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By Saeed Mahmoud Saleh

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, April 17: MP-

elect Abdullah Al-Anbaie was

the lone National Assembly

member present at the supposed

inaugural session on Wednes-

part of his constitutional commit-

ment and a confirmation of his

compliance with the rules

Al-Anbaie explained this is

day

THURSDAY, APRIL 18, 2024 / SHAWWAL 9, 1445 AH

emergency number 112

NO. 18572 **16 PAGES 150 FILS**

> On the other hand, MPs-elect Mohammad Hayef, Fahd Al-

> Masoud and Saad Al- Khanfour

have announced that they will

not attend the session scheduled

for Sunday. They asserted that

they have no intention to at-

tend an opening session without

His Highness the Amir Sheikh

Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-

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Sabah.

Incoming government urged to prioritize citizens' needs

No Assembly start without HH Amir, MPs-elect assert

Opinion

Is Kuwait's Constitution divine, and are MPs reformist companions?

By Ahmed Al-Jarallah Editor-in-Chief, the Arab Times

CONSTITUTIONS are not divine texts. They shape the overall social behavior and govern relations between authorities, which is why it is necessary to research them from time to time. This is a prevailing rule in various



their people and seek to develop their society. However, some of them are afflicted by a group of reformers who know how to take advantage of the loopholes in the text, and resist the progress of

the nation. They

are usually keen to aggravate the chaos that occurs when the state remains stagnant. This is why such people in Kuwait threaten woe and ruin whenever there is a call to amend the Kuwaiti Constitution for the better.

On the other hand, the parliaments of several countries, their governments, and their leaders conduct reviews of the constitutional texts from time to time. If any loophole is found that could lead to corruption or allows a specific group to benefit from it, it is amended for the better.

After 1945, Germany amended its constitution 62 times, the United States of America 27 times, and France, from which most Arab countries took their constitution and laws, amended its constitution 24 times.

All these countries did the necessary to ensure correct parliamentary and governmental practice is followed in order to develop society, and make sure no woe and ruin befell on them.

Even ancient Greece, from which the world adopted democracy, amended its constitution ten times over the past decades - both when it was a kingdom and when it became a republic. This is ecause the objective

World Bank, IMF align on Kuwait's economic growth

Gov't denies Sahel app hack

KUWAIT CITY, April 17, (KUNA): The official

spokesman of the unified government application

of electronic services "Sahel," Yousef Kathem de-

nied on Wednesday that "Sahel" has been hacked.

the application is related to the addition of a new ser-

vice from the Anti-Corruption Authority (Nazaha).

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He said that the notification received by users of



Dual boost

KUWAIT CITY, Ap-ril 17: The World Bank has upgraded its growth projections for Kuwait's economy in 2024 to 2.8%, surpassing its earlier forecast of 2.6% made in January, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

Similarly, for 2025, the Bank now anticipates a growth rate of 3.1%, up from the previous estimate of 2.7%. These revisions are outlined in the report titled "Conflicts and Debts in the Middle East and North Africa.3

The expected growth follows a contraction of Kuwait's GDP by 0.1% in 2023, which contrasts with the significant 7.9% growth experienced in 2022.

In terms of per capita GDP, Kuwait is projected to see an acceleration, with a growth of 1.9% in 2024, compared to a slight contraction of 0.1% in the previous year. This growth trend is expected to continue, reaching approximately 2.2% in 2025. Regarding the current account balance, it is forecasted to decrease, representing 22.7% of GDP in 2024, down from 29.3% in the previous year, and further declining to 21.9% in 2025. It's worth noting that Kuwait's public debt law expired in September 2017, with no new state debt law approved since then, despite the introduction of a draft law allowing the issuance of sukuk. The World Bank anticipates faster growth for the economies of Gulf oil-exporting countries in 2024, around 2.8%, and a further increase to 4.7% in 2025. The report emphasizes the necessity of diversifying economic and financial revenues due to shifts in global oil markets and the growing demand for renewable energy sources For the Middle East and North Africa region, the World Bank expects GDP to rise to 2.7% in 2024, a slight improvement from 1.9% in 2023. Similarly, both oil-importing and oil-exporting countries are expected to experience more balanced growth rates compared to 2022, when higher oil prices favored growth in oilexporting nations. Meanwhile, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) has revised its forecasts for the Kuwaiti economy for the current year, projecting a deficit of 1.4% in GDP for 2024, a significant improvement from the previously anticipated 3.6%. Additionally, the IMF expects Kuwait's GDP to grow by 3.8% in 2025, reports Al-Qabas daily. According to the IMF's April 2024 forecast report titled "The Recovery of the Global Economy Is Steady but Slow and Varies

develop society, and not work in favor of any individual interests.

Therefore, we beg to ask - Is the Kuwaiti Constitution perfect? Does it not contain any defects? Have the loopholes discovered in the constitution over the past 60 years necessitated consideration to amend it? Does the

Continued on Page 5 Email: ahmed@aljarallah.com Follow me on: facebook. \mathbb{X} ahmedaljarallah@gmail.com

Newswatch

KUWAIT CITY: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah sent on Wednesday a congratulatory cable to the newly elected Slovakian President Peter Pellegrini on winning the presidential elections.

In his cable, His Highness the Amir wished the Slovakian president success in assuming office, and everlasting health. (KUNA)

DUBAI: The desert nation of the United Arab Emirates attempted to dry out Wednesday from the heaviest rain ever recorded there after a deluge flooded out Dubai International Airport, disrupting flights through the world's busiest airfield for international travel.

The state-run WAM news agency called the rain Tuesday "a historic weather event" that surpassed "anything documented since the start of data collection in 1949." That's before the discovery of crude oil in this energyrich nation then part of a British protectorate known as the Trucial States. (AP)

TEHRAN: Iran's president has warned that the "tiniest invasion" by **Israel** would bring a "massive and harsh" response, as the region braces for potential Israeli retaliation after Iran's attack over the weekend

President Ebrahim Raisi spoke Wednesday at an annual army parade that was relocated to a barracks north of the capital, Tehran, from its usual venue on a highway in the city's southern outskirts. Iranian authorities gave no explanation for its relocation, and state television didn't broadcast it live, as it has in previous years. (AP)

CAIRO: Arab League Secretary-General, Ahmad Aboul Gheit, said that containing the security situation in the region begins with putting an end to the massacre that Israeli occupation continues to commit daily in Gaza.

In a statement Wednesday, the Arab League noted that this came during Aboul Gheit's meeting with the head of the UN Truce Supervision Organization mission concerned with follow-up and field monitoring of the implementation of the armistice agreements between Israeli occupation and its neighbors, Major General Patrick Gochat. (KUNA)

Photo by Mahmoud Jadeed Photo shows Boursa Kuwait on Wednesday. The World Bank and IMF lift Kuwait's growth forecasts for 2024 and 2025.

Former interior minister lauds strategic cooperation

Kuwait-NATO vital for regional security: Sheikh Thamer

ROME, April 17, (KUNA): Kuwait's former Interior Minister Sheikh Al-Ali Al-Sabah Thamer lauded Tuesday the fruitful strategic cooperation between the State of Kuwait and NATO for its impact on regional security and stability.

Speaking at an international conference held in Rome to celebrate the 75th anniversary of the NATO foun-dation, Sheikh Thamer, also former chief of Kuwait's National Security Apparatus, highlighted the development of Kuwait-NATO relations and cooperation over the past two decades.

As he co-chaired a special session on "Security in the Southern Neighborhood: The Gulf Region," alongside the Undersecretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Deputy Secretary-General of the Supreme Defense Council in Bahrain, Sheikh Abdullah bin Ahmad Al-Khalifa, Sheikh Thamer pointed out that Kuwait was the first country to join NA-TO's Istanbul Cooperation Initiative (ICI), which is a platform established by NATO to promote security cooperation on a bilateral basis between NATO and partner countries in the broader Middle East region, in June 2004

He hailed the establishment of the

Minister Al-Ghareeb highlights measures

Kuwait pledges to combat human trafficking

MUSCAT, April 17, (KUNA): Kuwaiti Minister of Justice and Awqaf and Islamic Affairs Faisal Al-Ghareeb said Kuwait attaches great importance to combatting human trafficking through laws and legislation that include deterrent penalties and protect victims' rights.

This came in his speech Wednesday during the launch of the Middle East forum to combat human trafficking in its fifth session, organized by the Oman Capital Muscat.

In its relentless efforts towards criminalizing all kinds of human trafficking, Kuwait issued Law No. 91 in 2013 regarding combating human trafficking and smuggling immigrants, Al-Ghareeb stated.

He explained that the Cabinet ap-



Kuwait's former Interior Minister Sheikh Thamer Al-Ali Al-Sabah during the international conference.

ICI Regional Center in Kuwait in 2017 as a culmination of the cooperation between Kuwait and the Alliance. Sheikh Thamer shed lights on the center's activities and contributions in dealing with emerging challenges.

According to NATO, the NATO-ICI Regional Centre in Kuwait acts as a hub for the enhancement of practical cooperation between NATO and its Gulf partners.

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proved a decision to adopt the national strategy to prevent those crimes, which contains three main axes (prevention - protection - international cooperation) and the establishment a permanent national committee concerned with implementing that strategy with representation from all relevant national authorities.

This government committee approved the national referral system in December 2019, added Al-Ghareeb, and concluded partnerships with relevant international organizations and signed a declaration of intent with the UN Office on Drugs and Crime for the GCC region, and working on developing this cooperation into a memorandum of understanding.

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IT seems we are embarking on a path where faces will glow with righteousness, and where the pursuit of noble aspirations will shine brightly. Our vision has become clear, illuminated by the guiding lights of wisdom and insight.

May God bless you with a radiant countenance, O patient and steadfast one. May He illuminate your face as you champion justice, starting with yourself and ex-tending to your family. May God grant you a pure and

bright visage as you meticulously navigate every aspect of life, discerning between what brings benefit and what causes harm.

May God bless your life, extending its duration and elevating your status, as you solemnly pledge before your Creator to restore your country to its rightful path, free from the clutches of corruption.

. May God bless your countenance wherever you may be, and in whatever position you hold. How beautiful it is to be adorned with the purity symbolized by a white garment, shining like the sun that cannot be obscured by any obstacle.

... Yet tomorrow is another day.

Zahed Matar

Collab to prevent deportee re-entry

- Details Page 3 -

Deputy FM leads diplomatic meet

KUWAIT CITY, April 17, (KUNA): The Deputy Foreign Minister Ambassador Sheikh Jarrah Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah on Wednesday chaired a meeting of the council of the diplomatic and consular corps

The meeting was held at the ministry headquarters, with the participation of the assistants foreign minister and members of the council.

They addressed issues set in the session agenda.

Also:

KUWAIT CITY: Deputy Minister of For-eign Affairs Sheikh Jarrah Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah received on Wednesday a phone call from UK's Minister of State for the Middle East, North Africa, South Asia, Commonwealth and UN at the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office Lord Tareq Ahmad.

During the phone call, both sides discussed the two countries' bilateral relations, the latest regional and international issues, as well as topics of common interest.



MoFA photo Deputy FM chairs meeting of diplomatic, consular corps.

Continued on Page 5





Expected weather for next 24 hrs: By Day: Rather hot and relatively humid over coastal areas with light variable wind to light to moderate southeasterly wind, with speeds of 08-30 km/h By Night: Mild and relatively

Weather

: - S t	humid over light to mode to light variat of 06-28 km/	erate south ble wind, wi	nerly wind	Kuwait Airport Abdaly Jahra Salmiyah	36 36 36 31	21 20 21 22
,	Station	Max Exp	Min Rec	Nuwaisib	36	19
/	Kuwait City	35	23	Wafra	35	20

Sahel app includes financial disclosure data

KNG Deputy Chief congrats Sheikh Ahmad Abdullah on becoming PM

KUWAIT CITY, April 17, (KUNA): Dep-uty Chief of Kuwait National Guard (KNG) Sheikh Faisal Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah sent a cable of congratulations Tuesday to His High-

atth

Sheikh Faisal Nawaf

ness the Prime Min-ister Sheikh Ahmad Abdullah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah on assuming the office upon an Amiri decree. "It pleases us to

send sincere congratulations on appointing you (Sheikh Ahmad Abdullah) as Prime Minister and tasking you with nominating

the members of the new government," said a statement of National Guard quoting Sheikh Faisal Nawaf as saying

Sheikh Faisal wished Sheikh Ahmad Abdullah every success in the new post to serve the dear homeland, and meet aspirations and hopes of Kuwait's people.

He also wished everlasting well-being to Sheikh Ahmad Abdullah, praying to Allah the Almighty to protect Kuwait, and maintain security, safety, stability and progress to its people under the wise leadership of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, the Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces **Flights rescheduled**

Kuwait Airways Corporation (KAC) announced Tuesday rescheduling its flights to Dubai due to volatile weather, upon instructions of Dubai airport on not receiving flights during the coming two hours.

On its "X" account, the corporation said the move was taken for the safety of passengers, adding that Flight No. 675KU heading to Kuwait was rescheduled, and its passengers are listed on the Flight No. 677KU. Flight No. 676KU coming from Dubai

was rescheduled, and its passengers listed on Flight No. 674KU, it noted. The airline will communicate with the

travelers through SMS, it state. **Financial disclosure data**

Sahel government application announced on Wednesday that Kuwait Anti-Corruption Authority (Nazaha) has included a number of data relating to persons subject to the provisions of financial disclosure (Law No. 2 of 2016)

In a statement for KUNA, Sahel application spokesperson Yousif Kathem said that these data would only be shown to the people subjected to the provisions of financial disclosure in the application under the (Nazaha) button in the first page.



KUNA photo The Deputy Chief of the National Guard, Sheikh Faisal Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah during his visit to the 1st Protection Brigade.

KNG Deputy Chief pledges more equipment for squad

The Deputy Chief of the National Guard, Sheikh Faisal Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, has affirmed that the Guards' command spares no effort for securing sufficient equip-ment for the squad in coordination with military institutions in and outside Kuwait.

The Guards said in a statement on

Wednesday the Deputy Chief Sheikh Faisal was speaking during an inspection of the posts of the First Protection Brigade tasked with securing the US Embassy building, Al-Muqawaa Transmission station, and the Second Protection Brigade for Subhan fuel depots

He has affirmed necessity of applying the laws, staying vigilant and treating well citi-

zens and residents of the country. Sheikh Faisal conveyed to the person-nel greetings of His Highness Sheikh Salem Al-Ali Al-Sabah and good wishes for them. (KUNA)

Moral decadence at its low!

By Ahmad alsarraf

Other Voices

My first confrontation with mass corruption was during the horrific period of occupation, when, as head of the Riyadh Subsistence Committee, I handed over to our ambassador, Mr. Abdul Rahman al-Bakr, on the occasion of the end of my mission, a computer

printout containing the names, passport numbers, and civil cards of all those who had received financial aid from the committee, including a vast number of people who forged docu various ments, and each



of them received

subsistence payments several times. The ambassador was astonished by the magnitude of the number of people who robbed the country while it was occupied, and he asked me, with obvious concern, if there were copies of that statement. I reassured him that it was the only one. He asked me to swear on

As it became clear, from an article by our colleague Hamad Al-Hamad, that a group of mothers, on WhatsApp, which was formed to coordinate between them in what is in the interest of their children, has become the tool through which collective absence from schools is coordinated before holidays or on rainy or dusty days, etc.!

These actions and dozens of others, which we see in front of us every day, such as the phenomenon of not respecting the queue system or preserving public state property, and others, put us before the following matters:

First: The clear failure of religious education to teach citizens morals, and our lack of conviction that this matter is not the role of religion at all.

Second: The failure of public education to establish the concept of morality and its role in building the nation and the citizen.

Third: It is wrong to place all the blame on citizens, as they are already part of a backward society, but what is the excuse for a government that is supposed to include the best of the best, and yet it has been unable to see this moral collapse, or put an end to it ... and acceptance of linking morality to sexual issues? It is unfortunate to note the repeated failure of the majority of those who assumed responsibility for the Ministry of Education, in addition to the majority of representatives, to pay attention to all this violation of morals on the roads every second, and the continuous absence of students and employees from their schools and work, making our academic and professional year the shortest in the world. knowing that the history of regular education dates back to 120 years ago.

Prosecution appeal rejected

'Charges against Jarallah frought with doubts, fabrication'

AI-Seyassah report

KUWAIT CITY, April 17: The Court of Appeals, presided over by Judge Nasr Al-Heid, yesterday rejected the appeal filed by the Public Prosecution against the ruling issued to acquit the dean of Kuwaiti journalism and Editor-in-Chief of the Arab Times and Al-Seyassah newspapers Ahmed Al-Jarallah who was accused of broadcasting false and tendentious rumors about the country's internal situation via the X platform.

This new ruling is added to the series of rulings by the lofty Kuwaiti judiciary that are written in luminors letters, upholding the constitution and the law, consolidating freedom of opinion in the country, and promoting constructive criticism through press outlets on their electronic platforms and on paper. Based on allegations raised by the Department of the State Security, the Public Prosecution had charged Al-Jarallah with deliberately spreading false and malicious rumors about the internal situation of the country by publishing posts on his Twitter (now renamed to X) account called @ahmadaljaralah during the period from December 26, 2021 to November 5, 2022. The Public Prosecution explained that the social media program "X" is available to everyone both inside and outside the State of Kuwait. Such posts would have weakened the prestige and reputation of the State of Kuwait and harmed the country's national interests, as revealed in the investigations. The suspect deliberately misused smart phones for committing the crime. He committed the felony and misdemeanor stipulated in article 15 of law No. 31/1970 amending some provisions of



the truth of my words, but I refused, and added that he had to believe or not my words. But I later regretted not keeping a copy of the extract from the "mass theft," which was behind the majority of those who prayed in front of me every day, at Al-Malaz Stadium, in Riyadh, as I looked at them from the upper balcony.

A long time has passed since that incident, and there is no doubt that I have witnessed other cases of theft and mass corruption, but the weakness of my memory has forced me to forget them.

Another mass fraud occurred a year ago, when tens of thousands of students, along with a similar number of parents, teachers and observers, committed the largest fraud, and the result was that a few of them were accepted by universities abroad due to their poor level. There is no doubt that a very large percentage of the students and their parents were among the worshipers, submissive and fasting.

Then came the latest phenomenon a few days ago, when thousands of students were absent from school, and in the evening they, along with their parents, stood in queues in front of clinics to obtain an excuse for absence, due to "illness"! Knowing that these same students, and their parents, were on that day or the day before, standing in the rows of worshipers in the mosques, performing their religious duties, such as, Taraweeh and other prayers!

The rift is deep, the tragedy is getting worse daily, and almost everyone is preoccupied with immoral things, and often with trivial matters!

Note: 100,000 worshipers in the Grand Mosque participated in observing Lavlat al-Oadr, and the majority of them parked their cars in the wrong places!

If half of these people refused to violate the law and returned to spend the night in their homes, they would not have lost anything, the rest would be at ease, and morality would have a role in our lives and a meaning!

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2 dead, 1 hurt in Mutla'a accident

Kuwaiti woman flouts travel ban

By Munif Naif

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff and Agencies

KUWAIT CITY, April 17: Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Defense and acting Minister of Interior Sheikh Fahad Yusuf Al-Sabah has ordered the formation of an investigation panel to determine the circumstances leading to the departure of a Kuwaiti woman banned from traveling and was arrested by Saudi authorities, reports Al-Rai daily.

The security personnel assigned at a Kuwaiti port received a call from officials at a Saudi port inquiring about a female citizen, including her entry and exit records. The Kuwaiti security personnel revealed she is banned from traveling, but the Saudi officials said she was under their custody and that she left Kuwait illegally. It turned out her departure was not recorded, because a Saudi woman helped her and hid her in her car.

A security source told the daily that the suspect has been handed over to the Kuwaiti authorities and the necessary legal measures will be taken against her.

2 die in accident: Two unidentified people

died and a Kuwaiti citizen sustained injuries when two vehicles collided and overturned on Mutla'a Road. The bodies of the two victims were referred to forensic medicine.

According to a security source, when the Operations Room of the Ministry of Interior received information yesterday morning about a two-vehicle collision on Mutla'a Road, securitymen, paramedics and firefighters from Jahra Fire Station immediately rushed to the location and discovered that two vehicles had collided and overturned, after which one of them burst into flames. After extinguishing the fire, the two corpses from the vehicle was referred to the Forensics Medicine Department, and the injured citizen was referred to the nearest hospital. A case has been filed in this regard.

Indian assaulted by trio: An Indian resident filed a case against three unidentified people who stopped him, attacked him, and fled.

According to a security source, the victim went to Saad Al-Abdullah police station and informed securitymen that three unknown young men severely beat him and then fled the scene.

Penal Code No. 16/1960, and article 70 of law No. 37/2014 on the establishment of the

Communications and Information Technology Regulatory Authority (CITRA). In its accusation report before the Criminal Court, the Public Prosecution demanded that the accused be punished

mentioned two articles.

However, Lawyer Nahis Al-Enezi insisted that the accusations against Al-Jarallah are invalid, and submitted a defense memorandum, at the end of which he called for acquittal.

Lawyer Al-Enezi explained that the indictment was invalid for several reasons, the most important of which are the absence of criminal intent, the lack of the material element of the crime, laxity in reporting the incident, and the indictment's contradiction between the record and the description, in addition to what the witness and the indictment authority assumed wrongly that the accused committed the alleged incidents outside the country

Article 1 of the Penal Code stipulates that "the act is not considered a crime and no punishment may be imposed for it except based on a text in the law'

The legislator alone is the one who determines the crime and the punishment prescribed for it, and determines everything related to the crime, including elements, conditions, and circumstances, and places in the text related to that crime. Hence the idea of the "legal model of crime."

Crime

What is clear from the aforementioned text is that the final say in the present crime is identifying the extent of the existence of the crime that requires criminal liability against the accused regarding the facts presented in the investigation, or denying that crime on his part. The decision of the esteemed body to reach this result is governed by the Constitution and the law.

What is proven in the Twitter posts and the press articles attributed to the accused is that they repeated what was stated in proven facts in the papers of case No. 1854/2021 in terms of felonies, and they are not false rumors or different news, as they included some facts but not the entire facts of the case. Hence, it becomes clear that there was no criminal intent in the Twitter posts that are the subject of the accusation and that were published on Twitter or through the accused's electronic newspaper, given that the reporting of the news was partial and not complete, which proves that no harm was committed against the accused by reporting this news.

Lawyer Al-Enezi said, "The witness, and the indictment authority mistakenly assumed that the accused commit-



KUNA photo Chief of the General Staff of Kuwait Army Lieutenant General Bandar Al-Muzain and Commander of the US Central Command General Michael Kurilla discuss regional scenario.

Army chief, CENTCOM commander meet

Chief of the General Staff of Kuwait Army Lieutenant General Bandar Al-Muzain discussed with Commander of the US Central Command (CENTCOM) General Michael Kurilla and his accompanying delegation, issues of common interest and ways to boost them.

ted those alleged incidents outside the country, Based on that, he was criminalized in accordance with article 15 of the aforementioned penalty, even though there is nothing in the papers to prove that at all.'

Al-Seyassah was established in the State of Kuwait. The accused's Twitter account was also created in the State of Kuwait and not abroad. Neither the newspaper nor the Twitter account has an option or electronic feature that would make it directed outside the country.

There is not a single piece of evidence in the papers that confirms that the accused made these articles or posts outside the country, or even intended to direct them outside the country.

The defense lawyer said in his memorandum, "All of the Twitter posts address relevant state officials and are related to an internal matter. There is not a word or phrase that indicates that they are directed to any person outside Kuwait. Also, the accused did not issue such information to any television or radio channel outside the country.

Lawyer Al-Enezi stressed that the papers did not contain any indication of the presence of followers of the accused's Twitter account or newspaper from abroad.

He said, "What is also confirmed in the photos of the Twitter posts is that there is no one who commented on them from abroad or even viewed the accused's Twitter page.

The papers also did not indicate whether the accused had readers outside the country at all or not so that it could be imagined that the basic element for the crime to occur was present.

In addition, the witness was negligent in writing the report of the incident for about eleven months, which would have been sufficient for him to mention any impact it had, whether positive or negative, outside the country. This was not mentioned in the

papers. The facts described in the criminal papers presented are nothing but permissible criticism of the conduct of a public employee working in the State Security Department regarding an incident related to his job work in terms of case No. 1854/2021 that was addressed in the Twitter posts. This description applies to article 214 of the Penal Code and not article 214 of the Penal Code 15 mentioned above.

Looking at the act of attribution contained in the indictment, it becomes clear that the phrases contained therein are comprehensive without specifying the incriminating description of the crime attributed to the accused. They referred to what was stated in the words and phrases mentioned in the investigations, and they had to be specifically and conclusively specified.

The charge sheet contradicted the registration and the description, as it was stated in the newspaper, in the description section, that the incident occurred within the department of the State Security Service in the State of Kuwait. The registration stated that the incident oc-

During the meeting, they discussed the latest regional and international develop-ments, said Al-Muzain in a press statement on Wednesday.

Several senior commanding officers in the army attended the meeting. (KUNA)

curred outside the country. For your information, neither this nor that agrees with the true law or reality.

By reviewing the charge sheet, it becomes clear that the Public Prosecution charged the accused with the crimes listed and described based on the phrases contained in the posts on the Twitter account only, and without the articles published in Al-Seyassah that were included in the report submitted by the witness of the incident. Therefore the scope of the accusation was limited to those Twitter posts only.

Incident

Looking at the dates of these posts, we find that they contain many signs of bad faith, as their dates were all in the year 2021 and then January 2022. The officer did not write his report on the incident until November 23, 2022, that is, about a year later. When he became aware of this, he pulled out the recent Twitter posts and appended it to the facts. He attached to his report the post published on November 5, 2022, which he regarded as the end line of the crime, and considered to be continuing from 2021 until the end of 2022.

In fact, this recent post that he added to his record without justification did not contain any phrases that constitute a crime, but was just a thank you addressed to the Minister of Defense and the Minister of Interior regarding the cancellation of security restrictions that was actually issued by the Minister of Interior and was published on the ministry's website and circulated by all Kuwaiti newspapers.

By deleting the aforementioned post dated November 5, 2022 from the accusation, all the Twitter posts subject to the accusation will have dates in the year 2021 and January 2022.

Despite this, the incident officer did not file his report until November 23, 2022, that is, about a year later, which is considered laxity in reporting.

The portfolio of documents submitted included a copy of the website of the Ministry of Interior, Al-Rai newspaper, and other newspapers, in which the same news was published about the accused posting on Twitter on November 5 regarding the cancellation of security restrictions.

There is no logical justification for the inaction of the witness of the incident during all these periods that began on December 26, 2021, as he described.

How could the Public Prosecution state in the charge sheet that the crime occurred during the pe-riod from December 26, 2021 to November 5, 2022, given that these periods carry an extension that is unacceptable to logic and contradicts what is established in the papers?!

This laxity in reporting, if it indicates anything, indicates the absence of a sinful act against the accused, and that the procedures undertaken by the incident officer are fraught with doubts, suspicions, and fabrication of evidence, if any, and were served for a purpose hidden within him."



Nahis Al-Enezi

3

LOCAL



A DIGEST OF PUBLIC OPINION

The difference between TV 'serial' and the parliament

"WHEN the Kuwaiti Ministry of Information announced the referral of the cast of the Ramadan series "One Wife is Not Enough" to the Public Prosecution, under the pretext that "the role of the Ministry of Information is to preserve the values and traditions of Kuwaiti society... and advance public taste," I was drawn to a tweet that supported a question within its lines," columnist **Iqbal Al**-Ahmad wrote for Al-Qabas daily

"The Ministry of Information also

decided to "stop anyone who participated in any artistic work that offends Kuwaiti society from participating in any artistic or theatrical works that are filmed or shown inside Kuwait." "The Minis-



Iqbal Al-Ahmad

try's decision came against the backdrop of intense campaigns on social media criticizing the series, which deals with the story of polygamy, in addition to other social issues. Many demanded that this show be stopped.

"Many described the series as bold and offensive to Kuwaiti society and damaging its image, and because its content is not compatible with the principle of preserving the values and traditions of Kuwaiti society, and highlighting its true image and adherence to values and morals, because it, that is, the series, touches on sensitive issues in marital life and family relations

"I very much liked the tweet, which I read on the "X" platform, which says: "If we convince the world that the declining Ramadan series do not represent us... how can we convince them that the decline in dialogue in the National Assembly does not represent us... and this honorable representative received the largest number of voters' votes." ..!

"Certainly, the tweeter is referring in his words to some of what the candidates said during their seminars in the recent elections, which in their vocabulary exceeded respect and the principles of speech in our authentic Kuwaiti society.

"It is no secret to anyone that in many of the nation's previous assemblies, the dialogues of some representatives reached a lower level, whether through vocabulary or exchanges of words, reason, or cups of water.

"It would be great if there were

eryone's homeland.

"Let us begin with the slogan of our late Amir, Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad, 'We are all for Kuwait and Kuwait is for us,' so that the wheel of development and progress moves in our dear Kuwait.

"The people of Kuwait are still committed to the covenant and commitment to the 'Jeddah Conference,' in which Kuwait pledged with the ruling family to reconcile, fully cooperate, and prevent all attempts to spread discord.

"Let our slogan be the interest of Kuwait above all differences, and we are confident of the next government's keenness to fully cooperate with the National Assembly to adopt the most successful development projects to build a prosperous future for our homeland, Kuwait, which is considered the home of everyone.

"We also feel the members of the National Assembly are keen that their work during the next phase be aimed at achieving full cooperation with the government so that we can continue the achievements that were made during the eras of our honorable former rulers.

"From the sayings of the late Amir Sheikh Jaber Ål-Ähmad, may God have mercy on him, God willing 'The status and distinguished international reputation that Kuwait has achieved is due to the cohesion and solidarity of the people of this country, and today more than ever we must preserve these qualities.' The authenticity of our one Kuwaiti family, and that we nurture it and increase its trust over the days. God bless."

"The style of parliamentary elections and peoples of the world... The election of an individual among the people to represent them in the corridors of parliaments is an established right of the human being who lives in countries where solid democratic rules prevail. This has been in place since ancient times, as many nations tried it in their political life. This principle was applied in countries, peoples and civilizations of the previous world -- in Rome, Sparta, Greece, Britain and France, as well as America recently, and the rest of the countries of the modern world that follow the civilized democratic system," columnist Mohammad Salem Al-Balhan wrote for Al-Qabas daily.

"Most of these modern countries, whose peoples live in our current era, have adopted partisanship -- the basic rule for the voter and the elected. This is according to clear rules, evidence, regulations and principles that the elected and the voter follow in representing their party in Parlia-ment. Naturally, the elected member provides the texts and an action plan that defines the aims of his party, which he can use in his mission. Based on what the senior leadership of his party deems appropriate, he works with all his energies to ensure the successful implementation and effectiveness of party instructions, which aim to do everything in the interest of the country. "As for whoever wins parliamentary membership in those countries, other than the party that wins the majority of votes, he usually joins the so-called parliamentary opposition bloc, the task of which is to supervise the functioning of a system pledged by the ruling party and to oppose anything that is not in the interest of the country. In this case, the elected member will walk to his seat in the legislative hall armed with a road map to facilitate his task, as he will work according to the opinions and instructions he has been provided with. "One of the provisions of this rule adopted by European countries and America is that whoever obtains the majority parliamentary votes from the political parties assumes the task of heading the State and forming the government, in which the majority consists of members of the ruling party, as is the practice under the American system or the system of some European countries. "In the United States and else-where, they appoint the head of State from the elected party, and the government usually works ac-cording to the instructions of the ruling party. Some countries take this rule as the basis for political action. In Africa, for example, the party that wins the election brings the head of State, and the government is formed by its majority. This is also the case in Latin America including Brazil. "However, some countries in the whole world and in our third world in particular, do not adhere to this rule. They rather work according to what they see as good for the country and the people. These countries are not satisfied with partisanship. They are satisfied with the general system that unites rather than divide.



Kuwait, UAE pledge to bolster security cooperation. Above: Kuwait police verify the identity of an individual through biometrics process.

Kuwait, UAE focus on prevention of deportees 'breaching borders'

'Law awaits people using fake license plates in two nations'

KUWAIT CITY, April 17: Recent discussions between Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates have yielded significant outcomes aimed at bolstering bilateral cooperation in security matters. A key focus of these discussions was the prevention of deported individuals from reentering either country using forged documents, reports Al-Rai daily.

High-level representatives, including Lieutenant General Sheikh Salem Al-Nawaf from Kuwait's Ministry of Interior, engaged in fruitful talks with an UAE security delegation. The primary agenda included enhancing coordination in managing the deportation process and sharing crucial information electronically to prevent deportees from circumventing immigration controls.

Additionally, discussions addressed the longstanding traffic link between the two nations, which has been operational for over a year. Plans are underway to finalize pending matters and address any outstanding issues officially in the coming month.

Both Kuwait and the UAE expressed a mutual interest in expanding the scope of their cooperation beyond mere traffic violation data exchange. They aim to implement measures for security collaboration to identify and apprehend individuals using counterfeit license plates within their territories.

Emphasizing the importance of consolidating security cooperation, officials from both sides underscored the need to encompass various relevant aspects to ensure the safety and integrity of their borders.



Nepali maid commits suicide

Grocery robbers to be deported

By Munif Naif

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff and Agencies

KUWAIT CITY, April 17: The Ministry of Interior announced personnel from the Criminal Security Sector have arrested two Egyptians who were involved in criminal activities, reports Al-Qabas daily.

These individuals were identified from a video clip circulating on social media, depicting incidents of grocery theft in the Salmiya area. Following the circulation of these clips, the Ministry intensified its search and investigation operations, leading to the identification of the culprits under the direct supervision of Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Defense, and Acting Minister of Interior, Sheikh Fahd Al-Yousef Al-Sabah.

The Security Media Department con-firmed that all necessary legal measures are

being taken against the perpetrators. Cases have been registered against them, and they will be deported from the country.

This swift and decisive action underscores the Ministry's commitment to maintaining law and order, ensuring the safety and security of citizens and residents alike. Such measures serve as a deterrent to criminal activities and reinforce the importance of upholding the rule of law.

Maid commits suicide: A Nepalese domestic worker died by suicide inside her sponsor's house in Qasr, Jahra.

According to a security source, when the Ministry of Interior's operations room received information about the incident, securitymen rushed to the location and found the domestic worker hanging from the ceiling using a cloth piece.



hr@almuna.org

keenness on the part of the concerned authorities, the first of which is the National Assembly, to stop those who set a bad example in the style of dialogue, discussion and expression of opinion under the dome of Abdul-lah Al-Salem Hall, which attracts attention and arouses more interest than soap operas.

"The matter of parliamentary immunity, which has been used as a shield against accountability and responsibility, should not hinder the efforts to uphold privacy and ethical standards within Kuwaiti society, particularly within the National Assembly. We have been closely monitoring recent media coverage surrounding the series 'One Wife is Not Enough,' and it is imperative that we address these issues without any hindrance from immunity provisions

"Although I personally have a special opinion regarding these Ministry of Information procedures, what concerns me is that muscle flexing should not be only in a specific area and not in other areas in Kuwait, which may be much more important. "Morals are morals, principles are

principles. They cannot be mixed here or ignored there.'

Also:

"Citizens are looking forward to the beginning of the new Parliament being the beginning of complete harmony between the two authorities, as everyone is keen for the two authorities to devote themselves to adopting development projects for the benefit of citizens," columnist Abdul Mohsen Muhammad Al-Husseini wrote for Al-Anba daily.

"Kuwait is everyone's country, and there is no doubt that everyone is keen for the relationship between the two authorities to prevail in complete understanding. The next stage is considered an important stage in progress towards building a bright future for Kuwait, a country for everyone.

"We are all for Kuwait and Kuwait is for us.' This is the slogan announced by His Highness the late Amir Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad after the complete liberation of the pure soil of Kuwait from the treacherous occupier. We hope that the two authorities will circulate this slogan so that the members of the two authorities focus their deliberations in the council on the public interest of the Kuwaitis and Kuwait, and that everyone's loyalty is to Kuwait, ev-

"May Allah grant everyone goodness, security and peace."

Compiled by PFX Fernandes

A ministry inspector checks the weight of plate of kebab after cooking.

Eateries involved in food fraud face law

KUWAIT CITY, April 17: The Ministry of Trade and Industry has taken action against three restaurants found guilty of deliberately reducing the weight of grill pans after grilling. The Commercial Control Inspectors at the Salmiya Center uncovered these violations and the Ministry has completed legal proceedings against the offenders. This announcement was made through the official social media account of the Ministry on Tuesday, reports Al-Jarida daily.

In a related move, the Ministry of Trade and Industry also cracked down on two food stores involved in commercial and retail fraud. Inspection teams seized these stores located in the "impossible" fruit and vegetable market for deceptive practices, which included altering the country of origin labels and repackaging large items into smaller packages.

The Ministry's efforts underscore its commitment to ensuring fair trade practices and protecting consumers from deceptive tactics in the marketplace.



the influence of drugs ports Al-Anba daily.

The daily said the suspect was initially arrested for speeding in his Americanmade car on the Jahra Road.

After intercepting the vehicle and prompting the driver to stop, it was discovered that he was under the influence of drugs and had in his possession bags containing the narcotic substance known as shabu, narcotic pills, and drug paraphernalia.

Subsequently, the individual was arrested, and the confiscated narcotic materials were handed over to the appropriate authorities for further action.

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LOCAL

MoE receives 10 school buildings in Mutla'a as it preps for new school yr

Second phase of lectures at govt schools resumes: MEW

KUWAIT CITY, April 17: As the Ministry of Education gears up for the upcoming academic year 2024/2025, preparations are underway to equip schools and ensure they meet the latest standards.

Sources within the education sector disclosed to Al-Jarida that the ministry has received 10 school buildings in Al-Mutla'a City from the Public Authority for Housing Welfare. These buildings include facilities for kindergartens, primary, middle, and secondary schools.

The handover process was overseen by project engineers from both the PAHW and the educational facilities sector. The last building, designated for a kindergarten, was handed over last Sunday. These buildings come with a two-year warranty period, during which their compliance with standards is monitored and any issues are addressed with the PAHW.

The ministry has already commenced the process of equipping these schools, including providing necessary furniture for staff and students, as well as books and materials. The aim is to open several of these schools at the beginning of the next academic year. Educational districts near Al-Mutla'a have devel-



One of the school models received by the ministry.

oped plans to accommodate students wishing to transfer to these newly received schools, with preparations underway to ensure a smooth transition for students and staff.

Furthermore, the ministry expects to receive additional schools in Al-Mutla'a, as 11 more projects are nearing completion. This would bring the total number of schools received or expected to be received to 21.

The ministry is diligently preparing seven of these schools to be operational for the next academic year, including one kindergarten, two primary schools, two middle schools, and two secondary schools (one for boys and one for girls) at each educational stage.

Meanwhile, the Ministry of Electricity, Water, and Renewable Energy has announced the resumption of the second phase of morning lectures at the Ministry of Education, aiming to cover 30 schools by the end of the academic year, reports Al-Jarida daily.

This initiative is part of the ministry's plan to promote the rationalization of electricity and water consumption, particularly as the winter season comes to a close. The ministry stated that this collaboration with the Ministry of Education is part of a renewed partnership plan to raise awareness about the importance of consumption rationalization. The awareness programs are delivered by a committee responsible for preparing the strategy for rationalizing electricity and water consumption in the ministry, along with teams derived from it.

The ministry's specialized team, comprising both male and female engineers, has organized several awareness lectures for middle and high school students. These lectures aim to educate the younger generation about the services provided by the ministry related to electricity and water.

In the first phase of the campaign, the ministry's team covered 11 schools across various governorates, delivering lectures on various topics related to consumption rationalization.

The Electricity Company expressed gratitude to the Ministry of Education, particularly the Educational Development and Activities Sector, for their cooperation and warm welcome extended to the ministry's team. The lectures provided aim to

encourage responsible consumption habits in the targeted schools, ultimately serving the ministry's objectives.

PAHW inks \$42 mln deals to build public buildings in Mutla'a

KUWAIT CITY, April 17, (KUNA): The Public Authority for Housing Welfare (PAHW) has signed two contracts to construct public buildings in the new Al-Mutla'a residential district worth KD 42.468 million (USD 140 million).

The authority said in a state-

ment on Wednesday that the new buildings would be constructed with high-quality materials, affirming the keenness to secure all needs for the citizens while moving to their newly built houses in the region.

The facilities will include nurser-

ies, stores, two schools in addition to various other shops.

Currently, the authority is executing several projects including a medical center, a supermarket, a police station a supermarket, a

police station, a municipal building, a postal office and others. Electric power has been connected to 109 buildings in the district, it said, indicating at the ongoing work to build all necessary facilities for the new residential district, one of the latest mega housing projects in Kuwait.

Mutla'a, with some hilly sites, is located to the north of Kuwait City.





MEW official giving a lecture at one of the government schools.



Ambassador Miguel Moro Aguilar with Suhailah Al Salem and Mercedes Vazquez.

Reception hosted by Kingdom of Spain Plenipotentiary Ambassador to State of Kuwait focuses on women's leadership

KUWAIT CITY, April 17: The Kingdom of Spain's Ambassador to the State of Kuwait and the Kingdom of Bahrain His Excellency Mr. Miguel Moro Aguilar, hosted a reception in the State of Kuwait to meet with Mrs. Suhailah Al Salem, Supervisor of Planning Department at Kuwait's Ministry of Defense and Ms. Mercedes Vazquez, General Manager at ESK Holding, a Spanish business and technology executive who has demonstrated extensive innovative wards the support of the role of women in all dimensions of the economic fabric, Spain's maximum envoy to the State of Kuwait addressed with Mrs. Al Salem and Mrs. Vazquez, their journey, impact, challenges and future prospects as women in the defense and technology, innovation and business fields respectively.

During the reception held on April 14, Mrs. Al Salem also addressed her experience running for the latest 2024 Kuwait National Assembly elections, as part of

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impact in the State of Kuwait for the past eight years. Considering Spain's foreign policy toher desire to encourage female representation in leadership in the State of Kuwait for sustainable prosperity.

Kuwait to host Chief IT CEO Summit

Municipal Council member submits questions about repair of Darwaza

By Inass Awadh Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, April 17: The Municipal Council member Alia Al-Farsi submitted a question to the executive body regarding the repair work of the lower part of Al-Abdul Razzaq Gate (Darwaza) in Kuwait City and the Mubarakiya Markets Development Project.

In the preamble to the letter with her questions, Al-Farsi emphasized the significance of the donation approved by the Municipal Council from the Commercial Bank of Kuwait.

This donation aims to support the restoration work of the tunnel and Darwazat Al-Abdul Razzaq Street. The intersection holds great importance as it connects four main roads in the heart of the capital and has

roads in the heart of the capital and has a significant impact on development and urban plans, particularly in Kuwait City and the Mubarakiya markets, areas of concern for the Kuwait

Municipality. Al-Farsi asked a number of questions, such as:-

1. What is the expected time to reopen the surface intersection (car intersection), according to the schedule?

2. What is the expected time to reopen the underground tunnel (for pedestrian traffic) according to the schedule?

3. Are there structural safety measures for the site?

4. To what extent will the Mubarakiya Markets Development Project be affected if the Kuwait Metro is not implemented?

She also asked for an explanation of the impact on the surrounding roads in coordination with the relevant authorities as well as a feasibility study for the project components.



Chief IT CEO Summit in May: The Communications and Information Technology Regulatory Authority (CITRA) announced the forthcoming Chief Information Technology CEO Summit 2024 will be held in Kuwait on May 13, reports Al-Jarida daily.

This summit will host speakers in digital transformation to delve into various topics concerning artificial intelligence and its broader impact on technology. Dr. Ammar Al-Husseini, the agency's

Dr. Ammar Al-Husseini, the agency's acting director, highlighted their strategic role as a partner in the summit, demonstrating their commitment to spearheading digital transformation in the country and shaping the future of information technology.

Al-Husseini emphasized Kuwait's rapid digital advancement, citing numerous government-led initiatives supporting citizens and companies, with artificial intelligence playing a pivotal role across sectors like education, healthcare, and government.

The summit aims to facilitate constructive dialogues between regional technology firms and influential decision-makers in information and communications technology. Al-Husseini underscored the Kuwaiti government's dedication to advancing its digital agenda in alignment with Kuwait Vision 2035 and Kuwait Strategy 2040, emphasizing the adoption of emerging technologies and fostering innovation in both public and private sectors.

Furthermore, Al-Husseini noted the growing investment in Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI) use cases by Kuwaiti institutions, highlighting the summit as an ideal platform to explore the evolving role of artificial intelligence in shaping the future of information technology.

Jyoti Lalchandani, Vice President of IDC Group and Regional Director for the Middle East, Turkey, and Africa region, emphasized the summit's objective to empower technology leaders with knowledge and strategies essential for embracing artificial intelligence as a fundamental component of their organizations' technology agendas.

The summit's agenda includes expertled sessions and panel discussions covering various aspects of digital transformation, including modernizing applications, fortifying organizations in the digital economy, and harnessing artificial intelligence and analytics for transformative outcomes.



Is Kuwait's

Continued from Page 1

democracy that we praise today reflect our society? Or was it the reason for provoking tribal and sectarian strife, and creating a distorted parliament that does not reflect the nature of a society based on tolerance and mutual support?

There are people who agreed to have Shura (consultative) councils, because they found them most suitable. On the other hand, there are underdeveloped nations where civil wars broke out simply because of proposals to amend the constitution. An example of such a nation is Lebanon, which was immersed in war for 15 years. Tunisia is still suffering to this day from poor constitutional amendments dictated by some parties after the so-called "Arab Spring". Libya is experiencing an ongoing war as a result of the lack of agreement on a single constitution after the demise of Gaddafi's regime. Another example is Syria.

In Kuwait, we have the ability to work on improving society by amending the Constitution, especially since there is an Amir who has committed himself to restoring pioneership to Kuwait and advancing it.

After living for six decades under an absurd struggle to prevent the development of the state, we are today in dire need of correct parliamentary and governmental practice.

In the Arabian Gulf region, Kuwait is the only country where 46 ministries were formed within 60 years, more than twothirds of which were formed after liberation. The situation reached such an extent that some of them were no more than three months old. All of this was the result of parliamentary grilling based on personal interests

Many times, confidence was withdrawn from the minister before the rest of the MPs heard his defense. Non-cooperation with the Prime Minister is a sword that is always on the necks, and the result is always either his dismissal, or the dissolution of the National Assembly. We thus end up returning to square one.

One of the loopholes is setting 14 days to form the ministry, which is why there is always a flaw. Either more than one ministry is assigned to one person, or it is being boiled down because the deadline granted to the prime minister-designate runs out quickly.

In order for Kuwait to get out of the vicious circle around which it is revolving, and according to what circles close to the government say, we today have a leader who is keen for a serious development vision, which he has been calling for since he assumed power.

Every effort is being made to rid the country of parasites that have grown in light of the conflict of interests between some groups that realized overnight that they were able to turn the tables if an employee of theirs was not appointed, or if they did not like a minister. This is due to the fact that the current constitution restricts the leader and the executive authority that cooperates with him.

It is certain that we will not get out of this vicious circle without amending the constitution, even if that means appointing a Shura Council, or if the parliament is made up of two chambers

World Bank,

Continued from Page 1

According to Regions," Kuwait's financial balance is expected to decline from and public diplomacy. Sheikh Thamer underscored the impor-

tance of understanding the special nature and dimensions of regional security in the Middle East. He called for acting for confining weap-

ons to states, after the spread of weapons among non-state actors and terrorist organizations in many countries.

He described NATO as the most important organization concerned with strategic and geopolitical security.

Gov't denies

Continued from Page 1

Yousef Kathem pointed out in a press statement that the service provided by (Nazaha) is for financial disclosure services for those covered by Law No. 2 of 2016 who are subject to the provisions of financial disclosure.

He explained further that the notification reached all users of (Sahel), whose number exceeds one million and 700 thousand users, which led to slowing down some of the application services

He stressed the need to obtain information from trusted sources and not to spread any rumors or false information through social media.

Kuwait pledges

Continued from Page 1

Al-Ghareeb stated that Kuwait established a shelter for female expatriate workers, where those who wish to reside there are received voluntarily through immediate entry without any requirements and allocating accommodations and means of living.

Kuwait is well aware of the importance of cooperation with other countries, especially those who issue reports regarding trafficking around the world, in order to combat it, Al-Ghareeb noted, pointing to the importance of exchanging opinions to achieve the desired goals.

He offered his sincere condolences and sympathy to the Sultanate of Oman over the deaths and losses due to the heavy rains that have swept it these days, and thanked the Sultanate for the warm reception and organizing the forum.

He concluded by suggesting several recommendations, including the establishment of a technical working group to develop a map for implementing the recommendations to ensure achieving the desired goals of the forum.

He also recommended benefiting from the experiences of participating countries in the field of labor inspection procedures, control rules, follow-up of recruitment and employment companies, and coordination mechanisms between labor-hosting countries and source countries, as well as continue raising community awareness of the rights and duties of migrant workers and boost combating forced labor.

No Assembly

Continued from Page 1

Al-Khanfour said the sessions slated for April 17 and April 21 are useless since HH the Amir is not present; hence, there is no Amiri speech. He then confirmed his attendance at the opening session scheduled for May 14 as per the Amiri decree on postponing the session until that day.

It is worth mentioning that the second oldest MP-elect, Saleh Ashour, previously invited the newly elected MPs to a session on Sunday in order to prevent the submission of petitions about the constitutionality of the Assembly.

MoSA introduces e-services for social assistance applications

Light shed on who qualifies and how to apply

KUWAIT CITY, April 17: The Family Welfare Department in the Ministry of Social Affairs has allowed the opening of social assistance file for eligible groups through the ministry's electronic services, reports Al-Anba daily.

Following are the conditions for the abovementioned procedure as per the Social Assistance Law and relevant regulations:

Kuwaiti nationality.

Should be in the country when submitting the social assistance request except those studying abroad. ■ No commercial licenses regis-

tered under the name of the beneficiary or individuals covered by the social assistance.

■ Income should not be more than the value of the prescribed social assistance.

■ Not registered in the Public Authority for Manpower as the owner of a file, a partner in a file, an authorized signatory or one of the individuals covered by the social assistance.

Married women should be at least 55 years old.

gible at the end of the legal waiting period for marriage. The addition of children is possible only if custody and alimony rulings are issued. The woman's share in the Public Institution for Social Security (PIFSS) from her father is settled if the father is deceased. All children covered by the social assistance must study once they reach the compulsory education age.

that the husband is unable to earn and work according to the medical examination form approved by the Medical Council.

Widows should not have remarried, with their share of the deceased husband's salary and from the father (if deceased) are settled. All children covered by the assistance must study once they reach the compulsory education age.

Unmarried women must be 35

For orphans, the father is de-

For those 60 years old and



A group photo of the bank's executive management with Kuwaiti medical personnel.



From right: Ambassador of Palestine to Kuwait, representative of the British Embassy, Sheikha Al-Bahr, and Maha Al-Barjas.

NBK sponsors 'specialized training' for Kuwaiti Medical Team heading to Gaza

KUWAIT CITY, April 17: Over a period of five days, National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) sponsored and hosted specialized medical training courses conducted by UK-based charity David Nott Foundation, in collaboration with Kuwait Red Crescent Society (KRCS). The courses involved the participation of 37 Kuwaiti doctors and trainees specializing in general surgery and anesthesia. These medical professionals were trained to offer assistance in crisis situations ilting from wars and natural dis-



nership between NBK and KRCS. Through this partnership, the bank extends support to numerous charitable and humanitarian initiatives both domestically and internationally.

Moreover, Al-Sayer expressed his delight in the successful accomplishment of the training courses, fulfilling their intended objective of enhancing the skills of several Kuwaiti surgeons and anesthesiologists to deliver vital medical assistance in regions impacted by conflicts and sters. He highlighted that a portion of these skilled professionals will be dispatched to Gaza Strip to provide essential medical aid to the injured and wounded members of the Palestinian community.

Divorced women shall be eli-

Women married to non-Kuwaitis should have children, and

years old if their father is alive or 18 years old if their father is dead. Their share from their father is settled from PIFSS once they reach 18 years old and if their father is dead.

ceased and their share from the father is settled. All children covered by the assistance must study upon reaching the compulsory education age.

32.8% of GDP in 2023 to 30.1% in 2024 and further to 27.1% in 2025. Inflation rates in Kuwait are forecasted to reach 3.2% in 2024 and 2.7% in 2025, down from 3.6% in 2023.

The IMF also adjusted its expectations for the Middle East and Central Asia region, forecasting growth to rise from 2% in 2023 to 2.8% in 2024 and further to 4.2% in 2025. This adjustment is attributed to a decline in non-oil activity and oil revenues in some regional countries.

Globally, the IMF raised its expectations for economic growth to 3.2% in 2024, driven by the strength of the US economy and certain emerging markets. It maintained its 2025 growth forecast at 3.2% but cautioned about ongoing inflation and geopolitical risks.

Despite the upward revision in global economic growth, the IMF warned of potential short-term challenges stemming from rising borrowing costs and reduced financial support in some countries.

It stressed the need for decisive economic measures and highlighted the ongoing battle against inflation, particularly in low-income countries facing pressure from a strong dollar and high food and fuel costs.

The IMF identified several risks to global economic growth, including indirect effects of conflicts like the Russian-Ukrainian war and regional violence in the Middle East, which could fuel inflation and lead to expectations of interest rate hikes, impacting global markets and economic sentiment.

Moreover, Standard & Poor's credit ratings agency highlighted increased geopolitical risks in the Middle East region, particularly citing ongoing tensions in Gaza and Iranian pressure on Israel.

The agency warned that a major regional conflict could destabilize economic, social, and financial stability in the region, potentially leading to negative credit rating measures and significant economic repercussions for affected countries.

Standard & Poor's emphasized that sovereign ratings for Middle Eastern countries are sensitive to regional geopolitical fluctuations, with the possibility of long-term conflicts negatively impacting economic growth, financial flows, and government finances.

However, countries like Abu Dhabi, Kuwait, Qatar, and Saudi Arabia are expected to mitigate these pressures in the near term through their substantial financial reserves and international investments.

Kuwait-NATO

Continued from Page 1

It aims to improve common understanding of security challenges and, through increased interoperability and standardization, enable closer cooperation. The hub promotes practical cooperation in various areas including strategic analysis, civil preparedness, military-to-military cooperation

Meanwhile, MP-elect Khalid Al-Otaibi said he got a document that the Council of Ministers sent to the ministries asking about their vision on revising the subsidies. He pointed out that in 2013, a committee was formed to revise the subsidies and this led to an increase in fuel prices. He added the committee is currently conducting studies on minimizing or canceling some subsidies; including the construction materials subsidy amounting to KD30,000.

He also cited the reduction of rent allowance, 50 percent reduction of the student allowance, reducing the housewives allowance of those who spent three months abroad instead of six month, in addition to increasing gasoline prices. He argued that gasoline prices affect the prices of commodities, which depend on gasoline for transportation and delivery.

He went on to say that the government is conducting studies on laws it considers a burden on public budget. He added the government should have conducted studies on improving the citizens' standard of living, especially since it requested the previous Assembly to postpone voting on relevant bills for further discussion.

He urged HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Abdullah to take the chance to immediately issue decisions in the interest of citizens like increasing the social allowance and granting interest-free loans. He said this is one way of cooperating with the Assembly.

On the appointment of HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Al-Abdullah; MP-elect Saad Al-Khanfour said the premier is approaching a critical and exceptional era, which requires the selection of ministers capable of fulfilling the citizens' demands and executing the directives of the political leadership.

MP-elect Saleh Ashour has stressed the need for a capable government with a distinguished and practical work program that considers the citizens' demands.

MP-elect Bader Al-Mullah urged the incoming government to lay down a feasible work program focusing on three vital issues combating corruption, ensuring financial sustainability and improving the citizens' standard of living.

MP-elect Mohammad Musad Al-Doussari called on HH the Prime Minister to protect the middle class and limited income citizens. He said such objectives are based on the balanced public and private sectors.

Moreover, MP-elect Muhannad Al-Sayer criticized the decision of the government to suspend the processing of citizens' transactions until they pay their energy bills. He argued this decision contravenes the verdicts issued by the Court of Cassation and reveals the real attitude of the government, which is not concerned about the citizens' suffering. He added the government should focus on combating corruption and recovering stolen public funds, instead of targeting the pockets of citizens.

above, the social assistance is for single women (divorced, widowed or unmarried) and men above 60 years old.

For those in foster care, they are required to obtain a certificate from the Family Nursery Department at the Ministry of Social Affairs.

For those studying in the country, they should be married and not more than 26 years old on the date of applying for assistance. It should be ensured that their share from their father is settled if the latter is deceased. All children covered by the assistance must study upon reaching the compulsory education age and that they do not receive any social incentive. After high school, they should enroll at Kuwait University or the Public Authority for Applied Education and Training (PAAET) or private universities accredited by the Ministry of Higher Education.

For those studying abroad, they must be married, shoulder their own education expenses, and that their share from the father is settled if the latter is deceased. They must not be above 26 years old on the date of application. All children covered by the assistance must study upon reaching the compulsory education age. After high school, they must be enrolled in a university or college accredited by the cultural attaché.

For the families of prisoners, the head of the family should be a Kuwaiti serving time at the Central Prison. All children covered by the assistance must study upon reaching the compulsory education age.

For those released from prison, they must present a certificate the Bashaer Al-Khair Association or a medical care form. All children covered by the assistance must study upon reaching the compulsory education age.

For those who are sick, the women must be unmarried and 18 years old or older. They must present a medical examination form from the social unit proving the inability to earn and work. The form should be approved by the Medical Council. It should be ensured that their share from the father, if deceased, is settled. All children covered by the assistance must study upon reaching the compulsory education age.

■ In case of financial disability (adult), he must be at least 40 years old and registered at the Civil Service Commission. He must not have caused the loss of his source of income. All children covered by the assistance must study upon reaching the compulsory education age.

asters. A selected group will be dispatched to the Gaza Strip to provide medical support to the injured Palestinian population.

At the conclusion of the training courses, Mr. Isam Al-Sager, Vice Chairman and Group CEO of NBK, welcomed the medical personnel. Also present were Dr. Hilal Al-Sayer. Chairman of the Board of Directors of Kuwait Red Crescent Society (KRCS), Palestinian Ambassador to Kuwait Rami Tahboub and representatives from UK-based David Knott Foundation Medical Director Dr Ammar Darwish and representatives from British Embassy Kuwait.

Strategic partnership

In his speech, Al-Sager extended a warm welcome to the attendees, conveying NBK's delight in partnering with Kuwait Red Crescent Society and David Nott Foundation. This collaboration underscores the bank's commitment to its strategic partnership with KRCS, aimed at bolstering humanitarian endeavors both within and beyond Kuwait's borders.

He elaborated on NBK's commitment to extending aid to the people in Gaza Strip, aiming to bolster their resilience in the wake of Israeli aggression. The bank's sponsorship of the collaboration between KRCS and David Knott Foundation underscores this commitment. The partnership entails providing training for doctors operating in conflict and disaster zones. The bank hosted these specialized training courses for five days, from April 13 to 17, accommodating doctors and trainees from Kuwaiti medical professionals, specializing in general surgery and anesthesia.

Surgical procedures

Al-Sager announced that a group of the trained local professionals will be dispatched to Gaza Strip, offering medical assistance to the injured individuals of the Palestinian community. They will conduct vital surgical procedures and administer treatments and medications to those impacted by the continuous Israeli airstrikes on Gaza Strip.

Pride & gratification

"We, at NBK, are deeply honored to extend our support to KRCS's initiative aimed at performing surgical procedures and delivering essential healthcare services to Gaza Strip. This project, led by specialized medical personnel from Kuwait, is projected to directly benefit approximately 20,000 individuals in Gaza. It addresses the urgent medical and therapeutic needs of the injured and affected, while also prioritizing the critical deficit in the healthcare infrastructure of Gaza Strip. Our collabora-

Al-Sager receives an honorary shield from Dr Al-Sayer.

tion with humanitarian organizations endeavors to prevent the imminent collapse of the healthcare system in Gaza," Al-Sager commented.

Familiar territory

Al-Sager highlighted that NBK's sponsorship of the collaboration between KRCS and David Knott Foundation isn't the bank's first initiative toward aiding the people of Gaza during their ongoing crisis. He noted that the bank had previously contributed US\$5 million in October 2023 to support relief efforts. Additionally, the bank donated mobile medical clinics, fully equipped with medical equipment and devices, through KRCS to support Gaza.

Al-Sager emphasized that the bank, in collaboration with KRCS, remains steadfast in its commitment to providing assistance to those in need, particularly the Palestinian population. This commitment stems from its dedication to humanitarian and social causes, aligning with Kuwait's policy of aiding nations requiring support and championing Arab and Islamic causes, notably the Palestinian cause.

He highlighted that NBK's initiatives and backing for humanitarian and relief endeavors epitomize its commitment to social responsibility, a principle it diligently upholds not only within Kuwait but also across the Arab world.

Thanks & appreciation

In conclusion, Al-Sager expressed heartfelt gratitude to KRCS and David Knott Foundation for their dedicated efforts. He also expressed hope that their collaboration would successfully achieve its objectives of alleviating the health impacts on Gaza. He also voiced optimism that such initiatives would help prevent the collapse of the healthcare system in Gaza Strip and mitigate the effects of the humanitarian crisis faced by our brothers and sisters in Palestine.

Leading organization

Chairman of the Board of Directors of Kuwait Red Crescent Society, Dr. Hilal Al-Sayer, expressed gratitude for NBK's sponsorship and hosting of the training courses organized by KRCS in collaboration with David Knott Foundation. He remarked, "This exemplifies what we have come to expect from a leading organization like NBK, in extending its generosity to execute humanitarian projects aimed at alleviating the suffering of those in need." He highlighted that this collabo-

ration is part of the strategic part-

Recipients and project initiatives

He indicated that the project to conduct surgical operations and provide medical treatments in Gaza Strip will directly benefit 20,000 individuals wounded by the Israeli airstrikes, with an indirect impact on all residents living in Gaza Strip. The project spans six months and entails several activities, including conducting a comprehensive field survey to accurately assess needs and identify recipients, with a focus on those most vulnerable to death or complications among the injured. Other activities involve obtaining necessary permits, coordinating with relevant authorities, supplying medical personnel and equipment, conducting essential surgeries, and providing advanced training courses for the medical team by David Knott Foundation, facilitated in collaboration with NBK. Additionally, the project includes ongoing follow-up activities, field assessment, and media records to document its progress.

Al-Sayer concluded his speech by emphasizing that KRCS stands as a national foundation committed to consistently offering humanitarian and relief aid to those in need, demonstrating unwavering dedication to supporting afflicted and affected populations.

Specialized training

Meanwhile, Dr Ammar Darwish from David Nott Foundation expressed his satisfaction in collaborating with KRCS to provide specialized training to a cohort of Kuwaiti general surgeons and anesthesiologists. He extended gratitude to NBK for sponsoring and hosting these specialized training sessions.

Skill development

He emphasized that David Knott Charitable Foundation remains steadfast in its commitment to supporting and enhancing the skills of medical teams delivering urgent aid to the injured and affected individuals amidst the ongoing events in Gaza. He noted that since 2015, the foundation, specializing in training doctors operating in conflict zones and areas struck by natural disasters, has consistently provided training courses to national teams across various countries. These courses aim to elevate their abilities to deliver essential medical care in regions impacted by wars and calamities.

INTERNATIONAL

World News Roundup

Europe

Ukraine prez signs law Russia missiles hit Chernihiv; 14 killed

KYIV, Ukraine, April 17, (Agencies): Three Russian missiles slammed into a downtown area of the northern Ukrainian city of Chernihiv on Wednesday, hitting an eight-floor apartment building and killing at least 14 people, authorities said.



At least 61 people, including two children, were wounded in the morning attack, Ukrainian emergency services said. Chernihiv lies about 150 kilometers (90 miles) north of the capital, Kyiv, near the border with Russia and Belarus, and has a population of around 250,000 people. The latest Russian bombard-

ment came as the war stretched into its third year and approached what could be a critical juncture as a lack of further military support from

Ukraine's Western partners increasingly leaves it at the mercy of the Kremlin's bigger forces.

Through the winter months, Russia under the government of Vladimir Putin made no dramatic advance along the 1,000-kilometer (620-mile) front line, focusing instead on attritional warfare. However, Ukraine's shortage of artillery ammunition, troops and armored vehicles has allowed the Russians to gradually push forward, military analysts say.

A crucial element for Ukraine is the holdup in Washington of approval for an aid package that in-cludes roughly \$60 billion for Ukraine. House Speaker Mike Johnson said Sunday that he would try to move the package forward this week.

Ukrainian president signs law: Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy signed a controversial law Tuesday, days after it was passed by parliament, potentially helping Kyiv to boost conscription to re-plenish depleted forces to fend off Russia's continued aggression.

The mobilization law, published on Ukraine's Par-liamentary website, is expected to take effect in a month and make it easier to identify every draft-eligible man in the country. Many have dodged conscription by avoiding contact with authorities.

The law also provides soldiers with incentives, such as cash bonuses or money toward buying a house or car, which according to analysts Ukraine can't afford. Ukraine has been struggling to fend off the Russian

advance.

'Defense key issue ahead of polls': Russia's invasion of Ukraine is at the forefront of European Union citizens' minds, with defense and security seen as key campaign issues ahead of the June elections, according to a study published Wednesday.

At national level, the EU's defense and security is mentioned first in nine countries, in contrast with sentiments five years ago when the last EU Parliament elections were held.

"The EU's defense and security was far from a prominent topic in 2019, before Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022,," the latest edition of the EU Parliament's Eurobarometer said.



Spain's King Felipe VI, (centre left), and Queen Letizia, (centre right), arrive for a wreath laying ceremony at the National Monument opposite the Royal Palace in Amsterdam, Netherlands on April 17. (AP)

Politics



Trump makes campaign stop at NY bodega

NEW YORK, April 17, (AP): Fresh from a Manhattan courtroom, Donald Trump visited a New York bodega where a man was stabbed to death, a stark pivot for the former president as he juggles being a criminal defendant and the Republican challenger intent on blaming President Joe Biden for crime.

Trump stopped by Sanaa Con-venient Store, a tiny bodega that sells chips, sodas and other snacks. Trump aides said the former president and presumptive GOP nominee chose the store because it has been the site of a violent attack on an employee.

Presumptive

The visit was Trump's first campaign appearance since his criminal hush money trial began, making the presumptive GOP nominee the first

Facing GOP revolt, Johnson's plan for **US** aid to Ukraine and allies uncertain

WASHINGTON, April 17, (AP): Defiant and determined, House Speaker Mike Johnson pushed back Tuesday against mounting Republican anger over his proposed US aid package for Ukraine, Israel and other allies, and rejected a call to step aside or risk a vote to oust him from office.

"I am not resigning," Johnson said after a testy morning meeting of fellow House Republicans at the Capitol.

Johnson referred to himself as a "wartime speaker" of the House and indicated in his strongest self-

helpful." But as night fell, the speaker's resolve collided with Republican opposition to his plan.

For hours, Johnson holed up at the Capitol with lawmakers sorting through their alternative strategies, particularly ways to attach US-Mex-ico border security measures to the package. No bill text was released, putting passage of any aid this week in serious doubt.

"We'll see," Johnson said about the legislation, ducking into a meeting that dragged toward midnight. Tuesday had initially brought a

in tone fro House Republicans and the speak-

er himself at a pivotal moment as the embattled leader tries, against

the wishes of his majority, to mar-

shal the votes needed to send the

stalled national security aid for Is-

rael, Ukraine and other overseas

Democratic nomination. Attorney and

political newcomer Caroleene Dob-

son defeated former state Sen. Dick

Brewbaker to win the Republican

nomination. Dobson and Figures will

face off in November in the closely

after the district was redrawn by a fed-

eral court to boost the voting power of

Black residents. If Figures is elected,

it will be the first time in history that

Alabama, which is about 27% Black,

has two Black members in its congres-

"I'm enormously grateful for the

confidence and the trust and the faith

that the voters of this newly drawn dis-

trict have placed in me to represent the

Democratic Party in November," Fig-

ures said as he addressed supporters Tuesday night. "That is something that

Figures, an attorney, also served as

an aide to former President Barrack

Obama, serving as domestic director

of the Presidential Personnel Office.

Democrats are aiming to flip the seat

watched general election.

sional delegation.

I do not take lightly.'

allies to passage.



US Speaker of the House Mike Johnson, R-La., pauses as he and the House Republican leadership meet with reporters following a closed-door Republican strategy session as Johnson pushes towards separate votes on aid for Israel and Ukraine, at the Capitol in Washington on April 16. (AP)

Ex-UK premier Truss backs Trump: During her 49 days as Britain's shortest-serving prime minister, Liz Truss sparked mayhem on the financial markets and turmoil within her Conservative Party.

Now she is speaking up, and her message is: It wasn't me.

In interviews and a new book, Truss robustly defends her economic record, blaming the "deep state," "technocrats," "the establishment," civil servants and the Bank of England for her downfall.

Her ideas include abolishing the United Nations and backing Donald Trump for reelection - a departure from the convention that senior British politicians stay out of US elections.

Croatia votes in parliamentary election: Croatia is voting Wednesday in a parliamentary election after a campaign that centered on a bitter rivalry between the president and prime minister of the country.

The ballot pits the ruling conservative Croatian Democratic Union, or HDZ, led by Prime Minister Andrej Plenkovic, against an alliance of centrist and left-wing parties informally led by populist President Zoran Milanovic and his Social Democratic Party, or SDP.

The election is being held as Croatia, a European Union and NATO member, struggles with the highest inflation rate in the eurozone, a labor shortage, illegal migration and reports of widespread corruption.

At stake in the race for Croatia's 151-seat parliament isn't just the Adriatic Sea country's future domestic policies, but also the EU's unity as it grapples with the instability from Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

10 held in large-scale raid in Germany: German authorities conducted a large-scale raid against an international human smuggling gang early Wednesday, police said in a statement.

More than 1,000 police officers searched dozens of homes, stores and offices across western and southern Germany and detained 10 suspects, including two lawvers.

A total of 38 suspected gang members, as well as 147 other people who allegedly paid to be smuggled by it, are being investigated, German news agency dpa reported. The two lawyers, 42 and 46 years old and from the Cologne area, are the main suspects, federal police in nearby Sankt Augustin said. The names of the suspects were not given, in line with German privacy rules.

The suspects are accused of having illegally taken advantage of special German immigration rules reserved for skilled foreign workers to obtain residency permits for around 350 mostly Chinese nationals who don't meet the needed criteria - in exchange for hundreds of thousands of euros (dollars).

PACE recommends Kosovo: The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) recommended Kosovo's Council of Europe (CoE) membership, deciding to monitor its fulfilment of commitments and obligations as during its accession, stated CoE.

Dora Bakoyannis, CoE member from Greece, reported the statutory opinion of Kosovo's passing by 131 votes in favor, 29 against, and 11 abstentions.

PACE stated that Kosovo's membership would lead to ""the strengthening of human rights standards by ensuring access to the European Court of Human Rights for all those who are under Kosovo's jurisdiction.'



America

Ex-sen, gov Graham dies: Former US sen and two-term Florida gov Bob Graham, who gained national prominence as chairman of the Senate Intelligence Com-mittee in the aftermath of the 2001 terrorist attacks and as an early critic of the Iraq war, has died. He was 87.

Graham's family announced the death Tuesday in a statement posted on X by his

daughter Gwen Graham. "We are deeply saddened to report the passing of a visionary leader, dedicated public servant, and even more importantly, a loving husband, father, grandfather, and great-grandfather," the family said.

Graham, who served three terms in the Senate, made an unsuccessful bid for the 2004 Democratic presidential nomina-tion, emphasizing his opposition to the Iraq invasion. (AP)

4 people shot in Bronx: Four people were shot - one fatally - on a street corner in the Bronx Tuesday evening by shooters riding on scooters, police said

About 10 shots were fired after two scooters pulled up to the intersection after 6 pm and passengers on the back of each pulled out guns, Assistant Police Chief **Benjamin Gurley** said.

Three victims standing on the street corner, ranging in age from 23 to 37, suffered gunshot wounds to their legs. The fourth, a 29-year-old man, was hit in the legs and chest and later died, Gurley said.

"The perpetrators wore masks and hoodies to block their identities and then they fled on the scooters northbound. Gurley said.

One person was taken into custody for questioning Tuesday night. But Gurley said police were unsure if that person was involved in the shooting. (AP)

Man fatally shot Uber driver: An Ohio man who authorities say fatally shot an Uber driver who he thought was trying to rob him after scam phone calls deceived them both has been indicted on a murder charge.

William Brock, 81, also faces counts of kidnapping and felonious assault in the indictment handed up Monday by a Clark County grand jury.

former president in US history to stand criminal trial.

Trump will be confined to the courtroom on most days, dramatically limiting his movements and his ability to campaign, fundraise and make calls. Aides have been planning rallies and other political events on weekends and Wednesdays, the one weekday when court is not supposed to be in session. Plans also include local appearances Trump can make after court recesses each day.

For months, Trump has assailed Democratic-run cities as crime-ridden and overrun with migrants who have crossed the U.S.-Mexico border. His local campaign stop in Harlem allows him to blend that familiar, if often exaggerated, message with his promise to make a serious play at winning his native state despite its heavily Democratic lean.

"They want law and order ... every week they're being robbed," Trump said of businesses in New York, as he tried to compare his prosecution with the state of New York streets. "You know where the crime is? It's in the bodegas.'

Despite Trump's rhetoric, FBI statistics show overall violent crime in the U.S. dropped considerably in 2023 after pandemic-era spikes that began in 2020, when Trump was president. Crime also has fallen in New York City.

Still, in July 2022, Jose Alba, a

Court documents did not list an attorney for him and a telephone number for Brock could not be located. He has pleaded not guilty and could face a life sen-



In this photo provided by the Ukrainian Emergency Service, blood is seen next to a car damaged by Russian missile strike in Chernihiv, Ukraine on April 17. Three Russian missiles slammed into a downtown area of the northern Ukrainian city of Chernihiv on Wednesday, hitting an eight-floor apartment building and killing at least 13 people, authorities said. (AP)

ward with a US national security aid package, a situation that would force him to rely on Democrats to help pass it, over objections from his weakened majority.

"We are simply here trying to do our jobs," Johnson said, calling the motion to oust him "absurd ... not

clerk at the store Trump visited in Hamilton Heights, a heavily Hispanic section of Harlem, was attacked by 35-year-old Austin Simon. The resulting altercation, captured on surveillance video, ended with Alba fatally stabbing Simon. Alba, an immigrant from the Dominican Republic, was arrested and charged with murder but the Manhattan district attorney dropped the charges within weeks, saying they could not prove Alba had not acted in self-defense.

Also:

MONTGOMERY, Ala.: Alabama voters decided primary runoffs on Tuesday for the state's newly redrawn 2nd Congressional District, setting up a potentially historic November race that could play a part in the battle for control of the US House of Representatives.

Shomari Figures, a former top aide to US Attorney General Merrick Garland, defeated state House Minority Leader Anthony Daniels to win the

tence if convicted on the murder charge. Brock's home in South Charleston. Of-

sponded there after Brock called 911 and The shooting occurred March 25 at said he had shot someone who was trying to rob him. (AP)

ficers from the county sheriff's office re-



An EF-1 tornado touched down shortly after 6 a.m. near the northeastern Kansas town of Richland, the National Weather Service said. The twister reached speeds of up to 100 mph (161 kph) and was on the ground for about 20 minutes, the service said.

Two people were injured when their RV flipped over during the tornado. Details about the injuries were not immediately available. Buildings and trees also were damaged in the neighboring town of Overbrook.

In central Iowa, a barn was demolished and other buildings were damaged after a tornado touched down in a rural area of Dallas County. The weather service also reported ping pong ball-sized hail in Bloomfield, just north of the Missouri line. There were no immediate reports of injuries.

The weather service said the central U.S. was under threat of severe weather through Tuesday. (AP)

INTERNATIONAL

Lat/Am

'El Chapo' can't get calls Venezuela closes its embassy in Ecuador

MEXICO CITY, April 17, (AP): Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro ordered the closure of his country's embassy and consulates in Ecuador on Tuesday in solidarity with Mexico in its protest over a raid by Ecuadorian authorities on the Mexican Embassy in Ouito.

Maduro and other presidents participating in a virtual meeting of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States expressed their support for Mexico's request to have the United Nations suspend Ecuador from the world body over the April 5 raid. But Maduro was the only one to announce the closure of diplomatic outposts and recall of personnel.

The condemnation has been unanimous, total, absolute," Maduro said, referring to the excoriation Ec-



uador's move has drawn. "No one today in this world comes out to defend this barbaric act.' Ecuadorian President Dan-

iel Noboa ordered authorities to raid the Mexican Embassy to arrest the country's former Vice President Jorge Glas, a convicted criminal and fugitive who had been living there since December. Mexico granted him asylum hours before police found Glas in a bedroom

Maduro

The extraordinarily unusual use of force drew immediate condemnation from governments around the world because diplomatic premises are considered foreign soil and "inviolable" under the Vienna treaties

and dragged him out.

Noboa, who did not participate in Tuesday's meet-ing, said last week that he authorized the raid "to pro-tect national security." His government has argued that Glas was wanted for his criminal convictions for corruption and not political reasons and has accused Mexico of violating the Vienna treaties by granting him asylum.

Relations

Mexico severed diplomatic relations with Ecuador immediately after the raid and recalled its diplomatic mission. It hoped to use the CELAC meeting to rally a unified front for its case both at the U.N. and before the International Court of Justice.

Honduras President Xiomara Castro, who currently leads CELAC, opened Tuesday's meeting by reading a proposed statement condemning Ecuador's actions. She then presented a video of Ecuadorian authorities breaking into Mexico's Embassy, along with dramatic music.

Mexico President Andrés Manuel López Obrador followed, repeating his demand that Ecuador be suspended from the United Nations until it apologizes and promises to never do it again.

"If we don't do this, we are not going to be able to live in a world ruled by norms, by laws," López Obrador said. "We would be living in the world of the gorillas."

The Mexican president cited Augusto Pinochet, who ruled Chile from 1973 to 1990, and said even Pinochet did not raid Mexico's embassy when Chilean dissidents sought refuge there. "Pinochet didn't dare to invade our embassy, that fearsome dictator," López Obrador said



In this photo released by Xinhua News Agency, Chinese President Xi Jinping, (second from left), and German Chancellor Olaf Scholz, (second from right), walk together in Beijing, China, on April 16. (AP)

German chancellor presses China on Russia's invasion of Ukraine

German Chancellor Olaf Scholz said he asked Chinese leader Xi Jinping on Tuesday to pressure Russia to end its "insane campaign" in Ukraine, the latest in a parade of European leaders and senior officials to make such an appeal.

The Chinese side gave no sign of any change in its position, which has been to blame Europe and the US

for prolonging the fighting by supplying Ukraine with weapons and calling for peace negotiations that rec-ognize Russian as well as Ukrainian concerns. "China is not a party to the Ukraine crisis but has

consistently promoted talks for peace in its own way," read a Chinese statement following talks between Xi and Scholz in the Chinese capital.

Scholz, winding up a three-day visit to China, told journalists that he believes "a building block has been put in place" that will contribute to discussions on diplomatic efforts to end the war.

Earlier, he said in a post on the social media platform X that he had asked Xi to use his influence with Russia. (AP)

Asia

Bejing, Washington discuss military relations

'US determined to monitor NKorean nukes'

SEOUL, South Korea, April 17 (Agencies): The United States and its allies are discussing options "both inside and outside the UN system" to create a new mechanism for monitoring North Korea over its nuclear weapons program, the American ambassador to the United Nations said Wednesday.

Russia last month vetoed a UN resolution in a move that effectively abolished monitoring by UN experts of Security Council sanctions against North Korea, which prompted Western accusations that Moscow was acting to shield its arms purchases from North Korea to fuel its war in Ukraine.

"I look forward to engaging with oth the Republic of Korea and Japan

Suu Kyi moved from prison to house arrest due to heat: Myanmar military

BANGKOK, April 17, (AP): Myan-mar's jailed former leader Aung San Suu Kyi has been moved from prison to house arrest as a health measure due to a heat wave, the military government said as it freed more than 3,000 prisoners under an amnesty to mark this week's traditional New Year holiday.

Suu Kyi, 78, and Win Myint, the 72-year-old former president of her ousted government, were among the e ly and infirm prisone

major defeats at the hands of prodemocracy resistance fighters and their allies in ethnic minority guerrilla forces. The nationwide conflict began after the army ousted the elected government in February 2021, imprisoned Suu Kyi and be-gan suppressing nonviolent protests that sought a return to democratic rule.

Suu Kyi has been serving a 27year prison term on a variety of al convictions in a spe

Maduro said he has ordered all diplomatic personnel back to Venezuela "until international law is expressly restored in Ecuador.'

Maduro said Glas, who is now being held at a maximum-security prison in the port city of Guayaquil, "must be returned to the Mexican embassy and have his political asylum recognized."

Noboa drew additional criticism for not appearing at CELAC's virtual gathering.

Also:

MEXICO CITY: Mexico's once most powerful drug lord, Joaquín "El Chapo" Guzmán is claiming he cannot get phone calls or visits in the maximum security U.S. prison where he is serving a life sentence.

Guzmán, who in the past was able to break out of Mexican prisons seemingly at will, wrote a letter to District Court Judge Brian M. Cogan in the Eastern District of New York in late March, complaining that he hadn't been able to speak with his twin daughters.

He was convicted for running an industrial-scale drug smuggling operation and is serving his sentence at a maximum security prison in Florence, Colorado.

In May 2023, "the facility stopped giving me calls with my daughters. And I haven't had calls with them for seven months," Guzmán wrote. "I have asked when they are going to give me a call with my daughters and the staff here told me that the FBI agent who monitors the calls does not answer. That's all they've told me.'

"It is unprecedented discrimination against me,' Guzmán complained. "They have decided to punish me by not letting me talk to my daughters.

Guzmán also asked the judge to authorize a visit by his wife, Emma Coronel, but did not say when he was last allowed to see her. Coronel also pleaded guilty to drug charges in 2021 but was later released.

QUITO, Ecuador: Ecuador on Tuesday began to ration electricity in the country's main cities as a drought linked to the El Niño weather pattern depletes reservoirs and limits output at hydroelectric plants that produce about 75% of the nation's power.

The power cuts were announced on Monday night by the ministry of energy, which said in a statement that it would review its decision on Wednesday night.

"We urge Ecuadorians to cut their electricity consumption in this critical week," the statement read. "And consider that each kilowatt and each drop of water that are not consumed will help us face this reality.'

The power cuts in Ecuador come days after dry weather forced Colombia's capital city of Bogotá to ration water as its reservoirs reached record lows, threatening local supplies of tap water.

In the town of La Calera, on the outskirts of Bogotá, water trucks visited neighborhoods where water has been scarce recently because a local stream that supplies the town with water is drying up. Local residents lined up outside the water trucks with buckets to collect as much as they could carry.

"I'm worried about what's happening," said Carlos Arturo Rueda, a 72-year-old who was gathering water from the truck. "We need to do more to preserve this precious liquid."

Precipitation has diminished in Ecuador and Colombia this year due to warming temperatures in the south Pacific Ocean, which can cause floods along South America's west coast but can also generate intense droughts in the Andean valleys, where many of Ecuador's and Colombia's main cities are located.

Mexico in its protest over a raid by Ecuadorian authorities on the Mexican embassy in Quito. (AP)

People stand outside the Venezuelan

embassy in Quito, Ecuador on April

Maduro ordered the closure of his

country's embassy and consulates in

Ecuador on Tuesday in solidarity with

Venezuelan President Nicolás



Africa

Boat capsizing kills 8: At least eight people from one family have died after their homemade boat sank in central Mozambique, state media reported Tuesday

Monday's sinking on a tributary of the Zambezi River in Sofala province came days after nearly 100 people, many of them children, died in one of the country's worst shipwrecks.

State-run Radio Mozambique said two people survived Tuesday and two were missing, citing Nobre dos Santos, administrator of the district where the latest sinking occurred.

The southern African country's public broadcaster attributed the accident to "excess weight and bad weather."

President Filipe Nyusi last week declared three days of mourning after the April 8 disaster, when a ferry overcrowded with residents reportedly fleeing a feared cholera outbreak capsized off Mozambique's northern coast, killing at least 98 people. (AP)

EU OKs support for SNA: The Political and Security Committee of the Council of the EU has approved 70 million euros to the resources to support the Somali National Army (SNA) and the military component of the African Union Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS).

Both actions aim to contribute to the handover of security responsibilities from ATMIS to SNA, by allowing the former to fulfil its mandate while strengthening the capacities of the latter, said the EU council in a press statement.

For ATMIS, the agreed support would mostly contribute to the troop allowances of the African soldiers deployed in Somalia, over the period July 1, 2021 - Dec 31, 2023, previous support under the EPF amounted to 270 million euros. (KUNA)

'\$630 million for Ethiopia': A

United Nations-backed gathering raised pledges of almost \$630 million for Ethi-

but like-minded (countries) as well, on trying to develop options both inside the U.N. as well as outside the U.N. The point here is that we cannot allow the work that the panel of experts were doing to lapse," US Ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield told a news conference in Seoul, using the formal name for South Korea.

Thomas-Greenfield didn't provide specific details about US discussions with allies and other partners, including whether an alternative monitoring regime would more likely be established through the U.N. General Assembly or with an independent entity outside of the UN.



NKorea buys China cams: North Korea is putting surveillance cameras in schools and workplaces and collecting fingerprints, photographs and other biometric information from its citizens in a technology-driven push to monitor its population even more closely, a report said Tuesday.

The state's growing use of digital surveillance tools, which combine equipment imported from China with domestically developed software, threatens to erase many of the small spaces North Koreans have left to engage in private business activities, access foreign media and secretly criticize their government, the researchers wrote.

opia's humanitarian crisis on Tuesday but fell short of the \$1 billion sought to help feed and support millions of people facing conflict and climate change in moved to house arrest because of the severe heat, military spokesperson Maj. Gen. General Zaw Min Tun told foreign media representatives late Tuesday. The move has not yet been publicly announced in Myanmar.

Suu Kyi's transfer comes as the army has been suffering a string of

But the isolated country's digital ambitions have to contend with poor electricity supplies and low network connectivity.

US, China discuss army ties: Chinese Defense Minister Dong Jun stated on Wednesday that China and the US are committed to stabilizing and improving bilateral relations, emphasizing the importance of their militaries as a cornerstone for maintaining stability.

Dong made the remarks during a video call with US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin on Tuesday. He underscored that the Taiwan question was at the core of China's core interests, which brook no compromise, said State-run Xinhua News Agency. "The Chinese People's Liberation

Army stands firm against any activities seeking "Taiwan independence" or external support for such separatist actions," the minister said, noting the overall stability in the South China Sea

Africa's second most populous country. The United States, Ethiopia's leading humanitarian donor, warned that its resources are "increasingly stretched."



Voters check the list of electors at a polling station in the capital Honiara on April 17. Voting began across the Solomon Islands on Wednesday in the South Pacific nation's first general election since the government switched diplomatic allegiances from Taiwan to Beijing and struck a secret security pact that has raised fears of the Chinese navy gaining a foothold in the region. (AP)

built annex of the main prison in the capital Naypyitaw, where Myanmar's meteorological department said temperatures reached 39 degrees Celsius (102.2 degrees Fahrenheit) on Tuesday afternoon. Win Myint was serving an eight-year prison sentence in Taungoo in Myanmar's Bago region.

situation.

Plane flies thru Taiwan Strait: The US 7th Fleet said a Navy P-8A Poseidon flew through the Taiwan Strait on Wednesday, a day after US and Chinese defense chiefs held their first talks since Nov. 2022 in an effort to reduce regional tensions.

The patrol and reconaissance plane "transited the Taiwan Strait in international airspace," the 7th Fleet said in a news release.

"By operating within the Taiwan Strait in accordance with international law, the United States upholds the navigational rights and freedoms of all nations." the release said.

Although the critical 160 kilometer-(100 mile-) wide strait that divides China from the self-governing island democracy is international waters, China considers the passage of foreign military aircraft and ships through it a challenge to its sovereignty.

The UK, the second-largest donor, said Ethiopia risks being "overshadowed by other humanitarian crises globally." (AP)

Journo expelled from Algeria: An Algerian journalist was expelled from the country after flying in from France and not being allowed to leave the airport as journalists continue to face challenges reporting in Algeria.

Farid Alilat, a writer for the Frenchlanguage magazine Jeune Afrique, wrote on Facebook that he spent 11 hours in police custody on Saturday at the airport before being boarded onto a plane and sent to France, where he has a residency permit.

Alilat said he regularly takes flights from Paris to Algiers to report on Algeria, where he has for years been a well-known journalist due to his work for Frenchlanguage daily newspapers including Liberté, which was shuttered in 2022 amid financial problems and scuffles with the government and Algeria's state-owned oil company, both of which are major advertisers for the country's newspapers.

In a lengthy post in which he wrote of his deportation as if he were reporting on it, Alilat alleged that police officers on the tarmac in Algiers told him that they were acting on orders "from above." (AP)

oil surges

The price of Kuwaiti oil went up by 77 cents to USD 90.89 per barrel on Tuesday in contrast with USD 90.12 pb the day before, reported the Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) on Wednesday.

In global markets, the Brent crude price went down by eight cents to USD 90.02 pb, while the West Texas Intermediate went down by five cents to USD 85.35 pb. (KUNA)

Market Movements 17-04-2024

				Cha	nge	Closing pts					Change	Closing pts
	PHILIPPINES	-	PSEi	+45.	07	6,450.04		SAUDI	-	Tadawul	-34.45	12,465.98
	EGYPT	-	EGX 30	+266.87	29,667.71		DUBAI -	-	- DFMGI	-11.38	4,172.93	
1							V	JAPAN	-	Nikkei 225	-509.40	37,961.80
								PAKISTAN	-	KSE 100	-97.83	70,355.31

said

The Exchange rate of the US Dollar stabilized

on Wednesday against the Kuwaiti Dinar at KD 0.308 and the Euro went up by 0.18 percent trading at KD 0.327 compared to Tues-

day's rates, the Central Bank of Kuwait (CBK)

the Pound Sterling went up by 0.03 percent to KD 0.383, the Swiss Franc by 0.10 percent to KD 0.337 and the Japanese Yen remained

steady at KD 0.002. Declared exchange prices,

declared by the CBK, reflect average rates and not the transactions' actual ones. (KUNA)

The CBK reported, in its daily bulletin, that

dollar stable

Kuwait's trade surplus with Japan narrowed 12.4 percent from a year earlier to JPY 106.2 billion (USD 685 million), down for the first time in two months, due to slow exports, government data showed Wednesday. However, Kuwait stayed in black

However, Kuwait stayed in black ink with Japan for 16 years and two months, as exports still outpaced imports in value, the Finance Ministry said in a preliminary report.

Overall exports from Kuwait to Japan fell 14.2 percent year-on-year to JPY 128.4 billion (USD 829 million)

n for the first decline in two months. Imports from Japan also slid 21.8 percent to JPY 22.2 billion (USD 143 million), down for the fourth month in a row.

Middle East's trade surplus with Japan also narrowed 3.4 percent to JPY 796.8 billion (USD 5.2 billion) last month, with Japan-bound exports from the region sliding 0.9 percent from a year earlier.

Kuwait's March trade surplus with Japan down 12.4%

Crude oil, refined products, liquefied natural gas (LNG) and other natural resources, which accounted for 95.8 percent of the region's total exports to Japan, sank 1.0 percent. The region's overall imports from

The region's overall imports from Japan expanded 5.1 percent on demand for machinery, manufactured goods and electrical machinery. Japan's global trade balance re-

Japan's global trade balance returned to surplus in March, marking the first black ink in three months at JPY 366.5 billion (USD 2.4 billion). Exports grew 7.3 percent from the year before, mainly driven by shipments of automobiles, electronic semiconductor parts and vessels. (KUNA)

Business

Global oil demand resilience tested by US inflation

Mideast tensions propel crude oil prices to 5-month highs, supply concerns mount

By KAMCO Invest

Crude oil prices touched the highest level in five months at the start of April-2024 mainly led by supply side fears. This included fears of escalating geopolitical situation in the Middle East region with a potential impact on oil supplies. In addition, the OPEC+ decision to maintain the current output policy with voluntary cuts further indicated tighter markets in the near term as supplies would remain constrained. On the other hand, resilient inflation rates in the US affected sentiments on the demand side, partially offsetting the overall rally in crude oil prices. In addition, the recent symbolic attacks by Iran only had a minimal positive effect on oil prices. That said, the decline was somewhat capped by temporary surge in crude oil imports from China during March-2024.

Furthermore, a report from the IEA said global crude oil output is expected to reach a record level during 2025 following a y-o-y increase of 1.4 mb/d to reach 104.5 mb/d in 2025. The increase is expected to come mainly from the US that is expected to see record oil output next year. The EIA expects next year's output in the US to reach 13.7 mb/d as compared to 13.2 mb/d expected this year. However, the EIA expects production to decline during 2Q-2024 and 3Q-2024 led by high decline rates for shale wells followed by a rebound next year. The cost of drilling in the US is also expected to go up following a new rule passed by the Biden administration that significantly increased the minimum oil and gas lease bond amount. In addition, restrictions from developing in sensitive wildlife habitat would affect expansion of output, especially in the Alaska region.

Oil output from the OPEC group remained flattish m-o-m at around 26.6 mb/d after marginally higher output from Iran and Saudi Arabia were almost fully offset by decline in output in Nigeria, Iraq and Venezuela. Oil production in the US has also remained flat over the last five weeks at 13.1 mb/d, according to data from the Department of Energy. The flattish trend in the US reflected subdued growth in oil rig count that hovered around the 500 mark over the last few months.

On the demand side, concerns continued to remain due to various factors including sticky inflation in the US that came in at higher-than-expected levels for March-2024 mainly led by higher rents and gasoline prices. The US is now expected to delay starting rate cuts this year with consensus showing first cuts in September-2024, in addition to lesser cuts this year than previous expectations. Meanwhile, the IEA also warned of slower oil demand growth next year mainly led by slower economic growth as well as rising popularity of electric vehicles globally. However, this comes contrary to the bullish demand growth expectations from the CEOs of Vitol Group, Trafigura Group and Gunvor Group. **Oil Prices**

Crude oil prices during the first week of April-2024 breached the USD 90/b mark for the first time since October-2023. Crude oil future prices have gained almost 10% over the last one month. The market witnessed consistent gain in prices following OPEC+ decision to maintain its current policy of cutting oil output, contrary to market expectations that eyed higher output due to elevated prices. Strong imports of crude oil by China supported on the demand side and statements from the OPEC showing strong seasonal summer demand for crude oil also resulted in higher prices. Nevertheless, higher inventories in the US capped gains during the month.

The oil market tracked developments in the Middle East region, especially related to ceasefire talks and repeated failure on this front resulted in consistent gain in prices since mid-March-2024. The risk premium on crude oil prices shot up prior to the retaliatory attacks by Iran resulting in consistent gains but the symbolic nature of the action with minimal damage resulted in a slight cor-



Average spot brent crude oil price was up by 1.8% to reach USD 85.44/b during March-2024 as compared to USD 83.9/b during February-2024. The gain in average OPEC reference basket price was much stronger at 3.8% to reach USD 84.3/b while Kuwait export grade crude witnessed a slightly lower gain of 4.3% to average at USD 84.8/b during March-2024. Meanwhile, the consensus estimate for Brent crude underwent minimal positive changes from last month's forecast for the next two quarters. Prices are expected to average at USD 83.5/b in Q2-2024 and show gradual growth until Q4-2024 to reach USD 84/b. Price forecasts from the US EIA once again underwent an upgrade for Brent which is forecasted to reach USD 89.0/b in 2024 vs. USD 87.0/b in the previous forecast whereas next year price is expected to come in at USD 87.0/b.

World Oil Demand

Global oil demand growth expectations for 2024 were kept broadly unchanged n OPEC's latest monthly report at 2.2 mb/d with average demand reaching 104.5 mb/d during the year. However, adjustments were made at the regional level that offset each other. According to the report, demand from OECD Europe underwent an upward revision of around 0.05 mb/d for Q1-2024 reflecting better-than-expected oil demand during the quarter. After two consecutive months of declines, oil demand in the region witnessed a strong growth during January-2024 supported by higher demand for diesel, jet/kerosene and gasoline. The biggest increase was seen in Spain and Germany. OPEC also expects the region to show a relatively stable economic growth for the remainder of the year with gradual improvement in the industrial sector with Germany's economic revival set to play a key role in the region's economic growth. Upward revisions were also made to non-OECD countries, including China, India and Other Asia mainly for updated data for Q1-2024. These upward revisions were almost fully offset by downward revisions to demand data for Africa during Q1-2024 and the Middle East region during the first three quarters of the year. For 2025, oil demand growth forecast was kept unchanged at 1.8 mb/d with average demand expected to reach 106.3 mb/d during the year.

Latest monthly oil import data from China showed robust demand during March-2024. Total crude oil imports by China surged to the highest level since August-2023 during March-2023 mainly led by higher imports by refineries as they restocked inventories after a strong holiday travel period. According to Bloomberg, oil processing by Chinese refiners was the highest in five months at 63.78 millions tons equivalent to 15.08 mb/d during March-2024. The upcoming refinery maintenance season also added to the strong demand during the month. That said, there is still caution on future requirements as industrial de-

mand continues to be affected by a slowing real estate market in China. This was seen in oil demand growth that came in at 1% during March-2024, the slowest pace since December-2022, as per Bloomberg. Oil demand in India declined by 0.6% y-o-y in March-2024 after higher consumption of diesel, gasoline, bitumen, cooking gas and naphtha was offset by decline in fuel oil.

World Oil Supply

Non-OPEC oil supply (liquids production) growth forecast for 2024 was once again lowered by 0.1 tb/d by the OPEC in its latest report. Supply is now expected to grow by 1.0 mb/d and average at 70.4 mb/d, including 50 tb/d in processing gains. The downward revision mainly reflected lowered output expectations for the US, partially offset by small upward revision to supply forecast for the non-OECD regions. Crude oil production forecasts from the US EIA underwent a downgrade last month, but was raised slightly in the latest report. The agency now expects production to increase by 0.28 mb/d this year to reach 13.21 mb/d, a revision of 20 tb/d followed by an increase of 0.51 mb/d to 13.72 mb/d for 2025 after an upward revision of 25 tb/d. A report from Oilprice.com showed that exports of US crude oil has reached record levels as consumers of Russian and Venezuelan crude oil are now favoring US crude oil due to the sanctions while the crude oil. In addition, European customers are also shifting to US crude due to increased costs and time for crude oil coming through the Red Sea/Suez Canal route due to geopolitical issues. Reports have shown Asian buyers, especially India, shunning Russian crude oil tankers due to the sanctions over the last few months.

Supply growth forecast for 2025 was also lowered by 0.1 mb/d to a growth of 1.3 mb/d with non-OPEC supplies expected to average at 71.75 mb/d during the year. The downward revision once again reflected lowered output forecast for the US partially offset by a small upward revision to supply from Latin America.

OPEC Oil Production & Spare Capacity

OPEC crude oil production remained flattish during March-2024 and averaged at 26.9 mb/d, according to production data from Bloomberg. OPEC secondary sources also showed flattish growth in total OPEC output that averaged at a slightly lower level of 26.6 mb/d. Country-level data on output showed higher production mainly in in Iran, Saudi Arabia and Gabon that were almost fully offset by a sharp fall in production in Nigeria and Iraq. Oil production in Saudi Arabia averaged at slightly above the 9.0 mb/d mark after the country increased production by 30 tb/d (20 tb/d increase as per OPEC secondary sources). Similarly, production in Iran increased by 40 tb/d to reach an average production of 3.2 mb/d during the month, as per Bloomberg data. The decline in oil output in Iraq mainly reflected compliance to OPEC+ pledge while the fall in production in Nigeria came after the Dangote refinery took in more cargoes.

In the latest OPEC+ meeting, the producers decided to maintain the existing production cuts despite elevated oil prices. Traders were expecting that the existing voluntary output curbs of 2.2 mb/d would be altered due to the prevailing oil prices, however, with the policy being unchanged, oil prices got further support, at least until June-2024 when the voluntary curbs are set to expire. In addition, producers that did not meet the required compliance implemented extra compensatory cuts that resulted in a fall in output. These compensatory cuts are expected to steepen in the near term as the aim is to comply with the agreement. For instance, Kazakhstan, which is a part of OPEC+ produced above its quota during March-2024 due to climate condition and heating season duration. The country has pledged to comply with it obligation and compensate for the over-production. Similarly, the fall in production in Iraq during March-2024 came as part of the efforts to comply with the quotas and compensate for the over production in the previous months. Russia has also decided to shift to production as a base as against exports for calculating the cuts.

Meanwhile, the fall in output in Nigeria pushed output to the lowest since Aug-

rection in crude oil prices. In addition, the attacks on Russian energy refineries and the counter st rike by Russia on Ukrainian energy facilities during the last week of March-2024 also resulted in higher crude oil prices. Prices of almost all crude grades reported gains for the third consecutive month during March-2024. 2023. The buildup of unsold cargoes in Nigeria increased due to the heavy refinery turnaround in Europe, in addition to competition from producers in the Mediterranean region. Output at the country's Bonga, Akpo and Bonny streams dropped to multi-month lows, while Agbami and Escravos output increased m-o-m.

Gulf markets suffer \$52.09 bln loss amid Middle East tensions

Agility plummets, leading declines in Boursa Kuwait

KUWAIT CITY, April 17: During Tuesday's trading, most Gulf financial market indices experienced losses totaling \$52.09 billion in market value, amidst growing concerns over the escalating conflict in the Middle East, reports Al-Qabas daily.

The Saudi market took the biggest hit with losses amounting to \$41.84 billion, followed by the Abu Dhabi market with \$3.48 billion, then the Kuwaiti market with \$3.46 billion, and the Dubai market with \$2.38 billion. However, both the Bahraini and Omani markets managed to record slight profits, as per KAMCO Invest data.

At the Kuwait Stock Exchange, Tuesday's trading session ended in the red, influenced by various factors including regional security tensions and the timetable for distributing entitlements for certain shares, notably Agility.

The primary market index dropped by 2.75%, the general index fell by 2.54%, and both the main 50 and main indexes experienced declines of approximately 1.95% and 1.53%, respectively, compared to Monday's levels.

Trading activity at the stock exchange totaled 100.26 million dinars, involving 364.67 million shares across 28.12 thousand transactions.

Agility led the list of declining stocks, with its share price plummeting by 44.36% to 286 fils, losing 228 fils. Conversely, 27 stocks saw increases, with Meydan leading the gains by 6.20%, while the prices of 8 stocks remained stable.

Agility's trading activity was particularly notable, with a volume of 206.83 million shares worth 62.28 mil-

Banking sector strength drives market dynamics

Kuwaiti companies see 5.19% surge in shareholders' equity

KUWAIT CITY, April 17: The increase in shareholders' equity by 748 million Kuwaiti dinars, or 5.19%, from the beginning of the year until the end of last February is indicative of expected growth in the results of the first quarter of 2024, reports Al-Jarida daily.

Shareholders' equity is a measure of a company's net worth, representing the amount of money that would be returned to shareholders if all assets were liquidated and all debts paid off.

The growth in shareholders' equity is significant for the financial market, as it reflects the overall health and performance of companies. It indicates positive results and potential for future growth, which can influence investor sentiment and market trends.

The banking sector plays a crucial role in driving market dynamics, as the strength of banks' annual cash distri-

lion dinars traded in 14.15 thousand transactions.

In response to the unusual activity in Agility's shares, the company clarified to the Kuwait Stock Exchange that there were no developments warranting such activity, highlighting its previously disclosed interim dividend distribution on March 28, 2024.

Agility distributed interim dividends totaling 25.5 million dinars in cash, amounting to 10 fils per share after deducting treasury shares, and distributed in-kind dividends to shareholders worth 800 million dinars, representing 49% of Agility Global PLC shares.

The financial impact of these distributions will be reflected in the company's statements, with the maturity date for entitlements set for April 18, 2024.

By the end of Tuesday's trading, Agility's stock remained active with a volume of 47.80 million shares and

liquidity of 25.12 million dinars. Looking at Agility's performance, Raed Diab, Vice President of the Research and Investment Strategies Department at KAMCO Investment Company, attributed the significant decline in the Boursa Kuwait to adjustments in Agility Public Warehousing Company's share price and its separation from its subsidiary, Agility Global, scheduled for listing on the Abu Dhabi Financial Market.

Diab also noted the market's reaction to the dividend timetable of major stocks like Agility, alongside anticipation regarding the maturity of Kuwait Finance House (KFH) stock.

butions and their lending activities are closely monitored. The increase in shareholders' equity also suggests positive trends in economic activity, as banks provide financing to various sectors and activities, supporting growth and development. Additionally, interbank transactions and loans provide

insights into liquidity and funding conditions in the financial system. While interbank transactions declined, interbank loans increased, reflecting shifts in demand for liquidity and short-term financing needs. The high interest rates offered on interbank deposits indicate the cost of funds, which influences pricing and market dynamics.

Overall, the growth in shareholders' equity and banking activities indicate positive trends in the financial market, which can have broader implications for economic growth and stability.

> He emphasized the impact of geopolitical tensions on market sentiment, particularly after Iranian attacks, with investors closely monitoring potential escalations and their repercussions on oil shipments and global economy. Despite the decline, Diab highlighted the resilience of Gulf markets and the expectation for investors to consider strong fundamentals, such as robust profits in 2023 and anticipated growth ahead.

> In the upcoming period, attention will focus on any developments regarding geopolitical tensions, global economic indicators, central bank decisions on interest rates, and the expected policies of incoming governments.

IPG projects rise in net profit for Q1 '24

KUWAIT CITY, April 17: The Independent Petroleum Group Company KSCP (IPG) has confirmed that its financial management has finalized the preliminary results for the first quarter ending on March 31, 2024, reports Al-Qabas daily.

The company anticipates a net profit of approximately 1.64 million dinars, equivalent to about 9.10 fils per share. This marks an improvement compared to the net profit of 1.46 million dinars, or 8.12 fils per share, recorded during the same period in 2023.

IPG has indicated that it will release the final results for the first quarter of 2024 on Boursa Kuwait after they have been reviewed by the auditor over the next three weeks.

Brad Smith joins board

Microsoft invests \$1.5 billion in UAE technology firm 'G42'

WASHINGTON, April 17, (AP): Microsoft is investing \$1.5 billion in a technology firm based in the United Arab Emirates and overseen by the country's powerful national security adviser.

Microsoft and the technology holding company G42 announced the deal Tuesday. As part of the agreement, Microsoft's president, Brad Smith, will join G42's board of directors.

The deal "was developed in close consultation with both the UAE and U.S. governments," Microsoft said.

Based in Abu Dhabi, G42 runs data centers in the Middle East and elsewhere and has increasingly identified itself as an AI firm. It has built what's considered the world's leading Arabic-language AI model, known as Jais.

Microsoft said G42 will run its AI applications and services on the U.S. tech giant's cloud computing platform, and the two companies will work to bring digital infrastructure to countries where G42 has established a presence in the Middle East, Central Asia and Africa.

G42 has previously said it would cut ties to Chinese hardware suppliers over American concerns it was too close to the Chinese government.

The company has faced spying allegations for its ties to a mobile phone app identified as spyware. It has also faced claims it could have gathered genetic material secretly from Americans for the Chinese government.

Sheikh Tahnoon bin Zayed Al Nahyan, the UAE's national security adviser, is chairman of the company's board.

The U.S. Commerce Department on Tuesday described the UAE as a "global player in cutting edge technology" and said it is working with it and other countries toward "verifiable commitments" for the safe development and deployment of such technologies. "When responsibly managed, investments like the one announced today have the potential to further innovation in digital technologies around the world," spokesperson Brittany Caplin said in a written statement.

China Q1 growth better than expected on strong exports, manufacturing

China showed a better-than-expected economic performance in the first quarter of 2024, mainly driven by strong export volume and manufacturing sector capital expenditure, Morgan Stanley Chief China Economist Robin Xing said when comment-ing on China's latest economic data.

China's gross domestic product (GDP) grew 5.3 percent year on year in Q1, faster than market expectations and higher than the government's annual target of around 5 percent.

Total exports and imports continued to shore up the world's second-largest economy, rising 5 percent year on year in yuan terms in Q1, according to data released earlier this month. The growth rate hit a sixquarter high

"The Chinese economy grew stronger than the initial market expectations at the end of 2023, particularly on the supply side," a recent interview, adding that Xing said in "it reflected China's supply chain competitiveness

Many overseas organizations have upgraded their forecasts for China's growth. Goldman Sachs forecast the Chinese economy will expand by 5 percent year on year

in 2024, up from 4.8 percent previously. Citi raised its GDP forecast to 5 percent from

4.6 percent. Morgan Stanley also revised up its 2024 GDP forecast from 4.2 percent to 4.8 per-cent, and expected China's GDP growth to reach 4.5 percent in 2025, higher than the previous forecast of 4 percent.

"Two-thirds of the upward revision for 2024 GDP growth forecast stems from stronger-than-expected exports, driven by the rebound of external demand and robust export volume amid soft prices," said Xing

The rest of the upward revision comes from strong capital expenditures in the man-ufacturing sector, Xing said, highlighting the effects of China's policy efforts on supply chain upgrade, with a focus on energy ef-ficiency and digitalization. This year, China has doubled down on

efforts to promote a new round of large scale equipment renewals and trade-ins of consumer goods to boost its investment and consumption.

Last week, seven government organs, including the Ministry of Industry and Infor-mation Technology and the Ministry of Fi-

nance, jointly released a plan on equipment renewals in the industrial sector, aiming to realize a more-than-25-percent increase in equipment investment in the sector by 2027 compared with that of 2023. China's central bank has also estab-

lished a special relending facility worth 500 billion yuan (about 70.47 billion U.S. dollars) to support sci-tech innovation, technical transformation and equipment renewal, with one of its key goals set at guiding financial institutions to enhance credit support for equipment renewal projects. (Xinhua)

Bumps expected in 'last mile' of disinflation

IMF urges central banks to remain vigilant

(IMF) on Tuesday said there are likely to be "bumps" as the fight against inflation is entering its "last mile," calling for a multi-pronged approach to preserve financial stability.

There is recent evidence that disinflation may have stalled in some countries, and that underlying inflation may be persistent in some sectors, Tobias Adrian, director of the IMF's Monetary and Capital Markets Department, told a press briefing during the 2024 Spring Meetings of the IMF and the World Bank.

Despite progress on inflation, the IMF noted that an intensification of geopolitical tensions could further disrupt shipping and energy production and push up inflation once again, according to its latest Global Financial Stability Report.

Adrian pointed out that a divergence between asset price volatility and uncertainty has preceded volatility spikes, which could occur when investors are jolted by adverse shocks, prompting their re-valuing of assets to account for high uncertainty.

One such adverse shock along the last mile could be upside inflation surprises, he said.

If inflation remains high, expectations that central banks such as the

WASHINGTON, April 17, (Xinhua): The International Monetary Fund U.S. Federal Reserve will soon cut rates could topple, which could lead to a correlated selloff of assets, from bonds to stocks to crypto assets, the IMF official noted.

> Under this scenario, financial conditions would broadly tighten, he said, adding that borrowers worldwide would find it harder to service debt, given higher bond yields.

> The report noted that emerging market borrowers are often disproportionately affected in these situations, as many such issuers already face refinancing rates higher than interest rates on outstanding U.S. dollar-denominated sovereign bonds.

> Calling for a multi-pronged approach, the report argued that financial regulatory authorities should take steps to ensure banks and other institutions can withstand defaults and other risks, using stress tests, early corrective actions, and other supervisory tools.

> Further progress on recovery and resolution frameworks is also of first order importance, to limit the fallout from the demise of weaker institutions, the report said.

> Central banks should ensure banks have access to liquidity facilities when needed and be prepared to intervene early to address funding stress in the financial sector, it added.



Pedestrians walk past the International Monetary Fund headquarters in Washington, D.C., the United States, April 16, 2024. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) on Tuesday upgraded its forecast of global growth in 2024 to 3.2 percent, 0.1 percentage points higher than its projection in January, according to its newly released World Economic Outlook (WEO) report. (Xinhua)

World ramps up clean energy

2023 was a record year for wind installations - report

WASHINGTON, April 17, (AP): The world installed 117 gigawatts of new wind power capacity in 2023, a 50% increase from the year before, making it the best year for new wind projects on record, according to a new report by the industry's trade association.

The latest Global Wind Report, published Tuesday by the Global Wind Energy Council, explores the state of the global wind industry and the challenges it's facing in its expansion.

The increase in wind installations "shows that the world is moving in the right direction in combating climate change," the report said.

But the authors warned that the wind industry must increase its annual growth to at least 320 gigawatts by 2030 in order to meet the COP28 pledge to triple the world's installed renewable energy generation capacity by 2030, as well as to meet the Paris Agreement's ambition of capping global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius (2.7 Fahrenheit).

"It's great to see wind industry growth picking up, and we are proud tor, said the report shows that the wind industry is "picking up pace" by attracting investments and gaining maturity, and that may lead to a snowball effect leading to future growth.

that it is possible to ramp up to reach climate targets.

"This is an important building block in the transition towards a net-zero emission society," said Andresen.

As was the case in 2022, China led all other countries for both new onshore and offshore wind power installations in 2023. It had 65% of new installations, and was followed by the U.S., Brazil and Germany, respectively. Together, these four countries accounted for 77% of new installations globally last year.

The report notes that growth in wind power installations is highly concentrated in a few big countries and links that to strong market frameworks to scale wind installations in those countries. The top five markets at the end of last year remained as China, the U.S.,

Germany, India and Spain.

tariffs on Chinese steel For the planet, he said, it indicates

the battleground state of Pennsylvania. The move reflects the intersection of Biden's international trade policy with his efforts to court voters i

US President courts union voters

Biden is seeking higher

of reaching a new annual record," said GWEC CEO Ben Backwell, "however much more needs to be done to unlock growth.'

Still, the report shows that wind is becoming "better understood and appreciated across the globe for the value it brings as a renewable energy source," said George Aluru, CEO of the Electricity Sector Association of Kenya, an industry body for private investors in electricity.

"This increased renewable energy supply supports climate goals in line with ensuring sustainable development," he said.

With the growing impacts of climate change, wind power and other renewable energy sources are seen as a key to reducing electricity generation from fossil fuels and mitigating climate change. Renewables are the cheapest form of electricity in many parts of the world and among the cheapest in most others.

The global cumulative wind power capacity now totals 1,021 gigawatts.

Christian Andresen, research manager at SINTEF Energy Research, a Norway-based independent institute for applied research in the energy sec-

Still, some other countries and regions are coming up, having witnessed record levels of growth in 2023

Africa and the Middle East installed nearly 1 gigawatt of wind power capacity in 2023, almost triple that of the previous year. With upcoming projects in South Africa, Egypt and Saudi Arabia, the report predicts that new onshore wind additions for Africa and the Middle East will grow fivefold by 2028 compared with 2023.

Some of the markets to watch include Kenva, where wind

power provides around 17% of electricity, the report said. The country has the largest wind farm in Africa, the 310-megawatt Lake Turkana Wind Power Project, and the report notes new planned large-scale wind projects in the country, including a 1-gigawatt wind park by local power generator KenGen.

But building wind power installations is expensive and entails high up-front investments, and emerging and developing countries face higher cost of capital and pay higher loan rates to build out their wind, the report said.

Apple CEO says co. is 'looking at' manufacturing in Indonesia

JAKARTA, Indonesia, April 17, (AP): Apple CEO Tim Cook said the company is "looking at" manufacturing in Indonesia as he met with Indonesian President Joko Widodo on Wednesday.

"We talked about the president's desire to see manufacturing in the country, and it's something that we will look out," Cook told reporters after the meeting.

Widodo's administration has worked for years to bring manufacturing to the country to power economic development, while Apple is seeking to diversify its supply chains away from China, where most of its smartphones and tablets are assembled.

The company began moving some production to countries like Vietnam, and more recently India, after shutdowns to fight COVID-19 in China repeatedly disrupted the company's shipments

"I think the investment ability in Indonesia is endless. I think that, there is a lot of great places to invest, and we're investing. We believe in the country," Cook said.

The previous day, Cook met Vietnamese Prime Minister Pham Minh Chinh in Hanoi, where he said Apple plans to invest more in Vietnam and increase spending on suppliers in the Southeast Asian manufacturing

hub.

"Given the slowing Chinese economy as well as the Chinese government's ongoing efforts to squeeze out foreign companies and replace them with domestic brands, Apple wants alternatives for manufacturing," said Chris Miller, an associate professor at Tufts University whose work focuses on technology and geopolitics.

"It has already invested more in India and Vietnam, but it is likely looking at other partners in South East Asia to additional manufacturing and assembly operations," Miller said.

Cook's visit to Indonesia came after Apple announced its fourth Apple Developer Academy in the country, to be located in Bali. The company first launched the program to train app developers in Indonesia in 2018, in the capital Jakarta. Widodo's government has sought to

leverage the country's reserves of nickel and other raw materials to bring in manufacturing, banning export of raw commodities such as nickel and bauxite to oblige companies to build refineries domestically.

Indonesia's minister of communication and information, Budi Arie Setiadi, said Wednesday that Microsoft CEO Satya Nadella would visit Indonesia at the end of April.

is likely to play a pivotal role in deciding November's election.

SCRANTON, Pa., April

17, (AP): President Joe

Biden is calling for a tri-

pling of tariffs on steel from

China to protect American

producers from a flood

of cheap imports, an an-

nouncement he planned to

roll out Wednesday in an

address to steelworkers in

The White House insists, however, that it is more about shielding American manufacturing from unfair trade practices overseas than firing up a union audience.

In addition to boosting steel tariffs, Biden also will seek to triple levies on Chinese aluminum. The current rate is 7.5% for both metals. The administration also promised to pursue antidumping investigations against countries and importers that try to saturate existing markets with Chinese steel, and said it was working with Mexico to ensure that Chinese companies can't circumvent the tariffs by shipping steel there for subsequent export to the U.S.

"The president understands we must invest in American manufacturing. But we also have to protect those investments and those workers from unfair exports associated with China's industrial overcapacity," White House National Economic Adviser Lael Brainard said on a call with reporters.

Biden was set to announce that he is asking the U.S. Trade Representative to consider tripling the tariffs during a visit to United Steelworkers union headquarters in Pittsburgh. The president is on a three-day Pennsylvania swing that began in Scranton on Tuesday and will include a visit to Philadelphia on Thursday.

The administration says China is distorting markets and eroding competition by unfairly flooding the market with below-market-cost steel.

"China's policy-driven overcapacity poses a serious risk to the future of the American steel and aluminum industry," Brainard said. Referencing China's economic downturn, she added that Beijing "cannot export its way to recovery.

"China is simply too big to play by its own rules," Brainard said.

Higher tariffs can carry major economic risks. Steel and aluminum could become more expensive, possibly increasing the costs of cars, construction materials and other key goods for U.S.



US President Joe Biden points to a member of the audience as he departs after speaking at a campaign event at the Scranton Cultural Center, Tuesday, April 16, 2024, in Scranton, Pa. (AP)

World Bank 'appoints' Dione as Vice Pres. of MENA region

WASHINGTON, April 17, (KUNA): The World Bank appointed on Tuesday Ousmane Dione as the new Vice President for the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region.

In a press release, the Bank said "Dione will lead the World Bank's strategic partnerships with clients and stakeholders across the region, oversee an active operational portfolio of 139 projects with financing over USD 27 billion, and guide the region's delivery of cutting-edge knowledge, policy advice and advisory services.

"Under Dione's leadership, the World Bank will continue to provide critical support to MENA countries in the face of complex, multifaceted chal-

consumers.

Inflation has already been a drag on Biden's political fortunes, and his turn toward protectionism echoes the playbook of his predecessor and opponent in this fall's election, Donald Trump.

The former president imposed broader tariffs on Chinse goods during his administration, and has threatened

lenges," the statement said.

"Priorities include driving forward economic transformation and private sector job creation, human capital development with inclusive social protection, education and health systems, climate resilience underpinned by green energy, water and food security, and access to critical infrastructure including digital development," the statement added.

In Dione's most recent position as Country Director for Eritrea, Ethiopia, South Sudan, and Sudan, he led a major expansion of the Bank's engagement, overseeing a portfolio of USD 17.5 billion.

Under his leadership, Ethiopia be-

to increase levies on Chinese goods unless they trade on his preferred terms as he campaigns for a second term. An outside analysis by the consultancy Oxford Economics has suggested that implementing the tariffs Trump has proposed could hurt the overall U.S. economy.

with a wide-ranging program to drive transformative impact for people, including by expanding access to water, electricity, and health services. In Sudan, he played a crucial role in

came the Bank's largest IDA client

paving the way for the country's full re-engagement with the World Bank after nearly three decades.

Dione joined the World Bank in 2000 and has worked on development issues with countries spanning income groups across Africa, East Asia, Latin America and South Asia.

A Senegalese national, Dione holds a Ph.D. in Water Resources Engineering from the University of Lyon 3.

said that, unlike the Trump administration, they were seeking a "strategic and balanced" approach to new tariff rates. China produces around half of the world's steel, and is already making far more than its domestic market needs. It sells steel on the world market for less than half what U.S.-produced steel costs, the officials said.

Senior Biden administration officials

Business boom: Record numbers of people are starting up new small businesses: study

NEW YORK, April 17, (AP): Record numbers of people are starting new businesses, and more and more of them are women and minorities, according to a new study.

New business applications jumped in 2020 as the pandemic started, and have continued to be filed at a record pace. More than 5 million applications were filed in 2021 and 2022 and a record 5.5 million new business applications were filed in 2023.

Payroll firm Gusto surveyed 1,300 owners who started their small business last year to discover their characteristics.

Women made up 49% of the new business owners surveyed. That's in line with the past several years, but up starkly from 2019, when just 29% of new business owners were women. Still, women do not receive as much

interest from investors as men. In 2023, just 3% of women entrepreneurs received a private capital investment to start their business, compared to 9% of male entrepreneurs.

Black entrepreneurs made up 6% of new business owners in 2023, double the 3% rate seen before the pandemic.

Hispanic entrepreneurs made up 13% of new owners, compared to 8% last year.

Meanwhile, more businesses are being started as "side hustles," or businesses that supplement day jobs. Forty-four percent of entrepreneurs who started a new business in 2023 did so while working another job, either part time or full time, up from 27% in 2022.

What's On



Photos by Mahmoud Jadeed

Photos from the event

Celebrating 60 years of diplomatic ties

Greek ambassador hosts event to showcase Crete's beauty

By Paul Francis X. Fernandes Arab Times/Al-Seyassah Staff

KUWAIT CITY, April 17: The Embassy of the Hellenic Republic in Kuwait organized a Greek Luxury Tourism Workshop at the St Regis Hotel to promote tourism in the region of Crete.

Speaking on the occasion, the Ambassador of Greece to Kuwait HE Ioannis Plotas said it is with great pleasure and gratitude that he welcomes the Greek Luxury Tourism Workshop, dedicated to showcasing the beauty and allure of his country to friends from the Middle East, particularly from Kuwait.

He extended a warm welcome to the representatives of Greece's premier luxury resorts who graced the gathering. "Their presence here is not only a testament to their commitment to excellence in the tourism industry but also an opportunity to share their wealth of experiences and forge meaningful partnerships with our Kuwaiti counterparts, thereby enriching our bilateral relations," he said.

He added, "Moreover it fills me with immense pride to note that tonight's event coincides with the celebration of the 60th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Greece and Kuwait. This milestone serves as a poignant reminder of the enduring friendship and mutual respect that characterize our nations' ties."

He went on to say, "It is indeed an honor to have with us tonight HE Hussain Zanki, the Chief of the Protocol Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Kuwait. 'Your presence underscores the significance of our gathering and further strengthens the bonds of friendship between our nations'."

During his address the Greek envoy highlighted a significant event that transpired earlier - the breathtaking ceremony of the Olympic Flame lighting in Olympia. This momentous occasion not only holds profound significance for Greece, the birthplace of the Olympic Games but also extends its significance to France, particularly to Paris. I extend my heartfelt thanks to our French colleague who is among us tonight. May this event symbolize the spirit of the Olympic truce and serve as a beacon of peace across the globe."

Dr Kyriakos G. Kotsoglou, Crete Vice-Governor Tourism and e-Governor and member of Economic Committee gave a detailed account of what the region of Crete has to offer holiday makers.

Nestled in the embrace of the azure Aegean Sea, he said, Crete emerges as a jewel of the Mediterranean, captivating travelers with its rich tapestry of history, culture, and natural beauty. As the largest and most populous of the Greek islands, Crete boasts a landscape that ranges from rugged mountains to sunkissed beaches, offering an unparalleled diversity of experiences to its visitors. Kotsoglou said Crete is not merely a destination for history enthusiasts. Its pristine beaches, framed by crystal-clear waters and framed by rugged cliffs, are a haven for sun-seekers and water sports enthusiasts alike. Firm's ongoing partnership with UNHCR advances SDGs

Markaz underscores corporate social responsibility and continues support for refugee humanitarian aid

KUWAIT CITY, April 17: Reaffirming its keenness to give back to the community, Kuwait Financial Centre "Markaz" has recently participated at a roundtable discussion and event under the title "Islamic Philanthropy Humanitarian Response to Forced Displacement Crises," organized by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in partnership with Zakat House, and held under the auspices and with the attendance of H.E Ambassador Hamad AlMeshan, Assistant Foreign Minister for Development and International Cooperation, in addition to the participation of renowned Kuwaiti NGOs and UNHCR supporters.

Speaking at the event, Mr. Abdullatif Al-Nusif, MD - Wealth Management and Wealth Development at Markaz, said: "Markaz remains dedicated to positively serving the community and building a strong and sustainable economy in Kuwait. This is where the role of corporate social responsibility stems, to contribute to the development of society and the national economy. Our key participations, sponsorships and donation activities in the humanitarian field falls under one of our CSR pillars, which is: Building Human Capacity, reflecting our relentless role in collaborating with several non-profit organizations to contribute to providing and maintaining sustainable progress through the development of individual skills and capabilities, in addition to providing the support for humanitarian initiatives and activities aimed at raising the quality of life and achieving long-term positive change.



Markaz-UNHCR

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Whether basking in the sun on the iconic pink sands of Elafonissi or exploring the hidden coves of the south coast, visitors are spoiled for choice when it comes to coastal delights, he added.

Moreover, Crete's culinary heritage is as rich and varied as its landscape, with traditional dishes showcasing the island's bounty of fresh produce, olive oil, and aromatic herbs. From hearty stews flavored with wild herbs to delicate pastries filled with local cheeses and honey, every meal is a celebration of the island's gastronomic prowess.

As tourism continues to flourish on the island, Crete remains committed to sustainable practices, preserving its natural and cultural heritage for generations to come, he said.

Whether embarking on a hiking adventure through the rugged gorges of the White Mountains or indulging in a rejuvenating spa retreat overlooking the Libyan Sea, visitors are invited to immerse themselves in the timeless allure of Crete, where every moment is a journey of discovery.

The region of Crete has much to offer in terms of natural attractions, popular beaches, coastline, beach resorts mountains and gorges in addition to cultural and historical attractions. Markaz continues to extend its support to UN-HCRin line with its CSR strategy and responsibility towards contributing to providing vital support to refugee families and communities in need.

Markaz has actively supported UNHCR since 2019, providing aid to approximately 3,565 individuals across 713 families, including humanitarian programs aimed at improving the living conditions of refugees and fulfilling their basic needs such as access to water, food, and shelter.

This continued partnership with UNHCR dem-

comprehensive and impactful initiatives aligned with the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), specifically goals 1, 2, 3, 6, and 16. These goals encompass eradicating poverty, eliminating hunger, promoting good health and well-being, ensuring clean water and sanitation, and fostering peace, justice, and strong institutions.

onstrates an unwavering responsibilityto UNHCR's

Markaz has continuously played an active role in supporting refugees, contributing to dignified living conditions, alleviating their hardships, and preventing them from resorting to desperate survival strategies. With a vibrant Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) founded on three key pillars: building human capacity, aligning the business environment with the principles of sustainable development, and promoting good governance in the business environment, the company has been at the forefront of helping communities in need and contributing to the economic growth of Kuwait and beyond.

Markaz staunchly advocates for the pivotal role of the private sector in contributing to societal wellbeing. In addition to its own programs, it consistently partners with globally renowned entities such as UNHCR as well as leading non-profit organizations, renowned institutions, and individuals to support humanitarian initiatives and activities that transform lives and leave a lasting positive social change.

Add to this, he said, the gastronomy and culinary tourism in addition to adventure and outdoor activities such as hiking and trekking mountain climbing, water sports including diving, snorkeling, and sailing and surfing and windsurfing spots; wellness and health tourism, thermal springs and spas.

The Greek participants who attended the event included Nikolaos Alexakis Head of Tourism Directorate Region of Crete; Ioannis Androulakis Deputy Regional Governor of Lasithi Regional Unit; Mrs. Maria Lavdaki Head, Tourism Dept. Lassithi Regional Unit Region of Crete; Mrs. Sani Ikkos Irina Shorakhmedova GCC Representative; Hyatt Regency, Thessaloniki, Mrs Elena Biniari General Manager; Omikron Hotels, George Baradakis Sales & Reservations Manager; Milos Hotel, Giorgos Savvidis General Manager; Kalamaki Tours, Miltiadis Despotakis; Aegean Airlines, Mrs. Marina Spyridaki Corporate Affairs Manager; Al Kazemi Group & Travel Agencies WLL (Kwt) GSA of Aegean Airlines and Meri Kareem, Tours Manager.

Bank spreads joy with Gergean celebrations

Warba concludes its Ramadan campaign full of social initiatives and contributions

KUWAIT CITY, April 17: Warba Bank concluded its program of initiatives that was launched during the holy month of Ramadan 2024, which included many social activities and contributions aimed at daily communication with various segments of society through volunteer and charitable work, to benefit and help them.

This year's program was filled with many activities and events, whether targeting clients or the public in general, including citizens and residents, in



Al Mutairi

an effort to provide a role model in the field of social responsibility and sustainable development, and to consolidate volunteer work among its employees and spread the culture of volunteering in society.

Warba Bank formed its volunteer team consisting of a group of its employees from various departments to participate in its initiatives during the holy month.Expressing the readiness and enthusiasm of the team to carry out its duties towards society and implement various daily initiatives according to the set plan during the holy month.

Warba Bank prepared more than 6,500 Iftar meals to distribute daily and throughout the month in cooperation

with the Tarahum Volunteer Team, as part of its social and humanitarian role towards the needy in Kuwait, in addition to establishing the concept of volunteering and giving among the youth participating in this initiative. In continuation of its volunteer role, the team visited more than 7 mosques in various governorates of Kuwait to provide hospitality services to worshipers during Tarawih and Qiyam prayers.

Warba Bank celebrated Gergean with children at the Avenues Mall and the orphanage, and Gergean gifts were distributed to bring happiness and joy to their hearts in celebration of this popular Ramadan occasion, which is one of the most important traditions that Kuwaiti society is proud of in all age groups. Warba volunteer team distributed the Gergean and the children shared their joy with the Team. The Bank distributed more than 5,000 gifts, which reflects the Bank's keenness to interact with various segments of society to enhance the culture of volunteer work and social responsibility.

Warba Bank pays attention to electronic sports, so it launched two tournaments in cooperation with Rush Arena. During the holy month, a partnership was concluded with Flare Club through several sporting activities. The Bank also held two tournaments for the Warba Bank leagues (the Turf Football League) and (the Futsal Football League), whichended with an enthusiastic





Warba Bank completes Ramadan 2024 initiative with volunteer work.

atmosphere and effective organization, and concluded with a brilliant success that was praised by all.

To spread awareness through social media platforms, the Bank launched a

Ramadan podcast entitled: (Why Ramadan?) through cooperation with Dr.Ali Al-Rashed, and continued disseminating medical advice to Warba Bank clients in cooperation with Warah Hospital.

For the second year in a row, Warba organized for its clients the annual competition for recitation and memorization of the Holy Qur'an through the "Sad Application" for all segments of the Bank's clients and their children, which witnessed a number of strong participations from both genders, indicating the increase and extent of attachment to the Holy Qur'an among the various segments of Warba Bank's clients, and ultimately representing a milestone among the Holy Quran competitions in Kuwait.

Warbahonored the winners of its clients and their children in the competition, and as part of its Ramadan activities and events, Warba Bank participated in part of the Iftar Cannon program, which was broadcasted on Kuwait TV daily.

The Bank also contributed by offering many prizes through the Mukhallat program on 360 FM, in addition to motivating Warba Bank clients to exercise to maintain health in this holy month, by organizing many events in cooperation with Flare Sports Club, the most notable of which was a special weight-loss competition for the employees.

The Bank also launched the "Mus'hafi" application for the Holy Qur'an, and this initiative reflects Warba Bank's commitment to providing comprehensive services with the latest technologies that keep pace with the needs of everyone who wishes to recite the Holy Qur'an via smart phone applications.

The Bank concluded its activities by organizing Zakat al-Fiter for employees in cooperation with the Insan Charitable Society, where the employees paid their zakat in cooperation with the Insan Charitable Society, the leading humanitarian organization.

In this regard, Director Marketing and Corporate Communications, Ayman Salem Al-Mutairi, said: "The Bank's activity in 2024 is a continuation of its annual approach in terms of social responsibility, especially in the holy month of Ramadan, and that these activities contribute to building a conscious and cooperative society in all sports, cultural and social fields." Concluding his statement that the same approach will continue even after the end of the holy month of Ramadan and throughout the year.

Warba Bank is one of the banks that has achieved great successes in a short period, as it occupied a leading position in the field of Islamic digital banking services for individuals, and it is one of the largest local banks in the number of shareholders, and these are among the most prominent components that make the Bank close to all members of society.

Al-Danah account draw highlighted in trio of commercials

32 million views for Gulf Bank ads starring Nabil Shuail

KUWAIT CITY, April 17: Gulf Bank has wrapped up its adver-tising campaign in collaboration with the renowned star, Nabil Shuail. The campaign, featuring three comedic commercials, accumulated approximately 32 million views across various social media platforms.

The third advertisement, centering on the semi-annual draw of the Al-Danah account featuring a prize of KD 1 million, accumulated approximately 11 million views in just two weeks during the holy month of Ramadan. This campaign comprised four prize competitions, with each offering KD 1,000. It is noteworthy that the semi-annual draw for the Al-Danah account, revealing the winner of the KD 1 million prize, is set for July 18, 2024, with representatives from the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, and Ernst & Young in attendance.

The second commercial, which celebrated Kuwait's National Day and featured the song "Free Kuwait" by artist Nabil Shuail, received around 13 million views in a short timeframe. It also highlighted the prepaid card adorned with Kuwait's flag, resonating deeply with citizens.

Regarding the "Ya Shams" commercial, which concluded with Nabil Shuail stating, "Switch to Gulf Bank today and experience continuous benefits,"featured participating stars expressing their enthusiasm and appreciation for the bank's digital advancements and the comprehensive features of its mobile application. This

commercial amassed approximately 8 million views across different social media platforms.

Appreciation

Ms. Najla Al-Eisa, Deputy General Manager and Chief Marketing Officer of Gulf Bank, extended her appreciation to the esteemed star Nabil Shuail, the actors, the filming crew, and the director, for their substantial contributions towards accomplishing the social and promotional goals of the three commercials.

Al-Eisa

Al-Eisa highlighted that the significant engagement on social media attained through the bank's promotional campaign underscores their success in reaching diverse segments within society. She also emphasized the level of customer satisfaction with the notable enhancements observed in the customer experience, especially through the bank's mobile application.

She also noted that Gulf Bank's digital transformation journey, which includes branch and ATM developments, customer service center updates, and enhancements to the interactive voice response system. These efforts align with the bank's 2025 strategy to reinforce its prominent role in Kuwait's banking industry, and deliver exceptional services and solutions to its customers.

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.







Diversity in music faces Nashville's test

Beyoncé leads fans of color to country

LONDON: A portrait of Winston Churchill by an artist whose work the British leader loathed went on display Tuesday at Churchill's birthplace ahead of an auction in June.

The painting by modernist artist Graham Sutherland was made in preparation for a larger portrait that Churchill hated and which was later destroyed - an episode recounted in the TV series "The Crown.

The surviving oil-on-canvas study shows Churchill's head in profile against a dark background. It is expected to sell for between 500,000 pounds and 800,000 pounds (\$622,000 and \$995,000) at Sotheby's in London on June 6. Sutherland was commissioned by the Houses of Parliament to paint Churchill to mark his 80th birthday in 1954. The full-length portrait was unveiled in Parliament that year, with Churchill calling it, with a smirk, "a remarkable example of modern art."

Churchill is said to have complained that the painting "makes me look half-witted, which I ain't." It was delivered to his home and never seen again. The Churchill family disclosed years later that it had been destroyed.

Its fate was recreated with poetic license in an episode of "The Crown" in which Churchill's wife, Clementine, watches the painting go up in flames.

Andre Zlattinger, Sotheby's head of modern British and Irish art, said that in the surviving study, "Churchill is caught in a moment of absent-minded thoughtfulness, and together with the backstory of its creation, it gives the impression of a man truly concerned with his image." (AP)

NEW YORK: Participant, the activist film and television studio that has financed Oscar winners like "Spotlight" and socially conscious documentaries like "Food, Inc," and "Waiting For Superman" is closing its doors after 20 years.

Billionaire Jeff Skoll told his staff of 100 in a memo shared with The Associated Press Tuesday that they were winding down company operations.

"This is not a step I am taking lightly," Skoll wrote in the memo. "But after 20 years of ground-

NEW YORK, April 17, (AP): Dusty, worn boots. Horses lapping up water. Sweat dripping from the foreheads of every shade of Black skin as country classics blare through giant speakers. These moments are frequently recreated during Tayhlor Coleman's family gatherings at their central Texas ranch. For her, Beyonce's country album, "Act II: Cowboy Carter," was the granting of an unlikely wish.

"There is something to be said about the biggest artist in the world coming home to the genre that... we all kind of love but never really felt welcome into - it's really hard to put that to words," said the 35-year-old native of Houston's Third Ward, the same area Beyoncé lived in as a child. Loving artists like Miranda Lambert and Shania Twain, Coleman hoped this moment would come. "I was praying then that one day she would make a country album...Beyoncé is more country than a lot of people making country music today." Beyoncé's latest project is not only No. 1 on the Bill-

board 200 for the second consecutive week, but she became the first Black woman to top Billboard's country album chart.

"There's nothing that that girl can't do....that's inspiring to me," said country superstar Lainey Wilson, who took home the country album Grammy in February. "I'm excited to see the fans that didn't know they liked country music find out that maybe they like it a little bit."

Beyoncé's steamrolling into country music - and her motivation behind it - has reignited discussions about the genre's origins and its diversity. But with increased interest from Beyoncé's fans at a fever pitch, is Nashville prepared and willing to welcome them in? And will these new listeners of color and others curious about the hoopla stay or will their interest in the genre wane?

"I will be honest with you: I think that it's a Beyoncé thing. I don't know that it's a country music happening because that would mean the industry would have to do something...I think it's one of those cultural moments for Black people, specifically Black women," said country artist Rissi Palmer, host of the Apple Music radio show Color Me Country which has created a centralized community where fans of color can enjoy the genre.

"It's really funny to me to see a lot of country radio programmers trying to take credit for what just happened with Beyoncé. That wasn't country radio...that

was her power, her money and...the acknowledgment of her brand. The fandom did that," Palmer said.

Tanner Davenport, co-director of Black Opry - and proud BeyHive member - worries the massive achievements of "Cowboy Carter" could have unintended consequences, such as country music executives not feeling an urgency to platform existing and future Black artists. Black Opry was founded by Holly G in April 2021, as she examined her relationship with the genre during the social justice movement sparked by the murder of George Floyd. The organization aims to amplify Black voices in country, Americana, blues and folk music.

Progress

"Once 'Act II' has ran its course and gone away, there are going to be programmers... looking back at this moment and saying, 'We've already done this. We've given a Black woman a No. 1," said Davenport. "If they can really start to dial into the audience a bit more, I think they can start to see progress within this and capitalize on this moment because I think there's a huge undermining of the Black dollar and how far it can go.

Reyna Roberts' parents filled their house with music. Roberts, a rising country artist featured on "Cowboy Carter" with vocal credits on "Blackbiird" and "Tyrant," said some questioned her musical aspirations.

"People are always so surprised. But I'm like my parents played country, they played trap, they played rock, they played classical, they played blues...Anything that I'm creating is all truly authentic," said Roberts, who hit a career breakthrough in 2020 after shout-outs from superstar Carrie Underwood and Mickey Guyton, who in 2021 became the first Black woman to co-host the Academy of Country Music Awards. (Charley Pride, who died in 2020, was the first Black co-host of the CMA Awards in 1975.)

Roberts is part of a new generation of artists, like Shaboozey, Tanner Adell and Willie Jones, who are fusing country with other genres like hip-hop.

While Wilson, one of the biggest artists in the genre, hopes some Queen Bey fans will explore country, a significant percentage of Black listeners already exists. A 2021 Country Music Association self-commissioned study, "Country Music's Multicultural Opportunity," examining potential audience expansion opportunities, revealed that 26% of Black respondents said they listen

weekly.

"I don't think they have gotten to the point where they feel as safe to be at country shows... the broad listenership in country music is going to be reflected in the streaming world," said Davenport. He says the Black Opry is strategizing ways to capitalize on Beyoncé's momentum so curious fans can find spaces "where they can exist and not feel threatened."

Safety and feeling comfortable in a country music environment is often on the minds of Black country musicgoers. Davenport was in the audience during Beyoncé's 2016 CMA performance with The Chicks which sparked a much-documented racist online backlash, and is widely believed to be the genesis for "Cowboy Carter" with the superstar expressing in an Instagram post, "I did not feel welcomed.

During the performance, Davenport says a woman near him yelled, "They need to get that Black b---- off stage," adding, "I started to realize, OK, this is truly a space in which I don't feel comfortable in, and I don't feel safe in."

That same CMA multicultural study found that 20% of concert attendees of color experienced racial profiling or harassment. The polling also included non-country music listeners, and up to 31% of that segment noted that they don't listen because they "wouldn't be safe/ comfortable at live events."

Monica Wisdom understands.

In the early '90s, the St. Louis native attended a concert by one of her favorite artists, Reba McEntire. Wisdom, 55, says McEntire's performance was on fire, but the atmosphere and crowd were ice cold.

"They were very unwelcoming ... You saw the eye rolls and you heard the comments and the whispers, like, 'What are you doing here?'" recalled Wisdom, the founder of Black Women Amplified, a women's empowerment group. "I said if this is what country music is, I don't want any parts of it. So, I stopped listening to it.'

And Wisdom hasn't attended a country music concert since.

While popular artists like Wilson, the legendary Dolly Parton, Maren Morris, Jason Isbell and more have publicly voiced the need for inclusion, their allyship can sometimes be overshadowed. In 2021, Morgan Wallen, then already a huge star, was caught on camera

Continued on Page 12

breaking content and worldchanging impact campaigns, it is the right time for me to evaluate my next chapter and approach to tackling the pressing issues of our time. Since Skoll founded the

company in 2004, Participant has released 135 films, 50 of which were documentaries and many of



Skol

Churchill

which were tied to awareness-raising impact campaigns. Their films have won 21 Academy Awards including best picture for "Spotlight" and "Green Book," best documentary for "An Inconvenient Truth" and "American Factory" and best international feature for "Roma." (AP)

NEW YORK: Fiction writer Aaliyah Bilal, a National Book Award finalist last fall for her story collection "Temple Folk," is among 10 winners of the Whiting Award for emerging authors. Bilal and the other recipients, who include fellow fiction writers Yoon Choi, Gothataone Moeng and Ada Zhang, will each be given \$50,000.

On Wednesday, the Whiting Foundation announced that Whiting prizes also were awarded to dramatists Shayok Misha Chowdhury and Frances Ya-Chu Cowhig; as well as poets Taylor Johnson, Charif Shanahan and Elisa Gonzalez; and to poet and nonfiction writer Javier Zamora. (AP)

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NEWS/FEATURES

People & Places



Country reign Beyoncé redefines tradition, diversity

Continued from Page 11

using the N-word as his "Dangerous: The Double Album" record sat at No. 1 on the Billboard 200 for three consecutive weeks. Although there were repercussions, many fans rallied around him boosting his popularity. Jason Aldean's "Try That in a Small Town" also experienced a surge last year as the music video swirled in controversy.

"That's the problem that the industry has in trying to retain and foster a real Black country audience, said Palmer, whose first meetings with major labels in the early 2000s were sight-unseen due to her



team's concerns that her race might present an obstacle. In 2007, Palmer became the first Black woman in 20 years to reach Billboard's Hot Country Songs chart with "Country Girl." She remembers performing at shows with Confederate flags in the crowd but singing anyway as a form of resistance. Concerns from music labels included her hairstyle and even the ethnicity of her love interests in music videos.

McEntire

Palmer says the perception of racism is a "hard connotation to overcome, and you have to do a lot of work. You have to do a lot of answering for that and possibly asking for forgiveness...I don't know that the industry is prepared to do that.'

"I do think that there is this sense that country music is white music," said Coleman, who didn't always express her love for country music as a teen. "It was not cool to be country...for the longest time, especially growing up, I was trying to fit in with everybody else. It's a sentiment many Black fans have echoed, including Palmer.

The genre might not seem relatable to fans of color because they don't see themselves. In the CMA multicultural study, respondents noted feeling that country music isn't interested in attracting them and not seeing enough Black, Latino or Asian artists.

"It's hard to be in a space if you don't see a repre-sentation of yourself," said the 26-year-old Roberts, whose song "Louisiana" was inspired by Beyoncé's "Daddy Lessons." "My mindset was even though I don't see representation, I will make sure that there's representation.3

Education

In a frequently cited 2021 study published by Jada Watson, a University of Ottawa musicologist, data revealed artists of color received just 1.5% of country radio airplay between 2002-2020. During that period, with nearly 15,000 songs played within the format, only three of the 13 Black artists were women. No songs by Black women reached the top 20 on country radio charts.

"There's so much unloving in the world of Black people, especially Black women, that you have to find the spots where you're loved," said Wisdom, who grew up loving Parton and Kenny Rogers and watching McEntire's "Reba" TV sitcom. "I didn't find that in country music."



Beyoncé performs at the Wolstein Center, Nov. 4, 2016, in Cleveland, Ohio. With the release of 'Act II: Cowboy Carter,' Beyoncé has reignited discussions about the genre's origins and its diversity. (AP)

Film



Cynthia Erivo poses at the premiere of the film 'Challengers' at the Regency Village Theatre, Tuesday, April 16, in Los Angeles. (AP)



Studio announces 'Five Nights at Freddy's'

Universal unveils blockbuster lineup

LAS VEGAS, April 17, (AP): With the dust settled from a big 2023, winning best picture and topping the box office, Universal Pictures is looking to the future. The studio's upcoming releases include the big screen adap-tation of "Wicked," "Twisters" and the newly announced sequel to "Five Nights at Freddy's."

Universal brought some of the stars of its biggest films, like Ariana Grande, Cynthia Erivo, Michelle Yeoh, Jeff Goldblum, Glen Powell, Lupita Nyong'o, Daisy Edgar Jones and Anthony Ramos to CinemaCon in Las Vegas recently to get the audience of theater owners and exhibitors excited for what's to come as well.

"This whole experience is absoluteimpossible to put into words," said Grande, who with Erivo introduced some new footage from the Thanksgiving release.

brought both a reverence for the stage show and a vision for big screen grandeur.

"We dreamed very, very, very big for 'Wicked,'" Chu said. "Twisters" star Powell introduced

some intense new footage from "Twisters," which is storming theaters July 19. The film, a companion to the 1996 Jan de Bont blockbuster, was directed by "Minari" filmmaker Lee Isaac Chung and produced by Frank Marshall and Steven Spielberg, who Chung said is a "tornado fanatic."

"We really tried to make this film as immersive and real as possible," Chung said. "This is meant to be a joyful, fun ride.'

Adaptation

velopment for 2026, but also said that their "commitment to producing original animated films remains steadfast." Their original "Migration," released in late 2023, became a slow-burn hit earning nearly \$300 million globally.

Universal also has DreamWorks Animation offerings, which recently released "Kung Fu Panda 4" and has The Wild Robot" set for September, from "Lilo & Stitch" filmmaker Chris Sanders and based on the children's book by Peter Brown and featuring Nyong'o's voice.

'If you haven't read it, please do yourself a favor and do it because it is wonderful," Nyong'o said.

On the other end of the ratings spectrum, horror films are also a key component of the mix as one of the most

Fans and experts seem to agree that Beyonce has created an education on Black country trailblazers like Linda Martell and Rhiannon Giddens, and is providing an immeasurable amount of attention toward existing artists.

"It's really great for them...The rising tide lifts all boats," said iconic singer Wynonna Judd, who mentors several established and rising Black female singers. "What I think of professionally is how this has to be a blessing to so many women in the business that are... wanting to be heard."

Before "Cowboy Carter" officially announced featured musicians, searches, streams and social media impressions rose exponentially for many current Black country artists such as Roberts, Guyton, Adell, Tiera Kennedy, Brittney Spencer, Shaboozey and others due to media stories and curiosity. Since the album has dropped, the numbers have risen even more.

"The fact that Beyoncé has been able to create this conversation for more people to be included in this space and talked about, it's been really cool," said Shaboozey, who's featured on "Spaghettii" and "Sweet Honey Buckin." "To see her just kind of coming in here has been honestly beneficial to me and plenty of other artists.

But Davenport, who noted the Black Opry will honor pioneering songwriter Alice Randall for the organization's anniversary this month, says while country is more diverse, progress has been too incremental, and Nashville hasn't made good on promises made following the social justice uprising.

"I don't think things are going to change overnight... at this point now, it feels like a repeat of what happened in 2021 after George Floyd was murdered,' said Davenport, referring to the current backlash against diversity and inclusion efforts. "There's been no progress. I mean, you can see it on the charts. You can see it on the (festival) lineups." While fans say country music has a lot to fix, they realize they have to do their part.

Support

"Fans, though, have to take a responsibility and support the artists," said Wisdom, whose love for country music was rekindled after watching the Peabody-award winning series "High on the Hog: How African American Cuisine Transformed America,' which featured a Black cowboys episode. "We have to go to these shows, we have to buy their music."

The scope of Beyoncé's country music impact might not be realized for years, but there's an optimism that the curiosity about Black country artists will continue.

"I hope that when Beyoncé moves on to 'Act III' that some of the people are going to stay... There are women that we stand on the shoulders of, and I want to make sure that we acknowledge all of them," said Palmer, whose Color Me Country Artist Grant fund provides micro grants to artists of color pursuing careers in country, Americana and roots music. "I'm glad everyone is excited about Beyoncé. I'm glad that she's having the milestones that she's having - all of that. Also, just remember there were people that were here before.

Despite Beyoncé never explicitly saying so, many fans believe "Cowboy Carter" - as well as her previ-ous album, the dance-themed "Renaissance" - are meant to reclaim genres whose foundations are rooted in Black culture. But with the passage of time, along with systemic inequalities, is reclamation even possible?

Simpson Kelce

Variety

LOS ANGELES: Travis Kelce's NFL off-season with the Kansas City Chiefs has

been a busy one. The Super Bowl LVIII-winning tight end is the host of a new game show called "Are You Smarter than a Celebrity?" for Prime Video, the streaming service confirmed Tuesday. Filming for the 20-episode season has already completed.

The premise is a twist on "Are You Smarter Than a 5th Grader?", which debuted on Fox in 2007 and was hosted by Jeff Foxworthy. It also aired in syndication. John Cena hosted a 2019 revival for Nickelodeon.

In Kelce's show, an adult contestant will be given 11 elementary-level questions where they can ask a classroom of various celebrities for help answering. The final question is from the 6th grade curriculum and is worth \$100,000. Only one celebrity is allowed to talk through the answer to the last question with the contestant.

Kelce, who is dating music superstar Taylor Swift, said in a statement he grew up watching game shows and is "excited to be following in the footsteps of so many TV icons.'

This isn't Kelce's first TV gig. He starred in his own 2016 dating competition show for E! called "Catching Kelce" and hosted an episode of "Saturday Night Live" last year. (ÂP)

LAS VEGAS: O.J. Simpson's last robust discussion with his longtime lawyer was just before Easter, at the country club home Simpson leased southwest of the Las Vegas

Strip. "He was awake, alert and chilling, "Vergne recalled attorney Malcom LaVergne recalled Tuesday. "He's on the couch ... drinking a beer and watching TV. And so that was the last time we had effective back-and-forth conversations. He's usually the one who keeps me up on the news ... so we were just catching up on the news then."

About a week later, on April 5, a doctor said Simpson was "transitioning," as LaVergne described it. The last time LaVergne visited, last week, Simpson only had strength to ask for water and to choose to watch a TV golf tournament instead of a tennis match.

"Of course he chose golf," LaVergne told The Associated Press in an interview. 'He was an absolute golf fanatic. Simpson died April 10, after being

Goldblum was also on hand to talk about "Wicked" in which he plays the man behind the curtain.

"I've been chased by dinosaurs, I flew into the belly of a humongous spaceship ... I tuned into a fly," Goldblum said. "But I have never been part of the particular flavor or magic that is this movie. ... The whole experience has been dreamy.'

The first part of "Wicked" arrives in theaters on Nov. 25, with part two coming in 2025, also over Thanksgiving. Directed by Jon M. Chu, the film stars Erivo as the green-skinned Elphaba and Grande as the popular Glinda. Yeoh plays the headmistress at their school, and, the studio recently announced, Peter Dinklage will be Dr. Dillamond, a

history professor and goat. Producer Marc Platt has been on the "Wicked" journey for 25 years, since he first read the novel.

"I always intended 'Wicked' to be a movie," he said.

It was Stephen Schwartz who convinced him that it needed music and to go to Broadway first. The theatrical production made a big impression on the movie's future director, too, who

diagnosed last year with prostate cancer. He was 76.

A post the following day from Simpson's family on X, formerly Twitter, said Simpson "succumbed to his battle with cancer" while "surrounded by his children and grandchildren." However, LaVergne said Tuesday just one person was with

Universal was the top grossing studio in 2023 thanks to the likes of jugdio in 2025 manks to the fixes of jug-gernauts like "The Super Mario Bros. Movie" and "Oppenheimer," which accounted for over \$2.3 billion in ticket sales alone, and other hits like "M3GAN," "Cocaine Bear," "Fast X" and "Five Nights at Freddy's," the video game adaptation that made over \$295 million worldwide despite its day-and-date release. All told, Universal made nearly \$5 billion in ticket sales. It's the first time that Universal topped the charts since 2015, before Disney dominated in first place for almost a decade.

"Audiences are sending us a very clear message: They've fired off a bright green flare telling us they're ready for something new," said Jim Orr, Universal's head of distribution.

Also, he added, "We released more movies in theaters than any other studios.'

Universal plans to release more than 20 films theatrically in 2024, too, more than any other studio for the third year in a row, spanning all genres and including original titles and franchises.

Chris Meledandri, the founder and CEO of Illumination, spoke about the upcoming "Despicable Me 4" (July 3) and a new Mario movie that's in de-

Simpson when he died, identified by the attorney only as "a close family member." He declined to say who it was.

"You have to remember that they've shared O.J. with the world their entire lives," the attorney said of Simpson's surviving adult children of his first marriage - Arnelle Simpson, now 55, and Jason Simpson,



From left: Josh O'Connor, Zendaya and Mike Faist, cast members in 'Challengers,' pose together at the premiere of the film at the Regency Village Theatre, Tuesday, April 16, in Los Angeles. (AP)

consistent box office genres in recent history. Coming up, the studio has 'Wolf Man," with Julia Garner and Christopher Abbott, coming in January, "Speak No Evil," a remake of a Danish horror with James McAvoy set for Sept. 13 (a Friday), and then "Five Nights at Freddy's 2" in the fall of 2025.

Focus Features, the independent arm of Universal, which put out films like "Asteroid City" and "The Holdovers" last year, also previewed its slate including Sam Taylor-Johnson's Amy Winehouse biopic "Back to Black" (May 17), Jeff Nichols' "The Bikeriders" (June 21), Edward Berger's Machiavellian papal thriller "Conclave" (Nov. 8) and Robert Eggers' "Nosferatu" (Dec. 25).

"This definitely ain't your father's 'Nosferatu,'" said Focus chairman Peter Kujawski.

Donna Langley, the Chairman of NBC Universal Studio Group, took the stage to thank the exhibitors in the room. She noted that it would have been easy to drop the mic after their last year.

But, Langley said, "We believe that our best year should always be in front of us and our best projects always in the pipeline."

53 - and the children Simpson had with ex-wife Nicole Brown Simpson before she was killed in 1994: Sydney Simpson, 38, and Justin Simpson, 35. The family social media post asked "during this time of transition" for "privacy and grace." (AP)

TAMPA, Fla.: An endangered Bornean orangutan baby has been welcomed into the world at Busch Gardens Tampa Bay in Florida.

The baby orangutan was delivered by cesarean section on Saturday, weighing just over three pounds (1.3 kilograms), park officials said. The mother, Luna, is recuperating from surgery and will be reunited with the baby once she is stabilized.

These orangutans are found only on the island of Borneo and are listed as critically endangered by the International Union for Conservation of Nature. Busch Gardens Tampa Bay is part of the Association of Zoos and Aquariums' Species Survival Plan, which focuses on managing threatened populations and educates visitors about the animals.

The Bornean orangutan is the largest treedwelling ape species and the third largest overall. The birth of this newborn is a "milestone in orangutan conservation efforts,' Busch Gardens said in a news release.

Orangutans in the wild typically live between 35 and 40 years. The newborn ape does not yet have a name. The theme park in Tampa bills its zoo as one of the largest in North America, housing thousands of animals. (AP)

HEALTH/SCIENCE

FAST detects over 900 new pulsars

China's gigantic telescope embraces int'l exchanges, innovations

GUIYANG, April 17, (Xinhua): China's Five-hundred-me-ter Aperture Spherical Radio Telescope (FAST), the world's largest single-dish radio telescope, has identified more than 900 new pulsars since its launch in 2016.

The number of new pulsars discovered by FAST is more than three times the total number of pulsars found by foreign telescopes during the same period, Han Jinlin, a scientist with the National Astronomical Observatories under the Chinese Academy of Sciences (NAOC), said on Wednesday.

One of the important implications of the research on pulsars is to provide cosmic coordinates for possible future interstellar travel, Han noted.

FAST started formal operations in January 2020 and was officially opened to the world in March 2021. The telescope provides astronomers around the globe with a powerful tool to uncover the mysteries and evolution of the universe, said Jiang Peng, chief engineer of the FAST.

Cooperation

British astronomer Ralph Eatough, who has been interested in Chinese culture, history and literature since he was young, said that he felt extremely lucky to travel to China and join the FAST research group, the members of which have been very welcoming.

Having earned a doctorate in pulsar astrophysics at the University of Manchester, Eatough works as a pulsar astronomer at the NAOC and takes charge of pulsar data processing and time-frequency system optimization.

Pulsars are extremely compact remnants of massive stars that, whilst spinning extremely quickly (sometimes hundreds of times a second), emit beams of electromagnetic radiation that can sweep past the Earth -- a bit like a cosmic lighthouse, he said.

Thanks to its high sensitivity, the telescope can detect very faint pulsars that were previously too far away to identify.

In the past few years, Eatough has joined Chinese scientists and performed many observations with FAST, searching for undiscovered pulsars and precisely measuring the properties of pulsars found with FAST.

He has been searching for pulsars in the small satellite galaxies surrounding the Milky Way. "These would be the most distant pulsars known, and it is only now with the sensitivity of FAST that we have the chance to detect them. Such pulsars could tell us a lot about the unmeasured gaseous material that surrounds the Milky Way," Eatough said.

Eatough said that opening up FAST to the world means that now astronomers can perform experiments that were previously not possible due to insufficient telescope sensitivity, with a prime example of this being the potential to detect pulsars located in external galaxies.

According to Sun Chun, engineer in charge of FAST measurement and control, FAST has received applications from 15 foreign countries, including the United States, Germany and Japan, and approved a total of nearly 900 hours for observation. The applications mainly involve fast radio burst observations, pulsar observations, and neutral hydrogen surveys, Sun added.

Exchange

The telescope has attracted many tourists from home and abroad since its inception.

The telescope, located in a naturally deep and round karst depression in southwest China's Guizhou Province, has a re-

ception area equal to 30 standard football fields. This February, a total of 34 people from a French delegation, including students, young volunteers and staff members from the Secours populaire français, visited the telescope and the memorial hall dedicated to the late chief engineer of the FAST project, Nan Rendong.

It was the first time for Florent Madrolle, a French translator, to visit China and see the gigantic telescope. "The size and the technology were very impressive," said Madrolle.

Five kilometers away from FAST in Kedu Township, the memorial hall has attracted a lot of tourists and visitors eager to pay tribute to Nan.

Nan, who selected the site of FAST and oversaw its construction, died in 2017 due to sickness at the age of 72. China honored him with several posthumous titles, including the "role model of our times.

Thibouw Laurine said that during this trip, she not only saw the telescope and knew its functions, but was also deeply touched by and eager to know more stories about Nan.

Innovation

Since its inception, the telescope has continually prompted special technical progress through the efforts of a team of scientists led by Jiang.

"I thought we would revise the design scheme seven or eight times, and didn't expect that the first version would be so successful, with its performance reaching the globally advanced level," said Chai Xiaoming excitedly, senior engineer at the NAOC. She pointed at a silver-plated low-noise amplifier (LNA), which was only the size of a harmonica.

The LNA is the core component of the telescope's receiver. It had been imported from foreign countries including the United States, Sweden and Australia previously. To master the key technology, Chai and her team spent nearly two years developing a high-performance domestic low-noise amplifier.

As soon as the prototype of the LNA was launched, it attracted the attention of the international astronomical community. The Brazilian BINGO project contacted the telescope's operation and development center for batch purchase of the LNA. Chai said that if the cooperation is reached, it would be the first time that the core components, independently developed by the telescope's operation and development center, are exported overseas.

The FAST project had no experience to follow and was destined to meet unprecedented challenges. "No one told you what to do, and no one was sure what would work," said Jiang, adding that the construction stage was filled with trials and failures

Jiang said that if FAST was only regarded as a telescope or a piece of observational equipment, it would have already sufficed. But to maintain its leading position in the world, his team will make every effort to ensure that the FAST becomes even more stable and more efficient.

At present, the annual observation time of the telescope is about 5,300 hours, and it plays an important role in the continuous output of scientific research achievements.

In the near future, the telescope will provide the international astronomical community with new perspectives, allowing them to further explore the universe and try to find the unknown, and make greater contributions to helping human beings break into new fields of cognition, Jiang added.

'A colossal ecosystem tragedy'

Coral reefs in crisis: UN urges action

ATHENS, Greece, April 17, (AP): The world is not doing enough to protect coral reefs, the United Nations' special envoy for the ocean said in defense of the marine ecosystems that protect biodiversity, sustain underwater life and produce some of the oxygen we breathe.

In an interview with The Associated Press on the sidelines of an international ocean conference in Greece, Peter Thomson suggested that all significant coral reefs should be included in marine protected areas under what is known as the "30x30" initiative - a plan to designate 30% of the world's land and ocean areas as protected areas by 2030.

Top reef scientists on Monday announced that coral reefs are experiencing global bleaching for the fourth time - and the second time in just 10 years - as a result of warming oceans amid human-caused climate change.

Bleaching occurs when stressed coral, which are invertebrates, expel the algae that provide their food and give them their vibrant colors. Although the coral can recover, severe and prolonged bleaching can kill it.

Scientists from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and International Coral Reef Initiative said on Monday that coral bleaching across at least 53 countries, territories or local economies has been confirmed since February 2023.

Although much is being done to protect coral reefs around the world, the prime cause driving events such as global bleaching is the burning of fossil fuels, which leads to green-

house gas emissions and warming oceans, Thomson said. "Is enough being done? The answer is definitely not



A drone photo taken on Feb. 26, 2024 shows China's Five-hundred-meter Aperture Spherical Radio Telescope (FAST) under maintenance in southwest China's Guizhou Province. (Xinhua)

Spotlight on AI, life sciences and new materials

China to showcase major sci-tech achievements at 2024 ZGC Forum

BEIJING, April 17, (Xinhua): China's upcoming 2024 Zhongguancun Forum (ZGC Forum) will focus on cutting-edge fields such as artificial intelligence (AI), life sciences and new materials, and unveil a series of major scientific and technological achievements of the country, an official with the Ministry of Science and Technology said Wednesday.

Chen Jiachang, vice minister of science and technology, made the remarks during a press conference in Beijing, noting that the forum will also see the establishment of a trade and cooperation platform featuring over 3,000 sci-tech achievements from more than 40 countries and regions.

During this year's ZGC Forum, scheduled in Beijing from April 25 to 29, China's opening-up and cooperation efforts will be highlighted by inviting international sci-tech organizations, scientists, innovative enterprises and investors, according to Chen.

Founded in 2007, the forum, with its enduring focus on innovation and development, has evolved into a nationallevel open innovation platform and an international forum over the years.

Themed "Innovation: Building a Better World," this year's edition will comprise five major sections, including forums and meetings, technology trading, unveiling of achievements, and competitions in cutting-edge fields.

Up to 120 events are planned this year, with invitations extended to top scientists, including Nobel laureates, to engage in discussions on open innovation and explore opportunities for mutual development.

According to Yu Yingjie, a member of the Standing Committee of the Communist Party of China Beijing Municipal Committee, the 2024 ZGC Forum will invite 19 international organizations and foreign government departments to host 17 parallel forums.

The competitions in cutting-edge fields have amassed over 3,100 entries from 75 countries and regions, covering areas such as quantum information, photon computing and metaverse.

Between April 27 and 29, the eighth China Science Fiction Convention, a parallel sub-forum of the 2024 ZGC Forum, will be held, with a focus on the technology, creation and industry development in the realm of science fiction.

UK moves closer to total smoking ban

US unveils plan to halt future pandemics

WASHINGTON, April 17, (AP): President Joe Biden's ad- administration official told reporters on Monday. 50 countries identify and respond to infectious diseases, with the goal of preventing pandemics like the COVID-19 outbreak that suddenly halted normal life around the globe in 2020. US government officials will offer support in the countries, most of them located in Africa and Asia, to develop better testing, surveillance, communication and preparedness for such outbreaks in those countries. The strategy will help "prevent, detect and effectively re-spond to biological threats wherever they emerge," Biden said in a statement Tuesday. The Global Health Security Strategy, the president said, aims to protect people worldwide and "will make the United States stronger, safer, and healthier than ever before at this critical moment. The announcement about the strategy comes as countries have struggled to meet a worldwide accord on responses to future pandemics. Four years after the coronavirus pandemic, the prospects of a pandemic treaty signed by all 194 of the World Health Organization's members are flailing.

The U.S. program will rely on several govern



Bleached coral is visible at the Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary, off the coast of Galveston, Texas, in the Gulf of Mexico, Sept. 16, 2023. (AP) he said. "And the 'done' factor is the transition away from burning fossil fuels."

Thomson said he believes some more resilient coral will survive, and noted efforts to preserve coral in facilities such as aquariums. But "are we faced with a colossal ecosystem tragedy? Yes, definitely. And we can't escape that," he said. "The fourth mass bleaching is just ... a harbinger of what's coming.

Sometimes described as underwater rain forests, coral reefs support a quarter of marine species and form crucial barriers that protect coastlines from the full force of storms. They also provide billions of dollars in revenue from tourism, fishing and other commerce.

Thomson said that including significant reefs in the "30x30" initiative would be a feasible way of increasing their protection. Extending them the safeguards afforded to marine protected areas would be "very valuable for the preservation of the reefs," he said.

"You can't have a healthy planet without a healthy ocean. And the ocean's health is currently measurably in decline," Thomson said

The Biden administration plans to move forward with its new strategy to prepare the world for the next pandemic, regardless of whether a treaty is hammered out or not, a senior

- including the U.S. State Department, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Health and Human Services and the U.S. Agency for International Development, or USAID - to help countries refine their infectious disease response.

Also:

LONDON: The British government's plan for a landmark smoking ban that aims to stop young people from ever smoking cleared its first hurdle in Parliament on Tuesday despite vocal opposition from within Prime Minister Rishi Sunak's Conservative Party.

The bill, a key policy announced by Sunak last year, would make it illegal to sell tobacco products to anyone born after January 1, 2009. If passed, the bill will give **Britain** some of the toughest anti-smoking measures in the world. Authorities say it will create modern Britain's "first smoke-free generation."

Under the Tobacco and Vapes Bill, children turning 15 this year or younger will never be legally sold tobacco. Once implemented - officials are aiming for 2027 - the legal age of sale that people in **England** can buy cigarettes will be raised by one year, every year until it is eventually illegal for the whole population.



Americans projected to win 123 medals overall

US & China expected to win most medals at the Paris Oly

WASHINGTON, April 17, (AP): The United States and China are expected to finish 1-2 in the gold and the overall medal counts at the Paris Olympics, which open in 100 davs.

The United States is projected to win 123 medals overall, including 39 golds. China is projected to win 35 gold and 89 medals overall. The two also finished 1-2 in both categories three years ago in the pandemicdelayed Tokyo Olympics.

This forecast is done by Nielsen's Gracenote Sports, which supplies statistical analysis for sports leagues around the world. It also tracks major competitions involving Olympic sports leading up to the Games.

Gracenote's rankings are based on overall medals won, although others focus the rankings on gold totals.

This would be the eighth straight time the United States has won the most overall medals in the Summer Games. In 1992 at Barcelona, the so-called Unified team topped the overall count. Those athletes were from the former Soviet Union, which had just broken up as a sovereign state.

The last time the United States did not top the gold-medal count in the Summer Games was in the 2008 Olympics in Beijing, where China invested heavily and saw dividends.

OLYMPICS

Next in line with overall and gold totals are: Britain (66-13), France (55-28), Australia (50-13), Japan (49-13), Italy (47-12), Netherlands (38-18), Germany (36-9), South Korea (24-9).

The next 10 are: Canada (22-6),

Spain (20-5), Hungary (19-5), Bra-zil (18-9), Turkey (13-4), Ethiopia (13-3), Uzbekistan (13-3), Ukraine (13-3), Georgia (12-3) and Denmark (11-5).

Host nations always get a bump in medals, and France is expected to get a big one and increase its overall total from 33 in Tokyo. France is forecast to nearly triple its goldmedal output from Tokyo, where Japan picked up a record haul.

Performing at home is an advantage, partly because host nations invest more heavily in training athletes. Then, of course, there are adoring home crowds.

France is also competing in 25 different sports in Paris, far above its average in recent Olympics of between 15 and 19, according to Gracenote's analysis.

The unknown factor is the presence of Russian and - to a lesser extent - Belarusian athletes. They have been absent from most international competitions over the last two years because of the war in Ukraine. Their influence is difficult to factor into the

forecast, Gracenote acknowledges. "It appears that there will be limited participation of these athletes

(Russian and Belarusian)," Gracenote said. It said it expects its predictions to be accurate "based on the data that we have.'

Russia and Belarus are barred from team sports at the Olympics because of the war in Ukraine and the International Olympic Committee has laid out a two-step vetting procedure for individual athletes from those countries to be granted neutral status.

Those athletes must first be approved by the governing body of their individual sport and then by an an IOC-appointed review panel.

Surge into the future eyed **Buttler's unbeaten ton helps**

MotoGP racing for new momentum in America

AUSTIN, Texas, April 17, (AP): A new American team with ties to the NASCAR stock car series, a new television deal in the United States and upcoming American ownership.

MotoGP, global motorcycle racing's version of Formula 1, looks primed for a bid to copy F1's explosive growth in recent years and bring a new group of fans - notably from the U.S. - to the thrills of two-wheeled speed.

"It has what Americans really crave or demand out of their sports: A combination of physical ability and danger," said Bobby Epstein, president of the Texas racetrack Circuit of the Americas, which hosts MotoGP's only race in the U.S.

MOTOR CYCLING

Liberty Media's purchase of Spainbased Dorna and the commercial rights to MotoGP by the end of the year has fueled speculation of what might come for a racing series anchored largely in Europe.

"They know what to do, they raise Formula 1 to the maximum peak we've ever seen," said Italy's Francesco Bagnaia, the 2022 and 2023 MotoGP champion with Ducati. "It will be a great opportunity for MotoGP."

Liberty took over Formula 1 in 2017 and has overseen its rise in popularity, with an expanded calendar, new races in Las Vegas and Miami, and the slick Netflix docuseries "Drive to Survive."

Liberty has yet to reveal specific plans for MotoGP, but President and Chief Executive Greg Maffei called the series "a great sporting spectacle that we can expand to a wider global audience. The business has significant upside, and we intend to grow the sport for MotoGP fans, teams, commercial partners and our shareholders.'

MotoGP already has two key elements for growing its American audience: Trackhouse Racing's move into the series this season and its potential crossover appeal to NASCAR fans; said Justin Marks, co-owner of Trackhouse Racing with pop star Pitbull. "I understand the American motorsport consumer. I understand the profile of the American racing fan.'

Those fans will appreciate daredevil riders racing at speeds that can top 200 mph (321 kph), and short races that typically finish in under and hour, Marks said.

Trackhouse is already trying to lure its NASCAR fans into giving MotoGP a look.

Trackhouse NASCAR drivers Ross Chastain and Daniel Suarez were in the MotoGP paddock at the Grand Prix

of the Americas last week before their own race on Sunday. Earlier in the week, Trackhouse MotoGP riders Miguel Oliveira and Raul Fernan-

dez visited the team's NASCAR headquarters in Maffei North Carolina.

All of it was cross-promoted across team social media accounts.

"It's our one time to race on American soil. I spent a spent a lot of time talking to fans who walked up and shook my hand and just said, 'Thanks for doing what your are doing and in-vesting in motorcycle racing," Marks said.

American fans will look for an American rider. They won't find one yet.

No American has held a full-time ride in MotoGP since 2015. No rider from the U.S. has won a MotoGP race since 2011. The last American champion was the late Nicky Hayden in 2006.

Europe dominates the talent development at all levels. Of the 22 riders this season, 16 are from Spain, including Fernandez, or Italy. Oliveira is Portuguese.

Joe Roberts, who races for the Onlyans American Racing team, is the only American rider at the Moto2 level.

Rajasthan Royals' Rovman Powell plays a shot during the Indian Premier League cricket match between Kolkata Knight Riders and Rajasthan Royals in Kolkata, India, Tuesday, April 16, 2024. (AP)

Pakistan target right T20 combination vs NZ

Rajasthan beat Kolkata in IPL

14

KOLKATA, India, April 17, (AP): Jos Buttler's unbeaten century helped Rajasthan Royals chase down 224 to equal an Indian Premier League record in a breathtaking two-wicket win over Kolkata Knight **Riders.**

The Englishman hit 107 not out off 60 balls and carried Rajasthan to 224-8 off the final ball as the team matched the league record for the highest successful run chase.

Buttler had earlier watched from the dugout as Sunil Narine (109) smashed his maiden T20 century in Kolkata's strong total of 223-6 after Rajasthan won the toss and elected to field.

CRICKET

Buttler, brought in as impact substitute, kept Rajasthan in the hunt despite wickets falling around him as he took the game deep before counterattacking in the last five overs.

Spinners Narine (2-30) and Varun Chakravarthy (2-36) strangled Rajasthan in the middle overs as it slumped to 121-6 in the 13th over. But Rovman Powell hit a brisk 26 off 13 balls before he fell leg before wicket in the 17th over in Narine's last over before Buttler singlehandedly took the game away from Kolkata.

Needing 46 off the last three overs, Kolkata's multi-million dollar signing Mitchell Starc (0-50) conceded 18 runs as the left-arm Australian was scrappy and even gave away five extra runs when wicketkeeper Phil Salt couldn't gather the ball cleanly down the leg side

Buttler smashed six sixes and nine boundaries and raised his century in the final over when he hit Chakravarthy for a six over long-on off the first ball before closing out the game by scrambling for two runs off the fifth ball and then drove the spinner on the on-side for the winning run off the final ball.

Earlier, Narine decimated tournament's two best spinners - Ravichandran Ashwin (0-49) and Yuzvendra Chahal (1-54) - with his powerful hitting as the left-hander clubbed 13 boundaries and six sixes.

Fast bowler Avesh Khan had plucked a brilliant one-handed return catch to dismiss Salt (10) after Riyan Parag had dropped a regulation catch at point off Trent Boult's second ball of the match.

Narine took his time to settle down, but took charge once he completed his half-century off 29 balls. He hamPulisic & McKennie face off as rivals in Italy, then join forces again for US

MILAN, April 17, (AP): Weston McKennie thought back to when he first met Christian Pulisic, a pair of 13-year-olds on a bus from a hotel to training camp in Carson, California.

"I used to sit behind him. I used to squirt empty air with a little bit of water into his ear," McKennie said. "I was scared to take the elevator, so he used to walk with me up the stairs, like 11 flights of stairs, after training all the time."

A dozen years later, they are mainstays on the U.S. national team as it prepares for this summer's Copa América and the 2026 World Cup, but first will be rivals when Pulisic's AC Milan faces McKennie's Juventus on April 27 or 28 with second place at stake in Italy's Serie A.

"More fun playing with him, so I don't really have to worry about him offensively," McKennie said with a laugh during a conference call Tuesday to promote the match.

Both found success as teenaged American standouts in Europe, struggled in their early 20s and reemerged in 2023-24 for their best club seasons as 25-year-olds.

Pulisic has thrived under coach Stefano Pioli, scoring 10 Serie A goals and 13 overall, topping his previous highs of nine league goals and 11 overall with Chelsea in 2019. He was given a string of starts on the right side of the attack - U.S. coach Gregg Berhalter has preferred him on the left - and of late has been shifted to a central attacking midfield role.

Pulisic regained what he termed "that self belief."

"I don't think it's so important to

mered Chahal for two straight sixes and two fours in an over to complete his century off 49 balls before Boult (1-31) knocked back his leg stump with a perfect yorker in the 18th over.

Angkrish Raghuvanshi (30) was the next best batter for Kolkata and provided momentum by sharing an 85-run second-wicket stand with Narine before he sliced a catch to third man.

Rajasthan is atop the table with 12 points from six wins and one loss. Kolkata still holds the second spot on superior net run-rate over Chennai Super Kings and Sunrisers Hyderabad as all three teams are locked on eight points.

Also:

RAWALPINDI: The 2009 champion Pakistan is aiming to tick all the right boxes in its preparation phase ahead exactly find the exact reason for why I've scored some more goals or whatever you want to call success," he said. "It comes and goes at times in players" careers and we both kind of needed to find that again and, yeah, luckily we have.'

A native of Hershey, Pennsylvania, Pulisic debuted with Borussia Dortmund at age 17 in January 2016 and moved to Chelsea for the 2019-20 season. He became the first American to play in a Champions League final in 2021, winning a medal, but struggled for playing time in 2022-23 under his third manager in four seasons. In his 2022 book, Pulisic disclosed he battled depression in the winter of 2020-21.

SOCCER

While Pulisic is expressive and introspective, McKennie is the U.S. national team extrovert.

"I might be a little bit different than Christian in terms of I want to be happy," he said. "I want to feel like I'm at home because being away from family a lot, it's very important for me to have a kind of family environment and people that I get along with.

McKennie spoke of the upcoming matchup as a competition for "bragging rights," and Pulisic of how when they get together it becomes time for video games.

McKennie said he missed ranch dressing and Cheez-Its in Italy and smirked while saying the crackers should be kept away from Pulisic.

of the Twenty20 Cricket World Cup as it gears up for the five-match series under comeback captain Babar Azam against an understrength New Zealand

Rawalpindi will host the first three games from Thursday. The remaining two games will be staged at Lahore on April 25 and 27 as both squads build up to the world tournament being staged in the United States and Caribbean in June.

Babar returns as white-ball captain and will lead the squad for the third successive T20 World Cup. He replaces Shaheen Shah Afridi, who lost to the Black Caps 4-1 earlier this year in his maiden series as Pakistan's T20 skipper.

Babar led Pakistan to the semifinals of the T20 World Cup in 2021 in the

"You can't give the Cheez-Its to Christian. He'll kill 'em," McKennie said. "That's such a lie," shot back Pu-

lisic, cracking up.

Citing the switch to Serie A as ideal, McKennie mentioned Pulisic even gets to live on a golf course. Pulisic cited "the change in mindset and just the way of life here, feeling that family environment" and his face brightened when he discussed "the trust and the confidence from a top team, and being given that right away.

McKennie was born in Fort Lewis, Washington, spent a good deal of his youth in Little Elm, Texas, then left the FC Dallas academy and made his pro debut at age 18 with Germany's Schalke in May 2017. He was loaned to Juventus for the 2020-21 season and signed a four-year contract in March 2021. He struggled at times and was loaned to relegation-bound Leeds for the second half of the 2022-23 Premier League season, then returned to Juventus and became a standout this season under coach Massimiliano Allegri. McKennie leads the team with seven assists in 30 Serie A matches.

"During the summer, I looked at myself and realized I lost a little bit belief in myself, to be completely honest. The confidence was kind of low..' McKennie said. McKennie recalled a conversation with Allegri when preseason training began last summer. "He joked with me a little bit, was

like Wes, you got to start running now and you stop running at the end of the season," McKennie said. "So that's kind of what I've been doing.

United Arab Emirates, where it lost to eventual champion Australia, and also skippered the side beaten by England at Melbourne in the 2022 edition.

Fast bowler Mohammad Amir and allrounder Imad Wasim have come out of retirements to give Pakistan plenty of selection options after express fast bowler Haris Rauf was ruled out of the series due to shoulder injury and Mohammad Nawaz was dropped.

Selectors rewarded several performers from the Pakistan Super League, including uncapped Usman Khan and Irfan Khan. Usman was banned by the UAE for five years after switching allegiance to his country of birth. He came into contention for Pakistan's T20 World Cup squad after smashing back-to-back centuries for Multan Sultans in the PSL.

and a broadcast deal with TNT Sports to carry every sprint race and grand prix live across the network's platforms.

"I see a tremendous amount of potential, which is exactly why I made the investment to come into this sport,"

"An American rider at the top level of GP competing for wins is the absolute best-case scenario. It's just going to get take a while to get there. Hopefully, Trackhouse can help curate that American talent," Marks said.

Best of the Rest

Ulsan beat Yokohama: Lee Donggyeong's first-half goal gave South Korean club Ulsan HD a 1-0 win over Japan's Yokohama F.Marinos in the first leg of their Asian Champions League semifinal on Wednesday.

The win not only gives Ulsan the edge going into the second leg in Japan next Wednesday but also sends it to the inaugural 32-team Club World Cup in the United States next year as one of Asia's four teams at the lucrative monthlong tournament.

Urawa Reds of Japan and Saudi Arabia's Al-Hilal have already booked their places as the last two winners of Asia's premier club tournament along with European giants such as Real Madrid, Manchester City and Bayern Munich.

Lee scored in the 19th minute from just inside the area, and the host came close to adding to its lead as Joo Min-kyu hit the post twice.

Yokohama, coached by former Leeds and Liverpool forward Harry Kewell, is appearing at the semifinal stage in Asia for the first time. (AP)

Results under investigation: Organizers are investigating a half marathon race in Beijing after three African runners appeared to let China's top long-distance runner move ahead of them shortly before the finish line and sprint to victory, sparking public speculation that the result was rigged.

There was a flood of public reaction online expressing suspicion about the race after video from the final moments of Sunday's Mengniu Beijing Half Marathon circulated online. On Monday, organizers of the race issued a statement saying they would investigate the results. "The organizing committee attaches

great importance to the issue raised by netizens about the results of the (race), organizers said. "A special investigation team has been set up to conduct an investigation, and the results of the investigation will be released to the public in a timely fashion."

The Beijing Sports Bureau, which was in charge of the race, did not respond to a request for comment.

He Jie, who won the marathon at the Asian Games and holds the Chinese national record in the event, was trailing behind three runners from Kenya and Ethiopia as they approached the finish line. One of the runners then seems to gesture for the others to slow down as He moves in front and sprints to the finish line.

One of the other runners, Willy Mnangat of Kenya, told BBC Sport Africa that they allowed He to win but that they had been hired to serve as pacemakers and were not competing to win the race. However, all three had entered the race as official competitors rather than as pacemakers.

"I was not there to compete," Mnangat was quoted as saying. "My job was to set the pace and help the guy win but unfortunately, he did not achieve the target, which was to break the national record."

He finished with a time of 1 hour, 3 minutes, 44 seconds, which was more than a minute slower than the Chinese half marathon record. (AP)

Banda joins teammates: Forward Barbra Banda has officially joined the Orlando Pride after helping Zambia secure a spot in the Summer Olympics.

The Pride acquired Banda last month for a team-record transfer fee of \$740,000 from Chinese Women's Super League club Shanghai Shengli FC. She finally arrived in Orlando over the weekend and was greeted at the airport by fans.

After her first practice Tuesday, she praised the National Women's Soccer League and suggested she'll fit in well with the Pride.

"I think the league is quite good. I've been following it from way back," she said. "I think it's a very interesting league, very strong. All the teams are very physical, fast. So I think it's good for myself to improve.

Before coming to America, Banda was on international duty with Zambia. She scored twice - including a penalty in extra time - in the second leg of the team's victory over Morocco for one of Africa's two spots in the Olympics. Nigeria earned the other berth.

The Paris Games will mark Zambia's second Olympic appearance. The Copper Queens also played in Tokyo and Banda became a breakout star as the first player ever to score hat tricks in consecutive games. (AP)

SPORTS

Lakers earn playoff rematch with Nuggets



Al-Arabi win title

Al-Arabi secured victory over Al-Kuwait with a 3-1 scoreline in the final of the Futsal Cup. Goals for Al-Arabi were scored by Mohammad Al-Mansouri, Marcio Moreira, and Borja Torres, while Al-Kuwait's only goal came from Abdul-Rahman Al-Mesbahi. (KUNA)

Best of the Rest

Bremen suspend Keïta: Werder Bremen suspended former Liverpool midfielder Naby Keïta for the rest of the season after he skipped the team's last Bundesliga match.

Bremen said in a statement that it also gave Keïta "a substantial fine" and that he will no longer train with the team.

On Sunday, Keïta chose not to travel with the rest of the team to the game at Bayer Leverkusen and instead went home after he found out he was not going to be in the starting lineup, the club said.

"As a club, we won't tolerate Naby's behavior. He let his team down in a time of difficulty surrounding our recent run of form and squad availability and put his own interests above those of the team. We can't allow that," Bremen sporting director Clemens Fritz said. "At this stage of the season, we need full focus on the

Iran play Afghanistan

Kuwait face tough Cup opener against Bahrain

BANGKOK, April 17: Kuwait faces a challenging opening match against Bahrain at 5:00 at the Asian Futsal Cup at the Hawa Mark Hall in Bangkok, Thailand. In another Group D match, Iran will compete against Âfghanistan at 12:00 PM.

The continental championship, which kicked off extending until April 28 in Thailand, holds immense significance for all participating teams as it serves as a qualifying platform for the World Cup in Uzbekistan scheduled for next September. Teams advancing to the semi-finals secure their berths in the World Cup.

Kuwait, previously encountered Bahrain during the qualifiers for the current edition, which they won 5-3.

FUTSAL

In preparation for the tournament. Kuwait underwent rigorous training, including two camps in Dammam and Bangkok, where they engaged in several friendly matches. These matches served as a litmus test for the technical staff to assess the readiness of all selected players for the tournament.

Al-Azraq is under the guidance of Spanish coach David Marin (Kazma Club coach), who is temporarily lead-

Kuwaiti gymnast Al-Saqr 'set' for the World Championships in Baku

KUWAIT CITY, April 17: Kuwait's Maha Al-Saqr is gearing up to compete in the upcoming World Rhythmic Gymnastics Championships in Baku, Azerbaijan. Scheduled from April 17 to 21, the championships will witness top athletes from around the globe showcasing their talents.



The Gymnastics Federation announced that the national team delegation, led by Lamia Al-Rifai, departed for Baku yesterday. Alongside Al-Rifai, the delegation includes Maha Al-Saqr and Ukrainian coach Yelena Maryasova.

Fahad Al-Soula, Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Gymnastics Federation, expressed confidence in Maha's abilities to deliver an outstanding performance in rhyth-

GYMNASTICS

mic gymnastics on the international stage. He highlighted the challenging nature of the competition and the caliber of the participating athletes.

Al-Soula emphasized the significance of Al-Saqr's participation in the tournament, where she will face some of the world's most prominent rhythmic gymnastics stars. He noted that the Federation prioritized Maha's involvement in this global event to enhance her skills, gain valuable experience, and boost her self-assurance. Al-Soula commended Maha's dedication to her training regimen, which she diligently pursued while temporarily residing in the United States for her studies.

Kings eliminate the Warriors

NEW ORLEANS, April 17, (AP): LeBron James, Anthony Davis and their supporting cast have the Los Angeles Lakers looking like a tougher out in the playoffs than they appeared to be just a few weeks earlier.

New Orleans Pelicans, The meanwhile, find themselves on the brink of elimination and wonder-

ing about the health of star power forward Zion Williamwhose son. dominant NBA postseason debut was cut short by an injury in the final minutes of a tight game.



points, nine assists and nine rebounds, and the Lakers secured a playoff berth with a 110-106 victory over the Pelicans in the Western Conference playin tournament .

Williamson had 40 points and 11 rebounds. But shortly after tying the game at 95 on a driving layup with 3:19 to go, Williamson went to the locker room, throwing a towel to the floor in disgust as he walked into the tunnel with an apparent injury.

After the game, Pelicans coach Willie Green said Williamson had "left leg soreness.'

Soon after Williamson went out, James hit a jumper, Davis dunked Austin Reaves' alley-oop lob, DeAngelo Russell hit a 3 and Davis grabbed a crucial offensive rebound, after which he hit two free throws to help the Lakers hold on.

The Pelicans "threw some heavy blows at us," Lakers coach Darvin Ham said. "They kept swinging. We kept fighting back.

Davis finished with 20 points and 15 rebounds. Russell scored 21, hitting five times from deep. James was 10 of 10 on free throws and Davis 8 of 10.

The Lakers advance to face defending champion Denver in the first round in a rematch of last season's Western Conference finals, a sweep by the Nuggets. Game 1 is Saturday night.

The Pelicans will host Sacramento on Friday, with the winner earning the No. 8 seed in the West. The Kings eliminated Golden State in the later

play-in game on Wednesday night. The Lakers went 14 of 35 from 3-point range. The Pelicans hit 9 of 29 from deep and Williamson didn't get a lot of help from the Pelicans' usual high scorers. Brandon Ingram - in his second game back from a 12-game absence because of a knee injury missed 8 of 12 shots and finished with 11 points after spending the final few minutes on the bench.

CJ McCollum missed 11 of 15 shots and scored nine points.

a pair of layups. Murphy pulled up for a 31-foot 3-pointer in the final minute of the quarter and Williamson's free throw made it 83-76 at the end of the period.

The Pelicans finally tied it when Williamson slammed down Jose Alvarado's alley-oop lob in transition to make it 93-all with 3:53 to go.

Looking to redeem themselves for a lackluster loss to the Lakers on Sunday, the Pelicans put together a promising opening quarter and took a 34-28 lead on Herb Jones' 3.

Los Angeles surged into the lead by outscoring New Orleans 34-16 in the second quarter, leading by as many as 14 after James, who had 15 first-half points, hit two free throws to make it 58-44.

In the final seconds of the half, Williamson sprinted nearly the length of the court on the dribble for a floating layup at the horn that made it 60-50.

The chants of "Light the Beam!" started midway through the fourth quarter as the Sacramento Kings kept piling on the Golden State Warriors.

A year after having their season ended by their neighbors, the Kings dealt the Warriors a bit of payback in emphatic fashion with a victory that might have signaled the end of a dynasty.

BASKETBALL

Keegan Murray scored 32 points, De'Aaron Fox added 24 and the Kings stayed alive in the play-in tournament, eliminating the Warriors with

a 118-94 victory. Sacramento advanced to play at New Orleans on Friday night with a chance to return to the playoffs as the eighth seed in the Western Conference after snapping an NBA-record 16-year playoff drought last season.

The Kings avenged a Game 7 loss at home to Golden State in last year's first round by playing cleaner and being quicker to loose balls against the older Warriors in what was one of the most consequential wins for the franchise in two decades.

The loss kept Golden State out of the playoffs for the third time in the past five seasons, including two eliminations in the play-in tournament. The Warriors committed 16 turnovers, gave up 15 offensive rebounds and way too many open 3-pointers, looking nothing like the dynastic team that won four titles from 2015-22

Klay Thompson missed all 10 shots from the field in what could have been his final game with the Warriors as he heads to unrestricted free agency this summer and a potential breakup of the championship trio of Thompson, Stephen Curry and Draymond Green.

With Thompson struggling, Curry didn't get nearly enough help. Curry finished with 22 points but was hound-ed for much of the game by Keon Ellis. The undrafted Ellis, who was on a two-way contract until February, add-

ed 15 points to go with his strong defense. Harrison Barnes scored 17 and Domantas Sabonis had 16 points and

remaining games and a team who stick together. That's why we've been left with no alternative.

Keïta joined Bremen from Liverpool last summer but struggled to make an impact in an injuryplagued season. The 29-year-old Guinea midfielder made only five Bundesliga appearances all season, four of those as a substitute.

Bremen has other worries after seven games without a win in the Bundesliga. Keïta missed the 5-0 defeat that confirmed Leverkusen's first league title on Sunday - a loss that left Bremen just five points above the relegation zone with five rounds remaining.

Bremen next hosts third-placed Stuttgart, which is closing in on Champions League qualification after nine wins in 11 games in the Bundesliga. (AP)

Jeruto faces hearing in June: Former steeplechase world champion Norah Jeruto faces a doping case hearing in June, five weeks before the Paris Olympics open.

The Court of Arbitration for Sport said Wednesday it will hear an appeal by World Athletics on June 17 against a ruling last year that cleared the 2022 world champion of suspected blood doping.

Jeruto had argued that ulcers and a bout of COVID-19 could explain her blood test results in 2020 and 2021 that were later judged to be irregular. She did not test positive for a banned substance.

The Kenya-born Jeruto competed for Kazakhstan when she won gold in the 3,000-meter steeplechase at the worlds in Eugene, Oregon, but could not defend her title last year as she was suspended during an investigation.

The Athletics Integrity Unit implicated the 28-year-old Jeruto in banned blood transfusions and taking the endurance-boosting hormone EPO.

An independent tribunal judging the case said a COVID-19 infection in late 2020 raised "sufficient doubt on this part of the case that it would be unfair to convict (Jeruto)."

An expert witness said internal bleeding from Jeruto's ulcers could explain why some of her samples indicated she had lost blood, and there was no evidence she received any transfusions.

Jeruto became an African champion while representing Kenya and won on the top-tier Diamond League circuit in 2021. She missed the Tokyo Olympics that year while her change of allegiance to Kazakhstan was processed.

An urgent CAS verdict is likely before the women's steeplechase is raced at the Paris Olympics on Aug. 6-8 at Stade de France. (AP)

ing the team in the continental finals after the dismissal of Iranian coach Mohamed Nazim Al-Sharia.

With a roster boasting players renowned for their skill, experience, and capabilities, including Muhammad Al-Hazeem, Fahd Al-Khawari, Ahmed Al-Farsi, Abdul-Rahman Al-Taweel, Saleh Al-Fadil, and Abdul-Latif Al-Abbasi, Al-Azraq aims to achieve commendable results in the finals.

Kuwaiti gymnast Maha Al Saqr.

Trey Murphy III scored 12, hitting two 3s from beyond 28 feet in the second half to help New Orleans come back from an 18-point second-half deficit to tie it.

The Lakers led 75-57 after Rui Hachimura's layup in the third quarter. But New Orleans got back in the game by outscoring Los Angeles 19-8 during the final 5:31 of the period.

Williamson sparked the surge with

12 rebounds for Sacramento. The meeting between the Northern California rivals separated by less than 100 miles was a rematch of last year's series won by Golden State. Curry scored 50 points in the seventh game.

The crowd was loud from the start even if the energy didn't quite reach the level of last year's matchup, when Sacramento fans celebrated the end of the record-long playoff drought.



Players intensify training for the challenging test against Bahrain.



New Orleans Pelicans forward Zion Williamson (1) goes to the basket against Los Angeles Lakers forward Anthony Davis and forward Taurean Prince. (AP)

Leonard's status for Clippers' playoff opener against Mavericks remains murky

Blake Griffin retires after 14- year high-flying NBA career

WASHINGTON, April 17, (AP): Blake Griffin announced his retirement after a 14-year career that included six All-Star selections, Rookie of the Year honors and a dunk contest victory.

Griffin said in a social media post that he's "thankful for every single moment" of his career. He was the No. 1 overall pick by the Los Angeles Clippers out of Oklahoma in 2009. He missed his first season with a knee injury, but rebounded to earn the Rookie of the Year award in 2011, when he also won the All-Star Game dunk contest.

Alongside Chris Paul and DeAndre Jordan, Griffin's high-flying plays rejuvenated the Clippers franchise and earned it the nickname "Lob City." He was traded to the Detroit Pistons during the 2018 season as his ability to soar dwindled and injuries piled up. "Blake was a big part of the turna-

round here," said Tyronn Lue, the current Clippers coach who was an assistant on the staff early in Grif-fin's LA career. "Blake was one of the most dynamic players we've seen in this league for a long time as far as athletic-wise. One thing he doesn't get credit for is his passing ability. He had a great career.'

BASKETBALL

Griffin was able to reinvent his game in Detroit with a reliable 3-point shot and was selected for his sixth All-Star Game in the 2018-19 season. He averaged 24.5 points and 7.5 rebounds that season.

Griffin, 35, also had stints in Brooklyn and Boston. He did not play in the 2023-24 season.

He averaged 19.0 points and 8.0 re-

bounds in his career. He finished third in MVP voting behind Kevin Durant and LeBron James in the 2013-14 sea-

"I'm thankful for every single mo-

ment - not just the good ones: the wins, the awards, the dunks, and the memorable times spent with family, friends, fans, teammates and coaches," Griffin said in his Instagram post, thank-

ing

and

ĥis family agent, Sam Griffin Goldfeder. "I am

equally thankful for the not-so-good moments: the losses, the injuries, the wayyyy too many surgeries, the lessons, the heartbreaks, and it wouldn't be sports retirement letter without acknowledging the 'haters.'

"All of these experiences made my 14 years in the league truly unforgettable, and I can't help but just feel thankful.'



Kawhi Leonard's status for the Los Angeles Clippers' first-round playoff series against the Dallas Mavericks remains murky.

Leonard missed the final eight games of the regular season with right knee inflammation. The Clippers were 4-4 in that stretch, having clinched their first Pacific Division title in 10 years. They earned the fourth seed in the West

Coach Tyronn Lue said Tuesday that Leonard was participating in "a quarter" of practice.

"Just bring him along slowly," Lue

said.

Asked if Leonard will play Game 1 on Sunday, Lue said, "We'll see."

Leonard hasn't played since the end of March. The All-Star forward averaged 23.7 points, 6.1 rebounds and 3.6 assists during the regular season, when he was mostly healthy.

Will Bynum, who played for the Detroit Pistons for six season, was sentenced Tuesday to 18 months in prison for his conviction in a scandal involving NBA insurance fraud.

Bynum, 41, of Bensenville, Illinois, was sentenced in Manhattan federal court, where a jury convicted him in November of conspiring to make false statements related to NBA players who submitted false dental and medical claims to the NBA Players' Health and Benefit Welfare Plan.







Latest sports scores at — http://sports.arabtimesonline.com

Mongolia rout Indonesia

Kuwait kickstart World Ice Hockey Championship with resounding victory

KUWAIT CITY, April 17, (KUNA): waiti fans for their unwavering sup-Kuwait hammered Malaysia 15-1 in the opening match of the World Ice Hockey Championship. The event, organized by the Kuwait Winter Games Club, witnessed the Kuwait scoring five goals in the opening period, six in the second, and four in the final period. Malaysia managed to secure their lone goal during the second period.

On the same day, Mongolia secured a convincing 9-3 win over Indonesia. After the match, Kuwaiti player

Mohammad Al-Duaij expressed confidence that the team's impressive performance would boost their morale and readiness for their crucial upcoming match against Mongolia scheduled for Thursday. He extended his gratitude to the Kuwait Winter Games Club and the dedicated Kuport, recognizing their pivotal role in the team's success.

The championship was officially inaugurated by Dawood Marafi, Minister of State for National Assembly Affairs, Minister of State for Youth Affairs, and Minister of State for Communications Affairs, who conveyed his best wishes

Mbappé stars, PSG oust Barcelona to reach Champions League semis

ICE HOCKEY

to all participating teams.

In his remarks to reporters following the opening, Minister Marafi emphasized the commitment to providing comprehensive support to young athletes, particularly in hosting significant international, continental, and regional championships. Similarly,

Sheikh Fahad Al-Nasser Al-Sabah, Chairman of the Kuwaiti Olympic Committee, affirmed the committee's steadfast dedication to supporting all sports federations and specialized clubs in organizing major tournaments. The tournament, spanning from April 16 to 19, is taking place at the ice skating rink of the Kuwait Winter Games Club in the Bayan area.



Dawood Marafi poses with some of the players after the opening ceremony

BARCELONA, Spain, April 17, (AP): Playing with an extra man for more than an hour, Paris Saint-Germain rallied against Barcelona to reach the Champi-

ons League semifinals. Kylian Mbappé scored twice as PSG reversed its first-leg loss at home with a 4-1 win at Barcelona to advance 6-4 on aggregate and keep alive its hopes of a first European title in what is the France star's final season with the club.

Former Barcelona forward Ousmane Dembélé and Vitinha also scored for PSG, which took advantage of a 29th-minute red card to Barcelona defender Ronald Araujo after he fouled Bradley Barcola while trying to

"When it was 11 against 11 we were well organized. The sending off changes everything. The match changed completely," said Barcelona coach Xavi Hernández, who was later sent off himself for complaining. "We would have liked to play PSG 11 against 11. That should not have been a red card.

SOCCER

Barcelona had gotten off to a good start and opened the scoring with a goal by Raphinha in the 12th, but the visitors took control with the man advantage and didn't let Barcelona get back into the game. Xavi had to replace young forward Lamine Yamal with defender Iñigo Martínez after the red card to Araujo, who was deemed by the referee to be the last defender when he fouled Barcola.

PSG is back in the semifinals after two consecutive eliminations in the round of 16.

KUNA photo

match point to seal the victory over the

21-year-old Italian ranked 62nd in the

Nadal was returning from yet anoth-

er injury layoff and hadn't played

since an exhibition match against

Carlos Alcaraz in March. The 22-time

Grand Slam champion had last played

a tournament in Brisbane in January,

when he played only three matches

Nadal said it will likely be his last

time playing the Barcelona Open. The

37-year-old Spaniard had hip surgery

last summer and said 2024 will prob-

ably be his last year playing on tour.

smashed his racket to the ground sev-

eral times after a 6-4, 7-6 (6) loss to

It was the third consecutive first-

round defeat for the second-seeded

Rublev, who also lost in straight sets in

Monte Carlo and Miami. He also lost

in straight sets in the second round in

TENNIS

It was only the second win over a

top-10 opponent for the 22-year-old

Nakashima, and the first on clay. The

world No. 87 had beaten Holger Rune

Facundo Diaz Acosta defeated 15th-

seeded Borna Coric 6-2, 7-5. Tomas

Machac beat Shang Juncheng 6-4, 6-4

to set up a meeting with 11th-seeded Alejandro Davidovich Fokina.

Hugo Grenier 6-2, 6-4, while Jaume

Munar cruised past Yoshihito Nishioka

Zheng Qinwen eased past Sorana Cîrstea 6-2, 6-3 in the first round of the

Porsche Grand Prix despite a long

journey from China to reach the clay-

Roberto Carballes Baena defeated

in Shanghai last October.

American Brandon Nakashima.

Indian Wells.

6-3, 6-1.

court tournament.

World No. 8 Andrey Rublev

before skipping the Australian Open.

The Catalan side, which won the first leg 3-2 in Paris last week, made it



Dortmund's Julian Brandt, (left). and Atletico Madrid's Jose Gimenez challenge for the ball during the Champions League quarterfinal second leg soccer match between Borussia Dortmund and Atletico Madrid at the Signal-Iduna Park in Dortmund, Germany. (AP)



PSG's Kylian Mbappe celebrates after scoring his side's 4th goal during the Champions League quar-terfinal second leg soccer match between Barcelona and Paris Saint-Germain at the Olimpic Lluis Companys stadium in Barcelona, Spain. (AP)

Dortmund dig deep to beat Atlético

Thailand defeat Iraq

Saudi Arabia make a winning start at AFC U-23 Championship

DOHA, April 17: In the opening round of the AFC U-23 Championship held in Qatar, Japan, Thailand, South Korea, and Saudi Arabia emerged victorious against their respective opponents - China, Iraq, the Émirates, and Tajikistan.

At Khalifa International Stadium,

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Saudi Arabia beat Tajikistan 4-2 in the Group C. Rayan Muhammad netted in the 17th minute, and Haitham Asiri scored in stoppage time of the first half. In the second half, Ayman Yahya struck twice in the 55th and 61st minutes. Tajikistan's Ruslan Kailov and Rustam Surov found the

net in the 23rd and 64th minutes. In the second group at Jassim Bin Hamad Stadium, Japan secured a 1-0 victory over China, with Kru Matsuki scoring in the eighth minute of the first half. The Thai national team secured its first three points in the tournament by defeating Iraq 2-0 at Al Janoub Stadium. Waris Choltung scored in the 26th minute, and Terasak Poipiamayi added another goal in the 65th minute.

In another match South Korea secured a 1-0 win over the Emirates, with Lee Young Joon scoring in stoppage time of the second half.

Today's fixtures include Indonesia facing Australia at Abdullah bin Khalifa Stadium at 4:00 PM, and the Jordanian and Qatari teams meeting at 6:30 PM at Jassim bin Hamad Stadium

Nadal returns to action with easy victory over Cobolli in Barcelona

world

BARCELONA, Spain, April 17, (AP): Rafael Nadal looked good in a comfortable 6-2, 6-3 win over Flavio Cobolli at the Barcelona Open in his first competitive match in more than three months.

The victory at the center court named after him allowed Nadal to advance to the second round at the clay-court tournament that the Spaniard has won a record 12 times. He will next face Alex de Minaur, who had a first-round bye.

Nadal converted on his second



Players challenge for the ball during the Saudi Arabia and Tajikistan match.

to the knockout stage of Europe's top club competition after back-to-back eliminations in the group stage.

Mbappé scored his goals in the 61st and 89th minutes. The France star is hoping to win what would be a first Champions League title for himself and for PSG before he leaves the club. Barcelona opened the scoring in its first attack with a fortuitous goal by Raphinha after Lamine Yamal's low cross from the right side bounced off the shin of the Brazil forward and went into the net.

PSG equalized about 10 minutes after Araujo was sent off, with Dembélé finding the net by the far post after a cross by Barcola. Dembélé, named the man of the match, was loudly jeered by the Barcelona crowd when he was substituted in the final minutes. He had also scored in the first leg in Paris.

PSG took the lead when Vitinha fired a low shot from outside the area in the 54th. The visitors increased their lead when Mbappé converted a penalty kick after Dembélé was brought down by João Cancelo inside the area.

Barcelona had chances to get back into the game, with Ilkay Gündogan hitting the post in the 56th and both Robert Lewandowski and Raphinha squandering chances toward the end of the match.

Mbappé's second goal came from close range in a breakaway in the final minutes. He has now scored at least 40 club goals in all competitions for the third time in four seasons with PSG. He has scored 13 goals in his last 13 Champions League matches.

Xavi was sent off after kicking a cushion protecting a sideline camera in the 56th.

Marcel Sabitzer scored late and set up two goals to send Borussia Dortmund into the Champions League semifinals with a helter-skelter 4-2 win over Atlético Madrid.

After losing the first leg of their quarterfinal 2-1 in Madrid, Dortmund had to come from behind twice over two legs to advance 5-4 on aggregate. Julian Brandt opened the scoring to level the tie before Sabitzer set up Ian Maatsen to give Dortmund a 2-0 lead

on the night. Atlético coach Diego Simeone responded with three changes at the break and they all paid off. A Mats Hummels own goal and goal from substitute Joaquín Correa put the Spanish side back in front on aggregate.

Then Sabitzer set up Niclas Füllkrug in the 71st minute for the Germany forward's first goal after nine scoreless games, and Sabitzer scored himself three minutes later to send Dortmund into the last four.

Dortmund will face Paris Saint-Germain again in the semifinals, PSG progressed to the final four with a 4-1 win at Barcelona. The teams played already this season with Dortmund losing 2-0 in Paris in their opening group match, then drawing 1-1 in their final game as Dortmund topped Group

The final will be played June 1 in London, where Dortmund lost the 2013 final 2-1 to bitter rival Bayern Munich.

The win stretched Dortmund's unbeaten run at home in the Champions League to 10 games.

Atlético needed goalkeeper Jan Oblak at his best. He denied Brandt, then Karim Adeyemi, before Brandt finally made the breakthrough in the 34th, firing a powerful shot in off Oblak's leg from a difficult angle after eluding former teammate Axel Witsel.

Sabitzer then combined with Maatsen, who surged past two defenders and fired the ball inside the far post in the 39th. It was the Dutch defender's first Champions League goal.

But Atlético only needed four minutes after the break to level the tie when Hummels' attempted clearance of Mario Hermoso's header ended in his own net.

Correa should have scored shortly afterward when he nudged the ball wide. Simeone - dressed sharply in a black suit - flopped to the ground in frustration.

Correa made no mistake in the 64th when he fired in a rebound after his first attempt was blocked.

It put the visitors back in front, but Sabitzer was involved in both goals as Dortmund struck twice in three minutes to send the home fans wild.

ARAB C TIMES

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