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Rain expected until early Monday, chances of hail

Ministry of Education moves schools online amid unstable weather

KUWAIT CITY, March 24, (KUNA): The Ministry of Education announced switching to online schooling on Sunday in both public and private schools citing reports of unstable weather conditions issued by the Directorate General of Civil Aviation.

Ministry Spokesperson Ahmad Al-Wahida clarified that for the safety of the students, they'll be conducting their studies through Microsoft Teams app, while faculty and administration will go on as usual.

Al-Wahida urged adhering to Ministry instructions and following its official social media accounts to remain updated.

Meanwhile, the Kuwait Meteorological Center forecasted rain to continue at varying intervals starting from Sunday evening until the early hours of Monday.

Director of the Dept. Abdulaziz Al-Kar-

rawi said to KUNA that the country was affected by moderate to heavy rains since Sunday dawn.

He expected that there would be chances of hailstones falling, accompanied by wind activity exceeding 65 kilometers per hour, leading to waves rising to more than seven feet.

He stated that the gradual improvement in weather conditions would begin Monday afternoon, as clouds decrease and chances of rain gradually disappear, with chances of fog forming in some areas in the morning.

The highest quantities recorded since this morning until now at the monitoring stations amounted to 8 millimeters at the Al-Salmiya station, 3.7 millimeters at Al-Rabieh station, 3.8 millimeters at Al-Sabriya, 3.4 millimeters at Al-Wafra station, while Al-Abdali reached 2.4 millimeters.

OPEC chief rebuffs call to abandon oil

'Lifefood of modern life'

KUWAIT CITY, March 24, (KUNA): The Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) Secretary General Haitham Al Ghais described calls to abandon oil as "wrong and unrealistic," because oil, which represents 31 percent of the global energy mix, has undoubtedly been the "lifefood of modern life."

Al Ghais, in an interview with KUNA, said oil would continue to

play an "important and vital" role in international markets for decades to come. "Abandoning it is not easy," he added.

He said oil occupies an important part in human life. "Oil and its products are used in many of the vital daily activities of people regardless of their locations, nationalities, jobs or interests, such as transportation, travel, energy production and manufacturing," added Al Ghais.

Al Ghais highlighted the abundance of oil and added that "oil is

also easy to extract, refine and transport. All these factors have made oil extremely important since it was discovered decades ago. It plays nowadays a vital role in the global economy and it has become an integral part of our daily life. We also depend on it due to its supplies being secured.

"There have been many voices in recent years calling for abandoning oil under the excuse of protecting the environment," he said, and warned of the severe consequences that the world could face if oil production would be stopped.

Therefore, he said, OPEC has launched awareness campaigns to highlight the importance of oil and its vital role in our daily life in various languages, including English, Arabic, German, Spanish and Persian.

Al Ghais, commenting on sectors that would be affected if the world stopped using oil, said the impact would extend to road, sea and air transport, ambulances, food production, pharmaceuticals, medical supplies and equipment.

"If oil disappeared, this would also affect the production of renewable energy, such as manufacturing of wind turbines and solar panels, as their production is linked to oil products," he said, adding that "Lithium-ion batteries used in electric cars would also be affected."

Al Ghais highlighted further that "we would also be unable to produce soaps and toothpastes."

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Opinion

In the face of firm leadership ... what is required of new parliamentarians?

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

MANY questions are being raised about the nature of the outcome of the upcoming elections, especially about the relationship between the two authorities - the legislative and the executive.

This is due to the fact that the current political scene is different in both form and content compared to the scenes that Kuwait witnessed throughout the past thirty years, especially with regard to the National Assembly's encroachment on the powers of previous governments, and the laxity of some prime ministers regarding this matter, as well as the ministers' fear of interpellation, and them offering concessions to the parliamentarians on a golden platter.

Today, we are facing a different leadership, something that the country has not seen in over the past three decades, or even during some of the pre-invasion eras.

Therefore, the recent dissolution of the National Assembly did not come out of nowhere, but after several warnings from the leadership who saw that the relationship between the two authorities had reached an impasse.

Also, the reasons for dissolution are different from what was mentioned above. They certainly indicate that the head of state was serious in those warnings, the messages of which unfortunately did not reach the dissolved National Assembly.

This implies that necessity forces the solution to be outside the usual box. What exactly does this mean?

It means that all individuals engaged in public service, particularly the MPs in the upcoming parliament, as well as voters, should realize the significance of the firm messages conveyed by His Highness the Amir in recent months. They ought to strive to elect parliamentarians who truly embody the interests of the nation rather than pursuing their own agendas.

Also, the parliamentarians must uphold a level of national responsibility that necessitates cooperation with the new Council of Ministers, irrespective of whether it is of the same form and content or a different one, and with the current presidency or others.

Hence, if there is harmony between the two authorities, the state can progress as needed. However, if the relationship is not as healthy as expected, akin to what is observed in sound democracies, a solution may be sought imminently.

The priority now lies in ensuring that state institutions operate effectively and address the demands of the people, particularly considering the significant toll exacted by failed experiments over the last three decades. Kuwait cannot afford to endure further futile experiments, particularly if they replicate the instability witnessed in previous councils, especially the most recent one.

In the past three decades, the scene seemed as if the parliamentarians were the rulers and the Council of Ministers were merely their employees. This is not a normal relationship.

In all democracies, parliamentarians have their role, and the government has its work. One authority does not creep over another. On the other hand, what was seen in Kuwait resembled an inverted pyramid.

In the usual course of events, a solution is anticipated, whether through conventional means or through a potentially difficult surgical intervention.

However, it is imperative, particularly considering His Highness's constitutional right to suspend the work of the National Assembly for a duration he deems necessary, and appoint someone to assist him in the legislative role in a manner beneficial to the nation.

Given that the leadership has perceived significant public discontent with the two authorities in recent years, its aspiration is for progress rather than being stuck in a vicious cycle that drains institutions and jeopardizes the nation's destiny.

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Day by Day

THROUGHOUT our lives, we encounter countless proverbs and sayings, each offering wisdom and guidance. One such proverb advises us that life is akin to a path strewn with stones. Instead of stumbling over these obstacles, we're encouraged to gather them and fashion a ladder to ascend toward success.

But do we truly grasp the significance of this proverb? Do we have the time and determination to collect these metaphorical stones and build our ladder to success? ... Yet tomorrow is another day.

Zahed Matar

P.M. RECEIVES DEPUTY P.M., CIVIL AVIATION DIRECTOR



His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Dr. Mohammad Sabah Al-Sabah received on Sunday Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Defense and Acting Minister of Interior Sheikh Fahad Yousef

Saud Al-Sabah. During the meeting, Sheikh Fahad presented to His Highness the newly appointed director of the Civil Aviation Administration, Sheikh Humoud Mubarak Al-Sabah.

PM Diwan photo

UN chief says it's time to 'truly flood' Gaza with aid

Starvation in Gaza 'moral outrage': UN

RAFAH CROSSING, Egypt, March 24, (AP): U.N. Secretary-General António Guterres stood near a long line of waiting trucks Saturday and declared it was time to "truly flood Gaza with life-saving aid," calling the starvation inside the enclave a "moral outrage." He urged an immediate cease-fire between Israel and Hamas.

Guterres spoke on the Egyptian side of the border not far from the southern Gaza city of Rafah, where Israel plans to launch a ground assault despite widespread warnings of a potential catastrophe. More than half of Gaza's population has taken refuge there.

"Any further onslaught will make things even worse - worse for Palestinian civilians, worse for hostages and worse for all people in the region," Guterres said.

He spoke a day after the U.N. Security Council failed to reach consensus on the wording of a U.S.-sponsored resolution supporting "an immediate and sustained cease-fire."

Guterres repeatedly noted the difficulties of getting aid into Gaza, for which international aid agencies have largely blamed Israel.

"Here from this crossing, we see the heartbreak and heartlessness ... a long line of blocked relief trucks on one side of the gates, the long shadow of starvation on the other," he said.

About 7,000 aid trucks are waiting in Egypt's North Sinai province to enter Gaza, Gov. Mohammed Abdel-Fadeil Shousha said in a statement.

Guterres added: "It is time for an ironclad commitment by Israel for total ... access for humanitarian goods to Gaza, and in the Ramadan spirit of compassion, it is also time for the immediate release of all hostages." He later told journalists that a humanitarian cease-fire and hostage release should occur at the same time.

Hamas is believed to be holding around 100 hostages as well as the remains of 30 others taken in its Oct. 7 attack that killed about 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and sparked the war.

When asked about Guterres' com-



Palestinians wounded in the Israeli bombardment are treated in a hospital in Rafah, Gaza Strip, Sunday, March 24, 2024. (AP)

ments, the office of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu referred to a social media post by Foreign Minister Israel Katz accusing the U.N. chief of allowing the world body to become "antisemitic and anti-Israeli."

An estimated 1.5 million Palestinians now shelter in Rafah after fleeing Israel's offensive elsewhere.

U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken on Thursday said an Israeli ground assault on Rafah would be "a mistake" and unnecessary in defeating Hamas. That marked a shift in the position for the United States, whose officials have concluded there is no credible way for getting civilians out of harm's way.

Netanyahu has vowed to press forward with military-approved plans for the offensive, which he has said is crucial to achieving the stated aim of destroying Hamas. The military has said Rafah is Hamas' last major stronghold and ground forces must target four battalions remaining there.

Again on Saturday night, Israelis protested in Tel Aviv and Jerusalem against Netanyahu and the government amid fears that surviving hostages held in Gaza are in ever-worsening conditions months into the war.

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Ramadan Timings

Iftar Monday 18:03
Imsak Tuesday 04:22

NewsWatch

KUWAIT CITY: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received, Sunday, His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Dr. Mohammad Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah at Bayan Palace.

His Highness the Amir also received the Deputy Commander of Kuwait National Guard Sheikh Faisal Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

His Highness the Amir received Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Defense and Acting Minister of Interior Sheikh Fahad Yousef Saud Al-Sabah.

In addition, His Highness the Amir received the newly appointed Civil Aviation President Sheikh Humoud Mubarak Humoud Al-Sabah. (KUNA)

BEIRUT: The U.S.-backed force that defeated the Islamic State group in Syria five years ago warned Saturday that the extremists still pose grave dangers throughout the world and called on the international community to find solutions for thousands of fighters still held in its jails. (AP)

WASHINGTON: The US Central Command (CENTCOM) announced the Houthi militia launched five ballistic missiles, one of which hit a Chinese owned and operated oil tanker.

CENTCOM said in a statement on X, late on Saturday, that on "March 23, the Iranian-backed Houthis launched four anti-ship ballistic missiles (ASBM) into the Red Sea in the vicinity of M/V Huang Pu, a Panamanian-flagged, Chinese-owned, Chinese-operated oil tanker." (KUNA)

Disqualified candidates' appeal denied by court

By Saeed Mahmoud Saleh
Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, March 24: The Court of Appeals upheld the decision of the Ministry of Interior to disqualify all those removed from the list of candidates for the 2024 National Assembly election; the most prominent of whom are those who participated in the by-elections like Marzouq Al-Khalifa, Marzouq Al-Habini, Ahmed Mutee and Jaber Al-Muhailbi.

The lawyers of those who were disqualified said their clients are waiting for the ruling of the Court of Cassation, which will decide whether or not the conviction in the subsidiary cases of crimes against honor and trust is considered.

Earlier, the Administrative Court received electoral appeals from some candidates disqualified by the Ministry of Interior; demanding in their appeals to cancel the disqualification decision and re-register their candidacy in the electoral district in which they were registered.

The ministry disqualified some candidates for failure to fulfill one of the electoral conditions due to their conviction for the crime of participating in by-elections.

The ministry informed Ahmed Mutee, Jaber Al-Muhailbi, Marzouq Al-Habini, Marzouq Al-Khalifa, Sheikh Mishal Al-Malik, Mohammad Al-Juwailhi, Walid Al-Nasser, Mohammad Al-Azmi, Hani Hussein, Adel Al-Saeedi, Mubarak Trad and three others about their disqualification for not completing the candidacy procedures.

Meanwhile, former MP and Second Constituency candidate Bader Nashmi Al-Anzi recently held a public meeting as part of his campaign for the upcoming election.

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Following heavy rainfall, Kuwait experienced the formation of puddles, with the country encountering moderate to heavy rains since Sunday dawn. The highest recorded accumulation, up to 8 millimeters, occurred at the Al-Salmiya monitoring station.

Photo by Samer Shikier

Prayer Timings

Fajr	04:29	Asr	15:23
Sunrise ..	05:48	Maghrib ..	18:01
Zohr	11:54	Isha	19:19

Local

Expected weather for next 24 hrs:
By Day: Warm, cloudy to partly cloudy and chance of rain will decrease gradually with moderate to fresh northwesterly wind, with speeds of 20-50 km/h causing rising dust.

Weather

By Night: Mild with light to moderate northwesterly wind, with speeds of 08-30 km/h and some high clouds will appear.

Kuwait Airport	25	18
Abdaly	27	15
Jahra	26	19
Salmiyah	21	18
Nuwaisib	25	19
Wafra	25	17

BIOMETRIC/FINGERPRINT APPOINTMENT: <https://meta.e.gov.kw/En/>

'Determine future through legislation, laws'

Kuwaiti National Assembly ... Democracy on display, voice of people

KUWAIT CITY, March 24, (KUNA): The National Assembly of Kuwait, since inception, has always put on display the true essence of the democratic process and practice in the country, giving the people their voice and enabling them to determine their future through legislation and laws.

The parliament experience in its modern sense with people choosing their representatives began with the establishment of the Municipal Council in 1930 when Kuwaitis chose 11 members and the council's head. This was followed by the elections of the departments for media, health, and endowment (Awqaf).

In 1938, during the era of the late Amir Sheikh Ahmad Jaber Al-Sabah, a council aiding in the matters of governance was elected with the inclusion of 14 elected members out of 20. Sheikh Abdullah Al-Salem Al-Sabah was chosen as the head of the council.

Transitioning

After transitioning to a constitutional state, the late Amir Sheikh Abdullah Al-Salem Al-Sabah signed a decree on August 26, 1961, which stated that elections for the Constitutional Assembly would be held on December 30, 1961 to choose 20 members in addition to 11 ministers. The late Amir inaugurated the first session on January 20, 1962.

The Amir Sheikh Abdullah Al-Salem Al-Sabah presided over the first session of the Constitutional Assembly on January 20, 1962.

The assembly was tasked with the most important mission in the history of the country, writing the constitution of Kuwait.

The elections for the very first National Assembly was held on January 23, 1963 after the independence of Kuwait with 250 candidates running to be included in the 50-seat parliament. Eligible voters amounted to 16,889 covering 10 constituencies. The inaugural session was held on January 29 the same year. The term of the house concluded on January 3, 1967.

Elections for the second legislative term of parliament was held on January 25, 1967 with 220 candidates involved from 10 constituencies and 27,296 eligible voters casting their ballot.

The first session of parliament was held on February 7, 1967 and the term concluded on December 30, 1970.

On January 23, 1971, elections for the third legislative term held with 180 candidates running and 40,649 eligible voters partaking in the elections in 10 constituencies. The first session of the term was held on February 10, 1971 and the term concluded on January 8, 1975.

The fourth legislative term elections was held on January 27, 1975 with 256 hopefuls running and 52,994 eligible voters casting their ballot in 10 constituencies. First session of parliament in that term was held on February 11, 1975, but the parliament was dissolved on August 29, 1976.

On February 23, 1981, election for the fifth legislative term was held with the participation of 42,008 eligible voters choosing from 447 candidates representing 25 constituencies. The first session of parliament for the term was held on March 9, 1981. The parliament ended its term on January 19, 1985.

Dissolved

On February 20, 1985, election for the sixth legislative term was held with the participation of 56,845 eligible voters choosing from 231 candidates representing 25 constituencies. The first session of parliament for the term was held on March 9, 1985. The parliament was dissolved, before finishing the term, on July 3, 1986.

On April 22, 1990, the late Amir Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah signed an order to establish the national council and on June 10, 1990, election was held to choose the members of the council involving 62,123 eligible voters in 25 constituencies. On June 28, 1990, an Amiri order was issued assigning 25 members of the national council.

The first legislative term of the national council ended with the Iraqi invasion and occupation of Kuwait on August 2, 1990. The second legislative term of the council held on July 9, 1991, but in August 1, 1992, a decree was issued to end the term and the session of the national council.

On October 5, 1992, the elections for 7th legislative term for the National Assembly began with the participation of 278 candidates and the 81,440 eligible voters from 25 constituencies. The first session of the term was held on October 20, 1992 and the term concluded on October 5, 1996.

On October 7, 1996, election for the eight legislative term began with 230 candidates running and 107,169 voting casting ballot in 25 constituencies. The first session of the term was held on October 20, 1996, but parliament was dissolved on May 4, 1999.

On July 3, 1999, some 288 candidates and 112,882 eligible voters were involved in the 9th legislative term elections held in 25 constituencies. The first session of the term was held on July 17, 1999 and concluded on May 21, 2003.

Some 264 candidates and 136,715 voters took part in the elections for the 10th legislative term of parliament held in the country's 25 constituencies. On July 5, 2003. The first session of the term was held on July 19, 2003, but the term did not finish its allocated period and was dissolved on May 21, 2006.

The 11th legislative term of parliament had an election involving 288 candidates and 327,287 eligible voters. It was held on June 29, 2006 in 25 constituencies. The first session was held on July 12, 2006, but the parliament did not finish the term, dissolved on March 19, 2008.

On July 17, 2008, elections for the 12th legislative term of parliament had 275 candidates running with 361,684 eligible voters from five constituencies. The first session was held on June 1, 2008. The house was dissolved on March 18, 2009.

The 13th legislative term's elections were held on May 16, 2009 with 210 candidates running and 384,790 candidates from five constituencies.

The 13th legislative term saw victory of four women for the first time in Kuwait's history: Dr. Maasouma Al-Mubarak, Dr. Rola Dashti, Dr. Aseel Al-Awadhi and Dr. Salwa Al-Jassar. The first session of the term was held on May 31, 2009 and the parliament was dissolved on December 6, 2011.

Held

Elections were held on February 2, 2012 to elect members of parliament for the 14th legislative term, with 210 candidates from five constituencies, and 400,296 eligible voters. The house held first session on February 15, 2012 but the Constitutional Court considered, in a ruling on June 20, 2012, void because of irregularities in a decree that dissolved the 2009 parliament, and the court reinstated it.

Elections for the 14th legislative term were held on December 1, 2012. Some 307 candidates ran in five constituencies with 422,569 eligible voters. The house held first session on December 16, but the Constitutional Court ruled, on June 16, 2013, that elections were void and revoked memberships of winning candidates.

The 14th legislative term's election was again held on July 27, 2013. Some 321 candidates ran for parliament with 439,715 eligible voters casting their ballot in five constituencies. The first session of the term was held on August 6, 2013, but the house was dissolved on October 16, 2016.

Elections for the 15th legislative term held on November 26, 2016 with 293 candidates partaking on the race and 483,186 eligible voters casting their ballots in five constituencies. The first session of the term began on December 23, 2016, and the final session on October 20, 2020.

Elections for the 16th legislative term of parliament held on December 5, 2020, with 326 candidates running and 567,694 eligible voters covering five constituencies. The first session was held on December 15, 2020, but the parliament did not finish the term, dissolved on August 2, 2022.

On September 29, 2022, election for the 17th legislative term held with the participation of 305 candidates, while eligible voters amount to 795,911 in the five constituencies.

The 17th legislative term began its first session on October 11, but the constitutional court decided on March 19, 2023 to annul the 2022 National Assembly, which paved the way for the return of the 2020-elected parliament. On May 1st, 2023, a decree was issued to dissolve parliament.

On June sixth, 2023, the 17th legislative term re-election began with 207 candidates partaking and 793,646 eligible voters casting their ballot in the five constituencies.

On February 15, 2024, a decree was issued to dissolve parliament.

On February 27, the cabinet set April 4 as the date of the National Assembly elections and on March 2, Kuwait's official gazette published Decree No. 29/2024 inviting eligible voters to elect parliament members.



Speaker of the Constituent Assembly hands over the Constitution to HH the late Amir Sheikh Abdullah Al-Salem Al-Sabah.



KUNA photos HH the late Amir Sheikh Abdullah Al-Salem Al-Sabah making a speech in the Assembly Hall.

Municipal Council to deliberate on changes to advertising regulations

'Companies must declare over 5 pc ownership movements'

KUWAIT CITY, March 24: In its upcoming session chaired by Abdullah Al-Mahri, the Municipal Council will address revisions to the new advertising list, reports Al-Jarida daily.

An appendix to the agenda includes the Kuwait Municipality's proposal to introduce seasonal advertising fees at 5 dinars per square meter per month, raise fees for animated electronic advertisements to 75 dinars per square meter per year, and implement a 5-dinar monthly fee for advertisements on licensed mobile vehicles by the Ministry of Commerce.

Fahd Al-Abduljader, head of the Legal and Financial Committee of the Municipal Council, urged the discussion and voting on the amendments to Ministerial Resolution No. 2023/599 concerning advertising regulations, emphasizing the amendments' significance and the committee's inability to convene. He requested the matter be brought before the main session for consideration.

Campaigns

Meanwhile, the Public Relations Department reported that the Audit and Follow-up Department of Municipal Services conducted field campaigns across governorates to verify health and shop advertising licenses and monitor Ramadan-related violations.

In Mubarak Al-Kabeer Governorate's West Abu Ftaira Al-Herfiyya area, an intensive inspection campaign resulted in 13 violations and 6 warnings, addressing issues like unlicensed advertisements and unauthorized use of spaces.

Ownership movements

Recent movements in ownership exceeding 5 percent of total shares, predominantly held by major government entities and institutions, have marked a departure from previous periods of inactivity, reports Al-Jarida daily.

Traditionally focused on annual cash distributions and bonus shares, institutions like the Kuwait Investment Authority and the Public Institution for Social Security (PIFSS) are now actively adjusting their portfolios.

Among the notable shifts, PIFSS has reduced its holdings in various companies, while the KIA has done the same with others. However, the reasons behind these changes remain undisclosed, prompting questions in the financial market.

In accordance with regulations, companies are obligated to disclose ownership movements exceeding 5 percent. However, the lack of explanations for these changes raises concerns and underscores the need for transparency.

Moreover, institutions transitioning from long-term to short-term investments must announce their shift in strategy. Their significant stakes in listed companies grant them access to critical information and influence over future decisions.

The recent transfer of ownership to local investment firms suggests a dynamic approach to portfolio management. While this flexibility is necessary, clear explanations for ownership adjustments are crucial for market stability and investor confidence.

Overall, government institutions play a pivotal role in the market, instilling confidence among investors and driving companies to enhance performance. Transparency regarding ownership changes is essential to maintain trust and transparency in the financial market.

PAI issues directives for license 'renewal'

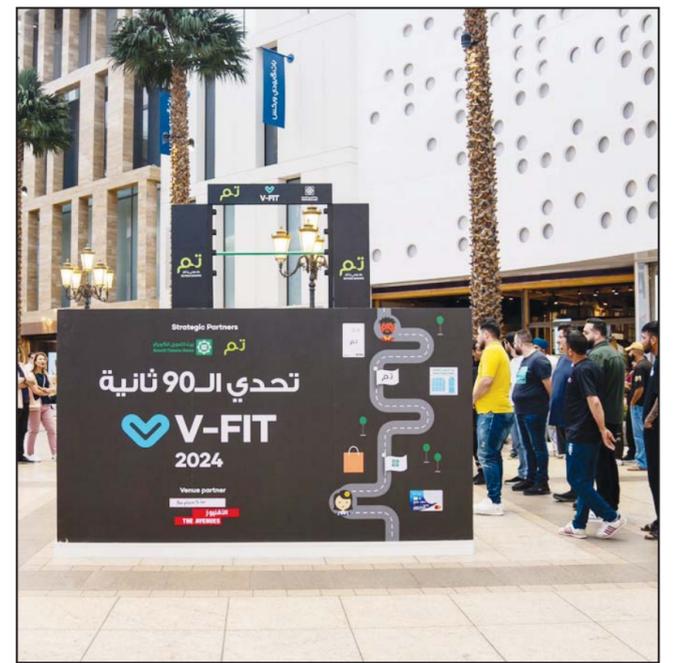
KUWAIT CITY, March 24: The Public Authority for Industry has issued directives to industrial craft license holders to update their licenses in compliance with Law No. 56 of 1996 and its subsequent amendments and regulations, reports Al-Jarida daily.

Failure to do so within the specified timeframe may lead to the authority exercising its legal powers.

Furthermore, in an effort to ensure adherence to Kuwaiti, Gulf, and international standards for imported and local products, the PAI has designated eight employees, in addition to their regular duties, to conduct monitoring activities.

These employees are authorized to enter industrial establishments, craft headquarters, stores, and shops, collect samples, review records, and enforce compliance with relevant laws and regulations.

The Ministerial Resolution No. 2 of 2024 underscores these measures, following a thorough review of standardization and industry laws, including amendments related to the Unified Industrial Regulation Law for the Gulf Cooperation Council countries.



Huge gathering at the starting point.

KFH launches the biggest walking challenge in Kuwait; V-Thru partner

KUWAIT CITY, March 24: Kuwait Finance House (KFH) has launched the biggest walking challenge in Kuwait in collaboration with its strategic partner, V-Thru application.

The challenge, which is organized by KFH for the third consecutive year, is part of (Increase Good Deeds in Ramadan) program, and an extension to its (Better Health... Better Life) campaign. The initiative is also part of KFH's social responsibility and keenness to encourage youth and sport activities to disseminate awareness of the importance of exercise, namely walking which has gained significant momentum in Ramadan.

To reach out to many audiences, the competition is launched in two different locations: the Avenues Mall and Al Shaheed Park.

KFH organizes the virtual walking challenge daily throughout the holy month of Ramadan for the public before and after Iftar in collaboration with V-Thru application through V-FIT feature.

The challenge allows participants to earn a balance of KD 1/- for 1 Km that

may be used in purchase transactions from several Kuwaiti businesses from the application, or for contributing to the plantation and greening of Kuwait through (Keep It Green) campaign to achieve a sustainable environment.

During the previous editions of the walking challenge, participants contributed to planting thousands of trees in Abdali Reserve, as KFH plants a tree on behalf of the participant when they pass the challenge.

Ever since the launch of this initiative, KFH has contributed to planting thousands of trees and providing three years care, which is the average period required for the tree to be self-sufficient. Indeed, the contributions have a significant impact on the development and preservation of the environment and the raising of awareness on the importance of greening.

It is worth noting that the partnership with V-Thru is part of KFH's social responsibility through which the Bank focuses on pioneering Kuwaiti youth experiences and supports SMEs and entrepreneurs, affirming KFH's leadership in the field.

World Down Syndrome Day March 21

'I CAN' organizes Ramadan ghabqa

KUWAIT CITY, March 24: Under the patronage of Minister of Social, Family and Childhood Affairs Sheikh Feras Saud Al-Sabah the Integrated Care Foundation for People with Disabilities 'I CAN' and its branches in Granada and Mahboula recently organized the annual Ramadan meeting on the occasion of World Down Syndrome Day that falls on March 21 each year, reports Al-Anba daily.



Sheikh Firas

The meeting was held in coordination with the Public Authority for Disabled Affairs (PADA), Down Syndrome Voluntary Mothers Association and Community Development Center.

The United Nations General Assembly

declared the World Down Syndrome Day in December 2011 with the aim of raising public awareness about down syndrome and ways to support people with the syndrome.

Acting Deputy Director General of the Rehabilitation Services Sector at PADA Mubarak Al-Badah warmly welcomed those who attended the annual Ramadan meeting and Ramadan Ghabqa for people with disabilities to celebrate World Down Syndrome Day. He said the United Nations has declared a number of health-related days to celebrate them internationally with the aim of attracting society's attention to the importance of health; including World Down Syndrome Day, which is aimed at supporting every person suffering from the syndrome around the world, as well as providing assistance to their families and the best methods of assistance in education, health, psychological and social care for them.

Touristic, trade travel destination

30,000 Kuwaitis visited Italy in '23

KUWAIT CITY, March 24: Lorenzo Morini, the new Ambassador of Italy to Kuwait, said his country is one of the favorite destinations for Kuwaiti tourists and businesspersons who are extremely passionate about Italian culture, heritage, food, fashion and design; and strongly appreciate the warm Italian hospitality, reports Al-Qabas daily.



Morini

Speaking to the daily, Morini pointed out that Milan, Rome, Flor-

ence and Venice are considered among the most appealing cities in the world, while there is a growing touristic interest in the most famous Italian coastal cities and islands such as Portofino, Positano, Capri, Sardinia and Sicily.

He said the number of Kuwaiti nationals visiting Italy is constantly growing. In 2023 the Italian Embassy in Kuwait delivered approximately 30,000 visas — a significant number compared to other countries in the region and a testament of the growing relevance of Italy as a touristic and business travel destination for Kuwaiti nationals, he added.

Kuwait thrives in shadow of unsung heroes, leadership

"YOUNIS Ihab died and no one knew about him except those close to him. He was an important element in protecting the Kuwaiti civil registry in the most successful intelligence resistance operation during the brutal Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990," columnist Iqbal Al-Ahmad wrote for Al-Qabas daily.



Iqbal Al-Ahmad

"Younis Ihab, an Egyptian, died, and we did not know before his death that he played a major role in protecting the database, which includes the civil registry of Kuwaitis, which was approved by the resolutions of the Security Council and the United Nations General Assembly and under a population map of Kuwait, and he, may God have mercy on him, protected it before it was tampered with by the Iraqi occupation forces.

"Younis, may God have mercy on him, who arrived in the country when he was only one month old with his family in 1962, lived all the stages of his life in Kuwait, and played an essential role in co-operating with officials of the Public Authority for Civil Information during the occupation, when he was appointed as the first database specialist at the time.

"He extracted this copy of the database from the Authority's headquarters in the Al-Rehab Complex, and came out with it after he succeeded in destroying the central control disk, causing the main computer to stop working, making it impossible for Iraqis to obtain information from the civilian information systems.

"The loyal Egyptian-Kuwaiti hero, Ihab Younis, transferred this data to a group of Kuwaiti resistance men in complete secrecy. Then he traveled to Bahrain on October 30, 1990, to download the database and operate the system after a month of continuous work, until he was able to prepare lists of the names of everyone -- Kuwaitis with all their data, to be delivered to the Kuwaiti government in Taif, and then a copy of it was transferred to the United States, to be approved by the United Nations General Assembly as a demographic map of Kuwait.

"This great achievement for a person who is not Kuwaiti, but stood firm to be loyal to Kuwait and return the kindness of embracing it since his first months, and all the services he received throughout his years, puts us before a comparison with people who forged and violated the sanctity of Kuwaiti law and its sovereignty, by obtaining the Kuwaiti citizenship through dirty methods, unfortunately, in cooperation with Kuwaitis, to milk this country and benefit from all the advantages of its nationality, while being loyal to another country.

"The matter did not stop there, as they continued to attack, insult, and openly violate the procedures of the Ministry of Interior which withdrew the nationalities of those who had fraudulently acquired them, and with the help of the Kuwaiti judiciary put these fraudsters into prison. However, unfortunately, they served the prison term and came out but their Kuwaiti nationalities still remain intact while at the same time the rights of the real people of Kuwait are being violated.

"How can a person be imprisoned on charges of forging nationality and have his nationality retained after his years of imprisonment have passed? All of these people must have their nationalities withdrawn or cancelled, in addition to those whose official papers and files prove that they belong to the group of forgers.

"Voices were heard and some continue to scream and attack law enforcement officials, and some of these voices may be false or those holding dual nationality, and they are the same ones who left Kuwait on the first days of the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait and escaped out of fear, unlike the Egyptian citizen Ihab Younis, who remained in Kuwait and carried out this heroic deed, which unfortunately, went unnoticed until after he went to his Creator, and after the press and media wrote about him.

"We now address the concept of 'great deeds,' and wonder about the criteria for this term, and whether what this person performed in his heroic role in saving Kuwait's civil information can be classified within the framework of great deeds, like any actor, singer, player, or any celebrity, and others.

"Unfortunately, in Kuwait, 'most-ly' only the voice of the violator or the deceived person and his supporter is raised, to instill fears in the decision maker and making him hesitate or back down, as evidenced by their

success and unfortunately in previous experiences.

"The big question here is: If you, the official or the person in authority, are applying the law and the constitution for the benefit of the nation, then why this hesitation, fear, or retreat?"

"Unfortunately, too, we do not hear the voices of those who are right, patriots and true lovers of Kuwait, as we should and are supposed to do, so they lose their sincerity and their rights in the world of noise and disturbance of violators, fraudsters, and counterfeiters, and those who support them, because they are only strong through them, and they do not rise except through them especially in light of weak authority or the fear of an official.

"We thank God that today we are in an era of strength and firmness, the triangle of the Amir of the country, the Prime Minister and the Minister of the Interior, with the hope that this strength and this firmness will continue at the same level and degree for everyone, and this is what we are confident of, thank God."

Also:

"The interaction between bank customers and financial institutions is founded on contractual agreements, commencing with the execution of an account opening agreement and the subsequent administration of banking services. Following this, various other contractual arrangements are formed, encompassing loan contracts, deposits, investment portfolios, and additional agreements," columnist Dr Fayeze Al-Fadhli wrote for Al-Jarida daily.

"It is imperative to distinguish between these individual relationships, each governed by its own set of terms and conditions. For instance, in the event of a loan default, where the bank pursues legal recourse, the court ruling dictates the bank's entitlement to the loan repayment, distinctly separate from the terms outlined in the original account opening agreement.

"Account opening procedures are regulated by the Central Bank, while disputes regarding loan contracts are resolved through legal channels. Consequently, the court's decision supersedes the original loan contract, transitioning the relationship between the bank and the customer from a contractual to a judicial one, governed by the merits of the ruling and the subsequent enforcement orders issued by the relevant authorities.

"However, a concerning trend observed in many banks involves a conflation of contractual and judicial procedures. Banks may treat customer accounts as conduits for seizing funds based on clauses within loan agreements, a practice deemed illegal due to its contravention of established regulations and judicial rulings.

"This practice is unlawful for several reasons. Firstly, it violates the terms of the loan contract, which are nullified upon the issuance of a court ruling. Secondly, any withdrawal of funds from a customer's account must be executed solely through judicial orders issued by the Enforcement Department, as specified by law. This includes actions like seizing the debtor's funds, which can only be carried out in accordance with legal procedures.

"Such actions also breach regulations set by the Central Bank, which prohibits deductions exceeding 40% of a customer's salary, as established in a meeting held on April 20, 1996, and outlined in subsequent amendments. Additionally, the Code of Procedures stipulates that withholding more than half of a salary is impermissible.

"Withdrawing funds directly from a customer's account or seizing their entire salary, violates both Central Bank directives and the Civil and Commercial Procedures Law, rendering the bank liable for damages. Civil law mandates compensation for affected clients, emphasizing the necessity of adhering to legal avenues for debt collection rather than bypassing established procedures.

"Confusion may arise regarding the distinction between the agreement to open an account and other contractual obligations. However, a customer's bank account is a private repository for their funds, entrusted to the bank. Therefore, any action taken by the bank, such as hacking into a customer's personal account to withdraw funds in the context of a loan dispute or other banking agreement, necessitates a valid judicial ruling and appropriate legal procedures.

"Banks engaging in such practices not only harm customers but also face potential liability for torts and damages. Consequently, it is imperative for banks to rectify their practices, while customers must assert their rights through legal and regulatory channels to curtail these violations."

— Compiled by PFX Fernandes

3 years jail for forging official docs, slander

By Jaber Al-Hamoud
Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, March 24: The Criminal Court sentenced an individual to three-year imprisonment with hard labor for forging official documents and illegally using state seals, causing harm to a Kuwaiti woman who holds the position of head of a department in the Ministry of Health. The court ordered that the civil case be referred to the concerned civil court.

The Public Prosecution had accused the defendant of committing forgery of two official documents - the results of special mental capacity tests for two girls - with the intention of using them in a way that would make them appear to be identical to the truth. The documents were fabricated according to the correct documents from them and attributing their publications to a department affiliated with the Ministry of Health, contrary to the truth.

The suspect unlawfully obtained the department seal of a government department, as well as the seal of a public employee, namely the complainant, and used them in a harmful manner to the interest of the latter and the public interest by using them on the documents subject to the first accusation.

The complainant and plaintiff was represented at court by Lawyer Khalil Haider who demanded that the civil claim be accepted in form, and in matter to oblige the accused to pay the plaintiff a sum of KD 5,001 as temporary compensation for the damages she sustained as a result of the acts attributed to her.

After the ruling was issued, he confirmed that this step indicates the presence of financial repercussions or possible compensation that will be discussed at a later stage of the judicial procedures.

He said the ruling highlights the keenness of the judicial system to confront crimes that affect public order and the interests of individuals and the state, stressing the importance of maintaining integrity and transparency in all official documents and procedures.



Unstable weather continues in Kuwait with rain and thunder.

Competent Kuwaitis sought

126 vie for 11 top co-op positions

KUWAIT CITY, March 24: Ahmad Al-Freij, Acting Assistant Undersecretary for Cooperation Sector Affairs at the Ministry of Social Affairs and Chairman of the Quartet Committee overseeing Kuwaitization efforts, announced the second batch of prospective employees have been received from the Public Authority for Manpower, reports Al-Jarida daily.

The 126 Kuwaitis are vying for 11 supervisory positions across 7 cooperative societies -- Al-Wafra Agricultural, Al-Surra, Al-Yarmouk, Hitteen, Al-Ardhiya, Al-Khaldiya, and Al-Shuhada.

The positions range from Deputy General Managers to Directors overseeing various sectors such as finance, administration, and marketing.

Al-Freij stated that the committee, comprising representatives from the Public Authority for Manpower and the Federation of Cooperative Societies, is finalizing a schedule for personal interviews with applicants after Ramadan. He emphasized the commit-

tee's impartiality and adherence to Ministerial Resolution No. 68/2023, aimed at appointing qualified individuals to supervisory roles in cooperatives.

Highlighting the importance of equal opportunities and transparency, Al-Freij underscored the significance of selecting competent national cadres to manage the cooperatives' substantial sales. Following interviews, successful candidates will be announced for the available positions.

Regarding the first batch of applicants, Al-Freij noted their employment in nine cooperative societies, including Al-Fayhaa, Cordoba, Jabriya, and others. He specified the distribution of supervisory positions and emphasized the commitment to Kuwaitization directives.

Al-Freij warned non-compliant cooperative boards of directors of impending penalties, including judicial action, if they fail to adhere to Kuwaitization regulations. He urged compliance to avoid further stringent measures.

All Mol leadership positions filled as restructuring in ministry over

Five promoted to assistant undersecretaries post

By Munif Naif

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, March 24: Following the release of press statements by the Deputy Prime Minister and Acting Minister of Defense and Interior Sheikh Fahad Al-Yousef during the national holidays last month to declare that he will organize all sectors of the Ministry of Interior before the end of March, the ministry's restructuring began with the promotion of five employees to the position of assistant undersecretaries in the ministry and the filling of vacant positions.

The assistant undersecretaries appointed directors general and their assistants. All leadership positions in all sectors of the ministry have been filled and the restructuring of the ministry has been completed.

According to security sources, the ministry has put the final touches on the procedure for rotating and staffing the security directorates.

It has decided to appoint Brigadier General Muhammad Rajab as the Director of the Ahmadi Security Department and Brigadier General Abdullah Hamoud as his assistant.

Brigadier Saleh Oqla Al-Azmi has been appointed as the Director of Farwaniya Security Department and Brigadier General Nayef Al-Hajraf as his assistant.

Brigadier Suleiman Al-Jarrah has been appointed as the Director of the Capital Security Department and Brigadier General Talal Al-Enezi as his assistant.

Brigadier Muhammad Mutlaq has been appointed as the Director of Mubarak Al-Kabeer Security Department and Brigadier General Khaled Bonashi as his assistant.

Brigadier Ziad Al-Khatib has been appointed as the Director of Hawally Security Department and Brigadier General Hussein Dashti as his assistant.

Brigadier Hamad Al-Tawala has been appointed as the Director of Jahra Security Department and Brigadier General Saqer Fayeze Al-Enezi as his assistant.

In a related context, a security source stressed that a large number of officers with the rank of "Brigadier General" had been transferred to the ministry's headquarters.

He explained that the officers transferred to the headquarters will retain the position's allowance and its special allowances for a period of three months only. They will be dropped after that unless he is seeking assistance or is assigned to any other position or work that requires the payment of allowances to him.

The source indicated that a number of the officers who were referred to the ministry's headquarters will submit requests for referral to retirement.

In the same context, a ministerial decision was issued to appoint Major General Hamid Al-Baloul as the Assistant Undersecretary for Financial Affairs and Support Services along with his current position of the Assistant Undersecretary for the Affairs of the Office of the Minister of Interior.

Woman dead as police launch 'hunt' for driver

KUWAIT CITY, March 24: Personnel from the Al-Ahmadi Governorate Search and Investigation Department are looking for an unknown hit-and-run motorist for running over a woman in Fintas, reports Al-Anba daily.

According to a security source the victim, whose identity has not been disclosed, died immediately after the accident.

The security authorities are checking the CCTV footage from cameras installed in the area in an effort to identify the runaway motorist.

The source added, it has become clear that the motorist was speeding above 120 kilometers per hour, while stressing at the same time the need for people to make use of the pedestrian bridges build on highways.

Mutla'a farm ransacked: An unidentified expatriate has filed a report at the Al-Mutla'a Police Station accusing two people, a Kuwaiti citizen and an expatriate, of stealing a diesel electric motor, four surveillance cameras that operate on solar power and 3,000 meters of electrical cables with 10 mm thickness from a farm in the Al-Mutla'a area, reports Al-Anba daily.

The misdemeanor Case No. 38/2024 has been filed against the suspects. Meanwhile, the Jahra Investigation Department has issued an arrest warrant against the two men.

On the other hand, an expatriate who works as a contractor has filed a complaint with the same police station accusing unidentified person/s of stealing 60 EGP and other construction materials from a plot in which construction work was being carried out.



Municipality workers removing all illegal 'Poll 24' advertisements.

365 illegal 'Poll 24' ads removed

KUWAIT CITY, March 24: The Kuwait Municipality has launched a campaign to remove violating advertisements in Mubarak Al-Kabeer during the 2024 National Assembly elections. The initiative involves field trips conducted by municipal branches across the governorates, reports Al-Rai daily.

During these tours, a total of 365 violating advertisements were identified and removed. Among them were 46 election advertisements lacking proper licenses for the 2024 National Assembly elections. Additionally, 319 advertisements of various sizes were taken down for non-compliance

with regulations.

The municipality emphasizes the continuation of these field trips throughout the election period. Inspectors from the departments of audit and follow-up of municipal services are actively involved in these efforts. In Mubarak Al-Kabeer Municipality Governorate, inspectors conducted thorough inspections to enforce legal provisions. They removed advertisements placed outside electoral headquarters or in residential areas without authorization. Furthermore, random advertisements from streets and squares, as well as those not licensed by the municipality, were also targeted for removal.

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Alarm bells ring over limited seats in KU medical colleges

Minister Al-Jouan expands scope of commercial activities

KUWAIT CITY, March 24: As the Kuwait University Council convenes to discuss the admission plan for the 2024-2025 academic year, alarm bells ring over the dearth of available seats in medical colleges. The proposal put forth by the Deanship of Admission and Registration presents a mere 190 seats for both the Faculties of Medicine and Dentistry 150 in the former and a scant 40 in the latter, reports Al-Qabas daily.

Informed sources highlight the discrepancy between these limited admission numbers and the escalating student population, as well as the growing demand for national medical professionals. Urgent measures are called to address this pressing issue and bolster the available seats.

Fault detection -- For over four decades, the College of Medicine has maintained low admission figures, raising questions about the underlying cause. Despite Kuwait University statistics revealing a substantial number of appointed professors in both colleges, the admission seat count remains disproportionately low.

Planning for progress -- Efforts must be directed towards expanding seat availability without compromising educational quality. The administration is urged to devise a strategic plan that aligns with the staffing levels in the medical colleges.

Warning signs -- maintaining the status quo risks denying admission to many highly qualified students, reminiscent of the previous year's scenario where top-performing students were overlooked due to insufficient

seats.

Providing solutions -- anticipating a surge in student applications, particularly for medical specialties, alternative pathways must be explored to accommodate the rising demand for medical personnel. Former officials advocate for doubling admission seats in medical, dental, and pharmaceutical colleges to meet future healthcare demands.

Opportunities ahead -- with ample teaching staff and available facilities in the newly established Sabah Al-Salem University City, Kuwait University is poised to expand its medical education capacity. Collaboration with Abdullah Al-Salem University presents an opportunity to leverage untapped resources.

Call for coordination -- Efforts should be made to synchronize application deadlines for higher education institutions to prevent outstanding students from missing out on foreign scholarship opportunities due to seat shortages. Last year's setbacks underscore the importance of strategic planning and coordination in admission processes.

The three demands to avoid the crisis include increasing the number of admission seats; meeting the needs of the development plan and providing alternatives for students

The questions that need answers include -- is it reasonable to deprive someone who scores 98% of admission to medical colleges; how will new hospital staff be covered in the development plan and why do the numbers of medical admissions remain low over the years?

2 ministerial decisions issued: The Minister of Commerce and Industry, Abdullah Al-Jouan, has issued two ministerial decisions to expand the scope of commercial activities

outlined in the Unified Guide for Classification of Economic Activities in Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, reports Al-Jarida daily.

The ministry announced that the newly added commercial activities encompass "aviation services and car or motorcycle rental activity."

These decisions were made following a comprehensive review of the Commerce Law, its amendments, and the Companies Law.

Additionally, they align with the ministerial decision on unifying the classification of statistical data for economic activities across government agencies, adhering to the United Nations International Classification of Economic Activities.

These updates reflect the internationally recommended fourth revision by the United Nations Statistics Division and agreements within the GCC countries, as well as the deliberations of the Committee for Classification of Commercial, Professional, and Craft Activities.

Meanwhile, the Ministry of Health is currently preparing the list of Kuwaiti employees who are eligible for promotion, reports Al-Anba daily.

The nomination for promotion by selection is exclusive for Kuwaiti employees in various job categories, except doctors whose promotion is governed by the rules stipulated for their category.

Upon completion of the assessment of applications and other related procedures, the list will be finalized and then announced, the ministry explained.

On the other hand, the ministry has approved the list of employees eligible for promotion by seniority -- around 2,000 employees including administrators, technicians, doctors and others.

In addition, the ministry has started amending the job data of employees under the previous categories specified by the Financial and Administrative Affairs Authority and added the corresponding bonus. This will be completed next week, the ministry affirmed.



Doctors from plastic surgery unit at Jaber Hospital.

'Unit performs over 1,200 surgical cases'

Jaber Hospital's plastic surgery unit receives int'l academic recognition

By Marwa Al-Bahrawi

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, March 24: The Ministry of Health announced the upcoming formation of a medical team to receive cases of lymphatic vessel malformations at Jaber Al-Ahmad Hospital.

In another development, the Head of the hospital's plastic surgery unit Dr. Sarah Al-Youha confirmed that the unit obtained international academic recognition, which requires following several specific plans and steps, including adoption of international protocols, a system for recording complications, and learning how to deal with them.

In a press statement issued yesterday, Dr. Al-Youha explained that the unit performing more than 1,200 surgical cases and examining more than 10,000 cases since its inception in 2020 until now contributed to obtaining this recognition.

Contributed

The unit began with one surgeon, Dr. Salma Al-Hamad, who contributed to establishing the unit. Now, eight surgeons work in the unit, including Dr. Hisham Bourezaq, Dr. Heba Al-Khasnam, Dr. Khaled Al-Tarrah, Dr. Hussain Al-Mousawi, Dr. Hussain Al-Qattan, and Dr. Abeer Kalender.

The department has created specialized units within the plastic surgery unit. For example, it conducted operations to restore children's deformities.

They cooperated with doctors in other specialties to create the cleft lip unit at Farwaniya Hospital, which has received recognition from the American Society for Cleft Lip Surgery and Head Deformities Surgery, led by Dr. Latifa Al-Kharafi.

The department has a post-mastectomy reconstruction unit and a unit for the removal of head and neck tumors, with the cooperation of the Ear, Nose and Throat Department at Jaber Hospital, led by Dr. Maha Al-Jilani, and the Breast Surgery Unit in the Surgery Department with Dr. Lamia Malak and Dr.

Sulaiman Al-Mazidi.

Dr. Al-Youha stated that this academic accreditation obtained by the department came with the support of the Ministry of Health, the administration of Jaber Hospital and the head of the Medical Corps who provided all the capabilities to the unit until it became competitive with its counterparts in the developed world.

Harmony

Meanwhile, plastic surgery consultant Dr. Hisham Bourezaq said the unit is characterized by harmony and cooperation among all doctors, which has contributed to realizing great achievements within a short period of time.

He said, "Through this cooperation, we were able to form the first team specialized in surgery of congenital deformities. The unit receives a large number of cases on a weekly basis.

With the support and approval of the Ministry of Health, we receive cases from all hospitals in Kuwait.

We have cooperated with doctors from 11 specialties from various hospitals of the government sector to create a unit that is the first-of-its-kind to treat cleft lip and head deformities. It is based in the Dental Center of Farwaniya Hospital and receives all cases from the government and private sectors."

In addition, Dr. Bourezaq indicated that the Plastic Surgery Unit of Jaber Hospital contributes to treating cases of chronic wounds in Bayt Abdullah Children's Hospice, adding that the unit's doctors also participate in the Vascular Deformities Clinic at Mubarak Al-Kabeer Hospital.

He stressed that the burns and plastic surgery unit of Jaber Hospital is not only a unit for providing services to patients, but it has also become an important headquarters for training doctors and giving lectures on an ongoing and periodic basis, with the aim of raising the level of information among trainee doctors, and thus improving the services provided to patients.

KIMS opens doors for expat doctors

MEW report highlights private sector dominance in electrical installations

KUWAIT CITY, March 24: The Ministry of Electricity and Water's monthly statistical report unveiled that in February, a total of 64,770 kilowatts of electrical installations were recorded across all sectors in the country, spanning 504 plots, reports Al-Jarida daily.

The report underscored the prominence of the private sector, leading with 458 plots and a cumulative load of 45,636 kilowatts, constituting 70.5% of the total extensions.

Following closely, the investment sector secured the second position, with the ministry extending electrical currents to 12 investment sites, amassing a total load of 10,696 kilowatts, representing 16.5% of the total loads.

The government sector ranked third in load volume, with 3,979 kilowatts across 12 government plots, accounting for 6.1% of the total extensions in February.

Subsequently, the commercial sector registered a total load of 2,318 kilowatts across 7 commercial sites, making up 3.6% of the overall load distribution. Meanwhile, the industrial sector captured the fifth spot, with loads amounting to 2,056 kilowatts for 10 industrial plots, representing 3.2% of the total.

Lastly, the agricultural sector recorded the least load volume, with 82,760 kilowatts distributed across 5 agricultural plots, accounting for 1% of the total load distribution.

Training for expat doctors: The Kuwait Institute for Medical Specializations (KIMS), under the Ministry of Health, has opened the door for applications for training and fellowship programs for non-Kuwaiti doctors working for the Ministry of Health (Kuwaiti Board), reports Al-Jarida daily.

Applications will be accepted from today until Wednesday, April 3, in accordance with Ministerial Resolution No. 324 of 2018 outlining the acceptance process for specialized training programs.

Available specializations include family medicine, internal medicine, professional diploma programs in general medical practice, and fellowship programs in adult cardiology, clinical hematology, oncology, and nephrology.

Eligibility criteria include meeting conditions and passing prescribed tests, being currently employed by the Ministry of Health, having completed the internship training year, and not being enrolled in another training program at KIMS during the application

period.

Applicants must hold a Bachelor of Medicine and Surgery degree or its equivalent, and for specialized fellowship programs, a Kuwaiti Board certificate or its equivalent is required.

World witness peculiar trend: As spring unfolds, the world is witnessing a peculiar trend: a rise in gasoline prices, despite the absence of typical factors such as summer holidays and increased winter heating demand. This puzzling phenomenon has prompted many to seek an explanation, reports Al-Jarida daily.

A recent report published by the American "Oil Price" website sheds light on this annual occurrence, revealing that gasoline prices tend to increase by approximately \$0.30 per gallon since the beginning of the year. Surprisingly, this rise is not uncommon, with data showing that gasoline prices have risen almost every year between January and May, dating back to 2000. The sole exception was in 2020 when the Covid-19 pandemic triggered a collapse in oil prices.

Conversely, gasoline prices often decrease between August and December, a trend that becomes particularly noticeable during American election years, leading many to speculate about political manipulation.

However, the report suggests a more fundamental explanation rooted in seasonal factors. The Environment Protection Agency (EPA) in the United States strategically regulates gasoline blends to mitigate emissions, especially those contributing to smog.

This regulation involves adjusting blends seasonally to control evaporation rates, known as "reed vapor pressure," which varies between spring and fall due to temperature fluctuations.

Two key factors contribute to the rise in gasoline prices during this seasonal shift. Firstly, the production of summer gasoline is inherently more expensive due to the exclusion of butane, which is cheaper but less effective in cold weather blends.

Secondly, this shift coincides with the onset of summer, when gasoline demand typically surges. As a result, the combination of higher production costs, reduced supplies, and increased demand invariably leads to higher gasoline prices year after year.

In summary, while the rise in gasoline prices during spring may seem perplexing, it is largely driven by the seasonal adjustment of gasoline blends mandated by environmental regulations, coupled with the predictable pattern of increased demand during the summer months.

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Senior European, UN and Arab officials attend Ramadan Iftar

Kuwait, Belgium share similar views on key topics: ambassador

BRUSSELS, March 24, (KUNA): Kuwaiti Ambassador to Belgium Nawaf Al-Enezi said Kuwait and Belgium share similar views on human rights, democracy and humanitarian aid.

The remarks came during an Iftar (fastbreaking) banquet the ambassador held late Friday, in the honor of Belgian Foreign Minister Hadja Lahbib, with the presence of senior European, UN and Arab officials.

This year marks 60 years of Kuwaiti-Belgian diplomatic relations, Ambassa-

dor Al-Enezi, who also chairs Kuwait's missions to the European Union (UN) and the NATO, said in a statement to KUNA, noting that Kuwait deeply appreciates Belgium's role in liberating Kuwait from the Iraqi invasion.

Meanwhile, the Kuwaiti diplomat underlined Belgium's role in supporting Palestinians, as the country succeeded in issuing a resolution on ceasefire and allowing the delivery of humanitarian aid to Gaza, as part of the country's current presidency of the European Council.

"We are now in 2024 and all these projections proved to be wrong, as oil demand has been increasing on an annual basis, reaching record-breaking levels," said Al Ghais.

OPEC, fulfilling its role by providing the world with secure, stable and environmentally friendly energy, has injected investments in the oil industry and other energy sectors, like renewables, as well as in technologies that can help in reducing emissions.

"The organization's member countries believe in the importance of guaranteeing global energy security and reducing emissions," he said. Member countries of OPEC have actively adopted initiatives and developed projects to support climate change mitigation efforts, he noted, adding that OPEC has been an observer to the Conference of the Parties (COP) since the beginning.

For example, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) announced at COP28 in Dubai a joint initiative aimed at reducing carbon emissions from gas and oil.

OPEC member countries, said Al Ghais, have abundant natural resources and vast expertise in oil and energy, which should be harnessed towards the development of innovative solutions to reduce emissions and ensure regular and reliable supplies of energy.

Among the solutions, he said, were carbon capture, utilization and storage (CCUS), enhanced oil recovery (EOR) using CO₂, direct air capture (DAC) and emission reduction strategies to alleviate carbon intensity in oil's upstream, mid-stream and downstream sectors.

In the face

Continued from Page 1

This all depends on two things - the first is the parliament's output and what it can provide, and the second is government performance.

It is not possible to bet on the current Council of Ministers, considering what it presented during the short period that followed its formation, because it did not take the opportunity to express the contents for which it came.

Therefore, the real test remains on the extent of harmony between the two authorities in the three months after the elections and the formation of the new Council of Ministers.

Disqualified candidates'

Continued from Page 1

He pointed out that every time the people choose their representatives well, the government is not satisfied with the election results. He considers this the reason behind the frequent dissolution of parliaments, especially the most recent that ratified a number of important laws and laid down a clear legislative agenda.

He criticized the measures taken by Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Defense and acting Minister of Interior Sheikh Fahad Yusuf Al-Sabah regarding the citizenship issue. He clarified that he does not support those who obtained citizenship illegally, indicating the court should rule on citizenship cases individually in order to hear the defendants' side.

He added that if he wins in the election, he will question Sheikh Fahad Yousef Al-Sabah on the measures he took as they are tantamount to threatening the social fabric and national unity.

Fourth Constituency candidate Anwar Al-Fikr also met with citizens as part of his electoral campaign. He tackled a number of issues, including education; pointing out the graduates are inefficient despite the high budget allocated for the Ministry of Education and Higher Education.

He said eight leadership positions at the Ministry of Education are deliberately left vacant or occupied by acting or delegated officials in order to blackmail those currently occupying such positions. He added the acting or delegated officials are asked to approve illegal transactions in the interest of some traders. "If such an official refuses to sign the illegal transactions, he is terminated or his delegation ends," he asserted.

He also underscored the need to amend the relevant law for the courts to deal with citizenship cases.

In addition, electricity was cut off from the electoral center of former MP and First Constituency candidate Adel Al-Damkhi for the second time. He hopes this is just the result of an ordinary technical error, not deliberate power disruption.

He urged all eligible voters to participate in the election, asserting that attempts to suspend the Constitution is like a coup against democracy and they will not succeed.

OPEC chief

Continued from Page 1

"It would also have catastrophic impacts on millions of people losing their jobs. It would also put manufacturing worldwide to a halt, slow global economic growth and worsen energy poverty in many countries as millions won't be able to secure the energy they need including electricity," he added.

Currently, around 2.3 billion people still lack access to clean cooking fuels and oil can play a role in providing energy to meet these critical needs, he noted.

Al Ghais called for encouraging development of the oil industry and the investments it requires, while improving the industry's environmental credentials. "This is OPEC's message to the world," he stated.

OPEC continues to receive support and praise for its reasonable calls and efforts to find realistic solutions amidst false information and biased narratives that lack any scientific merit calling for abandoning oil, he said.

There have been, he added, reports that oil demand would peak by 2030, "which are regrettably based on ideologies" pushing for abandoning oil and gas in general.

Reports by OPEC and international energy consultancies affirm the important and critical role of oil in the decades to come because of the anticipated growth in world's population, which is expected to reach 9.5 billion by 2045, of which the majority will happen in developing countries, said Al Ghais.

He said that OPEC projects global oil demand to reach 116 million barrels per day (bpd) in its base scenario and 120 million bpd in one of its alternative scenarios by 2045, and noted there should be adequate investments to provide for "these huge needs for energy and oil.

"In order to secure the necessary oil supplies, we need to invest around USD 14 trillion in the different sectors of the oil industry by 2045," he said, which would support enhancing energy security and the development of technologies that help in reducing emissions.

Al Ghais noted that calls to stop using oil has caused panic and confusion. "We heard projections during the COVID-19 pandemic that global oil demand had reached its peak and it would soon start dropping.



Kuwaiti Ambassador to Belgium Nawaf Al-Enezi with Belgian Foreign Minister Hadja Lahbib during the Iftar (fastbreaking) banquet.

KUNA photo

MoH to open specialized clinics in primary health care centers

PAAAFR's request for food canteen license gets nod

By Marwa Al-Bahrawi, Inaas Awadh and Abdul Rahman Al-Shammari

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, March 24: Assistant Undersecretary for Health Care Affairs in the Ministry of Health Dr. Nadia Jumaa revealed the ministry's intention to soon open specialized clinics in various primary health care centers within the government's 100-day action plan.

In a press statement on the sidelines of the annual Ramadan Ghabqa organized by the Kuwait Association of Family Doctors and General Practitioners recently, Dr. Jumaa affirmed the ministry's readiness to launch the Fahaheel Health Center after adding some new specialties, including preventive health and oral and dental health.

She highlighted the interest and keenness of the ministry to expand the specialized clinics in West Mubarak Al-Kabeer and Farwaniya areas to include healthy child and psychiatry clinics.

Dr. Jumaa affirmed that the ministry announced the extension of working hours in some health centers, specifically in the Adan and Sadeeq health centers, explaining that the Adan health center will continue working until 12 am, and the Sadeeq health center will work until 9:00pm, during the duration of the government's 100-day work plan.

Priorities

She stressed the ministry's great interest in primary health care as one of the priorities of the government's development programs.

Dr. Jumaa said Kuwait is one of the leading countries in the health field due to the achievements it has realized through its remarkable renaissance to ensure a healthy life, enhance well-being for all, and create a qualitative shift in health care services.

Meanwhile, the President of the Kuwait Association of Family Doctors and General Practitioners Dr. Mohammad Al-Azmi revealed the launch of the activities of the 2nd Family Medicine Conference in May with the participation of an elite group of family doctors and in the presence of a group of representatives of the Gulf Society of Family Medicine and various international institutions.

He affirmed the association's keenness to be close to everyone, as it is the unifying home for every family and general practitioner in Kuwait, revealing that the number of the association's members has increased from 200 to 500 since the beginning of its inauguration until now.

Dr. Al-Azmi announced the opening of membership in the association's working committee.



Dr. Nadia Al-Jumaa



The charity handed out 16,000 food baskets as part of one million Iftar meals for the poorest families.

KUNA photo

Kuwait's Najat charity lays cornerstones of 3 villages in Yemen

A delegation of Kuwait's Al Najat Charity has laid cornerstones of three residential villages for Yemen's poor families in Taiz and Hodeidah governorates, as part of "Kuwait by Your Side" campaign for the 9th year in a row.

Zayed Al-Qahtani, coordinator of society's Yemen projects, said Saturday every village contains 30 units, three classrooms, an equipped-medical center, a drinking water project and a

mosque as well as an administrative office.

These villages would provide shelters and good services for orphans and poor families, he added in a statement to KUNA.

Furthermore, the charity also handed out 16,000 food baskets as part of one million Iftar meals for the poorest families, he noted.

He went on to say that the charity continues establishing residential villages to meet the

needs of thousands of displaced families, which live in cottages and poor houses.

Meanwhile, Governor of Hodeiha Al-Hassan Taher lauded generous humanitarian support provided by His Highness the Amir, and the Kuwaiti Government and people in all domains.

He stressed the importance of sustainable development and humanitarian projects, which serve orphans and poor people. (KUNA)

site.

It was stated in the transaction letter approved by the Director General of Kuwait Municipality Saud Al-Dabbous that the Kuwait Dairy Company submitted an application for the license of a canteen with an area of 130 square meters within the boundaries of its own plot allocated to it in Sulabiya Agricultural Area, in pursuant to the decision of the Municipal Council issued on December 1, 2008, with a total area of 70 thousand square meters.

The lease contract was signed with the Ministry of Finance, dated 4/5/2016, and PAAAFR was addressed to express an opinion on the request submitted by the Kuwait Dairy Company.

A decision was issued by the Agricultural Vouchers Committee of PAAAFR on January 17, 2024 for approving the license for a food canteen to serve the Kuwait Dairy Company and its employees within the boundaries of the area in its possession. However, it is only 30 square meters in area and the service should not be carried out outside the site.

In confirmation of the article that Al-Seyassah published on Friday regarding the deposit of teachers' bonuses on Sunday, the Acting Assistant Undersecretary for Financial Affairs Matrouk Al-Mutairi announced that the disbursement of all bonuses of all types will be completed this week.

He explained that this step was based on the directives of the Minister of Education, Higher Education and Scientific Research Dr. Adel Al-Adwani for the completion of the outstanding files in the Ministry of Education, especially with regard to addressing the problem of disbursing late financial dues and giving them priority.

The process of disbursing financial claims to teachers and administrators for correcting test papers, confidential printing presses, and

adult education rewards has actually begun since Thursday, March 21, 2024. The disbursement of all types of rewards will be completed next week.

The remuneration of the control workers (scientific and literary) among the members of the educational, administrative, supervisory, and leadership staff will be transferred to the Central Bank and deposited in the accounts of all those eligible on Sunday, March 24.

Following the directives and instructions of the Minister of Education, the Ministry of Finance approved the transfer and enhancement of some items related to rewards, which include fees for correcting test papers, confidential printing presses, scientific and literary control, shifts, adult education, and administrative supervision, and all other dues that have not been paid for a while because there are no funds to cover the disbursement.

The financial sector has begun to complete all procedures quickly before the end of the fiscal year, issuing disbursement forms in the financial systems, and presenting these forms to the Financial Supervision Authority for approval and then transferring them to the beneficiaries' accounts.

Due to the large number of financial forms and claims, these forms will be disbursed in batches until they are all completed next week.

Al-Mutairi affirmed the financial sector's keenness to complete all disbursement processes despite the limited time and the near end of the fiscal year.

He expressed appreciation for the great efforts exerted by all employees in the financial department who have been working until late hours after work during the month of Ramadan, out of their keenness to complete tasks and pay the dues of all ministry employees during this short period.

World News Roundup

Europe

Russia launches missile attack on Ukraine: Russia launched its third massive missile attack on Ukraine in the past four days, and the second to target the capital of Kyiv, with Poland's military saying that one of the missiles launched at western Ukraine briefly entered its airspace Sunday.

The head of Kyiv's military administration, **Serhiy Popko**, said Russia used cruise missiles launched from Tu-95MS strategic bombers. An air alert in the capital lasted for more than two hours as rockets entered Kyiv in groups from the north.



Popko

He said the attacks were launched from the Engels district in the Saratov region of Russia.

According to preliminary data, there were no casualties or damage in the capital, he said.

The operation command of Poland, a member of NATO, said in a statement that there was a violation of Polish airspace at 4:23 a.m. (0323GMT) by one of the cruise missiles launched by Russia against towns in western Ukraine.

The object entered near the Polish town of Oserdów and stayed there for 39 seconds, the statement said. It added that military radar systems observed the missile the entire time and all necessary procedures were launched to ensure the safety of Polish airspace. (AP)

Families wonder if loved ones are alive: Family and friends of those still missing after an attack that killed over 130 people at a suburban Moscow concert hall waited for news of their loved ones as Russia observed a day of national mourning on Sunday.

Events at cultural institutions were cancelled, flags were lowered, and TV entertainment and ads were suspended, according to state news agency RIA Novosti. A steady stream of people brought flowers to a makeshift memorial near the burnt-out concert hall.

The attack, which has been claimed by an affiliate of the Islamic State group, is the deadliest on Russian soil in years.

As rescuers continue to search the damaged building, some families still don't know if members who went to the event targeted by gunmen on Friday are alive.

Igor Pogadaev was desperately seeking any details of his wife's whereabouts after she went to the concert and stopped responding to his messages.

He hasn't seen a message from Yana Pogadaeva since she sent her husband two photos from the Crocus City Hall music venue. (AP)

'Gunmen tried to escape to Ukraine': The suburban Moscow music hall where gunmen opened fire on concertgoers was a blackened, smoldering ruin Saturday as the death toll in the attack surpassed 130 and Russian authorities arrested four suspects. President Vladimir Putin claimed they were captured while fleeing to Ukraine.

Kyiv strongly denied any involvement in Friday's assault on the Crocus City Hall music venue in Krasnogorsk, and the Islamic State group's Afghanistan affiliate claimed responsibility.

Putin did not mention IS in his speech to the nation, and Kyiv accused him and other Russian politicians of falsely linking Ukraine to the assault to stoke fervor for Russia's war in Ukraine, which recently entered its third year.

US intelligence officials confirmed the claim by the IS affiliate.

"ISIS bears sole responsibility for this attack. There was no Ukrainian involvement whatsoever," National Security Council spokeswoman Adrienne Watson said in a statement.

The US shared information with Russia in early March about a planned terrorist attack in Moscow and issued a public warning to Americans in Russia, Watson said.

Putin said authorities detained a total of 11 people in the attack, which also wounded more than 100. (AP)

Albania prosecutors order arrest of town mayor: Albanian prosecutors said Saturday they ordered the arrest of the mayor of a seaside tourist town in the country's south on corruption charges.

The Special Court Against Corruption and Organized Crime, which handles cases involving senior officials, ordered the arrest of Jorgo Goro, the mayor of Himare. He was charged with abuse of power for allegedly creating fake documents to obtain government land for a former member of parliament who planned to build a private tourist resort there.

Another person was arrested and three other officials with the Himare and Vlore municipalities were placed under house arrest. The five face up to seven years in prison if found guilty.

There was no immediate comment from Goro or his lawyer Saturday. Goro had been accused by imprisoned politician Dhionisios Alfred Beleri of producing the fake documents regarding the 5,512 square-meter (6,592 square-yard) property for the resort. Himare, 220 kilometers (140 miles) southwest of the capital Tirana, is a main tourist attraction in Albania's Riviera. (AP)

Korvok, Pellegrini set for Slovakia runoff: A pro-western career diplomat defeated a close ally of Slovakia's populist Prime Minister Robert Fico in the first round of the presidential election Sunday to set up a runoff between the two to decide who will succeed Zuzana Čaputová, the country's first female president.

Former Foreign Minister Ivan Korvok had 42.13% of the votes late Sunday, with nearly all polling stations counted by Slovakia's Statistics Office. Peter Pellegrini was in second with 37.28%.

Because no candidate won an outright majority, a runoff will be held April 6 in this central European nation of 5.4 million people.

A former justice minister and judge, Štefan Harabin, 66, who has openly sided with Russia in its war with Ukraine was a distant third with 11.79%. (AP)

\$228m in US military aid to 3 Baltic states: The US Congress has passed a bill that involves a total of \$228 million in military and defense aid to Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania this year under the Baltic Security Initiative, Estonia's defense officials said Saturday.

The US government funding legislation includes military aid to the three Baltic countries, which all are NATO members and neighbors of Russia, was approved by lawmakers on Friday.

"Support from the US has significantly helped Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania fast track several military infrastructure and capability development projects," Estonian Defense Minister Hanno Pevkur said in a statement. "The good news is that the support is slightly higher than last year."

"This (financial aid) sends a clear signal that the US, the largest ally in NATO, is committed to the security and stability of our region," he said. (AP)

'Spanish reporter was invited to stay': Russia's Foreign Ministry says it issued the necessary documents for a Spanish journalist to stay in the country although the reporter claims he was forced to leave because his visa was not renewed.

Xavier Colas of the newspaper El Mundo is the latest foreign journalist to have left Russia after visas were not continued. The cases come amid a crackdown on media that has intensified since Russia sent troops into Ukraine in February 2022.

Colas said he was forced to leave Russia on Wednesday, a day after authorities refused to renew his visa.

In a statement to The Associated Press on Friday, the Foreign Ministry said Colas collected his official accreditation and "a package of documents to extend his stay in our country." Although the ministry issues invitations to remain in the country, the actual visa is issued by the Interior Ministry. (AP)



US Vice President Kamala Harris speaks to the media after she and the White House Office of Gun Violence Prevention met with families whose loved ones were murdered during the 2018 mass shooting that took the lives of 14 students and three staff members at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Fla., on March 23. (AP)

Politics

'This agreement represents a compromise'

Biden signs \$1.2 trillion funding package

WILMINGTON, Del., March 24, (AP) — US President Joe Biden on Saturday signed a \$1.2 trillion package of spending bills after Congress had passed the long overdue legislation just hours earlier, ending the threat of a partial government shutdown.

"This agreement represents a compromise, which means neither side got everything it wanted," Biden said in a statement. "But it rejects extreme cuts from House Republicans and expands access to child care, invests in cancer research, funds mental health and substance use care, advances American leadership abroad, and provides resources to secure the border. ... That's good news for the American people."

It took lawmakers six months into the current budget year to get near the finish line on government funding, the process slowed by conservatives who pushed for more policy mandates and steeper spending cuts than a Democratic-led Senate or White House would consider. The impasse required several short-term spending bills to keep agencies funded.

Spending

The White House said Biden signed the legislation at his home in Wilmington, Delaware, where he was spending the weekend. It had cleared the Senate by a 74-24 vote shortly after funding had expired for the agencies at midnight.

But the White House had sent out a notice shortly after the deadline announcing that the Office of Management and Budget had ceased shutdown preparations because there was a high degree of confidence that Congress would pass the legislation and the Democratic president would sign it Saturday.

The first package of full-year spending bills, which funded the departments of Veterans Affairs, Agriculture and the Interior, among others, cleared Congress two weeks ago with just hours to spare before funding expired for those agencies. The second covered the departments of Defense, Homeland Security and State, as well as other aspects of general government.

Biden & Trump win Louisiana primary having already clinched nominations

WASHINGTON, March 24, (AP) — US President Joe Biden and former President Donald Trump won Louisiana's primary on Saturday, collecting more delegates after they already clinched their party nominations.

Biden also appeared in Missouri's Democratic primary, with results not expected to be reported until next week.

None of the races were in suspense. Biden and Trump have already beaten their major competitors. But the primary races are still closely watched by insiders for turnout and signs of protest voters.

For Biden, some liberals are registering their anger with Israel's war against Hamas following the militant group's Oct. 7 attack. More than 30,000 people, two-thirds of them women and children, have been reported killed by Gaza authorities since Israel launched its offensive. A protest movement launched by Arab American communities in Michigan has spread to several other states.

Trump is his party's dominant figure and has locked up a third straight Republican nomination. But he faces dissent from people worried about the immense legal jeopardy he faces or critical of his White House term,

which ended shortly after the Jan. 6 insurrection mounted by his supporters and fueled by his false theories of election fraud.

Saturday's primary was the Missouri Democratic Party's first party-run presidential contest since a new law took effect in August 2022. Louisiana's primaries, meanwhile, come almost four years after the state was the first to postpone its primaries due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Also:

TRENTON, NJ: US Sen Bob Menendez of New Jersey said he won't run in the Democratic primary as he faces federal corruption charges, but he left open the possibility that he would reenter the race as an independent later this year if he is exonerated at a trial.

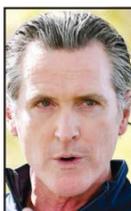
Menendez's announcement comes four days before a state deadline to file to run in the June 4 Democratic primary that's already being contested by Rep. **Andy Kim** and New Jersey first lady **Tammy Murphy**. The almost 10-minute video shows Menendez speaking about his decades in Congress, pushing for aid for his state, including for Superstorm Sandy recovery and COVID-19 relief.



In this photo released by the Russian Emergency Ministry Press Service on March 23, Russian Emergency Ministry rescuers work inside the Crocus City Hall on the western edge of Moscow, Russia on March 23 following an attack on March 22, for which the Islamic State group claimed responsibility. (AP)



Gordon



Newsom

America

Wintry weather blankets US: It may officially be spring, but wintry weather blanketed the US on Saturday with New England and California seeing a mix of rain, heavy snow and gusty winds.

In the West, a winter storm warning was in effect through Sunday morning for parts of the Sierra Nevada, and a 91-mph (147-kph) wind gust was recorded at Mammoth Mountain near the California-Nevada line. About a foot (30 centimeters) of snow had fallen by Saturday morning north of Lake Tahoe. California's governor is **Gavin Newsom**.

A winter weather advisory was issued through Sunday night for parts of northern Arizona, the Grand Canyon and Flagstaff to the New Mexico border with up to a half foot (15 centimeters) of snow possible at upper elevations and winds gusting to 40 mph (64 kph).

The National Weather Service also warned of what it called a significant winter storm over central regions of the country through Monday. (AP)

Mountain lion kills 1 in Calif.: A mountain lion in Northern California killed one man and injured another while the two were out hunting for shed antlers, authorities said Saturday.

An 18-year-old male called the El Dorado County Sheriff's Office Saturday afternoon, reporting that he and his 21-year-old brother were attacked by a mountain lion in a remote part of the county, the office said in a news release.

Deputies arrived around 1:30 p.m. to find the younger brother with "traumatic injuries" to his face. Minutes later, deputies saw a crouched mountain lion next to the older brother on the ground, according to the statement.

They fired their guns and scared off the mountain lion, but the older brother was deceased. (AP)

Harris tours building: US Vice President Kamala Harris toured on Saturday the

bloodstained classroom building where the 2018 Parkland high school massacre happened, then announced a program to assist states that have laws allowing po-

lice to temporarily seize guns from people judges have found to be dangerous.

Harris saw bullet-pocked walls and floors still covered in dried blood and broken glass

Ukraine and Israel that is bogged down on Capitol Hill. Biden, in his statement, again pressed Congress to pass additional aid.

"The House must pass the bipartisan national security supplemental to advance our national security interests. And Congress must pass the bipartisan border security agreement - the toughest and fairest reforms in decades - to ensure we have the policies and funding needed to secure the border. It's time to get this done."

Wyoming gov vetoes bill: Wyoming Republican Gov **Mark Gordon** has vetoed a bill that would have allowed people to carry concealed guns in public schools and government meetings.

In his veto letter Friday night, Gordon said he had concerns the bill would exceed the separation of powers provision in the state constitution since any policy, further regulation or clarification of the law could only be implemented by the Legislature.

It would have required each state facility, including the University of Wyoming, the Wyoming State Hospital and the Wyoming Boys' School, to seek legislative approval to restrict carrying firearms.

The bill "erodes historic local control norms by giving sole authority to the Legislature to micromanage a constitutionally protected right," Gordon wrote. "Any further clarification of the law, if this bill were enacted, would augment the Legislature's reach into local firearms regulation."



Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau places his hand on the casket during the funeral of former prime minister Brian Mulroney, in Montreal on March 23. Politicians, dignitaries and celebrities joined members of the public Saturday at a state funeral to honor Mulroney, one of Canada's most consequential prime ministers who in the 1980s solidified trade ties with the US and spoke out against South Africa's apartheid. (AP)

Under the bill, open carry of firearms would still have been prohibited in schools and government meetings, and K-12 students would not have been allowed to have guns at school. (AP)

Lat/Am

Chevron manager jailed

Heavy rains kill 7 in Rio de Janeiro state

PETROPOLIS, Brazil, March 24, (AP) — Heavy rains in Rio de Janeiro state have killed at least seven people, authorities said Saturday, while a 4-year-old girl was rescued after more than 16 hours under mud.

The girl was pulled out alive in the city of Petropolis, 69 kilometers (43 miles) north of Rio. Rescue teams had to stop their work Friday night because of risks of new landslides in the region.

The girl's father died as a house was knocked to the ground. She survived because he protected her with his body, members of rescue teams said. Three more people died in the same place.

"My son was a warrior, he spent all that time there and saved his little daughter," Roberto Napoleão, the grandfather of the girl, told journalists. "You can't imagine what it is like to lose a son. It hurts so much."



Castro

Mayors in the state and Gov **Claudio Castro** had alarmed residents of potential problems for the weekend since Thursday.

Firefighters have struggled to reach those hit by heavy rains, many of them residents of long-endangered areas. Sniffing dogs were also part of the rescue efforts. Almost 100 people had been saved, authorities said.

Local authorities in Teresopolis, close to Petropolis, said that one person was still missing after the heavy rains.

Meteorologists say the heavy rains that hit Rio state are moving towards the neighboring state of Espirito Santo.

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42 rescued after Mexico mass kidnappings: Mexican authorities said they rescued 42 hostages, including 18 children, from criminal groups Saturday after a wave of kidnappings in Sinaloa state, where more than 600 special force troops were sent to beef up security.

Sinaloa Gov Rubén Rocha said an intensive operation by police and military forces was still trying to find 24 more people who were kidnapped.

Kidnappings en masse took place Friday in different areas of the La Noria region, outside Sinaloa's capital city of Culiacan. Members of criminal groups made hostages of at least three families, local public security chief Gerardo Mérida said.

Federal authorities sent special forces troops to Sinaloa to search for the missing people. An additional 300 soldiers and a National Guard battalion are also operating in the area.

Local authorities have not said who was behind the mass kidnappings, which took place one day after three people were killed in the state's Badiraguato region. Culiacan and other cities in the state have been the scenes of violent incidents in recent years, with killings by members of the powerful Sinaloa cartel.

□ □ □

Haiti gang violence personal: When Vivianne Petit Frere fled her native Haiti for Brazil in 2019 and later walked through the Panamanian jungle and on to Mexico, where she opened a restaurant, she always believed she would eventually return home. Until now. With gang violence wracking Haiti, many of the more than 1 million who have left the Caribbean nation feel helpless when they call terrified family members who can't leave because airports are closed and crossing to the United States by sea is too risky.

"Before, you could say things were OK. I knew things weren't OK, but I had faith, hope that it would change one day. We lost faith. There is no path forward because of the gangs," Petit Frere, 36, said at a table of the restaurant she runs in downtown Tijuana with her husband, who also fled Haiti.

The escalating unrest has reverberated among those who left Haiti for Brazil, Chile, Mexico and the United States. As their hopes of returning home dim, decisions lie ahead on how the U.S. responds to the turmoil in the country long plagued by political upheaval, widespread poverty and natural disasters.

A devastating earthquake in 2010 sent many Haitians to Brazil and Chile. When Brazil's economy tanked in 2016, Haitians were one of the first nationalities to make the perilous trek through Panama's Darien Gap to the United States, some crossing the border from Tijuana to San Diego and settling in the U.S. with others who came before them, largely in Miami, New York and Boston.

Haitian Bridge Alliance has been contacting immigrants in the United States and Canada and finding many have family trapped in gang warfare, said Guerdine Jozef, the advocacy group's executive director, whose childhood neighborhood in Haiti was ravaged in attacks. Her cousin was killed by gangs last year.

"It's not something that we're reading on the news. It's something that happened to my own family and that's the reality for the majority of people in the diaspora. You start hearing the realities of my cousin, my mom, my sister, my dad, and that becomes very personal," Jozef said.

□ □ □

Chevron manager jailed in Venezuela: A former fighter pilot jailed in Venezuela in February for his ties to a prominent human rights attorney is an employee of U.S. oil firm Chevron. The Associated Press has learned, an arrest that combined with other recent repressive acts by Nicolás Maduro's government is straining efforts by the Biden administration to pave the way for free and fair elections in the South American country.

Alejandro González was taken into custody Feb. 9 when counterintelligence agents raided his home near the eastern oil center of Barcelona around 10 p.m. The only information his family has received came in a single statement by Maduro's chief prosecutor accusing him of revealing national security secrets and obstruction of justice.

"I can't stop thinking that this is all a nightmare and isn't really happening," Alexandra González, the oldest of González's three daughters, said in an interview from her home in Spain. "We don't know how our dad is doing. We haven't spoken to him, nor has he had access to his chosen lawyers."

González's arrest came hours after his ex-wife, human rights attorney Rocío San Miguel, was herself picked up at an airport outside Caracas while heading on a short trip to Miami. Attorney General Tarek William Saab has accused her of working as a "spy" in one of multiple, U.S.-backed conspiracies that authorities claim to have foiled in recent months. Her daughter, two brothers, and another former husband, who also served in the air force, were also detained but later released in what U.N. officials have denounced as a growing trend of targeting friends and family members of government opponents.



A resident walks through the debris caused by landslides and heavy rains, in Petropolis, Rio de Janeiro state, Brazil on March 23. Inset: Rescue workers carry a 4-year-old girl who was rescued from her collapsed house after heavy rains. (AP)

Africa

Senegal votes in contested presidential race

Nearly 300 schoolchildren freed in Nigeria

ABUJA, Nigeria, March 24, (AP) — Nearly 300 kidnapped Nigerian schoolchildren have been released, local officials said Sunday, more than two weeks after the children were seized from their school in the northwestern state of Kaduna and marched into the forests.

At least 1,400 students have been kidnapped from Nigerian schools since 2014, when Boko Haram militants kidnapped hundreds of schoolgirls from Borno state's Chibok village in 2014. In recent years, abductions have been concentrated in the country's northwestern and central regions, where dozens of armed groups often target villagers and travelers for ransom.

Kaduna state Gov Uba Sani did not give details of the release of the 287 students abducted from their school in the remote town of Kuriga on March 7, at least 100 of them aged 12 or younger. In a statement, he thanked Nigerian President Bola Tinubu "particularly ensuring that the abducted school children are released unharmed."

Tinubu had vowed to rescue the children "without paying a dime" as ransom. But ransoms are commonly paid for kidnappings, often arranged by families, and it is rare for officials in Nigeria to admit to the payments.

Claimed

No group has claimed responsibility for the Kaduna kidnapping, which locals have blamed on bandit groups known for mass killings and kidnappings for ransom in the conflict-battered northern region, most of them former herders in conflict with settled communities.

At least two people with extensive knowledge of the security crisis in Nigeria's northwest told The Associated Press that the identity of the abductors is known.

Murtala Ahmed Rufa'i, a professor of peace and conflict studies at Usmanu Danfodiyo University, and Sheikh Ahmad Gumi, a cleric who has negotiated with the bandits, said they are hiding in the region's vast and un-governed forests.

Arrests are rare in Nigeria's mass kidnappings, as victims are usually released only after desperate families pay ransoms or through deals with government and security officials.

The Kaduna governor thanked Nigerian security forces and officials for

the release of the students. "I spent sleepless nights with the National Security Adviser, Mal. Nuhu Ribadu ... fine-tuning strategies and coordinating the operations of the security agencies, which eventually resulted in this successful outcome," he said.

Also:

DAKAR, Senegal: Senegalese lined up to vote Sunday in a tightly contested presidential race that followed months of uncertainty and unrest that has tested the West African nation's reputation as a stable democracy in a region that has experienced a wave of coups in recent years.

The election comes after President **Macky Sall** unsuccessfully tried to postpone the Feb. 25 vote until the end of the year, sparking violent protests. Sall is barred by the constitution from seeking a third term. As a result, the vote is taking place during Ramadan, the holy month when observant Muslims fast from dawn until dusk.

Lines formed outside polling stations in the early morning, while roads were largely deserted in the capital **Dakar**. The nation's elite police force deployed across the city in armored vehicles and checked voters' cards. Results are expected next week.

In the run-up to Sunday's vote, opposition leader **Ousmane Sonko** was released from prison last week, triggering jubilant celebrations on the streets of Dakar and renewed excitement about the contest. Sonko was barred from running due to a prior conviction for defamation, and is backing his key ally **Bassirou Diomaye Faye**, who was also freed from prison last week.

Khodia Ndiayes, a 52-year-old cook, said she picked Faye on the ballot because she wanted Sonko to win.

"I'm proud to have voted," she told The Associated Press. "We need a new president because life is expensive, the economy is bad and we need better schools." At the forefront of concerns for many Senegalese voters is the economy, which has been squeezed by high food and energy prices partly driven by the war in **Ukraine**. Almost a third of Senegal's youth are unemployed, according to the independent researcher Afrobarometer, driving thousands to risk their lives on dangerous journeys in search of jobs in the West.

Senegal has stood apart in a region where the military has seized power

from civilian governments in **Mali**, **Niger** and **Burkina Faso**. The election is set to be the nation's fourth democratic transfer of power since it gained independence from France in 1960.

Despite Senegal's record, the electoral process over the past year has been marred by violence and unrest, and hundreds of opposition protesters have been jailed. There are 19 candidates in the race, including one woman, the highest number in the nation's history.

Mame Diarra Juey, a 29-year-old administrator, told the AP she was arrested at a protest after police found a bracelet that showed her membership in the now-dissolved party led by Sonko. She spent a month in prison and is still on provisional release.

"It really impacted me but I realized there is a huge need to change the system and the regime. Now I'm raising awareness in my community on the importance of voting," she said.

□ □ □

METCHE CAMP, Chad: Overcrowded refugee camps in eastern Chad are set to run out of money soon, exacerbating a dire humanitarian crisis caused by the spillover from a deadly conflict in **Sudan**, the **United Nations** said.

More than a million people in Chad, including refugees, face losing access to lifesaving aid unless more funding is raised to help, the U.N. World Food Program said this month.

The devastating conflict between feuding generals in Sudan has killed more than 5,000 people there and displaced over 5 million, the United Nations said. In Chad, refugee numbers are at a 20-year high. The U.N. has warned that the conflict is on course to become the world's worst hunger crisis, with a third of Sudan's 18 million people facing acute food insecurity already.

At refugee camps in eastern Chad, lack of clean drinking water and sanitation is causing dangerous diseases to spread. Doctors Without Borders said it has recorded almost 1,000 cases of hepatitis E in the camps and several pregnant women have died.

"The situation is dire in all camps," said **Erneau Mondesir**, the group's medical coordinator in the region. "Without swift action to improve sanitation infrastructure and enhance people's access to clean water, we risk witnessing a surge in preventable illnesses and unnecessary loss of life."



Nigerian army patrol near LEA Primary and Secondary School Kuriga where students were kidnapped in Kuriga, Kaduna, Nigeria, on March 9. (AP)



Subianto



Widodo

Asia

Chinese pastor released: Unable to buy a train ticket, or even see a doctor at a hospital, a Chinese pastor found that even after release from prison, he is not quite free.

The Rev John Sanqiang Cao was arrested and sentenced to seven years in prison while coming back from a missionary trip in Myanmar. Now back in his hometown of Changsha in southern Hunan province, he is without any legal documentation in his country, unable to access even the most basic services without a Chinese identification.

"I told them I'm a second-class Chinese citizen, I cannot do this, I cannot do that," Cao in an interview with The Associated Press. "I'm released, I'm a free citizen, why should there be so many restrictions upon me?"

Cao, who was born and raised in Changsha, had dedicated his life to spreading Christianity in China, where the religion is strictly regulated. He had studied in the U.S., married an American woman and started a family, but said he felt a calling to go back to his home country and spread the faith.

It's a risky mission. Christianity in China is allowed only in state-sponsored churches, where the ruling Communist Party decides how Scripture should be interpreted. (AP)

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Pranowo demands revote: The camp of Indonesia's losing presidential candidate filed a complaint with the Constitutional Court on Saturday alleging widespread fraud at the polls and demanded a revote.

The legal team of Ganjar Pranowo, who was backed by the governing Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle, said it wants the elected president, **Prabowo Subianto**, and his vice president, Gibran Rakabuming Raka, disqualified.

"We demand the Constitutional Court to order the General Election Commission to administer a revote," said Todung Mulya Lubis, a lawyer representing Pranowo and his running mate Mohammad Mahfud. He said that nepotism and abuse of power were at the core of the complaint.

He said that the candidacy of Raka, President **Joko Widodo**'s son, should not have been allowed and alleged that some regional leaders and village heads had been intimidated into voting for him. He also alleged that state funds were used to buy votes.

"We are at a very decisive moment in our lives as a nation and state," Lubis said. "Democracy is important, the rule of law is important, the constitution is important, and we don't want it to be trampled on, we don't want it to be violated."

Pranowo and Mahfud received 16.5% of votes, the lowest among three contenders in the Feb. 14 polls, according to final results. Subianto, the incumbent defense minister

who was accused of human rights abuses under a past dictatorship, won with 58.6%. (AP)

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Japan emperor, empress visit towns:

Japan's Emperor Naruhito and Empress Masako on Friday visited towns in the north-central region of Noto to pray for victims of the deadly New Year's Day earthquake

and console thousands of homeless living in evacuation centers.

The magnitude 7.6 quake killed 241 people. Four are still missing. More than 9,000 residents whose homes were destroyed or damaged are still living in evacuation facilities such as community centers and school gymnasiums. Reconstruction has come slowly in a largely rural area with an aging population. The region is known for Waji-

ma lacquerware and other handicrafts.

Hundreds of people lined the streets to cheer the imperial couple and held up their phones to take photos of them waving back from the window of a bus.

Naruhito and Masako had not visited earlier because they did not want to interfere with the immediate relief and reconstruction efforts, officials said. (AP)

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Bodies of 3 refugees found dead:

The bodies of three Rohingya refugees were found in the sea as the Indonesian authorities ended a search for survivors from a boat that capsized near Aceh province, the provincial search and rescue agency said Sunday.

Fishers and a search and rescue team rescued 75 people from the boat on Thursday - 44 men, 22 women and nine children - after they huddled on its overturned hull throughout the night.

A few were taken to a local hospital for treatment, but most were sent to a temporary shelter in the Aceh Barat district. Several told UNHCR workers they had lost family members on the journey. Fishers first spotted the three bodies and reported them to local authorities on Saturday.

"After we searched the area, the team found three bodies, two adult women and one boy. They are allegedly Rohingya refugees who were the passengers of the capsized and sunken boat," Al Hussain, chief of Banda Aceh Search and Rescue Agency in a statement on Sunday.

The bodies were immediately taken to the hospital in Calang city in Aceh Jaya district, before local authorities buried them. (AP)



Todung Mulya Lubis, (left), a prominent Indonesian lawyer representing losing presidential candidate Ganjar Pranowo registers a legal challenge alleging widespread irregularities in Feb 14 presidential election, at the Constitutional Court in Jakarta, Indonesia on March 23. (AP)

Country	Index	Change	Closing pts	Country	Index	Change	Closing pts
EGYPT	EGX 30	+5.06	29,060.02	SAUDI	Tadawul	-39.56	12,796.09

Business

European PMI figures reveal mixed outlook across Eurozone sectors

Federal Reserve holds interest rates steady, signals potential cuts later in '24

By National Bank of Kuwait

United States

Federal Funds Rate Unchanged in March

The Federal Reserve decided to hold interest rates steady at their current level (between 5.25% and 5.5%) but signaled a shift in policy by indicating plans to cut rates later in 2024. The highly anticipated cut would be the first since the Federal Reserve decided to hike rates to combat inflation after the pandemic. While the Fed didn't specify when the cuts would happen, projections from Fed officials suggest there could be three reductions by the end of the year. This was seen in the published dot plot showing expectations unchanged for three cuts 2024, while expectations for cuts in 2025 went down to three cuts from previously expected four, while expectations for 2026 remained at three cuts.

Flash Manufacturing PMI Increases

US Flash Manufacturing PMI rises to a 21-month high of 52.5 in March from 52.2 in February, indicating a big improvement in the health of the sector. The strong manufacturing data was accompanied by a strengthening in business conditions, attributed to sharper expansions in outputs and employment. Moreover, suppliers' delivery times saw a recovery from the disruption of supply chains seen at the start of the year. Despite the uptrend in manufacturing, firms have scaled back their purchasing activity in comparison to the February Figure.

Flash Services PMI Declines

While the manufacturing sector saw an increase in the month of March, the services sector on the other hand saw a decrease from the 52.3 in February to a three-month low of 51.7. Meanwhile, employment was unchanged in the sector compared to the previous month. Despite reports showing an improvement in demand, higher price pressures seem to have limited customers' ability to commit to new projects, resulting in a softened services sector. The greenback ended the week closing at 104.004.

Canada

CPI Data Shows Decline in Inflation

Inflation in Canada eased further in February, with headline CPI coming in at 2.8% from 2.9% previously. Expectations were for the print to come in at 3.1%. On a monthly basis, inflation was up 0.3% versus expectations of a 0.6% rise. The Bank of Canada's preferred measure of core inflation also declined to the lowest level in over two years, coming at 2.1% annually from 2.4% prior. The median and trim CPI readings fell to 3.1% and 3.2% respectively. The better than expected inflation figures caused markets to increase bets on a June rate cut. The Canadian Dollar was last seen trading at 1.3563.

Europe

Flash Eurozone Composite PMI increases in March

The flash Eurozone composite PMI output index compiled by the S&P Global rose from 49.2 in February to 49.9 in March. Although the figure shows falling output for the 10th consecutive month, March's decline is considered the smallest since June of 2023, increasing optimism for near stabilization of activity backed by new orders falling at the slowest rate in 10 months. The PMI figures released paints an uneven picture on the outlook of the Eurozone, as conditions varied considerably between different countries and sectors. Where manufacturing output fell across the eurozone for the 12th consecutive month, while new orders for goods keeps falling in comparison to historical figures. Meanwhile, the services sector rose for the second month in March after six weeks of decline, coming at 51.1 for the month. Output declined sharply in Germany, dropping for the ninth consecutive month. While in France, output also declined sharply for the month compared to the February figure. Meanwhile, employment increased for the third month, after two months of marginal declines at the end of 2023.

The Euro ended the week last trading at 1.0823.

Swiss National Bank Cuts interest rates in March

The Swiss National bank unexpectedly cut rates in March ahead of other major central banks, in what was considered a surprise move by the SNB. The 25 basis points cut from 1.75% to 1.50% made it the first major central bank to dial back monetary policy as global economies combat inflation. The decision came after inflation eased to 1.2% in February, with no forward guidance on the upcoming plans for the SNB. The news sent the franc lower last seen trading at 0.8991.

United Kingdom

Inflation in the UK Lower Than Expected for the Month of February

Inflation in the UK fell to the lowest level since September 2021, with headline CPI coming in at 3.4%, well

Rates - March 24th, 2024

Currencies	Previous Week Levels				This Week's Expected Range		3-Month
	Open	Low	High	Close	Minimum	Maximum	Forward
EUR	1.0858	1.0821	1.0868	1.0823	1.0630	1.1020	1.0847
GBP	1.2657	1.2600	1.2675	1.2604	1.2450	1.2780	1.2609
JPY	151.63	151.27	151.86	151.40	150.25	152.80	149.35
CHF	0.8975	0.8971	0.8995	0.8991	0.8880	0.9215	0.8887

below January's reading of 4% and market expectations of a 3.5% rise. Core CPI declined to 4.5% from 5.1% previously. The inflation figures were welcomed by the Bank of England, where the central bank decided to hold interest rates in Thursday's meeting at 5.25%. Markets are still pricing in three rate cuts by year-end starting in June for the BoE. Meanwhile, the Sterling pound rallied on the day following the Federal Reserve's interest rate decision and dot plot, accompanied by a decline in the US Dollar.

Flash Manufacturing and Services PMI

The latest PMI data published from the UK shows a strong end for the first quarter of 2024, following worries from the brief technical recession seen in the previous quarter. The upturn was driven by the services sector, where output rose for the fifth month in a row at 53.4, slightly lower than the expected figure of 53.8. Manufacturing PMI also rose for the month, coming at 49.9, well above expectations of 47.8 and the previous month reading of 47.5.

The Sterling Pound was last seen trading at 1.2604.

Asia-Pacific

Bank of Japan Ends Negative Rate Policy

The Bank of Japan ended eight years of negative interest rates, marking a historic turn for the bank which had focused on boosting growth with decades of massive monetary stimulus. The central bank raised its short-term interest rates to around 0% to 0.1% from -0.1%, taking interest rates out of negative territory for the first time since 2016. Still, the BoJ cautioned it's not about to take on aggressive rate hikes, saying that it "anticipates that accommodative financial conditions will be maintained for the time being," given the fragile growth in the world's fourth-largest economy. Governor Kazuo Ueda had repeatedly said the outcome of this year's annual wage negotiations would be key to sustainable price increases. The bank expects higher salaries to lead to a virtuous spiral with domestic demand fueling inflation.

BOJ Ends Yield Curve Control Policy

The BoJ also ended its yield curve control policy for Japanese sovereign bonds, which the central bank has employed to target longer-term interest rates by buying and selling bonds as necessary.

The USD/JPY pair closed the week trading at 151.40

Reserve Bank of Australia Holds Rates Steady

In a widely expected move by markets, the Reserve Bank of Australia (RBA) held the benchmark rate at 4.35% for the third straight meeting. The central bank detailed in their statement that "The path of interest rates that will best ensure that inflation returns to target in a reasonable timeframe remains uncertain and the Board is not ruling anything in or out." RBA Governor Michele Bullock added that "We have to be prepared to watch data... what it's telling us where things are heading and if that's changing our assessment and that's going to drive potential changes." The Australian dollar declined as low as 0.6502 but has rebounded slightly following the central bank's interest rate decision. Meanwhile, markets are pricing in the first rate cut to occur in June.

The AUD/USD pair was down for the week closing at 0.6515.

Kuwait

Kuwaiti Dinar

USD/KWD closed last week at 0.30760.

Kuwaiti bank settlements rise to KD 24 billion in Jan

Settlements increase by KD 2.4 billion annually

By Mahmoud Shendi

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, March 24: In January, the value of financial settlements among local banks saw a monthly increase of 889 million dinars, or 3.8%, reaching 24 billion dinars by the end of the month, compared to 23.206 billion dinars in December 2023. Additionally, on an annual basis, these settlements rose by 2.4 billion dinars from January 2023, when it was about 21.686 billion dinars.

Meanwhile, the value of checks issued between banks, including the Central Bank of Kuwait and the Kuwait Credit Bank, rose by 0.2 percent in January, totaling 1.479 billion dinars, compared to 1.475 billion dinars in December 2023. However, on an annual basis, there was a 0.3 percent decrease, amounting to 1.484 billion dinars in 2023.

In terms of check settlements, there was a 10.5 per-

cent increase in January, with 208.3 thousand transactions compared to 197.8 thousand transactions in December 2023. However, there was a decrease of about 2.3 thousand transactions, or 1 percent, compared to January 2023, when it was 210.6 thousand transactions.

Annual settlement operations increased by 0.7 percent, reaching 7,047 thousand dinars in January 2023.

The combined settlements for check values between banks decreased by 4.8 percent in 2023, totaling 17.151 billion dinars compared to 18.02 billion dinars in 2022.

Settlement operations between local banks witnessed a 10% decrease in 2023, amounting to 259.9 billion dinars compared to 287.6 billion dinars in 2022.

Checks are exchanged between local banks in Kuwait through the Central Bank using the Kuwait Electronic Check Clearing System (KECCS). The Central Bank oversees this system and sets regulatory rules to govern the relationship between participating entities.

Bursa indices experience limited declines

Financial markets across GCC show mixed performance for second consecutive week

KUWAIT CITY, March 24: The financial markets across the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries witnessed a mixed performance for the second consecutive week, with five indices recording gains while two experienced declines, albeit with most changes being limited, reports Al-Jarida daily.

The Kuwait Stock Exchange indices experienced limited declines, with the general market index, Premier Market Index, and the 50 major index losing 0.37 percent, 0.40 percent, and 0.72 percent, respectively. Meanwhile, the Qatar market index recorded a decline of 0.44 percent, remaining the least performing among the GCC indices this year.

The Abu Dhabi Market Index led the gainers, rebounding from the previous week's decline with a clear growth of 1.09 percent, reducing its year-to-date loss to only 2.68 percent.

This rise coincided with the US Federal Reserve's hints at potential interest rate cuts, leading to positive movements in global markets. The Saudi "TASI" index continued its upward trajectory for the third consecutive week, approaching 13,000 points with a growth of 0.84 percent, supported by favorable oil prices and global market performance.

Three Gulf indices recorded limited gains: the Dubai Financial Market Index, the Bahrain Index, and the Muscat Index. The Dubai Financial Market Index rose by 0.42 percent, mainly driven by positive movements

in US market indices and gold prices. Similarly, the Bahrain and Oman market indices achieved marginal growth, reflecting stable performance in these markets.

Overall, while some Gulf market indices experienced gains supported by positive global market trends, others faced challenges, resulting in mixed performances across the region. The varying factors influencing these markets underscore the complexity of the economic landscape in the GCC countries.

Turkish central bank raises key interest rate to 50% as inflation soars

ANKARA, March 24, (AP): Turkey's central bank raised its key interest rate by 5 percentage points on Thursday, resuming a policy of rate hikes aimed at combating soaring inflation that is causing households severe economic pain.

In a surprise decision, the central bank said it was raising the benchmark one-week repo rate to 50%. The bank had been widely expected to keep the benchmark rate steady for a second month, ahead of mayoral elections on March 31.

The bank said it had decided to raise the benchmark rate "in response to the deterioration in the inflation outlook."

"Tight monetary stance will be maintained until a sig-

nificant and sustained decline in the underlying trend of monthly inflation is observed," the bank said.

Annual consumer price inflation rose to 67% in February, coming in above expectations. Surging prices have left many families struggling to afford food, rent and utilities.

President Recep Tayyip Erdogan is a long-time proponent of an unorthodox economic policy of slashing interest to tame inflation - a theory that runs contrary to conventional economic thinking. A series of rate cuts by the central bank spurred double-digit inflation and a currency crisis until Erdogan reversed course following his re-election in May and appointed a new economic team.

Under the new team, the central bank had raised the

benchmark interest rate from 8.5% in June to 45% in January before pausing the rate hikes last month.

"Although the end of the tightening cycle was declared in January, the Turkish central bank was forced to lift the one-week repo rate from 45% to 50% despite local elections looming," Bartosz Sawicki, a market analyst at Conotoxia, wrote in an emailed note.

Sawicki said the rate hikes since the May 2023 presidential elections "were not enough to quickly fix imbalances cultivated by years of irresponsible, unorthodox policies."

The Turkish currency, which has lost some 40% of its value against the dollar in the past year, recovered some ground following Thursday's decision.

Nation invests KD 850 million in contracts

Kuwait accelerates oil exploration with 24 deep drilling rig contracts

KUWAIT CITY, March 24: Kuwait is poised to enter a transformative phase in its oil and gas exploration endeavors, aligning with a development strategy outlined by the Kuwait Oil Company to optimize the utilization of the nation's oil and gas reserves.

Informed sources told Al-Qabas daily that deep drilling initiatives signal a promising future for Kuwait's exploration operations, playing a pivotal role in realizing the Kuwait Petroleum Corporation's 2040 strategy and augmenting production capacity.

According to these sources, the Kuwait Oil Company has recently awarded contracts for 24 deep drilling rigs valued at approximately 850 million dinars. Kuwaiti companies secured contracts for 5 rigs, while American and Chinese companies won contracts for 9 and 10 rigs respectively.

This initiative is expected to unlock new avenues for production growth, with the delivery of the new drilling towers slated to span 15 months from the contract signing date.

The Kuwait Oil Company is committed to expediting oil contracts implementation to uphold the nation's current production capacity and bolster future production potential.

Recent modifications to Kuwait Oil's awarding strategy have yielded substantial savings, surpassing 120 million dinars in the latest deep drilling tender. These changes, aimed at fostering competition and preventing monopolization, underscore a commitment to innovative ideas and advanced technology to maximize the value of Kuwait's oil resources.

Focusing on operational excellence, the strategic changes aim to ensure sustainable production capacity and optimize investment returns across all hydrocarbon resources,

KIPIC's urea plant project initiates tender process amid uncertainty

KUWAIT CITY, March 24: Contractors foresee potential setbacks in the progress of the planned urea plant, slated to be interconnected with the Al-Zour refinery, and incorporating carbon capture technology, reports Al-Qabas daily quoting sources from MEED.

Managed by the Kuwait Integrated Petroleum Industries Company (KIPIC), the project initiated the tender process for conducting project studies and will be floated in April of this year.

A reliable source said "Given the current political climate, delays are highly probable. Obtaining necessary permissions and signatures is challenging presently and there's uncertainty regarding the project's prioritization."

Following the contract award, the studies are projected to span a year and will adopt a lump-sum contracting approach, as outlined in Qubeq's annual plan.

These studies will explore the feasibility of utilizing CO2 sources from the Al-Zour refinery complex, focusing on flue gas from the hy-

draulic power unit and tail gas from the swing pressure absorption unit for urea production.

The proposed factory will integrate solar energy for hydrogen and nitrogen production, contributing to the decarbonization of both the Al-Zour refinery and the planned petrochemical complex.

Nonetheless, KIPIC envisions this project as an avenue to add value through small-scale urea production while promoting carbon removal efforts and enhancing oil recovery through CO2 injection into oil reservoirs.

Initially slated for the period 2023-2024, the feasibility studies have now been deferred to 2024-2025. The feasibility study budget is estimated at 100,000 dinars (\$325,000), with the pilot study's scope contingent on the feasibility of the outcome of the study.

KIPIC disclosed ongoing efforts by Kuwait Petroleum Corporation to identify additional fields suitable for enhanced oil recovery using carbon dioxide from the forthcoming Al-Zour petrochemical facility.

positioning Kuwait as a global leader in exploration and production.

Expanding the drilling rig fleet stands as a key challenge for Kuwait Oil, essential for achieving strategic objectives and enhancing production capabilities, the company emphasizes the importance of safe and efficient drilling operations, integrating modern technology to drive operational improvements while minimiz-

ing environmental impact.

The KOC is dedicated to ramping up crude oil production capacity through capital projects aimed at reaching 3,650 million barrels per day by 2035 and sustaining this rate until 2040. Additionally, the company aims to produce 1.5 billion cubic feet of free gas per day by 2040, positioning itself as a beacon of operational excellence on a global scale.

Gulf Bank's Annual General Assembly OKs distribution of 12 pct cash dividends and 5% bonus shares for 2023

Bader Nasser Al-Kharafi: We are in the process of developing an innovative strategy for the forthcoming years



Bader Nasser Al-Kharafi, Chairman of the Board of Directors at Gulf Bank.

Bader Nasser Al-Kharafi:

■ The Bank is reaping the benefits of its Kuwait-focused strategy while taking steady steps towards achieving its strategic priorities.

■ We continuously strive to deliver sustainable value to all stakeholders over the long run.

■ We are committed towards achieving high financial performance and maintaining our leadership in providing innovative and reliable banking services.

■ Our performance over the years reflects the trust Gulf Bank enjoys in the local financial and banking segment.

■ We thank Mr. Jassim Mustafa Boodai for his dedicated efforts during his tenure as Chair of Gulf Bank's Board of Directors.



Acting CEO of Gulf Bank, Waleed Khalid Mandani.

Waleed Khalid Mandani:

■ 2023 was a successful year for Gulf Bank, full of achievements despite local and regional challenges.

■ The Bank continued its steady approach towards exceptional revenue growth and profitability, while maintaining its high assets quality.

■ We have made significant progress in enhancing cost efficiency through precise evaluation, streamlining processes, and embracing digital innovation.

KUWAIT CITY, March 24: The ordinary and extraordinary general assembly of Gulf Bank was held on March 23, 2024, with a quorum of 79.16%. The Board of Directors is recommending a distribution of a cash dividend of 12 fils per share, and to distribute 5% bonus shares was approved during the meeting.

During his speech addressed to the shareholders, Mr. Bader Nasser Al-Kharafi, Chairman of the Board of Directors at Gulf Bank said: "I am proud of Gulf Bank's excellent financial results for the year 2023, achieving the highest level of net profits during the past decade. The increase in profitability was matched with an increase in dividends cash distributions to 12%, accompanied by bonus shares distributions of 5%."

He mentioned that the Bank is reaping the benefits of its Kuwait focused strategy. It is steadily advancing towards its strategic objectives of delivering unparalleled banking services to customers, enhancing operational efficiencies, and upholding financial transparency and governance principles. These efforts are firmly rooted within the Bank's commitment to providing sustainable value to all stakeholders over the long run.

He added: "We are working hard to strengthen our systems and policies to ensure we achieve the highest standards of financial performance, and to remain at the forefront in providing innovative and reliable banking services. Stressing that the Bank will continue to achieve outstanding results and remarkable financial stability."

He continued: "The performance we have demonstrated over the past years highlights the trust the Bank enjoys in the financial markets and local banking sector, announcing that Gulf Bank is in the process of developing an innovative strategy for the forthcoming years focusing on enhancing financial and operational performance, and providing the best products and services."

Al-Kharafi expressed appreciation to the former Chair of Gulf Bank's Board of Directors, Mr. Jassim Mustafa Boodai, for his valued efforts and leadership, which played a pivotal role in driving exceptional growth across all performance indicators of the Bank. He conveyed his best wishes for Mr. Boodai's and extended his gratitude to all members of the Board of Directors, the executive management, and all employees for their contributions to the Bank's success.

Success Despite Challenges

In his presentation of key performance indicators, the Acting CEO of Gulf Bank, Mr. Waleed Khalid Mandani, stated: "2023 was a successful year for Gulf Bank, full of achievements despite local and regional challenges."

He highlighted the Bank's continuous and steady approach towards exceptional revenue growth and profitability, while maintaining its high assets quality, through controlling non-performing loan ratios at their lowest levels and investing in the development of human capital.

He added: "We have also made significant progress in enhancing cost efficiency through precise evaluation, streamlining processes, and embracing digital innovation. These efforts have had a positive and noticeable impact on returns to our investors and delivered excellent services to our customers, thereby solidifying Gulf Bank's leading position in the local banking sector."

Financial Indicators

On a related note, Mandani outlined the key financial indicators for Gulf Bank during the year 2023, noting that the Bank achieved a 15% growth in net profits to reach KD 71.2 million, compared to KD 61.8 million in 2022. Earnings per share also increased by 13% to 21 fils, while cash distributions increased from 10 fils per share in 2022 to 12 fils in 2023, with a payout ratio of 57% of net profit, alongside a 5%



Bader Nasser Al-Kharafi with members of the Board of Directors and executive management officials.



Bader Nasser Al-Kharafi, chairing the General Assembly.



Some of the attendees to the General Assembly.

A new study links climate shocks to inflation

Higher temps mean higher food and other prices

FRANKFURT, March 24, (AP): Food prices and overall inflation will rise as temperatures climb with climate change, a new study by an environmental scientist and the European Central Bank found.

Looking at monthly price tags of food and other goods, temperatures and other climate factors in 121 nations since 1996, researchers calculate that "weather and climate shocks" will cause the cost of food to rise 1.5 to 1.8 percentage points annually within a decade or so, even higher in already hot places like the Middle East, according to a study in Thursday's journal *Communications, Earth and the Environment*.

And that translates to an increase in overall inflation of 0.8 to 0.9 percentage points by 2035, just caused by climate change extreme weather, the study said.

Those numbers may look small, but to banks like the U.S. Federal Reserve that fight inflation, they are significant, said study lead author Max Kotz, a climate scientist at the Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research in Germany.

"The physical impacts of climate change are going to have a persistent effect on inflation," Kotz said. "This is really from my perspective another example of one of the ways in which climate change can undermine human welfare, economic welfare."

And by 2060, the climate-triggered part of inflation should grow, with global food prices predicted to increase 2.2 to 4.3 percentage points annually, the study said. That translates to a 1.1 to 2.2 percentage point increase in overall inflation.

Gernot Wagner, a climate economist at Columbia University's business school who wasn't part of the research, said what he calls "climateflation" is "all too real and the numbers are rather striking."

Kotz and European Bank economists looked at 20,000 data points to find a real world causal link between extreme weather, especially heat, and rising prices. They then looked at what's projected in the future for climate change and saw sticker shock.

Usually when economists talk inflation and climate change, it's about rising energy prices in response to efforts to curb warming, but that's only part of the problem, Kotz said. "There are these productivity shocks that we know about from climate change, from the weather phenomena caused by climate change, from heat waves and so forth to reduce agricultural productivity," Kotz said. "Those also then have a knock-on effect on food inflation, on headline inflation."

The study points to 2022's European heat wave as a good example. The high heat cut food supplies, causing food prices to rise two-thirds of a percentage point and overall inflation to jump about one-third of a percentage point, Kotz said. Prices rose even higher in Romania, Hungary and parts of southern Europe.

"I find the main result on the historic relationship between regional temperature anomalies and national inflation to be credible," said Francesco Moore, an environmental economist at the University of California, Davis who wasn't part of the study. "The findings are important. Price variability in essential goods like food is very painful to consumers."

Kotz said the analysis found the inflationary pressure on food and other prices is worse in areas and seasons that are hotter. So Europe and North America may not be hit as hard as the Global South, which could afford it less, he said.

Applications for U.S. unemployment benefits dip to 210,000, another sign the job market is strong

WASHINGTON, March 24, (AP): The number of Americans signing up for unemployment benefits fell slightly last week, another sign that the labor market remains strong and most workers enjoy extraordinary job security.

The Labor Department reported Thursday that jobless claims dipped by 2,000 to 210,000. The four-week average of claims, which smooths out week-to-week ups and downs, rose by 2,500 to 211,250.

Overall, 1.8 million Americans were collecting unemployment benefits the week that ended March 9, up a modest 4,000 from the week before.

Applications for unemployment benefits are viewed as a proxy for layoffs and a sign of where the job market is headed. Despite high-profile job cuts at tech companies such as Google parent Alphabet, eBay and Cisco Systems, overall layoffs remain below pre-pandemic levels. The unemployment rate, 3.9% in February, has come in under 4% for 25 straight months, longest such streak since the 1960s.

The economy and the job market, supported by consumer spending, have proven resilient even though the Federal Reserve raised interest rates 11 times in 2022 and 2023 in an effort to combat inflation.

tion that flared up in 2021. Inflation has come down from a four-decade high 9.1% in June 2022 to 3.2% in February - but remains above the central bank's 2% target.

Hiring has slowed from the breakneck pace of three years ago but remains strong: Employers added a record 604,000 jobs a month in 2021, 377,000 in 2022 and 251,000 last year. In February, job creation rose unexpectedly to 275,000.

"Overall, layoffs remain at low levels," said Rubeeela Farooqi, chief U.S. economist at High Frequency Economics. "We expect job growth to slow somewhat but the unemployment rate to remain low this year."

The combination of easing inflation and a sturdy economy has raised hopes that the Fed can manage a so-called soft landing and tame price increases without tipping the economy into a recession. On Wednesday, the Fed signaled that it still expects to reverse policy and cut rates three times this year - a sign of confidence in the progress being made against inflation.

Egypt increases the prices of fuel

CAIRO, March 24, (AP): The Egyptian government raised fuel prices on Friday in a move that is bound to exacerbate inflationary pressures on an already-struggling population.

The new prices were announced on the Cabinet's Facebook page and came into effect Friday morning. The price of diesel, the main fuel for transport of people and goods, rose from 8.5 Egyptian pounds (\$0.18) to 10 pounds (\$0.21) per liter.

Egypt, a net importer of energy, increased the price of 95 octane gasoline to 13.5 Egyptian pounds (\$0.29) per liter from 12.5 pounds (\$0.27).

The government said the hikes resulted from the increased cost of importing energy because of the depreciation of the local currency and the global surge in energy prices following the turmoil in the Red Sea.

On March 6, Egypt's central bank announced the adoption of a market-based exchange rate after nearly a year of defending an over-valued local currency, which inadvertently invigorated a parallel market. The pound's official rate fell from nearly 31 to 51 per U.S. dollar before appreciating by nearly 10% in recent weeks as the banking sector began receiving large inflows of foreign currency, according to the government.



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bonus share distribution.

He pointed out that the total loans and advances increased by 1% to KD 5.5 billion in 2023, with an increase of KD 68 million compared to 2022. Asset quality remained strong, with non-performing loans at 1.2%, supported by substantial coverage at 466%. Additionally, total credit provisions ended 2023 at KD 312 million with excess provisioning level above and beyond what is required by the IFRS9 accounting requirements by KD 125 million.

Furthermore, the regulatory capital adequacy ratio increased from 16.4% in 2022 to 18% in 2023, exceeding the minimum regulatory requirement of 14%. Mandani noted that Gulf Bank holds an "A" rating from the three major credit rating agencies.

April 8, 2024 Record Date for Cash Dividend Distribution Shareholders registered in the bank's records as of the record date, April 8, 2024, are eligible to receive cash dividends, with distribution set for April 18, 2024.

Recognition

Mr. Bader Al-Kharafi stated: "On behalf of the Board of Directors, I would like to express my appreciation to the Central Bank of Kuwait, the Capital Markets Authority, and the Ministry of Commerce and Industry for their relentless efforts in supporting and enhancing the Kuwaiti banking sector. Additionally, I extend my thanks to all our customers, partners, and shareholders for their trust and support."

Eco-Friendly Branch Network

Gulf Bank launched its first eco-friendly branch in Sabah Al-Ahmad residential area, marking the beginning of a comprehensive network transition towards sustainability. This initiative aligns with the bank's ongoing implementation plan, reflecting its commitment to embedding sustainability principles. Gulf Bank is confident that integrating environmental, social, and governance (ESG) standards into its practices and activities will enhance the customers' experience and promote sustainable products and services in the market.

Prestigious Awards

During 2023, Gulf Bank was recognized by several prestigious organizations. Gulf Bank was awarded

with "Best Prepaid Card Program in Kuwait" award for 2023 during the Mastercard MENA East Business Forum, for the Gulf Bank Mastercard Prepaid Card. In addition, Gulf Bank was awarded two awards for "Best Training and Development" and "Excellence in Diversity and Inclusion" by the Middle East and North Africa Human Resources Management Summit 2023 signifying Gulf Bank's outstanding efforts in enhancing its employees' skills and achievements in promoting sustainability principles within the workplace. Furthermore, Gulf Bank was awarded "The Prestigious Excellence in Data Innovation" award by the 2023 Finnovex Awards Summit in recognition of its excellence in leveraging data to drive transformative change and create new opportunities in the banking industry.

Bank pursues its mission with children to help them overcome their pain and shine again

NBK shares Gergeean happy moments with children at NBK Hospital

KUWAIT CITY, March 24: On the occasion of the holy month of Ramadan, National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) held its annual Gergeean event at NBK Specialty Hospital and Stem Cell Therapy Unit, at Al Sabah Medical district, to celebrate with the children the happy moments of Gergeean and present them with felicitations and gifts.

Ms. Shaikha Al Bahar, NBK Group Deputy Chief Executive Officer, along with NBK Public Relations and NBK Family shared happy moments with children.

NBK has always considered supporting the children an essential part of its social and community outreach. Sharing with these children residing at NBK Hospital major social and religious occasions come as part of an extensive social outreach program specifically mapped out and implemented by NBK.

NBK's visit to the hospital was emotional and overwhelming for both the children and NBK Team. It is a well rooted tradition that has been carried out by NBK each year in its efforts to continuously have an active role in the Kuwaiti society.

NBK Children's Hospital stands as a landmark for the bank's social initiatives towards children. NBK expanded the hospital's capacity and opened recently the only Stem Cell Therapy Unit for children in Kuwait, further expanding its hospital's ability to treat children with cancer and blood diseases. Recently, NBK donated KD 13 million to the ministry of health to build a new full equipped medical building to increase the hospital's capacity.

Helping and supporting children and their families are integral parts of the Bank's culture and practices that reflect its deep commitment to its corporate social responsibility.

Since its establishment, NBK has been at the forefront of supporting Kuwait's community through a range of education, health, sports and social initiatives. The establishment of NBK Children Hospital at Al Sabah Medi-



Shaikha Al Bahar and Hospital Director Dr. Ali Mulla Ali during a visit to the bank to participate in the Gergeean celebration.



cal Area stands as one of many NBK initiatives for children.

NBK has undertaken several initiatives to support the healthcare sector in Kuwait, including the establishment of NBK's Children's Hospital at Al Sabah Medical Area, which provides medical care to underprivileged children. The hospital houses a number of clinics specialized in leukemia treatments, neurology, psychiatry and pediatrics as well as surgeries and operating theatres.

In line with NBK Children Hospital's strategy to provide integrated care for patients, the hospital's management embeds the wellbeing of children and their families as a key part of the treatment programs and healthcare services. To this end, the hospital organizes many various activities to ensure continuous communication with patients and their families, as well as to raise patients' satisfaction and encourage them to socialize and distract from the pains of treatment.

NBK has also provided an indoor cinema for inpatient children to watch their favorite movies with their sib-



On Mondays of every week all year round, the hospital holds a fun activity for children treated at NBK's Specialized Hospital for Children, including inpatients and outpatients visiting the hospital for the necessary medical examinations to follow up on their health conditions.

NBK has also provided an indoor cinema for inpatient children to watch their favorite movies with their sib-



lings. NBK also organizes 'I Dream to Be' program, which is the first of its kind for children in Kuwait hospitals who are facing life-threatening conditions. The initiative helps the children realize their 'dreams' in an effort to improve their emotional and psychological wellbeing and help them fight the diseases. Through this program NBK helped many patients realize their

dreams over the past years. The hospital also provides a number of integrated social programs for children and their families as well as the medical staff to ensure an integrated benefit for all. This includes including organizing weekly entertainment activities and the selection of "champion of the week", in addition to choosing "the nurse of the month". The hospital also organizes regular activities



including "reading corner", library, reading sessions, visits and entertainment activities. This comes within the endeavors to support and care not only for children during their treatment journey, but also for the attending medical staff.

Hundreds of vehicles visited Zain HQ in Shuwaikh to join the fun

Zain brings back drive-thru Gergeean celebration

KUWAIT CITY, March 24: Zain has brought back its highly anticipated drive-thru Gergeean celebration in collaboration with Wainkoum for the second year running. Hundreds of vehicles visited Zain's headquarters in Shuwaikh to join the one-of-a-kind celebration of the much-cherished local tradition of Gergeean (candy distribution).

This event came under the umbrella of Zain's annual Ramadan social campaign, Zain Alshuhoor, which aims at sharing the joys and blessings of the Holy Month with the entire Kuwaiti community, especially with children and young people who shape its most vibrant segment. Ramadan brings a wonderful opportunity to experience local traditions like Gergeean, which the company celebrates every year with a fresh and distinctive approach.

For the second year running, Zain brought back its drive-thru Gergeean celebration at its main headquarters in Shuwaikh, which was widely received by families and children. For two hours straight, hundreds of vehicles visited Zain HQ to join the fun and participate in the many segments the company had prepared. The event, which came in partnership with the creative minds at Wainkoum, is the only of its kind locally and has become a local sensation.

This year, many of Zain's strategic community partners from both the public and private sectors join its annual Ramadan social campaign, Zain Alshuhoor. The campaign features a wide range of humanitarian, charitable, social, religious, health, and sports programs that continue throughout the Holy Month of Ramadan.

Zain Alshuhoor is one of Kuwait's biggest and most successful community programs during the Holy Month. Every year, the company introduces a



Zain's team at the event.



Zain celebrated Gergeean with a fresh and distinctive approach.



Hundreds of vehicles visited Zain HQ in Shuwaikh.

bigger, renewed version of the campaign that expands upon the previous year's initiatives and programs. The campaign strives to share the blessings of this holy month with the entire Kuwaiti people.

Warba announces winners of Al Sunbula weekly draw

KUWAIT CITY, March 24: Warba Bank - the best bank in corporate and investment banking services in Kuwait - announced the winners of the weekly Al Sunbula draws. Warba Bank will continue to hold weekly draws for ten winners of Al Sunbula account, in the presence of a representative of Ministry of Commerce and Industry and Warba Bank employees.

Each of the 10 lucky winners of the Sunbula weekly draw of Warba Bank received KD 1,000, and the winners are: Kafia Attiya Qattan Awad, Malihan Abdul Mohsen Farhan, Salem Mohammed Al-Otaibi, Hussein Abdul Karim bin Ali, Nasser Abdul Ghaffar Mohammed Al-Awadi, Eman Essa Ghuloum Al-Yousifi, Falah Bardi Mnnahi Al-Mtouwta, Waleed Faisal Abdul Aziz Al-Shemmari, Ahmed Talib Mulla Ali Al-Mesri, and Mutrek Zayed Dawwas Al-Ajmi.

As for the Sunbula account, it is the ideal choice for all those wishing to save money and achieve appropriate financial returns on their accounts at the same time, in addition to the opportunity to win cash prizes throughout the year.

Regarding the conditions, Mr. Ahmed M. Al-Mutawa, Area Manager Retail Banking Group said: "KD 100 is now required to enter the weekly Sunbula draws and major draws, and the client still gets one chance for every KD 10 in the account, and the chances are counted according to the lowest balance in the account during the month. Therefore, a full month must have passed in the account to qualify for the weekly draw, and two full months for the major draws to count the chances. There are no restrictions or limits for



Ahmed Al Mutawa

withdrawal and deposit, the higher the deposited amount, the greater the client's chances to win".

Warba Bank launched its latest banking solutions service, "Customer Onboarding", in accordance with the terms of its ambitious five-year strategy, which enables non-Warba Bank clients to apply for opening a Sunbula account in an easy digital way via the Bank's website without the need to visit any of the Bank's branches, and within only five minutes - through the new and unique automated system used to enable this service - new clients will be able to complete the request to open an account at any time and any place.

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.

Company soars high with achievements, through efforts of its employees

Kuwait Airways hosts its annual Ramadan Ghabqqa

KUWAIT CITY, March 24: As part of its annual customary events and initiatives, and within the framework of strengthening relations among its employees, Kuwait Airways hosted its annual Ramadan Ghabqqa held under the patronage and presence of Kuwait Airways Chairman, Captain Abdulmohsen Salem Al-Fagaan and the company's Chief Executive Officer, Captain Ahmad M. Alkrebbani. The event also had the attendance of the former Chairman, Captain Sami Al-Nisf, numerous officials, and employees.

The Ghabqqa held at the Kuwait Airways headquarters is part of the company's initiatives to enhance social communication among employees and strengthen relations between them, bearing witness to the spirit of friendship, and unity of being one family. The celebration is also exceptional as it coincides with the 70th anniversary of the establishment of Kuwait Airways. Through the event, the company also aims at fostering and enhancing a positive and productive team spirit, in addition to contributing and consolidating relations between the members of the Blue Bird family.

In his opening speech to the employees at the Ghabqqa event, Kuwait Airways Chairman, Captain Abdulmohsen Al-Fagaan welcomed the attendees and extended his sincere congratulations to those present on the occasion of the holy month of Ramadan. Al-Fagaan stated, "Kuwait Airways recently completed the 70th



Kuwait Airways Chairman, Captain Abdulmohsen Salem Al-Fagaan during his speech.



Kuwait Airways Chairman, Captain Abdulmohsen Salem Al-Fagaan accompanied by Captain Sami Al-Nisf.

anniversary of its establishment. The people of this country have been accustomed to seeing the company soar high in the sky of achievements throughout these eras commencing from its establishment, which has been accomplished with the efforts, and commitment of its employees, thus enabling Kuwait Airways to attain numerous remarkable achievements in the world of aviation."

Al-Fagaan added, "As the national carrier of the State of Kuwait, Kuwait Airways continuously strives to be at the forefront, which the former Board of Directors have endeavored to accomplish, regardless of their circumstances, strategies, and work plans. We are grateful for their endeavours and appreciate their efforts, which is being accomplished today by the Board of Directors, invoking the blessings of God Almighty for further achievement and progress."

Al-Fagaan extended his sincere thanks and gratitude to the company's success partners starting with the Directorate General of Civil Aviation, the Ministry of Interior with its various associated departments, the General Administration of Customs, and Incheon Corporation, who have spared no effort in supporting the national carrier of the State of Kuwait to achieve success and to attain its desired objectives. In addition, he also conveyed his good wishes to everyone for further progress and development under the political leadership.



Kuwait Airways Chairman, Captain Abdulmohsen Salem Al-Fagaan with numerous officials and employees.



Kuwait Airways Chairman, Captain Abdulmohsen Salem Al-Fagaan in a group photo.

Tessa Hulls' 'Feeding Ghosts' chronicles generational trauma

By Donna Edwards

When Tessa Hulls sets out to tell her family's story, she's feeding their ghosts in the best way she's learned how: by pulling them into the light.

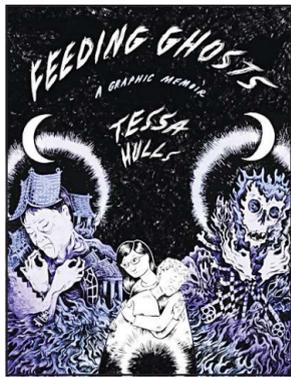
Hulls' graphic memoir "Feeding Ghosts" covers three generations of women, starting with her grandmother, Sun Yi, who herself was once a bestselling author of a memoir. Sun Yi's path wades through a treacherous Chinese history, from the brutal massacre of Chinese in Nanking by Japanese soldiers through her escape to Hong Kong in 1957 — just missing the Great Leap Forward and the mass starvation that came with it. Then, as Sun Yi withdraws into a spiral of hospitalizations and mental illness, the story picks up through Sun Yi's daughter, Rose, until we reach the author herself, Rose's daughter, as she pieces together their past to make better

sense of the reverberating wounds that have threatened to drown each of them in matrilineal succession.

From Sun Yi's roots in China to Tessa Hulls' in California, it's clear the story is going to address generational trauma right out of the gate. But you can rest assured there's a profound sense of closure waiting at the end.

Despite the extreme weight of the story, the density of the historical context and the way every bit of space is utilized to communicate pictorially or verbally, that information is surprisingly digestible — and even nourishing.

With this high level of approachability, Hulls conveys the kind of historical details that turn staggering and unimaginable numbers into a reality you can feel: people eating bark off the trees, then painting over the trees' nakedness when Mao Zedong comes to inspect; bodies left where they died waiting in



This cover image released by Farrar, Straus and Giroux shows "Feeding Ghosts" by Tessa Hulls. (AP)

food lines while grossly inflated reports of crop production greenlight the export of those same basic necessities so desperately needed at home.

Immensely interesting family history aside, Tessa has lived her own exciting life, including a season working at McMurdo Station in Antarctica. Her explosive joy in the freedom of that vastness beams from the page.

The art is simple — cartoons drawn with black strokes on white paper — but what it conveys is so much more intricate. Panels often bleed into one another as if the gutters that divide them are mere suggestions, allowing for layered illustrations rich in metaphor.

Hulls visually represents trauma as ghosts in her bones, emanating from her, her mother and her grandmother, often intermingling like smoke; veins of their shared history branching out from their bodies as a physical representation of

their emotional interconnectivity.

Then there are these beautiful spreads that echo earlier imagery, reverberating without subtlety or fanfare.

As the pieces fall into place and healing and understanding take root, the rib cage once gushing with ghosts now bursts with tree branches reaching toward the sky.

"Feeding Ghosts" is courageously and heartbreakingly bare, and Hulls' attempt to present it all in a subjective manner only heightens the memoir's emotional impact. Her words narrate the story while the art carries the weight of the emotions. And the author pauses more than once to remind the reader that a memoir is curated, and therefore only a slice of the truth. At the same time, hers is deeply grounded in historical fact. Pointing out when she takes artistic license only strengthens the story's trustworthiness. (AP)

Books

Variety



Mark Gatiss poses for a photo during an interview to The Associated Press at a theater, in London, Thursday, March 14, 2024. The turbulent union of actors Richard Burton and Elizabeth Taylor that set gossip columns aflame are the subjects of "The Motive and the Cue," a play that is being broadcast in cinemas in Britain and internationally starting Thursday as part of the National Theatre Live series. The play looks at a famous 1964 production of "Hamlet" that starred Burton and was directed by John Gielgud. Mark Gatiss plays Gielgud in the witty and moving look at fame's fickleness and cost. (AP)

Film

Stage hit depicts Hollywood golden couple

'The Motive and the Cue' hits big screen

LONDON, March 24, (AP): The world has always loved a golden couple, especially when there are hints of trouble in paradise.

Decades before millions tracked every move of Harry and Meghan, William and Kate or Taylor Swift and Travis Kelce, it was the turbulent union of actors Richard Burton and Elizabeth Taylor that set gossip columns aflame.

"In a time when the world was much less connected, they were like gods," said Mark Gatiss, who stars in "The Motive and the Cue," a hit play about Taylor and Burton in their 1960s heyday. "They really were. People hung off their every divorce."

"The Motive and the Cue" has had two sellout runs in London and will be broadcast in cinemas in Britain and internationally starting Thursday as part of the National Theatre Live series.

The play charts the rocky creation of a now-legendary piece of theater, a 1964 Broadway production of "Hamlet" in which Burton played William Shakespeare's tormented prince. The production was a triumph, but it was almost a disaster. Jack Thorne's backstage drama depicts the tensions between Burton, played by Johnny Flynn, and the play's director, John Gielgud, played by Gatiss. Tuppence Middleton forms the third point in the central triangle as Taylor.

Directed by Sam Mendes — returning to his first love, the theater, after a film-dominated period that included James Bond thrillers "Skyfall" and "Spectre" — it's a witty and moving look at fame's fickleness and cost. It shows Taylor and Burton essentially confined to the gilded cage of their New York hotel suite.

The brooding, velvet-voiced Burton was a

megastar but craved artistic credibility. Gielgud, a dashing leading man in the 1920s and 30s, was, Gatiss said, "completely washed up."

"Gielgud was a relic. He did this because it was the best offer he'd had in a long time."

The twist in the tale came in the years that followed. Burton's heavy drinking blighted his career, and he died in 1984 aged 58. Taylor also did her best work when young, married eight times — twice to Burton — and died in 2011.

Career renaissance

Gielgud, meanwhile, had a career renaissance that brought Hollywood fame, an Academy Award — for playing Dudley Moore's butler in "Arthur" — and the status of elder statesman of British drama. He died beloved and lauded in 2000, aged 96.

Gielgud, Burton and Taylor are increasingly figures from history, but the play has struck a chord even with audiences who don't remember them.

"I had two friends come the other day — they'd never heard of any of the principals, incredibly," Gatiss said during an interview in his dressing room at the Noel Coward Theatre. "But they got it, because of what it's about. It's about fame, it's about reputation, it's about legacy, it's about fathers and sons."

It's also a love letter to the theater, especially to "Hamlet," which a caption at the end of the play says has been played by an astonishing 250,000 actors. One of them was Gielgud, who performed the role in the 1930s in the same West End theater where "The Motive and the Cue" is running until March 23.

That coincidence tickles Gatiss, an actor-

writer-director who played the great detective's brother, Mycroft Holmes, in the BBC TV series "Sherlock," which Gatiss created with Steven Moffatt.

He has won rave reviews, and an Olivier Award nomination, for his understated and moving performance as Gielgud — "a mellifluous marvel," according to The Observer; "the performance of his career" in the view of the Daily Telegraph.

If Gielgud was once considered a relic, it's Burton who now seems an icon of a vanished age — one in which a Welsh coal miner's son like him could break into the acting world.

Gatiss' own love of drama was inspired by teenage trips to the theater in Darlington, near his childhood home in northeast England. He worries that a combination of cuts to arts education and the soaring cost of theater tickets is turning acting into a career for the privileged.

He's enthusiastic about NT Live, which lets people see productions for the price of a movie ticket. "The Motive and the Cue" is the 99th production in the series, which began in 2009 and now broadcasts to 700 cinemas around the world. NT Live uses multiple cameras, tracking shots and close-ups to merge the immediacy of live theater and the intimacy of film.

"Access to the arts is becoming so strangled," Gatiss said. "There are a lot of posh actors, in a sort of 'Brideshead' kind of way. It feels like we need a 1960s-type movement of getting working-class voices into the arts."

"The great irony is, theater used to be the great democratizer," he said. "It was as low as you could get. Actors were so disreputable. I think we maybe need to get back to that."

LONDON: Aaron Taylor-Johnson is the latest actor reportedly offered a license to kill and succeed Daniel Craig as the new James Bond.

The "Kick-Ass" star is no stranger to action movies and at 33 is a good age to join the franchise, as producers likely want a 10-year commitment to the role.

Since Craig announced that he was hanging up his tuxedo after five outings as 007 — the last being "No Time to Die" in 2021 — there has been frenzied speculation over which actor will take the coveted role.

Bond producers have not commented on the Taylor-Johnson rumors.

Speculating about the next Bond is a frequent subject (sometimes even before the job is available), leading British actors to adopt various strategies and responses when the topic comes up.

One of the foremost names in the frame over the past few years has been Idris Elba, though producer Barbara Broccoli said in 2022 that the "Luther" star had ruled himself out.

"He apparently has said he's out," she told The Associated Press. "We love Idris and he's been a wonderful friend and we love him as an actor. But I think he feels like a, you know, 10- or 12-year commitment or 15-year commitment might be a bit too much for him."

"You know, it's a rumor that's stuck with me," Elba said in 2023. "I think I'm the most famous 'Bond' actor that never actually played the part. So, what can I say? I'll take that."

Elba has high profile fans including Matt Damon. "I think he's brilliant. I'll watch him in anything and he makes everything he's in better and he would make that franchise better."

"Inception" and "Dunkirk" star Tom Hardy was touted as the next Bond back in 2015, though he claimed to have "heard nothing" about press speculation.

"I think answering something

like that means immediately you're out of the running. So there goes my spot," he joked.

Luke Evans, who has starred in a wide variety of movies and TV series from "The Hobbit" to "Beauty and the Beast" to "Nine Perfect Strangers," felt his dream of playing Bond has slipped away.



Craig



Taylor-Johnson

"By the time they cast it again, I'll be too old," the 44-year-old actor told The Associated Press in 2022.

Richard Madden brushed off rumors about his involvement in Bond at a press conference for "Rocket Man" in Cannes back in 2019.

"It's very flattering to be

involved in that conversation at all. But it's all just talk and I'm sure next week you'll be someone different," he laughed.

Other names connected with the role in recent years include Regé-Jean Page, who shot to fame in "Bridgerton" as the Duke of Hastings, Theo James, who earned an Emmy nomina-

tion for his role in "The White Lotus," and Henry Golding, star of "Crazy Rich Asians."

Every time Golding has appeared on a red carpet wearing a tuxedo, rumors swirl about him being the next 007, but he remains tight-lipped.

"It's a cultural icon. That's all I can say," he smiled. (AP)

Features

ARABIC TIMES

MONDAY, MARCH 25, 2024

Music

Exploring sacred

Hayter's bold 'Saved!' redefines boundaries

LOS ANGELES, March 24, (AP): The bones that embody an album can take many shapes. They may tell a story, follow a genre or soundtrack a film.

But thanks to her interest in religion and her education in art, literature and linguistics, **Kristin Hayter** found herself in a unique position to embark on a kind of anthropological experiment through her latest album.



Hayter

Released under the name Reverend Kristin Michael Hayter, "Saved!" is a concept album which explores a fictionalized conversion to Pentecostalism.

"When people ask me like, 'What is it?' I'm like - I honestly don't know what to say," she says of her album, ahead of the second of two recent performances at the Masonic Lodge at Los Angeles' Hollywood Forever Cemetery. "It's supposed to sound kind of like found sound, field recordings, that kind of thing."

Although not attempting to portray a genuine conversion or create a piece of historical research, Hayter, who previously recorded under the moniker Lingua Ignota, used the album to meditate on how people tell stories about their perceived realities. As she made it, she found herself thinking about the concept of documentary storytelling and "what is edited out and what we choose to leave in."

"Saved!" is made up of a combination of recognizable Christian hymns, including "Nothing but the Blood of Jesus" and "How Can I Keep from Singing," as well as original and sometimes more subversive tracks like "All of My Friends Are Going to Hell."

That range reflects Hayter's following, from devout Christians - including a snake handler from West Virginia who extended to her an open invitation - to those vehemently opposed to religion.

"I was expecting more outrage," she said plainly. "But I think there's enough ambiguity in it and the ambiguity is pretty intentional, where I'm not requesting or requiring people to have any kind of particular response. Your experience is going to dictate what you hear."

Powerful voice

To emphasize that "found sound" approach, Hayter recorded in a lo-fi style, often abruptly ending or fading in and out of a song. Hayter's powerful voice, accompanied by her prepared piano, vacillates between beautiful and terrifying in a manner not unlike the way in which she thinks about religion.

"A lot of the language surrounding Christianity really is quite beautiful and poetic but is also, or can also be, pretty horrifying," she said.

But Hayter doesn't just utilize her voice for singing on "Saved!" Woven throughout is her attempt at glossolalia - speaking in tongues - a defining feature of Pentecostalism, according to Grant Wacker, a historian at Duke Divinity School who specializes in the denomination.

"It's important to understand how fundamental speaking in tongues is to the identity of historic Pentecostals," Wacker said, recalling the pressure he himself witnessed to speak in tongues growing up in the church.

That Hayter turns such a sacred and integral aspect of the faith into a performance, while cultivating conditions that could bring the act of speaking in tongues about, could be taken as disingenuous. But Wacker says similar tactics are frequently employed within the Pentecostal church.

"The pastor would encourage young people - usually teenagers - they'd say 'Well, just start talking faster and faster, and before long, your tongue will just fall into it,'" he said.

Wacker explained that as long as attempts at glossolalia are done in a "worshipful context," tactics can be employed to achieve it. For Hayter, those included sleep deprivation, fasting and listening to others speak in tongues, an idea from her producer and recording engineer, Seth Manchester.

"He was like, 'Well, let's put you in the studio and blast other people speaking in tongues at you for 90 minutes and see what happens,'" she recalled. "What you hear on the record is actually like one unedited portion of maybe two hours total of speaking in tongues."

As is often the case with art, the line between performance and reality is a blurry one for Hayter. While she would by no means describe herself as a Pentecostal, the preparation and research required for the project raised the age-old question in the study of religion: whether an insider, outsider or both can study a tradition.

She spent much of the pandemic researching the denomination as a clear outsider, meticulously procuring and sifting through countless Gospel tracts and attending Pentecostal worship services behind a distant screen on Zoom. But her research bled into practice when it came time to record the album and experiment with what can be considered spiritual disciplines.

"It was really pretty dissociative. I was able to just kind of let my brain go and let language and the brain kind of act independently or something. I'm not entirely sure what happened. But it definitely felt like releasing something," she said.

Hayter attended parochial school as a kid and sang as a cantor in the Catholic Church. Though she was for years a devout atheist after denouncing her faith as a teenager, Hayter has long been drawn to religious concepts, imagery and iconography.

"I think the ideas of things that are absolutely evil or absolutely good are really interesting to me," she said.

Notorious

Across her chest, she is tattooed with the name "Caligula" - the notorious first century Roman emperor who - though the veracity of historical accounts is questionable - is often associated with religious persecution and sexual deviancy. Hayter's previous recording name was an ode to the 12th century Benedictine mystic and saint, Hildegard Von Bingen, an epochal figure in the history of glossolalia.

Hayter is hardly the first musician in recent memory to commit to religious extremes for the sake of art - Grimes, also inspired by Von Bingen, famously locked herself in her room for weeks to make the album "Visions." But Hayter is also cognizant of the ways in which her academic background - she has a master of fine arts from Brown University - make her distinct.

"It's just the way that my brain works," she said. "I do like this period of research and then this period of doing the thing and being kind of like an insurgent within the thing. And it becomes like a weird life-filling situation, an obsession."

Calling it an obsession might not be an exaggeration. She co-founded her current label, Perpetual Flame Ministries, ahead of the album's release. And once she settled on adding "reverend," Hayter decided she might as well get ordained in the Universal Life Church.



This image released by Warner Bros. Pictures shows Godzilla, left, and Kong in a scene from "Godzilla x Kong: The New Empire." (AP)

Film

Director Wingard's childhood dream comes alive

Titans star in 'Godzilla x Kong: The New Empire'

NEW YORK, March 24, (AP): There was no question who the stars were on "Godzilla x Kong: The New Empire." It wasn't Rebecca Hall, Brian Tyree Henry, Dan Stevens or any of the humans. As actors have known since the early days of cinema, the star is the one with their character's name in the title, even if in this case they never actually, technically, came to set.

"They are the stars of the movie," Hall told The Associated Press. "We're the scale."

Or, as Stevens put it: "We're just the side show."

The film, in theaters everywhere March 29, is a sequel to "Godzilla vs. Kong," the 2021 showdown between the 393-foot Godzilla and 337-foot Kong. It's also continuation of Legendary's Monsterverse that goes back to 2014's "Godzilla" and 2017's "Kong: Skull Island." If there seems to be an inherent stakes issue of "where do you go after the versus," for filmmaker Adam Wingard the path seemed clear. He heard the screams and cheers in the theater when the giants battled Mechagodzilla together: For the sequel, he knew they needed to team up.

"The last film on the surface looks like an everything in the kitchen sink type movie: We battle all over the world, we do all these crazy things. But there's still so much left to do," Wingard said. "These movies can hold up with the Titans, the monsters, as the point of view."

"Godzilla x Kong" contains long sequences of dialogue-free storytelling focused only on the monsters - especially Kong, who has found his home in Hollow Earth but is a little lonely. He also introduces several new titans, including Skar King (318 feet tall), and a mini Kong named Suko (149 feet tall).

For Wingard, it felt both groundbreaking to do on a film of this scale and also like a lifetime dream come true. It is, he said, the movie he wanted to see at age 10, when he first fell for Godzilla films.

"The whole drive I had for myself as a filmmaker in making this movie was trying to appeal to the inner 10-year-old in me," Wingard said. "Because that was my initiation into the whole thing I think I'm still sort of aiming towards that kid, trying to show him a good time."

Loving Godzilla movies and making one is a different proposition entirely. Just ask the actors.

"The first movie I didn't know what to expect. I didn't know how big the movie actually was," said Kaylee Hotelle, who is deaf, through an interpreter. "And at the end I thought to myself, oh, that was cool."

She was only 10 during the first movie and 15 while filming the second, working most closely with Hall, who plays her adoptive mother.

"There was a very steep learning curve that she completely scaled in no time at all," Hall said. "In this one she was that much older and wiser and smart to the whole thing."

Hall was also excited to finally share some scenes (and dialogue) with Henry, back as the monster fanboy/conspiracy blogger Bernie Hayes.

"I remember on the first one I was quite sad that Brian and I only had one day of filming together for the end scene," Hall recalled.

Henry agreed, saying "there was a lot of play that we wanted to have on this one" and they knew they were in good hands with Wingard, who is a "kid at heart." On Halloween, he came to set dressed as 1930s director.

The newcomer was Stevens, who starred in Wingard's 2014 thriller "The Guest." His character, Trapper, is a Titan veterinarian in a Hawaiian shirt.

Character

"I think his pitch to me was a particular scene where my character gets to fly this crazy spaceship through electrical buzzing creatures, saying cool lines," Stevens said. "I was like, 'that sounds great.'"

Henry said the character was a bit like Patrick Swayze's in "Road House."

Stevens added: "With a sprinkling of Ace Ventura in there."

They kept one another sane on the green or blue screen days of filming with a guy with a foam finger or a tennis ball on a stick to help get their eyes looking in the right place. All agree that "Kong neck" (getting your neck at the proper angle to gaze upon the titans for extended periods of time) can be a real struggle.

And just as actors don't quite formally train for "Kong neck," directors also don't get instructions on just how to make a movie like this. Wingard said by the end of the first, he'd just started to feel comfortable.

"You can read every back issue of Cinefex Magazine that exists, but until you're actually making one of these things and learning how to frame eyelines for characters looking up at 300-foot-tall monsters and trying to get emotional reactions out of that? There's only so many ways to create these monsters too," he said. "Almost half of it is fully animated sequences. It's like you're making an animated film, it's just hyper realistic."

That's part of the reason why he

made sure to take his actors and crew to real locations every chance they got, including the Daintree Rainforest in Australia. There were giant anacondas and cassowaries around, but the biggest anxiety was doing any harm to the environment. Many meetings were had about not touching anything, which is especially funny for a Godzilla movie. But it was all worth it.

"It's so easy to shoot everything in front of a green screen," he said. "But at the end of the day there's an artificiality to that."

Hall and the other actors noted how important the sets and locations were to the experience - especially with two no-show stars who had to be added later.

"Kong and Godzilla wouldn't show up to set, so you had to make believe," Hall said.

"Stayed in their trailer all day," Stevens joked.

If it seems like there's a lot of "Godzilla" in theaters lately, it's true. "Godzilla Minus One," the first Toho Godzilla film since 2016's "Shin Godzilla," just won the Oscar for best visual effects. It also did well in U.S. theaters in December and January, but had to make a graceful exit by February because of the licensing deal with Legendary.

That doesn't mean there's ill will between the productions. "Godzilla Minus One" director Takashi Yamazaki and Wingard have geeked out together about Kaiju and how their cats inspired their Godzillas. But he's also taken some time before "Godzilla Minus One" gets a streaming release stateside, at least until the dust settles from "Godzilla x Kong."

Warner Bros., which has released several hits in recent months including "Wonka" and "Dune: Part Two," is rolling "Godzilla x Kong" out nationwide and exclusively in theaters. Like the first "Dune," "Godzilla vs. Kong" was part of the company's 2021 day-and-date release strategy. And yet it still did business, both in theaters and on streaming where it was for a time the streamer's biggest hit.

Wingard liked being part of that moment when theater owners were reassured that audiences still wanted to come to the cinemas. But he's excited to just get a normal release this time, without the pandemic caveat. Both Godzilla and Kong are some of the oldest movie stars still in action, after all.

"It's so massive in scale. It's so grand," Henry said. "This is the kind of movie you go to the theaters for because you don't want to be the only one Kong necking."



Beyoncé performs at the Wolstein Center, Nov. 4, 2016, in Cleveland, Ohio. Beyoncé is full of surprises - and on March 12, 2024, dropped yet another one. Her forthcoming album has a name: Act II: Cowboy Carter. (AP)



Vicente



Piccioli

Variety

UTAH: Joana Vicente is stepping down as the CEO of the Sundance Institute, the nonprofit behind the annual Sundance Film Festival, after two and a half years.

"She has been a true advocate for independent storytellers, and I know she will continue to positively impact this community," said Sundance Institute Board Chair Ebs Burnough in a statement released Friday.

Vicente oversaw some of the Sundance Institute's most challenging years during the pandemic, when the festival went virtual and later came back as a hybrid version.

Amanda Kelso, a member of the board, has been appointed acting CEO, the organization said.

Kelso will transition into the role in April and Vicente will continue to advise through June. She comes to the position with 25 years of experience in communications and technology, including serving as the managing director of Google Creative Lab.

"I believe in the power of Sundance and its ongoing impact in nurturing our mission-based work," Kelso said in a statement.

The Sundance Institute runs programs year round for emerging artists, including directing and screenwriting labs and other artist programs that have helped filmmakers like Ryan Coogler, Chloé Zhao, the Daniels, Paul Thomas Anderson, Quentin Tarantino, Darren Aronofsky and Nita DaCosta early in their careers. (AP)

MILAN: Valentino's longtime creative director, Pierpaolo Piccioli, on Friday announced his departure after 25 years at the storied Italian fashion house.

In an emotional statement shared on Instagram, Piccioli reflected on his 25-year tenure with the brand, thanking co-founders Valentino Garavani and Giancarlo Giammetti and the team that contributed to the brand's success during his time. The designer, known for infusing Valentino with contemporary romance and bold creativity, will leave as the brand prepares to usher in a "new creative organization."

Joining Valentino in 1999 as an accessory designer with Maria Grazia Chiuri, Piccioli ascended to co-creative director in 2008. Piccioli's solo reign began in 2016 after Chiuri's departure to Dior, marking a period of profound influence on Valentino's aesthetic and global brand image.

Piccioli, a native of Nettuno with a background in literature from Rome University, started his fashion career with an internship at Brunello Cucinelli before moving on to a crucial role at Fendi with Chiuri. Their partnership proved foundational, propelling Valentino into a new era where traditional charm met contemporary edge - a transition epitomized by the introduction of the now-iconic Rockstud motif. (AP)

LONDON: The online auction of a trove of letters, photos and other items that Pattie

Boyd, who was at the heart of the Swinging 60s, concluded Friday - and it's safe to say that it really surpassed all expectations.

Christie's, the world-renowned auction

house, said its online sale of The Pattie Boyd Collection sold for around 2.82 million pounds (\$3.6 million), or more than seven times the pre-sale high estimate of

around 380,000 pounds.

The collection, which went on public display at Christie's London headquarters last Friday, provided a glimpse into the heart of the 1960s and 70s counterculture.

The 111 lots up for sale included affectionate letters from both her iconic rock icon husbands George Harrison and Eric Clapton, alongside clothing, jewelry, drawings and photographs - some of Boyd, and some by her.

"I am completely blown away by the enthusiasm of international bidders for these special treasures that I have always loved," Boyd said. "I am so happy that new hearts will now enjoy them, as they enter into their next 'chapters.' I am lucky that my life today continues to bring me joy and different adventures - I would encourage people to follow their passions and live their lives with gusto!"

Boyd, 79, is famous as a musicians' muse, inspiration for The Beatles' song "Something," composed for her by Harrison, as well as for Clapton's scorching "Layla" and sweet "Wonderful Tonight."

The most astonishing individual sale was the original artwork chosen by Clapton for the cover of the Derek and the Dominos 1970 album "Layla and Other Assorted Love Songs," which sold for just under 2 million pounds (\$2.5 million), 33 times the pre-sale high estimate. (AP)



This image released by Warner Bros. Pictures shows Chris Hemsworth in a scene from "Furiosa: A Mad Max Saga." George Miller's eagerly awaited follow-up to "Mad Max: Fury Road," will make its world premiere at the Cannes Film Festival in May. (AP)

Balancing tradition and emissions

India's dairy farmers caught between livelihoods and climate action

BENGALURU, India, March 24, (AP): Abinaya Tamilarasu said her four cows are part of the family. She has a degree in commerce from a local college, but prefers being home milking cows and tending to her family's land.

"Our family cannot let farming go, it's a way of life for us," said the 28-year-old, who lives on her family farm in India's southern Tamil Nadu state. Even when she could be making more money elsewhere, she said she's "still happy we have our cows."

India is the world's largest milk producer, and is home to 80 million dairy farmers who made 231 million tons of milk last year. Many farmers, like Tamilarasu, only have a few cows, but the industry as a whole has 303 million bovine cattle like cows and buffalo, making it the largest contributor to planet-warming methane emissions in the country. The federal government has made some positive steps to reduce methane, but wants to focus emissions cuts elsewhere, like by moving to renewable energy, saying most methane emissions are a fact of life. But experts say the industry can and should make more reductions that can quickly limit warming.

India is the third largest emitter of methane in the world, according to figures published earlier this month by the International Energy Agency, and livestock are responsible for about 48% of all methane emissions in India, the vast majority from cattle. Methane is a potent planet-warming gas that can trap more than 80 times more heat in the atmosphere in the short term than carbon dioxide.

The Indian government has not joined any global pledges to cut methane emissions, which many see as low-hanging fruit for climate solutions, as methane emissions only last in the atmosphere for about a dozen years, compared to CO2 that can linger for a couple of hundred years.

But there's some work on methane reduction in agriculture on the national level: The government's National Dairy Development Board, which works with over 17 million farmers across the country, is looking into genetic improvement programs to provide more nutritious feed to livestock which would make cows more productive, meaning each farmer would need fewer cows to produce the same amount of milk. Studies by the NDDB show that emissions are reduced by as much as 15% when a balanced diet is provided to the animals.

The board is also looking into reducing crop burning, a high-emitting practice that some farmers use to clear their lands, by feeding those crops to cows.

"Climate-smart dairying is the need of the hour," said Meenesh Shah, the board's chairman.



Shah

Vineet Kumar, from the New Delhi-based Centre for Science and Environment, agreed that good quality feed can help lower emissions. He also said encouraging more local breeds that emit less can help. "These solutions can be a win-win for everyone," he said.

But Thanammal Ravichandran, a veterinarian based in the southern Indian city of Coimbatore, noted that there's currently a shortage of feed in India, so farmers give their cattle whatever they can, which is mostly lower quality and higher emitting.

"Farmers are also not able to invest in better quality feed for their cattle," she said. To get better, and more affordable feed, dairy farmers need more government support, she said.

Whatever measures are taken to reduce methane emissions, experts note that it should have minimal impact on farmers' livelihoods, and should account for the ways people raise their livestock.

"Livestock have been closely integrated within the Indian farming system," said Kumar, meaning any drastic changes to farming methods would have severe effects on farmers. He added that efforts to reduce emissions shouldn't reduce the use of cow manure as fertilizer on India's farms, as chemical fertilizers emit nitrous oxide, an even more potent greenhouse gas.

Methane emissions

But looking at India's methane emissions as a whole could provide some more obvious solutions to slashing the gas, said Bandish Patel, an energy analyst at the climate thinktank Ember. Focusing on the energy sector is an easy win for targeted reduction of methane emissions, he said.

"You look at agriculture, those emissions are very dispersed in nature, whereas, with oil, gas and coal mining, there are very pointed sources from which you can basically reduce methane going forward," he said.

Shah from the NDDB added that India's high agricultural emissions must be considered in the context of the country being home to the world's largest cattle population, the largest producer of milk, and the largest rice exporter, as rice production also produces significant methane emissions.

"In this light, India's agriculture sector emissions must be considered significantly low," Shah said. Because of its large population, India's per capita emissions are well below average.

For dairy farmers like Tamilarasu, better welfare for her cows and programs for farmers to have better practices are welcome, but she won't be leaving her cows for the climate any time soon. She plans to continue dairy farming for the foreseeable future.

"The way we see it, our cows and us support each other. If we can make their lives better, they will make ours better too," she said.



Indian farmer Ram Singh Patel, right, and his wife Kantee Devi take their cattle out in the open in Fatehpur district south of Lucknow, India, Dec. 19, 2020. (AP)

The Conversation

Hidden risks of sweet indulgence

Fan of black licorice? 'Beware' of its potential dangers to your well-being

By Bill Sullivan
Indiana University

The Conversation is an independent and nonprofit source of news, analysis and commentary from academic experts.



Black licorice may look and taste like an innocent treat, but this candy has a dark side. On Sept. 23, 2020, doctors reported that black licorice was the culprit in the death of a 54-year-old man in Massachusetts. How could this be? Overdosing on licorice sounds more like a twisted tale than a plausible fact.

I am a toxicologist and author of the book "Pleased to Meet Me: Genes, Germs, and the Curious Forces That Make Us Who We Are." I have a long-standing interest in how chemicals in food and the environment affect the body and mind.

When something seemingly harmless like licorice is implicated in a death, we are reminded of the famous proclamation by Swiss physician Paracelsus, considered the father of toxicology: "All things are poison, and nothing is without poison; the dosage alone makes it so a thing is not a poison."

The unfortunate man who succumbed to excessive black licorice consumption is not alone. There is a smattering of similar case reports in medical journals in which patients experienced a sudden severe increase in blood pressure, muscle breakdown or even death.

Adverse reactions are most frequently seen in people over the age of 40 who are eating far more black licorice than the average person. In addition, they are usually consuming the product for prolonged periods of time. In the 2020 case, the Massachusetts man had been eating a bag and a half of black licorice every day for three weeks.

Licorice is a flowering plant native to parts of Europe and Asia. Its scientific name, Glycyrrhiza, is derived from the Greek words "glykos" (sweet) and "rhiza" (root). People have long used the aromatic and sweet extract from its root as an herbal remedy for a wide variety of health maladies, from heartburn and stomach issues to sore throats and cough. However, there is insufficient evidence that licorice is effective in treating any medical condition.

Glycyrrhizin, also called glycyrrhizic acid, is the chemical in black licorice that gives the candy its signature flavor, but it also leads to its toxic effects.

Glycyrrhizin mimics aldosterone, a hormone your adrenal glands make when your body needs to retain sodium and excrete potassium. Sodium and potassium work together as a kind of cellular battery that drives communication between nerves and the contraction of muscles. Too much glycyrrhizin upsets the balance of these electrolytes, which can raise blood pressure and disturb the heart's rhythm. Other symptoms of excessive licorice intake include swelling, muscle pain, numbness and headache. Examination of the man who died from consuming too much licorice revealed that he had dangerously low levels of potassium, consistent with glycyrrhizin toxicity.

It should be noted that a number of licorice-based foods

do not contain real licorice but use a flavoring substitute called anise oil, which does not pose the dangers discussed here. In addition, despite its name, red licorice rarely contains licorice extract. Instead, red licorice is infused with chemicals that impart its cherry or strawberry flavor.

Products that contain real licorice are usually labeled as such and list licorice extract or glycyrrhizic acid among the ingredients. Be advised that some products, such as black jelly beans or Good & Plenty, are mixtures of different candies that contain both anise oil and licorice extract.

Glycyrrhizin has the distinct licorice flavor and is 50 times sweeter than sugar. It has been used in other types of candy, soft drinks, tea, Belgian beers, throat lozenges and tobacco. The prevalence of glycyrrhizin can make it challenging to keep track of how much has been consumed, and a combination of these products could trigger adverse effects.

Some people take dietary or health supplements that already contain licorice, which increases the risk of toxic effects from eating black licorice candy. Certain medications such as hydrochlorothiazide are diuretics that cause increased urination, which can lower potassium levels in the body. Glycyrrhizin also lowers potassium levels, further disrupting the balance of electrolytes, which can produce muscle cramps and irregular heart rhythms.

Preexisting conditions

People with certain preexisting conditions are more susceptible to black licorice overdose. For example, patients who already have low potassium levels, high blood pressure or heart arrhythmia are likely to have greater sensitivity to the effects of excessive licorice. Those with liver or kidney deficiencies will also retain glycyrrhizin in their bloodstream for longer periods, increasing their risk of experiencing adverse effects.

If you're a fan of black licorice, there is no need to ban it from your pantry. Eaten in small quantities from time to time, licorice poses no significant threat to otherwise healthy adults and children.

But it is advisable to monitor your intake. A 2024 study conducted in Sweden found that daily ingestion of 100 mg of licorice, which is considered a safe amount, for two weeks was sufficient to raise blood pressure by an average of 3.1 mm Hg. A quarter of the participants also had elevated blood levels of a protein that is made when the heart is working harder.

Be sure to remind your kids that candy is a "sometimes food," especially black licorice. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration had issued warnings about the rare but serious effects of too much black licorice, advising that people avoid eating more than 2 ounces of black licorice a day for two weeks or longer. The agency advises that if you have been eating a lot of black licorice and experience an irregular heart rhythm or muscle weakness, stop eating it immediately and contact your health care provider.

Some scientists have further cautioned against the routine use of licorice in the form of a dietary supplement or tea for its alleged health benefits, including the treatment of cough associated with COVID-19 or other respiratory infections. A review article from 2012 warned that "the daily consumption of licorice is never justified because its benefits are minor compared to the adverse outcomes of chronic consumption." (AP)

Turkiye to launch locally made satellite in July

Russian Soyuz rocket with 3 astronauts blasts off to International Space Station

MOSCOW, March 24, (Agencies): A Russian Soyuz rocket carrying three astronauts to the International Space Station blasted off Saturday, two days after its launch was aborted at the last minute.

The spacecraft carrying NASA astronaut Tracy Dyson, Russian Oleg Novitsky and Marina Vasilevskaya of Belarus launched smoothly from the Russian-leased Baikonur launch facility in Kazakhstan.

The launch had been planned for Thursday but was halted by an automatic safety system about 20 seconds before the scheduled liftoff. The head of the Russian space agency, Yuri Borisov, said the launch abort was triggered by a voltage drop in a power source.

The space capsule atop the rocket separated and went into orbit eight minutes after the launch and began a two-day, 34-orbit trip to the space station. If the launch had gone as scheduled on Thursday, the journey would have been much shorter, requiring only two orbits. Docking is now expected at 1510 GMT Monday.

The three astronauts were to join the station's crew consisting of NASA astronauts Loral O'Hara, Matthew Dominick, Mike Barratt, and Jeanette Epps, as well as Russians Oleg Kononenko, Nikolai Chub, and Alexander Grebenkin.

Novitsky, Vasilevskaya and O'Hara are to return to Earth on April 6.

The space station, which has served as a symbol of post-Cold War international cooperation, is now one of the last remaining areas of collaboration between Russia and the West amid tensions over Moscow's military action in Ukraine. NASA and its partners hope to continue operating the orbiting outpost until 2030.

Russia has continued to rely on modified versions of Soviet-designed rockets for commercial satellites, as well as crews and cargo to the space station.



In this photo released by Roscosmos space corporation, the Soyuz 2.1a rocket with Soyuz MS-25 spacecraft carrying NASA astronaut Tracy Dyson, Oleg Novitsky of Roscosmos and Marina Vasilevskaya of Belarus to the International Space Station, ISS, lifts off from the Russian-leased Baikonur launch facility in Kazakhstan, Saturday, March 23, 2024. (AP)

Also:

ISTANBUL: Turkiye is planning to launch the satellite, Turksat-6A, into space in early July, Industry and Technology Minister Mehmet Fatih Kacir has announced.

In remarks published by the local press on Saturday, the minister said the satellite was under testing at the space systems center in Ankara.

Turksat is the first locally made satellite, he said, indicating that the launch would be during the week starting on July 8.

On April 15, Turkiye launched its first domestically produced observation satellite, MECE.

Turkiye has become among 11 countries that produce satellites with local resources.

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Iowa State eases past Washington State

RJ Davis goes for 20 as NC beats Michigan State 85-69

CHARLOTTE, N.C., March 24, (AP): RJ Davis scored 20 points to help North Carolina beat Michigan State 85-69 in the NCAA Tournament on Saturday, pushing the Tar Heels to the Sweet 16 while keeping them unbeaten in March Madness against Spartans Hall of Fame coach Tom Izzo.

Harrison Ingram made five 3-pointers and scored 17 points for the West Region's top seed, which continued its NCAA success in its home state. UNC (29-7) ran off 17 straight points during a 23-3 run over the last eight minutes of the first half to erase a 12-point deficit, then continued answering every push by the Spartans after halftime.

The Tar Heels improved to 5-0 in the tournament against Izzo, including victories in the 2005 Final Four and 2009 title game. And they move on to the regional semifinals in Los Angeles, where they will face either Grand Canyon or Alabama on Thursday night.

UNC also got a strong showing inside from Armando Bacot (18 points), who got into the paint to score, draw fouls or kick out against oncoming double teams. Ingram was on the receiving end of some of those, knocking down 5 of 7 3-pointers to go with seven rebounds.

Tyson Walker scored 24 points for the ninth-seeded Spartans (20-15).

East Region

Iowa State 67, Washington State 56
In Omaha, Neb., Tamin Lipsey scored 15 points, Iowa State cranked up the second-half pressure against Washington State, and the No. 2 seed Cyclones marched into their seventh Sweet 16 with a victory over the seventh-seeded Cougars in the NCAA Tournament.

Curtis Jones added 14 points and Keshon Gilbert and Milan Momcilovic had 10 apiece for the Cyclones (29-7), who made it to the second weekend of the tourney for the second time in three

years. They will play third-seeded Illinois in the East Region semifinals on Thursday night at TD Garden in Boston.

Jaylen Wells scored 20 points and Myles Rice had 13 for the Cougars (25-10), who were sent back to the Palouse still searching for their first Sweet 16 appearance since Tony Bennett was on the sideline in 2008.

Illinois 89, Duquesne 63

In Omaha, Neb., Terrence Shannon Jr. scored 30 points, Marcus Domask added 22 and No. 3 seed Illinois made fast work of 11th-seeded Duquesne in a victory to reach the NCAA Tournament's Sweet 16 for the first time since 2005.

Illinois (28-8) hadn't made it through the first weekend of the tournament in eight previous appearances, a maddening run of frustration the Illini ended in resounding fashion.

BASKETBALL

The Illini will play No. 2 seed Iowa State in an East Region semifinal in Boston on Thursday night.

Duquesne (25-12), which came in on a nine-game win streak, had its first tournament appearance since 1977 end with its worst loss of the season that sent 65-year-old coach Keith Dambrot into retirement.

Jimmy Clark III scored 14 points and Fousseyni Drame had 13 for Duquesne.

Midwest Region

Tennessee 62, Texas 58

In Charlotte, N.C., Dalton Knecht scored 18 points and made four free throws in the final 8.8 seconds as Tennessee topped Texas to advance to the Sweet 16 of the NCAA Tournament for the second straight year.

Second-seeded Tennessee will play No. 3 Creighton.

Jonas Aidoo had 11 points and To-

ber Awaka added 10 for the Volunteers (26-8), helping coach Rick Barnes beat the team he coached for 17 seasons. The Vols have reached the Sweet 16 three times in nine seasons under Barnes, but have yet to advance out of that round in that stretch.

Tyrese Hunter and Chendall Weaver each had 13 points for seventh-seeded Texas (21-13).

The Vols shot just 29% from the field in the first half, but managed to take a 38-29 lead into the locker room.

Knecht struggled early on, missing his first four shots, including an air ball on a fadeaway jumper. The AP All-American converted his first field goal with 90 seconds remaining in the first half, putting Tennessee up by 11.

Creighton 86, Oregon 72, 2OT

In Pittsburgh, Steven Ashworth and Ryan Kalkbrenner made 3-pointers in the second overtime and Creighton edged past its former coach, Oregon's Dana Altman, to move into the Sweet 16 of the NCAA Tournament with a win.

Gonzaga 89, Kansas 68
In Salt Lake City, Gonzaga played a nearly perfect second half, busting open a back-and-forth game with a 15-0 run Saturday to pull away from Kansas for a win and extend its nation-best streak of trips to the Sweet 16 to nine.

Anton Watson shot 8 for 11 for 21 points on an afternoon when basically everyone in a navy jersey was a star, especially after halftime.

The fifth-seeded Zags (27-7) made their first five 3-pointers of the second half, not missing from long range until 1:30 remained and the game had long entered extended garbage time.

Mark Few's team will make its regular trip to the second weekend to play the winner of Sunday's game between Purdue and Utah State.

SOUTH REGION

N. Carolina 79, Oakland 73, OT

In Pittsburgh, DJ Burns Jr. scored 24 points, including a go-ahead putback that ignited a 9-0 run in overtime, and 11th-seeded North Carolina State beat 14th-seeded Oakland in the second round of the NCAA Tournament.

Powered by their versatile 6-foot-9, 275-pound forward, the Wolfpack (24-14) advanced to the Sweet 16 for the first time since 2015 by finally pulling away from 3-point specialist Jack Gohlke and the Golden Grizzlies (24-12) in the extra period.

N.C. State will face either second-seeded Marquette and 10th-seeded Colorado in Dallas on Friday in the South Region semifinals.

Michael O'Connell had 12 points for the Wolfpack. DJ Horne and Casey Morsell added 11 apiece. Jayden Taylor came off the bench in overtime to hit a 3-pointer that put N.C. State ahead by five.

Oakland, which ousted third-seeded Kentucky on Thursday, just missed becoming the first 14 seed to reach the Sweet 16 since Chattanooga in 1997.

WEST REGION

Arizona 78, Dayton 68

In Salt Lake City, Caleb Love scored 19 points and second-seeded Arizona reached the Sweet 16 for the second time in three seasons, beating No. 7 seed Dayton in the second round of the NCAA Tournament.

The Wildcats (27-8), who also reached a regional semifinal in 2022 in coach Tommy Lloyd's first season, will face either the West Region's No. 6 seed, Clemson, or third-seeded Baylor in Los Angeles on Thursday night.

Keshad Johnson and Pelle Larsson each had 13 points and seven rebounds for Arizona. Larsson also had six assists, and Jaden Bradley scored 12 points off the bench. The Wildcats shot 53% from the field and made eight 3-pointers.



UCLA guard Kiki Rice (1) attempts a 3-point basket as guard Camryn Brown (35) gestures during the second half of the team's first-round college basketball game against California Baptist in the women's NCAA Tournament, Saturday, March 23, 2024, in Los Angeles. (AP)

Earthquakes edge Sounders 3-2

Bouanga scores twice to help LAFC end a three-game scoreless streak

LOS ANGELES, March 24, (AP): Denis Bouanga scored two goals and added a late assist as Los Angeles FC ended a three-game winless and scoreless streak with a 5-0 victory over Nashville SC on Saturday night.

Bouanga, last season's Golden Boot winner with 20 goals and seven assists, scored in the 18th and 48th minutes.

Timothy Tillman scored from close range in the 9th minute to open the scoring for LAFC (2-2-1). Cristian Olivera scored in the 75th minute, with an assist from David Martinez, to make it 3-0. Eduard Atuesta's header goal came in the sixth minute of second-half stoppage time. Bouanga had the assist.

Hugo Lloris had one save for LAFC, which entered having lost to Real Salt Lake 3-0, Sporting Kansas City 2-0 and Minnesota United 2-0. It was the club's first clean sheet since since a 4-0 win over MoCA FC in the CONCACAF Champions Cup.

Hany Mukhtar, the 2022 Golden Boot winner, had his right-footed shot blocked in the 72nd minute for Nashville (1-1-3), which lost for the first time this season after beating Charlotte 2-1 last time out.

Joe Willis was shown a red card in the 62nd minute and Elliot Joseph Panico finished in goal for Nashville. The pair combined for three saves.

LAFC hosts the Colorado Rapids on Saturday. Nashville returns home to face the reigning MLS champion Columbus Crew on Saturday.

In San Jose, Calif. Jeremy Ebobisse scored one minute after Danny Musovski pulled Seattle even late in the second half, rallying the San Jose Earthquakes to a 3-2 victory over the Sounders on Saturday night.

Defender Vitor Costa de Brito scored in the 42nd minute and Cristian Espinoza followed with a goal a minute later and the Earthquakes (1-4-0) took a 2-0 lead into halftime.

De Brito used an assist from Bruno Wilson off a corner kick to score his second goal in his fifth career appearance. Espinoza scored with his right foot in close - following a review - giving the Earthquakes a two-goal lead on the way to their first victory after four straight losses to begin the season.

Even the return of goalkeeper Stefan Frei failed to get the winless Sounders (0-2-2) on track this season. Seattle went 0-1-2 with Andrew Thomas in goal while Frei recovered from a hamstring injury.

The Sounders rallied to tie the match in the second half, using a penalty-kick goal by Raúl Ruidiaz in the 72nd minute and the equalizer by Danny Musovski in the 81st. Cody Baker had an assist on the first netter of the season for Musovski. Ruidiaz has scored twice this season.

San Jose's win evens the all-time series at 15-15-9, but the Earthquakes

have rolled to a 4-0-1 record in five matchups since the start of the 2022 season.

Frei finished with four saves for the Sounders.

William Yarbrough stopped five shots in his first career start for the Earthquakes. Yarbrough spent the previous four seasons with the Colorado Rapids, who traded him to San Jose in January.

Seattle stays on the road to play the Los Angeles Galaxy on Saturday. San Jose travels to play the Houston Dynamo on Saturday.

In Portland, Ore. Julian Carranza scored two goals for the Philadelphia Union in a 3-1 victory over the Portland Timbers on Saturday night.

Carranza scored on a header in the 28th minute and added a second goal in the 67th for the Union, who were missing eight players - including six starters - because of international

SOCCER

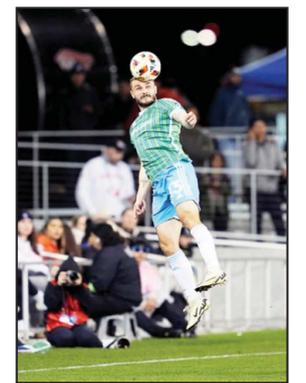
duty. It was the first win of the season for Philadelphia, which opened with three straight draws.

Quinn Sullivan added a rebound goal for the Union in the 58th minute. Portland goalkeeper James Pantemis pushed away Jeremy Rafanello's shot from distance, but the ball fell to Sullivan, who tapped it in.

Jonathan Rodriguez, signed earlier this week by the Timbers, started and scored his first goal for the Timbers in the 80th. Rodriguez joined Portland from Club America in Liga MX.

Rodriguez and Brazilian Evander had a trio of good chances for the Timbers early. Oliver Semmler had three saves in the first half alone and finished with four for the Union.

Pantemis started in goal for the Timbers while Maxime Crepeau plays for the Canada in the CONCACAF Nations League.



Seattle Sounders forward Jordan Morris keeps the ball in play next to San Jose Earthquakes defender Paul Marie during the first half of an MLS soccer match in San Jose, Calif. (AP)

Hosts collapse in reply

Kamindu, de Silva double tons help Lanka close in on win over Bangladesh in 1st Test

SYLHET, Bangladesh, March 24, (AP): Kamindu Mendis and skipper Dhananjaya de Silva both hit their second centuries of the match before pacer Vishwa Fernando ripped through Bangladesh's top order to help Sri Lanka close in on a victory in the series opening test on Sunday.

Kamindu followed a first-innings 102 with his career-best 164 and de Silva, who also scored 102 in the first innings, made 108 as Sri Lanka was dismissed for 418 in its second innings, setting an improbable 511-run victory target for Bangladesh.

The hosts collapsed in reply and were reduced to 47-5 at stumps on Day 3, after Fernando finished with 3-13. Bangladesh is 464 runs short of securing an unlikely victory.

Kamindu and de Silva put on 202 as Sri Lanka recovered from 57-5 to post 280 before being all out in their first innings. Fernando then claimed 4-48 to help the side bundle Bangladesh out for 188.

Fernando struck in the first over of Bangladesh's second innings when he

had opener Mahmudul Hasan leg-before for a duck before captain Najmul Hossain Shanto top-edged a wide delivery off pacer Kasun Rajitha to Dimuth Karunaratne at first slip.

Zakir Hasan who started with a brace of boundaries, looked positive but he too poked a delivery outside when on 19 and left Bangladesh at 36-3.

The situation was compounded when Fernando struck twice in consecutive deliveries, dismissing Shahadat Hossain and Liton Das for a duck.

Mominul Haque was on 7 with Taijul Islam, who hit the last ball of the day for a boundary, on 6.

Resuming at 119-5, Sri Lanka lost nightwatchman Fernando for 4 in third over of the day but de Silva and Kamindu then kept the home side frustrated throughout the session, keeping the scoreboard going with ease.

After raising his half-century off 82 balls de Silva paced the innings, smashing offspinner Mehidy Hasan for consecutive sixes.

Nuggets edge youthful Blazers after Portland starts 5 rookies



Portland Trail Blazers guard Scoot Henderson (right) drives to the basket beside Denver Nuggets guard Kentavious Caldwell-Pope during the second half of an NBA basketball game Saturday, March 23, 2024, in Portland, Ore. The Denver Nuggets won 114-111. (AP)

Suns never trail in steamrolling Spurs

PORTLAND, Ore., March 24, (AP): Reggie Jackson scored 23 points, Aaron Gordon had 22 points and 12 rebounds and the Denver Nuggets defeated the Portland Trail Blazers 114-111.

The Nuggets won without their star duo of Nikola Jokic and Jamal Murray on a night when the Blazers became the second team to start five rookies since NBA box scores started tracking starters in the 1971-72 season. The reigning champs have now won eight of their last nine.

Rookie Duop Reath led the Trail Blazers with 24 points. Scoot Henderson, the No. 3 overall pick in last year's draft, finished with 22 points and six assists as the Blazers dropped their sixth straight.

BASKETBALL

Denver's biggest lead was 15. After Porter gave the Nuggets a 109-98 lead with 2:04 remaining, Portland made its final run starting with a 3-pointer by Reath. The Blazers forced a turnover and cut the lead to 109-105 on a layup by Toumani Camara with 50.5 seconds left.

A layup from Jackson pushed the Nuggets ahead 111-105. Henderson responded with a layup to make it 111-107 with 27 seconds remaining.

Henderson's layup with 10 seconds left made it 112-109 after Jackson split a pair of free throws. After Gordon

split a pair of foul shots of his own, Henderson made another layup to make it 113-111.

Suns 131, Spurs 106

San Antonio, Devin Booker scored 32 points before sitting out the fourth quarter and the Phoenix Suns never trailed in steamrolling the San Antonio Spurs 131-106 on to help their playoff positioning.

Kevin Durant added 25 points for Phoenix, which never trailed and led by as many as 32. Bradley Beal had 13 points and a season-high 12 assists.

Victor Wembanyama had 13 points, five rebounds, four assists and a blocked shot in 21 minutes as San Antonio lost its third straight and eighth in 10 games. Keldon Johnson

had 14 points.

Celtics 124, Bulls 113

In Chicago, Jayson Tatum scored 26 points, Sam Hauser and Al Horford added 23 apiece, and the NBA-leading Boston Celtics won their ninth straight, 124-113 over the Chicago Bulls.

Hauser made seven of Boston's 21 3-pointers, while Horford hit 5 of 10 from beyond the arc. Derrick White scored 17. Payton Pritchard added 15 points and eight assists, and the Celtics pulled within two wins of their season-best streak even though Jaylen Brown (sprained right ankle) and Kristaps Porzingis (right hamstring) sat out the game.

Boston scored nine straight to go up by eight early in the fourth quarter and

hung on down the stretch. It was a six-point game when Luke Kornet scored on a tip-in and Tatum drove for a layup, making it 117-107 with 3:04 remaining.

Kings 109, Magic 107

In Orlando, De'Aaron Fox hit tying and go-ahead free throws with 21.2 seconds left and finished with 31 points, and Keon Ellis added another free throw in the final seconds as the Sacramento Kings beat the Orlando Magic.

After Fox tied the game at 107 and put the Kings ahead at 108-107, Ellis added another point with two seconds remaining and Sacramento ended Orlando's five-game win streak.

Paolo Banchero missed a long 3-pointer attempt at the buzzer for the Magic, who lost a similar game in double overtime at Sacramento on Jan. 3.

Rockets 147, Jazz 119

In Houston, Jalen Green scored 41 points, Fred VanVleet added 10 3-pointers and a season-high 34 and the Houston Rockets made a season-best 27 3-pointers to beat the Utah Jazz for their eighth straight win.

Jabari Smith Jr. and Kris Dunn were ejected five seconds into the second quarter after both were assessed technical fouls for fighting. The two threw punches at each other after they got tangled up while the ball was being brought up the court. Players and officials got between them before the scuffle could escalate further.

The Rockets' win streak is their longest since winning eight in a row in November 2019. Houston closed with 1 1/2 games of idle Golden State for 10th place and the last play-in spot in the Western Conference.



Toronto Raptors forward Kelly Olynyk (left) works against Washington Wizards forward Richaun Holmes (right) to shoot during the first half of an NBA basketball game Saturday, March 23, 2024, in Washington. (AP)

SPORTS

Kuwait Equestrian Club's Ali Al-Kharafi wins fifth round of Show Jumping Championship



Players in action.

KUWAIT CITY, March 24: Ali Al-Kharafi, a rider from Kuwait Equestrian Club, clinched the championship title in the fifth round of the Kuwait Equestrian Federation Championship for show jumping. The event, held at the Kuwait Equestrian Center, saw robust participation from riders representing various local clubs.

Sponsored by prominent entities including the Kuwait Olympic Committee, the Public Authority for Sports, Zain Telecommunications Company, KG Company, and Kuwait Interna-

EQUESTRIAN

tional Bank, the tournament was organized under the auspices of the Kuwait Equestrian Federation.

In the crucial eighth main heat, set at a height of 140-145 cm, Al-Kharafi delivered an impeccable performance, clocking in at 73.30 seconds without incurring any penalty points. Following closely behind were knights Nick Channing, Abdullah Al-Roudhan, Fawaz Al-Subaie, and Yara Al-Hunaidi. Al-Kharafi also secured sixth place in the competition.

Additionally, Al-Kharafi seized the lead in the seventh round at a height of 130-135 cm, while Abdullah Al-Roudhan emerged victorious in the fourth round, set at a height of 125-130 cm. Nabila Al-Ali, an esteemed international judge and Secretary of the Kuwait Equestrian Federation, officiated the crowning ceremony for the champions.



Winners on the podium.

Three Kuwaiti clubs suffer defeats at the Arab Table Tennis Championship

JEDDAH, March 24: The 34th Arab Table Tennis Club Championship witnessed defeats for Al-Tadamon, Al-Fahaheel, and Al-Fatah Club in its inaugural competition, slated to run until March 28.

Al-Fatah Club succumbed to Al-Basra of Iraq with a close score of 3-2, while Al-Tadamon faced a defeat against Enppi of Egypt with a

TABLE TENNIS

score of 3-0. Similarly, Al-Fahaheel lost to Al-Ahly of Saudi Arabia with a score of 3-1.

Fifteen clubs are vying at the men's level, including Al-Fahaheel and Al-Tadamon from Kuwait, Al-Ittihad and Al-Ahly, Al-Shabab from Saudi Arabia, Enppi from Egypt, Sulaymaniyah, Al-Jaish Sports Club from Iraq, Al-Arabi

and Qatar from Qatar, Al-Makki and Al-Aqsa, Atbara from Sudan, Al-Hussein City from Jordan, and Saar and Al-Bahrain from Bahrain.

At the women's level, eight clubs are participating, including Al-Fatat from Kuwait, Basra from Iraq, Women's Sports Association from Algeria, White Self-Employment from Sudan, Zamalek, Petrojet from Egypt, and Hamada from Jordan, in addition to Aali from Bahrain.

Al-Fatah Club team comprised of Manwa Al-Shammari, Maryam Abdel-Rahim, Sheikha Al-Hamad, and Liu Fay, while Al-Tadamon's squad consists of Meshal Dashti, Jaber Al-Balhan, Marzouq Al-Rashidi, Abdul-Rahman Al-Suwailem, and Muhammad Saleh. Al-Fahaheel Club features five players: Meshal Al-Kandari, Muhammad Hamiyah, Khaled Al-Fadhli, Salem Al-Hasnan, and Khaled Al-Dabbous.



Daniil Medvedev serves against Marton Fucsovics of Hungary in their men's second round match at the Miami Open tennis tournament in Miami Gardens, Fla. (AP)



Ilya Malinin, of the United States, performs his free skate in the men's competition at the figure skating world championships in Montreal. (AP)

Ilya Malinin takes men's world figure skating crown in record performance

MONTREAL, March 24, (AP): American figure skating star Ilya Malinin is a world champion - and a world-record holder.

Malinin put on a dominant display that included a jaw-dropping six quad jumps - including his patented quad axel - to snag the men's singles crown Saturday night at the world championships.

FIGURE SKATING

After placing third in Thursday's short program, the 19-year-old scored a world record 227.79 in the free program while skating to the "Succession" soundtrack to bring his total to 333.76 - more than 20 points than the rest of the field.

Malinin dropped to the ice in disbelief after presenting his sheer athletics to a rowdy Bell Centre crowd that cheered and clapped the whole way.

He dethroned two-time defending

world champion Shoma Uno of Japan, who fell to fourth (280.85) after missing two quad jumps to start his program.

Yuma Kagiyama of Japan won silver (309.65) and Adam Siao Him Fa of France claimed bronze (284.39). Siao Him Fa climbed from 19th to third with an awe-inspiring display of his own, which included a backflip.

Earlier Saturday, 2022 Olympic champions Madison Chock and Evan Bates of the United States defended their ice dance world title with a season-best total score of 222.20.

Canada's Piper Gilles and Paul Poirier won silver (219.68) and Italy's Charlene Guignard and Marco Fabbri claimed bronze (216.52).

It's Montreal's first time hosting the event since 1932. The city was supposed to stage the 2020 championship but the COVID-19 pandemic shut down the competition.

Boston will hold the 2025 competition.

TENNIS

MIAMI GARDENS, Fla., March 24, (AP): Indian Wells champion and second-ranked Carlos Alcaraz began his Miami Open campaign with an emphatic 6-2, 6-1 victory over fellow Spaniard Roberto Carballés Baena.

The 20-year-old Alcaraz, who is the reigning Wimbledon champion, dominated the match from start to finish with his impressive speed and agility. He saved all three break points he faced to pick

up his seventh straight win.

Jannik Sinner advanced to the third round with a 6-3, 6-4 victory over fellow Italian Andrea Pavanetti. The third-ranked Sinner, the Australian Open champion and last year's Miami Open runner-up, had to wait overnight to clinch the opening victory at Miami after rain forced a suspension of the match on Friday with Sinner leading 3-2.

"I think it's a lot of difference between here and anywhere else," Sinner said. "Here maybe the court suits me a little bit better because the ball is not that bouncy. But I feel just mentally quite free to play, and I think that's most important."

Andy Murray advanced to the third round with a 7-6, 6-3 victory over 29th-ranked Tomás Martín Etcheverry. That match was also suspended on Friday because of rain. Murray, who won the Miami title in 2009 and 2013, snapped a nine-match losing streak against top 50 players with the win and has now played 995 career four-level matches.

"My body feels that," said Murray, who turns 37 in May. "It feels like I've played a thousand. I've ob-

viously been on the tour a long time. My first matches on tour were just as I turned 18 years old ... It's been a long career but an amazing career."

In women's play, top-ranked Iga Swiatek, coming off an Indian Wells title last week, defeated Camila Giorgi 6-1, 6-1 in just over an hour. The victory gave Swiatek 81 wins in the first 100 matches of her career at the WTA-1000 level. Only Serena Williams (87) had more wins in her first 100 matches at that level.

Naomi Osaka continued her comeback journey by defeating 17th-ranked Elina Svitolina 6-2, 7-6 (5). Osaka, who is coming off a third-round loss at Indian Wells, now has two wins over top 20 opponents in her last four matches.

"I definitely do think it was one of my best matches (of the year), if not the best match," Osaka said. "But I also want myself to play better and better every match." A day after rain and wind delayed the start of play and suspended several matches, downpours again pushed the start of Saturday's matches back by nearly three hours.

On a day with several upsets on the men's side, Brazil's Thiago Seyboth Wild stunned American Taylor Fritz 6-3, 6-4 to reach the third round. Numerous Brazilian fans were in attendance to watch their compatriot play, and they cheered so loudly that Fritz complained to the chair umpire.

Christopher O'Connell topped 22nd-ranked Francis Tiafoe 7-5, 7-6; 14th-ranked Tommy Paul appeared to roll his left ankle in the second set of his match against Martin Damm Jr. and was forced to retire; last year's Miami Open winner Daniil Medvedev advanced, beating Márton Fucsovics 6-4, 6-2.

In other action, fifth-ranked Jessica Pegula advanced to the second round after Zhu Lin retired with an illness while trailing 6-4, 4-1.

Alcaraz begins Miami Open with victory

Pegula advances to second round

Wirtz scores Germany's fastest ever goal in 2-0 win over France

Endrick makes history as Brazil edge England

LONDON, March 24, (AP): Real Madrid-bound Endrick became the youngest men's player to score an international goal at Wembley as Brazil beat England 1-0 in a friendly.

Endrick, who will move from Palmeiras to Madrid at the end of the season when he turns 18, struck nine minutes after coming on as a second half substitute.

"My family is here, my girlfriend, my agents. I am not much of a crier, I am holding myself, but this is something unique and I am very happy," he said.

Based on his second half cameo, Madrid has secured another major talent for the future.

Coming on for Rodrigo in the 71st minute, Endrick wasted little time to make his mark, firing into an empty net after Vinicius Junior was denied by England goalkeeper Jordan Pickford.

Endrick could not hide his delight as he raced away in celebration and dropped to his knees - even though he did have to wait for VAR to confirm the goal following a check for offside.

It was his first senior goal for Brazil and, at the age of 17 years, 246 days, a record for an international game at Wembley, according to statistician Opta.

He might have scored another, but could not beat Pickford with a late chance.

"All of this affected me a little at the end, the chance I had at the end. I will not lie," Endrick said. "I was just thinking about scoring. I could only think about that. I couldn't think about the match any longer."

Ultimately, his one goal was enough to win the match and end England's 21-game unbeaten streak at the national stadium.

Madrid secured a deal for Endrick in December 2022 when he was just



Ireland's Andrew Omobamidele heads the ball during the international friendly soccer match between Ireland and Belgium at the Aviva Stadium in Dublin, Ireland. (AP)

16 but already tipped to be one of Brazil's next stars. Brazilian media said the transfer was worth nearly 60 million euros (\$64 million).

He will be 18 in July.

Last year, he helped Palmeiras win the Brazilian league from 12 points behind Botafogo at one stage.

He will join other Brazil stars at Madrid such as Vinicius Junior and Rodrigo.

As well as losing the match, England had a potential setback when defender Kyle Walker suffered a suspected hamstring injury. He was taken off after 20 minutes following treatment on the field.

Southgate also said Harry Kane will return to Bayern Munich and not take part in Tuesday's friendly against Belgium.

In Lyon, Toni Kroos returned and Florian Wirtz scored the fastest Germany goal ever as they defeated France 2-0.

Kroos, coaxed out of international retirement for the upcoming European Championship, wasted no time with a precise pass for Wirtz, who let fly from outside the penalty area to score after seven seconds.

The German soccer federation said it was the quickest goal ever scored in a national team game. The previous best was nine seconds by Lukas Podolski in a 2013 win over Ecuador.

SOCCER

Kai Havertz made it 2-0 after the break and Antonio Rüdiger produced a late goal-line clearance as the smiles returned to the German national team.

France, in contrast, was whistled derisively by the home fans at full-time.

It was Germany's second consecutive win over France, but only its third win in 11 games, giving Julian Nagelsmann's team a timely boost before they host Euro 2024 this summer.

Stuttgart's Maximilian Mittelstädt started for his debut at left back and Bayer Leverkusen's Robert Andrich also impressed in just his second Germany game.

Germany showed bite and commitment as the visitors bossed the opening 20 minutes before Marcus Thuram fired the first French chance over. More followed. Marc-André ter Stegen denied France captain Kylian Mbappé the best opportunity in a one on one as the Germans withstood the pressure for the rest of the half.

Kroos was again involved in the second goal, combining with Mittelstädt at the back before Wirtz sent the ball to Jamal Musiala, who rounded the goalkeeper and cut the ball back for Havertz to score in the 49th.

Ousmane Dembélé flashed a shot wide of the far post in response, but the French were unable to exert the same pressure as before.

In Dublin, Evan Ferguson missed a first half penalty and Ireland drew with Belgium 0-0.

The striker had the chance to put Ireland ahead in the 28th minute at Aviva Stadium after Arthur Vermeeren was adjudged to have handled in the area.

But Ferguson's spot kick was saved by the legs of Belgium goalkeeper Matz Sels.

Ireland keeper Caoimhin Kelleher pulled off an impressive save late on to deny Belgium substitute Thomas Meunier.

The draw meant Belgium extended its unbeaten run to nine games in all competitions.

The Belgians play England on Tuesday in a friendly at Wembley Stadium. John O'Shea took charge of Ireland for the first time since being appointed interim head coach last month. The former Manchester United defender will also be in position for Tuesday's game against Switzerland. The Football Association of Ireland said a permanent head coach would be hired by "early April."



England's Harry Maguire challenges for the ball with Brazil's Raphinha during an international friendly soccer match between England and Brazil, at the Wembley Stadium in London. (AP)



Vancouver Whitecaps' Tristan Blackmon, (right), attempts to stop a goal by Real Salt Lake's Anderson Julio during the second half of an MLS soccer match in Vancouver, British Columbia. Real Salt Lake won 2-1. (AP)

Sports

Latest sports scores at — <http://sports.arabtimesonline.com>

Blues wrap up training for the crucial clash

Kuwait eye maximum points against Qatar to keep qualification hopes alive

Sainz ends Red Bull winning streak as Max retires early with engine fire



Ferrari team celebrate the race win of Carlos Sainz, front centre, of Spain and second placed Charles Leclerc of Monaco following the Australian Formula One Grand Prix at Albert Park, in Melbourne, Australia. (AP)

Ferrari dominate Australian GP with 1-2 finish

MELBOURNE, Australia, March 24, (AP): Ferrari's Carlos Sainz ended Red Bull's Formula 1 winning streak when the Spaniard took advantage of Max Verstappen's early retirement to win the Australian Grand Prix just two weeks after missing the previous race in Saudi Arabia due to an emergency appendectomy.

Sainz, who started on the front row alongside Verstappen, kept his place into turn one, but passed the Dutchman on lap two at turn nine for the lead and took control once his rival retired two laps later with a fiery mechanical failure.

Verstappen had won the first two F1 races of the season in Bahrain and Saudi Arabia and was on a nine-race winning streak.

Sainz finished ahead of teammate Charles Leclerc for Ferrari's first 1-2 result since the 2022 Bahrain Grand Prix, with McLaren's Lando Norris finishing in third for his first podium at Albert Park.

His teammate, Australian Oscar Piastri, was fourth.

MOTOR RACING

Sainz, who will be replaced by Lewis Hamilton at Ferrari from 2025, was thrilled to get his third career win against the odds, his first since last year's Singapore Grand Prix.

"I felt really good out there," he said. "Of course, (I felt) a bit stiff, especially physically. It wasn't the easiest, but I was lucky that I was more or less on my own so I could just manage my pace, manage the tires, manage everything."

"Life sometimes is crazy, you know. What happened at the beginning of the year, then the podium in Bahrain, then appendix, the comeback, the win, it's a roller coaster. But I loved it."

Leclerc, on the podium for the second straight race, was encouraged by Ferrari's pace, and its ability to take the fight to rival Red Bull during its period of dominance.

"We knew that pole position and the race win was possible because we had very good tire degradation, very good pace," he said. "That is a very encouraging sign. However, if you look at the first three races, two

Canada and Costa Rica complete Copa América field

FRISCO, Texas, March 24, (AP): Canada beat Trinidad and Tobago 2-0 and Costa Rica rallied past Honduras 3-1 to complete the 16-nation field for the Copa América.

Cyle Larin scored in the 61st minute and Jacob Sheffield added a goal in the first minute of stoppage time for Canada in the doubleheader opener of CONCACAF qualifiers.

Larin's goal on a left-footed shot from just inside the penalty area from Iké Ugbo's pass was his 29th in 66 international appearances.

Sheffield added his second international goal on a left-footed shot off a pass from Jonathan David.

Canada will open the Copa América against defending champion Argentina in June 20 in Atlanta, plays Chile five days later at East Rutherford, New Jersey, and Chile on June 29 at Orlando, Florida.

Costa Rica starts on June 24 against Brazil at Inglewood, California, plays Colombia four days later at Glendale, Arizona, and closes the first round against Paraguay on July 2 at Austin, Texas.

They join the United States, Mexico, Panama and Jamaica at South America's championship as invited guests from North and Central America and the Caribbean.

Orlando Galo, Warren Madrigal, Jefferson Brenes scored their first goals for Costa Rica.

Honduras went ahead in the 10th minute when Edwin

SOCCER

Rodríguez crossed into the penalty area and Jerry Bengtson, with his back to the goal, made a backheel flick to Michael Chirinos. He volleyed past Keylor Navas from 22 yards for his first goal in 21 international appearances.

Costa Rica tied the score 1:19 later when Manfred Ugalde's header from Brenes' corner kick was parried by Jonathan Rougier to Galo, who kicked in rebound.

Madrigal put the Ticos ahead in the 56th minute with a 16-yard shot. Brenes scored in the 62nd on a 30-yard shot that deflected in off defender Raul Santos.

Larson tops Shane in double overtime

AUSTIN, Texas, March 24, (AP): Kyle Larson passed Shane van Gisbergen and Austin Hill on the final lap in double overtime to win the Xfinity road course race Saturday at the Circuit of the Americas.

Van Gisbergen looked to be in control and heading to his first career Xfinity win ahead of his season debut in the Cup series on Sunday. But two caution flags forced two overtimes, and Hill passed him with a bump into the first corner on the second restart.

Lurking behind them was Larson, the Cup Series leader who saw his opening for the race lead halfway through the final lap and passed both cars. Van Gisbergen crossed the line second, but was hit with a 30-second time penalty for track limit violations on the final lap that dropped him to 28th.

first double points finish since the 2022 Austrian Grand Prix, with Hülkenberg and teammate Kevin Magnussen closing out the top 10 in ninth and 10th respectively.

Verstappen's lead in the drivers' standings has been reduced from 15 points to four, with Leclerc in second place. Verstappen has 51 points and Leclerc 47.



Ferrari driver Charles Leclerc of Monaco leads Red Bull driver Sergio Pérez of Mexico during the Australian Formula One Grand Prix at Albert Park, in Melbourne, Australia. (AP)

out of the first three races, they (Red Bull) had the upper hand in the race, so we still have a lot of work to do."

Norris said it wasn't a surprise that he was able to earn his first podium since Brazil last year.

"I think when you take a Red Bull out of it, I would say no," he said. "I think our pace has been good all weekend. We put things together very nicely yesterday. We showed good long run, high-fuel pace on Friday, so I wouldn't have said we had no chance."

The race finished under the virtual safety car, ensuring there was no racing for most of the final lap, after Mercedes' driver George Russell crashed on turn seven. Red Bull's Sergio Pérez closed out the top five, and made just one place from where he started in sixth, after he was

handed a three-place grid penalty for impeding Nico Hülkenberg in qualifying.

Two-time world champion Fernando Alonso was sixth for the second straight race, having leapfrogged Aston Martin teammate Lance Stroll. But the Spaniard will face the FIA stewards, along with Russell, for their battle for sixth on the final lap.

Russell's teammate Lewis Hamilton also didn't finish following a lap 17 engine failure for Mercedes' first double non-points score since the 2021 Azerbaijan Grand Prix, ending its strong run of reliability.

Japanese driver Yuki Tsunoda earned RB, the team formerly known as AlphaTauri, its first four points for the season after finishing in eighth. American team Haas earned its

By Khaled Al-Enezi

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, March 24: Kuwait wrapped up training, at Ali Sabah Al-Salem Stadium, Al-Nasr Club as they gear up for Qatar on Tuesday for the Asian qualifiers for the 2026 World Cup finals in the United States, Canada, and Mexico, as well as the 2027 Asian Cup in Saudi Arabia.

Qatar are unbeaten in the group, leading with 9 points, followed by India with 4 points, and Kuwait falling to third place with 3 points, and Afghanistan trailing with just one point.

SOCCER

Since returning from Doha after their 3-0 loss against Qatar, Azraq's Portuguese coach, Rui Pinto, has been focused on rectifying the team's errors and regaining focus, particularly in the second half where they conceded two goals in five minutes. Pinto provided instructions to benefit the team and held technical lectures addressing the positives and negatives of the Qatar match. He emphasized each player's role in the upcoming crucial match. Kuwait will be aiming for the maximum points to keep their qualification hopes alive.

Meanwhile, Qatari delegation will arrive in today, and will un-



Youssef Nasser and Suleiman Abdel Ghafour take part in the training session.

dergo a single training session in at Ali Sabah Al-Salem Stadium, Al-Nasr Club.

Qatari media reports suggest that Spanish coach Marquez Lopez will likely continue rotating players, having introduced new players like Mahdi Salem and Ahmed Al-Rawi, the latter scoring the second goal against Al-Azraq. Salah Zakaria may replace Meshal Barshim in the second half due to Barshim's recent injury.

A press conference for the Kuwait-Qatar match will be held today at 8:30 pm at Jaber Al-Ahmad International Stadium, featuring a coach and player from each team. Preceding this, a technical meeting will convene at 8:00 pm at the same stadium.

Rana bowls a brilliant final over

Pant returns but Delhi loses opener, Kolkata edges Hyderabad by 4 runs

CHANDIGARH, India, March 24, (AP): Star Indian cricketer Rishabh Pant returned to action after 15 months out and couldn't stop his Delhi Capitals losing to Punjab Kings in their Indian Premier League season-opener.

In the evening match, unheralded pacer Harshit Rana bowled a brilliant final over to restrict Sunrisers Hyderabad and give Kolkata Knight Riders a thrilling four-run win.

Pant marked his first match since he was seriously injured in a car crash in December 2022 by scoring a 13-ball 18, making a stumping and a catch.

But his Delhi team's 174-9 was chased down by Punjab's 177-6 with four balls to spare, led by Sam Curran's 63 off 47 balls.

Punjab was 42-2 after skipper Shikhar Dhawan and Jonny Bairstow were dismissed cheaply.

Curran led the revival, first with Prabhsimran Mann, then Liam Livingstone when Punjab was 100-4 in the 12th over.

CRICKET

Curran hit six fours and a six in his 47-ball 63, while Livingstone smacked three sixes and two fours in a 21-ball 38. They shared 67 runs off 42 balls before Khaleel Ahmed bowled Curran in the penultimate over. Livingstone saw out the win.

Delhi got a speedy start from David Warner (29) and Mitchell Marsh (20) but Punjab struck back through its pacers - Marsh was caught off Arshdeep Singh and Warner was bounced out by Harshal Patel.

Pant walked in to a rousing reception but played a scratchy knock and was out caught in the 13th over. With Shai Hope gone as well after a leading 33, Delhi was 111-4 then 111-5.

At 138-7, Abishek Porel was subbed in and smacked four fours and two sixes for 32 not out off the 10 balls he faced to lift Delhi to an unlikely par score.

Harshit Rana, one of the two young Kolkata bowlers who was not an international, held his nerve to concede only eight runs in the last over when Hyderabad needed 13.

Hyderabad was expected to canter home by that stage at a packed Eden Gardens.

Heinrich Klaasen smashed 63 off 29 balls as Hyderabad came within touching distance of Kolkata's 208-7. He was out caught off the penultimate delivery, and Rana made Pat Cummins swing and miss the last delivery. Hyderabad finished on 204-7.

Klaasen hit eight sixes, scoring 50 off only 25 balls, and rescued Hyderabad from 107-3 in the 12th over. Klaasen put on 34 off 24 balls with



Punjab Kings' Sam Curran plays a shot during the Indian Premier League cricket tournament match between Delhi Capitals and Punjab Kings in Mullanpur, Punjab, India. (AP)

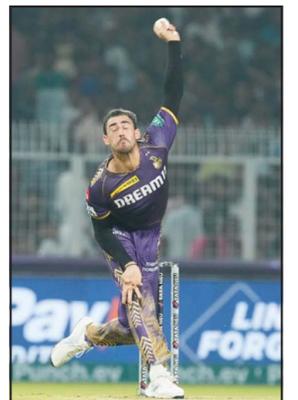
Abdul Samad (15), and a whirlwind 58 off only 16 balls with Shabbaz Ahmed.

Rana (3-33) dismissed Klaasen and Ahmed in the final over in his first match since December.

Kolkata's win was set up by Andre Russell. Russell, coming from the Bangladesh Premier League final, boosted his team from 119-6 in the 14th over.

He blasted an unbeaten 64 off 25 balls with seven sixes and three fours. He reached 50 off only 20 balls and helped Kolkata put up the first 200-plus total of the season.

Opener Philip Salt gave Kolkata a good start with 54 off 40 balls but the hosts lost wickets as pacer T Natarajan bagged 3-32.



Kolkata Knight Riders' Mitchell Starc bowls a delivery during the Indian Premier League cricket tournament match between Kolkata Knight Riders and Sunrisers Hyderabad in Kolkata, India. (AP)