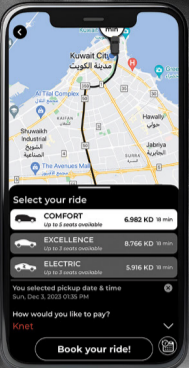



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Ramadan Kareem



Fajr	: 04:30
Shrooq	: 05:50
Dhuhr	: 11:55
Asr	: 15:23
Maghrib	: 18:01
Isha	: 19:17

US urges ‘immediate’ Gaza truce

Zionists massacre scores at Shifa Hospital, kill 8 in West Bank



(Left) Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman meets US Secretary of State Antony Blinken in Jeddah on March 20, 2024. (Right) A boy mourns by the bodies of children killed in a Zionist air strike on a building as they lie at Al-Najjar Hospital in Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip on March 20, 2024. — AFP photos

GAZA: The United States has circulated for the first time a draft UN resolution calling for an “immediate” ceasefire in the Zionist entity’s genocidal war in Gaza, as warnings grow of famine in the besieged territory. Washington had blocked previous Security Council texts using the word “immediate” but US top diplomat Antony Blinken confirmed the shift in position on Wednesday.

Blinken, who met five Arab foreign ministers in Egypt on Thursday, stressed any immediate truce must be linked to the release of captives taken by Palestinian fighters on Oct 7. The Zionist bombardment of Gaza continued overnight with the health ministry in the Hamas-run territory saying at least 70 people had been killed, pushing the overall toll towards 32,000.

“We were sleeping safely when we heard a big blast,” Gaza resident Mahmud Abu Arar told AFP following Zionist bombardment in the southern city of Rafah on Wednesday. He said the blast was “like an earthquake” and he had pulled bodies from

Continued on Page 6

RAMADAN KAREEM

Fasting and sincerity

By Dr Hatem Mohamed Ahmed

Islamic forms of worship are unique practices that bring about profound changes in the Muslim character and conduct. Fasting is not merely meant to help Muslims develop their self-restraint and willpower, but it is also about getting closer to the Almighty through the gate of sincerity. One of the secrets of fasting that makes it one of the greatest forms of worship is sincerity. Let us consider the hadith which Abu Huraira (RA) narrated: “The messenger of Allah (PBUH) said, Allah said, ‘All the deeds of Adam’s sons (people) are for them, except fasting which is for Me, and I will give the reward for it.’” In another narration: “The fasting person leaves his food and drink for Me; fasting is for Me and I shall reward it.” (Al-Bukhari)

Why is fasting given this lofty status over other forms of worship? The answer lies in the fact that fasting is the ultimate proof of sincerity. The tradition describes fasting as a worship only done for the sake of Allah. In fact, all actions are done for the sake of Allah and are rewarded by Him, based on the soundness of intentions. However, in fasting there is no potential for showing off like other acts of worship as in prayers or giving of charity.

Fasting is a secret bond between the Master and His servants. The fasting person abstains from permissible desires, which are instinctive, for the sake of Allah Alone, at a time when no one sees him. He does so out of sincerity to Allah. Sincerity is required in all acts of worship both outward and inward, but it is most apparent in fasting. Sincerity is one of the main pillars of the faith:

“Even though they were only commanded to worship Allah (alone) with sincere devotion to Him in all uprightness”. (Al-Bayyinah 98:5). They were not only commanded to worship, but to worship sincerely. Doing good deeds is not enough unless they are accompanied by the sincere desire to repent and gratify Allah. True faithful believers do not seek reward or praise from people, nor do they seek a noble position among them, nor do they seek a great status

Continued on Page 6

Kuwait applauds Arab League on 79th anniversary

CAIRO: Permanent Kuwaiti Representative to the League of Arab States Talal Khalid Al-Mutairi reaffirmed Thursday that despite the challenges, the League remains a sanctuary for all Arabs. In honor of the 79th anniversary of the establishment of the League, the Ambassador gave a statement to KUNA saying that the League proved itself to be a home of all Arabs and an important platform for the aspirations of the Arab nation.

It proved that by its continuous capabilities, stability and adaptability to sudden changes that have occurred in the international system over the past decades, the Arab

League showed the importance of the role it played in promoting joint Arab action. The ambassador mentioned the constructive role of Kuwait in the Arab League in playing an effective and active role, keen on enhancing joint Arab action and addressing the nation’s issues.

Mutairi also pointed out Kuwait’s financial contributions over the decades to Arab economic institutions affiliated with the Arab League, stressing that the ultimate goal behind this is to achieve growth and well-being for the people of Arab countries. The ambassador congratulated the Arab League’s Secretary-General Ahmed Aboul Gheit and its staff on the 79th anniversary, expressing his deepest gratitude for the work they are doing for all Arab countries.

The Arab League was established on March 22, 1945 after eight Arab countries signed the charter at the time, establishing the league in Cairo, which was chosen as the permanent headquarters of the organization. — KUNA



Talal Khalid Al-Mutairi

Live patient gets pig kidney in world first

WASHINGTON: A team of surgeons have successfully transplanted a genetically modified pig kidney into a living patient for the first time, a US hospital said Thursday. The four-hour operation was carried out on Saturday on a 62-year-old man suffering from end-stage kidney disease, Massachusetts General Hospital (MGH) said. “The procedure marks a major milestone in the quest to provide more

readily available organs to patients,” the hospital said in a statement.

Organ shortages are a chronic problem around the world and the Boston hospital said there are more than 1,400 patients on the waiting list for a kidney transplant at MGH alone. “Our hope is that this transplant approach will offer a lifeline to millions of patients worldwide who are suffering from kidney failure,” said Dr Tatsuo Kawai, a member of the team which carried out the operation.

The hospital said the pig kidney used for the transplant had been genetically-edited to remove harmful pig genes and add certain human genes. The hospital said the patient, Richard Slayman of Weymouth, Massachusetts,

“is recovering well at MGH and is expected to be discharged soon.” Slayman, who suffers from Type 2 diabetes and hypertension, had received a transplant of a human kidney in 2018 but it began to fail five years later and he has been on dialysis.

Slayman said he agreed to the pig kidney transplant as “not only as a way to help me, but a way to provide hope for the thousands of people who need a transplant to survive”. Slayman is black and the hospital said the procedure could be of particular benefit to ethnic minorities who suffer from high rates of kidney disease.

“This health disparity has been the target of many national policy initiatives for over 30 years, with

Ramadan food traditions bring Libyans together

TAJURA, Libya: Dressed in track-suits with their sleeves rolled up, about 30 residents in Tajura, a suburb east of Libya’s capital, volunteer every day to cook and give away some 300 meals during Ramadan. The men of all ages join efforts to make bazin — a Libyan barley-based dough served with a stew — as part of a campaign coupling social solidarity with culinary tradition to provide free meals for people fasting during the Muslim holy month.

Akin to Italian polenta or West African fufu, bazin, an originally Ber-

ber dish, is a classic family meal from Tripolitania, the historic northwestern region of Libya. It is also a symbol of sharing for Libyans, typically eaten by hand from a shared platter around which guests sit on the ground. “In the old days, this dish was limited to the homes” where it was prepared by women and served “to relatives and neighbors,” said Salem Omrane, a chef at the initiative which took shape after the 2011 uprising that overthrew longtime dictator Muammar Gaddafi. “We offer these meals to everyone who comes,” the 60-year-old told AFP.

Next to him, men in groups of three revolve around a large pot with long sticks in hand, mixing the barley flour in boiling salted water. Once cooked, for at least an hour, the steaming-hot dough is kneaded and divided

Continued on Page 6



TAJURA, Libya: Volunteers cook together portions of the traditional Libyan dish bazin on March 13, 2024 to be distributed to needy families during the holy month of Ramadan. — AFP

Prime Minister receives dignitaries



KUWAIT: His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Dr Mohammad Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah, in the presence of Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs, Sharida Maousherji, receives at Bayan Palace the president and members of the Union of Private Universities. In another development, His Highness the Prime Minister receives the chairman and members of Kuwait's Islamic Heritage Revival Society at Bayan Palace. — KUNA photos



KUWAIT: His Highness the Prime Minister receives UAE Ambassador to Kuwait Dr Matar Al-Neyadi. Ambassador Al-Neyadi delivered a letter from UAE Vice President, Prime Minister and Dubai Governor Sheikh Mohammad bin Rashed Al-Maktoum that included an invitation to participate in the Arab Media Forum to be held in the UAE in May.

Ten records set in China-Kuwait ties

By Zhang Jianwei
Chinese Ambassador to Kuwait



March 22 this year will mark the 53rd anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and Kuwait. Since the establishment of diplomatic ties, China-Kuwait relations have withstood the vicissitudes of the international landscape and enjoyed sound and steady growth, ensuring productive cooperation in various fields. Our bilateral relationship, always a pacesetter in China's exchange with other countries in the region, has played an exemplary role, creating many "firsts" and records.

(I) Kuwait was the first among Gulf countries to send a senior delegation to visit the People's Republic of China (PRC). In February 1965, the late Amir of Kuwait Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah who was then Minister of Finance, Commerce and Industry led a delegation to the PRC. The senior delegation, the first from Kuwait and even from Gulf countries to visit the PRC, was given a warm reception by the Chinese side. The then Chinese leaders met with Sheikh Jaber during his visit when he stressed that Kuwait recognizes the PRC and supports the one-China principle. That visit, a prelude to official exchanges between China and Kuwait, paved the way for the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two nations several years later.

(II) Kuwait was the first Gulf Arab country to establish diplomatic relations with the PRC. In March 1971, China and Kuwait announced the establishment of diplomatic relations, opening the door to friendly exchanges between Gulf Arab countries and China. In the same year, Kuwait voted in favor of China's return to the United Nations (UN). Over the years, Kuwait has been committed to the one-China principle, and China has been giving Kuwait firm support for its efforts to maintain national stability and explore a development path suited to its national conditions.

Our two nations have always supported each other on issues involving our respective core interests and major concerns. After Iraq's invasion of Kuwait, China expressed firm opposition to it, and made utmost efforts in its capacity as a permanent member of the UN Security Council for the restoration of Kuwait's sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity. Following the end of the Gulf War, China has always supported firmly Kuwait's legitimate aspirations on legacy issues of the war and worked to promote the proper settlement of the relevant issues.

(III) Kuwait has in China the largest diplomatic presence across the world. Kuwait is now represented by four diplomatic missions that include the embassy in Beijing and three general consulates in the cities of Guangzhou, Hong Kong and Shanghai. The size of its diplomatic representation in China attests to the significance of China-Kuwait relations and the breadth and depth of bilateral cooperation.

(IV) Kuwait was the first Arab state to offer and has made itself the Arab state offering the largest amount of government concessional loans to China. In 1982, the Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development (KFAED) started to offer China concessional loans. Over the past 40 years and more, it has granted concessional loans worth about KD 305 million in total to 40 projects in the areas of infrastructure, education, health, agriculture and environmental protection, making positive contributions to the development of local areas in China especially the central and western regions. Today, China has become the second largest source of foreign direct investment in Kuwait, while Kuwait continues to give China support on the rural revitalization strategy. This longstanding friendship is particularly precious to us.

(V) Kuwait is the only GCC country where a Chinese medical team is stationed. As early as 1976, China began to dispatch a medical team to Kuwait. In the ensuing four decades and more, China has sent to Kuwait a total of 245 medical workers in 24 groups that have diagnosed and treated over 800,000 patients. China sending medical teams epitomizes bilateral cooperation on healthcare and demonstrates the special bonds of friendship between us. Facing the challenges posed by COVID-19, China and Kuwait have stood together and looked out for each other, as China dispatched a medical expert team to assist Kuwait and Kuwait donated medical supplies to China. Out joint efforts to beat the virus has left a splendid chapter in the annals of bilateral cooperation on health safety and healthcare.

(VI) China has become the largest trading partner of Kuwait. China has remained the biggest trading partner of Kuwait for nine years in a row, meaning that economic and trade cooperation between the two sides has become and will continue to serve as an important anchor. In 2023, China-Kuwait trade

volume reached \$22.39 billion, soaring more than 100 times over the early days of diplomatic ties. And China imported 24.53 million tons of crude oil from Kuwait, making itself the second largest crude oil importer of Kuwait. In addition to traditional trade of crude oil, bilateral trade has been on the upgrade, with a notable increase in China's export of machinery products and automobiles to Kuwait. As China's high-quality development is advancing at a faster pace, economic and trade cooperation between our two nations will embrace broader prospects.

(VII) Kuwait was the first country in the Middle East to sign Belt and Road cooperation documents with China. In response to the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) proposed by President Xi Jinping, Kuwait signed in June 2014 memorandums of understanding with China to jointly promote cooperation concerning the Silk Road Economic Belt and the development of Kuwait's Silk City, opening up broader prospects for China-Kuwait win-win cooperation. In recent years, both sides have worked to better synergize China's BRI and Kuwait's Vision 2035, which has achieved positive outcomes in the areas of infrastructure construction, energy, investment and communications. Chinese enterprises have undertaken the construction of many signature projects in Kuwait, making prominent contributions to the country's economic and social development. This year marks the 10th anniversary of China and Kuwait signing the Belt and Road cooperation documents. China is prepared to work with Kuwait to write a new chapter in the joint pursuit of high-quality Belt and Road cooperation.

(VIII) The Kuwait Investment Office (Shanghai) is the only overseas investment office established by the Kuwait Investment Authority (KIA) after Kuwait's independence. KIA opened its representative office in Beijing in 2011 and then an investment office in Shanghai in 2018 which is the only overseas investment office that KIA has set up after the country's independence, marking a solid step toward stronger cooperation with China and the Asian-Pacific region. Investment cooperation has now become a new highlight of practical cooperation between the two sides. As part of its efforts to diversify investment portfolio, KIA has invested in the Jinan-Qingdao high-speed railway project, making it the first time that a domestic high-speed railway has attracted capital from a foreign institutional investor.

(IX) The China Cultural Center in Kuwait is the first of its kind in service in the Gulf region. Diverse interactions and cooperation in cultural and people-to-people fields between the two sides have registered many highlights. Over the years, multiple Chinese art troupes have given great performance during their visits to Kuwait, while people of cultural circles in Kuwait have taken an active part in cultural events held in China. On September 17 last year, the China Cultural Center, located in Kuwait's Salmiya, launched its trial operation.

Built as the first of its kind in the Gulf region, this center will serve as a key platform for promoting cultural exchanges between the two countries and fostering closer ties between the two peoples. It will also be a gateway for Kuwaiti friends in all sectors to learn Chinese language, understand the fine traditional culture of China and experience the development dynamics of contemporary China. It will play an active role in consolidating the cultural foundations for building a China-Arab community with a shared future.

(X) His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal is the first head of state among the leaders of GCC countries who explicitly expressed his support for three Initiatives proposed by President Xi Jinping. When President Xi Jinping and Amir Sheikh Mishal had a meeting in Hangzhou in September 2023, HH the Amir Sheikh Mishal voiced his support for the Global Development Initiative (GDI), the Global Security Initiative (GSI) and the Global Civilization Initiative (GCI) put forward by President Xi Jinping.

During their meeting, they reached broad consensus on deepening China-Kuwait strategic partnership and witnessed the signing of the Joint Statement on the Five-Year (2024-2028) Cooperation Plan between the People's Republic of China and the State of Kuwait, as well as multiple bilateral cooperation documents in such fields as renewable energy, infrastructure construction and environment governance, charting the course for future bilateral relationship.

Though far apart geographically, China and Kuwait have been working hand in hand, as good friends and good partners that support and trust each other, to pursue a shared future. Our bilateral friendship provides an example for state-to-state relations. Through two fruitful meetings, President Xi Jinping and HH the Amir Sheikh Mishal lay out a new blueprint for future China-Kuwait strategic partnership. Today, China-Kuwait relations have entered a crucial phase of building on past successes to strive for new progress. China stands ready to work with Kuwait to implement the common understandings reached by the two heads of state and develop greater synergy in our development strategies. Through enhanced cooperation in investment, energy, infrastructure, environmental governance and digital economy and closer people-to-people and cultural exchanges, we will be able to build a high-quality China-Kuwait community with a shared future and contribute to the greater vision of jointly building a community with a shared future for mankind.

FM receives foreign envoys



Minister of Foreign Affairs Abdullah Ali Al-Yahya receives foreign envoys. — KUNA

KUWAIT: Minister of Foreign Affairs Abdullah Ali Al-Yahya received on Wednesday the heads of diplomatic missions of several countries and international organizations in Kuwait on the occasion of the holy month of Ramadan. The minister conveyed to his guests the greetings of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Dr Mohammad Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah.

He expressed his appreciation for the deep-rooted relations between the State of Kuwait and the friendly countries and international organizations. Al-Yahya also expressed his best wishes for his guests and their countries, as well as the Arab and Muslim nations. The meeting was attended by Deputy Foreign Minister Sheikh Jarrah Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah and senior officials of the Foreign Ministry. — KUNA

Kuwait and China celebrate 53rd anniversary of ties

TOKYO: Kuwaiti Ambassador to China Jasem Al-Najem celebrated on Thursday the 53rd anniversary of "deep-rooted diplomatic relations" between Kuwait and China dating back to March 22, 1971. In a statement to KUNA, Al-Najem elaborated on the Kuwaiti and Chinese ties, stating they were "built on the clear foundations of mutual trust and common interests, which reflected not only the shared visions of the leaders but also the desire of the peoples of the two countries to increase friendship between them."

Since the foundation of diplomatic relations between Kuwait and China, significant growth has been witnessed in political, economic, cultural, and other fields, "effectively contributing to development, construction, and progress," added Al-Najem. Ambassador Al-Najem recounted the friendly bilateral bonds between the two countries as early as February 1965 with the late Amir His Highness Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah's official visit, as Minister of Finance, Industry, and Trade, to China to meet with former Chinese President Liu Shaoqi.

It is worthy to note that Kuwait is the first Arab country to provide soft government loans to China through the Kuwait Fund for Development, covering many projects in the fields of infrastructure, education, health, agriculture, environmental protection, etc., which have contributed to economic and social development in China, mentioned Al-Najem. Additionally, bilateral cooperation in the health field revived during the 2020 outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, where China cooperated with Kuwait by sending medical envoys and devices to fight against the outbreak.

Al-Najem noted that the Kuwait Investment Authority opened its office in Beijing in 2011 and moved to Shanghai in 2018, calling it "a good reflection of the special economic significance of China to Kuwait." He spoke highly of Kuwait Vision 2035, which provides opportunities to increase and develop cooperation between the two countries in various fields, especially with Kuwait's future vision being compatible with



Kuwaiti Ambassador to China Jasem Al-Najem

China's Belt and Road Initiative, as Kuwait was the first country in the Middle East to join the initiative in 2014.

Furthermore, Al-Najem underscored the successful visit of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah to China last September, during which seven important Memorandums of Understanding on economic development projects were signed between His Highness the Amir and Chinese President Xi Jinping. Kuwait and China established the strategic partnership in 2018, which witnessed the two countries ushering into an era of friendship, economic cooperation, and trade cooperation amounting to about \$22 billion, making China the largest trading partner of Kuwait for nine consecutive years, according to Al-Najem.

The two nations supported one another, from Kuwait's support of the One-China principle to China's support of Kuwait during the 1990 Iraqi invasion, where Chinese companies contributed to Kuwait's nation-building and restoration after its liberation in 1991, as well as extinguishing 10 oil fire wells, he said.

Al-Najem reiterated that both countries have consistent perceptions of regional and international affairs, and the Kuwaiti government highly appreciates China's wisdom and balanced policies while handling such issues, especially the situation that has occurred in the Gaza Strip since October 7, 2023. The Ambassador expressed his aspiration for bilateral relations between the two friendly countries, which were built on solid foundations and rules, for further growth, development, and prosperity. — KUNA

Mother's Day shifting towards materialistic gestures

By Faten Omar

KUWAIT: Mother's Day, originally intended as a heartfelt occasion to express gratitude for the invaluable roles mothers play, has increasingly succumbed to commercialization over the years, diminishing its inherent value and significance. What was once a day dedicated to honoring the selfless love and sacrifices of mothers has now become overshadowed by consumerism, with the emphasis shifting towards materialistic gestures rather than genuine expressions of appreciation.

Anna Jarvis, the founder of the "Mother's Day" official holiday in the United States, achieved a significant milestone by successfully lobbying for the recognition of Mother's Day as an official holiday. Motivated by a desire to honor women and motherhood in a society she perceived as biased towards male achievements, Jarvis passionately advocated for the establishment of this special day. However, despite her initial intentions, she was dismayed by the commercialization of Mother's Day, which she vehemently opposed throughout her life.

Jarvis actively campaigned against the exchange of gifts on the day and even went as far as suing companies profiting from the holiday. Disheartened by the holiday's transformation into a commercial extravaganza, she eventually called for its removal from the American

calendar. Amidst the commercial noise, many people feel obligated to buy an expensive gift, not to appreciate their mother's role in their lives, but to follow up with the trends and show off in society. "Simple, everyday items have taken on a new, inflated cost in the lead-up to Mother's Day, such as cakes. Usually priced between KD 10-15, they now cost KD 35-50 just because of Mother's Day decorations," Tala Al-Matar said.

She added that as prices soar in the name of honoring mothers, it underscores the paradoxical nature of a holiday intended to celebrate love and appreciation, but is often overshadowed by commercial interests, noting that even mothers are now expecting to receive expensive gifts to show off among their friends and neighbors.

According to the Central Statistical Bureau, in February 2024, prices of many items witnessed a great increase. Notably, prices of clothing and footwear increased by 6.56 percent, while prices of miscellaneous goods and services increased by 3.92 percent. Ali Bilal told Kuwait Times that the prices of perfumes and makeup have risen. "According to my wife, there was a noticeable change in prices of makeup products because of Mother's Day. That is why I prefer to give the mother of my children cash to spend wisely and buy her desired products at their original price instead of being taken advantage of by merchants," he said.

Dalal Shehab highlighted the enduring appeal of gold as a timeless gift, but noted with concern the recent surge in prices. She pointed out the rate of gold has escalated significantly. For instance, the price of a 22-karat gold coin, which earlier stood at KD 133, jumped to KD 145. "Although I already bought it for my mother, this notable increase underscores the current volatility in the gold market, presenting challenges for those seeking to find a good gift," she lamented.

Local

Zain Alshaheed Park Ramadan Challenge kicks off for 3rd year

In partnership with Suffix to promote active lifestyle during Holy Month



Waleed Al Khashti and Ahmad Al Majed with Zain and Suffix teams.



Initiative promotes active lifestyle during Holy Month.

KUWAIT: For the third year running, the Zain Alshaheed Park Ramadan Challenge kicks off in strategic partnership with Suffix Events. The health & sports program was highly successful in its first two seasons and aims to encourage people of all ages to stay active and engage in sports during the Holy Month of Ramadan. The challenge kicked-off at Alshaheed Park - Phase I, joined by Zain Kuwait Chief Corporate Affairs and Relations Officer Waleed Al Khashti, Suffix Chief Operations Officer Ahmad Al Majed, Zain and Suffix teams, and many participants from all ages.

Zain's support to this unique sports initiative for the third year running springs from the company's strategy to support health and sports programs in the community, especially during the Holy Month. In its past two seasons, the Zain Alshaheed Park Ramadan Challenge was highly successful with thousands of adults and children joining in to promote a healthier, more active lifestyle during fasting. The challenge runs from 20-29 March at Phase I and offers people of all ages a great opportunity to join by speed-walking or running at their own time and pace

inside Alshaheed Park. Participants can collect distance points and compete to top the leaderboards. Those who want to earn extra points can join the special workouts held at the park.

After signing up, participants collect their armbands from a vending machine at the park. The armbands feature a chip that tracks and registers each participant's kilometers as they pass through the solar-powered smart arch. The leaderboard screen shows everyone's progress in real time so every participant can check their standing and compete for a higher place.

The challenge also features many other interactive programs, including group workout sessions with several local gyms, an activation to celebrate the International Day of Happiness, a special race for people with down syndrome, the Zain Ramadan Kids Race, and more. The Zain Alshaheed Park Ramadan Challenge targets both males and females from all ages to encourage them to keep fit and adopt a healthy and active lifestyle, not only during the Holy Month, but throughout the year.

This year, six of Zain's strategic community partners, including Suffix, 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's initiatives and programs. The campaign strives to share the blessings of this much-cherished month with the entire Kuwaiti people.



Director of Zakat House, Dr Majid Al-Azmi and CEO of Misr Al-Kheir Foundation, Dr Muhammad Al-Rifai. — KUNA

Kuwait and Egypt charity sign \$10 million deal

CAIRO: The Kuwaiti Office for Charitable Projects signed an agreement with the Misr Al-Kheir Foundation on Thursday to finance charitable projects in Egypt with a financial donation of \$10 million provided by Kuwait Finance House. The Director of Zakat House, Dr. Majid Al-Azmi, representing the Kuwait Office for Charitable Projects, and the CEO of Misr Al-Kheir Foundation, Dr. Muhammad Al-Rifai, signed the agreement. Al-Azmi said in a statement to KUNA that the signing included a number of contracts for several development projects in various Egyptian governorates in partnership with the Misr Al-Kheir Foundation.

He added that these projects come with a generous donation from Kuwait Finance House to cover a wide range of socio-economic development issues (hunger, poverty, health, education, water, and economic empowerment) in Egypt. Adnan Sabti, Director of the Kuwait Office for Charitable Projects in Cairo, confirmed in a similar statement to KUNA that the donation provided by Kuwait Finance House amounts to \$10 million. On his part, Al-Rifai said in a similar statement to KUNA that the agreement between the Kuwaiti Zakat House and the Misr Al-Kheir Foundation is a promising beginning of cooperation between the two sides and comes as a continuation of a previous cooperation that included integrated development in society.

Al-Rifai stressed that this cooperation confirms the close ties between the Kuwaiti and Egyptian peoples, explaining that the protocol includes 33 development projects in various fields such as health, education, and relief. He added that the protocol includes multiple projects like Ramadan baskets and tents distributed to various Egyptian governorates, supporting hospitals, improving the housing environment, and other charitable projects. — KUNA

Kuwait keen on fighting scourge of narcotics

VIENNA: Kuwait has affirmed its keenness to combat the scourge of drugs, as per the Kuwaiti 1962 constitution and the legislation issued to combat narcotics and psychotropic substances and regulate their use. This came in a speech delivered by the Director of the Department of Legal Affairs and Investigations at the Ministry of Health, Dr. Ali Hussein Al-Khudhair, at the 67th session of the United Nations Committee on Drug Control. Dr. Al-Khudhair pointed out that Kuwait established the Addiction Treatment Center, a specialized medical center that provides medical services to addicted people. He also stressed that Kuwait focused on the awareness and religious guidance aspect to eradicate the scourge of drugs and psychotropic substance abuse, whether through preparing campaigns and bulletins across all concerned agencies. — KUNA

Medical students raise awareness on donation for cancer treatment

By Ghadeer Ghloom

KUWAIT: A group of medical students at Kuwait University launched an initiative to raise awareness about the importance of donating money for cancer treatment, as financial costs are one of the biggest obstacles during the treatment journey. This initiative was driven by the students' sense of social responsibility. The drive is being held at the center of Assima Mall in Kuwait City.

Ahmad Al-Bayati, a seventh-year medical student at the College of Medicine at Kuwait University, said a group of students from various medical specialties are behind this initiative. "We started under the title 'Be the Means', which aims to raise awareness about cancer and encourage people to donate money for the treatment of patients, in addition to trying to educate people about the value of each dinar they donate and how it positively impacts the lives of patients," he said.

This initiative is supported by the Patients Helping Fund Society, where donations go to this organization and hospitals receive the funds on behalf of patients who struggle with medical costs. These donations serve all cancer patients in Kuwait, whether citizens or expatriates. "This initiative is a

NBK distributes thousands of iftar meals

KUWAIT: As part of fulfilling its ongoing corporate social responsibilities and on the occasion of the Holy Month of Ramadan, National Bank of Kuwait (NBK)'s Public Relations Team distributed thousands of meals and special convoys to fasters daily at many areas in Kuwait. This initiative comes within the framework of the ongoing "Do Good Deeds in Ramadan" philanthropic campaign launched by the bank.

Also, NBK distributed dates and water at different intersections and bus stops in Kuwait before iftar time as part of "Do Good Deeds in Ramadan". The campaign aimed to raise awareness at reducing accidents, speeding and committing traffic violations during the holy month of Ramadan, especially during the run up to iftar at different areas.

The initiative involved a large number of NBK volunteers who distributed small snacks for drivers to break their fasting around iftar time, at strategic intersections and traffic lights, as well as bus stops. "NBK iftar banquets, an annual NBK philanthropic tradition and a landmark activity within the bank's corporate social responsibility, acquired much more momentum this year distributing daily thousands of iftar banquets at many Areas in Kuwait, including Farwaniya, Salmiya, Bneid Al Qar and Jleeb, in addition to hospitals: Amiri, Mubarak and Sabah as well as Kuwait Airport terminals 1 and 2", said Talal Al Turki, NBK Public Relations Senior Manager.

"The distribution scale and range of NBK iftar banquets this year also included distributing



Talal Al Turki



Group Picture of Medical Students who volunteer to raise awareness on the importance of donating money for cancer patients' treatment. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

student initiative, starting with students but directly cooperating with the Patients Helping Fund acting as a supportive umbrella for the project and a helping hand for students. The fund is a charitable organization, meaning that donations go directly to the patients. What drove us as students is that we are healthcare students who deal with cancer on a daily basis through studies, hospitals or research, making us feel a societal responsibility to deliver

this message," Bayati said.

"Just as every charitable movement has its people who bear its responsibilities, this disease has become our responsibility as we work in the healthcare field, especially since money is one of the main obstacles to treating this disease. Therefore, we raised awareness about the importance of donating money to spread awareness about one of the biggest problems of one of the biggest diseases," he added.



National Bank of Kuwait's Public Relations Team distributes thousands of meals.

fast-breaking meals via special convoys to various crowded locations in Kuwait. A large number of NBK staff volunteers was ready to serve the fasters", Al Turki added. Commenting on dates and water distribution, "NBK is proud to launch this initiative, which combines giving and sharing spirit in offering snacks to drivers to break their fasting and raising safety awareness to reduce traffic accidents, especially around iftar time," he stated. "NBK is committed to adopting value-added social initiatives, especially those related to the holy

month of Ramadan," he added.

For almost three decades, the Ramadan program comprised a series of activities and initiatives aimed at encouraging community engagement and solidarity in Kuwait. "NBK hopes to encourage a greater sense of responsibility during the holy month", Al Turki noted. It is worth mentioning that NBK's iftar banquet campaign launched with the commencement of the Holy Month of Ramadan as part of an extensive social program comprising a multitude of philanthropic activities.

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Ramadan health tips

Remain active

Exercising during Ramadan may sound absurd when we already feel tired as it is due to fasting. Even so, sleeping and lying down all day is not the way to go. Staying healthy goes beyond a balanced diet; while a healthy plate assists with the inner functioning of your body systems, working out helps to strengthen your physical aspect. Granted that we have taken adequate and healthy nutrients, exercises can actually provide energy rather than taking it away. The endorphin hormones released when exercising work to elevate our mood and increase energy levels. Nevertheless, we are reminded to be smart on how to execute our fitness routine. Practice light and slow exercises as easy as brisk walking and yoga stretch. Working out in the evening before iftar is the ideal time, as you can rehydrate soon right after. If the weather is too hot, you can always opt for indoor exercise.

Islamic books, lectures

The month of Ramadan is also the time to amp up your efforts in attaining knowledge. Read stories of the Prophet (PBUH) and their beloved companions, listen to podcasts on spirituality and wellness, and watch lecture videos that discuss various aspects of the Islamic way of life. Expand your mind to something new and be positive. These will be good for your brain, as well as your soul. Educate yourself with good sources of knowledge. These will help you gain a better grasp of the religion as a whole and therefore, can pass on what you have learned among your social circles.



Kuwait Heritage



KUWAIT: Photo shows a street in Kuwait in the 1950s, with houses made of mud. — Photo from KOC archive, provided by Mahmoud Zakaria, heritage researcher at Ministry of Information.

KRCS distributes coupons to families in West Bank

Kuwait participates in diplomatic movement to stop Zionist aggression

RAMALLAH: Kuwait Red Crescent Society (KRCS) started distributing coupons to families in need in the West Bank through Wafaa Capacity Building and Microfinance. The project mainly targeted Jenin Refugee Camp, which was continuously attacked by Zionist occupation forces, resulting in difficult economic conditions since October 7. Director General of Wafaa Mohasen Atawneh said that this project helped provide thousands of Palestinians with necessities during the holy month of Ramadan, expressing his sincere appreciation to Kuwait's Amir, government, and people for their continuous support since the beginning of the war.

Diplomatic movement

In another development, Kuwait participated in an Arab diplomatic movement in Brussels to exert

pressure towards stopping the Zionist occupation aggression on Gaza as well as halting the ongoing violations against Palestinians in the West Bank. Kuwait's Ambassador to Belgium, Nawaf Al-Enezi, told KUNA that this came during a meeting held on Tuesday by the Arab Contact Group on the Zionist occupation aggression on Gaza with the European Commissioner for Neighborhood Affairs and Enlargement, Oliver Varhelyi.

The ambassador added that they conveyed the Arab position on the need to stop the aggression on Gaza and ensure aid delivery, in addition to the importance of the continued support provided by the European Union to the Palestinian Authority and the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA). Ambassador Al-Enezi explained that the European Union

is an important partner for the region, and due to the geographical proximity between the European Union and the Arab region, there are common challenges and interests.

He noted that the contact group stressed the need to pressure the Zionist occupation to stop the aggression and violations in the West Bank and the importance of lifting restrictions on access to Islamic and Christian holy places and stopping attacks on worshipers at Al-Aqsa Mosque. Ambassador Al-Enezi pointed out that the humanitarian aid provided by Kuwait to Gaza through the air bridge amounted to more than 1,500 tons, and the assistance provided by the Gulf Cooperation Council countries to UNRWA exceeded 1.3 billion dollars, making the Gulf countries one of the largest donors to the UN agency. — KUNA



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GCC Secretary General Jasem Al-Budaiwi and Turkish Minister of Trade Dr. Omer Bolat take a group photo with some officials — KUNA photos

GCC, Turkey sign joint statement to start free trade negotiations

ANKARA: The Secretary-General of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), Jasem Al-Budaiwi, said that the joint statement signed on Thursday to start free trade negotiations between the GCC and Turkey reflected the strong relations between the countries. This came in a press statement during the signing of Al-Budaiwi and the Turkish Minister of Trade Dr. Omer Bolat in Ankara to start the free trade negotiations agreement between the two sides. Al-Budaiwi stressed that this was an indication of the GCC's regional and international status at all levels, including trade, economic, and financial status.

The Secretary General pointed out that the joint statement emphasized the importance of cooper-



ation between Turkey and the GCC to strengthen economic relations and expand trade and investment between the countries. Al-Budaiwi stressed that the GCC aims to strengthen the prospects of trade and economic cooperation for the GCC regionally and internationally, in addition to diversifying their sources of income and economies. — KUNA

Kuwait's trade surplus with Japan rises 53.4 %

TOKYO: Kuwait's trade surplus with Japan surged 53.4 percent from a year earlier to JPY 83.5 billion (\$652 million) in February, up for the first time in two months, as exports outpaced imports by a big margin, government data showed on Thursday. In a preliminary report, the Finance Ministry said that Kuwait stayed in black ink with

Japan for 16 years and one month. Overall exports from Kuwait to Japan jumped 34.2 percent year-on-year to JPY 101.9 billion (\$673 million), the first increase in two months. Imports from Japan sank 14.4 percent to JPY 18.4 billion (\$121 million), down for the third month in a row.

As for the Middle East's trade surplus with Japan, it edged up 0.4 percent to JPY 804.5 billion (\$5.3 billion) last month, with Japan-bound exports from the region expanding 1.3 percent from a year earlier. Crude oil, refined products, liquefied natural gas (LNG), and other natural resources, which accounted for 96.3 percent of the region's total exports to Japan, went up 1.5 percent. The region's overall imports from Japan grew by 4.0 percent on demand for machinery, manufactured goods, and electrical machinery. — KUNA



Montreal daily faces backlash over Netanyahu cartoon

Facing Putin threat, EU pushes to arm Ukraine — and itself



ACEH: Rohingya refugees wait to be rescued from the hull of their capsized boat as a National Search and Rescue Agency vessel approaches on March 21, 2024. — AFP photos

69 Rohingya refugees saved after boat capsizes

Fate of dozens unknown after being swept away off coast of Indonesia’s Aceh province

MEULABOH: As the skipper of an Indonesian search and rescue vessel scoured the sea early Thursday, a dot appeared on the horizon — dozens of Rohingya refugees drifting on the rusty hull of their overturned ship poking out of the water. Against the ocean expanse were men, women and children trying to escape Bangladeshi camps filled with poverty, crime and a lack of hope to reach the shores of Indonesia or, eventually, Malaysia for a better life.

Under the beating sun, a rescuer had seen one of the men desperately waving a red shirt through his binoculars, hailing the ship in the direction of the group whose boat capsized on Wednesday, with dozens feared to have been swept away.

The group was standing on their makeshift metal buoy because there was not enough room for them all to sit with more than half of it submerged by the sea, AFP footage from the rescue boat showed.

But the arrival of the rescuers had brought hope. “The first thing I saw was a little girl, around five years old. A rescuer carried the girl, I looked at her feet and they were badly wrinkly, as if they had been submerged in water for a long time,” said an AFP journalist on board the rescue ship. “She looked so weak and dehydrated, but her face seemed hopeful again.”

As the rescue boat approached them, a group of



A young Rohingya refugee disembarks from a rescue vessel.

men and children stood together, water tumbling around their legs as the rescuers tied a rope to the hull to keep their dinghy close. Some men panicked and tried to jump into the inflatable rescue boat, having to be calmed down by their peers and the rescuers. Others then made sure to let the children stranded on the hull board the rescue boat first.

As the rescuers negotiated who they should first take back to a larger ship, some of the men had to be dragged on to rescue dinghies with no energy left in

their arms. Others looked on patiently as they waited for their turn to be rescued. Many had no shirt on their back despite the scorching temperatures.

‘Exhausted, traumatized’

When they reached the larger rescue ship, safe in the shade, some Rohingya broke down into tears and hugged each other while others shivered or lay exhausted on the deck. “They looked exhausted and traumatized. The women’s faces were red, they were sunburnt,” said the journalist. Children sat in shocked silence, drinking water and eating biscuits. Fishermen had initially saved six Rohingya and refugees said others promised to help back on shore.

“[After the boat capsized] I was lifted by someone passing by, and I asked for help. He said he would call the police and his friends,” said 27-year-old survivor Dostgior. The 69 successfully reached land in Aceh on Thursday afternoon, with most taken to a temporary shelter. Some were immediately taken to hospital. Yet the status of those who accompanied them but were swept away when the boat capsized remains unknown.

For those who survived, reaching a new land and risking their life was better than staying where they were. “For Rohingya, there is no work [in the camps],” said Dostgior. “I like to work, but I’m not allowed to



A Rohingya refugee is rescued from their capsized boat.

work. What else can I do?”

While the evacuation effort in the Islamic holy month of Ramadan carried on, one side of the hull could be seen tilting up from the larger rescue boat and the rescued refugees began to count their luck. One of them, an old man, got to his knees. As he cupped his hands in prayer, tears began to roll down his face. — AFP

India’s opposition struggles to battle Modi juggernaut

NEW DELHI: Living a precarious existence on odd jobs, manual laborer Virender Singh says his relentless struggles to make money are inconsequential compared to Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s endeavors to make India great. Modi’s popularity remains stratospheric a decade after he first swept to power. He has successfully cast himself as the custodian of both India’s rising global stature and the best interests of its majority faith.

More than two dozen opposition parties hoping to unseat his Hindu-nationalist government at elections starting next month are campaigning jointly on a pledge to tackle rising economic distress.

But the pitch has fallen flat with voters like Singh, who lives in a New Delhi slum alongside fellow migrants who journeyed to the capital from small villages to jostle each morning for temporary employment on construction sites. “There are many people in the country, not everyone will get jobs,” the 31-year-old told AFP. “The poor will remain poor regardless of whoever is in power,” he added. “I think things should continue as they are since Modi is doing decent work.” Modi, 73, sits atop a well-oiled campaign juggernaut awash in corporate donations, and a Pew survey last year found nearly 80 percent of Indians viewed him favorably. In January, he presided over the inauguration of a controversial temple in northern India built on the site of a mosque that was razed by Hindu zealots decades earlier.

The temple’s opening was the latest landmark in the ascent of muscular Hindu-first politics in nominally secular India that has left religious minorities fearful of their future in the country. Hindus rapturously greeted it at street parties around the country, further burnishing Modi’s image as the chief advocate for their faith.

“Modi has been able to convince his supporters that the hegemony of Hindus and the putting down of minorities is more important than things like jobs,” said Nilanjan Mukhopadhyay, the author of a biography of the prime minister.

‘Megaphone’ for Modi

Dubbed INDIA — Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance — the opposition grouping bat-



NEW DELHI: A wall graffiti depicting Indian National Congress (INC) party leader Rahul Gandhi (left) and Prime Minister Narendra Modi of Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in a tug of war over India is seen in this file photo.—AFP

tling to oust Modi’s government meanwhile appears to have conceded this year’s election before a single vote has been cast. Its most prominent figure, Rahul Gandhi, has sought to capture attention by staging two cross-country journeys on foot to hear the concerns of average voters. Gandhi’s close aide Gaurav Gogoi told AFP that the listening tour was successfully emphasizing “bread and butter issues” of economic hardship facing much of the country. But despite being the son, grandson and great-grandson of former Indian prime ministers, Gandhi has already suffered two bruising landslide defeats to Modi.

The 53-year-old has studiously refrained from casting himself as an alternative prime minister this time to avoid frictions with allies, with their own national leadership aspirations. Gandhi’s campaigning has been largely ignored by India’s clamorous news channels, which critics believe are overwhelmingly in thrall to Modi’s agenda. Modi’s current term has seen him preside over the opening of new high-speed rail services, India’s hosting of the G20 summit and a successful uncrewed Moon mission.

The media breathlessly portrayed each event as a symbol of India’s rising clout and prosperity, which it now enjoys after decades of poverty. “Much of the

mainstream TV media today works as a megaphone for the governing party,” Manisha Pande of Newslaundry, a news website focusing on media criticism, told AFP.

‘No level playing field’

Prolonged public bickering over which party will contest which seat has also badly dented the opposition alliance’s efforts to resemble an alternative government. “People still find Modi more credible,” Rahul Verma of the Centre for Policy Research think-tank in New Delhi told AFP. “It is harder for opposition parties to come together. Even if they come together, each party is pursuing different interests.” Opposition figures also say Modi’s ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has worked to tilt the election’s outcome in its favor. Several party leaders in the opposition bloc are the subject of criminal investigations they say are politically motivated. Data released this month showed Modi’s party was far and away the single biggest beneficiary of a controversial donation scheme established by his government. The system had allowed huge amounts of corporate funding to be anonymously channeled towards political parties. Lawmaker John Brittas told AFP that Modi’s rivals were at a structural disadvantage. “The BJP has ensured that there’s no level playing field,” he said. — AFP

Population of most countries to shrink by 2050: Study

PARIS: The population of almost every country will be shrinking by the end of the century, a major study said Wednesday, warning that baby booms in developing nations and busts in rich ones will drive massive social change. The fertility rate in half of all nations is already too low to maintain their population size, an international team of hundreds of researchers reported in The Lancet. Using a huge amount of global data on births, deaths and what drives fertility, the researchers tried to forecast the future for the world’s population.

By 2050, the population of three quarters of all countries will be shrinking, according to the study by the US-based Institute For Health Metrics and Evaluation (IHME). At the end of the century, that will be true for 97 percent — or 198 out of 204 countries and territories, the researchers projected.

Only Samoa, Somalia, Tonga, Niger, Chad and Tajikistan are expected to have fertility rates exceeding the replacement level of 2.1 births per female in 2100, the study estimated. During this century, fertility rates will continue to increase in developing countries, particularly those in sub-Saharan Africa, even as they tumble in wealthier, ageing nations. “The world will be simultaneously tackling a ‘baby boom’ in some countries and a ‘baby bust’ in others,” senior study author Stein Emil Vollset of the IHME said in a statement.

“We are facing staggering social change through the 21st century,” he said in a statement. IHME researcher Natalia Bhattacharjee said the “implications are immense”. “These future trends in fertility rates and live births will completely reconfigure the global economy and the international balance of power and will necessitate reorganizing societies,” she said. “Once nearly every country’s population is shrinking, reliance on open immigration will become necessary to sustain economic growth.”

However, World Health Organization experts urged caution for the projections. They pointed out several limitations of the models, particularly a lack of data from many developing nations. —AFP

International

Russia targets Kyiv after vowing revenge

Zelensky calls on the West to deliver air defense systems as strikes injure 17

KYIV: Russia fired more than 30 missiles at Kyiv early Thursday, the largest attack on the Ukrainian capital in weeks after Russian President Vladimir Putin vowed retribution for escalating strikes on Russia's border regions.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky called on the West to deliver air defense systems after the attacks, which wounded 17 in Kyiv and the surrounding region. Ukraine's air force said it shot down 31 Russian missiles fired towards Kyiv. "Such terror continues every day and night," Zelensky said in a Telegram post Thursday.

"It is possible to put an end to it through global unity ... Russian terrorists do not have missiles capable of bypassing Patriot and other leading world systems," he said.

"This protection is required in Ukraine now. From Kyiv to Kharkiv, Sumy to Kherson, and Odesa to the Donetsk region. This is entirely possible if our partners demonstrate sufficient political will." For weeks a vital \$60 billion US military aid package for Ukraine has been blocked in Congress amid domestic political arguments.

'Shot down all missiles'

Local officials said falling debris from the missiles injured 17 people — 13 in Kyiv and four in the surrounding region. The air force said Russia fired two Iskander ballistic missiles and 29 cruise missiles, launched from strategic bombers.

"Our defenders worked successfully and shot down all the missiles," said Oleksiy Kuleba, the deputy head of Zelensky's office. Zelensky posted a video of windows blown out of a residential building and debris strewn across the street as firefighters used

water hoses on the smoking building. It was the first missile strike on the Ukrainian capital since early February, said Sergiy Popko, head of the Kyiv city military administration.

Russia's defense ministry said Thursday that it had targeted Ukrainian military sites with "long-range high-precision weapons, including Kinzhal hypersonic missiles." "The objectives of the strike have been achieved. All targets were hit," it said in a daily briefing. The attack comes after a sharp escalation in Ukrainian strikes on Russian border regions and oil refineries over the last two weeks.

Putin vows revenge

On Thursday, the Russian governor of the Belgorod region, on the border with Ukraine, said five people were wounded in the latest aerial bombardment. "In the city of Belgorod, more than 30 apartments in six residential buildings were damaged as a result of an air attack by the Ukrainian armed forces," governor Vyacheslav Gladkov said on Telegram.

He published photos showing damaged facades and smashed windows in multi-storey apartment blocks. Speaking last week after a wave of Ukrainian drone, rocket and artillery attacks on Russia, Putin said: "These strikes by the enemy do not and will not go unpunished."

On Wednesday he vowed to restore "security" to the border areas and said that Russia had a "plan" to delivery victory against Kyiv. Russia's FSB security service also said Thursday that it had arrested a Russian citizen in Belgorod who was preparing "terrorist acts against the Russian military", Russian state media reported.



KYIV: Police officers inspect a crater caused by an explosion after a missile attack in Kyiv, on March 21, 2024. — AFP

It said the person was working with the "Russian Volunteer Corps", one of the militia groups that claimed to be behind a string of attempted armed cross-border incursions last week. And Russia's defense ministry claimed to have captured the village of Tonenke in east Ukraine, around 10 kilometers (six miles) from the city of Avdiivka, which fell to Russian forces last month.

Zelensky has repeatedly called for the West to deliver more air defense systems for Kyiv as Russian missile attacks continue to kill and injure dozens across the country. At least five were killed in a missile strike on the northeastern city of Kharkiv on Wednesday, and 21 were killed in a strike on the Black Sea port city of Odesa last week.

In Kyiv for a meeting with Zelensky

on Wednesday, the US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan said he could not predict when the much-needed aid from Washington would be approved. "I'm not going to make predictions about exactly when this will get done, but we are working to get it done as soon as possible ... but I cannot make a specific prediction today," he told reporters. — AFP

Facing Putin threat, EU pushes to arm Ukraine - and itself

BRUSSELS: EU leaders will grapple at a summit on Thursday with how to get more weapons to Ukraine's outgunned forces while also re-arming their own countries to face Russia's Vladimir Putin — aggressive and newly emboldened after cementing his grip on power.

Over two years into Moscow's all-out war against its neighbor, Kyiv's troops are struggling to hold back the Russian army as Western support fails to keep pace with the fighting.

"If Ukraine had to surrender, then a puppet regime will be installed in Kyiv, the Ukrainian people will be crushed," EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell warned ahead of the Brussels meeting. "The Russian army will be at our borders and we could be sure that they will not be stopping there."

Following his weekend presidential election success, a bullish Putin on Wednesday described it as a "prologue" to victory in Ukraine. Kyiv desperately needs more weapons and ammunition to fend off Putin's troops, who have made recent battlefield gains.

As a \$60-billion package remains stalled in Washington, the EU's 27 leaders will debate a plan to spend profits from 200 billion euros in frozen Russian central bank assets on weapons for Ukraine.

Officials said that the proposal could unlock some three billion euros a year for Kyiv and that if EU countries agree quickly, the money could start flowing by July.

That would come on top of more than 33 billion

euros that the EU says it has provided towards arming Ukraine since the Kremlin invaded in February 2022. Alongside the efforts to get more weapons to Kyiv, the EU is also frantically working on ways to boost Europe's defense industry to be able to arm Ukraine and build up its own forces.

Brussels has put forward a raft of proposals aimed at ramping up capacity but there are complaints that Europe is still not moving fast enough.

While Russia has put its economy on a war footing, the EU has fallen well short of a promise made last year to supply Ukraine with a million artillery shells by this month. Meanwhile, the Czech Republic has spearheaded its own initiative aimed at hoovering up hundreds of thousands of shells available around the world to send to Kyiv.

Defense bonds

"At this crucial moment in global history, we must be defense-ready, matching the urgency of the threat," European Council chief Charles Michel wrote in an editorial. "If we want peace, we must prepare for war."

France, Estonia and Poland have pitched the idea of using joint borrowing similar to the massive package of support the EU came up with during the Covid pandemic to now fund defense spending.

But a majority of member states — led by the so-called "frugal" countries such as Germany — are unwilling to go anywhere near that far. Instead, the discussion will likely focus on getting the EU's lending arm, the European Investment Bank, to expand its funding for the sector.

At the moment, the bank is limited to investing in only a small number of "dual-use products" that can have both military and civilian functions. While the response to the conflict in Ukraine will dominate much of the summit, EU leaders will also push for a



BELGOROD: A worker removes damaged glass panels at the Belgorod Arena following fresh aerial attacks in Belgorod on March 21, 2024. — AFP

united stance on the war in Gaza, with United Nations chief Antonio Guterres in attendance.

Diplomats say that an overwhelming majority of countries support a call for an "immediate humanitarian pause" in the Zionist entity's offensive and a warning for it not to launch a ground operation in Rafah. But staunch Zionist ally Hungary has repeatedly blocked efforts to take a tougher line and could

veto a consensus this time as well.

Closer home, EU leaders look set to give the green light to opening membership negotiations with Bosnia as Russia's war has sparked a push to expand the bloc. Diplomats said that the Balkan state would likely get an agreement on launching talks, but they could only start in earnest when the country has passed more reforms. — AFP

US urges 'immediate' Gaza truce...

Continued from Page 1

the rubble. Gaza's biggest hospital has emerged as a major flashpoint after the Zionist entity accused Palestinian militants of hiding out there and launched a days-long raid, which it said on Thursday had killed more than 140 fighters.

Hamas accused Zionist troops of crimes at the vast Al-Shifa hospital complex, crowded with patients and people seeking refuge, including "executions of dozens of displaced persons, patients and staff". Gaza's civilian infrastructure has largely collapsed and UN agencies are warning that the territory's 2.4 million people are on the brink of famine. The United States has vetoed previous UN Security Council texts on the nearly six-month war, objecting even last month to the term "immediate" in a draft submitted by Algeria.

A new version circulated by the US and seen by AFP stressed "the need for an immediate and durable ceasefire" to protect civilians and allow aid into the territory. No vote has been scheduled on the text but Blinken told Saudi media outlet Al Hadath on Wednesday that support for the resolution would send a "strong message". The US secretary of state, whose diplomatic push is running alongside mediation efforts in Qatar, will land in the Zionist entity on Friday.

The Qatar talks were considering a Hamas proposal for a six-week ceasefire to allow hostages to be exchanged for Palestinian prisoners held by the Zionist entity and increased aid deliveries. But a senior Hamas official based in Lebanon, Osama Hamdan, said the Zionist entity's response had been "largely negative" and called it "a step backwards".

The US and the Zionist entity are also engaged in a diplomatic tug-of-war over the southern Gaza city of Rafah, the last part of the territory still largely untouched by Zionist ground troops. Hundreds of thousands of Palestinians have fled to the city to escape fighting elsewhere, but Zionist Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has insisted a ground incursion is the only way to finally root out Hamas.



GAZA: People react upon seeing the corpses of relatives killed in Zionist bombardment in Al-Zahra in the central Gaza Strip on March 21, 2024. — AFP

US officials said they supported Netanyahu's goal but wanted the Zionist entity to try strategies short of a potentially catastrophic invasion of an area where around 1.5 million people are hemmed in by the Egyptian border. The Zionist entity's offensive has killed 31,988 people, most of them women and children, according to Gaza's health ministry.

Tensions have also flared in the occupied West Bank, where Zionist troops and settlers have killed at least 437 Palestinians since the Gaza war began. The Zionist military killed four Palestinians during a predawn raid on a refugee camp near Tulkarem, the Palestinian Red Crescent said.

Two of the four Palestinians were killed by an air strike and two by live bullets, the Red Crescent said. In total, eight Palestinians were killed in less than 24 hours in the West Bank. Three Palestinians were killed late Wednesday in a Zionist strike on a car in Jenin, a stronghold of Palestinian armed factions in the northern West Bank. One Palestinian was killed by gunfire in the Al-Amari refugee camp near Ramallah.

The Saudi government announced it would donate \$40 million to the UN agency for Palestinian refugees, UNRWA, which has been central to aid operations in Gaza. UNRWA chief Philippe Lazzarini warned this week that "siege, hunger and diseases will soon become the main killer in Gaza". — Agencies

Fasting and sincerity...

Continued from Page 1

in their hearts. Sincerity is a prerequisite in all actions and words and they cannot be accepted without sincerity.

No matter how an action is good, if it is not done sincerely for the sake of Allah, it will be of no avail. A famous hadith makes this fact clear: "Allah never accepts any deed except what is done sincerely for His sake." (Sunan an-Nasa'i)

The life of our righteous predecessors abounds in amazing examples that show their sincerity. Imam Al-Zahabi narrated some examples in his famous book Biographies of Noble Flags. He wrote that Dawud ibn Abu Hind (may Allah have mercy upon him) fasted for 40 years. Neither his family nor people in the market knew about that. He was a seller of

silk and used to carry his lunch with him and give it away. His family would think that he had eaten in the market, and people in the market would think that he had eaten with his family.

Muhammad ibn Ishaq (may Allah have mercy upon him) reported, "A group of people in Madinah used to receive regular stipends without knowing from where it was coming. When 'Ali ibn Al-Hasan Zayn Al-'Abidin died, they would no longer find the sustenance and stipend that used to reach them at night. As they washed him, they found marks of the sacks that he used to carry to the poor on his back."

Fasting is the best training on sincerity through which Muslims can learn sincerity in all the actions of their life. Fasting strengthens the desire to dedicate good deeds to Allah Almighty and to avoid ostentation. Fasting is a practical way to cultivate sincerity and God-consciousness in the heart and implant an inner monitoring consciousness.

Ramadan food traditions bring...

Continued from Page 1

into smaller pieces, which are turned into dome-like shapes, then placed in a bowl with a stew of beans, tomatoes and spices.

Meat, once essential, is absent due to its soaring prices. But the volunteers make do. "We went from a saucepan to a pot, then from a pot to two, and now we serve between 300 and 400 meals per day," said Issam Al-Tayeb, a 57-year-old resident of Tajura who came to help. In the capital Tripoli, around 22 km away, another culinary delicacy is making a resurgence this Ramadan — sfinz, a deep-fried, soft doughnut made with leavened dough, usually filled with an egg or dipped in honey. Once an affordable street food eaten on the go, sfinz has become a luxury for many Libyans amid the soaring cost of living.

The country is still struggling to recover from the years of war that followed the death of Gaddafi in 2011.

The North African country remains split between two rival administrations in Tripoli, in the west, and Benghazi in the east. Despite having the continent's largest oil reserves and abundant natural gas deposits, enduring instability has undermined the economy and weighed heavily on the standard of living in Libya.

"Customers buy within their means," said Mohamad Saber, who runs a sfinz shop on the outskirts of Tripoli. "Today, a tray of eggs costs 20 dinars (around \$4), which has raised the price of egg sfinz to 3.5 dinars" from just a few pennies, he said. Saber, a Tunisian who has lived and worked long enough in Libya to master its dialect, said "life for Libyans is hard now".

Sfinz merchants like Saber have traditionally come from neighboring Tunisia, home of the popular bamba-louni doughnut, but in recent years they have become scarce in Libya. Now they are staging a comeback, despite competition from hamburger and shawarma vendors, for those who can afford it. Young and old queue up in front of Saber's small shop. "It smells very good," Mohamad Al-Bouechi, a 69-year-old customer, said with a playfully remorseful tone. "But to be honest with you, it's not ideal for your health." — AFP

International

Indonesia's Subianto confirmed president

Losing rivals allege fraud, vow to submit complaints to court over process 'tainted by cheating'

JAKARTA: Indonesia's Prabowo Subianto has been elected president of the world's third-biggest democracy, the elections commission said Wednesday, beating two rivals who have vowed to file legal complaints about the vote.

The fiery defense minister and his vice-presidential running mate Gibran Rakabuming Raka — eldest son of outgoing leader Joko Widodo — already declared victory last month after unofficial counts showed them winning a majority.

They were officially confirmed as winners Wednesday after receiving more than 96 million votes, commission chairman Hasyim Asy'ari said, roughly 58.6 percent of the total and enough to secure a first-round majority. "This decision is effective immediately as of March 20," Asy'ari said.

Former Jakarta governor Anies Baswedan secured 24.9 percent of the vote, while former Central Java governor Ganjar Pranowo received more than 16 percent. More than 164 million Indonesians voted, representing around an 80 percent turnout of eligible voters.

Prabowo, 72, was widely predicted to win the presidency on his third attempt. He takes over in October after a transition period. Speaking outside his house in the capital Jakarta to thunderous applause from supporters, Prabowo thanked Indonesians and his party for helping him rise to the country's highest office.

"We are grateful to the God Almighty for the official announcement from the KPU on the results of the election," he said, referring to the elections commission. "We would like to convey our gratitude and the highest appreciation for all the people of Indonesia who have exercised their rights to vote."

His popularity soared because of what experts said was his nationalist verve in populist speeches, strongman credentials as defense minister and backing from Widodo, more popularly known as Jokowi. Prabowo also offered his thanks to Jokowi, a former rival against whom he lost two election battles in 2014 and 2019.

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken quickly offered "sincere congratulations" to Prabowo, saying Washington looked "forward to partnering closely"

with the ex-general, who was once placed on a US visa blacklist. German Chancellor Olaf Scholz said in a statement that he looked forward "to deepening our strategic partnership even further" on issues such as climate change.

And France said in a statement from its foreign ministry that it "attaches priority importance to reinforcing its relations with Indonesia and stands ready to work with Mr. Prabowo Subianto" to deepen the two countries' strategic partnership.

'X factor'

Prabowo's rivals, Anies and Ganjar, have vowed to submit a complaint to the Constitutional Court about allegations of election irregularities and fraud.

Anies confirmed after results were announced that he would file a complaint to the court. "A leader that was born out of a process tainted by cheating and violations will result in a regime that will produce policies that are full of unfairness, and we don't want this to happen," he said in a statement.

But Prabowo's legal team is confident the result will not be successfully challenged because of his wide margin of victory, local media reported Tuesday.

Indonesia held one of the world's biggest single-day elections last month, featuring hundreds of thousands of candidates vying for the presidency, parliamentary seats and local legislator positions.

After failing as a vice presidential candidate in 2009 and presidential candidate in 2014 and 2019, Prabowo rode to victory this time with Jokowi's support.

The campaign was punctuated by accusations of ethical violations and interference by Jokowi, who critics said maneuvered to install a political dynasty through his son before leaving office.

"Jokowi is the X factor that heavily influenced Prabowo's victory," said Firman Noor, politics professor at the National Research and Innovation Agency. He has also tried to please Prabowo, experts say, by making him an honorary four-star general as the outgoing leader bids to keep his influence under the new administration.



JAKARTA: Prabowo Subianto (center), accompanied by his coalition party leaders, delivers his victory speech at his residence on March 20, 2024. — AFP

Democracy fears

Indonesia's next president has also weathered allegations from rights groups and his former bosses that he played a role in the disappearance of student activists in the late 1990s at the end of dictator Suharto's rule.

Between 1997 and 1998, when some kidnappings took place, Subianto led the elite army force known as Kopassus, used by Jakarta for special operations aimed at tamping down internal unrest. More than a dozen activists were never found.

He was discharged from the military over the kidnappings but has denied direct responsibility and the

accusations appeared to have little impact on his electoral hopes this time.

Prabowo will inherit Southeast Asia's largest economy, which is enjoying around five percent growth annually. There is voter optimism about the economy and Prabowo has pledged to carry on Jokowi's resource nationalism, which seeks to turn Indonesia into a global nickel powerhouse.

Others are less sure about the security of the country's young democracy. "I see the future of democracy becoming even bleaker during Prabowo's time," said Hurriyah, director of the University of Indonesia's Center for Political Studies. — AFP

Portugal's new PM faces tough mission

LISBON: Portugal's new Prime Minister Luis Montenegro vowed "stable" leadership after his appointment Thursday but faces a tough job ruling in a minority government with opposition from a rising far right.

The 51-year-old lawyer and veteran parliamentarian was named premier after midnight early Thursday after final results came through from the March 10 polls.

Despite falling far short of a majority in parliament, he has ruled out teaming up with the anti-immigration Chega party in government. "There is no internal or external reason to doubt our ability to have a stable government," he said on Thursday after meeting with European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen in Brussels.

His government "has the confidence of the voters," he said. "It also has what is required of all political players, including those now in opposition, that is a sense of responsibility." Montenegro added. "There is no reason to call into question the country's stability".

Growing far right

Montenegro's Democratic Alliance (AD) had campaigned on promises to boost economic growth by cutting taxes, and to improve unreliable public health services and education, which have been hit by strikes by teachers and school workers over pay.

Montenegro is scheduled to present his new government next Thursday and it will take office on April 2, he told reporters after a late-night meeting with President Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa. Montenegro's party beat the Socialist Party (PS) of outgoing premier Antonio Costa in the elections by a narrow margin. In Wednesday's final count, AD won 28.8 percent of the vote and 80 seats, far short of a majority in the 230-seat parliament.

Even with the backing of the tiny business-friendly Liberal Initiative (IL) party, the AD would still need the support of Chega to reach a majority of 116 seats in the assembly.

The election was called after Costa, 62, unexpectedly resigned in November following an influence-peddling investigation that involved a search of his official residence and the arrest of his chief of staff.

The PS came second in the elections, with 28 percent of the vote and 78 seats in parliament. Chega posted the biggest gains, winning 50 seats after taking just 12 in the last election in 2022, cementing its position in Portugal's political landscape.

But Montenegro has ruled out forming a coalition with Chega, saying he intends to form a minority government. Chega leader Andre Ventura this week warned of political instability if



LISBON: Democratic Alliance (AD) leader Luis Montenegro answers journalists' questions after a meeting with the Portuguese president at Belem Palace on March 18, 2024. — AFP

the AD continued to reject a coalition, threatening to oppose it if Montenegro refused to open negotiations.

Budget negotiations

The autumn deadline for agreeing the state budget for 2025 will be Montenegro's first major test. The new Socialist leader Pedro Nuno Santos said Tuesday that he was ready to vote on a budget amendment to increase the pay of teachers, police officers, nurses and court clerks, but that a favorable vote by the Socialist Party for the budget overall was "practically impossible".

Montenegro's new government will be "condemned to negotiation, because that is the fate of minority gov-

ernments", political scientist Antonio Costa Pinto, of the University of Lisbon's Institute of Social Sciences, told AFP. But it is not necessarily doomed to be an unstable government since "none of the players have an interest in triggering a crisis", he added. In the event of political deadlock, President Rebelo de Sousa would mediate the negotiations.

Outgoing prime minister Costa said there would be "no change" to Portugal's foreign policy. "Even Chega, unlike the far-right parties in other European countries, has never campaigned against the European Union or exploited any Eurosceptic attitude," Costa said at his last European Council meeting in Brussels. — AFP

Montreal daily faces backlash over Netanyahu cartoon

MONTREAL: A Montreal daily faced accusations of anti-Semitism on Wednesday over its depiction in a cartoon of Zionist Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu as a vampire.

La Presse, a digital-only French-language newspaper, showed Netanyahu with pointed ears and claws, standing in a long coat on the deck of a sailing ship, reminiscent of the vampire in the 1922 film Nosferatu. Beneath it was a caption that read "Nosfenyahou en route to Rafah."

Long-standing anti-Semitic tropes, including those used by the Nazis, have likened Jews to vampires. The head of La Presse apologized and said the cartoon was meant as a criticism of the Zionist government and not the Jewish people.

Concern has mounted in Canada and globally over the Zionist attack on Gaza — including a planned Zionist assault on the city of Rafah — in which Netanyahu has vowed to destroy Hamas in response to a deadly attack by its militants on October 7.

Canadian politicians, Jewish leaders and others immediately criticized the cartoon, including Prime Minister Justin Trudeau who called it "distasteful." "It is unacceptable to bring back anti-Semitism and allusions like that," Trudeau said.

Several of Trudeau's ministers were also critical of the cartoon, calling it "egregious" and an "anti-Semitic trope," and warning that it risked increasing already high tensions in



A screenshot of the cartoon which was published by Montreal daily La Presse.

Canada related to the fighting in Gaza.

By midday the cartoon had been taken down and La Presse issued an apology. Its editor-in-chief Stephanie Grammond said the cartoon was meant to be a criticism of the (Zionist) government, "not the Jewish people." "It was never our intention to promote anti-Semitism or harmful stereotypes," Grammond said. Montreal is home to a large Jewish community. — AFP

Anti-migrant rhetoric rampant as Bulgaria joins Schengen zone

SOFIA: A rising tide of anti-migrant misinformation has flooded Bulgaria, stoking rallies and xenophobia ahead of Sofia's partial accession to the European Union's visa-free Schengen zone.

After more than a decade of talks, EU members Bulgaria and Romania finally got the green signal in December to join the Schengen zone, but only for air and sea travel, from the end of this month.

The move came after Austria lifted its veto. But in exchange, Vienna insisted that Bulgaria and Romania take back asylum seekers who entered Europe through those countries.

The bloc's so-called Dublin regulation stipulates that migrants must apply for asylum in their first European port of call. The pro-Western government in the EU's poorest country has consequently faced attacks both from the left and the far-right. In January, the leader of the pro-Russian Vazrazhdane party Kostadin Kostadinov, said Bulgaria could become "the world's biggest refugee camp".

Some far-right politicians posted videos on social media they said showed "migrants beating up young Bulgarians" in Sofia. Police, however, described the incident as an altercation between two rival Bulgarian groups.

Security has been stepped up in the capital and at refugee centers after several incidents targeting foreigners and anti-refugee rallies. "There is no migration crisis, but a crisis narrative that poses a real threat to security," said Ildiko Otova, a migration expert and lecturer at Sofia University. Unlike most Western countries, the majority of Bulgarian politicians were choosing to get involved, she added.



HARMANLI: A migrant walks among Bulgarian riot policemen inside the Harmanli Refugee center, near the Bulgarian border with Turkey on November 25, 2016. — AFP

'Penal colony for criminals'

Bulgaria is part of the EU's eastern border, with Turkey to the southeast. It has become a gateway into the bloc for rising numbers of people over the past two years, despite increased patrols along its 234-kilometer (145-mile) barbed-wire fenced border with Turkey. Most of the migrants — mainly from Afghanistan, Syria and Morocco — do not stay long in Bulgaria and move instead to Western Europe.

After Germany deported about two dozen people to Bulgaria, the Socialists accused the government of rubber stamping a "penal colony for criminals, murderers, rapists and money launderers". German authorities said the only known criminals among those deported were some Bulgarians released after having served their sentences in Bavaria. The others were 18 Syrians — including children below the age of six — none of whom had been convicted of serious offences in Germany.

Last week, Bulgaria dismissed opposition claims of "unprecedented migratory flows" into the country. Relatively speaking, Bulgaria has been spared given that more than one million asylum applications were registered across the EU in 2023 — a seven-year high. — AFP

FRIDAY, MARCH 22, 2024

Business

Gold hits a new record above \$2,200

Traders welcome US Federal Reserve signal

HONG KONG: Gold rallied to a fresh record above \$2,200 on Thursday as traders welcomed a Federal Reserve signal that it would cut interest rates three times this year. Equity markets in New York and across Asia surged and the dollar retreated in reaction to the US central bank's projection that it would begin easing monetary policy this year despite recent data showing inflation ticking up in January and February.

Gold traders also joined the party to push the precious metal to as high as \$2,220 per ounce - building on a rally that has seen it climb almost 12 percent since mid-February. The gains have been helped by a weaker dollar and the gold's attraction as a safe haven as geopolitical tensions rise.

Because bullion does not generate any interest, it benefits when central banks lower borrowing costs as its safe-haven status makes it more attractive to investors. "What we saw last night was the green light really for gold traders to come back in," said Pepperstone Group's Chris Weston. "The Fed (has) said that right now they're tolerant of the inflation that we've seen, they're tolerant that the labor market strength is not going to be the impediment." — AFP



RIYADH: Saudis shop at a jewelry shop in the Taiba gold market in the capital Riyadh in this file photo. —AFP

Japan Airlines buys 42 airplanes from Airbus and Boeing

TOKYO: Japan Airlines said Thursday that it is buying 42 airplanes from Boeing and Airbus as part of a drive to boost its international and domestic operations. The firm said it would "introduce a total of 21 Airbus A350-900 aircraft from Airbus, along with 11 A321neo aircraft, and 10 Boeing 787-9 aircraft from The Boeing Company, as part of its fleet renewal plan". A spokesperson declined to comment on the financial details of the orders when contacted by AFP.

But a separate statement listed the "catalogue" prices of the planes, which in total comes to around \$12.9 billion. One of the Airbus A350-900 planes is to replace one of the same model destroyed in an accident with another airplane at Tokyo's Haneda airport on January 2, it said. All 379 people on board the JAL Airbus escaped just before the aircraft was engulfed in flames, but five of the six people on the smaller aircraft died.

The airline said it will add 20 Airbus A350-900 aircraft and 10 Boeing 787-9 to its international routes, adding to its existing fleet of more than 50 Boeing 787-series planes. "These new aircraft introductions aim to enhance and expand the capacity of JAL's international operations, with a primary focus on regions such as North America, Asia, and India where future growth is expected," it said in a statement. On domestic routes, JAL will introduce 21 Boeing 737-8 aircraft to replace its current Boeing 737-800 fleet, starting from 2026, it said.



NEW YORK: An Airbus A350 passengers aircraft of Japan airlines prepares to take off to Tokyo at JFK International Airport in New York. — AFP

Additionally, to update their existing fleet of medium-sized Boeing 767 aircraft, JAL will introduce 11 Airbus A321neo aircraft. This marks the first time that JAL, which is Japan's second-biggest airline after All Nippon Airways (ANA), will introduce the model, it said. The introduction of both aircraft types is planned over a period of approximately six years, starting in 2027. JAL added that it "remains committed to steadily advancing the introduction of fuel-efficient aircraft as part of its efforts to achieve its CO2

emissions reduction targets".

The goals include a 10 percent reduction in total emissions compared to 2019 by fiscal year 2030, and near-zero emissions by fiscal year 2050, it added. There was no comment from Airbus or Boeing. American Airlines this month ordered 260 new planes from Airbus, Boeing and Brazil's Embraer. The Airbus order was worth upwards of \$11 billion, based on list prices, while the Boeing order was worth some \$11.5 billion and Embraer's more than \$7 billion. — AFP

Meta, Microsoft slam Apple over app store policy

SAN FRANCISCO: Meta, Microsoft, X and online dating giant Match Group hit at Apple on Wednesday for overcharging on app purchases. The four companies filed a rare joint amicus brief in a California court in charge of applying a ruling that Apple must allow companies to link to alternative payment options outside the app store for iPhone users. That ruling was stemmed from a 2020 lawsuit by video gaming giant Epic Games, which has been fighting Apple in courts across the globe for years over its strict app store policies.

Apple takes a cut of as much as 30 percent on all financial transactions in its app shop, prompting complaints about an unfair "tax" on companies. A federal court in San Francisco overwhelmingly rejected Epic's lawsuit in 2021, offering only a concession that apps could indicate other ways of paying for services outside of Apple's ecosystem.

But Apple's compliance with the order earlier this year drew a furious response from Epic, which went to court arguing that it was defying the judge's intentions. Apple's proposed solution allows it a 12 to 27 percent fee on external purchases outside its app store, which amounts to just a small discount from what it charged within the app store. "The Apple Plan comports with neither the letter nor the spirit of this Court's mandate," Meta, Microsoft, X and Match said in their joint filing on Wednesday, in support of Epic. — AFP

Turkey's high inflation dampens Ramadan's high spirits

ISTANBUL: As the sun sets over the Bosphorus, a long queue forms on a street in Istanbul as people wait for iftar — the evening meal that breaks Ramadan's daily fast. Due to Turkey's high inflation, many worshippers cannot afford to prepare iftar at home and so rely on the local authorities for the meal. It is the first time 68-year-old pensioner Huseyin Ozcan has come to eat the meal supplied by the city — tonight it is lentil soup, spinach and pasta. He said more people were coming for the free meals than in previous years.

"We are well served, but it's no substitute for the iftar at home," said Ozcan, who waited over an hour to be served. "With my pension, I can't afford to prepare meals like I did during previous Ramadans. Food is too expensive." According to official figures, Turkey's inflation rate soared to 67 percent in February. The spike particularly hit food products, for which inflation reached 72 percent overall in 2023.

Vicious cycle

A group of independent economists from Turkey's Inflation Research Group (ENAG) estimated a 122 percent rise in prices in real terms in February compared to a year earlier. The Union of Chambers of Agriculture of Turkey said that "since the last month of Ramadan (in 2023), the prices of 38 food products have risen." The price of olive oil increased by 149 percent, turning it into a luxury item.

Meanwhile, Ramadan staples like dried apricots have risen by 148 percent and dried figs have surged 171 percent. Despite regular increases to the minimum wage and pensions to compensate for inflation, high prices remain an important topic ahead of local elections scheduled for March 31. The country has been trapped in a vicious cycle of rising prices and a falling currency for several years. Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan regularly promises a return to "single-digit inflation" and has acquiesced to interest



rate hikes by the central bank to control prices despite his past objections to such policy.

'Drowning in debt'

In the alleyways of the Spice Bazaar in central Istanbul, locals hunt for the best prices, hoping for discounts from vendors. Cicek Akpinar, carrying a half-empty shopping bag, scrutinizes every label. "I am drowning in debt. These prices are unaffordable. For iftar, I am preparing pasta or eggs for myself and my children. I can't invite relatives like before," she said. For Akpinar, the holy month of Ramadan "no longer has the same joy." "This year many people are having to look at the shelves without buying," she said.

Another shopper, Mirza, 65, like others, has had to give up meat because of the price. One kilo of mutton now costs more than 420 Turkish lira (\$13). "In the past, we prepared a different meal every day of the week during Ramadan so as to share a nice moment with the family," said Mirza, who would not give his last name. "Now we always cook the same meals, without meat," he said with a box of Turkish delight in his hand.

Rising price of dates

At the spice and dried fruit stall, a particular favorite during Ramadan, Mehmet Masum is worried about his business. "The month of Ramadan used to

be the liveliest period for traders. That is not the case this year." He said the price of dates, traditionally eaten to break the fast, has risen from 80 Turkish lira (\$2.50) per kilo to 230 Turkish lira (\$7) in one year. "Those who can afford to buy half a kilo of dates are as happy as if they have discovered gold," the shopkeeper said. "In the past, shoppers would taste before buying. We don't do that anymore; the prices are rising every day."

Fraternity in hard times

One hour before iftar, several hundred worshippers wait impatiently before the tent where the meals will be served after sunset. The crowd gets agitated and shoving breaks out. "You will all be served," insists a municipal employee. At 7:17 pm, the call to prayer drowns the hubbub of the city and in one hour 500 worshippers have been served. Haci Hakalmaz came to enjoy a convivial evening with his friends. "What is important is not the quality of the food but sharing this moment with the community," he said. During iftar, the 67-year-old retiree wants to forget his meagre pension — some are capped at 10,000 Turkish lira (\$309). "When you look at the prices, you can see that the country is on fire," he said. "But this evening, I want to keep my good humour and the feeling of fraternity around this table". — AFP

IMF pushes Sri Lanka to clinch debt deal with China

COLOMBO: Sri Lanka must speed up debt restructuring with key bilateral lender China and other creditors to sustain a recovery from its worst economic crisis, the International Monetary Fund said Thursday. Sri Lanka defaulted on its \$46 billion external debt in April 2022 after the country ran out of foreign exchange to finance even essential imports such as food, fuel and medicine. Months of protests forced the then president Gotabaya Rajapaksa to step down after being accused of corruption and mismanagement.

The IMF said it had reached a staff-level agreement with Colombo to clear the way for the release of \$337 million, the third installment out of a four-year \$2.9 billion bailout. The IMF said the "critical" next steps were to finalize agreements with creditors. Beijing accounts for around 10 percent of the island's total foreign debt. China had agreed "in principle" to restructure Sri Lanka's debt in December, but neither Colombo nor Beijing had given details and the two are yet to finalize an agreement.

President Ranil Wickremesinghe has raised sales and personal income taxes, cut energy subsidies and pushed reforms and austerity measures in line with the IMF rescue deal. "The economic situation is gradually improving," the IMF said in a statement. "Sustaining the reform momentum is critical". It noted that Sri Lanka recorded a modest 1.6 percent and 4.5 percent year-on-year growth in the third and fourth quarters of last year after contractions since the first quarter of 2022.

Wickremesinghe announced late Wednesday he expected the economy to make a full recovery after June. He expected the rupee to strengthen at 280 to the US dollar, up from the 360 rupees at the height of the crisis. Wickremesinghe said earlier this month he expects a moratorium on foreign debt payments till 2028. Sri Lanka's annual debt servicing is officially estimated at \$6.0 billion. Its foreign debt stood at \$52.65 billion at the end of September 2023, according to central bank figures. — AFP

France warns of deepening public deficit amid economic slowdown

Minister cites factors that created ‘new situation’

PARIS: France's public sector deficit for 2023 will be worse than forecast, a government minister said on Thursday, citing a global economic slowdown as the main factor for the slippage. The deficit is now expected to be in excess of five percent of gross domestic product (GDP), Thomas Cazenave, minister for public accounts, told broadcaster Franceinfo. This compares to the official government deficit estimate of 4.9 percent of GDP. Cazenave cited an economic slowdown in China and Europe, and the Ukraine war as reasons, saying these factors had created "a new situation" for France.

While acknowledging that the deficit figure would now be "in excess of five percent" Cazenave declined to confirm recent press reports that the government actually expects a deficit of 5.6 percent. The minister's remarks come a day after President Emmanuel Macron summoned members of his government to the Elysee Palace to discuss France's finances. Like all euro-zone members, France is committed to keeping its deficit to below three percent of GDP.

That requirement, agreed between European Union members as part of their Stability and Growth Pact, has been suspended since 2020 first to allow countries to deal with the COVID pandemic, and then with the economic fallout of Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Macron has promised to bring French finances back on track within the next four years but forecasts for economic growth, crucial for deficit cuts, have been disappointing. Finance Minister Bruno Lemaire last month cut the government's forecast for growth to 1.0 percent for this year from a previous 1.4 percent projection.

France has announced 10 billion euros (\$10.8 billion) of spending cuts this year to limit the fallout. The cuts would help the government meet its deficit target for this year of 4.4 percent of GDP. Le Maire has said, but experts say this may now also have to be revised. The government has said it hopes to bring its deficit to below 3.0 percent of GDP in 2027. Statistics institute INSEE is scheduled to report on the 2023 national accounts on Tuesday. — AFP



PARIS: A photo shows the French Economy and Finances Ministry in Paris. — AFP

Switzerland becomes the first developed economy to cut rate

ZURICH: The Swiss National Bank cut interest rates on Thursday—the first to do so among the major central banks, saying the battle against inflation was working almost two years after launching its monetary tightening campaign. The SNB eased its monetary policy and cut its rate by 0.25 percentage points to 1.5 percent, effective from Friday, in its first interest rate cut since it began to hike them in June 2022.

In a busy week for central banks, the Federal Reserve on Wednesday held US interest rates steady, but left open the door to three interest rate cuts before the end of the year. The Bank of England is widely expected to keep its main interest rate at a 16-year high of 5.25 percent on Thursday, rejecting a cut as inflation remains well above target despite recent slowing.

And the Norwegian central bank on Thursday kept its key interest rate unchanged at 4.5 percent but signaled it could start cutting later this year. But the SNB changed its monetary policy for the first time since the rapid tightening initiated in 2022, in a move that surprised most analysts who were expecting the SNB to hold off until June—when the Fed and European Central

Bank are also expected to cut their rates.

SNB chief Thomas Jordan said the decision to cut now was not to move before other central banks, but because it was "the right time" for Switzerland. "The easing of monetary policy has been made possible because the fight against inflation over the past two and a half years has been effective," the central bank said in a statement. "For some months now, inflation has been back below two percent and thus in the range the SNB equates with price stability."

Uncertain global outlook

The SNB said that according to its forecasts, inflation in Switzerland was likely to remain within the current range over the next few years. "With its decision, the SNB is taking into account the reduced inflationary pressure as well as the appreciation of the Swiss franc in real terms over the past year," it said. "The policy rate cut also supports economic activity. Today's easing thus ensures that monetary conditions remain appropriate." The SNB said inflation had declined further since the beginning of the year, and stood at 1.2 percent in February. "This decrease was attributable to lower goods inflation. Inflation is currently being driven above all by higher prices for domestic services," the central bank said.

The SNB said global economic growth was likely to remain moderate in the coming quarters, while inflation was likely to decline further—not least due to the restrictive monetary policy being upheld by many central banks. But it warned that inflation could remain



ZURICH: Chairman of Swiss National Bank (SNB BNS) Thomas Jordan (center) gestures next to Vice Chairman Martin Schlegel (left) and board member Antoine Martin during a press conference on March 21, 2024. — AFP

elevated for longer in some countries, while geopolitical tensions could increase. "It therefore cannot be ruled out that global economic activity will be weaker than assumed," the central bank said. "Our forecast for Switzerland, as for the global economy, is subject to significant uncertainty. The main risk is weaker economic activity abroad."

Few economists expected the SNB to cut its key rate, giving a boost to industry which is suffering from the strength of the Swiss franc. "With the bank sounding more dovish and inflation likely to undershoot its

forecasts, we continue to expect two more rate cuts this year," said Europe economist Adrian Prettejohn of researchers Capital Economics.

"We forecast the SNB to cut rates at the September and December meetings taking the policy rate to one percent, where we think it will remain throughout 2025 and 2026." The Swiss franc remains at a high level compared to the euro and the US dollar, even if it has lost some ballast since December. Around 0920 GMT, the Swiss franc was down 0.98 percent against the dollar at 0.8957 Swiss francs per dollar. — AFP

شركة الصفاة للاستثمار
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KUWAIT BOURSA WEEKLY REPORT

WEEK ENDED ON 21 MARCH 2024

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No.	Ticker	Sector	Price Movement & Performance										Valuation Multiples *				
			Open Price	Close Price	Week High	Week Low	Range	Volume	WTD Change	WTD %	YTD %	Support Level	Resistance Level	P/E	P/B	Yield	Beta
101	National Bank of Kuwait	Banking	971	971	975	963	12	14,970,025	4	0.41%	8.61%	958	974	14.3	1.78	3.6%	1.02
102	Gulf Bank	Banking	295	294	297	291	6	17,719,729	-1	-0.34%	4.63%	294	298	13.9	1.29	4.1%	1.28
104	Al Ahli Bank of Kuwait	Banking	258	259	261	256	5	2,196,507	26	11.16%	11.16%	244	260	13.9	0.98	3.5%	0.93
106	Kuwait International Bank	Banking	171	169	172	168	4	20,942,723	-2	-1.17%	12.67%	167	173	17.2	0.61	3.0%	1.09
107	Burgan Bank	Banking	216	209	216	203	13	15,642,698	-5	-2.34%	21.51%	202	212	20.8	0.71	2.9%	1.30
108	Kuwait Finance House	Banking	813	807	815	800	15	29,471,691	-4	-0.49%	11.16%	799	814	20.9	2.01	2.5%	1.15
109	Boubyan Bank	Banking	628	614	628	609	19	5,945,806	-9	-1.44%	2.33%	593	616	32.6	2.41	1.3%	1.16
201	Kuwait Investment	Financial Services	194	193	198	191	7	8,031,892	-3	-1.53%	51.97%	178	200	14.6	0.89	2.6%	2.05
204	National Investments	Financial Services	285	265	285	265	20	7,181,646	-20	-7.02%	10.88%	257	267	51.7	1.24	10.4%	2.09
205	Kuwait Projects	Financial Services	126	132	135	125	10	91,053,999	7	5.60%	25.71%	126	132	32.8	0.75	0.0%	0.97
212	Arzan Financial Group	Financial Services	211	203	213	199	14	14,614,545	-9	-4.25%	-3.33%	202	208	29.6	1.38	2.0%	1.25
222	Aayan Leasing and Investment	Financial Services	183	184	184	182	2	3,525,070	1	0.55%	5.75%	180	184	9.8	1.24	4.1%	1.62
252	Al Imtiaz Investment	Financial Services	52	49.1	52.9	47	5.9	11,379,166	-3.2	-6.12%	-13.10%	47.7	51.9	NM	0.32	0.0%	1.36
401	Kuwait Real Estate	Real Estate	230	228	232	225	7	10,344,670	-2	-0.87%	11.22%	220	237	18.4	1.52	1.3%	1.13
404	Salhia Real Estate	Real Estate	484	485	491	479	12	5,034,053	56	13.05%	13.05%	480	490	16.7	1.49	3.1%	0.55
413	Mabaneer	Real Estate	868	850	868	825	43	7,731,842	-5	-0.58%	0.83%	838	856	16.8	1.76	1.7%	0.99
418	The Commercial Real Estate	Real Estate	128	128	132	126	6	19,887,285	1	0.79%	25.49%	125	133	25.8	0.79	2.3%	0.64
501	National Industries	Financial Services	230	223	231	222	9	13,063,818	-6	-2.62%	9.31%	217	226	20.5	1.06	2.1%	1.63
505	Gulf Cable	Industrials	1,420	1,376	1,446	1,328	118	1,232,840	-44	-3.10%	5.04%	1,350	1,390	13.4	1.23	4.4%	1.08
506	HEISCO	Industrials	824	804	825	804	21	1,707,716	-18	-2.19%	-1.95%	793	815	20.7	1.98	3.7%	0.96
514	Boubyan Petrochemical	Basic Materials	613	609	613	606	7	2,431,348	-3	-0.49%	4.10%	604	633	12.7	1.25	9.9%	0.96
603	Agility	Industrials	603	599	604	590	14	7,666,991	-6	-0.99%	17.68%	598	618	17.9	0.85	0.0%	1.57
605	Zain	Telecommunications	507	501	509	497	12	11,243,565	-7	-1.38%	-1.18%	495	503	10.0	1.73	7.0%	0.60
623	Human Soft Holding	Industrials	3,317	3,321	3,368	3,290	78	761,878	5	0.15%	-2.29%	3,315	3,350	10.1	3.34	10.5%	0.64
642	ALAFCO	Industrials	207	208	210	207	3	989,507	-1	-0.48%	15.56%	206	210	NM	0.91	0.0%	1.27
654	JAZEERA	Consumer Discretionary	1,141	1,155	1,159	1,134	25	1,710,259	16	1.40%	-16.85%	1,100	1,204	41.1	9.88	2.4%	1.31
813	GFH Financial Group	Financial Services	86.6	87.9	89.8	84.0	5.8	51,835,023	0.9	1.03%	15.20%	86.3	90.0	9.8	1.02	5.6%	1.38
821	Warba Bank	Banking	190	189	191	188	3	13,665,244	-1	-0.53%	1.61%	188	192	23.4	1.00	1.5%	1.09
822	Kuwait Telecommunications	Telecommunications	596	592	596	590	6	2,697,951	29	5.15%	5.15%	586	595	18.1	2.42	5.9%	0.69
823	Mezzan Holding	Consumer Staples	622	640	640	614	26	3,607,371	20	3.23%	11.30%	638	645	17.1	1.78	1.9%	0.47
824	Integrated Holding	Industrials	540	543	545	526	19	3,012,507	7	1.31%	6.47%	535	546	37.8	2.19	2.8%	0.75
827	Boursa Kuwait	Financial Services	2,095	2,113	2,134	2,095	39	802,508	-6	-0.28%	22.56%	2,094	2,125	27.0	6.64	3.5%	1.37
830	AL GHANIM	Consumer Discretionary	1,164	1,198	1,215	1,155	60	2,741,709	22	1.87%	13.45%	1,175	1,220	11.5	3.95	5.9%	0.74

* As of end of week closing

New Zealand sinks into its 2nd recession in 18 months

Wild weather weighs heavily on the economy

WELLINGTON: New Zealand has sunk into its second recession in just 18 months, official data showed Thursday, as wild weather and efforts to tame inflation weighed heavily on the economy. StatsNZ said output shrank 0.1 percent in late 2023, after falling 0.3 the previous quarter. New Zealand also suffered a downturn in late 2022 to early 2023. A recession is commonly defined as two consecutive quarters of contraction.

This time around, the pain is being felt across the board, with many consumers tightening spending and businesses in multiple sectors trimming costs and holding off on new investments. Economists and investors pinned most of the blame on the central bank, which has aggressively raised interest rates to slow soaring prices. But the impact of Cyclone Gabrielle and wild weather in the country's north last year also took its toll.

"They lifted interest rates with a very heavy hand. We warned all those that would listen to us that interest rates were going too high, too fast," Jarrod Kerr, chief economist for Kiwibank told AFP. "We've seen a contraction on the back of it," he added.

The Reserve Bank of New Zealand's target interest rate was hiked 12 times from mid-2021, from 0.25 percent to the current rate of 5.5 percent. Interest rate rises are designed to cool the economy and ease inflationary pressures or price bubbles, but they can also slow economic activity as money becomes more costly to borrow.

'Deep hangover'?

The latest contraction came even though migration surged, with around 130,000 people arriving in New Zealand last year, boosting the population to 5.3 million. "That highlights just how weak the economy is," Kerr said. "We have had the spike in population with a lot of migrants coming here. They have added demand to the economy, and even with that we're still contracting."

StatsNZ reported wholesale trade was the largest drag on the economy, led by falls in grocery and liquor wholesaling. The retail sector is also struggling with falls in furniture, electrical, and hardware retailing. Vacuum retailer Godfreys announced on Wednesday the closing of all stores across New Zealand

and Australia after going into administration. The 90-year-old business is shuttering around 141 stores across the two countries, putting more than 600 staff out of work.

The International Monetary Fund has urged New Zealand to trim government spending to help battle inflation - a move that could also slow growth and put more pressure on the central bank to cut rates. Finance minister Nicola Willis blamed the shrinking economy on the previous centre-left Labor administration, who were voted out in general elections in October. "This is a deep hangover from the big spending, big taxing period under the previous government," she said. "We're focused on rebuilding our economy after years of economic mismanagement."

Prime Minister Christopher Luxon said that as part of a cost-cutting drive, jobs will go in the public sector, with the ministries of health and primary resources among the first to be targeted. "We have to get government spending under control," he told reporters Thursday. "We have to right-size it. It's a tough time for people in govern-



AUCKLAND: A general view shows the Sky Tower and the central district in Auckland. — AFP

ment and public service." Opposition finance spokesperson Barbara Edmonds said New Zealanders have been faced with a cost-of-living crisis for some time "and are yet to see a single policy from the new government to help them". — AFP

News in Brief

Brazil cuts interest rate

BRASILIA: Brazil's central bank cut its key interest rate by half a point for the sixth straight time on Wednesday, continuing the easing that President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva hopes will spur Latin America's biggest economy. In line with analyst forecasts, the bank's monetary policy committee said its members had voted unanimously to lower the benchmark Selic rate to 10.75 percent in their second meeting of the year. The committee's members plan to make reductions "of the same magnitude in their coming meetings," they said in a statement, with a next gathering expected in May. Haunted by a history of hyperinflation, Brazil had gone on one of the most aggressive monetary tightening cycles in the world when the COVID-19 pandemic and then Russia's invasion of Ukraine sent global prices on an upward spiral in early 2021. Veteran leftist Lula has pushed hard for interest rate cuts, saying a high Selic is "irrational" and stunting Brazil's growth. — AFP

Euro-zone activity stabilizes

BRUSSELS: Business activity in the euro-zone stabilized in March thanks largely to a "modest recovery" in the service sector, a closely watched survey showed Thursday. The HCOB Flash euro-zone purchasing managers' index (PMI) published by S&P Global stood at 49.9 in March, up from 49.2 in February, itself revised up from an initial reading of 48.9. A figure below 50 indicates contraction. The latest reading - though right on that threshold - was the highest registered in nine months. "Business activity in the euro area came close to stabilizing in March" with "only a marginal decline in output of goods and services", the survey said. It noted however that continuing output declines in the euro-zone's two biggest economies, Germany and France, were preventing the index from registering an expansion. Overall activity in the service sector rose for the second month, posting the biggest increase since June 2023. — AFP

Australia unveils tax rate

SYDNEY: Australia unveiled plans for a minimum tax of 15 percent on multinationals Thursday, a move government said would make big businesses operating in the resource-rich nation "pay their fair share". "Multinational companies making a profit in Australia should pay tax on those profits in Australia," Treasurer Jim Chalmers said as he unveiled draft legislation that the government hopes to pass by July. The new rules had already been flagged, but the legislation could have a significant impact on the world's largest mining and energy companies, and is likely to face opposition from powerful industry lobbies. They build on a global effort to stop big companies from tax jurisdiction shopping. More than 140 countries agreed at the end of 2021 to impose a minimum tax on multinational companies under the auspices of the OECD. — AFP

Norway keeps rate unchanged

OSLO: The Norwegian central bank on Thursday kept its key interest rate unchanged at 4.5 percent but signaled it could start cutting later this year. The bank said its current forecast indicated that the policy rate would be kept at the same level until autumn, "before gradually moving down." In order to curb persistent inflation, the bank has raised its rate 14 times since September 2021, most recently in December, but most analysts now believe the peak has been reached. Price increases have gradually decelerated in Norway, and the country's inflation rate was 4.5 percent year-on-year in February. Norway's economic growth has shown signs of slowing and unemployment is expected to rise slightly in the country. The central bank said that its monetary policy was having "a tightening effect," but noted that inflation was "still markedly above" its two percent target. — AFP

Bank of England holds rate despite slowing inflation

LONDON: The Bank of England (BoE) kept its main interest rate at a 16-year high, rejecting a cut as inflation remains well above target despite recent slowing. BoE kept borrowing costs at 5.25 percent, one day after official data showed UK annual inflation slowing to its lowest rate since September 2021.

In a busy week for central banks, the Federal Reserve on Wednesday held US interest rates steady, but left open the door to three interest rate cuts before the end of the year. Market watchers are forecasting the Fed and European Central Bank to start cutting rates in June, while the outlook for the BoE appears less clear, with a first reduction seen possibly as late as August.

'Inflation elevated'

"The UK faces some of the same issues as the Fed: elevated post-pandemic inflation rates and an unclear economic outlook," noted Kathleen Brooks, research director at XTB trading group. European Central Bank president Christine Lagarde on Wednesday warned of the risk of acting "too late" on interest rate cuts, reaffirming the likelihood that the euro-zone's first reduction in borrowing costs would come in June. Thursday also saw rate calls from the Swiss and Norwegian central banks. While analysts see a chance of a cut from the Swiss National Bank, they expect Norges Bank to leave borrowing costs unchanged.

While most central banks are eyeing rate cuts, the Bank of Japan this week delivered a rare hike in borrowing costs. The BoJ on Tuesday pulled the plug on its ultra-aggressive monetary stimulus program, hiking rates for the first time since 2007. Its outlier policy of negative rates and massive asset purchases was aimed at jump-starting economic growth and price rises after "lost decades" of stagnation and de-



LONDON: Pedestrians walk past the Bank of England, Britain's central Bank, in London.- AFP

flation in Japan — the opposite problem faced recently in most advanced economies.

Slower price rises

In the UK, inflation fell more than expected in February, official data showed Wednesday, fuelling speculation that the Bank of England would start cutting interest rates in the coming months. The Office for National Statistics said inflation reached 3.4 percent last month — the lowest level in nearly 2.5 years — as growth in food prices eased further. The drop may give a boost to embattled Prime Minister Rishi Sunak and his Conservative party as they face the prospect of losing a general election this year amid discontent over the country's cost-of-living crisis.

Britain entered recession in the second half of last year but with inflation remaining well above the

BoE's two-percent target, the central bank is widely expected to freeze interest rates for a few months longer. Companies and individuals have been hit by soaring interest rates as retail banks pass on their higher cost of money. At 5.25 percent, the BoE's main rate is the highest level since February 2008, hurting borrowers but handing a boost to savers.

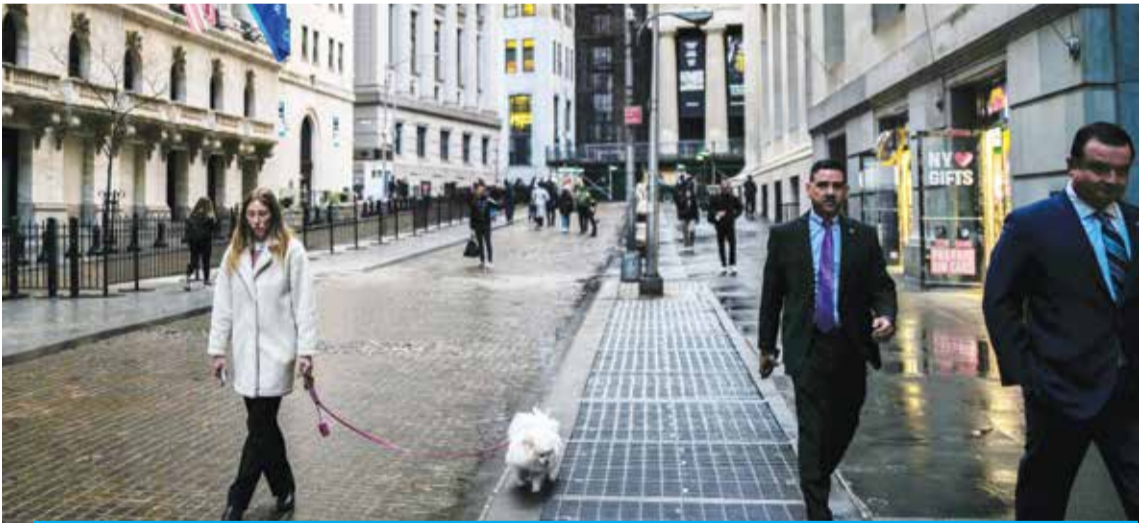
The BoE hiked its key interest rate 14 times between late 2021 — when it stood at a record-low 0.1 percent — and the second half of last year. Global inflationary pressures built up after the lifting of COVID lockdowns led to bottlenecks. Energy and food prices went on to skyrocket following the invasion of key grains producer Ukraine by major oil and gas provider Russia in early 2022. The UK's inflation rate has tumbled since striking a 41-year peak of 11.1 percent in October 2022. — AFP

Countries urged to 'strengthen' central bank independence

WASHINGTON: The head of the IMF called Thursday for countries to "preserve and strengthen" the independence of central banks in order to ensure price stability and support long-term economic growth. In recent decades, many countries around the world have increased the autonomy of central banks, tasking them with fighting inflation and restoring stable prices.

These actions have proven critical to the recent success many countries have had in fighting post-pandemic surges in inflation around the globe, International Monetary Fund managing director Kristalina Georgieva wrote in a blog post published Thursday. "Central bank independence matters for price stability - and price stability matters for consistent long-term growth," she said. "Financial stability benefits the whole economy and reduces the risk that the central bank becomes reluctant to raise interest rates for fear of causing a financial meltdown," she added.

Georgieva contrasted the years since the COVID-19 pandemic with the high inflationary period of the 1970s, arguing that a lack of central bank independence at that time meant politicians were often pressured to take actions that undermined price stability. "When central banks and governments each play their roles, we have seen better control of inflation, better outcomes in growth and employment, and lower financial stability risks," she said. "With such high stakes, we must preserve and strengthen central bank independence," she added. — AFP



NEW YORK: A woman walks her dog past the New York Stock Exchange (NYSE) (left) at Wall Street in the Manhattan borough of New York. — AFP

Stocks track Wall St record; US Fed keeps rate projection

HONG KONG: Markets rallied Thursday after Wall Street's record-breaking day as traders welcomed news that the Federal Reserve still saw three interest rate cuts this year even after recent data pointed to a bounce in inflation. Decision-makers remained confident that prices will eventually be brought to heel after pushing borrowing costs to two-decade highs without doing too much harm to the US economy.

After a much-anticipated policy meeting, officials held rates for the fifth time in a row and released dot plot projections that showed they saw 75 basis points of cuts before year's end, unchanged from December's outlook. Observers suggested June would likely see the first move.

They also ramped up their forecasts for economic growth. Last year saw inflation come down dramatically from the multi-decade highs seen in 2022, heading towards the bank's two-percent goal, but it nudged back up in January and February, fuelling worries of a down-

ward revision to the Fed's rate estimates.

Speaking after the meeting, boss Jerome Powell admitted "inflation is still too high" but added that the recent data "haven't really changed the overall story, which is that of inflation moving down gradually on a sometimes bumpy road toward two percent". The positive news was reinforced by a warning from European Central Bank chief Christine Lagarde that there was a risk in cutting too late, suggesting it could also make its first reduction in June.

"We cannot wait until we have all the relevant information," she said. All three main indexes on Wall Street surged to record highs, led by tech giants including Amazon and Apple. The buying excitement flowed through to Asia, where Tokyo ended at another record high, while Hong Kong piled on nearly two percent. They were followed higher by Seoul, Sydney, Mumbai, Singapore, Taipei, Bangkok, Wellington, Manila and Jakarta. Shanghai dipped.

London, Paris, and Frankfurt rose at the open. "The absence of any particularly hawkish news provided a green light for the market to continue its upward trajectory," said Stephen Innes at SPI Asset Management. "And why not, as a sturdy economy plus rate cuts is the best possible scenario, and it's fair to suggest that it's now the consensus." IG Markets analyst Hebe Chen added that traders were relieved to get "a clearer view of the near-term picture". — AFP

FRIDAY, MARCH 22, 2024

Weekender



Girgian O Girgian!

Children eagerly await traditional Ramadan mid-month celebration

By Ghadeer Ghloum



A boy carries a basket full of Girgian treats. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat

Girgian is a vibrant and joyful traditional celebration that takes place during Ramadan, usually marked on the 13th, 14th and 15th days of the holy month. It is mainly observed in Gulf countries and holds significant religious, cultural and social importance.

To celebrate Girgian, children walk around neighborhoods wearing colorful traditional clothes and carry beautifully decorated bags to collect treats while singing traditional Girgian songs. Households prepare special Girgian bags filled with candy, nuts, toys and sometimes a small amount of money to give to the visiting children.

A middle-aged Kuwaiti woman, Um Ali, elaborated to Kuwait Times on the origins of Girgian: “The exact day of Girgian is in the middle of the month of Ramadan, specifically on the 15th day of this holy

month. However, celebrations begin a few days earlier, starting on the 13th day of Ramadan and continue until the 19th; hence, about a week of celebrations,” she said.

Um Ali also spoke about the origins of the event. “The word ‘Girgian’ comes from the phrase ‘Qurat Ayn’, meaning the ‘apple of the eye’, based on what Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) used to say when his first grandson Hassan (RA) was born on the 15th of Ramadan. The Prophet (PBUH) would carry Hassan (RA) and visit the neighbors, telling them he is the apple of his eye and distributing sweets to them in joy. This tradition has endured from that time until today, where we celebrate in Kuwait and other GCC countries. Children go on the streets in their neighborhoods singing traditional songs and asking for sweets from their neighbors,” she explained.

According to late Kuwaiti historian and astronomer Saleh Al-Ujairi, the word Girgian is derived from the word “gargaa”, which refers to the loud clanging sound heard when a household pot made of metal is struck. There’s another reason why Girgian is celebrated in the middle of the lunar month. In pre-oil – and pre-electricity Kuwait – the full moon would provide illumination for the children to trudge across the neighborhood.

Mariam Dashti, a mother of three, spoke about the value of keeping this tradition alive and passing it down from one generation to another. “Girgian manifests



our cultural values, as it shows our generosity and unity, especially since it cannot be celebrated individually. Families, neighbors and friends have to come together to experience a proper Girgian,” she pointed out.

“I must admit that I am sad to see a decrease in the number of children walking and singing around the neighborhoods in the last few years. In the past, the neighborhoods were filled with the singing of children. However, we cannot deny that Girgian is taking

on a new form that has never been seen before. The clothes, bags, decorations and distributions have become beautiful, giving the experience of Girgian a magnificent taste,” Dashti noted. She added that with Ramadan beginning to arrive in moderate weather in Kuwait, perhaps children will return to singing in the streets in the coming years.



Girgian bags in the shape of traditional children's clothes



Girgian dresses with matching bags for girls.



Girgian dishdasha and vest for boys.



Girgian gifts in the shape of cooking pots, covered with traditional fabric.



Children in Girgian clothing.



A vendor displays Girgian items.



Sahar Moussa is a Lebanese lifestyle editor, social media deputy manager and reporter at Kuwait Times. She is a mom who hates cooking but loves eating, traveling and bingeing on sitcoms. She is also obsessed with supernatural stuff.

Since the beginning of Ramadan, most women in Kuwait have been competing with one another to score the best darraas online or in malls. Not only are the women competing, but the insane prices of the darraas are competing as well! Some darraas in Kuwait are very expensive, especially during the holy month, and surprisingly, some women are ready to pay a huge amount

ion nowadays is too risqué," she said. "Even children's darraas are not cheaper than the ones for grownups. Compared to last year, they are also overpriced. I think darraas should be comfortable, simple and timeless pieces I can wear every year. I saw some darraas that cost more than KD 200, and I don't think it is worth buying them, especially if you are going to wear it only once," she added.



of money just to show off and follow trends. The prices of darraas in Kuwait can range from KD 30 to over KD 200. Kuwait Times interviewed several women, asking them about the prices of darraas during Ramadan.

Sarah Al-Kandari, a 30-year-old Kuwaiti, believes darraas are very overpriced, and today's fashions are not suitable or decent and expose too much skin. "I think darraas are too expensive. Even the designs — it's like wearing a wedding dress and not a darraa. Even the material and fabric are not worth the price. I believe that darraas, especially in Ramadan, are supposed to be modest, but the fash-

ion nowadays is too risqué," she said. "Even children's darraas are not cheaper than the ones for grownups. Compared to last year, they are also overpriced. I think darraas should be comfortable, simple and timeless pieces I can wear every year. I saw some darraas that cost more than KD 200, and I don't think it is worth buying them, especially if you are going to wear it only once," she added.

The darraa is the Kuwaiti and Gulf

women's traditional dress. It is also called a thobe or abaya. The traditional darraa is long-sleeved, loose and floor-length. It usually has a sheer part covered in sequins and embroidery. In earlier days, darraas were boring and you couldn't tell the difference between a 70-year-old's and 20-year-old's, but nowadays with social media and influencers, darraas have become a big hit, a trend and a fashion statement, with many different designs and variations, and the fashion market is taking advantage of this.

"Today darraas are very expensive and pricy because the market has evolved. We are online now, and everybody wants to show off everything they are doing. Earlier, one used to wear a darraa for ghabgas, but now they have become a trend. I didn't even buy the darraa I have — my sister bought it for me for around KD 180 and I try to wear it every Ramadan as much as I can because it is expensive!" said Dhoha Al-Issa, a digital content creator.

Meanwhile, Hawrah Al-Yakoob, a marketing manager, believes people have forgotten the true meaning of Ramadan and what it stands for, and that people should concentrate on the spirit of Ramadan and what it represents instead of concentrating on fashions and trends. "Darraas have become a trend. We have completely forgotten what Ramadan is; Ramadan now is just a fashion show — what darraa you are wearing every day for the 30 days you are fasting and what brand are you wearing," she pointed out.

According to Al-Yakoob, Kuwaiti women usually don't look at prices, and this is bad. If they are savvier in terms of spending, they would look for alternatives, because there are so many places that have darraas for KD 20 or KD 30 of nice quality for simple and ev-



Prices skyrocket as colorful abayas become a social media trend

eryday wear. "We Kuwaitis take prices for granted and sometimes we just spend because we just want to look nicer and compete with each other. We think in terms of short-term gratification and don't think long-term, because next year we are probably going to change the darraa," she said. "The most expensive darraa I have cost around KD 200, and I don't even know if I have ever worn it, to be honest. The ones that I wear are those I have for years, and they cost less than KD 70-80," added.



A woman wearing a stylish darraa.



Photos show different styles, fashion and colors of darraas displayed at a shop in Kuwait City. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat

An artist's reflections on Kuwait's storied past

Abdulredha Al-Saegh



By Sajeev K Peter



Abdulredha Al-Saegh's paintings are an artist's reflections on Kuwait's storied past. His brushstrokes create the country's historic landmarks and traditions, evoking nostalgia among the spectators about the past. "A work of art ought to convey a universal message. And as such, it must be simple and everyone must be able to grasp it without any difficulty. It must be an easy language with a great concept," Saegh told Kuwait Times as he shared his artistic vision.

“

Kuwaiti visual artist Abdulredha Al-Saegh's painting 'History of Glory' truly encapsulates Kuwait's rich cultural legacy and dwells deep into the country's historic past. His impressionistic style helps him transcend his works beyond time and space, reflecting the true sense and vibrancy of Kuwait's heritage.

”



Kuwait's Ambassador to Belgium Nawaf Nafie Al-Enezi (right) with visual artist Abdulredha Al-Saegh.

A visual artist, an art trainer and an art education teacher, Saegh has participated in several painting exhibitions inside and outside Kuwait. He specializes in organizing art exhibitions and art gallery shows. Saegh did a live painting demonstration of his sublime art recently, displaying Kuwait's opulent cultural heritage at the Kuwait Embassy in Brussels on the occasion of the National Day celebrations. Kuwait's Ambassador to Belgium Nawaf Nafie Al-Enezi expressed his gratitude to Saegh for his contribution to the National Day reception at the embassy.

His artwork titled "History of Glory" encapsulates Kuwait's rich cultural legacy and dwells deep into the country's historical past. "As an artist, it is my duty to convey the image of our heritage and the historical legacy of our country to the new generation in an attractive albeit modern way," Saegh commented on his painting on Kuwaiti heritage which he completed during the live demonstration.

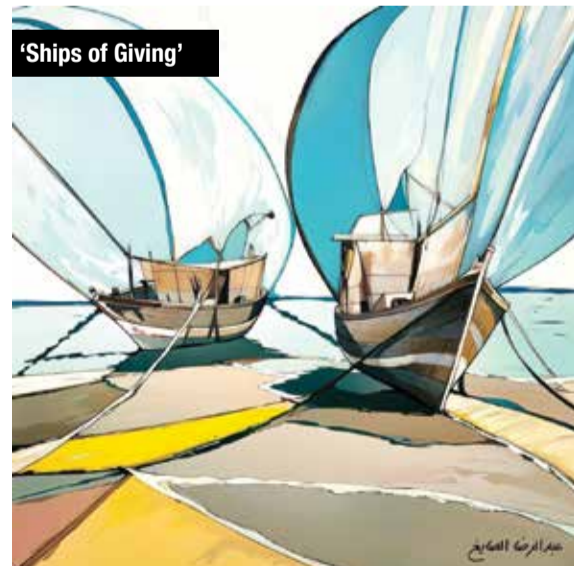
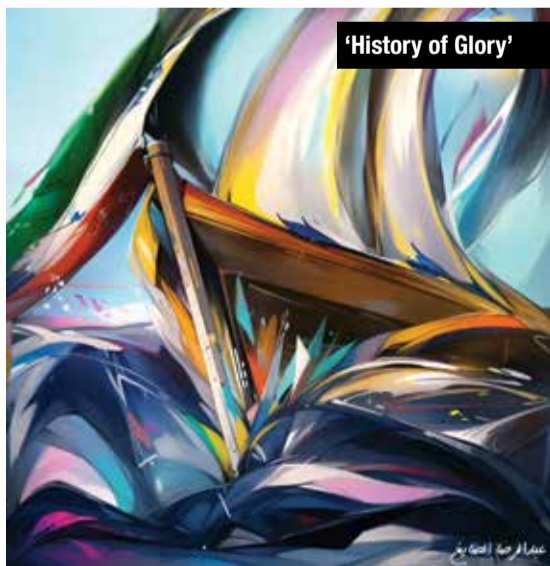
Bold hues

"My paintings seek to combine the history of the past with the beauty of the present and future so that these bold hues can captivate audiences

worldwide. The role of art is to send a global message, and this is the modernity that is sought to be achieved today through artistic works," Saegh said.

He mostly works on canvas using oil as the medium, although he uses acrylic occasionally. Although his works epitomize the richness of Kuwaiti heritage and tradition, he chooses to experiment with contemporary styles often bordering on impressionism or even abstract techniques. Here, he seeks to achieve a fine balance between tradition and modernity.

Saegh's artistic renderings of Kuwait's renowned landmarks evoke an aesthetic that is at once contemporary and yet rooted in tradition. "This impressionistic style helps me transcend my works beyond time and space to reflect the true sense and vibrancy of our rich heritage," he said. His works are eloquent and robust as they mirror the country's cultural past even while employing the mode of the contemporary. "For instance the painting titled 'Ships of Giving' seeks to convey a message that all our children must know the history of Kuwait and the path of goodness", he noted.



Event: Girgian and Ghabga
Location: Mikshat
Date: March 22, 2024

Event: Girgian
Location: Khairan Mall
Date: March 21-23, 2024

Event: Girgian
Location: Murouj Farm
Date: March 21-23, 2024

Event: Girgian
Location: The Walk Mall
Date: March 22, 2024

Event: The Walk Bazaar
Location: The Walk Mall
Date: March 21-23, 2024

Event: Bughsa Ramadan nights
Location: Arrayah Complex
Date: March 21-23, 2024

Event: Junior Girgian
Location: Takween Shuwaikh
Date: March 23, 2024

Event: Girgian
Location: Dhuha Mall
Date: March 23, 2024

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

Event: Season Expo - Ramadan
Location: Shamiya Park
Date: March 21-23, 2024

Verstappen to see out Red Bull contract despite off-track turmoil

Happy despite weeks of off-track turbulence



MELBOURNE: Red Bull Racing's Dutch driver Max Verstappen (L) and Mexican driver Sergio Perez play wooden block building game ahead of the Formula One Australian Grand Prix in Melbourne on March 21, 2024. —AFP

MELBOURNE: Three-time world champion Max Verstappen said Thursday he intends to see out his contract with Red Bull, insisting he was happy despite weeks of off-track turbulence. The Dutchman is signed until 2028 but suggested at the last race in Saudi Arabia he would consider leaving if Red Bull parted company with long-time mentor Helmut Marko in a power struggle threatening to envelop the team.

It followed his father Jos claiming earlier this month that Red Bull faced being "torn apart" if team boss Christian Horner remained in his position. Horner was accused of inappropriate conduct involving a woman colleague but he was subsequently cleared of any wrongdoing ahead of the season-opener in Bahrain.

Asked at the Australian Grand Prix in Melbourne if he would honour his contract, Verstappen replied: "Of course, that is why I signed the contract in the first place. "For sure, with the deal in place, that is my

intention, to be here until the end. "It would be a great story for me to see it out till the end because it would mean I've been part of one family and one team.

"I always felt comfortable (in Red Bull) because for me it is like a second family, it's good." The 26-year-old's career has been overseen by Marko, 80, and Verstappen reiterated that it was important to keep in place a team that has enjoyed so much success.

"I feel we all want the same, we all want to perform on the track, that's what we want to focus on as a team," he said. "In general, when you have a successful team, when you have a good group of central people, it is important to keep them together and happy and in the same roles."

His veiled threat to leave Red Bull piqued the interest of Mercedes boss Toto Wolff, who needs a replacement next season when Lewis Hamilton departs for Ferrari. "It's always nice to hear that," said Ver-

stappen, who added that he did not know what would happen after 2028.

"I don't know after 2028 what happens, if I am going to continue, sign a new deal, I don't know."

Verstappen dominated the first two grands prix of the season in Bahrain and Saudi Arabia to put him on a nine-race win streak.

Should he cross the finish line first in Australia, he will equal his own record of winning 10 races in a row. Sergio Perez, who finished runner-up to his teammate in the opening two races, said he hoped Verstappen remained, with the team in "a very strong position".

"To achieve that it takes a lot of years," he said. "Everyone in the team is working well together now, the whole engineering team is united. You can see that on the track and how efficient we have been in the last years. "So I don't see any reason to change it and it will obviously be a blow if Max were to leave." — AFP

Al-Kharafi wins basic dressage

KUWAIT: Rider Hussein Al-Kharafi won the first place of the basic dressage level at 74.58 percent at the end of the first edition of Kuwait Riding Center Dressage Championship that was held at the center. He also won the second basic dressage level of the same championship.

In the middle dressage level Cora Boselli was the winner while rider Ibrahim Ismail won the light dressage level. Danah Bourislee won the training level.

Khalid Mohammad Al-Kharafi who handed the winners their awards said, "we at Kuwait Riding Center seek to support the equestrian sport and the dressage championships as it's the foundation of equestrianism in general, and gives horses sound posture and healthy muscles and enables the rider to control the horse".

He hoped the state gives more interest in the dressage sport, while thanking rider Sheikha Fajer Al-Sabah for her support of this distinguished sport.



Starc, Cummins to Coetzee and Patel: 6 IPL big-money buys

NEW DELHI: The 2024 Indian Premier League begins on Friday, starring some of the world's best cricketers. AFP Sport highlights six who went for eye-watering sums at the player auction for the 17th edition of the richest Twenty20 league in the world:

Mitchell Starc (Kolkata Knight Riders)

The Australian is the most expensive buy in IPL history after Kolkata shelled out \$2.98 million on the fast bowler and handy lower-order slugger. Starc, a left-arm swing exponent with 358 Test wickets, returns to the IPL nine years after he played for Royal Challengers Bengaluru. Videos of the 34-year-old bowling in training for Kolkata have generated huge interest on social media. Starc took 16 wickets in Australia's 50-over World Cup triumph, including three in the final against hosts India.

Pat Cummins (Sunrisers Hyderabad)

Australia's World Cup-winning captain Pat Cummins will lead Sunrisers Hyderabad in his first stint as an IPL captain after they paid \$2.5 million for the 30-year-old fast bowler, an IPL auction record until Starc went under the hammer shortly after. Former Australia pace bowling great Glenn McGrath said the hefty price tags would not impact Cummins or Starc "even one percent". Cummins led Australia to win the World Test Championship triumph last year where they also beat India in the final.

Daryl Mitchell (Chennai Super Kings)

The batting all-rounder was bought by the 2023 IPL champions for \$1.6 million, a month after star-

ring for New Zealand at the World Cup. Mitchell, 32, rose to prominence by scoring two World Cup centuries against India—in the group stage and in the semi-final. The Super Kings are leaning heavily on New Zealand talent as they go for a record sixth IPL title in 2024. They also have batsman Rachin Ravindra and spinner Mitchell Santner in their squad ahead of the opening match on Friday against Royal Challengers Bengaluru.

Rovman Powell (Rajasthan Royals)

The hard-hitting West Indian was the first player to be sold in the auction in Dubai as Rajasthan Royals bid \$890,000. Powell scores at a strike rate of more than 144 in the middle order but his previous IPL record is moderate, with only 257 runs in two seasons. He shone, however, in the Caribbean Premier League for Barbados Royals.

Gerald Coetzee (Mumbai Indians)

Gerald Coetzee's tearaway speed saw him finish as South Africa's leading bowler at the World Cup in India with 20 wickets in eight matches. The displays led five-time champions Mumbai Indians to pay \$602,000 for him to partner Jasprit Bumrah in a formidable pace attack. The 23-year-old Coetzee, who said he was excited to "play under (Hardik Pandya, and bowl with Bumrah)", has taken 41 international wickets in all formats since his debut last year.

Harshal Patel (Punjab Kings)

An IPL regular since debuting for Royal Challengers Bengaluru in 2012, the medium-pace raised eyebrows when he was the subject of a bidding war at the auction, ending up as the most expensive Indian player at \$1.4 million. The 33-year-old took 32 of his 111 career IPL wickets in an outstanding 2021 campaign, performances that led to an India debut later that year. But he failed to cement a regular place in the national side, taking 29 wickets in 25 Twenty20 matches. His last cap came on January 3, 2023 and he was released by Bengaluru last year. — AFP

England's Owen Farrell open to Test return

LONDON: Owen Farrell has left open the possibility of returning to international rugby, be it with England or the 2025 British and Irish Lions, after calling a halt to his Test career. Farrell missed this season's Six Nations to prioritise the wellbeing of his family after being jeered by England fans during last year's World Cup in France.



Owen Farrell

He is set to become ineligible for England for at least two years after agreeing a post-season move to Paris-based Racing 92, given the Rugby Football Union rule barring overseas-based players from international selection. But the veteran of 112 England caps could still be chosen for next year's Lions tour of Australia, with father Andy Farrell, the current Ireland boss, appointed head coach of the combined side for a three-Test series with the Wallabies.

When asked Wednesday about his international future, Owen Farrell—a former England captain and his country's record points-scorer, replied: "I've not said anything. I don't know. "I've stepped back and there's obviously a change happening next year (moving to France). Then we'll see. There's no point in saying anything now because I don't know how I'm going to feel later down the line. We'll see."

As for the Lions, the 32-year-old playmaker said: "Have I spoken to my Dad about it? I've told him 'well done', if that counts. "There's nothing to talk about—whatever happens, happens. There are no decisions to be made about any of that.

"When it gets closer to the time, I guess things become clear or they don't. You see how people are at that time. There is nothing to talk about there at the minute." Farrell will make his 250th appearance for reigning Premiership champions Saracens in a London derby against Harlequins at the Tottenham Hotspur Stadium on Saturday.

Reflecting on a World Cup where England finished third, he said: "Obviously the World Cup was difficult at times but I really enjoyed the playing side of it and being involved. "I want to play for as long as I possibly can as long as I am enjoying it.

"I love playing. That's always been the case, even during the tougher bits as I've spoken about. "I loved the game, and I loved the rugby. I want to enjoy all of it a bit more. "I've been getting back to doing it here at the club, I've done that over this time during the Six Nations, and I want to really do that towards the end of the year. And then I want to get better at it next year as well. "That's how I think I am going to get the best out of myself and play my best. We'll see what happens." — AFP

Dodgers fire Ohtani's long-time interpreter after theft allegation

SEOUL: Shohei Ohtani's interpreter was fired by the Los Angeles Dodgers on Thursday after the Japanese baseball star's representatives alleged he had been the victim of "a massive theft" reported to involve millions of dollars. Ippei Mizuhara, who is also a close friend of Ohtani and often seen with him, is said to have stolen money from the player to place bets with a suspected illegal bookmaker. "The team can confirm that interpreter Ippei Mizuhara has been terminated," a Dodgers spokesperson said in an email to AFP.

The Dodgers are in Seoul for a season-opening series against the San Diego Padres and manager Dave Roberts said Ohtani will play on Thursday evening as planned. "Shohei's ready," he said. "I know that he's preparing. He's in a hitter's meeting right now and he's going to be ready for tonight's game."

Roberts said the possibility of Ohtani missing the game was "not considered". He refused to comment on reports that Mizuhara addressed the team after their Game 1 win over the Padres on Wednesday, and could not confirm the interpreter's current whereabouts.

Mizuhara was seen in the dugout during the game talking to Ohtani. The Los Angeles Times reported that West Hollywood law firm Berk Brettler LLP had looked into Mizuhara's actions after the newspaper learned that Ohtani's name had surfaced in a federal investigation of alleged illegal bookmaker Mathew Bowyer.

"In the course of responding to recent media inquiries, we discovered that Shohei has been the victim of a massive theft and we are turning the matter over to the authorities," Berk Brettler said in a statement.

The LA Times, citing two anonymous sources, said the money involved "was in the millions of dollars" and Mizuhara allegedly used it to place bets with Bowyer's operation. ESPN reported questions had arisen around "at least \$4.5 million in wire transfers sent from Ohtani's bank account" to an associate of Bowyer.

ESPN said that multiple sources, including Mizuhara himself, told ESPN that Ohtani doesn't gamble and that the funds covered Mizuhara's losses. Major League Baseball's gambling policy bars "any player, umpire, or club or league official or employee" from betting on baseball or making illegal bets on any other sport. While sports betting has been legalised in a majority of US states, online betting and retail sports books remain illegal in California.

Close companion

Japan's Ohtani, who has been likened to a modern-day version of Babe Ruth, joined the Dodgers in December in a 10-year deal worth \$700 million after playing six Major League Baseball seasons with the Los Angeles Angels. According to the Times, federal agents raided Bowyer's Orange County, California, home last year. He has not been charged with a crime. Diane Bass, a lawyer for Bowyer, told the newspaper that he "never met, spoke with, or texted, or had contact in any way with Shohei Ohtani".

Mizuhara, who was born in Japan but brought up in Southern California, became Ohtani's personal interpreter when he signed with the Angels in 2017 and followed him to the Dodgers. He has been a close companion of Ohtani, who has emerged as the global face of MLB. As Ohtani's star has risen, Mizuhara has been by his side, the two often arriving together at the ballpark for games and training, and spending time together away from team facilities. Mizuhara got his first job in baseball with the Boston Red Sox, interpreting for Japanese pitcher Hideki Okajima after graduating from college in 2007.

He returned to Japan to work for the Hokkaido Nippon Ham Fighters in 2013 and met Ohtani, who joined the club from high school the same year. Mizuhara is well known in Japan and news of his dismissal was met with shock, with his name trending on X, formerly Twitter. — AFP



Shohei Ohtani



MUMBAI: (FILES) India's Virat Kohli celebrates after scoring a half-century (50 runs) during the 2023 ICC Men's Cricket World Cup. Top cricket stars Virat Kohli and Rishabh Pant will return to elite action in the Indian Premier League starting March 22, 2024. — AFP

Sports

Court rules Robinho must serve Italian gang rape sentence in Brazil

Robinho’s lawyer says would work to keep his client out of jail while they appealed

BRASILIA: Former Manchester City and Real Madrid striker Robinho must serve a nine-year rape sentence — imposed on him by an Italian court — in Brazil, judges in Brasilia ruled Wednesday. The court decided by nine votes to two in favor of an Italian request that Robinho be jailed in his home country after he was found guilty of taking part in the gang rape of an Albanian woman celebrating her 23rd birthday at a Milan nightclub in 2013.

It also ruled the sentence must begin “immediately,” Robinho’s lawyer, Jose Alckmin, told reporters he would work to keep his client out of jail while they appealed. Robson de Souza, popularly known as “Robinho,” was not present for Wednesday’s decision. The former Brazil international, now 40, was convicted by an Italian court in 2017 for the crime committed four years earlier, when he was playing for AC Milan.

He lost in the Milan Court of Appeal in 2020 and then had his sentence upheld by Italy’s highest court in 2022, after which Italian prosecutors issued an international arrest warrant for him. Brazil does not extradite its nationals, however, and Italy asked that Robinho be made to serve his sentence in his home country instead.

The footballer, who protests his innocence, told Brazilian network TV Record in an interview broadcast Sunday the sex had been “consensual.” “I never denied it (the encounter). I could have denied it because my DNA was not there, but I’m not a liar.” He also accused the Italian justice system of “racism.”

According to the complaint, Robinho and his co-accused had made the young woman drink “to the point of rendering her unconscious and unable to resist” and then had “sexual relations

several times in a row” with her. In March 2021, the Milan court published its reasoning for upholding the original conviction, saying Robinho had acted with “special contempt for the victim, who was brutally humiliated.”

Robinho’s case and that of former Barcelona and Paris Saint-Germain defender Dani Alves have sparked criticism over the failure of football authorities in Brazil to condemn violence against women. In February, former Brazil international full-back Alves, 40, was sentenced to four-and-a-half years in prison for raping a woman in a nightclub in Barcelona. On Wednesday, a court in Spain ruled he would be released from jail pending an appeal in a one-million-euro bail agreement denounced by the victim’s lawyer as “justice for the rich.”

‘Completely drunk’

For Robinho, it has been a dramatic fall from grace. Having begun his career in 2002 at Santos, a team made famous by Brazil great Pele, Robinho was touted as the successor to the golden generation of Ronaldo, Rivaldo and Ronaldinho.

In 2005, he joined Zinedine Zidane, Ronaldo and David Beckham at Real Madrid. He went on to play for Manchester City from 2008 to 2010, and for Milan for four years until 2014. In 2009, he was briefly detained in England for an alleged sexual assault of a young woman, but the charges were dropped after an investigation.

He sought to return to Santos in 2020 but the club suspended the deal after pressure from fans and sponsors, leading to the abrupt end of his career. At about the same time, TV channel Globo Sports had released excerpts of a recording Italian prosecutors



BRASILIA: This handout picture released by Brazil’s Superior Court of Justice shows the general view of a session of the Special Court of the Brazilian Superior Court of Justice that judged the homologation of the Italian court’s sentence for rape against former football player Robinho in Brasilia on March 20, 2024. — AFP

used to secure their conviction, in which Robinho purportedly said: “I’m laughing because I don’t care. The woman was completely drunk. She doesn’t even know what happened.”

Robinho has 100 Brazil caps and 28 goals for his

country. He also played in China with Guangzhou Evergrande, Atletico Mineiro in Brazil and Turkish club Istanbul Basaksehir. Brazil president Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva had said he hoped Robinho could serve his sentence on home soil. — AFP

USA, Spain handed tough draws in women’s Olympics

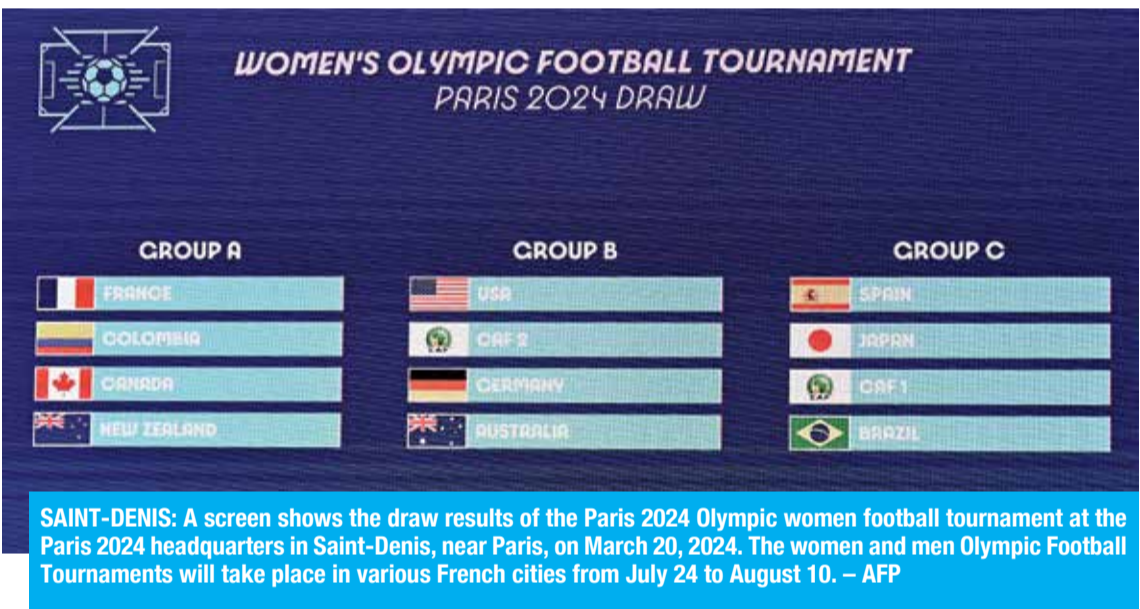
SAINT-DENIS: Four-time winners USA, Germany and Australia were placed in the same group, while hosts France will play holders Canada after the draw for the 2024 Olympic women’s football tournament was made on Wednesday.

Groups B and C appear particularly challenging, while France and Canada can be hopeful of securing their places in the knock-out rounds from Group A. The United States will face Germany, Australia and the winner of one of the two African zone qualifiers in Group B.

“It’s a tough group, but they’re all tough groups,” said the USA’s interim coach Twila Kilgore. “Our team thrives on that.” Group C consists of World Cup and Nations League winners Spain, Brazil, Japan and the other qualifier from CAF. It is Spain’s very first participation in the women’s tournament and, despite being drawn alongside 2011 world champions Japan, Montserrat Tome’s charges remain favourites.

Spain have been unstoppable in recent years, led by Ballon d’Or winners Aitana Bonmati and Alexia Putellas. The United States’ last Olympic title came in 2012 and after a disappointing 2023 World Cup, where they were eliminated in the last 16 by Sweden, some may be writing them off from claiming a fifth Games gold.

USA’s Kilgore says her team have bounced back from that disappointment: “We’ve just come off a great Gold Cup... we’ve taken a few steps in a new direction. “We’re excited to compete, as we



SAINT-DENIS: A screen shows the draw results of the Paris 2024 Olympic women football tournament at the Paris 2024 headquarters in Saint-Denis, near Paris, on March 20, 2024. The women and men Olympic Football Tournaments will take place in various French cities from July 24 to August 10. — AFP

always are, we’re taking it one game at a time and hopefully that puts us in a place where we’re competing to the end.”

They have the impending arrival of star coach Emma Hayes from Chelsea to further boost them before the Games’ start. Speaking on the arrival of Hayes, the interim coach said the group “were really excited” for the Englishwoman’s arrival.

France are seeking to become just the second host country to win gold after the US in 1996. The hosts were given a relatively easier draw compared to Groups B and C, and will face Canada, Colombia and New Zealand in Group A.

The tournament could be the last chance for players such as Wendie Renard, Eugenie Le Sommer or Amandine Henry to win a major international trophy

with France. The women’s tournament will begin on July 25, one day before the Games opening ceremony, and conclude with the final in Paris on August 10.

The top two teams in each group will qualify for the last quarter-finals, along with the two best third-placed sides. Full draw for the women’s football tournament at the 2024 Olympic Games:

Group A: France, Canada, Colombia, New Zealand

Group B: USA, Germany, Australia, CAF 2

Group C: Spain, Japan, Brazil, CAF 1

The CAF Women’s Olympic qualifying tournament fourth round will decide the final two participants. The matches will be played over two legs between April 1-9.

Ties:

Zambia v Morocco, Nigeria v South Africa. — AFP

Thailand hold South Korea in WCup qualifier

SEOUL: Son Heung-min scored but South Korea were held 1-1 at home by Thailand in a World Cup qualifier on Thursday in their first match since the sacking of Jurgen Klinsmann. It was also the first game since revelations about a bust-up between skipper Son and Paris Saint-Germain’s Lee Kang-in at the Asian Cup, where South Korea lost 2-0 to Jordan in the last four.

Son was left with a dislocated finger in the fracas at their team hotel in Qatar on the eve of the semi-final. Lee started on the bench on Thursday but came on soon after Thailand grabbed a shock equalizer in Seoul, with Suphanat Mueanta firing in from close range just after the hour.

Despite the stalemate, South Korea are still on course to reach the next stage of qualifying for 2026 and sit top of their group with seven points from three matches. With under-23 coach Hwang Sun-hong taking temporary charge following the dismissal as coach of the German Klinsmann, the hosts took the lead three minutes before half-time.

Spurs attacker Son inevitably scored it, turning in from close range to put South Korea on the way to a third qualifying win from as many games. A capacity crowd at the 66,000-seater Seoul World Cup Stadium was stunned into silence on 61 minutes when Suphanat was on hand and inside to rifle past exposed goalkeeper Jo Hyeon-woo.

South Korea had several chances to score the winner, but they failed to take them against an increasingly overworked Thailand defence. The two sides meet again on Tuesday in Bangkok. — AFP



MONTREAL: Eliska Brezinova of the Czech Republic skates her short program in the women’s competition during the International Skating Union (ISU) World Figure Skating Championships in Montreal, Canada, on March 20, 2024. — AFP

Canadian pair lead in figure skating championships

MONTREAL: Canadians Deanna Stellato-Dudek and Maxime Deschamps electrified home fans as they seized the lead in the pairs short programme at the Figure Skating World Championships on Wednesday.

Montreal-based Stellato-Dudek and Deschamps earned a personal best 77.48 points for their short programme for a commanding lead of 3.95 points over defending champions Riku Miura and Ryuichi Kihara of Japan.

Their performance to Cirque du Soleil’s “Oxygene” sparked a riotous ovation from fans at the Bell Centre and the score brought a scream of delight from Stellato-Dudek, who is on the brink of a first world title at the age of 40.

The 2000 world junior silver medallist skating

for the United States, she retired in 2001 because of injuries but came back in pairs in 2016 and began skating for Canada in 2021. Deschamps said it was “very special” to skate at a World Championships on home ice, and Stellato-Dudek said containing their emotions would be key in the free skate. “I need to stay calm,” she said. “I tend to over-try, and that never works.”

She and Deschamps won Skate Canada gold with this season’s best pairs total of 214.64 and triumphed again at the Four Continents championship in Shanghai this month, where they finished ahead of Miura and Kihara.

The Japanese duo have come back strong after missing much of the season because of injury. Their solid short programme, marred by a flawed landing on a throw triple-lutz, garnered 73.53 points. “We did the best we can at the moment,” Kihara said.

Italians Sara Conti and Niccolo Macii were third on 72.88 going into Thursday’s free skate, when the battle for podium places promised to be close. Germany’s Minerva Fabienne Hase and Nikita Volodin in fourth and Georgia’s Anastasi-

ia Metelkina and Luka Berulava in fifth were less than a point behind Conti and Macii.

Later Wednesday, Kaori Sakamoto’s bid for a third straight women’s title got off to an unsteady start in the short programme. The Japanese star slipped near the end of her routine and finished the day in fourth with 73.29 points.

Sakamoto is vying to complete an unbeaten 2023-24 campaign if she can become the first skater since American Peggy Fleming from 1966-1968 to win three straight world titles. However the 23-year-old from Kobe was upstaged by Belgium’s charismatic European champion Loena Hendrickx, who produced a dazzling performance to lead after the short programme with 76.98 points.

Hendrickx, bidding to land a gold after finishing with a silver and a bronze at the last two world championships, leads American teenager Isabeau Levito by 3.25 points. The 17-year-old Levito, the 2023 US champion, scored a personal best of 74.73 after a routine that saw her nail a triple Lutz-triple toe, a double Axel and a triple flip. South Korea’s Lee Hae-In is in third place after scoring 73.55. — AFP

Classifieds

Clinics & Hospitals

Clinics

Kaizen center	25716707
Rawda	22517733
Adaliya	22517144
Khaldiya	24848075
Kaifan	24849807
Shamiya	24848913
Shuwaikh	24814507
Abdullah Salem	22549134
Nuzha	22526804

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

Hospitals

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

Change of Name

I, Jagan Mohan Yenugula, holder of Indian Passport No. X2873711 having permanent address Lingi Reddipalli Chinnampalli, Obulavaripalli, Annamayya, Pin: 516108, Andhra Pradesh, India residing in Kuwait at present, hereby declare that henceforth my name will be read as: (Given Name) Jagan Mohan Royal and (Surname) Yenugula.
(#5187 22/03/2024)

Jayson scores 31 points as Celtics hold off Bucks for seventh straight win

‘No lead is safe in the NBA, but a win is a win and we’ll take it’



BOSTON: Jaylen Brown #7 of the Boston Celtics drives to the basket against Khris Middleton #22 of the Milwaukee Bucks in the fourth quarter at TD Garden on March 20, 2024 in Boston, Massachusetts. — AFP

LOS ANGELES: Jayson Tatum scored 31 points as the Boston Celtics held off a late fightback from the Milwaukee Bucks to win 122-119 in their top-of-table Eastern Conference clash on Wednesday. Boston had looked to be cruising towards their seventh straight victory after dominating Milwaukee for long periods at the TD Garden.

Exploiting the absence of injured Bucks talisman Giannis Antetokounmpo, the Celtics surged into a 21-point lead late in the third quarter after Milwaukee had closed to within five just after half-time. But a blistering fourth quarter performance by Milwaukee — who outscored the Celtics 36-21 in the final frame — set up a nerve-shredding finale before Boston squeaked home.

“It was ugly,” Tatum admitted. “We didn’t play the way we wanted to in the fourth quarter, and they went on a run. “No lead is safe in the NBA. But a win is a win and we’ll take it.” Boston improved to 55-14 with the victory, leaving them a hefty 11 games clear of the second-placed Bucks.

The Celtics now need just three more wins to be

assured of top seeding and home court advantage through the playoffs.

Even allowing for the fourth quarter wobble, few would bet against them returning to the NBA Finals in June after a performance which once again showcased their balanced offense.

‘Long way to go’

Five Boston players finished with double-digit points tallies, including Derrick White (23), Jaylen Brown (21) and Kristaps Porzingis (17). Payton Pritchard added 19 off the bench. “We’ve just got a really complete team,” Tatum told ESPN. “We’ve been playing great all season, but we’ve still got a long way to go,” Tatum said.

“I like the way that we’re trending, but we’re just focused on getting better every single day. “We’re not looking to the playoffs. We’ve got a game on Friday against Detroit — and that’s the mindset that we’ve got to have.”

With Antetokounmpo absent, Milwaukee’s challenge was spearheaded by Damian Lillard, who fin-

ished with 32 points while Bobby Portis added 24 off the bench. In other games on Wednesday, Kevin Durant surpassed Shaquille O’Neal to move into eighth place on the NBA’s all-time scoring list as the Phoenix Suns eased past the Philadelphia 76ers 115-102.

Durant, eight points behind O’Neal’s tally of 28,596 points before the game, drained a jump shot in the third quarter to move past the former Los Angeles Lakers icon. “Well deserved,” O’Neal said in a video message to Durant. “It doesn’t stop here ... If anybody was gonna pass me, it was definitely gonna be you.”

Durant finished the night with 22 points, while Grayson Allen led the Suns scoring with 32 points including nine three-pointers. In San Francisco, the Golden State Warriors bounced back from Monday’s defeat to the New York Knicks to hand the Memphis Grizzlies a 137-116 drubbing. The Warriors improved to 36-32 and remain 10th in the West.

Butler reminder

In Cleveland, the Miami Heat produced a barn-

storming finale to pip the Cavaliers 107-104. Miami led for most of the game but Cleveland crept into a four-point lead with 1min 34sec remaining in the fourth. The Heat’s Terry Rozier rattled off nine points in the closing stages including a crucial 26-foot three-pointer with 15 seconds remaining to restore Miami’s advantage and see the visitors home. Rozier finished with 24 points while Jimmy Butler led Miami’s scorers with 30.

“That’s the most important thing, just getting the win,” Rozier said. “My team-mates and coaches do a great job of reminding me daily, night-in, night-out, who I am and just to be that. Happy we got the win.”

Miami improved to 38-31 with the victory and sit in seventh place in the East. Cleveland remain third in the table at 43-26. The Sacramento Kings eased past the Toronto Raptors 123-89, while the Indiana Pacers swatted aside Detroit 122-103.

Western Conference leaders Oklahoma City breezed past the Utah Jazz 119-107, with Chet Holmgren (35) and Shai Gilgeous-Alexander (31) combining for 66 points. — AFP

Police search Spanish football federation offices over corruption

MADRID: Spanish police searched the Spanish football federation (RFEF) headquarters and its former president Luis Rubiales’ house among other locations as part of an investigation into alleged corruption and other crimes, judicial sources said Wednesday.

According to Spanish media the operation is part of a court investigation into contracts signed by former federation chief Rubiales to take the Spanish Super Cup to Saudi Arabia. The contracts signed are worth 40 million euros a year (\$43.3 million) and were arranged with former footballer Gerard Pique’s company Kosmos acting as an intermediary.

The operation involved searches of various locations across Spain as well as the RFEF’s base in Las Rozas, on the edge of Madrid, and Rubiales’ property in Granada, although the 46-year-old is currently outside of Spain.

“I am absolutely surprised by all this,” Rubiales told a journalist from Spanish television channel Telecinco. “I have been working here for months in the Dominican Republic, I’ve been here for over a month straight, and in fact, my family was going to come and spend Easter with me.” Rubiales stepped down in disgrace in September after forcibly kissing Women’s World Cup star Jenni Hermoso to provoke worldwide outrage, following Spain’s triumph in the Sydney final in August. A Spanish judge said in January Rubiales will face trial over the incident.

The police searches across 11 locations were part of “an investigation linked to presumed crimes linked with corruption in business, fraudulent administration and money laundering”, said judicial sources.



LAS ROZAS DE MADRID: Spain’s Civil Guard (Guardia Civil) of the Central Operational Unity (Unidad Central Operativa - UCO) and Europol officers leave after a search at the headquarters of the Spanish Royal Football Federation (RFEF) in Las Rozas de Madrid on March 20, 2024. — AFP

Sources said four arrests have been made so far, including the federation’s external legal advisor Tomas Gonzalez Cueto, and two RFEF directors.

“The RFEF has today offered its full cooperation to the police investigation, as well as to the public prosecutor, after the search of its headquarters,” the Spanish federation said in a statement. “Furthermore, the RFEF has called for total transparency in the institution that runs Spanish football.” “As such, it is keen that the investigation underway should proceed uninhibited until its conclusion,” the RFEF added, citing its “deep concern”. Police have also searched Seville’s La Cartuja stadium, where the Copa del Rey final will be held on April 6.

Spanish media said no arrests were made at the federation’s headquarters, where the Spanish national team is currently based ahead of upcoming friendlies against Colombia on Friday in England and Brazil on next Tuesday in Madrid. — AFP

Murray beats dizzy Berrettini, Osaka, Stephens advance

MIAMI: Two-time Miami Open champion Andy Murray fought back for a 4-6, 6-3, 6-4 win over struggling Italian Matteo Berrettini in the first round at Hard Rock Stadium on Wednesday. Berrettini needed medical attention near the end of the second set after appearing to almost faint on court but he battled on.

The Italian recently returned to the tour after an injury-plagued 2023, reaching the final of a Challenger event in Phoenix. He broke Murray’s serve in the first game of the match and was in firm control of the opening set. But he faded badly in the second and called a medical time-out when 5-2 down after walking off the court looking dizzy.

The weather in Miami was not particularly hot or humid and more pleasantly mild than has often been the case at the tournament in past years. The 27-year-old former world number six, put up a better fight in the third, but a solid-looking Murray saw the match out in two hours and 47 minutes.

Murray made just 20 unforced errors while Berrettini committed 44, as the Scot clinched his fourth consecutive first-round win. “There is life in the old dog yet,” wrote Murray on the television camera lens at the end of the game and he was pleased with the manner of his win.

“I started off a little bit slow, but I do think I played pretty well from the middle of the first set until the end of the match,” he said. “I created a lot of opportunities and he was struggling for a little bit at the end of the second and beginning of the third. I capitalized on that and got off to a quick start in the

third. I served it out well in the end.”

Murray, who won the Miami Open in 2009 and 2013, will meet 29th-seeded Argentine Tomas Martin Etcheverry in the next round. Osaka, Stephens advance.

In the WTA event, four-time grand slam-winner Naomi Osaka had little trouble in defeating Italy’s Elisabetta Cocciaretto 6-3, 6-4 in one hour, 18 minutes to move into the second round. Osaka is ranked 229th in the world after taking a break after having a child and spending over a year out of the game and is returning to the scene of her run to the final in 2022 where lost to Iga Swiatek in the final.

Osaka said her performance was the best since she returned to the tour at Brisbane in January. “Honestly, this is probably the most free that I was able hit my balls, the closest to the feeling that I want to capture going forward, so I would say that this is probably my best match in terms of shot-making....I was swinging the best that I have since I have been back,” she said.

Osaka will face another mother in the second round when she takes on Elina Svitolina of Ukraine who in 12 months back on the circuit is already back inside the top 20 -- a return which Osaka says has inspired her.

“I remember watching her play at Wimbledon whilst I was pregnant and thinking that I want to be there too one day. I think she’s always just been a really great player so it’s not surprising to me she’s back in the top 20. It’s where she belongs,” said Osaka.

American Sloane Stephens beat Angelique Kerber 6-2, 6-3 in a meeting of two former grand slam champions. Stephens, celebrating her 31st birthday, was on top throughout against the German who had shown good form in Indian Wells where she reached the fourth round. Stephens, the 2018 Miami champion, will play Romania’s 19th-seeded Sorana Cirstea in the second round. — AFP