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India's biggest election loser ready to fight again



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Boursa Kuwait's AGM approves cash dividend of over KD 14.8m for 2023



Traditional prayer beads and bukhoor in today's Weekender



Ramadan

Fajr	: 04:22
Shrooq	: 05:42
Dhuhr	: 11:53
Asr	: 15:23
Maghrib	: 18:04
Isha	: 19:22



Call to boost military cooperation

Efforts continue to introduce vertical aviation into National Guard



KUWAIT: (Left) Deputy Prime Minister, Defense Minister and Acting Interior Minister Sheikh Fahad Al-Yousef Al-Sabah holds a meeting of senior military leaders in the presence of Chief of the General Staff of the Army Lt Gen Bandar Al-Muzain on March 28, 2024. (Right) Deputy Chief of the National Guard Sheikh Faisal Al-Nawaf Al-Sabah meets senior commanders at the Sheikh Salem Al-Ali Al-Sabah Camp on March 28, 2024. — KUNA photos



RAMADAN KAREEM

Zakat in Islam-II

By Abdeltawab Moustafa

Zakat is a great obligation authorized by Almighty Allah for the purpose of maintaining solidarity among the Muslim community.

Conditions for Zakat: Zakat is obligatory on every Muslim who owns assets as his own, which are in his hand and at his disposal, or which he is able to collect. These assets must reach nisab (minimum value) set by Islamic law, which also varies according to the type of assets as previously mentioned, and that a full year lapses on its ownership. However, in the case of what comes out of land such as crops, then zakat is due when they become ripe, and in the case of grazing animals, young offspring are exempted from the nisab until they reach maturity.

Zakat is due on four kinds of wealth:

- The grains and fruits that grow from the earth, according to the saying of the Almighty Allah "But pay the due thereof..." (their zakat is due, according to Allah's orders, on the day of harvest...). (Al-Anam: 141)
- Valuables like gold, silver and cash. Allah says in the Holy Quran "And those who hoard up gold and silver and spend them not in the way of Allah, announce to them a painful torment." Al-Tawba (Verse 34):
- Goods designated for trade, including all assets that are used for earning and trading, such as real estate, animals, equipment, merchandise, foodstuffs, vehicles and other types of assets. Their owner evaluates them according to their value, whether they depreciated or appreciated, and counts the merchandise in their stores accurately and comprehensively, small or big, and pays zakat on it.
- Livestock: camels, sheep or goats, on condition that they are grazing and are prepared for breeding and they reach the nisab (minimum number). The grazing animals are the ones that graze on the grass all the year or most of it. If they are not grazing animals, there is no zakat on them unless they are for trade, and if they were prepared for profit by buying and selling, then they are merchandise, and the owner must pay their zakat as that of merchandise, whether they graze or not.

Continued on Page 6

KUWAIT: Deputy Prime Minister, Minister Defense and Interior Sheikh Fahad Al-Yousef Al-Sabah called on the military leadership on Thursday to enhance cooperation and coordination among various sectors of the Kuwaiti army and to expedite the pace of work and accomplishments. This came in a press statement from the ministry of defense during Sheikh Fahad's chairing of a meeting attended by senior military leaders in the presence of the Chief of General Staff of the Army Lt Gen Bandar Al-Muzain.

No letup Zionist bombardments, battles in Gaza

GAZA: Battles and bombardment pounded the Gaza Strip on Thursday after Washington said the Zionist entity had agreed to reschedule talks that had been canceled amid tensions between the allies. The Zionist military said it struck dozens of militant targets including tunnels over the previous day, and the health ministry in Gaza reported at least 62 more deaths over a similar period.

The United States' criticism of Zionist Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has mounted over Gaza's civilian death toll, dire food shortages, and Zionist plans to push its ground offensive against Hamas militants into Rafah. Gaza's far-southern city is crowded with displaced civilians and world leaders have warned against a Rafah offensive.

They fear it would worsen a catastrophic humanitarian situation for the Palestinian territory's 2.4 mil-

The meeting discussed and reviewed several programs and plans prepared for various military sectors and identified the most important obstacles and difficulties hindering the implementation of some tasks assigned to these sectors. Sheikh Fahad emphasized intensifying efforts of direct and periodic monitoring to ensure the smooth progress of work and exerting all efforts to equip and develop the capabilities of their units' personnel according to the highest technical and technological standards in or-

lion residents, many of whom are sheltering in Rafah along the Egyptian border. The United Nations reported late Wednesday that famine "is ever closer to becoming a reality in northern Gaza," and said the territory's health system is collapsing "due to ongoing hostilities and access constraints".

Bombardment and fighting have not eased despite a binding UN Security Council resolution passed on Monday demanding an "immediate ceasefire" in Gaza and the release of hostages held by militants. Netanyahu had scrapped a Zionist delegation's visit called by Washington to discuss the Rafah plan — a protest after the United States had abstained from voting on the UN ceasefire resolution, allowing it to pass.

The Zionist government has since backtracked. White House spokeswoman Karine Jean-Pierre said the Zionist entity had agreed "to reschedule the meeting dedicated to Rafah". US officials say they plan to present the Zionist entity with an alternative for Rafah, focused on striking Hamas targets while limiting the civilian toll.

Even without a ground invasion, Rafah is under regular bombardment that on Wednesday left the city's Al-Kuwaiti Hospital coping with the wounded and the dead.

Continued on Page 6



GAZA: Two men carry a man injured in Zionist attacks outside the Ahli Arab Hospital in Gaza City on March 27, 2024. — AFP

NEWS IN BRIEF

Kuwait hands \$2m to UNRWA

AMMAN: Kuwaiti Ambassador to Jordan Hamad Al-Marri handed Kuwait's contribution of \$2 million to UNRWA in a meeting with Director of External Relations at UNRWA Tamara Al-Rifai. Marri affirmed the "Kuwaiti leadership's keenness and its principled and permanent position to support the Palestinian cause and support Palestinian refugees". He said Kuwait's contribution reflects its commitment to its international obligations towards Palestine and its full confidence in what UNRWA provides and its lofty mission that it carries out towards serving refugees. — KUNA

Stricter hep C rules for new arrivals

KUWAIT: Health Minister Dr Ahmad Al-Awadhi issued a decree for stricter health supervision of newly arrived residency permit seekers. Those with "indeterminate" hepatitis C test results will be deemed "medically unfit", barring the use of PCR tests for them. Residents testing positive for hepatitis C antibodies after two indeterminate tests within four weeks will undergo a PCR test. Positive results render them medically unfit, while negative results grant a one-year residency. After a year, another PCR test determines fitness for renewal.

1 in 5 teachers 'hit by pupil'

LONDON: Nearly one in five teachers in England says they have been hit by a pupil in the past year, a poll revealed Thursday, as schools grapple with a post-pandemic slide in behavior. The poll also found 30 percent of teachers said they had seen pupils fighting in the previous week. Fifteen percent of teachers working with pupils aged 11-18 said they had experienced sexual harassment from a pupil while at school. The outgoing head of the UK's school inspection agency Ofsted said the problem would take years to resolve and was taking up "disproportionate" amounts of headteachers' time. The findings come after education chief Amanda Spielman last year blamed a national increase in disruptive classroom behavior on the loss of "socialization" caused by COVID lockdowns. — AFP

Next Assembly should boost, diversify economy: Experts

2024 election campaigns 'must highlight sports development'

KUWAIT: The upcoming National Assembly should adopt several prominent economic issues, namely laws that would boost the diversification of the Kuwaiti economy and finding new income sources that would secure sustainability, economic experts stressed. In interviews with KUNA, they said that the local economy depends on the global energy markets and their rapid fluctuations, pointing out the necessity of working on the sustainability of the national economy to transform it from a rentier economy to a productive one.

They also stressed creating an investment climate that would attract foreign capital, boost business competition, and remove obstacles for foreign investors, as well as encourage national cadres to pave their way into a free economy and encourage innovation and creativity. Financial markets expert Hassan Bu Mejdad said that resolving the structural imbalances in the national economy would be through the privatization of some government sectors, such as energy and communications.

He called for boosting private-public partnerships, citing Az-Zour North power plant, Sheqaya solar plant, and privatization of the stock market, as well as restructuring the government apparatus, canceling nonproductive sectors, and merging sectors of similar nature. For his part, Business Management Professor at the Public Authority for Applied Education and Training (PAAET), Dr. Abdulamir Al-Hendal, called for optimal utilization of funds in the National Fund for Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) Development to progress youth projects, reduce the burden on the government, and encourage skilled employees and those working in the private sector.

He stressed the importance of activating the partnership between the public and private sectors and encouraging the foreign investment environment in Kuwait, as well as facilitating all obstacles. He called for focusing on a specific vision between the leg-



Abdullah Al-Turqi



Fehaid Al-Ajmi



Dr. Hamad Majed



Souad Al-Roumi

islative and executive authorities and prioritizing it through activating strategic plans and policies that were set in the New Kuwait 2035 vision. Expert in economic and investment affairs Nader Al-Obeid said that the government and National Assembly have to "agree on a clear economic vision with specific goals" that could be achieved through intensifying all efforts and harnessing all possibilities.

He called for taking advantage of Kuwait's special strategic location that would achieve a sustainable economic boom (renaissance), stressing in this regard the importance of creating specialized zones with diverse activities. He warned against continuing to depend on a single source of income, which is oil, and to expand investment in oil industries and produce environmentally friendly oil derivatives that would meet the needs of global markets.

Dr. Issam Al-Tawari, the managing partner for Newbury Economic Consultancy, said that the next National Assembly would be facing an important entitlement, which is to preserve the state's sustainability through stopping overspending, boosting non-oil revenues, and collecting arrears on companies and individuals. He affirmed that diversifying income sources has become an urgent necessity in light of the developments in the world oil markets,

recalling the record drop in oil prices during the COVID-19 pandemic. He stressed the importance of sustaining the national economy and transforming it from a rentier economy to a productive economy, saying that investing in people is the pillar to building a productive and sustainable economy.

Highlight sports

While the campaigns for the 2024 National Assembly elections, scheduled for April 4, are in full swing, a number of Kuwaiti athletes and officials called on candidates to highlight issues related to sports and its development. In several interviews with KUNA, they affirmed that development sports in Kuwait were as vital as any other sector in the country, deeming it a necessity.

Lawmakers in Kuwait should and must set their vision on boosting sports in the country to revitalize this important domain, Olympian shooter and champion Abdullah Al-Turqi told KUNA. Al-Turqi indicated that since the Kuwaiti population has a majority of youth, the quest to develop sports in the country was not something trivial. Those involved in sports, whether athletes or officials, are eager to see Kuwaiti sports soar high, the Kuwaiti athlete indicated, noting that 2024 National As-

sembly candidates have the chance to bring such issues into the limelight.

He stressed that sports occupied the youth's time and made them veer off illicit activities such as reckless driving and, god forbid, narcotics. On his part, President of the Kuwaiti Winter Games Club Fehaid Al-Ajmi affirmed that sports must take center stage in political discourse, expressing bewilderment over the lack of sports issues in some of the candidates' rhetoric.

Finding solutions to problems plaguing sports development in the country and boosting the "soft power" impact of sports are indicators of countries that seek true progress, he stressed. Public and private sports clubs and entities all deserve attention, affirmed Al-Ajmi, adding that the youth of Kuwait are worthy of such care. Also giving a similar input, the head of the women's committee at the Kuwaiti Karate Federation, Souad Al-Roumi, indicated that sports was sort of a language that connected nations and reflected positively on overall development.

She said that recent upsets in Kuwaiti sports might be attributed to a lack of attention on the part of lawmakers, who should do their utmost to address all challenges facing athletes in the country and find means to overcome them. She also stressed that women's sports must also be included in the discussion to have an overall impact on the development of Kuwaiti sports. Candidates might have a lack of knowledge when it comes to sports, Dr. Hamad Majed, a sports consultant, told KUNA.

The absence of a clear national program for sports also might contribute to the seeming disinterest in sports by some candidates, Majed said, calling on lawmakers to set aside their political differences when it came to this vital issue for many of the youths in the country. He stressed that winners of the elections must include sports development in their agenda when reaching parliament, saying that developing sports was part of Kuwait Vision 2035. — KUNA



Professor Wafa Al-Arabi



Sharifa Al-Khamis

Women play vital roles in election campaigns

KUWAIT: Becoming an essential part of the democratic process via voting and running, Kuwaiti women also played vital in making or breaking candidates' chances for the coveted seat at the National Assembly. Women in Kuwait contributed immensely to various election campaigns, promoting candidates to eligible voters throughout Kuwait.



Eman Dashti

Women in Kuwait play a key role as campaign managers and activists to promote candidates, professor of political science at Kuwait University (KU) Wafa Al-Arabi told KUNA. She indicated that women usually promote male candidates more effectively due to the social fabric of society, noting that they are

strong in social networking, which contributes to the success of candidates. Women represent around 50 percent of the population, and it is very important to gain their votes to sway the polls, Al-Arabi affirmed, stressing that they are an important factor and a vital human resource during election season.

Meanwhile, Eman Dashti — a political activist vying for the rights of women to reach the highest levels in parliament — from the level of voters to becoming Members of Parliament, women were a force to be reckoned with. All candidates, whether male or female, made it a necessity to include a women's committee in their campaign, Dashti said, pointing out that this factor enabled candidates to gain an edge in elections.

It is very important to educate women on political participation in decision-making, Dashti noted, and she added that this would enable women to gain prominent positions in the country. On her part, member of the board of the Women's Cultural and Social Society Sharifa Al-Khamis affirmed that women played a part in the logistic part of election campaigns via coordinating committees' work and highlighting candidates' messages.

The active social nature of Kuwaiti society made women crucial for the task of luring voters to vote for certain candidates, she indicated. She said that after gaining full voter and campaign rights in 2005, Kuwaiti women had a decent record in the political scene, and hopefully this would continue in the future. — KUNA



Minister, US, French envoys discuss ties

KUWAIT: Kuwait Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Sharida Al-Maousherji met on Wednesday with US Ambassador in Kuwait Karen Sasahara on ways of

promoting distinguished relations between both friendly countries in all domains. During the meeting, they also looked into several issues and topics pertinent to further promoting bilateral cooperation and bolstering bonds of friendship between Kuwait and the US. The political officer at the US Embassy in Kuwait, Kelly Wood, was present at the meeting.

Kuwait Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of

State for Cabinet Affairs also met with the French Charge d'Affaires in Kuwait, Bassam Khadrawi, on ways of promoting distinguished relations between both friendly countries in all domains. They looked into several issues and topics pertinent to promoting bilateral cooperation and bolstering bonds of friendship between Kuwait and France. The second counselor at the French Embassy in Kuwait was present at the meeting. — KUNA



KRCS' volunteer helping voters in previous elections. — KUNA photos



KRCS volunteers set for elections

KUWAIT: The Kuwait Red Crescent Society (KRCS) announced on Wednesday that 400 of its volunteers would partake in organizing the 2024 National Assembly elections scheduled for April 4. KRCS' Deputy Chairman of the Board, Anwar Al-Hasawi, told KUNA that volunteers would be present in 26 schools throughout the country's five constituencies as part of their contribution to this tremendous national duty. He revealed that volunteers would be tasked with aiding the elderly and individuals with special needs to reach ballot boxes to cast their vote. Volunteers were trained to carry out their duties prior to elections and would hopefully attend to their tasks adequately on the day of election, said Al-Hasawi. He affirmed that



KRCS' Deputy Chairman of the Board Anwar Al-Hasawi



the KRCS would be coordinating with other state entities to make sure that the election process runs smoothly. — KUNA

Amir's visits to deaf, disabilities clubs a 'supportive' gesture

KUWAIT: State Minister for Youth Affairs Dawood Maarafi said that the two visits of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah to the Disabled Sport Club and the Sport Club for the Deaf embodied His Highness' interest in supporting athletes with disabilities. Minister Maarafi, also State Minister for National Assembly Affairs and State Minister for Communication Affairs, told KUNA on Thursday that these two visits, on the occasion of Ramadan, had a positive impact on all members of the two clubs.

He praised His Highness' initiative in taking these visits, adding that the Public Authority for Sport will continue supporting athletes with disabilities and motivating them for greater achievements. He added that the Kuwaiti champions with disabilities of all kinds achieved great victories and medals in various Paralympic games and in international and continental championships, praising their determination and keenness to raise the name of their country in major sporting forums. — KUNA



KUWAIT: (From left) CMO at M2R Group Bilal Al-Mourad, Director of Communication, PR and Corporate Communication at Talabat Kuwait Abdullah Al-Mansour, Manager Motor Department at Gulf Insurance Group–Kuwait Nawaf Alkout, Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Manager at Zain Group Jumanah AlMutawa, Co-founder and CEO at CODED Hashim Behbehani, Managing Director at Agility Abdullah Al-Failakawi, Associate Professor at the College of Business Administration at Kuwait University Dr Abrar Alhassan and PR and CSR Manager at Kuwait Times and Kuwait News Jana Alnaqeeb attend the launch of the Academy X initiative by CODED Academy. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat

CODED Academy launches Academy X in collaboration with leading organizations

Initiative aims to nurture skills of young women in entrepreneurship and technology

KUWAIT: In partnership with leading corporations and institutions in Kuwait, CODED is pleased to announce the inaugural edition of the Academy X initiative. The initiative is developed in strategic partnership with Zain Group, Gulf Insurance Group, Agility, Talabat and Kuwait University, with the exclusive digital sponsorship of M2R and media sponsorship of Kuwait Times and Kuwait News. In 2024, Academy X aims to nurture the skills of 300 young women aged between 14 and 18 in entrepreneurship and technology. Aligned with



Kuwait's Vision for 2035, this initiative offers invaluable opportunities for students to shape Kuwait's technological and entrepreneurial landscape. Academy X seeks to equip Kuwaiti youth with technical skills and programming knowledge and foster critical and creative thinking, thereby driving Kuwait's development forward. Timely in its inception, this initiative responds to the evolving global landscape, where advanced technical and entrepreneurial skills are increasingly vital.

CODED
Hashim Behbehani, Co-founder and Chief Operating Officer at CODED, emphasized during the initiative's launch press conference: "This unprecedented initiative in Kuwait focuses on empowering Kuwaiti young women in technology and entrepreneurship, aiming to bridge the gender gap in the tech sector. Participants in this program will receive foundational training in artificial intelligence for app development and technical concepts, complemented by hands-on exposure to entrepreneurship, thereby equipping them with indispensable problem-solving skills and

knowledge to establish tech startups. "Academy X" marks a significant stride in empowering young Kuwaiti women in technology and entrepreneurship, and we eagerly anticipate the upcoming participation of students throughout 2024."

Agility
Agility Chairperson Henadi Al-Saleh said: "CODED's Academy X provides young women with software development skills that are essential for full participation in a knowledge- and technology-driven economy. Academy X builds on the work of last year's Ra'idat Al Taqniya program, in which a record number of women took part. The women trained in the Academy X program will be equipped with essential job skills that will be the foundation for their professional success in years to come."

Kuwait University
Dr Abrar Alhassan, Associate Professor at the College of Business Administration at Kuwait University, said: "Kuwait University supports the efforts of CODED in educating girls about the principles and applications of technology and entrepreneurship. This is achieved through Academy X, a free innovative initiative aimed at empowering girls aged 14 to 18 and transforming them into leaders and innovators in the technology and entrepreneurship fields by providing them with the necessary tools to harness the power of technology and build technology-based and AI-based entrepreneurial projects."

Zain
Jumanah AlMutawa, Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Manager at Zain Group stated: "Anticipating the Future of Work, Zain is dedicated to empowering young girls and women, transcending age boundaries to create equitable opportunities for tomorrow's leaders and entrepreneurs. As part of our commitment with Academy X, we will mentor the participating girls to build a talent pool of future STEM leaders, aligning with Zain's targets and our long-term strategies for women empowerment in our rapidly evolving world."



Co-founder and CEO at CODED Hashim Behbehani

Gulf Insurance Group
On his part, Nawaf Alkout, Manager Motor Department at Gulf Insurance Group – Kuwait, added: "We at Gulf Insurance - Kuwait are proud to support this program, which aims to empower young women in the fields of entrepreneurship and technology, which are considered among the main pillars of the development of any society in the world. We believe in the importance of empowering individuals and developing their skills, and we believe that this program represents an important opportunity to build a new generation capable of keeping pace with rapid developments in the world of finance and business. In conclusion, I would like to express my deep thanks to everyone who contributed to reviving and supporting this wonderful initiative, and to everyone who will participate in realizing the dreams and ambitions of these creative girls. Let's work together for a better and brighter future for all."

Talabat
Abdullah Al-Mansour, Director of Communication, Public Relations and Corporate Communication at Talabat Kuwait, also mentioned: "We take pride in our partnership with CODED and support for the Academy X initiative,



PR and CSR Manager at Kuwait Times and Kuwait News Jana Alnaqeeb

as we aim to make a positive contribution in society. This feeling stems from our confidence in the Talabat experience, which has inspired entrepreneurship and technological advancement in Kuwait and the region, playing a significant role in the digital transformation journey.
"The wealth of expertise that we have at Talabat can enrich the educational content and practical training experience of this initiative, by aligning visions, goals and areas significantly. This gives impetus to our social efforts to enhance the educational experience for younger generations interested in technology, particularly for girls, who we believe have the ability to add new and creative value to the market.
"Therefore, we affirm our commitment to our development and enriching the societies we operate in, as we also contribute to the development and empowerment of youth by sharing our expertise and resources in such exceptional initiatives, to elevate modern entrepreneurial and technological thinking and build a diverse and sustainable community."

M2R
Bilal Al-Mourad, Chief Marketing Officer at M2R Group, emphatically



Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Manager at Zain Group Jumanah AlMutawa

expressed the group's endorsement of women's advancement in the tech sector, affirming: "M2R Group takes pride in backing Academy X. As pioneers in the media and advertising industry, we are wholeheartedly dedicated to fostering female leadership in innovation and decision-making." Al-Mourad further elaborated: "This initiative forms an integral part of our continuous Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) efforts, which are in harmony with Kuwait's 2035 Vision for a brighter future."

Kuwait Times and Kuwait News
Jana Alnaqeeb, Head of PR, CSR and Media at Kuwait Times and Kuwait News added: "Our role as a media sponsor allows us to shed light on the variety of technology and academia opportunities available. We want to showcase the journey of students on their development through proper extensive support and guidance. This program will surely nourish and shape the future of female innovators and all demographics alike throughout society and the ever-changing workforce dynamic."
CODED encourages all young women in Kuwait to benefit from this unique learning opportunity and register for Academy X completely for free on coded.com.



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Ramadan health tips



Road safety tips

Do not attempt to drive if you start experiencing any signs of fatigue and tiredness such as hunger, sweating, feeling faint, poor concentration, tired eyes, drowsiness, slow reactions, and over-steering fatigue is a significant road safety risk, so be aware of your own fatigue and watch out for other fatigued drivers. If you are feeling tired, use public transportation instead of driving.

See and be seen

If you must drive at night for suhoor or iftar, ensure that your headlights, taillights, and signal lights are clean and working properly before you go on the road. Clean your windows to remove road film and dust that could impair your ability to see clearly.

Drive defensively

Watch out for other road users potentially under the same effects, especially in the morning rush-hours and iftar. Always try to anticipate the other drivers' actions. All road users must use defensive driving techniques to avoid dangerous situations.

Pre-iftar rush hour time

As road users try to rush towards their iftar appointments, they may use this as an excuse to misbehave on the roads and not be as considerate with their driving habits. Try avoiding the roads during sunset, but if you must, make sure not to jump red lights and keep a sufficient distance between vehicles and do not tailgate. Plan your iftar appointments and leave early to avoid the need of rushing and speeding.

NBK organizes its 2nd Dama Tournament at Mubarakiyah



KUWAIT: National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) organized its 2nd Dama Tournament at Al Aswaq in Al Mubarakiyah as part of its annual social program "Doing good Deeds" in the holy month of Ramadan. The tournament that started last year and witnessed a remarkable public interest is designed to engage with youth and families visiting the area. NBK volunteers were there to help engagement between families to take part in the competition and to reward the top three winners in adult and youth categories in the tournament.

"Sharing such joyous moments stems from our inclusive corporate social responsibility towards the community, especially that NBK highly recognizes the importance of its social initiatives as the best way to achieve Kuwait's development, progress and prosperity", said Talal Al Turki, NBK Public Relations Senior Manager.

Al Turki added that the tournament is part of NBK's Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) Program held during the holy month of Ramadan, which is filled with various charitable and humanitarian activities, as well as social welfare initiatives, in addition to volunteering efforts and charitable events. It's worth mentioning that Ramadan program comprised a series of activities and initiatives aimed at encouraging community engagement and solidarity in Kuwait. NBK Ramadan Social Program includes distributing fast-breaking banquets at various locations throughout Kuwait.

NBK also distributes iftar meals via special convoys that tours the more crowded areas in the country. NBK volunteers manage and supervise the fast-breaking banquets distribution and the activities. NBK carries on its humanitarian initiatives and support of social welfare programs, as it firmly believes in the importance of corporate social responsibility and its effective impact in serving the community and its people, as well as emphasizing the leading role NBK has been playing in that field for many decades.



Kuwaiti Ambassador to China Jasem Al-Najem with Director of the Chinese Ministry's China-Arab States Cooperation Forum Affairs Ambassador Li Chen and Arab envoys. — KUNA

China-Arab States
Cooperation Forum
due May 30

TOKYO: Kuwaiti Ambassador to China Jasem Al-Najem has confirmed that China was preparing to host the 10th session of the ministerial meeting of the China-Arab States Cooperation Forum in Beijing on May 30. Al-Najem indicated that Arab foreign ministers plus the Secretary-General of the Arab League would participate in the meeting, according to a statement by the Kuwait Embassy in Beijing received by KUNA.

On his part, Director of the Chinese Ministry's China-Arab States Cooperation Forum Affairs Am-

bassador Li Chen explained the importance of the upcoming ministerial meeting of the forum. He expressed his hope that Kuwait would participate with a high-level delegation headed by Foreign Minister Abdullah Al-Yahya, with widespread participation of Arab foreign ministers in the meeting, which will discuss many important issues for both the Chinese and Arab sides, both at the regional and international levels, most notably the Palestinian issue.

The forum will adopt three documents after discussion, which are namely "the Beijing Declaration," "the Joint Statement on the Palestinian Issue," and "the Executive Program of the China-Arab States Cooperation Forum between 2024 and 2026." These statements came during the annual iftar dinner held by the embassy earlier this week, with the presence of Arab ambassadors accredited in Beijing and the participation of Li. — KUNA

Kuwait deplores
seizure of land
in West Bank

KUWAIT: The Ministry of Foreign Affairs expressed on Wednesday Kuwait's condemnation of Zionist occupation's decision to seize 8,000 dunams of Palestinian land in the occupied West Bank. This is a blatant violation of international law and norms as well as relevant UN resolutions, the Ministry said in a statement.

It reaffirmed and reiterated that the Zionist occupation's continued confiscation of Palestinian land and deprivation of the Palestinian people of their rights and possessions under the watchful eyes of the international community would not serve the international efforts to establish peace in the Middle East. It urged the UN Security Council to assume its responsibility and take firm actions to stop these Zionist

violations and the occupation's illegal settlement policy.

Meanwhile, Secretary General Ahmad Aboul-Gheit of the Arab League underlined Wednesday the necessity of reaching a ceasefire in the Gaza Strip and the rapid entry of humanitarian aid. This came during a meeting held between Aboul-Gheit and a high-level delegation of Palestine's Fatah Movement that included some officials, Jamal Roushdi, spokesman for the League's chief, said in a statement. Aboul-Gheit called for creating a path for a political settlement to establish a Palestinian state. He also stressed the need to make all possible efforts for Palestinian reconciliation.

The Arab League chief affirmed the central role of the Palestinian Authority and Fatah Movement and the need to end the political and geographical division from which Palestinians have been suffering since 2007. Recognizing a Palestinian state is the correct way to negotiate over the final settlement and the unity of Palestinians, Aboul-Gheit said. The chief also listened to the views of Palestinian leaders on how to enhance Palestinians' land, either in the West Bank or the Gaza Strip. — KUNA

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Marcos: Philippines will not be ‘cowed into silence’ by China

Haiti situation ‘cataclysmic’: UN



This picture taken on March 28, 2024 from Zionist entity’s southern border with the Gaza Strip shows smoke billowing on the Palestinian side amid the ongoing battles. – AFP

US-Zionist entity rift heads for moment of truth over Rafah

US abstains at Security Council, allowing ceasefire resolution to pass

WASHINGTON: The United States has taken a public distance from Zionist entity as never before over the Gaza war but the decisive test will be Rafah and whether Zionist entity heeds US warnings against an offensive in the packed city. The United States on Monday abstained at the Security Council, allowing a resolution to pass for the first time that called for an immediate ceasefire, infuriating Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu who delayed a delegation to Washington to discuss US concerns on Rafah. But in a stance surely noted by Netanyahu, President Joe Biden has made clear he will not use his key point of leverage—cutting US military assistance to Zionist entity.

Annelle Sheline, who recently resigned in protest from the State Department, where she had been on a fellowship working on human rights, said the Biden administration may be shifting but that its actions so far—including the resolution and plans for an emergency pier to bring in aid—amounted to “PR stunts.” “I can only hope that things are starting to change. Unfortunately, I don’t yet see the US actually using its leverage as far as ending or withdrawing support

for Zionist military operations, turning off the tap of weapons,” she told AFP.

Michael Singh, managing director of the Washington Institute who was a top White House aide on the Middle East under former president George W. Bush, said Biden was responding at the United Nations not just to domestic politics but to calls from US allies to compromise and not keep vetoing resolutions. A resolution “is a signal, but it doesn’t in any tangible way impact Zionist ability to prosecute the conflict,” Singh said, while arms restrictions would “come at a much higher cost” strategically and politically.

Limit damage in Rafah?

Zionists have been waging a relentless military campaign in Gaza in response to Hamas’s surprise attack on October 7. The United States has repeatedly warned Zionists not to attack Rafah, the southern city where more than 1.4 million Palestinians have taken shelter, but Netanyahu last week vowed to press ahead after a direct appeal from visiting Secretary of State Antony Blinken.

US officials say they will present alternatives to the

Zionist delegation on Rafah that will focus on striking Hamas targets while limiting civilian casualties. Stephen Wertheim, a senior fellow at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, said that US officials’ presentation of alternatives “indicates to me that they believe some sort of military operations will occur and they’re trying to limit the damage of that operation.”

Singh said the holding pattern on Rafah hurt the United States and Zionists as international pressure builds. “I would say that probably there’s a desire in Washington for them to get on with whatever they’re going to do one way or the other—absolutely protect civilians from harm, but this kind of perpetual indecision, I think, is itself harmful,” Singh said. James Ryan, executive director of the Middle East Research and Information Project, said: “You do own it a bit more if you give them plans and they don’t go well.”

‘Both benefit’ from distance

US criticism has been mounting against Netanyahu with Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, a staunch backer of Zionists and the highest-level elected American Jew, in a bombshell speech criticizing the conduct of the war and urging new elec-

tions. A Gallup poll released Wednesday said only 36 percent of Americans approved of Zionist actions, down from 50 percent in November. Biden is a lifelong supporter of Zionist entity who, facing a tough reelection fight in November, is feeling the wrath of the left in his Democratic Party on Gaza, where the United Nations is predicting famine. Netanyahu, also battling for his political life at the helm of a far-right coalition, is a veteran fighter in Washington who has aligned himself with much of the Republican Party and clashed with three Democratic presidents.

“Both Biden and Netanyahu benefit from having some degree of friction between them,” Wertheim said. “Possibly the one thing that could save Netanyahu government once a new election occurs is for Netanyahu to be able to say to the public, I’m the one figure who was able to stand up to the Americans and also preserve America’s support for us,” he said. Biden, in turn, is eager to show he is pushing back against Zionist “brutality” without imposing costs by restricting weapons. “What we’re seeing is a lot of theater that serves the political interests of the leaders,” Wertheim said. — AFP

2 bodies found in Baltimore harbor

BALTIMORE: The bodies of two construction workers were found in the cold waters of Baltimore harbor Wednesday, trapped in their red pickup truck after a giant cargo ship slammed into the bridge they had been filling potholes on, causing a thunderous collapse. Maryland police announced the grim discovery at a press conference, adding that sonar shows what they believe are more vehicles trapped within the concrete and twisted steel debris of the Francis Scott Key Bridge.

Six of the eight-man construction crew are believed to have been killed, with four bodies yet to be found. Warning that it was not safe for divers to try to penetrate the wreckage, police told a press conference that they were shifting to a salvage operation, removing the superstructure and then sending divers back in to recover the rest of the bodies.

“Based on sonar scans, we firmly believe that the vehicles are encased in the superstructure and concrete that we tragically saw come down,” Colonel Roland Butler, the superintendent of Maryland’s state police, told a press conference. Federal investigators also gave a detailed timeline of the tragedy



BALTIMORE, US: Maryland Governor Wes Moore speaks during a press conference in Baltimore, Maryland, on March 27, 2024. — AFP

based on preliminary findings from the ship’s voice data recorder.

Marcel Muise, lead investigator for the National Transportation Safety Board, told a separate press conference that the container ship Dali, about 1,000 feet (300 meters) long and piled high with cargo, left dock at 12:39 am Tuesday en route to Asia. At 1:24, alarms began sounding on the ship with indications of power trouble and the pilot soon radioed the port authority that the vessel was headed for the bridge,

requesting tug boats. The call for help was heard by two Maryland Transportation Authority units on the bridge because of the roadwork, and they shut down all lanes of traffic, likely saving lives. Muise told reporters that at 1:29 the voice data recorder captured “sounds consistent with the collision.” Nearly the entire steel structure—crossed by tens of thousands of motorists each day—collapsed within seconds, cascading over the bow of the ship, blocking one of the busiest US trading ports. — AFP

Unique US campaign: Trump in court, Biden in the kitchen

WASHINGTON: Though the candidates are the same as last time, the 2024 US presidential election promises to be unique in other ways—pitting two men facing challenges unprecedented in the 235-year history of US democracy. Joe Biden was already fending off misgivings about his advanced years in 2020, but America’s oldest-ever president will have four more candles on his birthday cake this November.

And Donald Trump, who was facing scrutiny during the last election over his conduct before and during

his term in office, now has four criminal indictments to his name—unprecedented for a US president. There isn’t much 81-year-old Biden can do about his age, except crack the occasional joke and point out that his opponent is less than four years younger. But Trump has tried to leverage his legal woes—treating his court appearances as if they were campaign rallies, complete with defiant, grievance-laden speeches before the media and cheering fans.

The speeches themselves aren’t exactly presidential—it’s hard to imagine Abraham Lincoln lashing out at judges or smearing political opponents as “Marxist thugs”—but Trump’s loyal base enjoys his proclivity for incendiary rhetoric and personal grievance. They are likely to see more of it, with jury selection beginning April 15 in Trump’s trial for campaign finance violations in New York. — AFP



US President Joe Biden speaks to supporters during a campaign event at El Portal Restaurant in Phoenix, Arizona. — AFP

Cyclone kills 11 in Madagascar

ANTANANARIVO: A slow-moving cyclone that unexpectedly turned toward Madagascar has killed 11 people on the island nation as high winds ripped down trees and torrents of water rushed through villages, washing away houses, officials said. Cyclone Gamane was projected to skim the island that sits in the Indian Ocean east of southern Africa, but changed course and made landfall in the north on Wednesday, the BNGRC national disaster management office said on Thursday morning.

Six people have drowned and five others were killed by collapsing houses or falling trees, authorities said, adding that some 7,000 people on the island were affected by the storm. The cyclone moved slowly, amplifying its destructive effects. Video images showed torrents of water rushing through villages and people making human chains in waist-deep water trying to help those trapped in their houses escape the deluge.

Numerous routes and bridges were flooded and cut off. “It’s rare to have a cyclone like this. Its movement is nearly stationary,” General Elack Andriakaja, director general of the BNGRC, told AFP. “When the system stops in one place, it devastates all the infrastructure. And that has serious consequences for the population. And significant flooding”, he added.

The low pressure system was expected to “graze the northeast coast of Madagascar but it is a natural phenomenon and there was a change in trajectory” and “it finally came to hit the Vohemar district” at 5:45 am on Wednesday, he said. Gamane has been reclassified as a tropical storm and was expected to leave the island on Friday afternoon, according to meteorologists. Cyclone season in southwestern Indian Ocean normally lasts from November to April and sees around a dozen storms each year. — AFP

International

Haiti situation ‘cataclysmic’: UN

Killings, rapes, lynchings galore as death toll hits 1,500

GENEVA: The situation in chaos-wracked Haiti is “cataclysmic”, with more than 1,500 people killed by gang violence so far this year and more weapons pouring into the country, the UN said Thursday. In a fresh report, the United Nations rights office detailed how “corruption, impunity and poor governance, compounded by increasing levels of gang violence (had) eroded the rule of law and brought state institutions... close to collapse”.

This, it said, had left Haiti in “a cataclysmic situation”. Impoverished Haiti, which has long grappled with violence, has been rocked by surging clashes since late February when gangs launched a coordinated offensive and demanded Prime Minister Ariel Henry resign. Henry, who has led Haiti since the 2021 assassination of president Jovenel Moise, promised more than two weeks ago to step down after a transitional council is set up — though reaching that stage has proved exceedingly difficult due to squabbles among party leaders.

In the meantime, the number of victims is skyrocketing. The UN rights office determined that gang violence left 4,451 people dead and another 1,668 injured last year. And just in the first three months of 2024 alone, up to March 22, 1,554 people were killed and 826 injured, it said.

The report described rampant sexual violence, including women forced into exploitative sexual relations with gang members, rapes of hostages and of women after seeing their husbands killed in front of them. And it highlighted the recruitment and abuse of children — both boys and girls — who are unable to leave the ranks of gangs for fear of retaliation.

“All these practices are outrageous and must stop at once,” UN rights chief Volker Turk said in a statement. The report also pointed to the so-called “self-defence brigades” set up to counter the intensifying gang violence, warning that they continue to take justice into their own hands.

“Individuals accused of petty crime or suspected of association with gangs continued to be lynched, stoned, mutilated, or burned alive” by such brigades, it said. At least 528 cases of lynchings were reported last year, including 18 women, according to the report, while 59 more have been reported so far this year.

Despite an international arms embargo put in place to try to stem the violence, the report said that there was still a reliable supply of weapons and ammunition flowing across Haiti’s “porous borders”.

It called for tighter national and international controls to stem the trafficking of weapons and ammunition to the conflict-torn country. “It is shocking that despite the horrific situation on the ground, arms keep still pouring in,” Turk said.

“I appeal for a more effective implementation of the arms embargo.”

Thursday’s report also reiterated the need for an urgent deployment of a Multinational Security Support mission to help Haiti’s police stop the violence and protect the population.

Kenya, which agreed to lead a long-awaited, UN-approved mission to Haiti to back its security forces as they grapple with the well-armed gangs, has put its plans on hold until the transitional council is in place. Once the mission is established, Turk



PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti: A woman leaves an area that was set fire to by armed gangs in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, on March 25, 2024. — AFP

stressed that it would be “essential” that it “effectively integrates human rights into the conduct of its operations and establishes a compliance mechanism to mitigate and minimize harm”. The rights office report also emphasized that enhancing security alone would not bring long-lasting solutions to

Haiti’s woes, stressing the need for policies aimed at restoring the rule of law.

“Widespread corruption and dysfunction of the justice system greatly contribute to the pervasive impunity for grave human rights violations,” Turk said. “They need to be addressed urgently.” — AFP

Freed 130 Nigerian schoolchildren reunited with families

ABUJA, Nigeria: Over 130 Nigerian schoolchildren freed following a mass kidnapping have reunited with their families and were expected to return home on Thursday, a state governor’s spokesperson told AFP.

Gunmen abducted the children from their school in northwestern Kuriga village on March 7, prompting national outcry about insecurity in the country. Officials said 137 students were released unharmed on Sunday and taken to Kaduna city for health checks.

They met their relatives at an event hosted by state governor Uba Sani on Wednesday, his spokesperson said. “Emotions were very high,” spokesperson Muhammad Shehu said in a statement.

He told AFP all the released children in Kaduna had met relatives. He confirmed they were set to return home with their families later on Thursday. The authorities have said an adult abducted with the children died in captivity, and six of the pupils were treated in hospital earlier this week for injuries received while held for ransom by the gunmen. Teachers and locals previously said around 280 pupils were kidnapped, but the army said the 137 released represented “all the captives”.

Discrepancies between the number of people kidnapped and released are common in Nigeria due to unclear early reports and the return of those who go missing while fleeing attacks. But it was still not



ABUJA, Nigeria: Over 130 Nigerian schoolchildren freed following a mass kidnapping have reunited with their families and were expected to return home on Thursday.

clear why there was such a large difference between the figures. Gangs of armed criminals routinely attack communities, loot villages and carry out mass kidnappings in northwest and north-central Nigeria.

Troops had been searching forests for the pupils and relatives said the kidnappers demanded a large

ransom — but President Bola Ahmed Tinubu has insisted he ordered security forces not to pay up.

Kidnap victims in Nigeria are often freed following negotiations with the authorities, though a 2022 law banned handing over money to kidnappers and officials deny ransom payments are made. — AFP

Call to boost military...

Continued from Page 1

He pointed out that HH the Amir called for the consolidation of the principles of justice and neutrality, and for taking legal measures to safeguard public funds, conducting inspection tours of camps, attending to their infrastructure, intensifying joint training and exercises to raise the level of performance and readiness of Kuwaiti army personnel and ensuring support and encouragement for Kuwaiti cadres.

Meanwhile, Deputy Chief of the National Guard Sheikh Faisal Al-Nawaf Al-Sabah emphasized the necessity of continuing efforts to achieve the goal of introducing vertical aviation into the Guard to provide support and assistance to state institutions in cooperation with the ministries of defense and interior and the civil defense force.

This came in a press statement issued by the

Zakat in Islam-II...

Continued from Page 1

The zakat is paid if they reach the nisab of trade merchandise by themselves, or by adding them to his other assets.

Zakat rate according to nisab (minimum value)
1- Grains and fruits: The nisab is equal to 612 kg of good wheat. The amount due on it is one tenth (10 percent) of what the sky or springs watered, and half of one tenth (5 percent) of what was irrigated at a cost.

2- Cash or valuables:

a- Gold: The nisab is currently equal to 85 gm, and the amount due is a quarter of a tenth (2.5 percent).

b- Silver: The nisab is equal to 595 gm, and the amount due is a quarter of a tenth (2.5 percent).

c- Cash: The nisab is equivalent of the value of the nisab of gold or silver, and the amount due is a quarter of a tenth (2.5 percent).

3- Goods designated for trade: Their value is estimated at the nisab of gold or silver, which is 85 gm of gold or 595 gm of silver – the amount due is a quarter of a tenth (2.5 percent).

4- Animals:

a- Camels: the minimum nisab is five, and the amount of zakat for that is one sheep.

b- Cows: The minimum nisab is 30, which in-

cludes animals one year old or more, and the amount of zakat for that is tabbiaa (one of them which its age one year).
c- Goat and sheep: The minimum nisab is 40, and the amount of zakat for that is one goat.
d- Zakat on shares: If one takes his shares to buy and sell them, the zakat due on them is a quarter of a tenth (2.5 percent) of the market value on the day zakat is due, like goods designated for trade.

However, if he takes his shares to benefit from their annual proceeds, their zakat is as follows:
1. If he is able to know - through the company or others - the amount of each share’s zakat assets of the company, then he pays zakat on that amount at a rate of a quarter of a tenth (2.5 percent).
2. If the company has funds on which zakat is due, such as cash, trade goods, and debts owed by debtors who owe zakat, and it does not pay zakat on its funds, and the shareholder cannot know from the company’s accounts what zakat assets pertain to his shares, then he must investigate what he can and pay zakat on the zakat assets corresponding to his shares. This is unless the company is in such a large deficit that its debts absorb its assets. However, if the company does not have funds on which zakat is due, then it pays zakat only on the proceeds and does not pay it on the principal of the share.
Allah Knows best. We ask Him to enable us to meet our obligations to Him and to our community in a beautiful way. — Courtesy of Kuwaiti Society for Cultural Dialogue

French parliament backs bill against hair discrimination

PARIS: France’s lower house of parliament on Thursday approved a bill forbidding workplace discrimination based on hair texture, which the draft law’s backers say has hit mostly black women wearing their hair naturally. Olivier Serva, an independent National Assembly deputy for the French overseas territory of Guadeloupe and the bill’s sponsor, said it would penalize any workplace discrimination based on “hairstyle, color, length or texture”.

Similar laws exist in around 20 US states which have identified hair discrimination as an expression of racism. In Britain, the Equality and Human Rights Commission has issued guidelines against hair discrimination in schools. Serva, who is black, said women “of African de-

scend” were often encouraged before job interviews to change their style of hair. Backers also say that men who wear their hair in styles like dreadlocks are also affected.

The bill was approved in the lower house National Assembly with 44 votes in favor and two against. It will now head to the upper Senate where the right has the majority and the vote’s outcome is much less certain. Serva, who also included discrimination suffered by blondes, redheads and bald men in his proposal, points to an American study stating that a quarter of black women polled said they had been ruled out for jobs because of how they wore their hair at the job interview.

Such statistics are hard to come by in France, which bans the compilation of personal data that mention a person’s race or ethnic background on the basis of the French Republic’s “universalist” principles. The draft law does not, in fact, contain the term “racism”, noted Daphne Bedinade, a social anthropologist, saying the omission was problematic. “To make this only about hair discrimination is to mask the problems of people whose hair makes them a target of discrimination, mostly black women,” she told Le Monde daily. — AFP

No letup Zionist bombardments...

Continued from Page 1

A motorcycle cart roared up with a man lying motionless in the back, part of his pants soaked with blood. The Zionist entity’s campaign has killed at least 32,552 people, most of them women and children, according to the latest toll issued Thursday by the health ministry in Gaza.

The Zionist entity has launched raids on and near several Gaza hospitals since the war began, saying fighters have used them as bases. Palestinian militants deny such accusations. Troops began raiding Al-Shifa hospital in Gaza City early last week, and on Wednesday night carried out an air strike.

The UN has reported “intensive exchanges of fire between the (Zionist) military and armed Palestinians”. It cited the health ministry as saying the army has confined Al-Shifa medical staff and patients to one building, not allowing them to leave.

Al-Amal Hospital “has ceased to function completely”, the Palestine Red Crescent said earlier this week, following the evacuation of civilians from the medical center. Zionist tanks and armored vehicles have also massed around another Khan Yunis facility, Nasser Hospital, the health ministry said, adding that shots were fired but no raid had begun.

The Zionist entity denies it is blocking aid trucks but only around 150 vehicles a day are entering the Gaza Strip, compared with at least 500 before the war, according to UNRWA, the UN agency for

Palestinian refugees. With limited ground access, several nations have begun aid airdrops, and a sea corridor from Cyprus has delivered its first cargo of food. UN agencies said these are no substitute for land deliveries.

Desperate crowds have rushed towards sustenance drifting down on parachutes, and Hamas on Tuesday said 18 people drowned or died in stampedes trying to recover airdropped aid. Talks in Qatar towards a new truce and hostage release deal, involving US and Egyptian mediators, have brought no result halfway through the holy month of Ramadan.

US criticism has mounted but President Joe Biden has made clear he will not use his key point of leverage — cutting US military assistance to the Zionist entity, which amounts to billions of dollars. Netanyahu, who leads a coalition including religious and ultra-nationalist parties, faces ongoing protests over his failure to bring home all of the captives.

Alongside the bloodiest-ever Gaza war, violence has surged in the Zionist-occupied West Bank, where medics and the army said three people were wounded in a gun attack Thursday. The war has raised fears of wider regional conflict, particularly along the Zionist-Lebanon border. Lebanon’s Hezbollah movement on Wednesday announced the deaths of eight of its members after a day of cross-border fire with the Zionist entity that left at least 16 people dead.

Zionist first responders said they pronounced a man dead in a Zionist-border town, after Hezbollah rocket fire followed a Zionist strike on what its military called a “military compound” in southern Lebanon. Both Hezbollah and Hamas are backed by Iran, the Zionist entity’s archenemy. — AFP

International

Marcos: Philippines will not be 'cowed into silence' by China

Beijing blames Manila 'provocations' for South China Sea tensions

MANILA: President Ferdinand Marcos said Thursday the Philippines will not be "cowed into silence" by Beijing after confrontations in the South China Sea that injured Filipino troops and damaged vessels. Marcos' remarks came as China blamed Philippine actions for recent rising tensions between the countries in the hotly contested waterway, which Beijing claims almost entirely.

Beijing and Manila have a long history of maritime territorial disputes in the South China Sea and there have been repeated confrontations between their vessels near disputed reefs in recent months.

Manila summoned a Chinese envoy over the latest incident near Second Thomas Shoal in the Spratly Islands, which occurred last Saturday during a regular Philippine mission to resupply Filipino troops garrisoned on the BRP Sierra Madre, a grounded navy ship. The Philippines said the China Coast Guard blocked its supply vessel and damaged it with water cannon, injuring three soldiers.

The China Coast Guard has defended its actions, describing them as "lawful regulation, interception and expulsion" of a foreign vessel that "tried to forcefully intrude" into Chinese waters.

China has urged Manila to "pull back from the brink" and stop "provoking trouble at sea", but Marcos hit back on Thursday. "We seek no conflict with any nation, more so nations that purport and claim to be our friends but we will not be cowed into silence, sub-

mission, or subservience," Marcos said in a statement. He said the Philippines would respond with a "countermeasure package that is proportionate, deliberate, and reasonable in the face of the open, unabating, and illegal, coercive, aggressive, and dangerous attacks by agents of the China Coast Guard and the Chinese Maritime Militia".

"Filipinos do not yield," Marcos said. China claims almost the entire South China Sea, brushing off rival claims from other countries, including the Philippines, as well as an international ruling that its assertion has no legal basis.

In a statement Thursday entitled "China Will Not Allow the Philippines to Act Wilfully", Beijing's defence ministry blamed "the provocations by the Philippine side" for the increased tensions over the South China Sea. "Relying on the backing of external forces... the Philippine side has frequently infringed on rights and provoked and created trouble at sea, as well as spreading false information to mislead the international community's perception of the issue, which is, so to speak, going further and further down a dangerous road," it added.

US repeats 'ironclad' commitment

The United States, a treaty ally of the Philippines, has led a chorus of support for the Southeast Asian country in response to Chinese actions.

Marcos said the international community had "offered to help us on what the Philippines requires to protect and



SAN ANTONIO, Philippines: Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos (center) waves to photographers after inspecting a high mobility artillery rocket system (HIMARS) before a live fire exercise as part of the US-Philippines Balikatan joint exercise at the naval training base in San Antonio in this file photo. — AFP

secure our sovereignty, sovereign rights, and jurisdiction while ensuring peace and stability in the Indo-Pacific."

"I have given them our requirements and we have been assured that they will be addressed," he said, without providing details.

His statement also came after US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin repeated the United States' "ironclad" commitment to its longtime ally in a call with his Filipino counterpart Gilberto Teodoro on Wednesday.

Last Saturday's incident followed similar

confrontations near Second Thomas Shoal earlier in the month. Manila said China Coast Guard ships caused two collisions with Philippine boats and water cannoned one of them, leaving four Filipino crew members injured. — AFP

Sri Lanka jails Buddhist monk for Muslim insults



COLOMBO: A police personnel escorts Buddhist monk Galagodaatte Gnanasara to prison at Colombo high court on March 29, 2024. — AFP

COLOMBO: A Sri Lankan court on Thursday sentenced an influential Buddhist monk to four years' hard labor for fanning sectarian hatred against the island's minority Muslim population. The Colombo High Court found Galagodaatte Gnanasara had hurt Muslims by making disparaging remarks about Islam at a 2016 press conference.

"The monk was sentenced to four years of hard labor and fined 100,000 rupees (\$330)," a court official said. "He was sent to prison to start serving his sentence," Gnanasara has been accused of instigating violence against Muslims in the Buddhist-majority country, where roughly 10 percent of the 22 million people follow Islam. He has close ties with Wirathu, an extremist monk based in Myanmar.

This is not the first time that Gnanasara, who once enjoyed powerful political ties, has been in jail. In 2018, he was sentenced to six years for intimidating the wife of a missing cartoonist and contempt of court but was freed nine months later after former president Maithripala Sirisena pardoned him. Ex-president Gotabaya Rajapaksa later made Gnanasara the head of a panel to recommend legal reforms to ensure religious harmony. At the time, opposition lawmaker Shanakiyan Rasamanickam described Gnanasara's committee as "the definition of irony". — AFP

Thailand sounds alarm after anthrax outbreak in Laos

BANGKOK: Thailand ordered a close watch on livestock on Thursday after an outbreak of anthrax in neighboring Laos, where more than 50 suspected human cases have been reported. Anthrax, which spreads through bacteria in soil, commonly infects grazing livestock and wild animals but can infect humans and be deadly in some cases. Thai Prime Minister Srettha Thavisin has ordered officials to closely monitor the disease and to "protect the public".

Humans can become infected by breathing in the spores, eating contaminated food or touching bacteria with broken skin, for instance when handling diseased animals. Media in secretive, communist Laos have reported 65 suspected cases, including 54 in southern Champasak province, which borders Thailand.

A Thai government statement referred to 54 cases reported this month. "The PM has ordered the public health minister to closely monitor, especially near the borders," spokesman Chai Watcharong said in the statement. It also encouraged individuals to inform authorities if they notice any abnormalities in animals. — AFP

India's biggest election loser ready to fight again

METTUR: Despite failing 238 times in his bid for public office in India, K Padmarajan is unperturbed as he prepares, yet again, to contest elections in the world's largest democracy. The 65-year-old tire repair shop owner began fighting elections in 1988 from his home town of Mettur in the southern state of Tamil Nadu.

People laughed when he threw his hat into the ring, but he said he wanted to prove that an ordinary man can take part. "All candidates seek victory in elections," said Padmarajan, sporting a bright shawl draped over his shoulder and an imposing walrus moustache. "Not me."

For him, the victory is in participating, and when his defeat inevitably comes, he is "happy losing", he said. This year, in India's six-week-long general elections that begin on April 19, he is contesting a parliamentary seat in Tamil Nadu's Dharmapuri district.

Popularly dubbed the "Election King", Padmarajan has competed across the country in elections ranging from presidential to local polls. Over the years he has lost to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, former premiers Atal Bihari Vajpayee and Manmohan Singh, and Congress party scion Rahul Gandhi.

"Victory is secondary," he said. "Who is the opposite candidate? I do not care."

Padmarajan's main preoccupation now is extending his losing streak. It has not come cheap — he

estimates he has spent thousands of dollars in more than three decades of nomination fees.

That includes a security deposit of 25,000 rupees (\$300) for his latest tilt, which will not be refunded unless he wins more than 16 percent of the vote. His one victory has been to earn a place as India's most unsuccessful candidate in the Limca Book of Records, the country's archive of records held by Indians. Padmarajan's best performance was in 2011, when he stood for the assembly elections in Mettur. He won 6,273 votes — compared to more than 75,000 for the eventual victor.

"I did not even expect one vote," he said. "But it showed that people are accepting me."

In addition to his tire repair shop, Padmarajan provides homoeopathic remedies and works as an editor for local media. But among all his jobs, fighting elections was the most important, he said. "It is about involvement," he said. "People hesitate to put in their nominations. So I want to be a role model, to create awareness."

Padmarajan maintains detailed records of the nomination papers and identity cards from each of his failed bids for statesmanship, all laminated for safekeeping. Each bears the multitude of campaign symbols he has used: a fish, ring, hat, telephone and, this time, tires.

Once the subject of ridicule, Padmarajan is now asked to address students about resilience, using his campaigns to explain how to bounce back from defeat. "I do not think of winning — failure is best," he said. "If we are in that frame of mind, we do not get stressed."

Padmarajan's lesson in democracy comes at a time when public support for India's clamorous democratic process appears to be waning. A February

Analysts say the election is a continuation of the 2022 presidential race, when Yoon narrowly beat the opposition Democratic Party's (DP) current leader Lee Jae-myung by a margin of only 0.73 percent.

Lee is currently under investigation in a slew of cases, including for alleged bribery in connection with a firm that is suspected of illicitly transferring \$8 million to North Korea. He denies all charges. There has also been a surge in support for a party recently created by a former justice minister, Cho Kuk, who is facing two years in prison for forging credentials to aid his children's entry into elite universities. He is appealing the sentence. The PPP's Han branded both Lee and Cho "criminals" in his opening campaign speech, and vowed to bring them to justice.

"This is not negative campaigning. This is addressing the needs of the people," he told cheering supporters. But with Yoon's approval rating hovering around 34 percent, and public discontent running high over the country's lackluster economy, the opposition DP and the newly formed minor third party are ahead in some polls. Lee urged people to treat the vote as a referendum on the last two years under Yoon. "Due to the government's incompetence, living cost has skyrocketed, and peace on the Korean Peninsula is in danger due to the foolishness of (Yoon) only shouting for war," Lee said, slamming the president's hawkish approach to the nuclear-armed North. — AFP



SEOUL: South Korea's main opposition Democratic Party of Korea (DPK) leader Lee Jae-myung (center) and other party members join hands at a campaign event for the upcoming parliamentary elections in Seoul on March 28, 2024. — AFP



SALEM, India: Independent candidate K Padmarajan, a tire repair shop owner popularly known as "Election King", twirls his moustache while posing for a photograph at his office in Mettur, near Salem district in India's Tamil Nadu state. — AFP

survey by the Pew Research Centre found 67 percent of Indians thought that a strong leader unencumbered by parliament or the courts was a better system of government than representative democracy — up from 55 percent in 2017.

Rights groups also say that democracy has become increasingly illiberal under Modi, with several criminal probes into opposition party leaders making this year's election appear increasingly one-sided.

Padmarajan said it was important, now more than ever, that every citizen of the country exercise their franchise. "It is their right, they should cast their votes, in that respect there is no winning or losing," he said. Padmarajan said he will continue to fight elections until his last breath — but would be shocked were he ever to win. "I will have a heart attack," he laughed. — AFP

Japan drugmaker reports two more deaths; toll four

TOKYO: A Japanese drugmaker whose dietary supplements are at the centre of a growing health scare reported on Thursday two more deaths potentially related to its tablets. Last week, Kobayashi Pharmaceutical recalled three supplement brands — "Beni Koji Cholestel Help" and two others — after customer complaints of kidney problems.

The over-the-counter products contain an ingredient called red yeast rice, or "beni koji", which is supposed to help lower cholesterol. Thursday's announcement brings the total number of deaths under investigation by the company and health ministry to four, with more than 100 other people hospitalized. Prime Minister Fumio Kishida said in parliament that "after the cause is identified, the government will examine what measures are necessary to prevent similar incidents".

"We will clarify the causes and, if necessary, I think we need to consider all possible measures," he said. Kishida was responding to an opposition politician who had urged him to revise safety frameworks that were relaxed under former prime minister Shinzo Abe.

Kobayashi Pharmaceutical sells a wide range of health products marketed through television adverts in Japan. Medical studies describe red yeast rice as an alternative to statins for lowering high cholesterol, but also warn of a risk of organ damage depending on its chemical make-up.

The Osaka-based company says it has also supplied red yeast rice to around 50 other firms in Japan and two in Taiwan. "We were told yesterday by a bereaved family that a person who had been using Cholestel Help had passed away due to kidney disease," the drugmaker said in a statement.

It added it had been told separately that another person who had used Cholestel Help in recent years had died. "We are in the process of confirming the facts and causal relationships in both of these cases," the statement said. "However, we decided to make this report public from the viewpoint of prompt disclosure." — AFP

FRIDAY, MARCH 29, 2024

Business

Boursa Kuwait's AGM approves cash dividend of over KD 14.8m for 2023

Cash dividends of 74 fils per share to be distributed to shareholders on April 24

Boursa Kuwait Chairman
Hamad Mishari Al-HumaidhiBoursa Kuwait's Chief Executive Officer
Mohammed Saud Al-Osaimi

Boursa Kuwait Chairman Hamad Mishari Al-Humaidhi chairs the annual general assembly meeting on Thursday.

KUWAIT: Boursa Kuwait Securities Company (KPSC) held its Annual General Assembly meeting for the year ended Dec 31, 2023 on Thursday (March 28, 2024), at the Boursa Kuwait building. The Board of Directors' recommendation to distribute cash dividends of 74 fils per share was approved, amounting to KD 14,857,406 (Fourteen million, eight hundred and fifty-seven thousand, four hundred and six Kuwaiti dinars). Shareholders registered by the end of the record date of April 21, 2024 will receive their share dividends by the end of 24 April, 2024, the company's scheduled payment date.

The meeting was chaired by Chairman Hamad Mishari Al-Humaidhi, who welcomed the esteemed shareholders and then read the reports issued by the Kuwait Clearing Company regarding the quorum of attendance, which came in at 70.25 percent, as well as the items on the agenda.

The Board of Directors' report, the Independent Auditor's report and the Consolidated Financial Statements for the fiscal year ended on Dec 31, 2023 were all approved, as were the Corporate Governance and Audit Committee reports and the remunerations and benefits report for BOD members.

Shareholders agreed to grant the Board of Directors authorization to buy or sell the company's shares, provided they do not exceed 10 percent, as per the provisions of Law No 7 of 2010 and its executive regulations and amendments. Shareholders also discussed and approved the Related Parties' Transaction Report for 2023 and the related parties' transactions, which are proposed to be conducted during the upcoming 2024 financial year.

Finally, the appointment of Waleed Abdulla Saud Al-Osaimi from Ernst & Young (Al-Aiban, Al-Osaimi & Partners) as the auditor for the fiscal year ending on Dec 31, 2024 was also approved.

Boursa Kuwait Chairman Hamad Mishari Al-Humaidhi commented on the results, stating: "Boursa Kuwait recorded a net profit of KD 15.80 million, an indication of the company's robust and effective operational model and its ability to successfully navigate a turbulent year characterized by economic uncertainty and geopolitical tensions. The Boursa

continued to collaborate with its partners to achieve its strategic goals to develop a strong and efficient financial market that adopts best-in-class standards and practice to achieve a high level of liquidity and transparency."

Al-Humaidhi added, "Boursa Kuwait solidified its role as a leading contributor to the diversification of the Kuwaiti economy and a key cog in the state's plans to transform the country into a cultural, financial and investment pioneer in the region. The company was able to implement its societal and environmental initiatives, aligned with its Corporate Sustainability (CS) pillars and the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), leveraging its extensive network and resources to support its various stakeholders throughout the past year while maintaining its illustrious record of honors and accolades in the field of sustainability."

The Boursa Kuwait Chairman also extended his sincere gratitude to His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah for his continued support of the stability of Kuwait's economy and development and thanked the company's esteemed shareholders for their continuous trust in the company and its objectives, extending his appreciation to his fellow Board members and Executive Management for their diligence and dedication in the realization of the company's strategy and goals as well as to all company employees for their active contribution to the bourse's achievements in 2023.

Al-Humaidhi concluded his remarks by showing appreciation to Boursa Kuwait's partners in the Kuwaiti capital market, with special mention to the Capital Markets Authority, the Kuwait Clearing Company, issuers, investors, brokers, and market participants, for their efforts in promoting Kuwait's position as a leading regional market and the State of Kuwait as a prominent destination for international investment.

Boursa Kuwait's Chief Executive Officer Mohammed Saud Al-Osaimi also commented on the company's results for 2023, saying, "Boursa Kuwait showcased remarkable agility in dealing with the volatility of the financial scene in 2023 thanks to its robust op-

erational model which allowed Boursa Kuwait to gain prominence as one of the best stock exchanges in the region and the Kuwaiti capital market to cement itself as an attractive investment destination for the world. The company remained steadfast in adapting to the changes and challenges of the year by ensuring that its products and services adhere to the best-in-class standards and practices of capital markets globally, cementing its collaborative partnerships with the Kuwaiti capital market apparatus and building bridges between itself and the investment community locally, regionally and internationally as well as instilling confidence in its diverse issuer base, its investors and its key stakeholders."

Al-Osaimi reiterated the company's commitment to modernizing Kuwait's capital market by expanding its offerings and improving market efficiency, enhancing access and reinforcing transparency and governance as well as increasing liquidity and transparency while fortifying investor confidence as part of the company's efforts to enhance the market and offer investors more opportunities to profit.

Al-Osaimi concluded his statement by thanking the Board of Directors for their unwavering support of the company's strategy and operations, as well as the executive management team and every company employee, who played significant roles in advancing the development of the market. He also thanked the Capital Markets Authority, Kuwait Clearing Company, and brokerage firms whose expertise, knowledge and professionalism are reflected in every aspect of the successful development of Kuwait's capital market.

Since its inception, Boursa Kuwait has worked diligently to create a thriving capital market that attracts local and foreign investors through a broad spectrum of new products and services, infrastructure upgrades, and market reform initiatives, as part of its multi-phase market development plans.

The company was fully privatized in 2019, the first government entity in the country to successfully undergo the process, bringing about greater levels of efficiency. Boursa Kuwait also self-listed in September 2020 and has made great strides in sustaining its operations and business continuity

Announcement of
Dividend Distribution

Boursa Kuwait Securities Company (KPSC) is pleased to announce the timeline for the distribution of cash dividends for the year ended December 31, 2023. Shareholders registered on the company's records at the end of the Record Date will be entitled to receive 74 fils per share, as discussed at the Annual General Assembly and outlined below:

Timetable	Date	Description
Cum-Dividend Date	Tuesday 16/04/2024	The last day to purchase the share in order for the shareholder to be entitled to the dividends
Ex-Dividend Date	Wednesday 17/04/2024	The first day on which the share is traded without cash dividend
Record Date	Sunday 21/04/2024	The day that the company determines the shareholders entitled to receive dividends, which is based on the company's register at the end of that day
Payment Date	Wednesday 24/04/2024	The day on which dividends are paid

Please note that cash dividends will be deposited in the shareholders' bank accounts through the automated payment service at the Kuwait Clearing Company.

Shareholders not subscribed to the service can do so by visiting any local or foreign bank branch in Kuwait.

OPEC, IEA and IEF stress energy market stability

VIENNA: The Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), the International Energy Agency and the International Energy Forum stressed on Wednesday the importance of supporting the stability of global energy markets in light of the changes.

The statement was issued in a joint press release by the OPEC media department at the conclusion of the tenth joint workshop between the organization, the International Energy Agency and the International Energy Forum on energy market interactions. The high-level technical workshop was held in the OPEC headquarters in which representatives of the three international organizations, headed by the Director of the Research Department at OPEC, Ayed Al-Qahtani, the Director of the Energy Dialogue at the International Energy Forum, Christoph van Agt Roos, and the Special Advisor to OPEC, Joel Coase attended.

The statement quoted Al-Qahtani as saying, "The latest forecasts estimate Cumulative oil-related investment requirements between now and 2045 stand at about \$14 trillion, or about \$610 billion on average annually. He added that this huge spending will be necessary to meet global demand for oil, which is expected to reach 116 million barrels per day by 2045. Pointing out that this matter should be a top priority in the industry "if we want to maintain security of supplies and avoid unwanted fluctuations in the coming years."

Ross said that "although the financial links to energy markets have become better understood and more transparent, they require analysis and continue to support the stability of global energy markets in a rapidly changing world." — AFP

China's giant Xiaomi enters cut-throat EV market for first time

BEIJING: Chinese consumer tech giant Xiaomi launched its first-ever EV at a press conference in Beijing on Thursday, injecting itself into a fiercely competitive sector in the world's largest car market. China's EV sector has grown rapidly in recent years - propelled by purchasing subsidies that were discontinued in late 2022 - and dozens of domestic automakers are engaged in a stiff price war to get ahead in a crowded market.

Xiaomi is known around the world for affordable smartphones and sleek home appliances, and CEO Lei Jun says he is now putting his "reputation on the line" with the SU7 EV, and challenging Chinese car giant BYD and Elon Musk's Tesla. Sleek, sporty, and available in blue bay, olive green or elegant grey, the SU7 even includes "sound simulation", Lei says, "to recreate the thrill of driving a sports car".

Lei has not divulged the price, but has promised it will be "the best-looking, best-driving and smartest car" costing under 500,000 yuan (\$69,200). Analysts have said they expect it to come in at half that price. "If my guess is correct, the 200,000 to 250,000 yuan range, that actually is the most competitive segment in the China EV space at the moment," Johnson Wan, an analyst at Jefferies Financial Group Inc, told Bloomberg.

Xiaomi is the world's third-biggest smartphone maker, and its experience in that sector has helped shape its EV strategy. Lu Weibing, Xiaomi's president, told CNBC last month that there were around 20 million people who used the company's premium



BEIJING, China: A Xiaomi SU7 electric car is displayed at a Xiaomi store in Beijing.— AFP

smartphones, a figure that helped it price the SU7.

"I think the initial purchasers will be very overlapped with the smartphone users. So that's our strategy," said Lu. China is now the world's largest producer of greenhouse gases, but officials plan for domestic car sales to be made up mainly of electric and hybrid models by 2035. The launch of the SU7 comes just days after BYD, the world's top seller of EVs, posted record annual profits as it pushes a rapid expansion overseas into countries in Southeast Asia, as well as further afield in Latin America and Europe.

In a note attached to the earnings report, BYD CEO

Wang Chuanfu acknowledged the year had not been all smooth sailing. "At the beginning of the year, the recovery of automobile consumption was relatively lagging behind, affected by the switch in promotional policies and market price fluctuations," he wrote.

XPeng — one of BYD's top competitors in China — last week reported a net loss of 10.4 billion yuan (\$1.4 billion) in 2023. Further highlighting the challenges of the sector, Evergrande NEV — a subsidiary of the debt-ridden real estate group — on Wednesday said it had delivered only 1,389 vehicles since its launch. — AFP

What is the economic impact of Baltimore bridge collapse?

Businesses rush to avoid hit amid cargo crisis and supply chain disruptions

French PM sticks to 2027 deficit reduction goal

PARIS: France's prime minister said his country still aimed to reduce its deficit to below three percent of gross national product by 2027, hours after a rating's agency warned this would be tough. "Yes, we are keeping the goal of bringing the deficit below three percent in 2027," Gabriel Attal said during the evening news on the TF1 television channel. He spoke after official figures on Tuesday showed that France's budget deficit overshot forecasts in 2023, undermining President Emmanuel Macron's pledge to bring national finances back on track within the next four years. The public deficit jumped to 5.5 percent of GDP last year, statistics agency INSEE said.

The Moody's ratings agency on Wednesday warned that France was "unlikely" to succeed in bringing its budget deficit down to its target of 2.7 percent of GDP by 2027 - even with extra budget cuts. The "2023 deficit makes it unlikely that the government will succeed in reducing the deficit to 2.7 percent of GDP by 2027, as outlined in its medium-term fiscal plan presented in September," said Sarah Carlson of Moody's Ratings. "The latest data point to somewhat higher debt for longer than we previously expected," she said. "The deficit shortfall highlights the inherent risks in the government's medium-term fiscal strategy, which is based on optimistic economic and revenue assumptions and unprecedented restraints on expenditure," Moody's said.

France has announced 10 billion euros of spending cuts to meet this year's deficit target of 4.4 percent of GDP. But even eliminating extraordinary support measures and the 10 billion euros in additional savings were "unlikely to allow the government to meet its fiscal target of 4.4 percent of GDP this year," Moody's added.

The government is looking to slash even more spending next year. Attal said Wednesday he was hoping to restart talks on reducing how long people receive unemployment benefits. "My aim is not to go after a particular individual or unemployed people, but to shake up a system to better encourage a return to work," he said. — AFP

WASHINGTON: Diverted cargo and supply chain disruptions have left businesses rushing to avoid an economic hit following the collapse of a major bridge in Baltimore after it was hit by a cargo ship. With vessel traffic at the Port of Baltimore suspended until further notice since Tuesday's accident, experts warn of knock-on effects but say these should be manageable in the near term.

Baltimore is the biggest vehicle-handling port in the country, including cars and heavy farm equipment, Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg told a press briefing. He estimates there is between \$100 and \$200 million in value coming through the port daily, with "about \$2 million in wages that are at stake every day."

He added in a CBS interview that ocean shippers, other ports and cargo owners are working to figure out where to divert ships headed that way. Besides the direct hit to thousands of Baltimore port workers, Maryland Governor Wes Moore warned in a CNN interview that more than 140,000 people could be indirectly impacted by disruptions.

"The Port of Baltimore has such a significant economic impact, not just on my state," he said. The port handled over 50 million tons of foreign cargo last year. "This is the impact it's going to have on our country's economy," he added. Experts noted that the economic blow will also depend on the length of work stoppage. Ted Hampton, senior credit officer at Moody's Ratings, said replacing the collapsed bridge "will likely take months or even years."

Cargo bound for Baltimore will probably be partially diverted to the Port of New York and New Jersey, analysts say. The port "has the capacity to handle whatever will come their way," a shipping industry source told AFP.

This is because the Port of New York and New Jersey is the second or third busiest in the country, and handles the equivalent of Baltimore's year-long container volume in a much shorter period, the source said. Bethann Rooney, port director at the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey, added that it is "proactively working with our industry partners to respond as needed and ensure supply chain continuity along the East Coast."

While there will be "noticeable headaches" in the coming months, economist Ryan Sweet at Oxford Economics expects businesses will be able to adapt. There will be supply chain disruptions, but he said: "I don't think it's going to have a macroeconomic effect because there are so many large ports within close proximity." These ports can likely handle a rise



BALTIMORE, USA: The collapsed Francis Scott Key Bridge lies on top of the container ship Dali in Baltimore, Maryland, on March 27, 2024. — AFP

in cargo volumes, Sweet noted.

He added that there will probably not be a "broad-based supply shock" that will impact US inflation for consumer goods or GDP.

Certain sectors will be more impacted, such as automobiles, noted logistics platform Container xChange. According to official figures, the Baltimore port's private and public terminals handled over 840,000 autos and light trucks in 2023, the most among US ports.

"The port is a crucial gateway for specialized cargo and bulk handling," said Container xChange. It warned that delays in cargo movement "could lead to inventory shortages, affecting businesses that rely on timely deliveries, like the automotive industry." Companies seeking alternative routes could also face greater transportation costs. Among auto companies importing through Baltimore is carmaker Mazda, which told AFP that the Baltimore port is "a vital part of Mazda's logistics chain in the United States."

"Mazda is currently assessing the potential impacts of a prolonged closure of the Port of Baltimore to ensure minimal disruption to operations," a spokesperson said. Automaker Stellantis said it is starting talks with transportation providers for "contingency plans to ensure an uninterrupted flow of vehicles" to customers. The port also ranked second last year in the United States for coal exports.

While it accounts for around a quarter of seaborne US coal exports, the United States only makes up about six percent of the global seaborne trade, said Alexis Ellender, a lead analyst at trade intelligence firm Kpler. While there will be a regional hit, "on a global scale, the disruption would not be significant," he said. Sweet of Oxford Economics said there will unlikely be broad-based shortages in autos, with weaker demand for new vehicles and higher inventories these days.

"The issues could be more isolated to certain companies that rely on the Port of Baltimore to bring in their inventory," he said. — AFP

AL SAFAT

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AL SAFAT INVESTMENT COMPANY

KUWAIT BOURSA

WEEKLY REPORT

WEEK ENDED ON 28 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	975	960	980	959	21	22,138,557	-11	-1.13%	7.38%	958	974	14.2	1.77	3.6%	1.02
102	Gulf Bank	Banking	294	294	296	292	4	19,542,117	0	0.00%	4.63%	294	298	14.1	1.30	4.1%	1.28
104	Al Ahli Bank of Kuwait	Banking	258	254	259	254	5	2,166,679	21	9.01%	9.01%	244	260	13.8	0.97	3.5%	0.93
106	Kuwait International Bank	Banking	169	170	170	167	3	11,646,767	1	0.59%	13.33%	167	173	17.0	0.60	3.0%	1.09
107	Burgan Bank	Banking	209	207	210	205	5	10,533,922	-2	-0.96%	20.35%	202	212	20.9	0.71	2.9%	1.30
108	Kuwait Finance House	Banking	809	800	810	791	19	44,563,746	-7	-0.87%	10.19%	799	814	20.9	2.01	2.5%	1.16
109	Boubyan Bank	Banking	615	620	622	614	8	5,484,961	6	0.98%	3.33%	616	627	32.8	2.43	1.3%	1.16
201	Kuwait Investment	Financial Services	191	191	196	188	8	3,711,317	-2	-1.04%	50.39%	178	200	14.3	0.86	2.6%	2.06
204	National Investments	Financial Services	267	265	275	262	13	5,910,973	0	0.00%	10.88%	257	267	51.7	1.24	10.4%	2.09
205	Kuwait Projects	Financial Services	132	122	134	120	14	88,959,742	-10	-7.58%	16.19%	122	126	65.4	0.71	0.0%	0.97
212	Arzan Financial Group	Financial Services	202	195	202	188	14	15,015,702	-8	-3.94%	-7.14%	195	202	28.6	1.34	2.0%	1.25
222	Aayan Leasing and Investment	Financial Services	183	182	187	182	5	12,764,897	-2	-1.09%	4.60%	180	184	9.9	1.25	4.1%	1.62
252	Al Intiaz Investment	Financial Services	49	47.3	49.7	47	2.6	5,895,911	-1.8	-3.67%	-16.28%	47.0	47.7	NM	0.33	0.0%	1.36
401	Kuwait Real Estate	Real Estate	228	225	228	223	5	8,521,769	-3	-1.32%	9.76%	220	237	18.1	1.50	1.3%	1.13
404	Salhia Real Estate	Real Estate	485	469	489	466	23	2,904,078	40	9.32%	9.32%	460	480	16.2	1.44	3.2%	0.55
413	Mabanee	Real Estate	788	791	818	781	37	5,399,934	-11	-1.36%	-0.54%	778	799	16.8	1.76	1.7%	1.00
418	The Commercial Real Estate	Real Estate	129	127	130	124	6	21,444,078	-1	-0.78%	24.51%	125	133	15.6	0.76	2.3%	0.64
501	National Industries	Financial Services	222	220	225	218	7	15,781,880	-3	-1.35%	7.84%	217	226	20.5	0.99	2.2%	1.63
505	Gulf Cable	Industrials	1,372	1,340	1,372	1,280	92	1,587,894	-36	-2.62%	2.29%	1,319	1,350	13.3	1.21	4.9%	1.08
506	HEISCO	Industrials	809	784	809	775	34	2,515,564	-20	-2.49%	-4.39%	769	793	19.7	1.90	3.9%	0.97
514	Boubyan Petrochemical	Basic Materials	611	618	620	606	14	3,074,972	9	1.48%	5.64%	604	633	12.8	1.26	9.8%	0.96
603	Agility	Industrials	601	666	682	601	81	48,218,821	67	11.19%	30.84%	654	672	18.8	0.89	0.0%	1.57
605	Zain	Telecommunications	501	491	506	491	15	17,583,372	-10	-2.00%	-3.16%	487	495	9.9	1.72	7.1%	0.60
623	Human Soft Holding	Industrials	3,324	3,333	3,349	3,302	47	479,831	12	0.36%	-1.94%	3,315	3,350	10.2	3.36	10.5%	0.64
642	ALAFCO	Industrials	208	213	215	208	7	2,200,990	5	2.40%	18.33%	210	213	NM	0.93	0.0%	1.27
654	JAZEERA	Consumer Discretionary	1,158	1,180	1,190	1,150	40	1,469,202	25	2.16%	-15.05%	1,100	1,204	42.2	10.16	2.4%	1.31
813	GFH Financial Group	Financial Services	88.5	88.4	89.7	86.9	2.8	80,644,807	0.5	0.57%	15.86%	86.3	90.0	10.5	1.10	5.2%	1.43
821	Warba Bank	Banking	189	186	190	185	5	14,759,504	-3	-1.59%	0.00%	181	188	23.1	0.98	1.6%	1.10
822	Kuwait Telecommunications	Telecommunications	595	594	598	590	8	3,254,258	31	5.51%	5.51%	586	595	18.1	2.42	5.9%	0.69
823	Mezzan Holding	Consumer Staples	640	658	663	629	34	3,120,157	18	2.81%	14.43%	650	660	17.5	1.82	1.9%	0.47
824	Integrated Holding	Industrials	530	531	543	528	15	2,843,963	-12	-2.21%	4.12%	520	535	38.0	2.21	2.8%	0.75
827	Boursa Kuwait	Financial Services	2,113	2,099	2,118	1,990	128	956,414	-14	-0.66%	21.75%	2,094	2,125	26.5	6.52	3.5%	1.38
830	AL GHANIM	Consumer Discretionary	1,180	1,165	1,218	1,150	68	1,464,062	-33	-2.75%	10.32%	1,140	1,175	11.4	3.93	5.9%	0.75

* As of end of week closing

Business

Burgan Bank raises public awareness of financial security during Eid holiday

As part of bank's commitment to the CBK's 'Let's Be Aware' campaign

KUWAIT: Burgan Bank continues to play an active role in supporting the "Let's Be Aware" (Diraya) banking awareness campaign, which was launched by the Central Bank of Kuwait (CBK) and the Kuwait Banking Association (KBA) in cooperation with Kuwaiti banks. The bank is introducing a series of seasonal awareness themes to promote the culture of financial literacy and accountability as part of its comprehensive social responsibility program. This initiative serves as a call to action, as both an educational and an empowerment tool dedicated to resonating with a diversified audience on their unique journeys of pursuing financial goals.

For the first theme, Burgan Bank is spreading general financial safety advice and travel tips to all fragments of society, especially in light of the high travel sea-



Kholoud Al-Feeli

son of the Eid Al-Fitr holiday. The bank's awareness efforts include informing the public about the main phishing and scam-

ming trends that are on the rise around the world. In addition, Burgan is reminding all individuals about the possible risks of failing to follow safety instructions and abide by safety requirements while performing banking transactions, payments, and other services, in Kuwait or abroad.

Speaking about the importance of financial knowledge, Kholoud Al-Feeli, Deputy General Manager – Marketing and Communication at Burgan Bank, said: "This Eid Al-Fitr holiday season is a golden opportunity for all individuals to develop and hone their understanding of financial and banking principles, to be able to make well-informed decisions that lead to financial security in the short and long term. To this end, we continue to dedicate efforts and work together with the CBK and KBA to support the 'Diraya' financial awareness campaign by spreading sound

financial practices to different members of society. We call on all individuals and families planning for their vacations this Eid to heed our recommendations and protect their finances while on holiday."

To ensure that customers and individuals are safe and can identify scamming attempts, Burgan Bank focused its banking awareness efforts on highlighting the most common financial fraud schemes that can come in many forms, such as text messages, emails, calls, social media posts, etc. In this regard, the Bank warned against replying to suspicious emails or SMS messages with personal and financial information, as well as urged all individuals to handle electronic links with vigilance, cautioning them to avoid accessing their bank's website unless connected to a secure Wi-Fi network. In addition, Burgan Bank recommended set-

ting a strong password, changing it regularly, and using two-factor authentication whenever possible. Finally, Burgan's awareness content encouraged individuals to ensure their cards remain valid throughout their vacation, advising them to examine their account statements to rule out questionable transactions upon their return to Kuwait.

It serves to note that Burgan's data protection and cyber security systems are regularly updated to keep customer assets safe and protected from unauthorized access or cyber attacks. The Bank also continues to dedicate efforts to educating all segments of society about the core life skill of financial literacy to make sound financial decisions. These efforts reflect its unwavering commitment to continue supporting CBK's Diraya campaign.

Lufthansa, ground staff reach pay deal after strikes

FRANKFURT: German airline giant Lufthansa and a union representing ground staff said Wednesday they had reached an agreement on pay after a lengthy dispute, averting the threat of Easter holiday strikes. The deal between the carrier and the powerful Verdi union came after ground staff staged walkouts in recent months, leading to widespread disruption for air travelers.

After a series of direct pay talks failed, Lufthansa and Verdi entered arbitration this week, leading to Wednesday's breakthrough.

Details of the deal were not immediately released. But Lufthansa personnel chief Michael Niggemann said it was a "good compromise with substantial salary increases over the term of the agreement."

Verdi had been seeking pay rises of 12.5 percent for the roughly 25,000 Lufthansa ground staff that it represents. The ground staff staged their latest strike in early March, with a two-day walkout that led to the cancellation of up to 90 percent of Lufthansa's flights.

They also walked out in February. Lufthansa cabin crew, who went on strike at major airports earlier this month, have still not reached a pay deal with the carrier. But news outlet Spiegel reported that the airline group and the UFO union, which represents cabin crew, are due to enter arbitration after the Easter break. The airline group earlier this month warned of the damaging impact of the wave of recent strikes, saying they would contribute to heavier losses in the first quarter compared to last year.

Lufthansa also faced a wave of strikes in 2022 by staff pushing for higher wages, leading to them winning hefty wage increases. The group — whose carriers include Lufthansa, Eurowings, Austrian, Swiss and Brussels Airlines — had to be bailed out by the German government during the coronavirus pandemic. But it has since bounced back strongly as travel has recovered, prompting unions to argue the airline is not passing on enough of its bumper earnings to its staff in the form of pay rises.

Wednesday's announcement represents some more much-needed good news for employers in Europe's top economy, who have faced a tough season of wage negotiations and strikes across many sectors. This week, German rail operator Deutsche Bahn and union GDL struck an agreement that will see train drivers work a shorter week, ending a months-long row that caused a series of crippling strikes. The strikes have added to an already gloomy economic picture, with the German economy shrinking 0.3 percent in 2023. — AFP

Yellen to warn China of industrial oversupply risks

WASHINGTON: A surge in cheap exports from China in industries like electric vehicles could create an oversupply and hurt economies, US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen warned in a speech on Wednesday.

She plans to raise those risks during her next trip to China likely this year, and press Beijing to take "necessary steps to address this issue." In her speech in the southern US state of Georgia, Yellen touted the benefits of President Joe Biden's landmark Inflation Reduction Act and highlighted major business investments that have been announced in response.

But she also raised concerns about the impact that China's excess industrial capacity could have on other countries. Chinese government support in sectors like steel and aluminum in the past has "led to substantial overinvestment and excess capacity that Chinese firms looked to export abroad at depressed prices," Yellen said.

While this boosted production and employment in China, it "forced industry in the rest of the world to contract," she added. "Now, we see excess capacity building in 'new' industries like solar, EVs, and lithium-ion batteries," Yellen noted.

The fear is that overcapacity could distort global prices and production, impacting companies and staff.

Yellen added that governments and businesses from other countries are also increasingly raising concerns. "It is important to the president and me that American firms and workers can compete on a level playing field," said Yellen. — AFP

Seoul bus drivers' strike ends with wage agreement

SEOUL: Thousands of bus drivers in Seoul ended their hours-long strike and returned to the roads on Thursday after their union reached a compromise with employers over a wage hike. The agreement follows a strike launched earlier in the day that disrupted 97 percent of bus routes in the South Korean capital, sparking chaos for commuters during morning rush hour.

It was the first general strike by drivers since 2012 and came after negotiations on pay collapsed early Thursday, with the drivers requesting a 12.7 percent hourly wage increase. But the two sides reached a deal in the second round of talks held the same afternoon, with the drivers accepting a 4.48 percent increase and bonuses for two major holidays, the Seoul city government said.

"Starting from 1500 (0600 GMT) all bus routes will be normalized," it said.

The strike left many bus stations empty as commuters flocked to the subway to get to work in the morning, with some caught off guard by the news. The Seoul city government had extended subway operating hours and added more trains during peak commuting hours, vowing to "deploy every transportation means" at its disposal. "I wasn't aware of

Crypto fraudster Bankman-Fried faces sentencing

NEW YORK: Disgraced cryptocurrency wunderkind Sam Bankman-Fried is set to be sentenced following his conviction in one of the biggest financial fraud cases in history. US prosecutors are seeking a prison term of 40-50 years after a New York jury found Bankman-Fried, known by his initials SBF, guilty in November following a five-week trial that probed the one-time high roller's spectacular fall.

Calling Bankman-Fried's seven-count conviction reflective of the defendant's "unmatched greed and hubris," the government's sentencing request argues for significant jail time in light of fraud it estimates at more than \$10 billion.

Moreover, a lengthy sentence is necessary to "protect the public," argued US Attorney Damian Williams, who characterized Bankman-Fried as an "adept" spin doctor capable of additional malfeasance. If quickly freed, "it is realistic that he will settle on a narrative, lean into it, and convince other people to part with their money based on lies and the promise of false hope," Williams said in a 113-page legal filing, accompanied by testimonials from dozens of victims.

Calling the government's proposed sentence "barbaric," Bankman-Fried's attorneys depicted their client as a diligent young man motivated by philanthropy who got in over his head. Their portrayal is similar to the one SBF's defense presented at trial — which was quickly rejected by jurors after just five hours of deliberation. Bankman-Fried, 32, should serve about six years in prison, a sentence

Thames Water sees financial crisis worsen

LONDON: Debt-plagued Thames Water revealed Thursday that it failed to raise a major cash injection from shareholders, blaming industry regulations that made its rescue plan "uninvestable".

Britain's biggest water supplier said in a statement that £500 million (\$630-million) of new equity will "not be provided by Thames Water's shareholders" this month. The company added it was in "ongoing" talks with industry regulator Ofwat over a plan that is "affordable for customers, deliverable and financeable for Thames Water, as well as investible for equity investors".

The cash represented most of a £750-million funding lifeline that had been previously agreed with investors last July to stay afloat. Britain's Press

Association newswire reported Ofwat had refused to bow to Thames Water's demands for concessions, which it said included a 40-percent jump in water bills that would worsen the country's cost-of-living crisis.

Other concessions would reportedly include an easing in capital spending requirements and leniency over regulatory penalties. In a separate statement, Ofwat said Thames Water needed to seek other solutions for its finances, but stressed that customers would be unaffected.

"Safeguards are in place to ensure that services to customers are protected regardless of issues faced by shareholders of Thames Water," said an Ofwat spokesperson.

"Today's update... means the company must now pursue all options to seek further equity for the business to turn around the performance of the company for customers." Thames Water, which supplies more than 15 million homes and businesses in London and elsewhere in southern England, is saddled with debts of al-



most £15 billion that have placed it at risk of nationalization.

The group has also faced fierce criticism over missing targets to reduce leaks and slash sewage discharges into rivers, despite major infrastructure investment. A record number of storm drains overflowed with sewage

last year in England, official statistics showed on Wednesday, angering campaigners wanting cleaner rivers and seas. Environmentalists have increasingly voiced outrage at the rise in pollution on the UK's beaches and waterways, and have pointed the finger at privatized water companies. — AFP



SEOUL: Commuters stand at a bus stop with an electronic display that reads "28th city bus on strike." — AFP

the bus strike because I don't follow the news closely," Cho Min-sang told the Yonhap news agency. "I was puzzled because there were no bus schedules on the bus station screens."

You Jae-youn, a 37-year-old AI industry re-

searcher, told AFP she had switched to work from home after learning of the strike, but said she supported it. "I am willing to take some inconvenience that could incur from the labor-management negotiations," she said. — AFP



Sam Bankman-Fried is likely to be sentenced following his conviction in one of the biggest financial fraud cases in history.

back their money, saying in the brief, that "the harm to customers, lenders and investors is zero." That argument drew a scathing response from FTX Trading Chief Executive John Ray, who said ongoing recoveries of ill-gotten gains do not make up for fraud.

"That things he stole... were successfully recovered through the efforts of a dedicated group" of professionals "does not mean the things were not stolen," Ray said in a letter to the court. "What it means is that we got some of them back." The recoveries are not likely to significantly affect the sentencing, said Jacob Frenkel, an attorney at Dickinson Wright who previously worked at the Department of Justice and the Securities and Exchange Commission. "The sentencing determinant is not about a speculative return of funds," Frenkel said. "It is about what was the fraud when he was convicted." Frenkel said he would be "shocked" by a sentence under 20 years, in part because of the need for the judge to send a strong signal that fraud in the emerging cryptocurrency sector will be taken as seriously as any other. — AFP

FRIDAY, MARCH 29, 2024

Weekender



Masbaha From tradition to luxury



A man performs dhikr using prayer beads in a mosque.

By Passant Hisham

During the time of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), his companions observed him engaged in a humble practice: He would count his dhikr, the rhythmic recitation of words or prayers in honor of God, using either his fingers or small pebbles. This simple yet profound tradition laid the groundwork for the creation of prayer beads, known as masbaha, designed to serve the same purpose of aiding in the remembrance of God. Prayer beads have since become a widely recognized symbol within Islam.



Kahraman (amber) prayer beads.

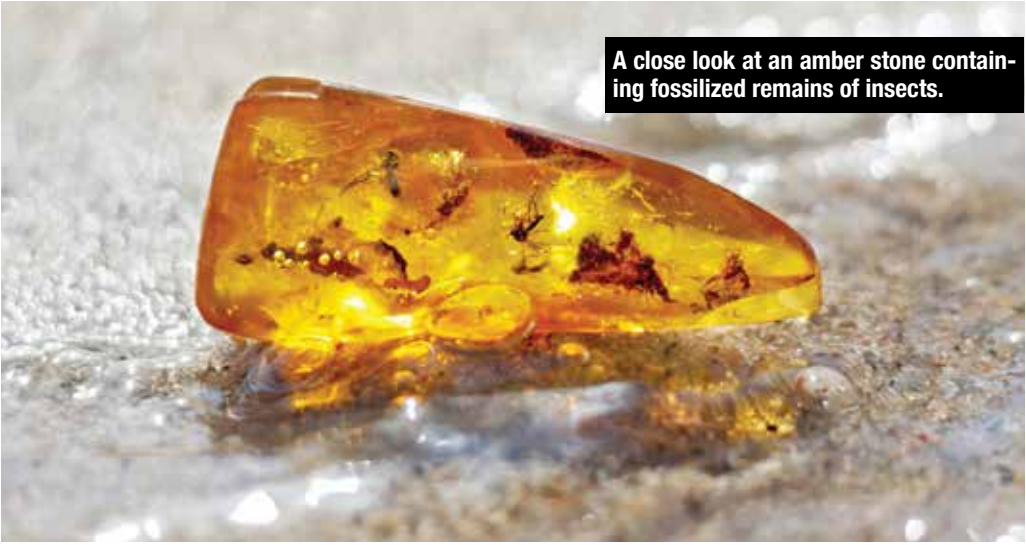
The art of crafting prayer beads originally emerged from Iraq, Persia, and among pilgrims from Makkah, eventually making its way to Kuwait in the mid-20th century, as noted by heritage researcher

These prayer beads, whose sales notably grow during Ramadan, are purchased for personal use or as gifts, according to vendors, embodying a rich cultural heritage in Kuwait. "They're worth

Prayer beads hold significance in Islamic and Kuwaiti culture



Salem Al-Misbah



A close look at an amber stone containing fossilized remains of insects.

Salem Abdullatif Al-Misbah. He highlighted that the Kuwaiti people admired this craft as they were eager to distinguish themselves from the conventional designs of other regions. They infused their creativity by introducing fresh concepts in material selection, designs and craftsmanship techniques.

Over time, prayer beads have evolved beyond their traditional use, becoming fashionable accessories that add a touch of luxury to Kuwaiti men's attire, according to Mohamed, owner of a mashaba shop in Kuwait. He emphasized that among all Gulf countries, Kuwait stands out as the leader in crafting and selling prayer beads.

more than gold now," Mohamed remarked, underscoring that a single gram of prayer beads can cost anywhere from KD 10 to 200. "And as they age, their value increases." He explained that prayer beads hold immense significance for Kuwaiti individuals, often cherished as invaluable treasures passed down through generations rather than traded for profit.

Khaled, owner of another masbaha shop, concurred, further elaborating that the prices of prayer beads span a wide range, from KD 20 to possibly KD 20,000. Khaled noted that the most sought-after variety in Kuwait is the Kahraman (amber stone), extracted from the

sea and admired for its originality and the distinctive aroma it releases. Misbah expanded on this matter, noting that this stone holds many secrets within. He discussed how it has been buried deep in the earth for millions of years and how it is often found to contain fossilized remains of insects and plants, preserved in time.



Vendors assemble rosaries. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat



The timeless aroma of
bukhoor
in Kuwaiti culture

Cambodian bukhoor, one of the best selling types of bukhoor in Kuwait, which sells for around KD 75 per tola.



By Ghadeer Ghloum

Bukhoor is a cherished tradition deeply intertwined with Kuwait's culture and heritage. It has been used by Kuwaitis since ancient times and continues to hold its place in their lives to this day. Kuwaitis use different types of bukhoor for various purposes, whether for daily use, celebratory events, perfuming their clothes and more. This practice adds a luxurious touch to living spaces and creates a welcoming atmosphere for guests.



Basic mukhar, used to burn bukhoor to release its pleasant fragrance.



Electronic mukhar is used to burn bukhoor or maamoul without the need for charcoal discs.



Mahfouz Ahmad showing Kuwait Times some unique looking bukhoor.

Bukhoor comes in different types, shapes and scents, and the choice of which kind to use is based on personal preference. According to Mahfouz Ahmad, a vendor at a well-known bukhoor shop in Kuwait, Kuwaitis often prefer a type of bukhoor known as "Tarath A" for scenting clothes, rooms and even brides.

Bukhoor typically originates from countries such as India, the Philippines, Cambodia and Indonesia, among others. Despite its appearance, which may resemble wood, only a very small part of it is wood. Bukhoor is made of a special blend of aromatic elements, which are later dried to remove excess moisture and make it suitable for burning. Drying also helps it retain its scent for months or even years.

Bukhoor is used by burning a fragment on a charcoal disc inside a special burner called a "mukhar" to create a pleasant aroma that fills the surroundings with a sweet and smoky fragrance. People then use their mukhar to perfume their clothes, cars, rooms or any other spaces. Ahmad also highlighted a minor difference between bukhoor and what is known as "maamoul", stating that maamoul is used similarly to bukhoor but is usually cheaper and has a moist texture, as it is soaked in specific oils that give it its fragrance. People often use maamoul for daily use to enhance their home's atmosphere.

Ahmad described to Kuwait Times the meticulous process of producing oud oil. "Take, for exam-



A type of Bukhoor called Ambala, considered one of the best types, brought from India, WHICH sells for around KD 35 per tola.



Maamoul



The recessed center of the mukhar, where the charcoal disc and bukhoor are placed.



Unique-shaped bukhoor.



Philippine bukhoor sells for KD 50 per tola.



Beautiful mukhars are used for decorative purposes besides burning bukhoor.



Mahfouz Ahmad showing Kuwait Times Tarath A, one of the Kuwaitis' favorite types of bukhoor.



A vendor using tongs to place a bukhoor fragment on a burning charcoal disc in a mukhar.



Tongs with carved names and initials.



Students use laser guns.



Ahmad Dashti and Khaled Murad



Students take part in the tug-of-war.

Special Forces Championship: Revolutionizing youth sports



Faten Omar

The Special Forces Championship, an idea that combines recycling and teaching children unconventional military sports skills, started between two friends: One a sports teacher and the other a passionate sports enthusiast working at the ministry of interior. Their shared vision and dedication culminated in the creation of this one-of-a-kind championship in Kuwait, aimed at boosting physical fitness, teamwork and a spirit of competition among young students.

Kuwait Times spoke with Ahmad Dashti and Khaled Murad to learn more about how they created this pioneering initiative. The idea occurred when Dashti, a physical education teacher, observed untapped potential within his school. He noticed empty spaces and unused equipment, recognized a pat-

years," he said. "Collaborating closely with my athlete friend and the head of the referee committee, Murad, we aimed to enhance the competition by integrating specialized equipment from the ministry of interior. Our shared goal was not only to provide a platform for physical activity but also to impart es-

"I have been working in the field of education for 15 years, and there is nothing new in the field of sports. Some students are not interested in traditional sports such as handball, basketball and football. So the idea was created to teach children and discover sports skills that they are interested in. We

students," he said. Dashti said the Special Forces Championship was held at Nasser Saud Al-Sabah School with cooperation from the interior ministry's special forces sector, led by Maj Gen Abdullah Al-Mulla, Brig Gen Dakhil Al-Dakhil and Brig Gen Abdul Nasser Al-Kandari. "The most important stage in students' life is growing up, and we must teach them the strength of endurance, bravery, acceptance of challenges and self-assurance. So in terms of health — psychologically, morally and logistically — we served them all in this competition, and we hope for governmental and private support," he pointed out.

For Murad, implementing the idea came from his sporting experience. "I used to undertake this task in previous sporting events, and based on my experience in such competitions, I prepared rules for the game, consisting of 14 stages. I transferred the game into a military/civilian game, preparing the child for the military and accustoming him to the idea that officers are not scary, contrary to what our parents used to scare us with," he explained. "The game was safe, and we rehearsed to teach the children before the actual date and instructed them on how to play safely, and luckily there were no injuries. We were given promises to hold the championship annually in all educational regions, and the ministry of interior even offered in the future to contribute to the field and support us. We aspire for this game to be a school sports game, and for it to be at the Gulf



level and also include girls' schools and not just boys," Murad added. He highlighted that this innovative initiative not only underscores the importance of physical activity in youth development, but also demonstrates the power of partnership and collaboration in bringing innovative ideas to fruition.



Ministry of Interior's team pose with the participants for a group photo.

tern of repetitive sports activities and observed a lack of enthusiasm among some students toward school sports. "I worked on developing a model plan to implement our idea of recycling unused tools and equipment and holding a competition for students aged 6-9

sential skills such as safe shooting and climbing techniques to the children. Through our concerted efforts, we aspired to create an enriching and engaging experience that would promote both enjoyment and skill development," Dashti said.

saw an area that had been neglected for more than 20 years. We put our ideas and presented them to the school administration. It took us six months from the birth of the idea to its implementation, with the participation of 20 government schools and 40 stu-



Event: Lx Expo Eid Preparation
Location: 360 Mall
Date: March 28 to April 1, 2024

Event: Ramadan Bazaar
Location: Wejha Art Center
Date: March 29-30, 2024

Event: Artspace Weekend Garage Sale
Location: Artspace Studio, Egaila
Date: March 29-30, 2024

Event: Screen Printing on Fabric Workshop
Location: Biyoot w Hikayat
Date: March 30, 2024

Event: Rush for Fun FC24 Tournament
Location: Rush for Arena - Sharq
Date: March 30, 2024

Event: Ladies ghabga for animal support
Location: Designz Interior
Date: March 28, 2024

Sports

Sunrisers Hyderabad beat Mumbai after highest-ever total on record-breaking day

It rained boundaries in Hyderabad's innings with 18 sixes and 19 fours

HYDERABAD: Sunrisers Hyderabad posted 277-3 for the highest-ever Indian Premier League total and went on to beat Mumbai Indians by 31 runs in a six-hitting festival on Wednesday. Australia's Travis Head made a 24-ball 62 and Abhishek Sharma, inspired by talking to West Indies legend Brian Lara, smashed 63 after Hyderabad batted first and went past the previous IPL best of 263-5 by Royal Challengers Bengaluru in 2013.

It rained boundaries in Hyderabad's innings with 18 sixes and 19 fours as the South African pair of Heinrich Klaasen (80 not out in 34 balls) and Aiden Markram, who hit 42, posted an unbeaten stand of 116. "Head is one of my favourite batters, I really admire his batting. Had a great time with him," said Abhishek.

Mumbai replied strongly in the match which witnessed 38 sixes for another IPL record, bettering the 33 hits over the fence clubbed three times in earlier seasons. "The wicket was good but, no matter how good or bad you bowl, if the opposition get 277 that means they batted very well," Mumbai skipper Hardik Pandya said.

He added: "The bowlers were good. It was tough out there. Close to 500 runs were scored so the wicket was helping the batters." Left-handed Tilak Varma stood out with his 64 in 34 balls for Mumbai but the effort was not enough on a batting-friendly pitch in veteran batsman Rohit Sharma's 200th IPL match.

Rohit smashed a 12-ball 26 and fellow opener Ishan Kishan made 34 to give Mumbai a flying start but the innings lost momentum after 10 overs due to the ever-in-

creasing asking rate. Tim David smashed an unbeaten 42 in a late charge but the chase was beyond reach as Mumbai ended on 246-5 -- the team's highest IPL total. It was records galore as the match also featured the highest run aggregate of 523 runs in 17 years of the IPL. Abhishek's

Lara chat

Hyderabad skipper Pat Cummins was the best of the bowlers with 2-35 in his four overs of pace, leading his side to their first win of the season and said "it was an amazing game". Earlier the left-handed Head, dropped on five by David off Pandya, reached his fifty in 18 balls and after his departure Abhishek reached his half-century off just 16.

The team's 100 came up in only seven overs and Hyderabad posted the tournament's highest ever total in the first 10 overs of 148-2. Abhishek, a left-hand batsman, fell after his 23-ball blitz but there was no respite for the bowlers who were at the receiving end of some punishing batting.

"I had a chance to talk to Brian Lara (West Indies batting great and IPL commentator) last night, that really helped me," he revealed. Mumbai's South African import Kwena Maphaka had a bruising introduction to IPL when the 17-year-old left-arm quick went for 66 runs in his four overs. Five-time winners Mumbai, who had a change in captaincy after Pandya took over from the experienced Rohit, and Hyderabad started this edition with a loss each. — AFP



HYDERABAD: Sunrisers Hyderabad's Abhishek Sharma (R) plays a shot as Mumbai Indians' wicketkeeper Ishan Kishan fields during the Indian Premier League (IPL) Twenty20 cricket match between Sunrisers Hyderabad and Mumbai Indians at the Rajiv Gandhi International Stadium in Hyderabad. — AFP

News in Brief

Ex-China coach on trial

BEIJING: Former China coach and ex-Everton midfielder Li Tie went on trial Thursday on allegations of bribery, state media said, part of a broader crackdown on corruption in football in the country. His former boss, the fallen Chinese Football Association chairman Chen Xuyuan, was jailed for life this week for taking bribes worth \$11 million. The Chinese legal system is tightly controlled by the ruling Communist Party and courts have a near-100 percent conviction rate in criminal cases. Local journalists gathered in front of the court in Hubei province where the 46-year-old Li's case will be heard. Li, who was China coach from January 2020 until December 2021, is accused of giving and taking bribes, state broadcaster CCTV said. Li, who played in the Premier League 34 times between 2002 and 2004, featured in a documentary aired on CCTV in January about widespread corruption in Chinese football. — AFP

Rajitha out of Bangladesh Test

CHITTAGONG: In-form pace bowler Kasun Rajitha is out of the second Test against Bangladesh because of a back injury, Sri Lanka Cricket said. The second and final Test begins in Chittagong on Saturday with tourists Sri Lanka leading 1-0 after their 328-run win in the opening match in Sylhet. Rajitha played a big part with eight wickets in two innings, including 5-56 in the second innings. Asitha Fernando has joined the squad as a replacement. "Kasun Rajitha will not be available for the second Test match as the player has suffered an injury to his left upper back area," Sri Lanka Cricket said. Fernando claimed 10 wickets the last time he played a Test match in Bangladesh, in 2022. He last played a Test against Afghanistan in February. He was initially ruled out of the Bangladesh series with a hamstring injury but recovered sufficiently to be drafted back into the squad for the second Test. — AFP

Smith on 10-year \$140m deal

LOS ANGELES: Will Smith, a catcher who helped the Los Angeles Dodgers to victory in the 2020 World Series, agreed to a 10-year contract extension worth \$140 million, the team announced Wednesday. Smith had five hits in 10 times at bat for the Dodgers during Major League Baseball's two season-opening games last week in South Korea. The 28-year-old American was an MLB All-Star last year with a .261 batting average, 19 home runs and 76 runs batted in over 126 games. Smith, in his sixth season with the Dodgers, has 91 home and 308 runs batted in and a .263 batting average over 486 career MLB contests. His signing continued the Dodgers' trend of signing top talent to long-term deals to ensure a solid core of contenders for years to come. Instead of becoming a free agent after the 2025 campaign, Smith is set to play for the Dodgers through 2033. The Dodgers signed a 10-year deal with designated hitter Shohei Ohtani worth \$700 million and a 12-year deal worth \$325 million with his Japanese compatriot, pitcher Yoshinobu Yamamoto plus a five-year contract worth \$137 million with Tyler Glasnow. — AFP

Japan leukaemia survivor Ikee to swim at Olympics

TOKYO: Leukaemia survivor Rikako Ikee will compete for Japan in the 100m butterfly at the Paris Olympics after missing out on an individual place at the Tokyo Games three years ago. Three-time world champion Daiya Seto will swim the men's individual medley after Japan's 27-member team for the Paris Games was announced by the country's Swimming Federation on Wednesday. An 18-year-old Ikee was named MVP of the

Van Aert breaks collarbone, ribs in Flanders fall

PARIS: Belgian cyclist Wout van Aert broke his collarbone and several ribs in a high-speed mass fall during the Around Flanders one-day race on Wednesday. The 29-year-old star will now miss Sunday's blockbuster Tour of Flanders and next week's Paris-Roubaix but could be back for the Giro d'Italia in May, where he will be hoping for several stage wins.

Wednesday's crash happened with the lead group riding at speeds approaching 60km/h on a broad highway. Van Aert fell on the uneven surface before being run over by another cyclist. Clearly in agony, with his riding outfit almost entirely shredded and with abrasion marks covering his back, he was left screaming in pain as he was taken into an ambulance.

"Unfortunately, Wout van Aert suffered several fractures in the crash at Dwars door Vlaanderen today," his Visma team said in a statement. "A broken collarbone and several broken ribs were diagnosed in hospital. It is unclear how long his recovery will take.

"He will definitely miss the Tour of Flanders, Paris-Roubaix and the Amstel Gold Race," The Amstel Gold Race takes place on April 14 while the Giro d'Italia, where van Aert suggested last week he would target four of five stage wins, begins on May 4.

Van Aert's sheer power and stamina were key factors in Visma's success in lifting the Giro d'Italia, the Tour de France and the Vuelta a Espana last season. He has won nine stages on the Tour de France. His role as 'road manager' on the Tours makes him Visma's highest paid star alongside Tour de France winner Jonas Vingegaard on around four million euros a season.

Korda and Ko among most fancied at new Arizona event

LOS ANGELES: Nelly Korda is off to her best start of any LPGA season and back atop the world rankings, but she wants to be boring at this week's LPGA Ford Championship. The 25-year-old American, the daughter of 1998 Australian Open tennis champion Petr Korda, will be among the favorites in the new tour event at Seville Golf and Country Club in Gilbert, Arizona.

Korda, the reigning Olympic champion, reclaimed the world number one spot by capturing her 10th career LPGA title last week at Los Angeles. "It felt really nice to get the W and get to double digits," Korda said. "My goal is to stay very present, take it—as boring as it sounds—one shot at a time and go from there."

Korda's first victory of 2023 came in January's Drive On Championship in her hometown of Bradenton, Florida, and both her triumphs this year have come in playoffs, the intensity fueling her for future success. "I feel like every single time you play under pressure you learn more about yourself and the way you handle it," Korda said. "My last two wins were a little dramatic."

"The main thing I learned when I'm in contention is how to handle myself, how to

calm myself and how to just take that moment on." More moments could be coming, as Korda has never won twice so quickly in a season. In 2021, she won four times, taking her second triumph in June a week before what is thus far her only major title at the Women's PGA Championship.

The season's first major comes next month at the Chevron Championship but before that, Korda will face a top field at the Ford event, including pal Lydia Ko of New Zealand.

Ko eyes Hall of Fame

Ko, who won the season-opening Tournament of Champions, needs one more victory to seal a place in the LPGA Hall of Fame and nearly took it earlier this month at the Blue Bay LPGA in China, sharing the lead entering the final round only to lose to US first-time winner Bailey Tardy.

"All you can do is do your best," Ko said. "I'm just going to keep giving myself good opportunities and instead of setting my goal to just be in the Hall of Fame, I want to win and compete at the highest level as much as I can."

Not just kind of set my end goal as the Hall of Fame. I think sometimes that



WAREGEM: Belgian Wout van Aert of Team Visma-Lease a Bike (L) and Italian Alberto Bettiol of EF Education-EasyPost compete in the Around Flanders cycling classic, 188.6 km from Roeselare to Waregem on March 27, 2024. — AFP

Out of comfort zone

Aware that the clock is ticking down on his career, Van Aert decided to target the Monuments races, starting with the Paris-Roubaix mudfest on the old mining roads of northern France, Sunday's epic Tour of Flanders, the Giro and the Olympics in Paris in July.

"Always staying in the comfort zone is the easiest thing, but the reality is that I haven't won the Ronde (Flanders) and Roubaix yet," he said when departing on a three-week altitude training camp in Tenerife in early March. "Skipping the Strade Bianche and Milan-San Remo was a difficult decision," he said of the two races he has in fact already won.

But it was a necessary choice to be in the best possible shape for the start of the Tour of Flanders and Paris-Roubaix. "There's a good chance I'll race the Amstel Gold Race after the cobbles. Hopefully I will do so with one or more victories under my belt," he said at the time.

Van Aert will almost certainly be a gold medal contender for both the individual time trial and the 273km road race around Paris at the 2024 Olympics. Wednesday's race was won by Van Aert's American teammate Matteo Jorgenson who added Around Flanders to his Paris-Nice victory earlier in March. — AFP



PALOS VERDES ESTATES: Nelly Korda of the United States celebrates with the winners check after winning the FIR HILLS SERI PAK Championship at Palos Verdes Golf Club. — AFP

makes you more narrow minded and makes me feel like I just need to win one. But I want to win more than one as long as I'm still playing."

Korda is a close friend of Ko and expects her to be more hungry and ready to bounce back this week. "She's super resilient and hard working and super dedicated and I definitely wish it upon her to be in the Hall of Fame,"

Korda said. Hall of Fame induction, Korda says, is not on her mind.

"I don't think I ever think of that actually. I just think of everything in my present time and just take it one week at a time," Korda said. "If I get there, then great, but that's not something I put on my goal sheet. I think small goals then eventually lead to your bigger goals." — AFP



Rikako Ikee

Sports

Zain sponsors Bait Al Othman Museum's carrom tournament

Competition embodied Kuwait's rich cultural heritage and embraced local talents



KUWAIT: Sheikha Amthal Al Ahmad honors Al Khashti with the presence of Al Asfar and Al Othman.

KUWAIT: For the second time, Zain has sponsored Bait Al Othman Museum's carrom tournament in collaboration with the Volunteer Work Center and the Public Authority for Sport. The competition came under the patronage and attendance of the Director of the Volunteer Work Center Sheikha Amthal Al Ahmad Al Jaber Al Sabah.

During the awards ceremony held at

the museum in Hawally, Zain was recognized for its support to the competition. In attendance were the tournament's patron, Sheikha Amthal Al Ahmad Al Jaber Al Sabah, Hawally Governor and Al-Asimah Acting Governor Ali Al Asfar, Honorary President of Bait Al Othman Museum Adnan Al Othman, Zain Kuwait Chief Corporate Affairs and Relations Officer Waleed Al Khashti, Director of Abdullah

Al Othman Heritage Center Anwar Al Refaie, along with public figures, diplomats, and participating teams.

Zain's support to this unique local event came to reflect its keenness to support any cultural initiative or program that strengthens belonging to our national identity, promotes Kuwait's rich heritage, embraces local talents, and helps introduce local traditions and values to new generations.

Bait Al Othman Museum, part of the Volunteer Work Center, hosted the carrom competition for two consecutive days. Carrom is a tabletop game of Indian origin that is deeply rooted in Kuwaiti heritage and tradition and stimulates mental focus and hand skill.

This year's competition featured 240 teams with over 400 players and was supervised and refereed by a team from the

Public Authority for Sport. Winners were awarded with valuable cash prizes.

Zain takes pride in supporting the programs and initiatives of Bait Al Othman Museum, one of Kuwait's top cultural and touristic destinations. The museum works to document and preserve Kuwait's rich history, heritage, and tradition, and hosts several cultural and social programs all year round.



Zain joined a friendly match during the tournament.



Juan Jesus

Napoli's Jesus bitter over racist probe outcome

ROME: Napoli defender Juan Jesus says he feels "bitter" at the Italian football federation's decision not to act over alleged racist comments targeted at him by Inter Milan's Francesco Acerbi. The Brazilian spoke out Wednesday the day after the FIGC shelved their investigation into the incident citing insufficient evidence.

"Although respecting this decision I have difficulty understanding it and it leaves me feeling very bitter," he declared in a statement published by his club. Initially Jesus played down the matter following Napoli's 1-1 draw at Inter Milan on March 17 after accepting Acerbi's on-field apology for unspecified insults.

He now says his conciliatory approach had not had the desired effect. "I am very discouraged at the outcome to a serious affair which I alone was in the wrong for handling it like 'a gentleman' in avoiding interrupting an important match, with all the hassle that would have caused for fans, with the hope that my attitude would have been respected and taken perhaps as an example."

He feared the federation's handling of the matter could have undesired consequences. "I didn't expect this decision which I fear, but I hope I'm wrong, will create an unfortunate precedent to justify certain behaviour."

Napoli had already said they were "stunned" by the FIGC's non action. Acerbi, 36, faced a possible Serie A season-ending 10-match suspension which could have ruled him out of Euro 2024 which starts on June 14.

At the time Jesus, 32, had initially explained that Acerbi "realised that he had gone too far" and apologised to him. The day after the match Acerbi joined Italy's training camp ahead of two friendlies after giving his version of events to his Azzurri teammates and coach Luciano Spalletti "on the alleged racist remark".

That triggered an angry reaction from Jesus. "I thought that the incident was done with on the pitch and frankly I was hoping not to have to come back to something so despicable," he posted on social media.

"However today I read Acerbi's comments which conflict completely with what happened, with what he himself said on the pitch which is backed up by video footage of him asking me for forgiveness. 'I'm not having it, racism is going to be fought here and now.'"

Napoli on Wednesday confirmed that they would not take part in this weekend's 'Keep racism out' campaign. Napoli players will instead wear a jersey with a message of support for their teammate, local media reported. Meanwhile, Italy's football federation (FIGC) on Tuesday dropped a probe into alleged racist comments made by Inter Milan's Italian international Francesco Acerbi to Napoli's Brazilian defender Juan Jesus due to lack of evidence.

Jesus had initially played down the incident following Napoli's 1-1 draw at Inter Milan earlier this month saying "what happens on the pitch, stays on the pitch" after accepting Acerbi's on-field apology for unspecified insults.

The FIGC said that "considering that the minimum level of reasonable certainty as to the discriminatory content of the offense committed has not been reached, it was decided not to apply the sanctions". — AFP

Chelsea march into Women's Champions League semi-finals

PARIS: Chelsea reached the semi-finals of the Women's Champions League on Wednesday despite a 1-1 draw at home to Ajax, while Lyon also progressed after brushing aside Benfica in France. Mayra Ramirez put Chelsea into a first-half lead on her European club debut before Chastity Grant equalised for Ajax in the second half.

Chelsea prevailed 4-1 on aggregate following a 3-0 win in the first leg in Amsterdam. "Ajax did really well, they came out as we expected them to," said Chelsea midfielder Erin Cuthbert. "Small margins in football, we could have put a little bit more away, give ourselves a bit more breathing room, but the job was really done in the first leg."

Ajax nearly took the lead in the opening 20 minutes when goalkeeper Zecira Musovic had her clearance charged down by Tiny Hoekstra, but the ball rolled against the post and went agonisingly wide.

Just after the half-hour mark, Ramirez opened her Champions League account with a composed finish after being set free by Guro Reiten. Now four goals to the good, Emma Hayes' side looked set to cruise into the final four.

Grant put a dampener on the night for Chelsea when she ran on to Hoekstra's through ball and her slightly scuffed finish

squirmed its way through Musovic. With the score level on the night, Chelsea's aggregate lead was insurmountable for Ajax although Musovic did redeem herself in the last 10 minutes when she made excellent fingertip saves to deny Romee Leuchter and then Danique Tolhoek.

Four up for Lyon

Earlier, braces from Delphine Cascarino and Kadidiatou Diani gave eight-times titleholders Lyon a 4-1 victory at the Groupama Stadium to claim the tie 6-2 on aggregate. Marie-Yasmine Aïdoui equalised minutes after Cascarino's opener at the end of the first half, but the 27-year-old hit a second shortly after half-time before two injury-time Diani goals gave Lyon a comfortable victory. "There was a lot to be pleased about," Lyon coach Sonia Bompastor told the club's channel, OLPLAY. "The comeback at half-time was beautiful and hurt the Portuguese mentally, but we had to be more clinical in the first half."

Lyon created several good early chances but failed to find a way past Lena Pauels in the Benfica goal until the 43rd minute. Cascarino gave Lyon a two-goal buffer on aggregate when Eugénie Le Sommer chased down an underhit backpass, won her challenge with Pauels and then had the presence of mind to lay the ball back to the French international, who duly finished with a delightful chip over the stranded keeper and two retreating defenders.

But Benfica struck back instantly to reduce the deficit to one goal when Aïdoui bundled home Lucia Alves' cross, following a sublime defence-splitting pass from deep by Kika Nazareth. Lyon made two changes at half-time, and the move soon paid off when Cascarino doubled up with a



LONDON: Chelsea's English striker #33 Aggie Beever-Jones attempts to connect with a crossed ball during the UEFA Women's Champions League quarter-final second-leg football match between Chelsea and Ajax at Stamford Bridge in London, on March 27, 2024. — AFP

fine individual effort six minutes into the second half.

Picking the ball up in midfield, she drove forward before unleashing a powerful shot from outside the area. One minute into added-time, Diani tucked away Lindsey Horan's knockdown in the box to cement Lyon's spot in the semi-finals. The margin of victory then became even greater five minutes later when Diani miscontrolled the ball and Catarina Amado's clearance actually glanced off the French forward and into the net. — AFP

Former England women's football captain to retire

LONDON: Former England women's captain Steph Houghton announced Wednesday she would be retiring from football at the end of the season. The 35-year-old Manchester City defender, who won 121 caps for the Lionesses, will end her playing career at the end of the current Women's Super League campaign.

Houghton began her career with northeast club Sunderland in 2002 and also represented Leeds Carnegie and Arsenal before moving to City 10 years ago. "There is no easy way to say it, but I am retiring from football at the end of the current WSL season," Houghton said in a statement published on her own website.

"Taking the decision to retire is such a difficult thing to do. Whilst age comes to every player, it makes it no easier having to say the words out loud. Football has been my life, my passion and I have loved the career I have had."

"I am excited for whatever comes next but, in the meantime, I remain focused on giving everything I have left for Manchester City over the next two months." City head coach Gareth Taylor said:

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Dasmah	22532265
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Mirqab	22456536
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Change of Name

I, Mel, holder of Indian passport no. N8554548 having permanent address Vill - Kothawar Aurahin post, Jaunpur, Uttar Pradesh, Pin code 222001, India, residing in Kuwait at present, hereby declare that henceforth my name will be read as under (given name) Mohd and (surname) Mel.

(#5191) 29/03/2024

I, Cheruvu Thomas (current name in passport) of Indian Passport No. V3747568, R/of H.No. 3/1445, Slonpuram, Kadapa town. A.P. India-516001, residing in Kuwait at present, hereby declare that henceforth my name will be read as Siddavaram Thomas, S/O Raja Kumar (new name) previously called Cheruvu Thomas, S/o. Raja Kumar (Old Name) (#5190) 27/03/2024

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Phoenix Suns eclipse Nuggets, Rockets silence Thunder

Timberwolves beat Detroit Pistons 106-91



DENVER: Aaron Gordon #50 of the Denver Nuggets drives against Bradley Beal #3 of the Phoenix Suns during the first quarter at Ball Arena on March 27, 2024 in Denver, Colorado. — AFP

LOS ANGELES: Kevin Durant scored 30 points and grabbed 13 rebounds to lead the Phoenix Suns to a 104-97 victory over reigning NBA champions Denver on Wednesday to keep things close at the top of the Western Conference. The Suns made 16 three-pointers and never trailed after the first quarter in Denver. Durant said it wasn't a matter of making a statement, but of paying attention to detail in a demanding final playoff push.

"I don't know if you're trying to show anybody anything," Durant said. "I think (we're) just trying to keep getting better... we're just trying to play good ball." Denver's two-time NBA Most Valuable Player Nikola Jokic, playing with a sore back and hip, scored 22 points with nine rebounds and 10 assists.

But the Nuggets clearly felt the absence of point guard Jamal Murray, who missed a third straight game with a sprained left ankle. It was just their third defeat in their 18 games since the All-Star break, but left them just one half-game ahead of Oklahoma City and Minnesota atop the West.

The Timberwolves beat the Detroit Pistons 106-91, but the short-handed Thunder fell to the red-

hot Houston Rockets—who pushed their winning streak to 10 games with a 132-126 overtime triumph in Oklahoma City. The Thunder were without star guard Shai Gilgeous-Alexander, who was sidelined with a right quadriceps contusion.

Josh Giddey carried the load in his absence, scoring 31 points. But Houston's Jalen Green led all scorers with 37 points and the Rockets out-scored the Thunder 20-14 in overtime to seal the win. Houston remained a game behind the Golden State Warriors for 10th place and the last play-in berth in the West. The Warriors, fueled by 23 points from Andrew Wiggins and two late baskets by Stephen Curry, beat the Magic 101-93 in Orlando despite the ejection of Draymond Green just 3min 36sec into the contest.

Curry was left shaking his head when Green was tossed, receiving two quick technical fouls for heatedly arguing a foul call. It was the fourth ejection of the season for Green, who missed 16 games after he was suspended in December for swinging an arm into the head of Suns center Jusuf Nurkic. "Too bad," Warriors coach Steve Kerr said of Green's

ejection. "It was unfortunate. He deserved it and he'll bounce back. I'm just proud of the guys for stepping up."

James triple-double

Los Angeles Lakers superstar LeBron James returned from a one-game absence to post a triple-double of 23 points, 14 rebounds and 12 assists in a 136-124 victory over the Memphis Grizzlies. James sat out the Lakers' come-from-behind double-overtime victory over the Milwaukee Bucks on Tuesday with a sore left ankle.

Anthony Davis, who played nearly 52 minutes on Tuesday, was sidelined with a hyperextended left knee. But Rui Hachimura provided a big lift, drilling seven of eight three-point attempts on the way to 32 points with 10 rebounds to help the Lakers win their fifth straight.

There was controversy in Philadelphia. The Los Angeles Clippers edged the 76ers 108-107 but officials acknowledged after the game they missed a call in the waning seconds that would have given the hosts the chance to win it at the free-throw line.

Clippers forward Kawhi Leonard made a pair of three-point plays in the final minute and came up with a big block on Kelly Oubre Jr. with 5.1 seconds remaining. The Sixers, down by one, had one last opportunity after a jump ball and coach Nick Nurse was incensed that no foul was called on Paul George as he defended Oubre's final attempt.

Nurse rushed onto the court to dispute the non-call, Oubre voicing his displeasure too. "I just thought it was enough contact to call," Nurse, sounding more conciliatory after the game, said. "But that's the way it goes sometimes."

Referee Kevin Scott told a reporter that in real time officials thought George jumped vertically but that "in post-game video review we did observe some slight drift to his left by the defender George, and a foul should have been called." There was some good news for the Sixers, as Nurse confirmed before the game he believed there was "a very good likelihood" that NBA Most Valuable Player Joel Embiid would return before the post-season. Embiid has been sidelined since January 30 by a knee injury that required surgery. — AFP

Spain prosecutors want Rubiales jailed for 2.5 years

MADRID: Spanish prosecutors are seeking two-and-a-half years jail for disgraced ex-football chief Luis Rubiales who is facing trial for kissing Spain midfielder Jenni Hermoso on the lips against her will, court documents showed Wednesday.

Prosecutors also want Rubiales, who has been charged with sexual assault and coercion, to pay at least 50,000 euros (\$54,000) in compensation to Hermoso, they wrote in a document sent to Spain's Audiencia Nacional court, a copy of which was seen by AFP.

During the incident, which took place on August 20 after Spain beat England to win the Women's World Cup final in Australia, Rubiales held Hermoso's head in both hands and forcibly kissed her on the lips. The kiss took place live in front of the world's cameras, provoking widespread outrage and prompting his suspension by world football governing body FIFA.

At the time, Rubiales brushed it off as "a consensual" peck on the lips, but Hermoso, 33, said it was not. Under Spanish law, a non-consensual kiss can be classed as sexual assault—a criminal category that groups all types of sexual violence.

Rubiales "grabbed the player's head with both hands, and surprisingly and without consent or the player's acceptance, he kissed her on the lips," they wrote. After realising the kiss could have "personal and professional consequences" with his suspension by FIFA on August 26, Rubiales and his entourage began to exert "constant pressure" on Hermoso so that she "publicly justify" the kiss as consensual.

The pressure caused her "anxiety and intense



SYDNEY: (FILES) Spain's defender #20 Rocio Galvez is congratulated by President of the Royal Spanish Football Federation Luis Rubiales (R) next to Spain's Jennifer Hermoso after winning the Australia and New Zealand 2023 Women's World Cup final football match between Spain and England at Stadium Australia in Sydney on August 20, 2023. — AFP

stress" for several months, they wrote. Prosecutors requested that the 46-year-old face a year behind bars for the kiss, and 18 months jail for the charge of coercion. Three of his former associates are also being tried for putting pressure on Hermoso: former women's coach Jorge Vilda, men's team director Albert Luque and RFEF marketing boss Ruben Rivera.

In terms of compensation, prosecutors want Rubiales to pay Hermoso 50,000 euros for the kiss and have said that he and the three other defendants jointly pay her 50,000 euros for the coercion charge. It was not immediately clear whether the amount would be evenly split.

Hermoso filed a lawsuit against Rubiales in September, telling the judge she had come under pressure to defend him both on the flight back from Australia and on a subsequent team holiday to Ibiza in the Balearic Islands. — AFP

Sinner, Medvedev book Miami Open semi-final clash

MIAMI: World number three Jannik Sinner will face defending champion Daniil Medvedev in the semi-finals of the Miami Open - a rematch of the Australian Open final won by Sinner and last year's Miami title match.

Sinner moved into the last four in emphatic style on Wednesday, beating Czech Tomas Machac 6-4, 6-2 before Medvedev overcame a stern test against Chilean Nicolas Jarry before emerging with a 6-2, 7-6 (9/7) win. Italy's Sinner, who rallied from two sets down to beat Medvedev and claim his first Grand Slam title at the Australian Open, will play in his fourth semi of the season after dealing with lively Machac in 91 minutes.

Sinner broke the opening game serve from the Czech but Machac responded immediately to make it 1-1. The crowd were on their feet to appreciate some brilliant defensive play from Sinner who eventually took charge of the set, breaking to go 4-3 up and then closing out.

The second set was more straightforward with Sinner breaking in the third game and never looking back. Despite the comfortable margin of the win, Sinner said Machac deserved praise for his energetic and aggressive performance.

"He has an incredible talent. He is super fast, also physically he is in great shape," said the world number three. "I didn't know exactly what to expect today. The first games I was looking a little bit at what kind of tactics could work or not," he added.

"I played good, especially in the important moments of the match, which makes it... the scoreboard, you see the score, but it's sometimes lying. Today

was a little bit like that," said Sinner. Medvedev ran away with the first set against Jarry, who was slow out of the blocks. But the second set was a different story with the Chilean, roared on by heavily Latin American crowd, finding his big serve.

Good atmosphere

The pair were inseparable, with plenty of entertaining rallies, until the tiebreaker. Medvedev missed a chance to win the match at 6-5 up when he came to the net for a routine conversion on match point but found the net - prompting a huge roar from the Chilean fans. A thumping ace from Jarry made it 7-7 but it was followed with a poor effort which flew long and then on the third match point Medvedev wrapped up the win.

"In the first set I feel like I was playing good level, but nothing extra and it was enough to win, so I was happy about it," said Medvedev. "Then he managed to play much better. It was tough rallies, tough points, he served better and yeah, it was a matter of a few points on the tiebreak like it is sometimes in tennis," he said.

The Russian appeared to enjoy the extra spice provided by the Chilean fans in the stadium. "To be honest I was ready for it and I was expecting worse, when I say worse (I mean) more cheering fans supporting him.

"It was a pretty good atmosphere, you know even many times the referee was saying like players are ready, but I was like I don't care, it's actually not too bad. I've seen worse," he said. Medvedev said he is looking forward to resuming battle with Sinner after his five-set loss in Melbourne.

"I won the first two sets—which would be enough in Miami," he quipped. "But for sure this match is going to be different. I am sure he will adapt again and I am going to talk to my team and see what I can do better. "I'm going to go out there, 100 percent ready to win and to make his life tough," said the Russian. — AFP