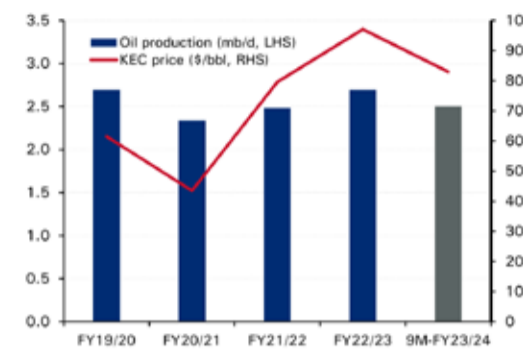
The 9M saw a jump in total expenditures by 56 percent y/y to KD 17.2 billion, 65 percent of the full-year budget allocation. Current spending which constitutes the vast majority, rose by 59 percent y/y to KD 16.5 billion, with a broad increase across all spending categories, but mostly in compensation of employees, goods and services and subsidies which rose sharply from the previous year. As mentioned above, the higher spending can be partly owed to

Chart 1: Fiscal balance



Source: Ministry of Finance (MoF)

Chart 2: Oil price and production



Source: OPEC, MoF

a large budget, which added KD 3.3 billion in current spending, around half of which (KD 1.6 billion) was one-off arrears and vacation allowances. The remainder comes from budgeted increases in other items including wages & salaries, social security, cost of living and student allowances, and MoH pharmaceuticals. Further, nine-month spending as a percentage of the pro-rated budget allocation was an elevated 87 percent in FY23/24 compared to only 63 percent the previous year, reflecting the higher than usual pace of spending. Finally, the higher spending

came despite a lower oil price average (-16 percent y/y) which would normally lead to lower fuel related outlays under subsidies and goods and services.

Capital expenditure

Capital expenditure continued to decline, with 9M cumulative outlays down 6.2 percent y/y to only KD 763 million. Outlays were 39 percent of the full-year budget allocation, which was at a recent low of KD 1.83 billion. Low capital spending reflects a multi-year negative trend despite the large projects

Table 1: Public finances

	First 9M, KD bn			% y/y	
	FY2021/22	FY2022/23	FY2023/24	FY2022/23	FY2023/24
Revenues	13.0	21.2	15.4	63	-27
Non-oil	11.5	20.0	14.3	74	-28
Oil	1.5	1.2	1.2	-20	-3
Total Expenditures	13.7	11.1	17.2	-19	55
Current Expenditures	12.6	10.3	16.5	-18	59
Compensation of Employees	6.0	2.7	6.2	-54	127
Goods & Services	2.2	2.6	3.8	20	48
Subsidies	0.5	0.2	0.9	-57	356
Grants	2.8	3.7	4.2	35	11
Social Subsidies	0.6	0.5	0.5	-24	4
Miscellaneous & Transfers	0.6	0.6	0.9	-2	41
Capital Expenditures	1.1	0.8	0.7	-28	-6
Budget Balance	-0.7	10.1	-1.7	---	---

Source: Ministry of Finance

in the state's development plan, making room for increased current spending and reflecting ongoing liquidity constraints. In addition, the decline could be attributed to the political turbulence of recent years, which may have affected the decision-making and execution process. With that said, the pace of decline was slower than previous years, implying that spending could stabilize before potentially recovering to levels consistent with long-term development goals. This will depend on liquidity-enhancing reforms which could spur a revival in capex.

Revenues fall

Revenues fell 27 percent y/y to KD 15.5 billion in 9M FY 23/24, reaching 79 percent of the full-year budget, though well below historical levels despite the typically conservative budget revenue assumptions. The drop was due to the exceptionally high oil revenues in the previous fiscal year, combined with a decline in oil prices, and below budget production of 2.55 mb/d (vs 2.65 mb/d) due to OPEC constraints. With production limits expected to continue until mid-2024, and softer oil prices so far this year, oil revenues could be close to the budget projection of KD 17.2 billion by the end of the fiscal year. Meanwhile, non-oil revenues amounted to KD 1.2 billion, 51 percent of the full year budget and with the fiscal year drawing to a close in March, non-oil revenues could fall slightly short of the 10 percent increase outlined in the budget.

Public finances

Given the record size of the FY23/24 budget and that cumulative spending was well above trend in the first nine-fiscal months, expenditure is on track to reach a record level in the FY23/24 closing account – although uncertainty over the likely size of the year-end jump in spending makes projections difficult. The draft budget for FY24/25 projects a KD 1.7 billion or 6.6 percent b/b decline in spending, but this is mostly due to the omission of the prior mentioned one-off items from the previous budget and recurring current spending (mostly wages and subsidies driven) remains high. As expenditure continues to rise to critical levels, the vulnerability of the government's finances to oil price volatility becomes more pronounced, stressing the need for swift reforms to address structural weaknesses and to promote fiscal sustainability.

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Business

New US climate envoy: China must speed up coal transition

Beijing has pledged to bring its carbon dioxide emissions to net zero by 2060

TOKYO: China should speed up its transition away from coal, the new chief US climate negotiator John Podesta said Thursday, calling for Beijing to "take their responsibility seriously".

"China is the largest emitter (of greenhouse gases) in the world... They still have online in my view more coal than they need, and more coal than is good for the health of the world," Podesta said in Tokyo. He praised Beijing's role in the UN's COP28 conference in Dubai in December when nations agreed to triple global renewables capacity this decade and to "transition away" from fossil fuels.

But Podesta added: "We just hope that (China's) transition away from coal would be a little faster than their current schedule." The United States was moving to "decarbonize" its power sector, he told an event. "We are historically the world's largest emitter but we take that responsibility seriously," Podesta said.

"Now China is by far the world's largest emitter. They need to take their responsibility seriously." He said it was key to keep communicating, and noted that China was "the fastest deployer of renewable power in the world". Despite frictions in other areas, on climate change Beijing and Washington have found some common ground.

In November Podesta's predecessor John Kerry and his Chinese counterpart Xie Zhenhua met in California, and issued a major joint statement calling for an acceleration of renewables.

In an earlier interview with Japan's Mainichi daily, Podesta said he and his new Chinese counterpart Liu Zhenmin have agreed to meet in-person in the future. China has pledged to bring its carbon dioxide emissions 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 al-

ternatives to fossil fuels and cutting the carbon intensity of its economy by 2025. But the country's energy-guzzling rebound from the pandemic means "all of these targets are severely off track after 2023", according to a report released last month by the Finland-based Centre for Research on Energy and Clean Air. There are fears that a victory by Donald Trump in November's US presidential elections could deal a serious blow to coordinated international efforts to tackle climate change. Podesta said that in the United States at least, there was considerable support for moving away from fossil fuels because people were seeing that the transition was creating jobs.

The US election is "a choice that the American people are going to have to make", Podesta said.

"And I think that when it comes to the climate side of that, there is no question that a majority of the American people support the direction that we are going in." — AFP



TOKYO: Senior Advisor to the US President for International Climate Policy John Podesta speaks at a seminar symposium in Tokyo on March 14, 2024. — AFP

NBK urges regular review of account activity or suspicious transactions

KUWAIT: Pursuing its active role to promote financial awareness and inclusion among all segments of society, National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) continues to support the "Let's Be Aware" campaign launched by the Central Bank of Kuwait, in collaboration with local banks and Kuwait Banking Association (KBA).

In this context, NBK highlights the necessity to regularly review account activity made and follow up credit re-

ports to promptly identify any unauthorized or suspicious transactions.

Typically, unauthorized payments after stealing credit cards, banking or personal information, or hacking smartphones through fake apps. Therefore, NBK advises customers to review account activity regularly to detect any unusual transactions, as well as to change passwords regularly and not reuse them or using the same password for

more than one account.

NBK also urges customers to beware of unwanted requests for personal information, and to avoid clicking on suspicious or unknown links, downloading attachments and apps using public Wi-Fi networks, or conducting any banking transactions using these networks being insecure. The bank also advised customers to use strong passwords that contain letters, numbers and special characters that are difficult to guess in order to keep

bank cards and personal information secure. It also urged them to keep always updated on the latest fraud trends and educating themselves on the best practices to prevent suspicious or unauthorized payments.

NBK affirms that it will never ask customers for personal information via e-mail, SMS or phone calls, warning them of responding to such messages representing fraud attempts to obtain their banking information. The bank intensifies awareness by publishing educational content including video clips and text communications, as well as awareness tips on all its social media platforms and other digital channels, in addition to reposting of CBK's related communications. This aims to increase awareness among all segments of society and familiarize them with different fraud

types and techniques, and the precautions to steer clear of these threats.

NBK employs its strong customer communication capabilities as well as all its digital channels, which are the most popular among all Kuwaiti banks, to support the Central Bank's endeavors to protect customers and the economy. It is worth mentioning that NBK is a key advocate and participant in all CBK's campaigns and initiatives to increase financial and banking awareness among different segments of society. As a leading financial institution, locally and regionally, NBK frequently organizes various activities to raise awareness on all topics related to the banking sector, as well as many training courses for its employees to enhance their knowledge and expertise in the areas of combating fraud and financial crime.



dirayakw.com

Foxconn reports 33% rise in Q4 net profit

TAIPEI: Taiwanese tech giant Foxconn on Thursday reported a 33 percent jump in net profit during the final three months of 2023, marking the second straight quarter of growth for the Apple supplier. The firm — also known by its official name Hon Hai Precision Industry — is the world's biggest contract electronics manufacturer and assembles devices for several companies, most notably Apple's iPhones.

It said net profit for October-December rose to Tw\$53.1 billion (US\$1.6 billion). The strong figures follow better-than-expected profits in its third quarter thanks to rising demand ahead of the holiday season. The boost came on the heels of two consecutive quarterly misses — with January-March seeing a drop of 56 percent and a one percent fall in the following three months.

Foxconn is China's largest private-sector employer, with more than a million workers nationwide. But the company has been looking to diversify its manufacturing supply chain after it saw production hit by strict COVID restrictions in China and diplomatic tensions with the United States. — AFP

Shell dilutes climate targets, sparking activist anger

LONDON: UK oil and gas giant Shell on Thursday watered down key targets on cutting carbon emissions, sparking anger from climate campaigners, but kept its pledge for net zero by 2050. The London-listed group, which is investing heavily in renewables, revealed the news in an energy transition update published alongside its annual report.

Shell said it had diluted its climate targets, including on "net carbon intensity", a measurement of emissions produced by each unit of energy sold by Shell.

The group said net carbon intensity would be cut 15-20 percent by 2030 compared to 2016 levels. That marked a dilution from its previous 20-percent target due to a slowdown in electricity sales. It similarly reduced a target on curbing customer emissions from the use of Shell oil products. Shell added that it would drop a plan to slash net carbon intensity by 45 percent by 2035 due to "uncertainty in the pace of change in the energy transition". However, it still targets a 100-percent reduction by 2050.

Green campaigners lashed out at the company's latest stance, arguing it was counter to the 2015 Paris climate accord, which seeks to limit the increase in average global temperatures to 1.5 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels. "Shell backtracks on climate targets," said environmental activist shareholders' group Follow This. It said the company was betting "on the failure of the Paris climate agreement".

"The company wants to stay in fossil fuels as long as possible," it warned, declaring that the move "not



LONDON: UK oil and gas giant Shell on Thursday watered down key targets on cutting carbon emissions, sparking anger from climate campaigners.

only endangers the global economy by exacerbating the climate crisis but also puts the company's future at risk". However, Shell insisted it sought a "balanced and orderly transition away from fossil fuels to low-carbon energy solutions to maintain secure and affordable energy supplies".

Shell still aims to halve emissions generated by its own operations — so-called Scope 1 and 2 activities — by 2030 compared with 2016. It achieved 60 percent of this target by the end of 2023.

"Today, the world must meet growing demand for energy while tackling the urgent challenge of climate change," Shell chief executive Wael Sawan in the

update. It confirmed plans to invest between \$10-15 billion by the end of 2025 in low-carbon energy.

The group also revealed that Sawan was paid a total £8.0 million (\$10.25 million) in 2023, his first year as CEO. That sparked additional fury at a time when millions of Britons are still struggling under a cost-of-living crisis sparked by elevated domestic energy bills.

"Shell's CEO pay packet is a bitter pill to swallow for the millions of workers living with the high costs of energy," said Jonathan Noronha-Gant, senior fossil fuels campaigner at pressure group Global Witness. — AFP

AstraZeneca buys French firm Amolyt for \$1bn

LONDON: Anglo-Swedish pharmaceuticals giant AstraZeneca on Thursday agreed to buy French biotech specialist Amolyt Pharma for about \$1 billion, expanding further into the field of rare drugs. "AstraZeneca ... has entered into a definitive agreement to acquire Amolyt Pharma, a clinical-stage biotechnology company focused on developing novel treatments for rare endocrine diseases," it said in a statement.

The London-listed group added that the transaction would bolster its rare diseases division Alexion.

It will pay \$800 million upfront for the Lyon-based company, plus an additional payment of \$250 million payable after a specified regulatory milestone is reached. "We enthusiastically welcome the proposed acquisition of Amolyt by AstraZeneca, an organization that shares our dedication to delivering life-changing treatments to people living with rare diseases," added Amolyt Pharma chief executive Thierry Abribat. "This agreement offers the opportunity to meaningfully advance our pipeline therapies." AstraZeneca's share price was up 0.1 percent in early morning London trading following the news.

"The deal adds weight behind Astra's rare disease division," said Sophie Lund-Yates, lead equity analyst at stockbroker Hargreaves Lansdown, noting that Amolyt is developing a treatment for an endocrine disorder which is in the final phase of clinical trials. "This addition to the pipeline looks to be potentially lucrative." The transaction is expected to close by the end of the third quarter. — AFP

Bosnia's lithium discovery raises hopes and fears

LOPARE, Bosnia and Herzegovina: In northeast Bosnia's rolling hills, the local community is torn between fears of environmental ruin and hopes of riches from huge deposits of the critical minerals Europe needs for its green transition.

The area around Lopare sits on an estimated 1.5 million tons of lithium carbonate, 94 million tons of magnesium sulfate and 17 million tons of boron — the stuff used to make everything from electric cars to wind turbines and electronics. The potentially game-changing deposits could be a rare boon for this poverty-stricken corner of southeast Europe, with Bosnia's economy having largely stagnated following a devastating war in the 1990s.

Bosnia's fiery Serb leader Milorad Dodik has called the project — which would be located in the country's Serb statelet — "an opportunity for development that should not be missed".

But simmering local opposition over what would be a sprawling open-pit mine has threatened to pull the plug on the project as some fear the potential environmental fallout.

Lopare's city council voted in De-

ember on a motion against the project. "More than 90 percent of residents are against it," said Lopare mayor Rado Savic. "People are afraid of leaks of toxic materials," he said. "We are clear, we do not want such a mine here."

Environmental groups have launched a petition against the project.

"Everywhere in the world where there are these kinds of mines there is also, sooner or later, pollution to the ground-water and air," said Snezana Jagodic Vujic, the leader of a local environmental association. In neighboring Serbia, mass protests over a Rio Tinto lithium mine near the Bosnian border pushed the government to revoke permits for the multi-billion project in 2022.

Vladimir Rudic, the director for the Bosnian subsidiary of Swiss mining company Arcore AG, accused the opponents of the project in Lopare of "sowing panic".

"The operating conditions will be absolutely controlled," he told AFP. Arcore hopes to break ground in the area by 2027. "These are exceptionally interesting quantities of raw materials for the European Union supply chain," Rudic said. The company said the mine would earn annual revenues of one billion euros (\$1.1 billion) and create 1,000 direct jobs and more than 3,000 indirect ones.

The project aims to export around 10,000 tons of lithium carbonate annually by 2032 — enough to make between 150,000 and 200,000 rechargeable



LOPARE, Bosnia and Herzegovina: This photograph taken on Feb 22, 2024, shows core sample library owned by Arcore AG, created while exploring deposits of lithium ore, near North-Eastern Bosnian town of Lopare. — AFP

batteries, according to experts.

The EU currently depends on China for 97 percent of its magnesium needs. With the EU phasing out the sale of new fossil fuel cars by 2035, Europe hopes to be able to extract 10 percent of critical raw materials from its own soil by the end of the decade.

Bosnia is a candidate to join the EU. Lopare is a deposit with "low content" lithium that nevertheless remains "interesting", said Rudic, noting that the larger presence of magnesium and boron guaranteed the mine's future "stability".

Arcore is hoping to secure rights to operate the concession for 50 years, but it has yet to receive the necessary permits from Bosnian authorities. An environmental impact study must be carried out before any operation breaks ground, along with a period of consultation with the local population.

But for resident Jovan Jovic — an unemployed pharmacist from Lopare — little will likely change his mind. "The town will be covered in a huge layer of dust, not to mention the impact on groundwater," he told AFP. — AFP

FRIDAY, MARCH 15, 2024

Weekender

Kuwait greets Ramadan with joy

A tree adorned with lanterns at Souq Mubarakiya.



By Ghadeer Ghloom

As the crescent signaled the arrival of Ramadan, Kuwait enthusiastically prepared to welcome the month of benevolence, with markets adorned in decorations expressing the joy of its arrival. The vibrant lighting and colorful decorations symbolize the anticipation of Muslims, creating a pleasing sight and igniting the significance and blessings of this sacred month.



Unique decorative Ramadan calendar.

They convey the desire for a blessed and generous month filled with spiritual growth, forgiveness and peace.



During Kuwait Times' visits to various markets around Kuwait, Hassan Swaidan, a vendor, shared insights about people's passion for decorating their homes to usher in the holy month. "On such occasions, shops are filled with banners, twinkling lights, traditional lanterns, crescent-shaped objects, etc, creating a festive atmosphere and evoking a sense of unity and Islamic spirituality of mercy among the people," he noted.

She mentioned fasting during the months of Rajab and Shaaban, the two months preceding Ramadan, as a way of preparing the spirit for the coming month.

Additionally, she highlighted the tradition of greeting one another with warm wishes, such as saying 'Ramadan Mubarak' and exchanging 'nuqsa', a gift that relatives and friends give each other in the days leading up to the holy month.

These decorative elements not only beautify the surroundings but also signify a collective readiness to embark on a period of reflection, prayer and acts of kindness and good deeds. Om Ali, a middle-aged woman, emphasized the spiritual aspect of preparing for the holy

'Graish', a gathering typically held at the eldest family member's house, is another way of preparing and welcoming the holy month. These gatherings involve the exchange of gifts, food and good wishes, fostering a sense of unity and shared purpose among the people.



A shop sells Ramadan decorations.



Women shop for decorative lanterns.



Shopkeeper Hassan Swaidan organizes Ramadan decorations. —Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat



Weekender



A worker displays a large tray of kunafa.

The sweet taste of
RAMADAN



Khaled Al-Abdulhadi is a Kuwaiti journalist exploring the intersection of cultures. He's a passionate world traveler and avid enthusiast of the human experience.

By Khaled Al-Abdulhadi

Sweets are one of the most important features of Ramadan cuisine in Kuwait, usually devoured after iftar with tea or Arabic coffee. There are many types of desserts held in high acclaim by most Kuwaitis, including luqaymat, baklawa, zalabia, qatayef, sabb al-gafsha, balaleet, Om Ali, mahalbiya, rahash and many more.

For Oum Fahad, she believes her nightly Ramadan iftar feast at the table must be followed by desserts and hot beverages in the main seating area. "We have been doing this for over 30 years. Everything is prepared at least an hour in advance, even starting from noon. Everyone in the kitchen will be working on preparing iftar and dessert afterwards," she said.

Luqaymat is a staple of Oum Fahad. It is made of flour, sugar, and sweet syrup, which, after stirring over heat, becomes red. It was previously named luqmat al-qadhi (the judge's piece), from which it is derived. It was made in the 13th century in Baghdad and spread among Arabs, and to the Turks and Greeks afterwards. "However, some days, I like to surprise everyone with sabb al-gafsha, which is very similar to luqaymat, but it is a little bigger and takes the shape of the stirrer I am using," Oum Fahad said.

Baklawa also has its place in Oum Fahad's Ramadan routine, which has its roots going back to the pre-Ottoman Empire, spreading during the 18th century. The oldest documented mention of baklava dates back to the kitchen notebooks of Top Kapi Palace, during the reign of Sultan Mehmet the Conqueror. It is a pastry mixed with nuts and usually served with syrup.

Mahalbiya is made on occasions and not every day. "It is a milk-based sweet. I make some with nuts on top as garnish and others are left plain, because most of the little ones do not like nuts with sweets. Without these sweet staples on every Ramadan night, the holy month just would not feel the same," Oum Fahad said, indicating that the habit has been passed down for generations.



An assortment of sweets.



Baklawa



Many also order their desserts online or bring modern Western desserts, which Oum Fahad doesn't mind. "They can bring whatever they like. I will not stop them, but they must also have some of my dessert!" she asserted. "I cannot fathom some of the new desserts. They are heavy to digest, while my luqaymat are small, and you can stop before having to feel full," she added.



Workers ready luqaymat and other sweets for sale.



Qatayef being freshly prepared.



Workers prepare confections at a sweetshop in Hawally. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat

Iftar cannon tradition

resonates as symbol of Kuwait's cultural identity



The iftar cannon is fired at sunset during the holy fasting month of Ramadan at Naif Palace in Kuwait City. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat

By Shakir Reshamwala

The firing of the iftar cannon has been a beloved tradition in Kuwaiti culture for decades and holds a special place in the hearts of people, as it announces the moment of breaking the fast during the holy month of Ramadan. The iftar cannon tradition is a unique and symbolic ritual that takes place every day throughout the holy month at Naif Palace in Kuwait City.



Shakir Reshamwala is a coffee-swigging veteran journalist with a nose for news and an eye for detail. When he's not in the newsroom beating the deadline to finish the front page, he can be found sparring over a Scrabble board or traveling the world.

When the call to prayer, or azan, signals the end of the day's fast, the cannon is fired, resonating across the city. This longstanding custom is not only a ceremonial gesture, but has become an integral part of Kuwait's cultural identity, with the firing by red-liveried cannoneers carried live on Kuwait TV and Radio.

The daily spectacle attracts a horde of visitors, although this year the crowds have thinned after a popular iftar TV program for children that used to be filmed at Naif Palace before the firing of the cannon was shifted to Youm Al-Bahar heritage village on Arabian Gulf Street.

Naif Palace, built in 1906 during Sheikh Mubarak Al-Sabah's reign, is a historic landmark in Kuwait. The palace served as a residence for the ruling Al-Sabah family and a venue for important events and witnessed Kuwait's significant moments. Damaged during

the Gulf War, it underwent restoration post-liberation.

Originating from the Ottoman Empire, the iftar cannon was used to convey the moment when Muslims could break their fast after the azan was heard, which allowed people in different parts of the city to synchronize their iftar. Over time, this practice spread to other Muslim communities and countries. Today, in various places around the world, especially in the Middle East and some parts of Asia, iftar cannons are still used during Ramadan.

As Kuwait modernizes and develops rapidly, with modern technology such as smartphones becoming more prevalent in signaling the end of the fast, the iftar cannon tradition remains a steadfast symbol of the nation's commitment to preserving its cultural heritage.



A family dressed in traditional attire waits for the firing of the cannon.



WHAT'S ON IN KUWAIT

Event: Ramadan Expo
Location: Murouj
Date: March 14-17, 2024

Event: Heya Expo
Location: 360 Mall
Date: March 14-19, 2024

Event: Bugsha Expo
Location: Kuwait Motor Town
Date: March 15-16, 2024
Time: 9 pm to 1 am

Event: Ramadan Kids Art Club
Location: Scientific Center
Date: Every Saturday
Time: 2 pm to 5 pm

Event: GCC Traffic Week
Location: Abdullah Al-Salem Cultural Center
Date: March 18-25, 2024

Event: Madang Ghabga
Location: Madang Korean Center
Date: March 16, 2024
Time: 8 pm to 1 am

Event: Mortal Kombat tournament
Location: Olympia Mall
Date: March 14-16, 2024

Event: Arabian Nights
Location: Al-Hamra Tower
Date: March 16, 2024
Time: 9 pm to 12 am

Sports

Young Ugandan mud wrestlers dream of glory on world stage

Competitors in Uganda endure spartan training and living conditions

MUKONO: In a mud pit ringed off by bamboo poles and two thin yellow ropes, a young Ugandan woman lies face-up after being tossed upside down by her opponent. She gets a second wind and takes down her rival with one swipe at her feet—to the delight and cheers of dozens of fellow wrestlers watching from the sidelines of the rickety ring.

The barefoot youngsters are training in “soft ground wrestling” at the Bumbash Wrestling Academy in the town of Mukono, some 30 kilometres (19 miles) west of the capital Kampala, hoping their skills may one day lead to fame and glory. The sport copies the style of World Wrestling Entertainment (WWE) in the United States.

Like WWE, the Ugandan version is as much theatre as sport, with bouts announced using the gimmicks of American shows and supervised by a referee in a bold black and white striped top. But competitors in Uganda endure spartan training and living conditions.

“The boys and girls here will be tomorrow’s Hulk Hogan and Sasha Banks,” the academy’s brainchild Daniel Bumba told AFP, referring to megastar American wrestlers. Bumba, a 35-year-old trained quantity surveyor turned television presenter, founded the school last year with his friend Arthur Asimwe, 32, and it now has more than 200 trainees, including 30 women. Nestled in a marshy plot surrounded by eucalyptus trees and yams, the academy features an open-air kitchen next to a two-room office where a 65-inch television set shows footage of training sessions.

‘Dream come true’

In one corner of the ring, a makeshift ladder fashioned from a plank of wood and two sticks is used to gain height and perform spectacular jumps like those made popular by WWE’s The Undertaker, John Cena and Randy Orton. “We were watching those (WWE matches) of the whites but we never knew that one day also we Ugandans could get a chance of having wrestling in Uganda,” said trainee Bridget Nahoba, sporting dyed-red hair.

“The moment I discovered Uganda also has a wrestling academy, I had to run very fast, because that was my dream come true.” The 25-year-old former nursing student and fan of professional wrestler Bianca Belair said she hopes to join the WWE ranks to break down the gender barrier in the male-dominated sport.

Nevia Hope Nabwire, 18, said she shares similar aspirations. “I love wrestling, I love Sasha Banks. I want to be like her,” said the former street vendor, who dropped out of school, unable to pay the fees. The youngsters—determined to escape the poverty of their home villages -- train extensively for five days every week. Under the blazing sun, they pump weights and practise chokeslam, powerbomb and other throwing techniques, with their heavy falls cushioned only by a layer of mud.

Facing eviction

The amateur acrobatics, which have become popular online, have however raised concerns among medics who have warned of possible injuries, espe-



BADRU KATUMBAAFP: Members of Uganda’s Soft Ground Wrestling battle during a training session at their camp in Mukono on February 28, 2024. The youngsters are training in “soft ground wrestling” at the Bumbash Wrestling Academy in the town of Mukono, some 30 kilometres (19 miles) west of the capital Kampala, hoping their skills may one day lead to fame and glory. — AFP

cially to the spine. “You stay safe when you know how to land. But you are at risk when you don’t know how to land,” Bumba said, noting that training in this skill takes about eight months.

The academy’s activities have also caught the attention of the Ugandan government. Army officials visited the school in early March to make

sure it was not a training ground for anti-government rebels, said Bumba. The academy, according to its founders, is in the process of registering with the government, a move it hopes will attract sponsors. “We have challenges... the trainees frequently suffer from malaria because we are in a mosquito-infested bush,” said Bumba. — AFP



Sheikha Fajer Al-Sabah

Kuwait Dressage championship tomorrow

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: Kuwait Riding Center Dressage Championship will be held tomorrow under the patronage of Kuwait Equestrian Federation. The judging panel is headed by Esther Fleurij, in addition to Amber Den Heyer, Nusaiba Al-Mousharji and Beverley McEvoy.

The Dressage panel is headed by Rider Sheikha Fajer Bader Al-Sabah and includes Alaa Al-Sultan, Abdullah Al-Awadhi, Nusaiba Al-Maousherji, Dana Buresly, and Abdullah Al-Amer. Meanwhile, the experienced Amber Den Heyer is technical director.

The championship will commence at 8:30 pm at Kuwait Riding Center in Sabhan with the training level, followed by the basic level, light level and the medium first level. Dressage sport depends on taming horses, which is the foundation of equestrianism, as it teaches the horse and the rider on balance, flexibility, and the move from one speed to another with the least effort by the rider and total obedience by the horse and the smooth orders to the horse without confusing it in a certain time and speed.

China’s Li edges ahead of LIV golfers at Macau Asian Tour event

MACAU: China’s Li Haotong birdied his final hole Thursday to card a seven-under par 63 and edge ahead of a packed leaderboard at the Asian Tour’s International Series Macau. Li, a multiple winner on the European Tour, had just one blemish, a bogey five at the 10th hole.

“I played really solid and left myself a lot of birdie chances,” said Li, who once rose as high as world number 32, in 2018. He has struggled since last winning at the BMW International in 2022 and admitted that the round had hugely exceeded his expectations. “Not even close. I just tried to play steady so I’m really happy to have this score today,” Li said. One back on six-under par are LIV Golf League pair Pat Perez and Mito Pereira, plus Japan’s Yuta Sugiura, after they all shot 64 at the Macau Golf and Country Club’s par-70 layout.

“It was nice, I hit it really good,” said Perez after rolling in seven birdies against just one dropped shot, on the par-four eighth. “Wind was blowing and there were some tight tee shots out there. I screwed up one hole, but other than that I played great,” added the 48-year-old. Pereira is playing his fourth week in a row, with two Asian Tour events on either side of LIV commitments, as the Chilean chases ranking points to secure one of his country’s two spots in the Paris Olympics.

“To be honest, I’m really tired and ready to go home,” said the 28-year-old Pereira, who currently sits 41st on the Olympic Golf Rankings with the top 60 qualifying for Paris. “This is the last push this week and I’m trying to really give my best.” Saudi-bank-rolled LIV Golf has invested \$300 million in the Asian Tour—which unlike LIV receives world-ranking points—leading to the creation of the International Series of 10 enhanced prize money events. — AFP

Kuwait cricket team receives warm welcome after historic triumph

KUWAIT: The Kuwait men’s national cricket team received a grand welcome at the Kuwait International Airport on March 12, 2024, following their triumphant win in the ICC 50 overs Challenge League Play-off in Malaysia earlier this month.

Led by skipper Mohammad Aslam and coached by Qasim Ali and assisted by Shehan Shashika, with management under Naveen Jayan, the team was greeted by the Kuwait Cricket Contingent, including KCC President Haider Farman, KCC Director General Sajid Ashraf, and other senior KCC officials.

In a proud moment for Kuwait Cricket, Haider Farman, the President of Kuwait Cricket Board, expressed his joy and satisfaction, hailing the victory as historic and pathbreaking. He credited the entire KCC family for their relentless hard work over the years, congratulating every member of the delegation to Malaysia and the KCC fraternity for this remarkable achievement. Despite an initial setback against Saudi Arabia in the league stage, he commended the team’s resilience and skill displayed throughout the tournament.

Sajid Ashraf, the KCC Director General, shared his



KUWAIT: Kuwait men’s national cricket team received a grand welcome at the Kuwait International Airport pose for a group photograph.

elation, emphasizing that one of their dreams had come true with Kuwait’s qualification for the ICC CWC Challenge League, granting them List A Status by the ICC. He praised the team for their exceptional skill, determination, and teamwork, highlighting their journey to participate in 15 List A matches and now targeting the ICC ODI Status in the process through the qualification obtained for the ICC Cricket World Cup Challenge League 2024-2027.

Looking ahead, the Kuwait national men’s team

gears up for the ACC T20 Men’s Premier League in Oman scheduled from April 10th to 24th, 2024, after a month’s break. With their recent success and new found momentum, Kuwait aims to continue their stellar performance on the international cricket stage.

The entire nation stands behind the Kuwait men’s national cricket team, celebrating their achievements and eagerly anticipating their future endeavors as they continue to make waves in the world of associate nations cricket.

Skiing Afghans determined to keep sport alive

BAMIYAN: From the edge of a slope in the province of Bamiyan, rivals cheer as they take turns to race down the mountainside, united in keeping skiing alive in Afghanistan. While it is home to spectacular mountain ranges, including the mighty Hindu Kush, the country does not have a widespread culture of skiing, with gear also costly and scarce.

That has not, however, stopped the growth of a thriving ski cohort, which is eager to keep developing the sport in Afghanistan, despite the loss of sponsors and prominent skiers who left the country after the Taliban takeover in 2021. “Ski races have lost a bit of their colour” in Afghanistan since the Taliban authorities returned to power, said 23-year-old Esmatullah Haidari, who captains a local ski team. But, he added, “there are still enthusiastic skiers who don’t want skiing to fade away”.

Shah Agha Rezaee, a trainer and long-time skier, said fans of the sport have “revived the spirit” of skiing. “We should work for it because it is our motivation, interest and love,” said Rezaee, who dreams of seeing Afghan skiing represented at the Olympics.

Today, there are teams in at least six provinces, with hundreds of members, a chunk of whom took to the Bamiyan slopes earlier in March for the federation’s first formal race of the season. Wearing a hodgepodge of warm clothes and neon pinnies, a long line of competitors shouldered their skis as they marched up the Bamiyan piste, which lacked a lift.

A handful of men gathered to watch, joining in spirited applause as each adult and child racer zipped through the finish line. Women no longer participate since the Taliban authorities effectively banned women from all sports, despite previously making up a large number of skiers in Bamiyan, according to the federation.

‘Ideal’ for Galthie to keep team for England Six Nations finale

PARIS: France coach Fabien Galthie said on Thursday it was “ideal” to be able to name an unchanged side to face England in a potential Six Nations decider this weekend. Galthie kept faith with his squad from last week’s 45-24 win over Wales for the home match in Lyon against Steve Borthwick’s England on Saturday. He had made eight



BAMIYAN: An Afghan skier competes in a ski race on the outskirts of Bamiyan province on March 8, 2024. From the edge of a Bamiyan slope, rivals cheer as they take turns to race down the mountainside—united in keeping skiing alive in Afghanistan. — AFP

“We feel their absence,” said Haidari. “Everyone should be free, and should be able to study and to ski, it’s not important whether you’re a girl or boy,” he added. “We miss our sisters a lot.”

Foreign women do not face the same restrictions and visitors have continued to join Afghans on the slopes, including at events organised by the charity-backed Bamiyan Alpine Ski Club. One such event was the well-attended Afghan Peaks Ski Race, which was also sponsored this year by a local TV station.

Tourists with the adventure travel company Untamed Borders brought with them about 130 kilograms (285 pounds) of gear into the country to donate. Many skiers get by with donated equipment and handmade wooden skis.

“We have a very limited budget for the sport,” said Mohammad Daud Kargar, president of the Afghanistan Ski Federation. “In the past, some organisations

changes before the win over Wales after a drab draw with Italy previously but has no injury or suspension worries before this weekend’s match. “It’s ideal to be able to keep the same team. The team won, put in a great performance last weekend,” Galthie told reporters.

“The team had changed a lot. It’s what we had felt for a while. “We chose to do things with consistency, we preferred to see what happened on the field, feel energy and react,” he added. Gregory Aldritt captains the side with Leo Barre, Nicolas Depoortere, Emmanuel Meafou and Georges-Henri Colombe keeping their places after making their debuts in Cardiff. It is the first time for Galthie to keep a same starting lineup from one match to another since last February. Nolann Le Garrec remains

at scrum-half after his man-of-the-match performance on his first start with Maxime Lucu on the bench despite scoring a try in the Principality Stadium win.

Regular scrum-half and captain Antoine Dupont is unavailable as he prepares to play Sevens at this year’s Paris Olympic Games. Le Garrec, as well as fellow new faces full-back Barre, centre Depoortere, lock Meafou and replacement prop Colombe all brought much-needed energy to the team. “The joy is when players create competitiveness between them, when they all want to wear the jersey and go grab it,” Galthie said. “When we open the door to new players because we feel need energy, we get the response straight away, that’s also the joy.” — AFP

Sports

Atletico bounce back, book Champions League quarters

Inter Milan lose in thrilling penalty shoot-out

MADRID: Atletico Madrid bounced back from two goals down on aggregate against Inter Milan to reach the Champions League quarter-finals with a thrilling 3-2 penalty shoot-out triumph on Wednesday. Trailing by a single goal after last month's first leg, Atletico looked dead and buried when Federico Dimarco pushed home Inter's opener at the Estadio Metropolitano.

But Antoine Griezmann immediately pulled the hosts level on the night and three minutes before the end of the regulation 90 minutes substitute Memphis Depay took the tie to extra time at 2-2 with a fine low finish. That set up the decisive shoot-out which ended with Inter missing three of their five penalties, star striker Lautaro Martinez handing passage to the last eight to Atletico when he booted his spot-kick way off target.

"I think penalties are a lottery. Today luckily I stopped two," said Atletico goalkeeper Jan Oblak, who saved from Alexis Sanchez and Davy Klaassen. "It's not easy to stop a penalty. Sometimes it looks easy from the outside but it's not." "I'm very, very happy for the team because I think we did a great match," he added. "We played well. Maybe in the last month we've not been in great shape but we showed we can do much more."

The two teams could barely have come into Wednesday's match in more contrasting form as Inter had won 13 matches on the bounce since the start of 2024 while Atletico had won only one of their last five. However it was an even and exciting contest in the Spanish capital in which Atletico pushed hard for the win and both sides created a clutch of opportunities. Home advantage turned out to be crucial for Atletico who have won 19 of their 21 fixtures at the Metropolitano in all competitions. Atletico are also

unbeaten in 17 knockout matches on home turf in the Champions League and in front of a passionate crowd they fought back from an impossible looking position against runaway Serie A leaders Inter.

Atletico fight back

Depay smashed a powerful effort off the woodwork moments before his strike took the two teams to an additional 30 minutes while Rodrigo Riquelme wasted a glorious chance to snatch the tie for Atletico without the need for extra time. Inter meanwhile were left ruing two great chances on the break as Atletico pushed for their second, both Marcus Thuram and Nicolo Barella finishing poorly with chances to seal the tie.

Simone Inzaghi's Inter now turn their attentions back to winning their 20th Serie A title while Atletico await Friday's draw for the last eight in Nyon. "Once we went ahead we needed to be better, those three-four minutes in order to maintain that advantage Dimarco gave us," said Inzaghi. "At that moment the match seemed in our hands but instead they got back into the game." Inter, who wasted a series of opportunities to earn a bigger first-leg advantage, are 16 points clear of AC Milan with 10 league matches remaining.

It was a fast-paced encounter from the off as Atletico pushed immediately to level the tie with aggressive pressing. Samuel Lino burst down the left flank and tested Yann Sommer in the fifth minute before his counterpart Denzel Dumfries forced a double save from Oblak. Inter were dangerous on the break and it was with a quick-fire exchange of passes that the away side took the lead, Dimarco confidently netting first time from Barella's neat cut-back.

However Inter's celebrations were almost instantly



MADRID: Atletico Madrid's Slovenian goalkeeper #13 Jan Oblak stops the ball during the penalty shoot-out session during the UEFA Champions League last 16 second leg football match between Club Atletico de Madrid and Inter Milan at the Metropolitano stadium in Madrid on March 13, 2024. — AFP

cut short when Griezmann pounced after Koke's through ball deflected off two Inter defenders, taking his club-record goal tally to 176. Griezmann forced a decent stop from Sommer shortly after the break as Atleti again tried to pen Inter into their own area. Thuram blasted over after being perfectly put

through by Martinez, leaving Inzaghi raging on the sidelines, before Barella shot weakly at Oblak in similarly good position. Depay then struck and all the momentum that had been building went definitively in Atletico's direction, eventually leading to a joyous shoot-out win. — AFP

Dortmund cruise past PSV, secure last eight

DORTMUND: A third-minute goal from Jadon Sancho and Marco Reus' late strike sent Borussia Dortmund through to the Champions League last eight with a 2-0 win on Wednesday, sealing a 3-1 aggregate victory. Level at 1-1 after the last-16 first leg in the Netherlands, Sancho wasted no time in putting Dortmund ahead at the Westfalenstadion with a low shot from outside the area -- his first Champions League goal since November 2021.

Dortmund were shaky despite the early lead and needed a fair share of luck and some poor PSV finishing to progress, with Hirving Lozano's 53rd-minute effort hitting the post. PSV pushed forwards in stoppage time looking for an equalizer but instead gave away another goal, as Isaac Babadi's unfortunate slip allowed Reus to seal the win. "It feels very nice," said Dortmund goalkeeper Gregor Kobel. "We didn't let them breathe in the first 30 minutes. "I'm now looking forward to facing a very big opponent in the next round."

The 1997 winners did enough against an outclassed PSV but will face stiffer challenges as they return to the quarter-final draw, to be held on Friday, for the first time since 2021. "We're happy about the first half, a bit frustrated about the second but were pleased that we're going further in the competition," Dortmund coach Edin Terzic told DAZN. PSV were left to rue several missed

chances, including when Luuk de Jong blazed over a golden opportunity deep into injury time. "(We) had the game in our grip but just couldn't score a goal," said PSV boss Peter Bosz, who endured a disappointing six-month spell in charge of Dortmund in 2017. "The Champions League is of course the highest level. We were so close. It hurts, but that's how it is."

'We were on'

Dortmund, 20 points behind Xabi Alonso's unbeaten leaders Bayer Leverkusen in the Bundesliga and out of the German Cup, came into the game knowing the Champions League was their only hope of lifting silverware this season. Despite their poor domestic campaign, Dortmund have impressed in Europe, emerging first from a group featuring Paris Saint-Germain, AC Milan and Newcastle. PSV are unbeaten in the Eredivisie and cantering towards their first league title since 2018.

Having said on Saturday he "expects more from himself" after scoring his first goal since returning to Germany on loan from Manchester United in January, Sancho opened the scoring before the smoke of the pre-game flares had cleared. The out-of-favour England winger made the most of PSV's failure to clear a bouncing ball in the box, collecting Julian Brandt's lay-off and picking out the bottom corner via the inside of



DORTMUND: Dortmund's Swiss goalkeeper #01 Gregor Kobel makes a save next to Dortmund's German forward #27 Karim Adeyemi (right) during the UEFA Champions League last 16, second-leg football match BVB Borussia Dortmund v PSV Eindhoven on March 13, 2024. — AFP

the post. "I just knew from the dressing room talk that we were on," Sancho told TNT Sports. "From the first whistle to the last, we stuck to our plan and I'm happy we got the win."

That goal put the wind in the hosts' sails, with Brandt and former PSV winger Donyell Malen denied by a brilliant double save from visiting goalkeeper Walter Benitez. Malen went close again before the interval, twice firing wide when he should have at least hit the target. The visitors were much improved after the break. Lozano, introduced at half-time, hit the post with a long-range effort. PSV upped the ante but were let down by their wastefulness in front of goal, with De Jong

heading over two good chances.

Substituted to applause with what looked like a thigh injury, Sancho was replaced by Reus with 15 minutes remaining. The Dortmund veteran looked to have laid on the crucial second goal for Niclas Füllkrug two minutes later against the run of play with a sublime cross from a free-kick, but the striker's half-volley was ruled out by VAR for the narrowest of offsides. PSV's best opportunity to force extra time fell to De Jong in the fourth minute of added time, but the Dutch striker blazed over unmarked from only 10 yards out. Reus quickly made him pay, racing onto a loose ball and slotting calmly past Benitez to spark wild home celebrations. — AFP

Mbappe on target as PSG thump Nice

PARIS: Kylian Mbappe returned to the starting lineup and scored as Paris Saint-Germain beat Nice 3-1 in the quarter-finals of the French Cup on Wednesday. Having only been used as a substitute in last weekend's 2-2 draw with Reims in Ligue 1, Mbappe was recalled in one of six changes made by coach Luis Enrique. He responded by opening the scoring in the 14th minute at the Parc des Princes, and Fabian Ruiz soon doubled the home side's lead. Gaetan Laborde pulled one back before the break for Nice, but Brazilian defender Lucas Beraldo's first PSG goal sealed the win on the hour mark.

Ten points clear at the top of Ligue 1 and through to the Champions League quarter-finals, the result means PSG remain in with a chance of winning a clean sweep of honors this season. "The team has clearly improved and I think we will keep improving," said Luis Enrique. "We are in a key moment of the season, into the final third, and we are still alive in every competition. We need to remain humble and try to be even more competitive, but we are in great form."

The capital side, record 14-time winners of the French Cup, will now play Rennes at home in the semi-finals on April 3, with Lyon hosting second-tier Valenciennes in the other tie a day earlier. PSG have won the competition six times in the last decade but failed to do so in either of the last two years. This year's final will be played in Lille on May 25. — AFP



PARIS: Paris Saint-Germain's Portuguese forward #09 Goncalo Ramos (center) fights for the ball with Nice's Brazilian defender #04 Dante (left) during the French Cup (Coupe de France) quarter-final football match between Paris Saint-Germain (PSG) and OGC Nice on March 13, 2024. — AFP

Messi, Suarez fire Inter Miami into CONCACAF quarters

FORT LAUDERDALE: Luis Suarez and Lionel Messi were on target as Inter Miami marched into the last eight of the CONCACAF Champions Cup with a 3-1 (5-3 aggregate) win over Nashville on Wednesday. Messi set up Suarez for the eighth-minute opener and then the Argentine found the target himself in the 23rd minute. But the

eight-times Ballon d'Or winner was substituted in the 50th minute before his replacement Robert Taylor made sure of the victory with a 63rd-minute header.

Inter Miami coach Gerardo "Tata" Martino said Messi's withdrawal, when he did not appear to limp or be in discomfort, was due to a concern about his hamstring. "He has an overload in his right hamstring. So we didn't want to take any risks. We tried to see if he could hold on a bit longer but it was bothering him and we preferred to take him out of the game," he said. "I imagine that for Saturday's game (at D.C. United) he is not going to be available," said Martino.

Miami, playing in the competition for the first time, will face the winner of Thursday's second-leg between Mexi-

co's Monterrey and MLS's FC Cincinnati in the quarter-finals. The Liga MX team are at home and lead 1-0 from the first-leg. The first-leg in Tennessee had seen Nashville take a two-goal lead before goals from Messi and Suarez inspired a comeback for a 2-2 draw.

And it was the former Barcelona pair that proved to be the difference again as Miami took control from the outset. Messi had an early opportunity when he was brought down on the edge of the box, providing him with a free-kick from a central position but his shot struck the wall. But minutes later, Messi created the opener, splitting the Nashville defence with a perfect pass to Suarez whose exquisite finish, with the outside of his right foot, matched the precision of the assist. — AFP

Classifieds

Hospitals & Clinics

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, Nazneen Shakeel Ahmeed Khan of Indian Passport No. U0744172 having permanent address: B 20 403 Vaishali Nagar, S V Road Jogeshwari, Mumbai, Pin: 400102, Maharashtra, India residing in Kuwait at present, hereby declare that henceforth my name will be read as under (Given name) nazneen shakeel ahmed and (surname) Khan (#5184) 15/03/2024

I Arif Inayathulla holder of Indian Passport No. T8759963 having permanent address 50/249, Ravindra Nagar, Kadapa, YSR Dist., Andhra Pradesh, India - 516003 residing in Kuwait at present, hereby declare that henceforth my name will be read

as (Given name) Arif Inayathulla and (Surname) Shaik. (#5182) 14/03/2024

I, Mohammad holder of Indian Passport No. M7063789, having permanent address Lal Ghati, Ratan Garh, Neemuch, Madhya Pradesh, Pin code: 458226 residing in Kuwait at present, hereby declare that henceforth my name will be read as (Given name) Mohammad and (Surname) Jaat Wala. (#5183) 14/03/2024

I, Sivakumar son of Thiru Nadarajan, born on 26th June 1990 (District of Birth: Kanyakumari, Address: 4/93A Chemponkarai, Puthenthurai PO, Nagercoil-629501), residing

in Kuwait at present, holder of Indian Passport No. W0770771 & Aadhaar No. 4021 8173 5852, hereby declare that henceforth my name will be read as under: Given Name: Yoseph & Surname: Nadarajan. (#5181) 13/03/2024

I, Zakaria Ane Kallu, holder of Indian Passport No. T8762998 having permanent address 3-180/2, Anekallu house, Kudupallathadka Post, Karopady Village, Bantwal Taluk, Dakshina Kannada, Karnataka - India, Pin: 574279, residing in Kuwait at present, hereby declare that henceforth my name will be read as (Given name) Zakaria and (Surname) Bin Hameed. (#5180) 13/03/2024

Bournemouth spoils Lockyer's emotional return, beat Luton

Third-bottom Luton sit three points adrift of Nottingham Forest



BOURNEMOUTH: Luton Town's Japanese defender #27 Daiki Hashioka (C) and Luton Town's Dutch midfielder #14 Tahith Chong (L) vie with Bournemouth's English striker #09 Dominic Solanke during the English Premier League football match between Bournemouth and Luton Town at the Vitality Stadium in Bournemouth. — AFP

BOURNEMOUTH: Bournemouth staged an astonishing fightback from three goals down to beat Luton 4-3 and spoil Tom Lockyer's emotional return to the scene of his near-death ordeal on Wednesday. Lockyer collapsed on the pitch after suffering a cardiac arrest during the second half of Luton's Premier League match at the Vitality Stadium on December 16. The Wales defender was "technically dead" for over two minutes as medics fought to save his life.

Rushed to hospital and fitted with an implantable cardioverter defibrillator, Lockyer has been able to resume normal life but is yet to return to playing with Luton. After the original game was abandoned with the score at 1-1, the 29-year-old was back at Bournemouth for the rearranged fixture 88 days on from the harrowing incident.

Lockyer's presence initially galvanized Luton, who scored three times in the first half through Tahith Chong, Chiedozie Ogbene and Ross Barkley. But Bournemouth hit back in stunning style after the interval thanks to strikes from Dominic Solanke, Illia Zabarnyi and two-goal Antoine Semenyo. Third-bottom Luton sit three points adrift of fourth-bottom Nottingham Forest after blowing a golden opportunity to climb out of the relegation zone. Forest will visit Luton in a crucial showdown on Saturday.

"We put ourselves in a good position. Of course it hurts," Luton boss Rob Edwards said after Bournemouth became the third Premier League team to win when trailing by three at half-time. "I don't want to make excuses. We were the ones to blame. We should have seen the game out." Luton's against the odds bid to extend their stay in the top flight pales in comparison to Lockyer's own fight for survival. Lockyer is unsure if he will ever play again after his second collapse, following an similar incident during Luton's Championship play-off final victory against Coventry at Wembley in May.

For now, he spends his days getting used to becoming a father for the first time after his girlfriend recently gave birth to their baby daughter. It was a heart-warming scene that greeted Lockyer when he stepped off the Luton team bus to loud cheers from waiting fans. Lockyer was on the front of Bournemouth's match-day program, with mental health first aiders on hand to offer advice to fans at the stadium about cardiac health.

"I'm quite numb to the whole thing but being back here, I came into the tunnel area and saw the paramedics that saved my life. I recognized them straight away," Lockyer said in a pre-match interview. "What do you say other than thank you? They are heroes

and they saved my life. I got a little bit emotional." A banner in Luton's orange and white colors displaying an image of Lockyer's smiling face was held up in the away end. He walked onto the pitch just before kick-off and shook hands with the life-saving medics.

Given a standing ovation from all four sides of the stadium, Lockyer was visibly moved as Bournemouth and Luton fans chanted his name. In the ninth minute, Jordan Clark's pin-point cross picked out Chong and he planted a header past Neto as Lockyer celebrated in the stands. Luton doubled their lead in the 31st minute when Alfie Doughty's clever cut-back invited Ogbene to slot home from close range. Barkley bagged Luton's third goal in first-half stoppage time, blasting past Neto after breaking Bournemouth's offside trap.

But Solanke started Bournemouth's escape in the 50th minute with a powerful strike from inside the area. Both sets of fans shared a round of applause in the 59th minute to mark the time of Lockyer's collapse. Just three minutes later, Zabarnyi had Luton's nerves jangling when he headed home from a corner. Luton's meltdown was complete in the 64th minute as Semenyo drilled past Luton keeper Thomas Kaminski. And there was even worse to come for Luton in the 83rd minute when Semenyo produced another blistering strike to leave Lockyer and company stunned. — AFP

Sabalenka sent packing as Gauff, Medvedev advance

INDIAN WELLS: American Emma Navarro shocked Australian Open champion Aryna Sabalenka to reach the Indian Wells ATP-WTA Masters quarter-finals on Wednesday as Coco Gauff sailed through.

Navarro, ranked 23rd in the world, pushed Sabalenka hard on a breezy Stadium Court to notch her first career win over a top-five player 6-3, 3-6, 6-2. US Open champion Gauff, seeded third, celebrated her 20th birthday with a dominant 6-0, 6-2 victory over Belgian Elise Mertens.

It wasn't quite so easy for last year's men's runner-up Daniil Medvedev, but the fourth-seeded Russian managed the windy conditions to post a 6-4, 6-4 triumph over Bulgarian Grigor Dimitrov. Medvedev next faces seventh-seeded Holger Rune, who saved a match point then roared through the second-set tiebreaker on the way to a 2-6, 7-6 (7/2), 6-3 victory over 2022 champion Taylor Fritz. "It was a crazy match," Rune said.

I managed to raise my level in the end of the second set. I just kept believing. I was always behind in the match, I was struggling to break his serve, but once I found my rhythm ... especially the tiebreak was very good for me and then I just gained confidence." Med-

vedev said consistency was the key to his victory in windy conditions. "I think in general I played well. I was really consistent," said Medvedev, who had just 13 unforced errors as he moved a step closer to a first title at Indian Wells - the only hardcourt ATP Masters tournament he has never won.

In other men's matches, American Tommy Paul ended Italian Luca Nardi's dream week with a 6-4, 6-3 victory. Nardi, who lost in qualifying but gained a place in the main draw as a "lucky loser" thanks to a withdrawal, was coming off a stunning upset of world number one Novak Djokovic in the third round. Paul will play for a place in the semi-finals against ninth-seeded Casper Ruud, who rallied to beat French veteran Gael Monfils 3-6, 7-6 (7/3), 6-4.

Navarro's victory over world number two Sabalenka continues a strong season for the 22-year-old, who won the WTA title in Hobart and reached the semi-finals in Auckland and San Diego. "It's definitely cool to be able to play an opponent like that and feel like I can hang and I can win," she said. "I've worked really hard over the years to kind of just get to this point and be able to play at a level that can compete with the best players in the world." "I think that showed today," she added.

Sabalenka, meanwhile, has found it frustrating since her successful title defense at the year's first Grand Slam. The Belarusian's fourth-round exit follows her opening-match defeat in Dubai last month. After the two exchanged just two breaks of serve in the first two sets, Navarro came out ahead as they traded three straight breaks in the third to take a 3-1 lead. She broke



INDIAN WELLS: USA's Emma Navarro reaches for a forehand return to Belarus' Aryna Sabalenka during their ATP-WTA Indian Wells Masters women's round of 16 tennis match at the Indian Wells Tennis Garden in Indian Wells, California, on March 13, 2024. Navarro defeated Sabalenka 6-3, 3-6, 6-2. — AFP

Sabalenka again to seal the match, finishing with 22 winners to 14 unforced errors while Sabalenka's 38 winners were countered by 34 unforced errors.

Learning experience

Sabalenka, who saved four match points to win her opener against 64th-ranked American Peyton Stearns, acknowledged that she never really got comfortable in the California desert this year. "I tried to adjust," she said. "I would say that we did our best and we'll learn." Navarro next faces ninth-ranked Maria Sakkari of Greece, a 6-2, 3-6, 6-3 winner over France's Diane Parry. — AFP

Denver back on top as Porter shines in Miami win

MIAMI: Michael Porter Jr. scored 25 points as reigning NBA champions the Denver Nuggets defeated the Miami Heat 100-88 on Wednesday to reclaim top spot in the Western Conference. In a low-scoring clash between last year's NBA Finals rivals, Denver led for most of the first half before the Heat edged ahead with a third-quarter rally, only for the Nuggets to regain their advantage.

Denver pulled clear in the fourth quarter, with Reggie Jackson draining a 26-foot stepback three with just over three minutes remaining to put the Nuggets 10 points up at 94-84. Nuggets star Nikola Jokic was restricted to 12 points after a disciplined Miami defensive effort, but that just allowed more space for Porter Jr., who drained five three-pointers in a 9-of-16 shooting display. Porter Jr. said his impressive performance owed everything to his teammates engineering time and space for him to shoot freely.

"Did you see the shots I was getting? They were wide open threes, so it's really my teammates, all credit to them," Porter Jr. told ESPN. "We've got a good, well-balanced team so when you take something away, there's another option. That's what it was tonight." Denver's fourth straight victory saw them improve to 46-20, leaving them half a game clear of Oklahoma City at the top of the Western Conference. It's the first time Denver have led the standings since November, suggesting Michael Malone's men are hitting form at the right time as they chase the top seeding for the playoffs.

"It feels good," Porter Jr. said of reclaiming top spot. "It feels like we're back where we belong. We wanted the No.1 seed and we've been playing well since the All-Star break. "But we've got to hold on to it though, there's a lot of good teams in the West, so we've got to come into every game knowing that people are coming for our spot." Porter Jr. received scoring support from Aaron Gordon with 16 points and Jamal Murray with 14. Bam Adebayo led Miami's scorers with 17 points. The Heat's fourth consecutive defeat leaves them eighth in the Eastern Conference with a 35-30 record.

In other games, Luka Doncic scored 21 points and Kyrie Irving 23 to lead the Dallas Mavericks to a 109-99 victory over the short-handed Golden State Warriors, who were missing the injured Stephen Curry and Draymond Green. "We played well on the defensive end, and from the first tip of the basketball at the start of the game we had physicality," Irving said. "That was the big difference tonight. "We knew they were kind of struggling and they've had a few tough games, and we wanted to make it tough for them tonight." — AFP