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Ramadan KAREEM

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AMIR: DON'T BETRAY YOUR VOTE

Sheikh Mishal urges voters to select best representatives

Incoming MPs should live up to their national responsibilities

Assault on national identity an assault on state's structure

Those who boycott polls have no right to blame anyone



KUWAIT: HH the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah delivers an address to the nation on the occasion of the last 10 days of Ramadan on April 1, 2024. — KUNA

KUWAIT: HH the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah called Monday on voters to select candidates who would be their best representatives, and hoped future MPs would benefit from past experiences and live up to their national responsibilities. "I talk to you ... hoping as we approach the National Assembly elections 2024 (on April 4), to better select your representatives, not to select those objective is personal gain or inciting crises, or harming constitutional principles; your sound selection is your path for the building of a future for your nation and the generations," HH the Amir said in an address to the nation on the occasion of the last 10 days of Ramadan.

"Don't betray your vote, and the candidate should speak in what satisfies the Almighty, has well-spoken dialogue which avoids harming of others, inciting sentiments and emotions of voters at the expense of the nation and citizens," he said. HH the Amir hoped the next parliament would be "distinguished with faces with enlightened thinking ... National Assembly members who benefit from previous parliamentary lessons and experiences, and live up to their national responsibilities."

"We are looking forward to the participation of

citizens of our beloved nation in the election, and who boycotts it will relinquish his constitutional right, does not perform his duty to select, and has no right after that to blame anyone for the poor outcome or poor performance and achievement. Everyone should neglect those inciting division and sedition, be united, protect Kuwait and its people," he said.

HH the Amir, meanwhile, said it was evident the severe damage that happened to the national identity through tampering with Kuwait's nationality. "Because the national identity represents existence, an issue of rule and a destiny of a nation, so an assault on it is an assault on the structure of the state and its major components, and cannot be ignored; therefore we commend and support all efforts and measures aimed at preserving the national identity," he asserted.

HH the Amir prayed to Allah the Almighty to bestow His blessings upon the State of Kuwait to enjoy security, progress and prosperity, urging for the love and loyalty of Kuwait in a selfless and united manner. HH the Amir also prayed to the Almighty to support "our brothers in Gaza, have mercy on their martyrs and ours", heal the sick, and have mercy on "our former rulers". — KUNA

RAMADAN KAREEM

We hear and obey

By Karima Kandeel

This statement is the mantra of Muslims in their lives, and it is the password that many who are interested in researching the mechanism of Muslims following their religion may not understand. Muslims - as followers of the last Messenger (PBUH) who was sent to the entire mankind and who came to conclude the message of the prophets before him - learned to obey God's commands without arguing. But God (Allah) is so generous to us that He commanded us not to close our minds or stop thinking about the wisdom of His commands, and gave us the freedom to ask questions and use reason to understand the wisdom in His commandments.

God forbade alcohol, so the early Muslims said, "We heard and obeyed." After the progress of scientific research, it became clear that alcohol has very harmful effects on the liver and heart, and harms consciousness. God forbade pork to Muslims, so the Muslims said, "We heard and obeyed." Today the world acknowledges that there are worms in pork that should not be eaten. High cooking temperatures kill them but may cause fatal damage that destroys the immune system and extends to the brain!

God forbade gambling, usury and bribery, and we said, "We hear and obey." Today, the societies in which these transactions are widespread suffer from economic problems that stifle the individual as well as the whole society.

God commanded women to cover their bodies except the face and hands, so they said, "We heard and obeyed." The Muslim woman is free, forcing men outside her home to deal with her in relation to her intellect and personality, and not as we see in some societies where women and their bodies are exploited to promote sales, where she is considered a beautiful thing that should be noticed by others.

Continued on Page 6

Zain carries out road inspection project for MPW

KUWAIT: Zain has presented a project for the inspection of major roads in Kuwait to the ministry of public works. The company has contributed to executing and delivering this project, which represents the first phase of the full inspection and evaluation of the nation's entire road network.

Minister of Public Works and Minister of State for Municipal Affairs Dr Noura Al-Meshaan welcomed Zain Vice Chairman and Group CEO Bader Nasser Al-Kharafi at her office, joined by officials from the ministry of public works and the Zain executive management team. During the visit, Zain delivered the project and introduced the ministry to the key role that can be played by AI-powered drone systems to implement strategic developmental projects. (See Page 3)



KUWAIT: Minister of Public Works Dr Noura Al-Meshaan welcomes Zain Vice Chairman and Group CEO Bader Al-Kharafi.

Zionists destroy Al-Shifa Hospital, kill scores in Gaza

GAZA: Zionist forces on Monday pulled out of Gaza's largest hospital complex after an intensive two-week military operation, leaving behind charred buildings and bodies strewn at the sprawling Al-Shifa Hospital complex. The health ministry in Hamas-ruled Gaza said that, after heavy Zionist air strikes and tank fire, "the scale of the destruction inside the complex and the buildings around it is very large".

"Dozens of bodies, some of them decomposed, have been recovered from in and around the Al-Shifa medical complex," it said, adding that the hospital was now "completely out of service". Several doctors and civilians at the damaged complex told AFP that at least 20 bodies had been found, some of which appeared to have been driven over by military vehicles.

Several were found close to the west entrance to the complex, which the Zionist army used during its departure from



GAZA: Palestinians inspect the damage at Gaza's Al-Shifa Hospital after the Zionist military withdrew from the complex on April 1, 2024. — AFP

the hospital grounds on Monday. "Bodies... The tanks went over them. Destruction. Children. Innocents. Unarmed civilians. They (soldiers) went over them," one witness said, asking not to be named. An AFP correspondent saw one badly decomposed body bearing tyre marks.

Battles have also flared around other Gaza hospitals almost six months into the war, which have destroyed swathes

of the besieged coastal territory. The Hamas government press office said the army had blown up more than 20 houses within 24 hours in the main southern city of Khan Yunis, where battles have raged around the Nasser and Al-Amal hospitals.

US, Qatari and Egyptian mediators have been pushing for a ceasefire and hostage release deal, but Hamas official

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Guards killed as Zionists strike Iran embassy in Syria

DAMASCUS: Zionist strikes destroyed the Iranian embassy's consular annex in Syria on Monday, killing and wounding everyone inside, Damascus said, as Iranian state TV reported a Revolutionary Guards commander among the dead. Britain-based war monitoring group the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said eight people were killed when "(Zionist) missiles... destroyed the building of an annex to the Iranian embassy".

The Zionist entity did not immediately comment on the deadly attack in Damascus which comes at a time of soaring tensions over its Gaza war against Palestinian group Hamas, and intensifying violence between the Zionist entity and Iran's allies. AFP reporters saw the annex building had caved in, and emergency services were rushing to treat the wounded and search for victims under the rubble, in the upscale Damascus district of Mazzeh.

Syria's defense ministry said "the attack destroyed the entire building, killing and injuring everyone inside, and work is underway to recover the bodies and rescue the wounded from under the

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Local

Kuwait marks 20th anniversary of strategic allyship with US

Status allows Kuwait, US to exchange security information, military training, arms supply

KUWAIT: Kuwait celebrated Monday the 20th anniversary of its designation by the United States as a strategic ally from outside NATO, as both countries share values that call for peace and stability in the world. This status — bestowed on Kuwait on April 1, 2004, by the US — has strengthened the close bilateral relations dating back to 1951 when the US opened its first consulate in the capital, Kuwait City.

Kuwait being a strategic ally of the US means it can acquire modern military technology in addition to encompassing other economic and scientific aspects, such as obtaining a distinctive status and significant preference. Kuwaiti-American relations began in the 19th century and witnessed great development over the years, especially in defense, security, education, economic, consular, customs and border security cooperation, as well as cooperation on global issues.

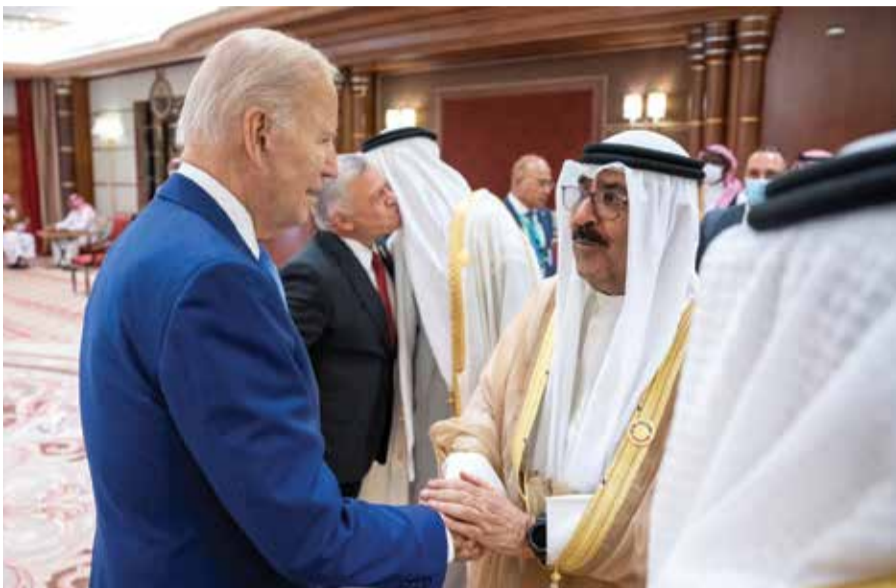
Kuwait has become a strategic ally and a key partner of the US thanks to its efforts in promoting security and stability and de-escalating tensions in the Middle East, especially through its mediation role and bridging viewpoints in a number of regional and global crises. Regarding the strategic alliance between the two countries, the Acting Head of the Department of Political Science at Kuwait University, Dr Haila Al-Mukaimi, stated to KUNA that Kuwaiti-American relations have gone through long and extensive historical stages that can be classified into five main stages.

The first of these stages is the early presence and early relations, where these relations date back to an early period, exemplified by the American hospital, which was considered an important landmark for the pre-independence stage of Kuwait, and the establishment of the American consulate in Kuwait in 1951. The second stage is the beginning of diplomatic relations in 1961. After Kuwait's independence, the consulate turned into an embassy, recognizing Kuwait by the US as an independent sovereign state, therefore, the US promptly initiated this recognition and supported Kuwait in facing Iraqi claims at the time, which is considered an important stage in the history of bilateral relations.

The third stage is the stage of the strategic relationship, which emerged following the Iran-Iraq War, where Kuwait requested the US in 1986 to put American flags on Kuwaiti tankers to ensure safe transport of its oil to the world and have the tankers under the protection of a major power. The fourth stage is enhancing the strategic relationship, represented by the 1991 Gulf War liberation, adding that Kuwaitis recognize the importance of the US' role in 1991.

The fifth stage is the Kuwaiti-American relationship in 2004, represented by Kuwait's declaration as a strategic ally of the US from outside NATO, adding that this came after the visit of the late Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah to the US.

Mukaimi added that the US remains



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah exchanges greetings with US President Joe Biden. — KUNA photos



The late Amir Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah (left) is seen with late US President George H W Bush (right).



The late Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah is seen with former US President George W Bush.



The late Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah shakes hands with former US President George W Bush.



Dr Haila Al-Mukaimi



Dr Abdullah Al-Shayji

one of the most important tourist destinations for Kuwaitis and for study, indicating that Kuwaiti-American relations are characterized by both official and public dimensions. She explained that this reflected several aspects, including Kuwait's pivotal role in maintaining regional and global peace and security, joint efforts, and informational coordination between the two parties. She added

ed that in Kuwait's dealing with matters related to global security, as Kuwait is closely linked to international law and has experienced invasion and liberation by the United Nations (UN) and the demarcation of borders and depositing them with the UN, it all contributed to shaping Kuwait's foreign policy.

Mukaimi stated that Kuwait's status enhances its international role in main-

taining peace and security, as well as its humanitarian and relief dimension, especially since it has been considered a global relief center since 2004, which has reinforced its role as a peace-promoting state worldwide. She mentioned that Kuwait has hosted many initiatives related to peace and reconstruction, such as the conferences on Syria and hosting the Iraq Reconstruction Conference.

Dr Abdullah Al-Shayji, Professor of Political Science at Kuwait University, stated that Kuwait's designation as a strategic ally outside NATO is an important matter. He added that this status was very important, noting that the number of major allies of the US outside NATO is 18, while the number of member countries in NATO is 32. He explained that this classification began during the days of President Ronald Reagan in 1987 and continued until President Joe Biden, who announced the accession of Qatar and Colombia in 2022 as strategic allies.

He said that Egypt was the first Arab country to be declared by the US as a

strategic ally outside of NATO in 1987, while Bahrain was the first Gulf country in 2002. He stated that there are three Gulf countries that have acquired the status of a strategic ally to the US outside NATO, which are Bahrain, Kuwait, and Qatar, considering it a distinctive status due to the exchange of security information, military training, arms supply, and participation in security and intelligence information exchange.

Shayji stated that this gave Kuwait an important advantage, as Kuwait has had a strategic dialogue consisting of five rounds over the past five or six years, which means that the relationship between the two countries was strong. It is worth mentioning that Kuwait has played a significant role in diplomatic reconciliation and mediation between countries over the years, and it is committed to the security and stability of the Gulf region, the Middle East, and the world and has spared no effort in assisting countries facing famine, crises, conflicts and wars. — KUNA



KUWAIT: The Kuwait Society for Relief's medical team pose for a photo before leaving for Gaza on Sunday March 31, 2024. — KUNA

Kuwaiti medical relief team heads to Gaza

KUWAIT: Kuwait Society for Relief (KSR) announced, Sunday, the departure of a medical relief team consisting of 11 physicians and consultants from different medical and surgical fields to Cairo Airport heading towards Gaza's hospitals. The medical relief team plans to assist the Kuwait Specialized Hospital and the Gaza European Hospital starting April 7.

The medical team consists of highly specialized medical and surgical professionals including a nurse and humanitarian directors, Deputy General Director of KSR and team leader Omar Al-Thuwaini said to KUNA. He pointed out that Kuwait has been sending medical relief teams to Gaza since October 10, 2023, including donations from more than 30 Kuwaiti humanitarian and charity organizations.

Ophthalmology surgical consultant and volunteer Dr Mansoor Al-Shammari said the medical relief of over three tons of equipment will be received in two hospitals in Gaza. The equipment will provide assistance to physicians during surgical operations in the territory, said senior specialist in nephrology, urology, infertility and robotic surgery, Dr Omar Al-Hunaidi.

Anesthesiologist and pain management specialist Dr Hasan Behbehani said the trip aims to lighten the burden of the Palestinian health authorities and the injured Palestinians in Gaza in the midst of the siege enforced by the Zionist occupation on Gaza. Faculty member of the Public Authority for Applied Education and Training Dr Mohammad Al-Kandari confirmed the necessity of providing medical assistance to Gaza, to curb the humanitarian disasters occurring at this time.

The Zionist assault on Gaza has killed at least 32,845 people as it enters its seventh month. The entity claims its attack is aimed at destroying Hamas after they launched an attack that resulted in the deaths of over 1,000 people in the south of the entity in October 2023. — KUNA

'Your vote, Nation's future': MoI urges Kuwaitis to vote

KUWAIT: The Ministry of Information has launched an electoral media campaign urging eligible voters to cast their ballots in the country's forthcoming parliamentary election due on Thursday. Speaking to KUNA on the initiative, the ministry's Assistant Undersecretary for the Media Service Sector Saad Al-Azmi said that the campaign titled: "Your Vote ... Nation's Future" is intended to persuade voters to live up to their due responsibilities by carefully picking the right candidate.

The endeavor, which Kuwait Times featured briefly on March 31, is co-organized by Kuwait Municipality, state bodies and civil society organizations.



Saad Al-Azmi



KUWAIT: An LED billboard lights up with an advertisement for the "Your vote ... Nation's future" campaign on top of a government building. — KUNA photos

The campaign, which features advertisements on billboards and in mass and social media, mainly urges Kuwaiti citizens to exercise their electoral rights enshrined in the Kuwaiti Constitution, the official pointed out. — KUNA



A billboard advertising the campaign is put up at Kuwait's International Airport.

Local

Zain carries out road inspection project for public works ministry

AI-powered drones to play key role in strategic developmental projects



Dr Noura Al-Meshaan poses for a photo with Bader Al-Kharafi and officials from the Ministry of Public Affairs and Zain.

KUWAIT: Zain has presented a project for the inspection of major roads in Kuwait to the Ministry of Public Works. The company has contributed to executing and delivering this project, which represents the first phase of the full inspection and evaluation of the nation's entire road network.

Minister of Public Works and Minister of State for Municipal Affairs Dr Noura Al-Meshaan welcomed Zain Vice Chairman and Group CEO Bader Nassar Al-Kharafi at her office, joined by officials from the Ministry of Public Works and the Zain executive management team. During the visit, Zain delivered the project and introduced the ministry to the key role that can be played by AI-powered drone systems to implement strategic developmental projects.

The first phase of the project included the inspection and evaluation of 1,000 kilometers of major roads and bridges across Kuwait, as well as providing high resolution aerial data, images, and videos. Zain is also currently preparing to execute the second phase of the

project, which includes the sub-road network.

Using drones for road inspection enhances the quality and safety of road maintenance, reduces time and effort, and helps with higher accuracy by automating the scanning process. Using drones also results in more accurate mapping of the road network and provides detailed 3D models for roads and bridges.

In addition, drones can highly contribute to reducing operational costs, offering measurable, high quality visual data, reducing human error, and accelerating progress, supervision, and monitoring. This initiative will contribute to support the ministry in presenting public tenders to suppliers for executing better road maintenance projects.

Leveraging its fleet of drones, Zain offers many innovative applications and solutions to serve the needs of governments and enterprises. With drone-powered solutions, the company offers limitless opportunities for all industries to make the most out of technologies such as Internet of Things and artificial intelligence.



Dr Noura Al-Meshaan and Bader Al-Kharafi are seen with officials during the visit.

Experts: Kuwait leads way in supporting people with autism

KUWAIT: Kuwait is joining the global celebration of World Autism Awareness Day Tuesday by sharing informative messages about the challenges individuals with autism face, how to interact with them, understand their needs, and support their families.

The annual celebration, initiated by the United Nations General Assembly in 2007 and observed every April 2, aims to raise public awareness about autism, support education programs, and emphasize the rights of autistic individuals under the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities confirming that individuals with autism are equal citizens with human rights.

Multiple academics and experts commended, in separate interviews to KUNA, Kuwait's dedicated efforts in caring for people with autism, underlining initiatives like centers, awareness events, and effective treatment programs aimed at integration.

Dr Fatima Ayad, psychology professor at Kuwait University (KU), said Kuwait is among the leading Arab countries in caring for individuals with special needs as well as autism, through specialized organizations and advanced centers. She pointed out the huge number of Kuwaiti experts focused on autism, urging for the improvement of personnel skills in relevant organizations and centers through exceptional training courses and participation in global events.

There are studies suggesting various potential causes of autism, including environmental factors, such as the "refrigerator mother," a phenomenon characterized by a mother's lack of emotional connection with the child, and the possibility of certain vaccinations like the measles, mumps, and rubella (MMR) vaccine being linked to autism, she noted. She underscored the significance of early detection and accurate diagnosis of autism, mentioning its various categories: some with high intelligence, others with intellectual disabilities and communication struggles, leading to self-isolation.

In her perspective, Dr Amthal Al-Huwailah, a faculty member at KU's psychology department, stated that Kuwait has 20-30 government and private centers for skill development, behavioral modification, and occupational therapy for autism, along with schools for them. She clarified that autism is a prevalent developmental disorder involving social communication challenges, restricted behaviors, and varied, complex causes with no confirmed specific cause yet. Since 2009, genetic syndromes, mutations, and metabolic disorders have comprised up to 20 percent of autism cases, often featuring characteristic signs affecting various body parts associated with autism, she explained. While common genetic variations may impact the development of autism spectrum disorder, not all individuals with these genetic differences are affected, Dr Al-Huwailah stated.

She called for establishing a library housing various publications and research on autism, coordinating between centers, setting up a hotline for parents and caregivers of autistic people to provide continuous support, and issuing an "autistic child card" to facilitate procedures for autistic children in hospitals, airports, and public service institutions. She stressed the importance of supporting this group to help them integrate into society, adapt to life's circumstances, and effectively manage their unique characteristics. — KUNA

Zain hosts first Quran recitation competition

KUWAIT: Zain hosted its first Holy Quran Recitation Competition in strategic partnership with the Grand Mosque of Kuwait. The contest, which aimed to encourage the community to pursue recitation of the Holy Quran and embody its values, offered prizes for the first three winners in each of the six categories.

The winners were awarded during the ceremony held at Zain's headquarters in Shuwaikh, attended by Zain Kuwait Corporate Relations Department Manager Hamad Al-Musaibeeh, Grand Mosque Administration Director Ali Shadad, Head of the competition's judges panel and Imam of the Grand Mosque Omar Al-Damkhi, along with Zain and Grand Mosque officials, and the winners and their families.

The Zain Holy Quran Recitation Competition ran for two consecutive days at the Grand Mosque's Western Hall and featured three age groups each for males and females: 7-12, 13-18, and 19-25 years old. The contest was supervised by a panel of certified judges from the Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs in collaboration with the Grand Mosque. Zain presented cash prizes to the first three winners in each category.

In a step to engage its employees in its community programs and initiatives, Zain also held the fourth



KUWAIT: Zain's Hamad Al-Musaibeeh and the Grand Mosque's Ali Shadad pose with the winners of the Zain Holy Quran Recitation Competition.

Holy Quran Recitation Competition for employees and their children. The competition was also held at the Grand Mosque, and the first three winners in each of the six categories were awarded with cash prizes as well.

This initiative came as part of the strategic partnership between Zain and the Grand Mosque of Kuwait under the Zain Alshuhoor Ramadan community campaign. The partnership features several key initiatives, including daily iftar meals at the mosque to serve fasting individuals and hospitality services for worshippers during the last ten days of the Holy Month.

This year, six of Zain's strategic community part-

ners, including the Grand Mosque, have joined its annual Ramadan social campaign, Zain Alshuhoor. The campaign features a wide range of humanitarian, charitable, social, religious, health, and sports programs that have continued throughout the Holy Month of Ramadan.

Zain Alshuhoor is one of Kuwait's biggest and most successful community programs during the Holy Month. Every year, the company introduces a bigger, renewed version of the campaign that expands upon the previous year in its initiatives and programs. The campaign strives to share the blessings of this much-cherished month with the entire Kuwaiti people.



People from different age groups participate in the competition.



A participant recites the Quran before a panel of certified judges.

KRCS distributes 2,400 food baskets in Tunisia

TUNIS: Kuwait Red Crescent Society (KRCS) handed out 2,400 food baskets in Tunisia on Sunday as part of a joint project with the Tunisian Red Crescent on the occasion of the holy month of Ramadan. Head of the KRCS delegation, Farouq

Khazal, said in a press statement that the food baskets distribution project was launched under the slogan "Kuwait is by Your Side" in cooperation with the Tunisian Red Crescent. He added that this project includes distributing 2,400 food baskets to the families in need in all the 24 Tunisian governorates over the course of a week during the Muslim fasting month. He stressed that this project reflects the roots of humanitarian work in Kuwait, which is keen to extend a hand of solidarity to those in need, especially during Ramadan. — KUNA



TUNIS: KRCS staff hand food baskets to families in need across Tunisia in collaboration with the Tunisian Red Crescent. — KUNA

Ramadan Health Tips

Staying energized during
last 10 days of Ramadan

Don't skip Suhoor

Even if you do not feel hungry, try to eat a small meal. Suhoor is extremely important for getting you through the day. Eat energy-releasing foods, which are high in protein, fiber, and carbohydrates.

Stay active

During Ramadan, we seem to take fasting as an excuse to move around as little as possible. But you will actually feel more energetic if you walk frequently during the day, even for 5-7 minutes. If frequent short walks aren't your thing, try to take a walk after iftar or suhoor and do some light exercises at home. Don't forget to take deep steady breaths while you move your body.

Take naps

Everyone needs at least eight hours of sleep. If you're not getting it, you will end up feeling tired and lazy throughout the day. Many people exhaust all their energy in the first few days of worship, so they don't make it through all 10 days with the same vigor as when they started. So adjust some power naps in between your worship timings and work schedule. It will really energize you and give you the boost you need to stand in prayer and supplication in the last few days of Ramadan.

Have a meal, not a feast

There is no need to overdose on food during Ramadan. We know that food, especially on an empty stomach, looks a bit too tempting and the urge to eat it all is overpowering, especially at iftar. However, you must resist. Overeating leads to abdominal discomfort, causing high levels of laziness and lethargy, leaving your body tired. Instead of having one large meal, have two or three smaller meals throughout the eating hours. You will find yourself to be much more active during your worship routine.

Remind yourself of your goal

If you feel yourself getting exhausted towards the end of Ramadan and you feel it's getting a bit too much, remind yourself of the bigger purpose behind fasting. You are doing it for Allah and to nurture your mind, body, and soul. Remind yourself of all this and it will give you the dedication and energy to power through those last ten days and make the most of them.

Kuwait Heritage



KUWAIT: Kuwaiti sailors hold the rudder of a sailing dhow. — Provided by Mahmoud Zakaria, heritage researcher at Ministry of Information.

Kuwait-Palestine education partnership sign of deep ties

'Kuwaitis are our people and brothers'



KUWAIT: Palestinian teachers from Gaza prepare for qualifying exams to work as teachers in Kuwaiti schools in 2022. — KUNA



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Kuwait Times

The First English Daily in the Arabian Gulf



By Khaled Al-Abdulhadi

KUWAIT: As part of continuous support and collaboration between Kuwait and Palestine, the ministry of education decided on March 26 to contract Palestinian and Jordanian teachers living in Jordan in needed scientific disciplines as part of early preparation for the next academic year. On October 7, Kuwait opened the door to bringing families of Palestinian teachers to Kuwait. On October 23, the Women's Cultural and Social Society opened its doors to Palestinian teachers who lost their families and relatives in Zionist airstrikes.

Official sources in the ministry of education said the ministry will send the foreign contracting committee to Jordan only, after it had previously sent it to Jordan and Palestine, to contract with teachers of physics, mathematics and chemistry. "The events in Palestine prevent the contracting committee from entering Palestinian land. Therefore, we can only contract with Jordanian and Palestinian teachers who are in Jordan," they clarified.

The sources pointed out the contracts in Jordan will be limited to Jordanian and Palestinian teachers only, and others will not be contracted even if the contracting committee cannot find a sufficient number. "The plan is to bring in around 300 teachers," the sources said. They made clear that the foreign contracting committee will not go to Egypt as reported, explaining that contracts with Jordanian and Palestinian teachers in Jordan will meet the need.

"The committee will go to Jordan at the end of May with the aim of finalizing contracts early and ensuring the arrival of contracted teachers before mid-August," sources indicated. The ministry of education had previously identified its needs for the next academic year 2024-2025

2 MoC services transferred to Google Cloud

KUWAIT: The Kuwaiti Ministry of Commerce and Industry announced on Sunday that it has taken concrete steps to transfer some of its services to Google Cloud. The ministry has moved the electronic portals designated for real estate management and issuing e-certificates of origin, it said in a statement Sunday.

The ministry said the move comes as part of its plan to enhance its digital transformation process, which allows it to provide integrated electronic services using the advanced technologies provided by cloud computing. The ministry pointed out that there

are similar steps to transfer many services and portals to Google Cloud, through which it provides its services to citizens and business owners.

It added that it is working to enhance the level of security and protection of the data of citizens and companies through advanced cloud computing services provided by Google Cloud, stressing that cloud computing provides additional layers of protection and encryption of data.

"Kuwaitis are our people and brothers, and this good land is the home of peaceful coexistence and acceptance of the other, and it has embraced Arab communities since time immemorial," the teacher added. "I will give everything I have for the renaissance of education in Kuwait and raise the name of the Palestinian teacher to high standards," another teacher said, noting that it is the first time she left her country. "I consider Kuwait as my second country and I am prepared to provide the highest service in my power, which is helping with the education of Kuwait's children," she stressed. Another teacher said: "We traveled 1,800 km to Kuwait in order to prove to the world that the Palestinian teacher is part of the Arab and Islamic people, and a brother to the Kuwaiti teacher. We will work in turn to strengthen the bond between the Kuwaiti and Palestinian peoples."

In 2019, the number reached over 350 teachers, while last August Kuwait contracted with 531 Palestinian teachers, as part of Kuwait's insistence to stand its ground with the Palestinian people who can provide the skills and the incentives to make a difference during their time in Kuwait.

are similar steps to transfer many services and portals to Google Cloud, through which it provides its services to citizens and business owners.

It added that it is working to enhance the level of security and protection of the data of citizens and companies through advanced cloud computing services provided by Google Cloud, stressing that cloud computing provides additional layers of protection and encryption of data.

The Ministry of Commerce also highlighted the importance of transferring its range of services to Google Cloud in accelerating development and innovation, noting that "it provides a flexible environment for development and easily scalable computing resources."

"It also allows the ministry's development teams to develop and test software faster and at a lower cost, which promotes digital transformation and contributes to achieving the goals of the Ministry of Commerce and Industry's vision more efficiently," they added. — KUNA



Senior Indian opposition leader moved to jail ahead of election

Egypt's Sisi begins third term after massive fresh financing

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RAMALLAH: Palestinian Authority President Mahmud Abbas poses for a picture with new Palestinian government, after it was sworn in on March 31, 2024, in Ramallah. -- AFP

New Palestinian govt gets wary greeting

Hamas says Mustafa's appointment would only deepen Palestinian divisions

RAMALLAH: A new Palestinian government that contains both Gazans and four women was sworn in Sunday, but was already facing skepticism from its own people. The Palestinian Authority led by Mahmud Abbas is under pressure from Washington to prepare to step into the breach in the aftermath of the Gaza war and undertake reforms. Newly-appointed prime minister Mohammed Mustafa said his government's "top national priority" was ending the war as he named his new team. He said his cabinet "will work on formulating visions to reunify the institutions, including assuming responsibility for Gaza".

President Abbas, 88, is being nudged by the United States to shake the creaking authority up so it can reunite the occupied West Bank and the devastated Gaza Strip under a single rule after the war. The Palestinian Authority has had almost no influence over the Gaza Strip since Hamas took power there in 2007 from Ab-

bas's Fatah party. Secretary of State Antony Blinken urged Abbas to make "administrative reforms" when the two men met in January. Abbas's Ramallah-based administration has been hamstrung by Zionist entity's decades-old occupation of the West Bank and his own unpopularity. Mustafa, an economist and longtime Abbas advisor, said the "reconstruction" of the Palestinian territories was his main goal, with Gaza in ruins after six months of the Zionist entity bombardment.

His new cabinet is made up of 23 ministers and includes four women and six ministers from Gaza, among them former Gaza City mayor Maged Abu Ramadan who has been given the health portfolio. Among the new female faces is Varsen Aghabekian, a Palestinian-Armenian academic who will work alongside Mustafa in the foreign ministry, which he also controls.

The premier, who previously worked for the World Bank, said the thorny issue of Zionist-annexed east Je-

rusalem was also a top priority along with the "fight against corruption".

But many doubt whether the Palestinian Authority—which has been dogged by divisions, corruption scandals and the authoritarian tendencies of its ageing leader—can be a credible player in any future deal. Ali Jarbawi, a former PA minister and political scientist, said it faces massive challenges on all fronts. "It is broke and it's in debt and can't pay its salaries, so it needs immediate financial support," he said. And it needs to be accepted by both Palestinian factions—Fatah which controls the West Bank and Hamas in Gaza. "Thirdly it needs a political horizon, from the international community, and a commitment to the two-state solution," Jarbawi said.

And none of that can happen unless the "Zionist entity, the army and settlers in the West Bank ease the pressure" on Palestinians, he added. Senior Hamas

member Bassem Naim criticized Abbas's policies. "His hijacking of the unified Palestinian decision-making" is dangerous for "our cause at this very critical stage in the history of our people," he told AFP.

He said Hamas "proposed sitting down for the sake of national dialogue and rebuilding the political system... but Abbas blocked all these attempts." Hamas, Islamic Jihad and the Marxist Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine issued a joint statement earlier this month declaring that Mustafa's appointment would only deepen Palestinian divisions. People on the streets of Ramallah, where the authority is based, were equally skeptical. "Changing the government will not solve anything because change to us comes only from the outside," said Suleiman Nassar, 56. "We know very well that any minister or any Palestinian government will not get in without an American or Zionist entity" approval he said. -- AFP



PESHAWAR: A supporter of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party kisses a photo frame of former Prime Minister Imran Khan, takes part in a protest rally for the release of leader Imran Khan, in Peshawar on March 31, 2024. -- AFP

Prison sentences of Imran Khan, wife suspended

ISLAMABAD: Jailed former prime minister Imran Khan and his wife had their 14-year prison sentences for graft suspended by a Pakistan high court on Monday, his party said. Khan has been tangled in more than 200 legal cases since he was ousted in April 2022, in what he said was a campaign to keep him from power.

Khan, 71, remains jailed on two other cases including treason and illegal marriage with sentences stretching up to a decade. A spokesman for his Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party said the Islamabad High Court dropped the pair's sentences from an anti-corruption court over selling state gifts, with an appeal against their convictions pending.

The trial court gave "limited counsel access but also had reached the decision in haste without allowing defence to conclude arguments", spokesman Ahmed Janjua said.

Khan was already jailed and barred from standing for office when he was hit by a trio of sentences in the days before Pakistan's Feb 8 general elections. His wife Bushra Bibi was also sentenced over graft and a marriage the courts said came too quickly after her divorce, in breach of Islamic law.

Analysts said it was a bid to seal the sidelining of the former prime minister and his PTI party from the poll, which was marred by widespread allegations of rigging both before and after the vote.

Despite a crackdown of arrests and censorship, candidates loyal to Khan won more seats than any other party but fell far short of the majority needed to govern. A coalition of parties with close ties to Pakistan's powerful military establishment has taken power, headed by Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif. -- AFP

Gaza children fly kites to escape horrors of war

RAFAH: Meters away from the concrete and steel fence separating the Gaza Strip from Egypt, 11-year-old Malak Ayad flies a paper kite high in the sky—a welcome distraction from the horrors of war. "Every day I play with my brothers and cousins with kites next to the Egyptian border," said the Palestinian girl, displaced from Gaza City with her family to the southern city of Rafah.

"When I do, I feel free and safe," she added, gently maneuvering her kite, which she calls "Butterfly", back and forth across the border with a white string. Her cousins and friends run along the fence trying, in vain, to get their kites to take flight, but a loud explosion in the distance makes them stop in their tracks.

"Quickly, the (Zionist) bombardment is getting closer," said Malak's uncle Mohammed Ayad, 24, urging the children to leave the area. Malak quickly obeys, reeling in her kite and folding it, then rushes back to a tent where her family is taking shelter in the nearby Khir area. "Playtime is over. When air strikes begin we run back home," Malak said, trembling with fear.

Malak Ayad and her family are among 1.5 million

people, most of them displaced by the war, now living in Rafah, where Zionist entity has vowed to carry a ground offensive as it pursues its campaign against Hamas. Despite the war and the fear that grips her, Malak seems to be happy to fly her kite and dreams of life as it was before the war broke out on Oct 7.

"My kite flies to Egypt everyday while we are here trapped in Gaza," said Malak, who wears a bracelet featuring the Palestinian flag. "I don't know when we will be able to return home," she said, adding that her mother told her that her school has been hit by the Zionist army and "destroyed".

Haitam Abu Ajwa, 34, who is also displaced from Gaza City, said kite flying "reminds me of my childhood". He too lives in a tent in Rafah with his wife and two boys, Mohammed, 5, and seven-months-old Adam. Flying kites helps to "free oneself of negative thoughts", he said, and the border area with Egypt is "the ideal place to expel... the sadness and pain that we feel". "In the camps, you cannot feel free or comfortable," said Abu Ajwa as he helped Mohammed fly a kite.

Dozens of children, some with their families, come daily to the border area in the afternoons to fly kites across the frontier. Some start up conversations with Egyptian soldiers manning surveillance towers. When Malak's kite flew past the watchtower, one of the soldiers called out to her: "Well done, princess." The little girl thanked him with a wave and said, "I love Egypt. My wish is to travel there like my kite." --AFP



GAZA: A displaced Palestinian man helps a child to fly a kite near the border with Egypt in Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip on March 28, 2024. — AFP

Diversity programs vanishing from US university campuses

WASHINGTON: The latest battle in the culture wars cleaving American society centers around diversity programs on university campuses, now restricted or banned in a growing number of US states. The debate pits those on the left, who advocate for boosting minority students victimized by deep-rooted inequality, and those on the right who say people should be judged on individual merit, not skin color.

"The idea of present discrimination being the remedy for past discrimination... is inherently wrong," said Jordan Pace, a Republican member of the House of Representatives in the state of South Carolina.

"We don't like the idea of judging people based on immutable characteristics, whether it be gender or race or height or whatever," he said, calling the United States a "hyper-meritocratic society."

Often known as "diversity, equity, and inclusion" (DEI) programs, many American universities had given special consideration to minority students—particularly those who are Black, Hispanic and Native American—as they sought to correct long-standing inequalities. Last June, the country's conservative-majority Supreme Court put an end to affirmative action in university admissions, reversing one of the major gains of the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s. Now, Pace is urging his state to follow the lead of Florida and about a dozen other states that have scrapped campus DEI programs.

"The primary target group across the country... are Black people," said Ricky Jones, professor of pan-African studies at the University of Louisville in Kentucky.

Carlie Reeves, 19, was the first person in her family to attend college and when she arrived at the University of Louisville, it was "very obvious that my professors didn't really think I belonged. Didn't really see me as intelligent." DEI leaders on campus "spoke life into me and told me... you have the merit." Many minority students are at the school "100 percent because of DEI," she said, raising as an example Black students who benefitted from race-based scholarships.

But on March 15, Kentucky lawmakers advanced a proposal to restrict such programs, spurring Reeves to co-organize a protest on campus. "It just felt like my duty to inform the students, hey y'all, these people are trying to literally get rid of us from campus... we have to do something," she said. Kentucky is following other conservative states, including Texas, Alabama and Idaho. At the beginning of March, the University of Florida ended DEI programs and related jobs, part of Republican Governor Ron DeSantis's offensive against what he calls "woke ideology." --AFP

International

Egypt's Sisi begins third term after massive fresh financing

Road out of economic crisis will still be long and arduous: Experts

CAIRO: Egypt's President Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi begins his third term this week buoyed by massive fresh financing, but experts say the road out of economic crisis will still be long and arduous. Sisi won December's presidential election with 89.6 percent of the vote, standing against three unknowns. He is set to begin his third term officially on Wednesday, with local media reporting that he will swear the oath before parliament the day before.

This six-year term is set to be the 69-year-old's last, unless another constitutional amendment again prolongs his tenure. Pundits have speculated about a potential cabinet reshuffle as Cairo struggles to contain the fallout from two years of punishing economic crisis and dire foreign currency shortages.

As 2024 began, the Arab world's most populous country seemed to be hurtling towards default and economic collapse, analysts said, before it suddenly received more than \$50 billion in loans and investments. Within weeks, the United Arab Emirates announced a \$35-billion land development deal for Egypt's Ras Al-Hikma, the International Monetary Fund more than doubled a \$3-billion loan, and the World Bank and European Union inked fresh financing agreements.

The massive bailout has saved Egypt "from falling into the abyss", according to former deputy prime minister Ziad Bahaa-Eldin. Following the deal and a fresh currency devaluation - the country's fifth since 2016 - economic indicators seemed to be improving. Financial services companies raised Egypt's credit ratings, as months-worth of blocked inventory began to be released into the import-dependent economy.

But "we shouldn't believe the crisis has passed, or that our problems have been solved", Bahaa-Eldin wrote in a recent op-ed in privately owned newspa-

per Al-Masry Al-Youm. The roots of Egypt's crisis - including "the pace of public spending, the state's hold on the economy, and the inflation rate" - must be addressed, economic analyst and former parliamentarian Mohamed Fouad told AFP.

This week, Egyptians will watch Sisi swear the oath from the New Administrative Capital - a controversial \$58-billion project in the desert east of Cairo - while many people struggle to make ends meet with inflation currently 35 percent. The bailout, more generous than widely expected, has come with strings attached for Cairo - namely moving to a flexible exchange rate and "withdrawing the state and military from economic activity", according to IMF chief Kristalina Georgieva.

But analysts have warned that the government might still be propping up the Egyptian pound. And according to Fouad, "the state wants to intervene more, not withdraw" from the economy. Concern has mounted that, without major reform - which the government has vowed to undertake - Egypt could find itself in a new cycle of crisis.

"To avoid falling into the same jam, we need a qualitative shift in how we manage our real economy," according to Bahaa-Eldin. At the same time, Egypt finds itself facing regional fallout from two wars on its borders. From its southern neighbor Sudan, more than half a million refugees have entered Egypt, fleeing the war between the regular army and the paramilitary. And in the Gaza Strip, 1.5 million Palestinians are seeking shelter in the city of Rafah, penned in by the Egyptian border on one side and relentless Israeli bombardment on the other.

Inside the country of 106 million people two-thirds of the population struggle to maintain their livelihoods, having lived on or below the poverty line even before the current crisis. "People were al-



CAIRO: This handout picture provided by the UAE Presidential Court shows UAE President Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al-Nahyan (left) being received by Egypt's President Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi in Cairo on March 23, 2024. — AFP

ready frustrated because they thought there was no solution," according to Mohamed Lotfy, executive director of the Egyptian Commission for Rights and Freedoms (ECRF).

But with the much celebrated massive influx of cash, "they might hold out hope, they'll expect things will get better", he told AFP. "If it doesn't, people will feel like they've sacrificed and waited and followed the rules, but have nothing to show for it - they still can't afford to survive."

Despite some Egyptians broadcasting their sense of frustration and disappointment on social media, the space for public dissent has been all but

curtailed. Over the past decade, Cairo has waged what Lotfy calls a "war of attrition" against civil society - detaining tens of thousands of people, prosecuting rights groups and eradicating nearly all opposition. Although a breakthrough seemed on the horizon in 2022 - when Sisi launched a "national dialogue" and began releasing high-profile political prisoners - "all those hopes were soon dashed", Lotfy said. Now, with more than twice as many people newly detained as released, according to an ECRF tally, Lotfy says Egypt's rights record "remains disastrous" as "a sense of despair" grips the country. — AFP

Germany gives green light to cannabis



BERLIN: Marijuana smokers celebrate in front of a giant mock marijuana plant at a demonstration outside Berlin's Brandenburg Gate to mark the coming into force in Germany on April 1, 2024 of a law allowing adults to carry up to 25 grams of dried cannabis and grow up to three marijuana plants at home. — AFP

BERLIN: Cannabis aficionados lit up in Germany on Monday, as the country became the largest EU nation to legalize recreational use, despite fierce objections from opposition politicians and medical associations. Under the first step in the much-debated new law, adults over 18 are now allowed to carry 25 grams of dried cannabis and cultivate up to three marijuana plants at home.

The changes leave Germany with some of the most liberal cannabis laws in Europe, alongside Malta and Luxembourg, which legalized recreational use in 2021 and 2023, respectively.

The Netherlands, known for its permissive attitude to the drug, has in recent years taken a stricter approach to counter cannabis tourism. As the law took effect at midnight, some 1,500 people cheered in central Berlin by the Brandenburg Gate, according to police, with some lighting up joints in celebration. Legalization was "a bit of extra freedom", 25-year-old Niyazi told AFP at

the gathering. "You do not feel as under pressure now".

Cannabis consumption has been brought out of the "taboo zone", Health Minister Karl Lauterbach said on X, formerly Twitter. The new law was "better for real addiction help, prevention for children and young people and for combating the black market," Lauterbach said, responding in part to criticisms leveled against legalization.

As the next step in the legal reform, from July 1 it will be possible to legally obtain weed through "cannabis clubs" in the country.

These regulated associations will be allowed to have up to 500 members each, and will be able to distribute up to 50 grams of cannabis per person per month.

Until then, "consumers must not tell the police where they bought their cannabis" in the event of a street check, Georg Wirth, director of the German Cannabis Association, told AFP. Initial plans for cannabis to be sold via licensed shops were ditched due to EU opposition, though a second law is in the pipeline to trial the sale of the drug in shops in pilot regions. — AFP

France wants 'clear message' from China to Russia over Ukraine

BEIJING: France's top diplomat said on Monday that Paris wants China to send "clear messages" to its strategic ally Russia over its war in Ukraine, after meetings with his counterpart in Beijing. France and China have sought to strengthen ties in recent years and, during meetings in Paris in February, Foreign Minister Wang Yi told President Emmanuel Macron that Beijing appreciated his country's "independent" stance.

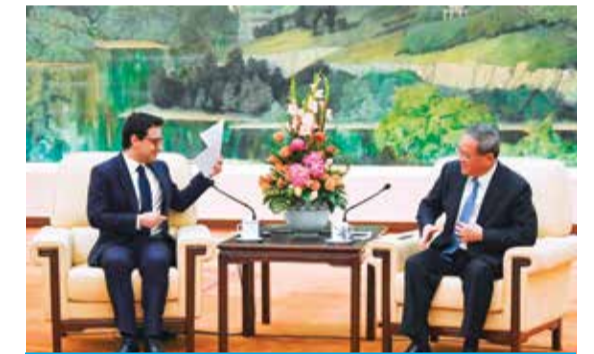
But Paris has also sought to press Beijing on its ties with Moscow, which have only grown closer since the invasion of Ukraine. While China says it is a neutral party in the Ukraine conflict, it has been criticized for refusing to condemn Moscow for its offensive.

Paris has, in contrast, become one of Kyiv's firmest backers, with Macron in February even refusing to rule out putting troops on the ground in Ukraine. Foreign Minister Stephane Sejourne said Monday that Beijing "plays a key role in... the respect of international law, including on Ukraine's sovereignty, and therefore we are clearly expecting that China will send very clear messages to Russia".

"We are convinced that there will be no lasting peace if it is not negotiated with the Ukrainians," he told a press conference in Beijing, speaking alongside his Chinese counterpart Wang.

"There will be no security for Europeans if there is no peace in accordance with international law," he continued. "It is an essential issue for us, which is why France is determined to maintain a close dialogue with China," he said.

Sejourne's visit is the second to China by a French foreign minister in less than six months, following a trip



BEIJING: China's Premier Li Qiang (right) and France's Minister for Foreign Affairs Stephane Sejourne attend a meeting at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing on April 1, 2024. — AFP

by his predecessor Catherine Colonna in November. On Monday afternoon he met with Premier Li Qiang at Beijing's opulent Great Hall of the People, telling China's number two official he wanted to discuss "global situations that are fracturing and dividing the world today".

"I am thinking of the situation in the Middle East, but also in Ukraine," he said. Li said he was "very happy" to welcome the minister to Beijing. "Our two countries have a long history and splendid civilizations," Li said, hailing their shared "spirit of independence and autonomy".

"This explains why China and France have a natural sense of closeness," he said.

Macron also visited last April, receiving a rock star welcome at a university in southern China from hundreds of screaming students and fans. But he faced accusations of cosy up to Beijing and sparked controversy by saying Europe shouldn't be a "follower" of the United States in the event of conflict with China over Taiwan. His foreign minister's visit this week comes as part of events marking the 60th anniversary of diplomatic relations between France and China. — AFP

We hear and obey...

Continued from Page 1

In Islam there are 26 cases of inheritance. In one case, the brother should take double his sister's share, so we said, "We heard and obeyed," because the woman in Islam is not obliged to spend on anyone. Rather, males must spend on their female relatives. Any woman in his family has financial rights over him!

Polygyny, which is allowed (in specific cases), safeguards single mothers who, in some societies, bear responsibility for themselves and their children alone, and addresses the problem of divorced and single women with nobody to protect them, spend on them, defend them, love them, and take care of them, especially when there is a shortage of men for one reason or another.

God forbade sexual relations outside the framework of marriage, so we said, "We heard and obeyed." Now social studies confirm that disobeying God in this regard destroys families, as well as the psychological health of the children. The societal structure becomes imbalanced, and trust between the spouses is fractured. This is something you do not find in true Islamic societies.

God commanded us to fast, so we said, "We heard

and obeyed." Today the world is discovering the wisdom of fasting, including the regeneration of stem cells, getting rid of excess weight, learning self-control, and softening the heart, other than feeling the pain of the poor who are starving and no one feels it!

The way of life for a Muslim is different from that of any other individual because the Muslim lives his life according to the laws of the Creator who knows the psychology, health and interests - among others - of His creation. Our limited minds may or may not reach the wisdom of His legislation. This does not make any difference to me as a Muslim, because I have reached the most important criterion in obedience or disobedience, which is based on the conclusion that this universe has a Creator.

Then I continued searching until I learned that Prophet Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him) and the messengers before him were honest in conveying their messages from God and that the Holy Quran is the Book and Word of God, and that we are here to pass the test and achieve the highest grades in the short time allotted to us. So, after we have arrived at the answers to the most important questions, what comes after that will be easy for the Muslim, which is to say, "We heard and obeyed!"

— Courtesy of Kuwait Society for Cultural Dialogue

Zionists destroy Al-Shifa Hospital...

Continued from Page 1

Osama Hamdan said "there is no talk so far about any new round of negotiations". UN agencies and humanitarian aid groups have warned that many of Gaza's 2.4 million people are on the brink of famine, and donor countries have sporadically trucked in and airdropped food.

A second ship carrying relief goods via the Mediterranean was near Gaza's coast on Monday, according to website Vesselfinder.com, days after leaving Cyprus. Zionist Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu — whose office said he underwent a "successful" hernia operation Sunday — has vowed to destroy Hamas, including in Gaza's far-southern city of Rafah. The premier was "in good shape and beginning to recov-

er", his office said in a statement.

The Zionist entity's campaign has killed at least 32,845 people, mostly women and children, according to the Gaza health ministry. Hamas in a statement acknowledged the suffering and "exhaustion" of Gazans because of the war, while vowing to continue fighting until it achieves "victory and freedom" for Palestinians. The Zionist military said Monday that 600 soldiers had been killed since the start of the war — including 256 in the Gaza ground invasion since late October.

Zionist police meanwhile said they had arrested the sister of Qatar-based Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh, as part of a terror probe, in the southern Zionist town of Tel Sheva. Police told AFP that Sabah Abdel Salam Haniyeh, 57, who is a citizen of the Zionist entity, was taken into custody as part investigation also involving security agency Shin Bet. A police spokesman said she is "suspected of having contact with Hamas operatives and identifying with the organization while inciting and supporting acts of terrorism in (the Zionist entity)". — AFP

Guards killed as Zionists strike...

Continued from Page 1

rubble". Iranian state TV said among those killed was a senior commander of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps' foreign operations arm, the Quds Force, Brigadier General Mohammad Reza Zahedi.

The Observatory later said it had "confirmed the killing of a high-ranking leader who served as the leader of the Quds Force for Syria and Lebanon, two Iranian advisors, and five members of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard". The Damascus strikes were the fifth in eight days to hit Syria, whose President Bashar Al-Assad is supported by Iran, the Zionist entity's long-time archfoe in the region.

SANA had earlier reported that "our air defense systems confronted enemy targets in the vicinity of Damas-

cus", Iran's Nour news agency said "Hossein Akbari, ambassador of the Islamic Republic of Iran in Damascus, and his family were not harmed in the (Zionist) attack". The ambassador later said that "the (Zionist) attack on the Iranian consulate shows the reality of the Zionist entity which recognizes no international laws and does all that is inhumane to achieve its goals". Akbari told Iranian state TV that "at least 5 people were killed in the attack which was carried out by F35 fighter jets".

Syrian Foreign Minister Faisal Mekdad denounced the attack after visiting the site. "We strongly condemn this heinous terrorist attack that targeted the Iranian consulate building in Damascus killing a number of innocent people," Mekdad said in a statement carried by official news agency SANA. The Damascus strike came three days after the Observatory reported Zionist strikes that killed 53 people in Syria, including 38 soldiers and seven members of Hezbollah. It was the highest Syrian army toll in Zionist strikes since the Zionist-Hamas war began, said the monitor. — AFP



DAMASCUS: Emergency and security personnel gather at the site of strikes which hit a building adjacent to the Iranian embassy in the Syrian capital on April 1, 2024. — AFP

International

Senior Indian opposition leader moved to jail ahead of election

India opposition holds massive rally in Delhi, decries 'autocracy'

NEW DELHI: Senior opposition Indian politician Arvind Kejriwal was moved to a high-security prison Monday after his arrest last month, a case supporters say is politically motivated and that comes ahead of elections. Kejriwal, 55, chief minister of the capital Delhi, had been held since his arrest on March 21 by the Enforcement Directorate, India's main financial crimes agency.

On Monday he was transferred to prison for 14 days as investigations continue, his party said. "Arvind Kejriwal has been sent to judicial custody for 14 days," Sanjeev Nasir, legal chief of the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), or Common Man Party, told reporters.

Kejriwal's government is accused of receiving kickbacks while handing out liquor licenses to private companies. His supporters say Kejriwal's arrest was aimed at sidelining challengers to Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Kejriwal, who denies the allegations, is a key leader in an opposition alliance formed to challenge Modi in the marathon six-week national elections beginning April 19.

AAP's Nasir said this party can now apply for bail for Kejriwal, but it was not immediately clear what will happen once the initial 14 days in prison comes to an end—just days before voting begins.

Meanwhile, top leaders of India's opposition coalition and thousands of supporters rallied in the capital Sunday, decrying "autocracy" in protest at

the arrest of a senior colleague ahead of general elections.

"The country is headed towards autocracy," Shiv Sena party leader Uddhav Thackeray, a former chief minister of Maharashtra state, told cheering crowds on Sunday. "This one-man government is taking the country to ruin." Nearly a billion Indians will vote to elect a new government in six-week-long parliamentary elections starting on April 19, the largest democratic exercise in the world. Many analysts see Modi's re-election under his Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) banner as a foregone conclusion, partly due to the resonance of his assertive Hindu-nationalist politics with members of India's majority faith.

Several leaders of the two dozen political parties of the INDIA opposition alliance—the Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance—addressed the crowd. "This is a fight to save India," Congress party leader Rahul Gandhi said. "If the BJP comes back to power, they will discard the constitution." Kejriwal's wife Sunita read out what she said was a message from the arrested leader. "I want us together to build a new India where there is justice for everyone," she read.

India's main financial investigation agency, the Enforcement Directorate, which arrested Kejriwal, has launched probes into at least four other state chief ministers or their family members. While Modi enjoys high levels of support, critics accuse



JABALPUR: People wave India's national flag as they take part in 'Ahimsa Run' (nonviolence run) during a campaign to create awareness for citizens to vote, ahead of the country's upcoming national elections in Jabalpur on March 31, 2024. — AFP

him of using law enforcement agencies to intimidate opposition leaders.

All the investigations involve political opponents of Modi's ruling BJP. Many in the flag-waving crowd were supporters of Kejriwal's Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), or

Common Man Party, who donned yellow tops with the image of their leader in jail.

"We are here to express our support for Kejriwal, who has been arrested under a conspiracy," said Sandeep Singh, 45, who drove overnight from Punjab, the Sikh-ma-

majority state north of Delhi that AAP controls. Congress supporter S K Vidhyarthi, 70, a retired teacher from Delhi, said "democracy in India is under threat". "What has happened to Kejriwal today can happen to us tomorrow," he said. — AFP

NEWS IN BRIEF

Japan Moon probe put to sleep

TOKYO: Japan's valiant Moon lander was put to sleep again after unexpectedly surviving its second ultra-chilly long lunar night, the space agency said Monday. The Smart Lander for Investigating Moon (SLIM) -- dubbed the "Moon Sniper" for its landing precision—touched down in January, making Japan only the fifth nation to achieve a soft lunar landing. But the unmanned lightweight spacecraft, carrying a mini-rover that moves like a turtle, landed at a wonky angle that left its solar panels facing the wrong way. Defying pessimistic predictions, the probe was revived in late February once the lunar night—which lasts about 14 Earth days—ended. —AFP

Heatwave sweeps Greece again

ATHENS: Thick clouds of dust blown in from the Sahara once again covered Greek skies Monday, especially Athens and Thessalonika, with temperatures rising as high as 31°C (88°F). The dust storms, which had already affected Greece last week as well as regions such as Switzerland and Southern France, made breathing difficult for many people. A high of 26°C was forecast in the capital Athens Monday, which public television station ERT described as conditions more akin to May. Thermometers in the south of the Peloponnese and on the island of Euboea near Athens are expected to hit 31°C Monday. Asthma sufferers and other vulnerable people "should avoid outdoor exercise as well as strenuous manual labor," Stamatoula Tsirikas, head of the Greek Pulmonologists' Union, told ERT. — AFP

UK Channel crossings hit a record

LONDON: Channel arrivals on small boats to the UK hit a record in the first quarter of 2024 with a nearly 42 percent rise over last year, the interior ministry said Monday. British officials processed 5,373 migrants landing on the shores of southeast England in the first three months of the year after crossing the Channel in small vessels, it said. This compares to 3,793 making the perilous journey from January to March in 2023 -- a 41.7 percent rise and the highest figure ever for the opening quarter of any year. Nearly 800 arrived on 16 small boats over just the Easter weekend. This is a serious political problem for Prime Minister Rishi Sunak in a general election year, after the embattled Conservative leader repeatedly vowed to "stop the boats". — AFP

Search for 13 miners in Russia ends

MOSCOW: Russian emergency workers on Monday ended a rescue operation at a mine in the country's Far East where 13 workers are presumed dead after an accident two weeks ago, state media reported. A landslide on 18 March at the Pioneer gold mine in Russia's Amur region near the Chinese border pinned the miners more than 120 metres (about 400 feet) underground. Initial search operations showed caverns where they could have been sheltering were flooded, raising fears the 13 had been killed in the landslide. "On 1 April, a decision was made to terminate the rescue operation at the Pioneer mine," operator Pokrovsky Mine said in a statement cited by the Interfax news agency. — AFP

Japan's royal family makes Instagram debut

TOKYO: Japan's royal family is now on Instagram—but don't expect any candid selfies from its official account, which went live Monday in a cautious social media debut for the ancient monarchy. The first 19 posts are formally staged photos and videos of Emperor Naruhito and Empress Masako carrying out royal duties at recent public appearances.

Nonetheless, more than 160,000 users have followed the Imperial Household Agency (IHA) account, which was announced a week ago but set to private until Monday.

The Japanese monarchy has mythological origins stretching back more than two millennia, and any public criticism of the emperor remains taboo in the country. By joining social media, the institution hopes to spark interest among younger generations

Pakistani who filmed sister's 'honor' killing arrested

ISLAMABAD: A Pakistani man who allegedly filmed his brother strangling their sister to death has been arrested as part of the latest "honor" killing that has outraged the country, police said Sunday. Maria Bibi, 22, was killed overnight on March 17, allegedly by her brother Muhammad Faisal and in the presence of her father Abdul Sattar, near Toba Tek Singh town in the central-eastern province of Punjab.

A video filmed by the woman's other brother She-

baz, and which has gone viral, appears to show Faisal strangling the girl on a bed in the family home while their father sat nearby. At one point, the video appears to show Shehbaz saying "father, tell him to let go", but is rebuffed as his brother continues to strangle the motionless body for more than two minutes.

When Faisal is done, his father offers him water to drink. "The police found out on March 24 that the girl had not died of natural causes. We registered a case, becoming the complainants ourselves," Ata Ullah, a police official in Toba Tek Singh told AFP by phone. Sattar and Faisal were immediately arrested, while Shehbaz was arrested on Saturday evening to determine the extent of his involvement, the officer said.

The murder had all the hallmarks of an "honor" killing, he added. Shehbaz's wife, who also appears in the video, has also been arrested. Much of Pakistani soci-

ety operates under a strict code of "honor", with women beholden to their male relatives over choices around education, employment and who they can marry. Hundreds of women are killed by men in Pakistan every year for allegedly breaching this code. According to the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan, 316 "honor" crimes against women were recorded in the country in 2022. But many cases go unreported, as families tend to protect the murderers - often male relatives. The motive for the murder has not yet been established.

Police said that Faisal, the killer, allegedly caught his sister talking on a video call with an unknown man on several occasions. The chief minister of Punjab province, Maryam Nawaz, has designated the matter as "high-profile", a term used for cases of public interest, although the legal system still allows for men to murder women with impunity. — AFP

Taiwan's ex-leader Ma begins 'peace journey' to China

TAIPEI: Taiwan's former president Ma Ying-jeou headed to China on Monday for what he called a "journey of peace" aimed at cooling cross-strait tensions.

China claims democratic Taiwan as part of its territory and has never renounced the use of force to bring the self-ruled island under its control. Ma, of the Beijing-friendly Kuomintang party, oversaw an improvement in cross-strait ties during his 2008-2016 stint in office, culminating in a summit between him and Chinese President Xi Jinping in Singapore in 2015.

But China has intensified pressure on Taipei ever since Ma was succeeded in 2016 by Tsai Ing-wen, who rejects Beijing's claim to the island. Tensions have further risen since January, when Tsai's deputy Lai Ching-te—whom Beijing regards as a "dangerous separatist"—was elected to succeed her.

Speaking to reporters at the airport before his departure, Ma described his trip to China as "a journey of peace and a journey of friendship". "I hope that when the situation across the Taiwan Strait is tense, we can convey the sentiments of the Taiwanese people that they love peace, hope for cross-strait exchanges and hope to avoid war," he said. Ma added that he aimed to promote youth exchanges and to "reduce hostility and accumulate goodwill".

Outside the airport, a handful of demonstrators protested against the visit, urging Ma "not to sell out Taiwan". Last year, Ma made the first visit to

China by a current or former Taiwanese leader in more than seven decades in a bid to improve the "cross-strait atmosphere".

On Monday, he said that trip "proved that this method is feasible and we can resolve cross-strait confrontation through building friendship between young people on both sides".

Ma is leading a delegation of 20 Taiwanese students, and will visit tech companies, universities and historical sites in Guangdong and Shaanxi provinces before arriving in Beijing on Sunday. Asked to comment on Taiwanese media reports that Ma might meet with Xi again during the visit, the former leader's spokesman said it remained to be seen. "Since we have the opportunity to go to Beijing, former president Ma also hopes to meet old friends. But everything depends on the mainland side's arrangements since we are guests," Hsiao Hsu-tsen told reporters. — AFP



TAOYUAN CITY, Taiwan: Taiwan's former president Ma Ying-jeou (center) speaks to journalists ahead of his visit to China at the Taoyuan International Airport in Taoyuan on April 1, 2024. — AFP



TOKYO: This photo illustration taken in Tokyo on April 1, 2024 shows a mobile phone displaying the Instagram account of the Imperial Household Agency of Japan, which went live earlier in the day. — AFP

spiry theories. The manipulation of a family photograph the palace released to the media fuelled online speculation over the whereabouts of Catherine, Princess of Wales, who later revealed she had been diagnosed with cancer. — AFP

Landmine blast in Afghanistan kills 9 children

KABUL: Nine children were killed in a blast in southeastern Afghanistan that was caused by a landmine laid during the country's decades of conflict, a provincial official said Monday. The mine went off as a group of young boys and girls were playing with it in the Geru district of Ghazni province on Sunday, said the provincial head of the information and culture department, Hamidullah Nisar.

"An unexploded mine left over from the time of the Russian invasion went off when they were playing with it," Nisar told AFP. "Unfortunately, it killed nine children."

Ghazni police said the children—five girls and four boys—were aged from four to ten years old. Swaths of Afghanistan are littered with unexploded mines, grenades and mortars from decades of conflict, spanning from the Soviet invasion in 1979, the civil war that followed, and the 20-year Taliban insurgency against foreign-backed governments. Violence has reduced dramatically since the Taliban seized power in August 2021, ending their insurgency.

Unexploded ordnance and mines, however, still claim lives regularly, with the International Committee of the Red Cross saying children are the main victims. Also on Sunday, another child died and five other people were wounded when unexploded ordnance went off in Herat province, local police said on social media platform X, formerly Twitter. — AFP

Business

TUESDAY, APRIL 2, 2024

Meta shuts monitoring tool in poll year

Decommissioning of CrowdTangle could disrupt efforts to detect political disinfo

WASHINGTON: A digital tool considered vital in tracking viral falsehoods, CrowdTangle will be decommissioned by Facebook owner Meta in a major election year, a move researchers fear will disrupt efforts to detect an expected firehose of political misinformation.

The tech giant says CrowdTangle will be unavailable after August 14, less than three months before the US election. The Palo Alto company plans to replace it with a new tool that researchers say lacks the same functionality, and which news organizations will largely not have access to. CrowdTangle has been a game-changer for years, offering researchers and journalists crucial real-time transparency into the spread of conspiracy theories and hate speech on influential Meta-owned platforms, including Facebook and Instagram.

Killing off the monitoring tool, a move experts say is in line with a tech industry trend of rolling back transparency and security measures, is a major blow as dozens of countries hold elections this year — a period when bad actors typically spread false narratives more than ever.

In a year where elections are taking place in dozens of countries that are home to almost half the global population, “cutting off access to CrowdTangle will severely limit independent oversight of harms,” Melanie Smith, director of research at the Institute for Strategic Dialogue, told AFP.

“It represents a grave step backwards for social media platform transparency,” Meta is set to replace CrowdTangle with a new Content Library, a technology still under development.

It’s a tool that some in the tech industry, including former CrowdTangle chief executive Brandon Silverman, said is currently not an effective replacement, especially in elections likely to see a proliferation of AI-enabled falsehoods. “It’s an entire new muscle” that Meta is yet to build to protect the integrity of elections, Silverman told AFP, calling for “openness

and transparency.”

In recent election cycles, researchers say CrowdTangle alerted them to harmful activities including foreign interference, online harassment and incitements to violence. By its own admission, Meta—which bought CrowdTangle in 2016 — said that in 2019 elections in Louisiana, the tool helped state officials identify misinformation, such as inaccurate poll hours that had been posted online.

In the 2020 presidential vote, the company offered the tool to US election officials across all states to help them “quickly identify misinformation, voter interference and suppression.”

The tool also made dashboards available to the public to track what major candidates were posting on their official and campaign pages. Lamenting the risk of losing these functions forever, global nonprofit Mozilla Foundation demanded in an open letter to Meta that CrowdTangle be retained at least until January 2025. “Abandoning CrowdTangle while the Content Library lacks so much of CrowdTangle’s core functionality undermines the fundamental principle of transparency,” said the letter signed by dozens of tech watchdogs and researchers.

The new tool lacks CrowdTangle features including robust search flexibility and decommissioning it would be a “direct threat” to the integrity of elections, it added.

Meta spokesperson Andy Stone said the letter’s claims are “just wrong,” insisting the Content Library will contain “more comprehensive data than CrowdTangle” and be made available to academics and non-profit election integrity experts.

Meta, which has been moving away from news across its platforms, will not make the new tool accessible to for-profit media. Journalists have used CrowdTangle in the past to investigate public health crises as well as human rights abuses and natural disasters.

Meta’s decision to cut off journalists comes after



WASHINGTON: A digital tool considered vital in tracking viral falsehoods, CrowdTangle will be decommissioned by Facebook owner Meta in a major election year, a move researchers fear will disrupt efforts to detect an expected firehose of political misinformation.

many used CrowdTangle to report unflattering stories, including its flailing moderation efforts and how its gaming app was overrun with pirated content. CrowdTangle has been a crucial source of data that helped “hold Meta accountable for enforcing its policies,” Tim Harper, a senior policy analyst at the Center for Democracy and Technology, told AFP.

Organizations that debunk misinformation as part of Meta’s third-party fact-checking program, including AFP, will have access to the Content Library.

But other researchers and nonprofits will have to

apply for access or look for expensive alternatives. Two researchers told AFP under condition of anonymity that in one-on-one meetings with Meta officials, they demanded firm commitments from company officials. “While most fact-checkers already working with Meta will have access to the new tool, it’s not super clear if many independent researchers — already worried about losing CrowdTangle’s functionality — will,” Carlos Hernandez-Echevarria, head of the Spanish nonprofit Maldita, told AFP.

“It has generated a lot of concerns.” — AFP

Greece lifts price of popular Golden Visa to fight housing crisis

ATHENS: Greece on Sunday tightened its Golden Visa rules raising the required investment to as much as 800,000 euros in a bid to help ease a housing crisis. The successful program that has attracted thousands of Chinese launched in 2014 granting foreigners a renewable, five-year residence permit in return for a 250,000-euro property investment. The finance ministry announced that from Sunday, the threshold would climb to 800,000 euros in attractive regions, such as Attica, around Athens, Thessaloniki, Mykonos, Santorini and the islands with a population of over 3,100.

In other areas, it would start at 400,000 euros. “These measures are part of the government’s overall housing policy, which aims, in cooperation with the private sector, to ensure affordable and quality housing for all citizens,” Finance Minister Kostis Hatzidakis said.

According to the Bank of Greece data, rents have increased by 20 percent since the country officially exited a near-decade-long crisis in 2018.

Investors must now purchase a property of at least 120 square metres, while for historic property and industrial buildings converted into living accommodation, the cost is 250,000 euros. Migration Ministry data for last year shows record demand with 10,214 applications for initial visa-related ac-



ATHENS: This aerial photograph taken on March 30, 2024 shows the buildings in Athens. Greece tightened its Golden Visa rules raising the required investment total for a third national to secure the residence permit to 250,000-800,000 euros in an effort to alleviate the country’s housing crisis. — AFP

quisitions or renewals.

A total of 5,701 Golden Visa permits were granted in 2023, and 8,800 applications are pending. Investment reached at least one billion euros over the year. However, the Association of Public Limited Companies and Entrepreneurship (SAE/E) has warned that it is “highly doubtful” that the government will achieve its goal of reducing house prices and increasing the

availability of homes for long term rental.

The property market and construction industry faced a severe downturn during the economic crisis that kicked off in 2008. The SAE/E says about 20,000 permanent residence permits have been granted to real estate investors to date. Some 6,405 Chinese nationals bought residence permits in 2021, according to the migration and foreign ministries. — AFP

barrels as of end-February, oil on water hit its second highest level since the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. Trade flow disruptions also boosted bunker fuel use. Longer shipping routes and faster vessel speeds saw Singapore bunkering reach all-time highs. That, along with surging US ethane demand for its petrochemical sector underpins a slight upward revision to our global oil demand expectations for this year by 110 kb/d compared with last month’s Report. World oil demand growth is now forecast at 1.3 mb/d in 2024, down sharply from last year’s 2.3 mb/d expansion.

The slowdown in growth, already apparent in recent data, means that oil consumption reverts towards its historical trend after several years of volatility from the post-pandemic rebound. A weaker economic outlook further tempers oil use, as do efficiency improvements and surging electric vehicle sales. Growth will continue to be heavily skewed towards non-OECD countries, even as China’s dominance gradually fades. The latter’s oil demand growth slows from 1.7 mb/d in 2023 to 620 kb/d in 2024, or from roughly three-quarters to half of the global total, under the gathering weight of a challenging economic environment and slower expansion in its petrochemical sector, the IEA said.

As in 2023, non-OPEC+ oil supply growth will eclipse the oil demand expansion by some margin. Led by the United States, non-OPEC+ production is forecast to rise by 1.6 mb/d in 2024 compared to 2.4 mb/d last year when global oil output climbed by 2 mb/d to 102 mb/d. Substantial gains will also come from Guyana, Brazil and Canada, all forecast to pump at record-highs this year. Together, the non-OPEC+ Americas quartet is set to add 1.3 mb/d of new oil production in 2024.

Global oil demand could rise in Q1 on better outlook: IEA

PARIS: Global oil demand is expected to rise by a higher-than-expected 1.7 mb/d in 1Q24 on an improved outlook for the United States and increased bunkering, said International Energy Agency in a report. While 2024 growth has been revised up by 110 kb/d from last month’s report, the pace of expansion is on track to slow from 2.3 mb/d in 2023 to 1.3 mb/d, as demand growth returns to its historical trend while efficiency gains and EVs reduce use.

World oil production is projected to fall by 870 kb/d in 1Q24 vs 4Q23 due to heavy weather-related shut-ins and new curbs from the OPEC+ bloc. From the second quarter, non-OPEC+ is set to dominate gains after some OPEC+ members announced they would extend extra voluntary cuts to support market stability. Global supply for 2024 is forecast to increase 800 kb/d to 102.9 mb/d, including a downward adjustment to OPEC+ output, the report said.

Refinery crude runs are forecast to rise from a February-low of 81.4 mb/d to a summer peak of 85.6 mb/d in August. For the year as a whole, throughputs are projected to increase by 1.2 mb/d to average 83.5 mb/d, driven by the Middle East, Africa and Asia. Refining margins improved through mid-February before receding, with the US Midcontinent and Gulf Coast as well as Europe leading the gains.

Global observed oil inventories surged by 47.1 mb in February. Offshore stocks dominated gains as sea-



borne exports reached an all-time high and shipping disruptions through the Red Sea tied up significant volumes of oil on water while onshore inventories declined. Global stocks plunged by 48.1 mb in January, with OECD industry stocks at a 16-month low.

Benchmark crude oil prices were range bound in early March, as the market had already priced in the announced extension of OPEC+ voluntary production cuts through 2Q24. North Sea Dated rose by \$2.13/bbl to \$84.66/bbl during February as continued tanker attacks in the Red Sea lengthened supply routes and global on-land oil inventories fell for a seventh consecutive month to reach their lowest level since at least 2016. Global onshore oil stocks fell a further 38 mb last month, taking the draw down since July to 180 mb, according to preliminary data. Over the same period, oil on water surged. Trade dislocations from the rerouting of Russian barrels and more recently due to unrest in the Middle East, have boosted oil on water by 115 mb. In February alone, oil on water surged by 85 mb as repeated tanker attacks in the Red Sea diverted more cargoes around the Cape of Good Hope. At nearly 1.9 billion

CBK bonds and related Tawarruq

KUWAIT: The Central Bank of Kuwait (CBK) announced the most recent issues of CBK bonds and related Tawarruq at a total value of KD 240 million for three months with a rate of return at 4.375 percent.

Gold hits another record high on Fed rate cut bets

HONG KONG: Gold hit another fresh record high Monday as investors grow confident that the Federal Reserve will cut interest rates this year, even after data showed a slight uptick in a key inflation report. The precious metal has enjoyed healthy buying interest this year as the US central bank hints at an easing of credit conditions.

It hit a new high of \$2,265.73 on Monday, according to Bloomberg News. On Friday, the closely watched personal consumption expenditures (PCE) index — the Fed’s preferred gauge of inflation — showed a small on-year rise in March compared with February, though the core reading eased slightly.

Federal Reserve chair Jerome Powell said the report was “pretty much in line with our expectations” and decision-makers were on track to hit their long-term inflation target of two percent.

He said that, while the recent inflation data was higher than the Fed would have liked, the February figures were “definitely more along the lines of what we want to see”. The data appeared to have little impact on traders’ expectations for a June interest rate cut, though Powell warned they were unlikely to fall to the levels seen after the 2008 global financial crisis.

Adding to the upward pressure on prices is its demand as a safe haven in times of turmoil owing to growing geopolitical tensions, with concerns that Zionist entity’s war on Hamas in Gaza will spread further. An air strike in Lebanon on Sunday stoked further tensions, with Israel saying a Hezbollah missile unit commander had been “eliminated”. — AFP



HONG KONG: Gold hit another fresh record high Monday as investors grow confident that the Federal Reserve will cut interest rates this year.

Business

Gulf Bank partners with KRCS to support 'Aid Palestine' campaign

Support part of bank's ongoing Ramadan initiatives

KUWAIT: As part of its various initiatives during the holy month of Ramadan, Gulf Bank announced its support for the charitable campaign organized by the Kuwait Red Crescent Society (KRCS) under the slogan "Aid Palestine", in response to the efforts of the state and civil society institutions aiming to alleviate the suffering of people affected by the war in Gaza. This announcement was made during a visit by a team from Gulf Bank to the headquarters of the Kuwait Red Crescent

Najla Al-Eisa: Our support for the 'Aid Palestine' campaign is part of a series of charitable initiatives during the holy month of Ramadan

Society. The team comprised Salma Al-Hajjaj, Gulf Bank's General Manager of Human Resources; Mohammed Al-Qattan, Gulf Bank's General Manager of Consumer Banking; and Najla Al-Eisa, Gulf Bank's Chief Marketing Officer. They were warmly received by the Director General of the Kuwait Red Crescent Society,

Abdulrahman Al-Aoun.

On this occasion, Najla Al-Eisa, Gulf Bank's Deputy General Manager-Chief Marketing Officer said: "At Gulf Bank, we are committed to lending a helping hand to our brothers and sisters in Gaza during these difficult times. Through our partnership with the Kuwait Red Crescent Society, which serves as a representative of Kuwait and its people in global humanitarian concerns, we aim to make a meaningful difference." She emphasized that Gulf Bank continues its strong commitment to sustainability programs, at societal, economic, and environmental levels, through numerous carefully selected initiatives that benefit both the bank and the community; aligning with its 2025 strategy, and in accordance with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals and Kuwait Vision 2035.

Al-Eisa highlighted Gulf Bank's dedication as a financial institution to support impactful civil society organizations like the Kuwait Red Crescent, acknowledging their significant social and humanitarian contributions. The bank firmly believes in the pivotal role of the private sector in aiding civil society organizations' endeavors across all humanitarian fronts. She further stated that the contribution to support



Officials of Gulf Bank and Kuwait Red Crescent Society pose for a group photo.

the Kuwait Red Crescent Society's campaign is part of a series of charitable initiatives launched by Gulf Bank during the holy month of Ramadan, including the distribution of food baskets "Machlat Ramadan", "Nuqsat Al-Khaleej", and others.

Gulf Bank's vision is to be the leading Kuwaiti Bank of the Future. The Bank is constantly engaging and empowering its

employees as part of an inclusive and diversified workplace in recognition of every employee's role in delivering customer excellence and serving the community at large. With its extensive network of branches and innovative digital services, Gulf Bank is able to give its customers the choice of how and where to conduct their banking transactions, all while ensuring a simple and

seamless banking experience. Gulf Bank is committed to maintaining robust developments in sustainability at environmental, social and governance levels through diverse sustainability initiatives, strategically selected to benefit the Bank both internally and externally. Gulf Bank supports Kuwait Vision 2035 "New Kuwait" and works with various parties to achieve it.

GCC markets bounce back

DUBAI: GCC stock markets were seeing positive performances overall as they started a potential rebound after a period of price corrections. If they maintain their uptrend, oil prices could help support a rebound in the region. The Saudi stock market experienced volatility on Monday as it stabilized to a certain extent after a period of correction. The energy and banking sectors showed mixed results, with Aramco remaining stable, whereas Al-Rajhi and other banks were declining. The Saudi stock market may begin a rebound following its correction if oil prices continue to climb.

The Dubai stock market was seeing a positive performance after a period of decline. The market was buoyed by the real estate sector, with stocks like Emaar Developments and Emaar Properties leading the gains. However, banking stocks were under some pressure. The market could find support near current levels and could extend its rebound while local economic performance remains strong.

The Abu Dhabi stock market moved to the upside as well, supported by the banking sector. New gains in oil prices could help support the market further. The Qatari stock market closed on a slightly positive note while the overall direction remained bearish. The banking sector supported the market while it rebounded to a certain extent. However, low natural gas prices could continue to be a source of risks.

IMF: Hydrocarbon prices fuel Algerian economic growth

WASHINGTON, DC: The Algerian economy was still emerging from the COVID pandemic when spillovers from Russia's war in Ukraine and recurrent droughts pushed up inflation, while high international hydrocarbon prices boosted government revenue and exports, said the International Monetary Fund in a statement.

The Algerian economy is estimated to have grown by 4.2 percent in 2023, a robust performance owing to a rebound in hydrocarbon production and strong performance in the industry, construction, and service sectors, IMF Executive Board, said in the statement after concluding its Article IV Consultation with Algeria.

The external position remained solid with a current account surplus for the second year in a row. However, inflation pressures persisted (primarily due to high food prices) and monetary policy remained accommodative. The fiscal deficit is estimated to have widened, albeit less than foreseen in the 2023 revised budget because of relatively slow execution rates. The near-term outlook is broadly positive, but inflation remains a concern. Real growth is forecast to remain strong in 2024, at 3.8 percent, supported in part by large fiscal spending. Inflation would start to decelerate, particularly thanks to easing fresh food prices, although entrenchment at a relatively elevated level is a concern. The current account surplus is projected to narrow further in 2024 as hydrocarbon prices decline.

Medium-term economic prospects hinge on efforts to diversify the economy and the ability to attract private investment, and are subject to several risks. Risks on the downside include stubborn inflation, volatility in international hydrocarbon prices,

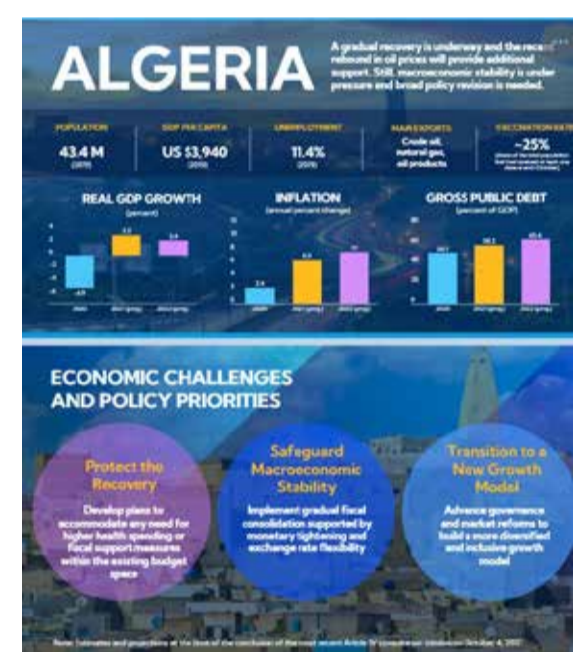
fiscal risks from contingent liabilities, large budgetary financial needs, and rising public debt. Extreme climate events would affect the economy and the budget while a disorderly energy transition is a longer-term risk. On the upside, sustained, bold, and deep structural reforms and resolute efforts to diversify the economy, improve the business climate, attract investment, and tap new export markets could spur growth and job creation further, the statement further said.

The executive directors agreed with the thrust of the staff appraisal. They welcomed Algeria's sustained solid growth and external position, despite multiple economic headwinds. While the near-term outlook is broadly positive, inflation remains high and downside risks, including from volatile commodity prices and climate hazards, require continued vigilance. In this context, the directors emphasized that a sound policy mix, accompanied by sustained implementation of reforms to diversify the economy and reduce climate related risks, will be necessary to ensure macroeconomic stability and promote inclusive and sustainable growth.

The directors welcomed the authorities' commitment to medium-term fiscal sustainability. Noting the importance of maintaining social equity, they indicated that the large projected near-term fiscal deficit and financing needs could increase financial, fiscal, and inflationary vulnerabilities. In this vein, they encouraged the authorities to gradually rebalance fiscal policy to help preserve buffers and improve fiscal and debt sustainability, while ensuring targeted support for the most vulnerable.

They also noted that improving public financial management and establishing a rules-based medium-term fiscal framework would help support the authorities' medium term fiscal plans.

The directors emphasized that proactive tightening of monetary policy, through raising the policy rate and reserve ratio, combined with continued liquidity absorption, will help support disinflation-



ary efforts. Strengthening the monetary transmission mechanism and specifying price stability as the primary objective of monetary policy will also be critical. The directors welcomed the adoption of the Monetary and Banking Law aimed at modernizing financial markets and central bank operations and governance. They also underscored that greater exchange rate flexibility would enhance its role as shock absorber.

The directors welcomed the resilience of the banking system. They encouraged the authorities to reinforce bank supervision, monitor NPLs, and strengthen governance of state-owned banks and other SOEs. These will help reduce the systemic risks posed by the intertwined economic and financial links between the government, public enterprises and state-owned banks. Further improvements in financial inclusion will also be critical.

France eyes spent uranium plant to bypass Russia

PARIS: The French government has said it is "seriously" studying the option of building a plant to convert and enrich reprocessed uranium to cut its reliance on Russia following the invasion of Ukraine. The only plant in the world that currently converts reprocessed uranium for use in nuclear power plants is in Russia.

"The option of carrying out an industrial project to convert reprocessed uranium in France is being seriously examined," the French industry and energy ministry told AFP late Thursday.

"The associated conditions are still being studied," the ministry said. The announcement came after French daily Le Monde said that state-owned power utility EDF had no immediate plans to halt uranium trade with Russia, as Moscow's war against Ukraine stretches into its third year.

Environment and climate NGO Greenpeace condemned the continuing uranium trade between Russia and France despite Moscow's invasion of Ukraine, and urged France to cut ties with Russia's state nuclear power company Rosatom. "If Emmanuel Macron wants to have a coherent stance on Ukraine, he must stop the French nuclear industry's collaboration with Rosatom and demand the termination of Russian contracts," Pauline Boyer of Greenpeace France said in a statement to AFP on Friday.

"For the time being, his 'support without limits' for Ukraine has one limit: his business with Rosatom," she said. According to Le Monde, Jean-Michel Quilichini, head of the nuclear fuel division at EDF, said the company planned to continue to "honor" its 2018 contract with Tenex, a Rosatom subsidiary.

The contract stipulates that reprocessed uranium from French nuclear power plants is to be sent to a facility in the town of Seversk (formerly Tomsk-7) in western Siberia to be converted and then re-en-



PARIS: The French government said it is "seriously" studying the option of building a plant to convert and enrich reprocessed uranium to cut its reliance on Russia following the invasion of Ukraine.

riched before being reused in nuclear plants.

Since Russian President Vladimir Putin sent troops into Ukraine in February 2022, the West has imposed several rounds of sanctions on Moscow, but Russia's nuclear power has remained largely unscathed. Contacted by AFP, EDF said it was "maximizing the diversification of its geographical sources and suppliers", without specifying the proportion of its enriched reprocessed uranium supplies that comes from Russia.

Greenpeace said it was "scandalous" that EDF insisted on continuing honoring its agreement with Rosatom. "It is neither legitimate nor ethical for EDF to continue doing business with Rosatom, a company in the service of Vladimir Putin, which has illegally occupied the Zaporizhzhia power plant in Ukraine for over two years, and is participating in the nuclear

threat whipped up by Russia in this war," Boyer said.

EDF said it and several partners were discussing "the construction of a reprocessed uranium conversion plant in Western Europe by 2030". "The fact that the French nuclear industry has never invested in the construction of such a facility on French soil indicates a lack of interest in a tedious and unprofitable industrial process," Greenpeace said in a report in 2021.

It accused France of using Siberia "as a garbage dump for the French nuclear industry". In recent years France has been seeking to resuscitate its domestic uranium reprocessing industry.

In early February, a reactor at the Cruas nuclear power station in southeastern France was restarted using its first recycled uranium fuel load, EDF said at the time. — AFP

Tax the rich: Slow progress on the international front

PARIS: The French government is under pressure from the opposition and its allies to tax the rich to reduce the country's yawning budget deficit.

President Emmanuel Macron's government says it likes the idea, but only if it is done at the international level. There have been a number of initiatives in recent years, but progress has been slow.

More than 140 countries agreed at the end of 2021 to impose a minimum tax on multinational companies under the auspices of the OECD, to combat efforts by firms to shift profits to countries with low rates. Two years later, there has only been limited progress.

One pillar of the reform, a minimum global rate of 15 percent, was implemented on January 1 by several countries, including the European Union. Others like the United States have yet to act. With the United States mired in a presidential election year, little legislative progress is expected. According to the OECD, this tax reform would bring in an additional \$200 billion in revenues per year.

Meanwhile nations have yet to reach agreement on the other pillar, aimed at a fairer distribution of tax revenues of multinationals, notably US tech giants. As the process drags on skepticism has grown, with Italy's Finance Minister Giancarlo Giorgetti recently expressing his "fear the attempt to move towards fair taxation of multinationals on a global level will founder in the impossibility of completing the work".

Brazil, which chairs the G20 this year, called on the group of nations which account for 80 percent of the world's economy to adopt a shared stance on preventing tax-dodging by billionaires by July. French Finance Minister Bruno Le Maire spoke publicly in support of a minimum tax on the wealthy.

There are no details yet on what such a tax would look like, with studies ongoing, and it is unclear how many G20 nations would support the measure. "The fact that these people (billionaires) pay very little in tax has become more and more obvious over the years," French economist Gabriel Zucman told AFP. — AFP

Business

Weyay Bank launches 'Direct Money Request' feature for Jeel cardholders

First-of-its-kind feature in Kuwait revolutionizes digital banking for children

KUWAIT: Weyay Bank by National Bank of Kuwait proudly announces the launch of two innovative additions to its acclaimed Jeel feature, aimed at revolutionizing digital banking for children aged 8 to 14 across Kuwait. With the introduction of "Direct Money Request" and "Request Money Link," Weyay Bank sets a new benchmark in digital banking tailored to the needs of young users and their families.

Direct Money Request empowers young users to seamlessly send money requests from their own app directly to the app of their parent, enabling swift replenishment of their Jeel card within minutes. This streamlined process ensures hassle-free transactions, fostering a sense of independence and financial responsibility among young users.

Alternatively, with the Request Money via Link service enabled by parents, young users gain the ability to generate and send money requests to friends and family members directly from their Weyay app. This feature not only enhances convenience but also fosters financial literacy and responsible spending habits from an early age. Parents can provide consent to switch on and off this feature in the app's settings, empowering the kids to manage their finances with guidance and supervision.

Jeel represents more than just a banking card; it signifies a comprehensive digital family bank-

ing solution. Young users benefit from a meticulously designed card and access to tailored financial services through their dedicated banking application. Meanwhile, parents enjoy full visibility and control over their child's Jeel card and banking activities, ensuring peace of mind and fostering trust in their financial journey. "This milestone marks a paradigm shift in the digital banking industry for children aged 8 to 14 across Kuwait, addressing longstanding gaps in digital banking experiences for young audiences," said Sabeeka Al-Tarkait, Product Owner at Weyay Bank. "By prioritizing transparency and parental oversight, Weyay Bank has redefined the standards of family banking, empowering children and parents alike to navigate the financial landscape with confidence. Additionally, this addition to the Jeel feature fosters financial inclusion for the youth, ensuring that they have access



Sabeeka Al-Tarkait



to digital banking services and resources."

The introduction of Direct Money Request and Request Money Link underscores Weyay Bank's commitment to offering curated access to banking services and promoting financial awareness from an early age. Through these features, young Jeel card-

holders lay the foundation for responsible money management and informed decision-making, setting them on a path towards financial empowerment.

For more information about Weyay Bank and its innovative digital banking solutions, visit www.weyaybank.com.

Confidence slips among Japan's big manufacturers

TOKYO: Confidence among Japan's largest manufacturers slipped after rising for three straight quarters but they remain positive, a key survey showed Monday. The Bank of Japan's Tankan poll showed business confidence declining in March to a reading of plus 11, down from plus 13 three months earlier.

The poll reports the difference between the percentage of firms that are upbeat and those not, with a positive figure meaning more businesses feel optimistic. The headline figure was slightly higher than market expectations of plus 10, and came after hitting plus 13 in December. Meanwhile, optimism grew among non-manufacturers, to plus 34 from plus 32, in the eighth-straight quarterly improvement. It compares with market expectations of plus 32. Big firms expect to increase capital expenditure by 4.0 percent in the fiscal year starting in April, after a 11.5 percent rise in the previous year, the survey showed.

An index measuring job market tightness showed companies of all sizes faced labor shortages, heightening prospects that wage hikes will broaden, analysts say. Companies also expected inflation to stay above the BOJ's 2 percent target one, three, and five years ahead, the tankan showed.

"The employment index underscores a tight job market and corporate inflation expectations remain high," said Atsushi Takeda, chief economist at Itochu Economic Research Institute. "The BOJ should be able to raise rates one more time this year, and possibly twice," he said. There are uncertainties, however, on the outlook. Both big manufacturers and non-manufacturers expect conditions to worsen three months ahead, according to the survey.

Some companies worried about global economic uncertainty and prospects of rising labor costs due to a tight job market, the BOJ official said. An earthquake in Japan on January 1, a halting of production by Toyota subsidiary Daihatsu and the slowing Chinese economy "seem to have been weighing on production activities," economist Tatsuhiro Nakanobu at Mizuho Research and Technologies said in a statement before the release.

Looking ahead, confidence among major manufacturers will likely improve thanks to a recovery in the semiconductor market, but concerns over the European, US and Chinese economies will weigh, Nakanobu said. Japan narrowly avoided a technical recession in the second half of 2023 but economists say the world's fourth-largest economy remains in the doldrums. — AFP

Chinese factory activity up after five-month slump

BEIJING: Monthly factory activity in China grew for the first time in half a year, official figures showed Sunday, in a positive sign for policymakers seeking to revive the world's second-largest economy. The purchasing managers' index (PMI) - a key measure of factory output - came in at 50.8 in March, according to the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), up from 49.1 in February.

A PMI figure above 50 indicates an expansion of activity, while one below that indicates a contraction.

The last expansion in China's monthly PMI was in September, with factory activity consistently negative since then, according to NBS data. A poll by Bloomberg had predicted a return to positive territory in March, though at a more modest level of 50.1.

The increase is an encouraging sign for Beijing, which has struggled to spur an economic rebound

Workers remove first chunk of destroyed Baltimore bridge

BALTIMORE: Workers have lifted out the first, 200-ton chunk of Baltimore's collapsed bridge, officials said Sunday, as efforts get underway to clear the harbor of the steel structure destroyed by an out-of-control ship. Demolition crews using blow torches sliced through the upper part of the Francis Scott Key Bridge, which crumbled when the Dali cargo vessel lost power and struck it on Tuesday, killing six people.

Authorities hope that removing the bridge - by cutting it into smaller sections and lifting them out - will help rescuers recover all the victims' bodies as well as reopen the crucial shipping lane. "The first lift was made last night after the cutting of the top portion of one of the northern sections of the Key Bridge was completed," said US Coast Guard spokeswoman Kimberly Reaves in a statement.

"The piece removed last night was approximately 200 tons," she said, adding it would be moved to a barge that, once filled with additional pieces, would be taken to a debris-holding site on land.

As salvage operations continued Sunday, Maryland Governor Wes Moore said that "progress is beginning to happen despite the fact that it's an incredibly complicated situation." He said adverse weather conditions and underwater debris meant divers were unable to assist.

Moore told CNN that a huge crane - the Chesapeake 1,000 that can lift 1,000 tons - was being used in the salvage operation. However, the multi-agency task force overseeing the operation said two smaller cranes - one weighing 650 tons and another at 330 tons - were actually being used in this work.

Markets mixed after US inflation data

HONG KONG: Asian markets were mixed while gold hit a record high Monday after data showed a slight uptick in US inflation that Federal Reserve boss Jerome Powell said was "in line with expectations". Traders were also cheered by a big jump in Chinese factory activity that fuelled hopes the world's number two economy may be on its way back after bottoming out.

The Dow and S&P 500 ended at records Thursday, with the latter chalking up its best first quarter since 2019. Long-awaited figures on the personal consumption expenditures (PCE) index - the Fed's preferred gauge of inflation - showed a small on-year rise in March compared with February, though the core reading eased slightly.

Powell said the report "is pretty much in line with our expectations" and decision-makers were on track to hit their long-term inflation target of two

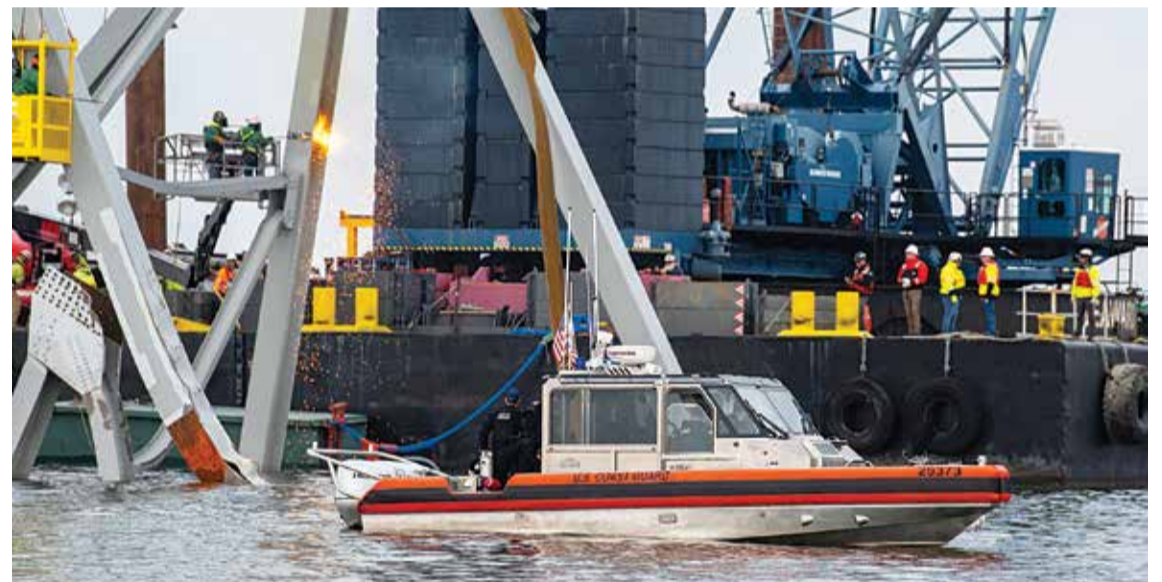
percent. He said that while the recent inflation data was higher than the Fed would have liked, the February figures were "definitely more along the lines of what we want to see". The data appeared to have little impact on traders' expectations for a June interest rate cut but Powell warned they were unlikely to fall to the levels seen after the 2008 global financial crisis.

Friday's news followed a surprise upward revision Thursday to fourth-quarter US economic growth that some observers said could complicate the Fed's plans to cut borrowing costs.

In Asian trade, Seoul, Singapore and Manila rose, while there were losses in Taipei and Jakarta. Hong Kong, Sydney, Wellington, London, Paris and Frankfurt were closed for Easter. Gold hit a record high of \$2,265.73, according to Bloomberg News, extending the year's rally fuelled by US central bank hints at an easing of credit conditions.

since lifting stringent COVID control measures in late 2022. A highly anticipated rebound has faced hurdles including a sustained crisis in the property sector, high youth unemployment and deflationary pressure. A global slowdown, meanwhile, is weakening demand for Chinese products overseas.

Beijing announced in early March its goal of achieving five percent annual growth in 2024, a target considered ambitious by many economists. Authorities have in recent months announced a series of targeted measures and the issuance of sovereign bonds to boost infrastructure spending and revive economic activity - with mixed results. In a positive sign, consumer prices edged up in February for the first time since August, bucking an extended stretch of deflation. China's non-manufacturing PMI - which takes the services sector into account - rose higher in March to 53.0, up from 51.4 the previous month, NBS data showed. The country posted some of its slowest growth in decades last year, strengthening pressure on Beijing to adopt more stimulus measures. China's gross domestic product grew 5.2 percent in 2023, according to an official figure that many economists consider to be an overestimate. That figure was the lowest since the 1990s apart from the pandemic years. — AFP



BALTIMORE, US: Demolition crews cutting the top portion of the north side of the collapsed Francis Scott Key Bridge into smaller sections for safe removal by crane in the Patapsco River, in Baltimore, Maryland, on March 30, 2024. — AFP

Video footage shared Saturday by the Unified Command - the overall response team that includes the US Coast Guard - showed sparks flying as crews suspended in cages cut through an upper section of bridge. Moore said the recovery would be a "long road," adding "but movement is happening."

The difficult conditions have hampered efforts to recover the bodies of the road workers - all Latino immigrants - who died when the bridge collapsed, with just two of six bodies recovered so far. Shipping in and out of Baltimore - one of the United States' busiest ports - has been halted, with the waterway impassable due to the sprawling wreckage.

Moore told MSNBC on Sunday that his priorities were recovering the victims' bodies before reopen-

ing the channel. "It's impacting the nation's economy. It's the largest port for new cars, heavy trucks, agricultural equipment. It's impacting people all over the country," he said.

The ship veered towards the bridge due to power trouble, with the pilot issuing a Mayday call that allowed some road traffic to be stopped just before the collision at 1:30am after which the structure collapsed in seconds. Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg told "Face the Nation" on CBS that there was no timeline to clear the harbor and reopen the port.

"It takes a lot to make sure that it can be dismantled safely, to make sure that the vessel stays where it is supposed to be and doesn't swing out into the channel, but it has to be done," he said. — AFP



TOKYO: People stand in front of an electronic board displaying stock prices of Nikkei 225 listed on the Tokyo Stock Exchange along a street in Tokyo. — AFP

It is also being supported by its attraction as a safe haven in times of turmoil, with geopolitical tensions growing. Shanghai jumped around one percent as traders welcomed news that China's manufacturing grew for the first time in half a year, giving a boost to leaders as they battle to kickstart the struggling economy.

The 50.8 reading in March was the first showing expansion since September and was well above forecasts. "The

industrial sector seems to be resilient, partly helped by strong exports," said Zhang Zhiwei at Pinpoint Asset Management. "If fiscal spending rises and exports remain strong, the economic momentum may improve." But Tokyo sank more than one percent as the Bank of Japan's closely watched Tankan survey showed that confidence among Japan's largest manufacturers slipped in the first quarter, having risen for three straight quarters. — AFP



Employees in China work on an assembly line producing speakers at a factory in Fuyang in China's eastern Anhui province. — AFP

Lifestyle

TUESDAY, APRIL 2, 2024



Emiratis battle to preserve dying art of embroidery

Far from Dubai's glitzy towers, Mariam Al-Kalbani's henna-dyed fingers weave brightly coloured threads in a skill she hopes young Emirati women watching her can preserve for the future. The art of hand-weaving braided shiny ribbons to adorn traditional clothing and bags is called Al Talli, and is on UNESCO's Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity list. But

itage for the next generation," she said. She emphasized that mastering Al Talli doesn't happen "in a couple of hours - AFP it could take a year or two, especially if training is done just once a week". Kalbani has been weaving Al Talli since she was a teenager. The simplest Al Talli designs are made from six threads - although they can number up to 50 - and mastering the

also pursuing her studies. No precise information on Al Talli's origins exists.

But Mohamed Hassan Abdel Hafez, a cultural heritage expert at the Sharjah Institute for Heritage, said it has been passed down through multiple generations, "at least from grandparents to grandchildren", in line with UNESCO's listing requirements.

"In the field of intangible cultural

At the main square in Al Ain, American Katie Gaimer watched men performing the traditional Ayalah dance, wielding bamboo sticks or unloaded rifles to the rhythm of folk songs. The 35-year-old teacher said she and her friends had just enjoyed an Al Talli workshop, where they had a free lesson on how to make bracelets. "It kind of felt like we were making friendship bracelets... it was fun and it was nice to learn from somebody teaching it in a traditional way," she said.



An Emirati woman weaves thread in the Al Talli method.



A drawing of an Emirati woman practicing Al Talli, a traditional local embroidery technique, is painted on a parking meter in Dubai.

'Worth preserving'

Elsewhere, women produced various items including Sadu fabric, which is used for tents, carpets and camel saddles, and is also listed by UNESCO.

Aisha Al-Dhaheri, who works to promote traditional crafts at the Department of Culture and Tourism in Abu Dhabi, said authorities hope to support Al Talli by licensing certified experts to expand production and teaching. "It's considered at risk of disappearance, so we tried to expedite preservation efforts by organizing training courses," she said.

Accounting student Ketbi believes that young women these days "are not very interested" in learning craft techniques from long ago. But she still considers preserving them worthwhile "out of love for the country".

Those who can even remember the UAE before its vertiginous ascent into modernity are increasingly few, however. Emiratis make up just 10 percent of the federation's 10 million inhabitants, and overwhelmingly the young are focused on the digital future, less so the often impoverished past.

At one shop in the festival area, octogenarian Kulthum Al-Mansouri sold bags, incense burners, bracelets, necklaces, medals and key chains - all adorned with Al Talli which she herself braided under the eyes of passers-by. She said she felt saddened that young women seem less interested in Al Talli than ever, distracted as they were "by screens and phones".

But she still hoped the skill could be passed on because her generation cannot maintain it forever. "For how long do we have left to live?" she said. — AFP



An Emirati vendor selling dresses sits in his shop during an annual heritage festival in Al-Ain.



An Emirati woman weaves thread in the Al Talli method.

with the relentless pace of change in the United Arab Emirates, its days may be numbered. "It's a craft of our ancestors and our people," Kalbani told AFP in Al Ain, the UAE's fourth largest city, which sits between mountains and the desert.

"If we do not take initiative and introduce it to them, it will disappear." The 70-year-old craftswoman, wearing a traditional black abaya robe and golden face covering, has been training students and apprentices in the art for 15 years. "The goal is to revive the her-

process of combining them with beads, ornaments and precious metals such as gold can take a long time.

'Rare and special'

Accounting student Reem al-Ketbi watched Kalbani intently as she worked on a round cushion called a Mousadah, weaving a silver thread back and forth during a recent handicrafts festival. "Every time I see Al Talli, I remember the Emirati identity - it's something rare and special," said the 23-year-old, who began learning the craft last year while

heritage, it is very difficult to determine the exact date or when it historically began," he said. However, the UAE authorities are working to preserve traditions that date from before the development of the oil industry in the country.

Kalbani laments that her own daughters did not take up the craft, but smiled as her three-year-old granddaughter beside her asked questions about the braids and threads.

Al Talli was not the only tradition being highlighted at the Crafts and Traditional Industries Festival.



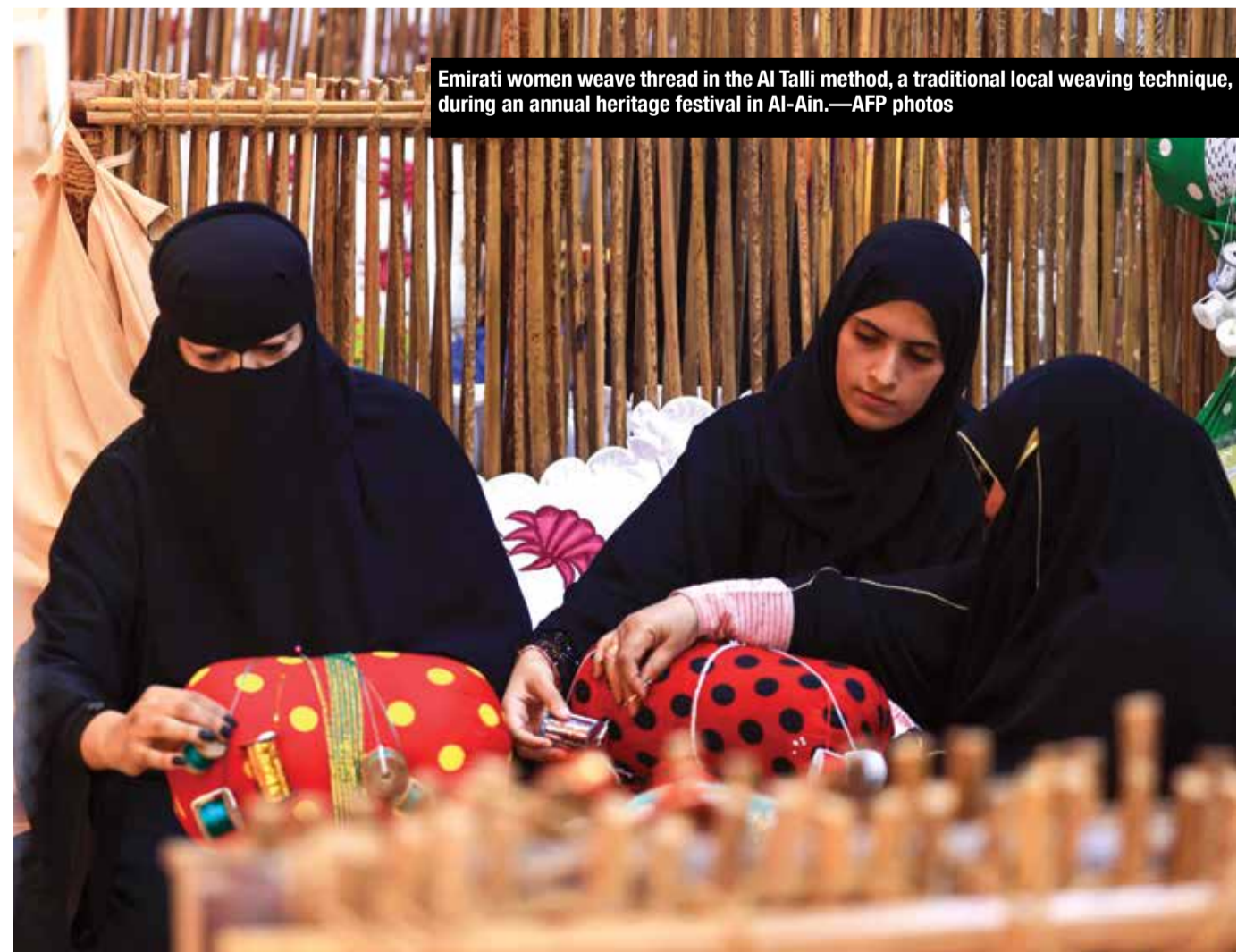
An Emirati woman weaves palm fronds during an annual heritage festival in Al-Ain.



An Emirati woman weaves thread in the Al Talli method.



An Emirati woman sews during an annual heritage festival in Al-Ain.



Emirati women weave thread in the Al Talli method, a traditional local weaving technique, during an annual heritage festival in Al-Ain.—AFP photos

Lifestyle



People take a selfie in front of independent bookstore 'Mount Zero' on its last day of business in Hong Kong.--AFP photos



This photo shows a man reading a book outside independent bookstore 'Mount Zero' in Hong Kong.



A visitor writes a goodbye note to independent bookstore 'Mount Zero' on its last day of business in Hong Kong.

Hong Kong book lovers mourn store closure after constant complaints

In a quiet Hong Kong cul-de-sac, hundreds gathered over the weekend to say goodbye to an independent bookstore after weekly government inspections spurred by anonymous complaints forced it to put up the shutters. Mount Zero said it would close at the end of March after constant complaints to authorities, which had accused it of illegally occupying government land by tiling a pavement in front of the store, with the threat of fines and jail time.

Since Hong Kong imposed a national security law in 2020 the city's cultural sector has been hit by censorship fears, and the handful of bookstores that remain say they are operating in an environment of increasing pressure. "Authorities often say Hong Kong will go back to normal... (But) these things will haunt our lives," said political scientist Ivan Choy, who attended the gathering.

Hong Kong recently enacted a second national security law, which critics fear will further drive pro-democracy sentiments underground and chill cul-



tural and artistic freedoms. The city's government has rejected allegations the laws curtail freedom of expression. But Mount Zero has lived through dramatic political change since its

founding six years ago and book lovers mourned that the liberal-minded bookstore had seemingly become a victim of that shift. Leo, a 20-year-old student who declined to give his last name, said

he worried "the categories of books allowed for sale would be restricted", hurting other independent bookstores. "These bookstores are spots for book lovers to get together, so it's a pity to lose it," he said.

'Ideas are bulletproof'

Mount Zero often hosted cultural events such as book talks in its outdoor area and gained a devoted following. Margaret Ng, a barrister and former pro-democracy politician, said the two-storey bookstore had offered like-minded readers a vital place to gather. "You can see in Mount Zero the aspirations of the young people to express themselves in literature and to form their own community," she said.

But several independent bookstores in December reported spikes in government inspections, some prompted by anonymous complaints including fire safety and labor regulations. Announcing its closure last year, Mount Zero said it hoped "the mysterious complainant can take a break" after it

received weekly visits from different government departments.

"The time saved can be used to sit down and read a book properly," it said. AFP could not independently verify the nature of the complaints.

Some Mount Zero supporters said the government should not quash spaces for bookworms. "If the government wants more people to stay in Hong Kong, they must think about whether there are still places in this city where we can stay," said Choy. Below a mosaic sign that read "Ideas are bulletproof", sweet green pea soup and barbecue pork were passed around in the bookshop's final hours.

As night fell, the store's lights dimmed and readers lamenting its loss said the impact on the local community would not be forgotten. "What really counts in the case of Mount Zero is not a particular bookshop," said Ng. "It's the spirit, and that spirit is unvanquished."--AFP



This photograph shows a vinyl of a compilation of the nightclub Fuse on a turntable at the record shop "Doctor Vinyl" in central Brussels.



Geert Sermon, owner of record shop "Doctor Vinyl" poses for a portrait in his store in central Brussels.



A photo shows vinyl records at the record shop "Doctor Vinyl" in central Brussels.

The sound and the fury: Famed Brussels nightclub sees off noise complaints

For 30 years, the Brussels nightclub Fuse has stood as a temple to Europe's legions of electro-techno fans, a venue where the likes of Daft Punk and Aphex Twin set the concrete-walled dancefloor thumping. Those thumps, though, are increasingly the source of tensions with neighbors who want more restful nights. It's a tussle—between youthful cultural exuberance and city-centre gentrification, a clash of generations and lifestyles—seen in many of the world's capitals.

And it's one that hangs heavy over Fuse as it celebrates its three decades of existence. Throughout 2024 the nightclub is emphasizing its cultural status by bringing out a memorial book and a vinyl compilation by top artists. It is also kicking off a global club tour of 10 cities that will include Amsterdam, Berlin, Barcelona and London, all under the banner "30 years of making noise".

The celebration is backed by big-name sponsors such as Brussels city politicians who hold Fuse up as a world-class "monument". Yet some residents in Fuse's Marolles district—a formerly working-class neighborhood gone hipster—would be happier to see all that as a crescendo before a definitive fade to silence. "It's tougher and tougher for clubs to exist in city centers," said DJ Pierre—real name Pierre Noisiez—who is one of a roster filling Fuse with sound since it started in 1994. "If you get rid of them, you end up with a city centre that is dead, which no-one wants," he said.

Noise complaints

The club's management has lashed out at noise complaints being made that threaten "the oldest techno club in Belgium". Fuse was forced to close for three weeks in January 2023 after complaints from one neighbor prompted authorities to swoop in with noise restrictions. "It really breaks my heart," DJ Charlotte de Witte, a Belgian who



DJ 'Avalon Emmerson' performs during her set at the Fuse nightclub in Brussels.

is one of the global stars of the techno scene, said of the order.

Since then, there have been "two new complaints from neighbors", the club's artistic director, Steven Van Belle, told AFP, who said the problem was not going away. "It's still a hot topic but the authorities are working on more protections for us," he said. Last year's January closure triggered a spectacular backlash uniting artists, nightclub goers and politicians.

Several months later, in July 2023, "clubbing" culture was added to the list of intangible heritage for the Brussels region—alongside beer and Belgium's "fritkot" stands that sell French fries. The symbolic move was a direct consequence of Fuse's dilemma.

Neighbors 'have to adapt'

Closing Fuse would have "imperilled all nightlife" in Brussels, said an aide to the official, Ans Persoons, in charge of the city's heritage. With the listing, "the neighbors also have to

adapt to what is considered part of the heritage". The classification—which is distinct from the internationally recognized UNESCO heritage list—applies to "at least 100 places" in the Brussels region, according to the nightlife federation that lobbied for it.

Some 20 Belgian nightclubs, late-hour bars, concert venues and open-air dance festivals round out the list. To balance their activity—which often spurs the local economy in the areas they are located in—against living standards other residents are entitled to, Brussels regional authorities have drawn up new urban rules to be followed. They cover planning permits and sound isolation requirements, as well as obligations for the venue's users—and for direct neighbors. Van Belle said he was awaiting formalization of those rules, to see them become law once they are voted on by the regional parliament.--AFP

'Godzilla x Kong' tops North America box office with \$80 million haul

"Godzilla x Kong: The New Empire" roared to the top of the North American box office on its debut weekend, pulverizing competition with a huge \$80 million haul in ticket sales, according to industry watcher Exhibitor Relations. "The final numbers may change by Monday, but whatever they are, this is a fantastic opening," analyst David A. Gross said, with ticket sales 2.5 times the average for a sequel to a monster flick.

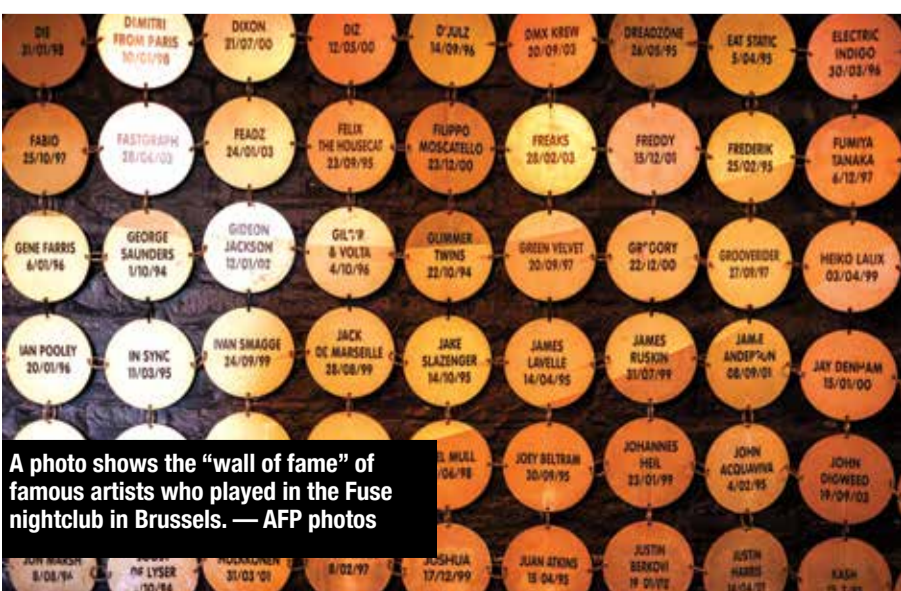
The enormous gorilla and reptilian giant set their differences aside in the movie, teaming up to save their species and humans in the latest MonsterVerse installment. In second place with an estimated \$15.7 million was "Ghostbusters: Frozen Empire," co-written by Jason Reitman, whose father Ivan Reitman directed the original "Ghostbusters" in 1984.



The film teams a new cadre of ghost catchers (Paul Rudd, Carrie Coon) with the veterans (Bill Murray, Dan Aykroyd, Ernie Hudson) as they take on a frightening deity trying to launch a new Ice Age. Meanwhile, Warner Bros.' sci-fi epic "Dune: Part Two," about war and survival on an inhospitable sand-covered planet, managed third place, taking in an estimated \$11.1 million for the Friday-through-Sunday period.

In fourth, dropping one spot from last weekend, was Universal and DreamWorks Animation's martial arts comedy "Kung Fu Panda 4," at \$10.2 million. "Immaculate," a new psychological horror film from indie studio Neon and starring Sydney Sweeney, placed fifth at \$3.3 million. Rounding out the top 10 were: "Tillu Square" (\$2.5 million) "Arthur the King" (\$2.4 million) "Late Night With the Devil" (\$2.2 million) "Crew" (\$1.7 million) "Imaginary" (\$1.4 million)

--AFP



A photo shows the "wall of fame" of famous artists who played in the Fuse nightclub in Brussels. — AFP photos



A photo shows the facade of the Fuse nightclub in Brussels.



People attend the annual Easter Parade and Bonnet Festival on Fifth Avenue in front of St Patrick's Cathedral in New York on March 31, 2024. — AFP photos



New York city's Easter Parade, where spring's in full bloom



New York City welcomed a hint of spring, with a bit of warm sun that turned this year's Easter Parade and Bonnet Festival into a rousing success. Fifth Avenue was filled with magnificent hat wearers, sauntering up and down 5th Avenue with charm and excitement that rivaled children who might be scouring parks for Easter egg hunts. A recurring cast of milliners and costumed spectators trading nods with the more casual participants — who found creative ways to create their own grand impressions — was a particular delight to see.



Sports

How period tracking could boost performance of female Olympians

Male coaches still embarrassed to talk about menstrual cycles

PARIS: French swimmer Caroline Jousse has been keeping track of her periods using her phone over the last year, collecting information for her coaches ahead of competing in the Paris Olympics this summer. The data helps her plan the best time to work on building her muscles, which is ideally in the middle and at the end of her menstrual cycle when her testosterone levels are at their highest.

"It's important to know when my testosterone peaks are, because that is when you feel your best and will be at your strongest in training," said the 29-year-old, who will compete in the 10-km open water event at the Paris Games. Research in sport focuses overwhelmingly on male athletes, and the effect menstrual cycles have on athletic performance remains under-studied.

Hoping to address this gap, France's National Institute of Sport (INSEP) launched a program called Empow'her in 2020 to track and learn from the menstrual cycles of athletes. "There is no need to be

embarrassed about your cycle — it is part of performance, just like nutrition or training," said INSEP gynecologist Carole Maitre.

For six months last year, Jousse's training sessions were analyzed daily. Her hormonal, cardiac and psychological data was then compared to the different stages of her menstrual cycle. "Before starting the program, I was not aware that there were all these phases," said Jousse, who is currently doing 10 swimming and three weight training sessions every week.

French cross-country skier Juliette Ducordeau said the Empow'her program helped her understand her body better, as well as identify "quite impressive trends" in her performance. "The optimal times for my training sessions are during the ovulation phase, from the first to the 15th day of the cycle," the 25-year-old said. The last few days were more laborious, she added.

Lack of research

Since launching in 2020, 130 French sportswomen

have participated in Empow'her, which hopes to help fill in significant gaps in scientific research about the female body. The head of the program, Juliana Antero, said that just nine percent of sports science studies published in the last five years were about women — compared to 71 percent for men. "There are very few high-quality studies, so for the moment there is no consensus on the impact menstrual cycles have on sports performance," Antero said.

While the symptoms — such as headaches and pain — were relatively similar, how intense they were and how long they lasted can vary significantly between different athletes, she said. A 2021 UK study conducted on elite female footballers found that around 90 percent suffered from fatigue and loss of power during menstruation.

Two-thirds said their confidence and focus were affected, while 13 percent missed training or matches, according to the study led by researchers at Queen Mary University of London. Period tracking hit the

headlines in 2019, when the United States women's football team credited it with helping players train for their victorious World Cup campaign.

But change has been slow. Alpine skier Clara Dizez, a former Empow'her participant, said that her mostly male coaches are still "embarrassed to talk about menstrual cycles — and don't show much interest". "It is important to raise awareness among athletes — but first and most importantly we need to raise awareness among coaches," Jousse, the swimmer, said. Talking about periods remains "taboo" in her sport, she added.

But ahead of the Paris Olympics starting in July, more attention is turning towards the subject. France's cycling federation recently took part in a study which demonstrated that cyclists perform better on average in the middle of their menstrual cycle. "Before there was discomfort, and athletes had to ask for help," Maitre said. "Now, we're working on them getting systematic support." — AFP



PHOENIX: Nelly Korda of the US poses with the trophy after the final round of the Ford Championship at Seville Golf and Country Club on March 31, 2024. — AFP

Korda powers to third LPGA victory in as many starts

LOS ANGELES: World number one Nelly Korda marched to her third victory in three LPGA tour starts on Sunday, firing seven birdies in a flawless seven-under par 65 to win the Ford Championship in Arizona by two strokes. Korda became the first LPGA pro to win three consecutive starts since Thailand's Ariya Jutanugarn in 2016. She's two shy of matching the LPGA record of five consecutive victories, first accomplished by Nancy Lopez in 1978 and matched by Annika Sorenstam in 2004-05.

Korda's 20-under par total of 268 at Seville Golf and Country Club in suburban Phoenix gave her a two-shot triumph over Australian rookie Hira Navced, who had seven birdies in her six-under 66. "Honestly feels like a blur," Korda said, adding that as the hype over her potential had trickled away she tried to "stay very present". "(I) just played really good golf, solid golf in tough conditions today, which I'm very happy about," said Korda, who opened her 2024 campaign with a playoff victory in the Drive On Championship in her hometown of Bradenton, Florida, in January.

She skipped the tour's Asian swing, and returned last week to win the Seri Pak Championship in Los Angeles in a playoff, a victory that returned her to the top of the world rankings. "It's very hard mentally to be 100%, especially after a win, especially playing in tough conditions," Korda said after an impressive round in cold, rainy weather. "So as boring as it sounds I was just taking it shot by shot and seeing where I was going to end up. To get three in a row, that's just a dream come true." — AFP

Standing ovation as Pant's 50 helps Delhi down Chennai in IPL

VISAKHAPATNAM, India: Rishabh Pant led from the front with his first IPL fifty since his comeback from a horror car crash as Delhi Capitals beat Chennai Super Kings by 20 runs on Sunday. Captain Pant hit 51 off 32 balls after fellow left-hander David Warner smashed 52 and helped Delhi to 191-5 in Visakhapatnam — the adopted homeground for the Capitals due to the upcoming general elections.

But the fans in the south Indian city largely represented Chennai as they chanted (M.S. Dhoni) "Dhoni, Dhoni" — the former skipper obliging with an unbeaten 37 off 16 balls, including four fours and three sixes. Delhi restricted Chennai to 171-6 for their first win of the season and hand their opponents a loss after two opening victories.

Khaleel Ahmed returned bowling figures of 2-21 to be named man of the match and Mukesh Kumar took three wickets. "Bowlers have been clinical today," said Pant. "We've learnt from our mistake. He's been working hard for the last two weeks." Warner and Prithvi Shaw, who hit 43, put on an opening stand of 93 before Chennai's bowlers hit back with wickets including Matheesha Pathirana's two strikes in an over.

Pathirana also played a part in Warner's dismissal after he took a stunning one-handed catch behind the stumps off an attempted reverse scoop from the left-handed Australian. Pant, who returned to the T20 tournament after 14 months away from top level cricket, came in on the back of two innings of 18 and 28 and took time to settle in. — AFP

Messilah Equestrian Club training sets stage for season

KUWAIT: Messilah Equestrian Club organized a training championship with 54 riders of both genders participating. This championship served as preparation for the remainder of the current season. Adnan Al-Allawi, the club's technical director, awarded the winners, who were then invited to a ghabga, which all club members attended. "The club's administration aims to organize various activities for all age groups, which have numerous benefits. This requires good and suitable planning to align with our goals and vision, including the organization of championships to provide all riders with the opportunity to prepare adequately for upcoming local events," Allawi said.

He emphasized that this approach was evident in the riders' performances during the latest championships held under the Kuwait Equestrian Federation, where they showcased advanced skills. Allawi emphasized the club's commitment to achieving its ambitions through outstanding performance and expanding its training role through a network of local and international trainers, as well as a dedicated team. "We aim to develop young talent and build confidence between the rider and their horse, starting with stable management and horse taming (dressage), and progressing to advanced training for showjumping," he said.

Jaeger holds off Scheffler for first PGA Tour title in Houston

LOS ANGELES: Germany's Stephan Jaeger held off world number one Scottie Scheffler down the stretch to win his first US PGA Tour title on Sunday at the Houston Open. Jaeger took the solo lead at 12-under with his fourth birdie of the day at the ninth, then parred all nine holes on the back nine to emerge with the victory on 12-under 268. "It feels amazing," Jaeger said. "I couldn't have dreamed up a better week to do it. Obviously playing Scottie last couple days, he's been on a tear, so to kind of slay the dragon a little bit this week was amazing. He's such a good dude, such a good player. I was just happy to play with him a couple days."

Scheffler, playing in the last group with Jaeger, responded to a bogey at the demanding par-three 15th with a birdie at 16, but he missed a five-and-a-half-foot birdie putt at 18 that would have forced a playoff. He settled for a two-under par 68 that put him in a five-way tie for second alongside Taylor Moore, Tony Finau, Belgian Thomas Detry and Argentina's Alejandro Tosti.

Tosti was 12-under after a birdie at 16, but closed



HOUSTON: Stephan Jaeger of Germany kisses the trophy after winning the Texas Children's Houston Open at Memorial Park Golf Course on March 31, 2024. — AFP

with a bogey at 18. Jaeger, ranked 71st in the world and chasing a first tour title in his 135th start, was part of a five-way tie for the lead to start the day. After a five-foot birdie at the third, he rolled in a 23-foot birdie putt from the fringe at the fourth to maintain a share of the lead.

After a bogey at the seventh, Jaeger made a

few strokes in the bank which I can credit back to my strong play on the front nine and the earlier rounds this week, so overall very proud of my performance. I want to try and finish in the top 10 on this tour and then go to the PGA Tour in 2025."

Nakajima began the final round in untroubled fashion, opening up a nine-stroke lead at the turn. But he ran into trouble on the back nine, starting with a double-bogey on the 14th. He clawed one stroke back on the next by sinking a 20-footer but then missed three successive greens to finish his one-over par round of 73 with bogeys on each of the final three holes.

Soderberg also dropped a shot at the last to finish with a 67 but Ahlawat gave the home crowd something to cheer when he sank an eagle putt on the 18th to get into a share of second place after a 71 laced with four bogeys. Veerman closed with a bogey-free 67 but Green fell away with a two-over 74. This season is the first in the DP World Tour to have multiple Japanese winners after Rikuya Hoshino won last February's Qatar Masters. — AFP

PCB on Sunday reinstated him as white-ball captain, replacing Afridi after less than five months in charge.

The PCB statement said Afridi had "nothing but respect" for the returning skipper. "I will try to help him on and off the field. We are all one," Afridi was quoted as saying. But a source close to Afridi denied he had signed off on the statement that implied a harmonious transfer of the top job. The source added Afridi resented being replaced after being in charge for just one Twenty20 series.

"This is not Shaheen's statement and he has contacted PCB to clarify this," the source told AFP. "Shaheen will meet PCB chairman Mohsin Naqvi on

three-foot birdie at the eighth and rolled in an eight-foot birdie at the ninth to make the turn with the solo lead. Jaeger barely missed a 20-foot birdie at the 12th, then drilled a 19-foot par-saving putt at the 13th. He parred 16 after his drive went left onto a cart path. Jaeger said patience was "the name of the game" on the potentially treacherous back nine, so he was pleased to avoid bogeys.

"I really didn't hit many bad shots," he said. "I didn't feel like I was playing defense at all. It's just this game is very hard." Scheffler, who birdied the second and third before bogeys at the sixth and ninth, was just behind Jaeger until he missed the green at 15 and fell two adrift. The US star clawed back a shot at the 16th, but couldn't get over the hump — even though Jaeger was "100 percent" expecting a playoff when he saw how close Scheffler was for birdie at the last.

"I put up a good fight," said Scheffler, who ended a near year-long title drought with a win at Bay Hill then won the Players Championship. He was trying to become the first player since Dustin Johnson in 2017 to win three consecutive tour starts. "Felt like I had some weird breaks this week," Scheffler added. "It's tough to describe, but obviously I'm a bit disappointed. I hit two or three really good shots into 18 to give myself a chance and I feel like I made the putt and I looked up and it was breaking off. So a bit disappointing, but Stephan played great this week and he's a deserving champion." — AFP



GURUGRAM: Japan's Keita Nakajima poses with the trophy after winning the Hero Indian Open at the DLF Golf and Country Club on March 31, 2024. — AFP

Monday to clarify this." The PCB issued a statement confirming that Naqvi, who is also the country's interior minister, would visit Pakistan team training in Kakul on Monday, without mentioning Afridi.

Fast bowler Afridi led Pakistan to a 4-1 loss in a Twenty20 Series in New Zealand in January. Afridi also captained Lahore Qalandars as they finished last in the T20 Pakistan Super League that ended two weeks ago. Pakistan next play New Zealand in a five-match home Twenty20 series, followed by matches in Ireland and England. The T20 World Cup takes place in the United States and West Indies in June. — AFP

Sports

Arsenal, City stalemate hands Liverpool Premier League lead

Title race tantalizingly poised with three points separating the top three

MANCHESTER: Manchester City failed to break down a determined Arsenal defense as a highly-anticipated clash at the top of the Premier League failed to live up to the hype in a 0-0 draw at the Etihad on Sunday. Liverpool were the big winners of the day in the title race as they beat Brighton 2-1 to go top, two points ahead of Arsenal and three clear of City with nine games to play.

A share of the spoils preserves City's unbeaten home run stretching back to November 2022 and ends Arsenal's eight-match winning run in the Premier League. But it is the Gunners who will be happier with a point as they prevented Pep Guardiola's men from scoring at the Etihad for the first time in two years. City had 72 percent possession but struggled to make anything of it against a defense that has conceded the fewest number of goals in the Premier League this season.

City are still yet to win in six matches this season against other sides in the Premier League top five and must end that run when fourth-placed Aston Villa visit on Wednesday to keep their title challenge alive. ee-scoring form, netting 33 times during their eight-match winning streak. However, the visitors had lost on their last eight trips to the Etihad, including a 4-1 thrashing as the title race swung decisively in City's favor last season, and opted for a counter-attacking approach.

Nathan Ake wasted the home side's best chance in the first half when he failed to connect properly with a dangerous Kevin De Bruyne corner. City were already missing the key defensive duo of Kyle Walker and John Stones after both were injured on international duty with England. And Guardiola was forced to cobble together an even more makeshift backline when Ake hobbled off on 27 minutes.

Arsenal, though, rarely tested the City defense. Gabriel Jesus could just not stretch far enough to meet Bukayo Saka's cross in the only sign of life from the England international. At the other end, Erling Haaland was extremely well-marshalled

by Arsenal's solid center-back pairing of Gabriel Magalhaes and William Saliba. And the Norwegian fluffed his lines when he did get a rare sight of goal seven minutes from time as he failed to connect with a corner at the back post. Arsenal's best chance to snatch all three points came late on when substitute Leandro Trossard fired straight at Stefan Ortega. But a share of the spoils leaves the title race still tantalizingly poised with three points separating the top three.

Mohamed Salah fired Liverpool to the top of the Premier League as the Egypt star's clinical finish capped a stirring fightback to beat Brighton 2-1 on Sunday. Jurgen Klopp's side were rocked by Danny Welbeck's blistering strike after just 85 seconds at Anfield. Luis Diaz restored order with an equalizer later in the first half, before Salah netted after the interval to seal a vital victory. Salah's third goal in his last three games was his 22nd in all competitions this term.

Unbeaten in their last 27 home league games, Liverpool are back in action at Anfield against lowly Sheffield United on Thursday. After former Liverpool star Xabi Alonso confirmed he intends to stay at Bayer Leverkusen, Brighton boss Roberto De Zerbi is a reported candidate to replace Klopp when the German steps down at the end of this term. Klopp is a big fan of De Zerbi's attacking philosophy and praised him as a "top coach" this week.

Playing for the first time since their painful FA Cup quarter-final defeat at Manchester United before the international break, Liverpool had a shocking taste of De Zerbi's enterprising tactics after just two minutes. Brighton's Simon Adingra broke quickly in a devastating counterattack that caught Liverpool right-back Conor Bradley out of position.

When Virgil van Dijk's scuffed clearance rolled to Welbeck just inside the penalty area, the Brighton forward lashed a strike into the top corner to leave Klopp shaking his head. Salah was making his first league start since New Year's Day after an inju-



MANCHESTER: Manchester City's English midfielder Jack Grealish fights for the ball with Arsenal's French defender William Saliba at the Etihad Stadium on March 31, 2024. — AFP

ry-plagued beginning to 2024. Looking to make up for lost time, Salah nearly grabbed the equalizer with a curler that whistled just wide.

The Egypt forward threatened again from Bradley's cross, but he couldn't keep his shot on target from a good position 10 yards out. Liverpool's dominance was rewarded in the 27th minute when Brighton failed to clear Salah's header from a corner and Diaz volleyed home from close range. Liverpool midfielder Alexis Mac Allister squandered a chance against his former club with a header that flashed narrowly wide early in the second half.

Dominik Szoboszlai fired past the far post from 20 yards, while Darwin Nunez was denied by Bart Verbruggen at the near post. Wave after wave of Liverpool pressure crashed against Brighton's defensive wall before De Zerbi's men cracked in the 65th minute. Mac Allister was catalyst with a perfectly-weighted pass that picked out Salah's run into the area and the forward dispatched a composed low finish past Verbruggen. In a tense finale, former Liverpool midfielder Adam Lallana should have punished his old team, but he rolled his shot wide to Klopp's immense relief. — AFP

Rodrygo keeps Madrid clear of Barca, Girona boost Europe dream

BARCELONA: Rodrygo fired La Liga leaders Real Madrid to a 2-0 win over Athletic Bilbao with a superb brace on Sunday to restore their eight-point advantage on Barcelona. Earlier Cristhian Stuani's last-gasp strike earned Girona an entertaining 3-2 win over Real Betis, keeping the minnows on track for Champions League qualification.

After champions Barca, second, beat Las Palmas on Saturday to put pressure on Carlo Ancelotti's side, Los Blancos responded with a solid showing at the Santiago Bernabeu. Without suspended Brazil forward Vinicius Junior, his compatriot Rodrygo made the difference with two superb strikes against an Athletic with one eye on next weekend's Copa del Rey final against Mallorca.

Los Leones coach Ernesto Valverde rested goalkeeper Unai Simon and defender Dani Vivian, along with Nico Williams, who had a minor muscular issue. Defeat leaves fifth place Atletico Madrid able to rise above Athletic in fourth on Monday when they visit Villarreal. Madrid, whose next match is Manchester City's visit on April 9 in the Champions League quarterfinals, enjoyed a comfortable night thanks to Rodrygo.

"He played very well, he made the difference, he was able to score ear-

ly, he has a lot of quality in his moves, it's what he has to do," Ancelotti told reporters. Ancelotti said he was not concerned that Rodrygo, who had only netted once in his last 13 matches across all competitions, was inconsistent in front of goal.

"There are very isolated cases of forwards who score all the time, like (Karim) Benzema or Cristiano (Ronaldo)," continued the Italian. "With experience Rodrygo will improve in that aspect, he's still young and plays with a lot of intensity, and sometimes because of that youth I ask him to do a lot of work, so that's why sometimes he's not as fresh in front of goal."

'Joy and happiness'

Rodrygo broke the deadlock after just seven minutes with a strike from just outside the area, beyond the reach of Julen Agirretzabala and into the top corner. Diaz crashed a shot against the post as Madrid sought a second goal to kill the game in the second half. Rodrygo netted his and Madrid's second after 73 minutes at the end of a slick move, ghosting inside Vivian and finishing at the near post.

La Liga's joint top scorer Jude Bellingham, making his return after a two-



GIRONA: Real Betis' Spanish midfielder Pablo Fornals fights for the ball with Girona's Spanish forward Cristian Portugues at the Montilivi stadium on March 31, 2024. — AFP

match suspension for dissent, had a quiet night — quite literally at one point. In complaining about a foul not called in his favor late on he acted out zipping his mouth shut, a reference to his recent punishment. Eder Militao's appearance in the final stages after a long-term knee injury he suffered against Athletic in August marked the end of a good night's work for Madrid. "I feel a lot of joy and happiness, hearing the fans when I went out to warm up is a joy that I can't describe," Militao told Real Ma-

drid TV. Their only concern was Fede Valverde limping off, but Ancelotti said it was not serious.

Michel Sanchez's Girona had fallen badly out of form after running Madrid close in the title race for most of the season, but Stuani's late goal earned them an important win. Two David Lopez errors gifted Betis forward William Jose two goals to twice equalize goals from Girona forward Artem Dovbyk but veteran Uruguayan forward Stuani had the final say. — AFP

Undav strike snatches Stuttgart a point against Heidenheim

STUTTGART: Deniz Undav scored in the eighth minute of stoppage time to snatch a point for Stuttgart, pulling the home side level in a pulsating 3-3 Bundesliga draw with visiting Heidenheim on Sunday. The match swung wildly late, Heidenheim's Tim Kleindienst scoring two goals in two minutes before Undav's last-gasp equalizer. Goals from Serhou Guirassy, his 23rd in 21 league games, and Angelo Stiller, had third-placed Stuttgart in the driver's seat, but a 62nd-minute howler of an own goal from goalkeeper Alex Nuebel gave Heidenheim hope.

Nuebel caught and then dropped a tame Kleindienst header, before allowing it to trickle between his legs and into the goal. Kleindienst, who scored the crucial goal in the ninth minute of stoppage time which took Heidenheim up to the first division at the end of last season, scored in the 84th and 85th minutes to steal the lead.

Kleindienst tapped in a Jan-Niklas Beste cross to level the scores and then headed in while unmarked in the box. The visitors were reduced to 10 men after six added minutes, Nikola Dovedan seeing straight red for a rough tackle on Maximilian Mittelstaedt. Undav, who celebrated a first-ever call-up to the Germany squad earlier in March, salvaged a point for the home side slamming a low drive into the bottom corner with the last kick of the game. "If you're leading 2-0 at home, you can't give a game away like that," lamented Mittelstaedt on DAZN.

Goalscorer Stiller, who is having a breakout season in the Stuttgart midfield, echoed the comments, saying: "We can't be satisfied with the draw. We can't let that happen." Stuttgart missed a chance to close the gap with second-placed Bayern to one point, but still sit seven points clear of fifth-placed RB Leipzig as they push for a return to the Champions League.

Stuttgart coach Sebastian Hoernes said his side got



STUTTGART: Stuttgart's German forward Deniz Undav tries to score against Heidenheim's German goalkeeper Kevin Mueller as other Heidenheim players defend on March 31, 2024. — AFP

carried away. "After the 2-0, there was a party in the stadium. That's fine for the fans, but we need to stay serious. "The result is bitter for us." Guirassy scored for the fourth straight game and is eight behind top scorer Harry Kane in the league this season. Heidenheim, who host Bayern next week, sit in 11th place and are all but certain to stay in the top division.

In Sunday's late game, rock-bottom Darmstadt came from two goals down to draw 2-2 at Bochum. A Philipp Hofmann double put the home side in control but a 62nd-minute Tim Skarke goal and an Oscar Vilhelmsson strike with 14 minutes remaining levelled the scores. Despite the point, Darmstadt are 12 points from safety with seven games left and look set for immediate relegation, having not won since October.

Earlier on Sunday, Augsburg drew 1-1 at home with Cologne to regain seventh spot in the Bundesliga, and remain on course for a return to European football. Arne Maier gave the home side the lead after 18 minutes, but Davie Selke's 33rd-minute goal leveled the scores for the visitors. Augsburg came into the game on a four-match winning streak and could qualify for Europe for the first time since 2015-16. — AFP

Okejepha raises Rivers' hopes of CAF Cup semi spot

JOHANNESBURG: Augustine Okejepha scored a superb goal to give Rivers United of Nigeria a 1-0 victory over USM Alger of Algeria on Sunday in their CAF Confederation Cup quarter-final first leg. Abubakar Adamu hit a low corner to the edge of the area, where Okejepha unleashed a powerful shot past goalkeeper Oussama Benbot on 10 minutes in the southern city of Uyo. Rivers, hoping to become the first Nigerian winners of an African club competition since 2005, adapted much better to the 34 degrees Celsius heat than the title-holders.

Rain midway through the second half did aid the Algerians, who lacked suspended captain and center-back Zinedine Belaid, but they rarely threatened to equalise. Rivers used their physical strength to good effect only to be let down by an inability to convert chances after Okejepha gave his team a perfect start.

Meanwhile, Dreams of Ghana, debuting in the African equivalent of the UEFA Europa League, are poised to reach the semi-finals after a 2-1 away win over Stade Malien of Mali in Bamako. Stade won the Confederation Cup at the first attempt in 2009 and this is their 10th appearance in the competition.

They went ahead on 53 minutes when Yoro Diaby scored his second goal of the CAF campaign, but veteran John Antwi then scored twice in seven minutes to stun the hosts. Antwi equalized on 66 minutes with a tap-in after Stade goalkeeper N'Golo Traore failed to hold a cross, and then converted a penalty to put Dreams ahead. The brace took Antwi to a chart-topping six goals in the Confederation Cup this season. Nigerian Kingsley Eduwo from already-eliminated Club Africain of Tunisia has scored five. — AFP

PSG overcome red card to beat Marseille and step closer to title

PARIS: Paris Saint-Germain overcame a controversial first-half sending-off to win 2-0 away to bitter rivals Marseille in Ligue 1 on Sunday, with Portuguese duo Vitinha and Goncalo Ramos scoring their goals. Marseille's hopes of a first home league win against PSG since November 2011 were raised when the away side had Lucas Beraldo sent off five minutes before the interval.

But the Qatar-owned club still came out on top, with Vitinha exchanging passes with Ousmane Dembele before firing home a superb opening goal in the 53rd minute on a wet night at the Velodrome. Marseille, who had been unbeaten at home this season, went looking for an equalizer and Jordan Veretout had a goal disallowed for an offside against teammate Luis Henrique.

PSG coach Luis Enrique then withdrew captain Kylian Mbappe just after the hour mark and it was his replacement Ramos who made sure of the win five minutes from time. The goal came on the breakaway, with the visitors clearing a corner before Achraf Hakimi found Marco Asensio and he picked out Ramos, who finished coolly for his 10th goal of the season. Only Mbappe, with 38 in all competitions, has found the net more often for PSG this season.

The result means PSG end the weekend as they started it, 12 points clear of second-placed Brest, who won 1-0 at Lorient earlier on Sunday. "I am very proud of our second-half performance, of the solidarity and the attitude of the players," said Luis Enrique. "We had to play in a different style to what we usually do, but we did it very well. "I am pleased with the result, because it was a 'Classique' and it counts for the supporters."

There are just seven games of the campaign remaining, and PSG need only 10 more points to claim a 10th title in 12 seasons. The biggest talking point on the night was the red card for Beraldo, the young Brazilian defender signed in January. He went shoulder-to-shoulder with Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang, knocking the attacker over just past halfway near the right touchline.

Already on a booking, he escaped a second caution but then referee Benoit Bastien came across to check the VAR monitor and, following the review, surprisingly chose to show Beraldo a straight red card, judging him to have been the last defender. "I don't usually judge refereeing decisions, especially when there is VAR," said Luis Enrique. "The action happened right in front of me, and I didn't think there was a foul. But I don't come here to talk about the referee, to comment on his decisions or to demand explanations." — AFP



MARSEILLE: Marseille's Cameroonian forward Faris Moubagna fights for the ball with Paris Saint-Germain's French defender Lucas Hernandez at Stade Velodrome on March 31, 2024. — AFP



NEW YORK: LeBron James of the Los Angeles Lakers dunks the ball against the Brooklyn Nets at Barclays Center on March 31, 2024. — AFP

LeBron hits 40 in Lakers win

Doncic scores 47 as Mavericks beat Rockets

NEW YORK: LeBron James delivered another epic performance on Sunday, scoring 40 points and matching a career-high with nine 3-pointers on 10 attempts as the Los Angeles Lakers rolled to a 116-104 NBA victory at Brooklyn. James, a four-time NBA Most Valuable Player and the NBA's oldest active player at 39, made 13-of-17 shots from the floor overall and added seven rebounds and five assists in an effort that had Brooklyn fans giving him a standing ovation.

"I was feeling pretty good today, obviously, shooting the ball from the perimeter," James said. "I just try to continually put my game where I have no weaknesses out on the floor, especially offensively. Tonight I had it going from the 3-point line." James achieved his 77th NBA career 40-point game to match Oscar Robertson for seventh on an all-time list topped by Wilt Chamberlain's 271.

"I love this game. I try to put everything into the game and with it, it gives back to me," James said. "Anytime I'm linked with the greats — and obviously Big O was a big inspiration for me

growing up, reading about his history — it's pretty cool." Anthony Davis added 24 points and 14 rebounds while Japan's Rui Hachimura had 20 points and 10 rebounds as the Lakers seized a 17-0 lead and never looked back.

D'Angelo Russell scored 18 points and cracked the 10,000 career point barrier in the triumph as the Lakers improved to 42-33, just ahead of Golden State in the last two Western Conference play-in spots. "Just extremely thankful that he packed the cape on this road trip," Lakers coach Darvin Ham said of the super-heroic display by James. "We needed all nine of those threes. (We) kind of dropped the rope in terms of what we were doing... turned the ball over way too much, but that said, you have to just overcome these things... And we were able to do that by some huge shot-making by him."

James wasn't the only superstar with nine 3-pointers Sunday. Luka Doncic scored 47 points on 18-of-30 shooting, 9-of-16 from 3-point range, to lead Dallas over host Houston 125-107, snapping the Rockets' 11-game win streak

and stretching the Mavericks' win streak to seven games. Golden State kept pace with the Lakers by winning 117-113 at San Antonio. Stephen Curry scored 33 points to lead the Warriors while rookie Victor Wembanyama led the hosts with 32 points.

Jokic has triple double

Nikola Jokic posted his 23rd triple double of the season, sparking defending champion Denver's 130-101 home victory over Cleveland. The 29-year-old Serbian center, a two-time NBA MVP, scored 26 points, grabbed 18 rebounds and added 16 assists for his 128th NBA triple double. "It speaks to why he's going to be a three-time MVP," Nuggets coach Michael Malone said. "(It was) him showing up and saying, 'I'm going to do what MVPs do. I'm going to lead us to a win.'"

The Nuggets sank a season-high 21 3-point shots and clinched a playoff berth. "We came out and really showed who we are, just getting after it defensively, rebounding, making shots. I thought we played amazing basketball," said Nuggets guard Kentavious Cald-

well-Pope, who scored 22 points. Denver hit 50-of-87 from the floor overall (57.5%) and 21-of-33 (63.6%) from 3-point range while outrebounding the Cavaliers 51-28.

The Nuggets improved to 52-23, a half-game behind leader Oklahoma City in a three-team fight for the West lead. Shai Gilgeous-Alexander sank the last of his 19 points on a game-winning basket with 2.1 seconds remaining to give Oklahoma City a 113-112 victory at New York. Jalen Williams led the Thunder with 33 points while Jalen Brunson, who missed a shot at the final buzzer, led New York with 30.

Minnesota fell a game out of first with a 109-101 home loss to Chicago. DeMar DeRozan scored 27 points for the Bulls, who snapped the Timberwolves' four-game win streak. Paul George scored 41 points to lead the Los Angeles Clippers over host Charlotte 130-118. Kelly Oubre Jr. scored 32 points to lead Philadelphia over host Toronto 135-120, extending the Raptors' losing skid to 13 games. Terry Rozier netted 27 points to lead Miami's 119-107 victory at Washington. — AFP

Van der Poel wins 'favorite classic' for third time



OUDENAARDE, Belgium: Dutch Mathieu van der Poel of Alpecin-Deceuninck celebrates after winning the men's race of the 'Ronde van Vlaanderen' (Tour des Flandres) on March 31, 2024. — AFP

OUDENAARDE, Belgium: Mathieu van der Poel, at ease in the Belgian rain, powered into history on Sunday as he joined the elite group who have won the Tour of Flanders three times. "It's my favorite classic, I fell in love with it the first time I took part. And it's the one that suits me best too," Van der Poel told the post-race press conference.

The 29-year-old Dutch rider finished just over a minute ahead of the chasing group as he became the sixth rider in the 111-year history of the race to claim three victories. "Honestly, I don't pay particular attention to records," he said. "My career has already succeeded beyond my expectations. Everything is a bonus from now on."

Italian Luca Mozzato grabbed second, one minute and two seconds back, outsprinting Australian Michael Matthews to the line. But Matthews was then penalized for dangerous riding and German Nils Politt was awarded third. "Winning the Tour of Flanders with the world champion's rainbow jersey on your back is a dream come true," Van der Poel said at the finish. "It was the hardest Tour of Flanders I've ever done, one of the hardest races of my career. At the end I was finished. I crawled all the way to the finish line. It was really hard."

Sunday's slog through the second and most sacred 'monument' took riders over 270.2 km and up 18 nasty climbs, under grey Belgian skies and through persistent rain that made the cobbled sections slippery. Van der Poel, of the Alpecin-Deceuninck team, spent most of the first 220 km stalking breakaways. Ivan Garcia had built a lead of 10 seconds, but slipped out of his pedals trying to find the power to climb the cobbled Kloppenberg. Rather than try to remount on the steep slope the Spaniard pushed his bike up the hill. He was not the only one. — AFP

Ice-cool Sinner downs Dimitrov to triumph in Miami

MIAMI: Italy's Jannik Sinner won the ATP Miami Open Masters 1000 title on Sunday with a dominant 6-3, 6-1 victory over Bulgarian Grigor Dimitrov in the final at Hard Rock Stadium. Sinner's third title of the season means he will move to a career-high second in the ATP world rankings on Monday ahead of Spain's Carlos Alcaraz. And the manner of his performance, ice-cool throughout with errors at a minimum and winners struck with sure-fire confidence, suggests that when Novak Djokovic finally surrenders the top spot, Sinner and Alcaraz are set to battle for supremacy for years to come.

Sinner finishes the hard-court season in electric form, having won 25 of his last 26 matches — the only defeat coming to Alcaraz in the semi-final of Indian Wells. He added the Miami title to his crowns this year at the Australian Open and the Rotterdam Indoors after taking care of business in 72 minutes. Sinner never looked in danger after he broke in the fifth game of the first set, facing just one break point in the entire match.

"As this tournament went on, I felt better and better. Today's performance was really good. I'm just proud of how I handled the situation," Sinner said. "I started the season really, really well. I never thought (I would) start like this. Being number two is an amazing feeling." Sinner clinched the first set with his second break, a brilliant backhand down the line that brought spectators to their feet. Dimitrov, with his trademark one-handed backhand

strokes and willingness to go to the net, was enjoying plenty of support from the home crowd but Sinner's calm approach and pristine technique was too much for him. The Italian broke in the second set to go 3-1 up and with his serve strong and returns rock solid, it was a procession to victory from that point.

Sinner's Australian co-coach Darren Cahill, whose past pupils include Andre Agassi and Simona Halep, was hugely impressed with the way his player approached the match. "I thought he was incredible today, barely any unforced errors, kept a great depth and kept it difficult for Grigor to win points. If Grigor did win points, he did so with spectacular tennis," Cahill said. "He made Grigor force a lot and take a lot of risks and when he's doing that I know Jannik is playing the right way. Tactically, I thought he was great today."

Zero doubt

Dimitrov had no doubt he had lost to a man in supreme form. "I think at the moment clearly Jannik is playing outstanding tennis. There is nothing to say to that. You see how focused he is, how determined he is, the way he's hitting his shots, there is zero doubt," said Dimitrov. "Can he play any better? I don't know. He's the one to show that. But at the moment he has been able to really put so many matches back to back with the same level, so all credit goes to him. "And he's the best player right now in the world."

The Italian's title came in his third appearance in a Miami final — he lost to Poland's Hubert Hurkacz in 2021 and Daniil Medvedev last year. Sinner's previous Masters 1000 title came in Toronto in 2023. Dimitrov will return to the top 10 in Monday's rankings for the first time since October 2018.

The 32-year-old's run to the Miami final included a quarterfinal win over Alcaraz and a semi-final victory over world number five Alexander Zverev. "I just want to focus



MIAMI GARDENS: Jannik Sinner of Italy celebrates with the trophy after defeating Grigor Dimitrov of Bulgaria 6-3, 6-1 in the men's final of the Miami Open at Hard Rock Stadium on March 31, 2024. — AFP

on the positives this week," he said. "I was extremely determined throughout the whole week. "Clearly it's Jannik's week. He has been playing amazing tennis. It's really impressive how he's been able to keep that way of playing. "I don't think I have this time to be down on myself. I just want to embrace this moment as well. Just as you win, you need to be able to handle (losing) matches like that, I think, even better than winning those type of matches." — AFP