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CITIZENSHIP ISSUE KEY IN 2024 NATIONAL ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS

Security, military banned from campaigns



Ministry of Justice photo
The Minister of Justice and the Minister of Endowments and Islamic Affairs with members of the advisory committee to prepare and follow up on the procedures for conducting the National Assembly elections.

Eid expected on April 10th: Ojairi

KUWAIT CITY, March 30: The Al-Ojairi Scientific Center and the Qatari Calendar House have announced that the first day of Shawwal, marking Eid al-Fitr, will astronomically align on Wednesday, April 10, 2024 according to precise astronomical calculations, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

The crescent of Shawwal is expected to appear on Monday evening, April 8th, at 9:22 pm local time in Kuwait and Doha (6:22 pm Universal Time). However, sighting the crescent on the evening of the investigation day is deemed impossible across Kuwait, Qatar, and other Arab and Islamic countries due to its absence at sunset.

The crescent of Shawwal will remain visible for 55

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Kuwait's second Ramadan poll April 4

By Saeed Mahmoud Saleh

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff and Agencies

KUWAIT CITY, March 30: Instructions have been issued to ban security personnel in the Ministry of Interior and military personnel in Kuwait Army from participating in the campaign headquarters of candidates for the National Assembly elections, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

According to informed sources, whoever violates these instructions exposes himself to legal accountability, disciplinary actions, and court martial.

They explained that Article 13 of Law No. 32/1967 regarding the army and its amendments stipulates, "Military personnel are prohibited from

engaging in politics. They are also prohibited from joining any association or union other than those designated for the army, except with written permission from the Chief of Staff of Army."

The sources added that the Police Force Law also prohibits members of the police force from engaging in politics.

Most 2024 National Assembly election candidates have included the citizenship issue in their electoral programs.

Former MP and Fourth Constituency candidate Obaid Mohammad Al-Wasmi has vowed to submit a bill on allowing the court to rule on citizenship cases. He pointed out that the Kuwaiti citizenship is the only citizenship in the world covered by a resolution issued by the United Nations Security Council based on the documents submitted by the government during the Iraqi occupation. He said the government at the time submitted the records of citizens and expatriates; indicating the resolution covered the citizens who existed on Nov 27, 1990.

He asked HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Dr Mohammad Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah and Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Defense and acting Minister of Interior Sheikh Fahad Yousef Saud Al-Sabah if they are aware of the consequences of doubting the documents submitted by the government during the Iraqi occupation - the

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Opinion

Your Highness the Prime Minister, Kuwait needs an awakening

By Ahmed Al-Jarallah

Editor-in-Chief, the Arab Times

CAN a country like Kuwait sustain itself by merely waiting and indulging in extravagance instead of addressing its problems?

This question has been raised in diwanias from the time of the announcement of the current Council of Ministers, and the short period during which the two authorities were working together. From that time until today, everything is suspended. All we witness are showboatings either by the government or candidates.

It is worth highlighting that waiting for the outcome of the general elections does not prevent the Council of Ministers from actively working and devising solutions to the problems that Kuwait is suffering from.

Whether it is the decline in national productivity, the failure in the revitalization of the key sectors, or the urgent need to address the infrastructure crisis, action is imperative, especially since the country is engulfed in rhetoric that does not ride on the rainbow.

There is a lot of muscle-flexing in the electoral campaigns, but they are nothing more than air bubbles. On the other hand, the Council of Ministers contented itself with the timid conquest of the country which neither nourishes nor avails against hunger.

It also worked to stimulate the so-called national identity, which has its merits but also poses significant drawbacks.

Revoking citizenship could potentially exacerbate the number of stateless residents (Bedouns), thus perpetuating a longstanding problem that has been characterized either by procrastination or temporary measures instead of a genuine commitment to resolving the issue. This unresolved matter continues to draw negative attention towards Kuwait in international forums.

Withdrawing citizenship will today constitute a more complicated factor, because those who lose their citizenship will be added to the 100,000 Bedouns residents. These people cannot be expelled abroad, as they will claim that they have nowhere to go. No country will be willing to receive them, because it will simply say "They are not among our citizens."

Dual citizenship is another problem, but its solution is simple, which is to give the person the choice between Kuwaiti nationality, or the other nationality he holds.

Your Highness the Prime Minister, everyone knows that there are no secrets in Kuwait, because there are about 4,000 diwanias in the country where everything is discussed.

If we were to attribute this issue to the inherent nature of governance, it does not imply waiting forever to address people's concerns. This applies not only to nationality issues and the

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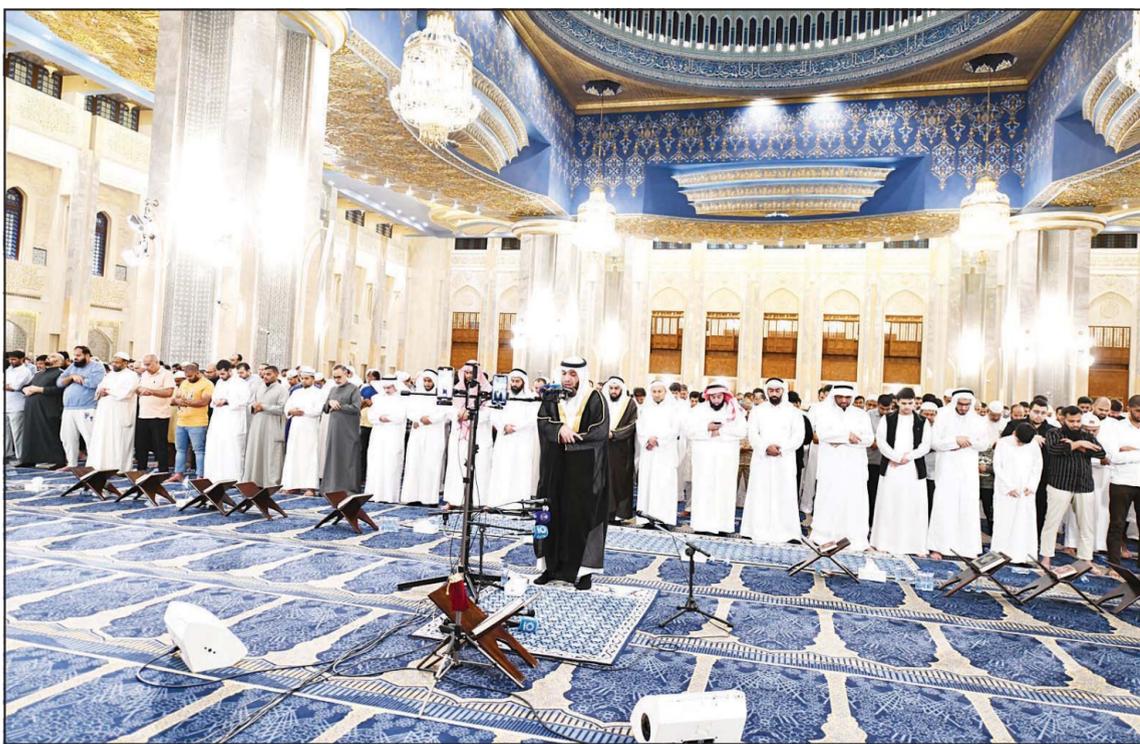
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Ramadan Timings

Iftar Sunday 18:07
Imsak Monday 04:15



The Grand Mosque (Masjid Al-Kabir) in Kuwait City hosted the first 'Qiyam' prayers for worshippers on Friday, March 29, 2024 evening. Qiyam (late-night) prayers are held during the last ten days of the holy month of Ramadan which culminates in the Eid celebrations announcing the end of the fasting month for Muslims worldwide. Grand Mosque has a capacity to receive 50,000 worshippers. —See Page 2

'Open more land crossings for Gaza aid'

Kuwait welcomes ICJ measures against Zionist occupation

KUWAIT CITY, March 30, (Agencies): The Kuwait Foreign Ministry welcomed Friday the International Court of Justice new order which included additional provisional measures to address the Zionist occupation violations of the Genocide Convention in the Gaza Strip.

In a statement, the Ministry said that the ICJ new measures came within the framework of lawsuit filed by the Republic of South Africa concerning the Israeli occupation violations in the Gaza Strip of obligations under the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide.

The Ministry called for forcing the Israeli occupation to immediately implement the ICJ measures and working to provide protection of Palestinian people from the Israeli practices and violations.

It also emphasized the need for allowing the unhindered humanitarian aid access to all Gaza Strip population considering the catastrophic living condition and massive destruction there.

This requires immediate end to the Israeli occupation genocidal war on the Occupied Palestinian Territories in line with the recent UN Security Council Resolution No. 2728 which called for immediate stop to the Israeli military operations in the Gaza Strip and allowing unimpeded flow of humanitarian aid to the Strip.

The State of Kuwait urged the international community to press the Zionist occupation to urgently and fully implement the ICJ provisional measures and the UN resolutions and to allow the entry of humanitarian aid by all means and through all crossing points to avoid a humanitarian catastrophe in the Gaza Strip.

On Thursday, the top United Nations court ordered Israel to take measures to improve the humanitarian situation in Gaza, including opening more land crossings to allow food, water, fuel and other supplies into the war-ravaged enclave.

The International Court of Justice issued two new so-called provisional measures in a case brought by South Africa accusing Israel of acts of genocide in its military campaign launched after the Oct. 7 attacks by Hamas. Israel denies it is committing genocide and accused South Africa of trying to "undermine Israel's inherent right and obligation to defend its citizens."

Thursday's order came after South Africa sought more provisional measures, including a cease-fire, citing starvation in Gaza. Israel, which had urged the court not to issue new orders, said it places no limits on aid entering Gaza and vowed to "promote new ini-



Palestinians collect their belongings from the rubble of a residential building for the Moussa family after an Israeli airstrike in the Maghazi refugee camp, central Gaza Strip, Friday, March 29, 2024. (AP)

tiatives" to bring in even more assistance.

In its legally binding order, the court told Israel to take measures "without delay" to ensure "the unhindered provision" of basic services and humanitarian assistance, including food, water, fuel and medical supplies.

It also ordered Israel to immediately ensure that its military does not take action that could harm Palestinians' rights under the Genocide Convention, including by preventing the delivery of humanitarian assistance.

The court told Israel to report back in a month on its implementation of the orders.

Israel declared war in response to a bloody cross-border attack by Hamas on Oct. 7 in which 1,200 people were killed and 250 others were taken hostage. Israel responded with a campaign of airstrikes and a ground offensive that have left over 32,000 Palestinians dead, according to local health authorities.

The Health Ministry in Hamas-run Gaza does not differentiate between civilians and combatants, but say roughly two-thirds of the dead are women, children and teens. Israel says over one-third of the dead are militants, though it has not provided evidence to support the claim, and it blames Hamas for civilian casualties because the group operates in residential areas.

The fighting has displaced over 80% of Gaza's population, caused widespread damage and has sparked a

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NewsWatch

BEIRUT: The United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) underlined the need to ensure the safety of the UN employees.

In a statement on Saturday, UNIFIL Spokesperson Andrea Tenenti said that three military observers and one Lebanese language assistant on a foot patrol along the Blue Line were injured when an explosion occurred near their location.

They have now been evacuated for medical treatment. The United Nations Truce Supervision Organization UNTSO observers support UNIFIL in implementing our mandate, Tenenti added. (KUNA)

LONDON: British counterterrorism police are investigating the stabbing of an Iranian television presenter outside his home in London as concern grow over threats to a Farsi-language satellite news channel long critical of Iran's theocratic government.

Pouria Zeraati, a presenter at London-based Iran International, was stabbed in the leg Friday afternoon and is in stable condition at a hospital, the station said. His condition is not believed to be life-threatening. (KUNA)

WASHINGTON: The US Department of State announced on Friday additional visa restrictions targeting individuals involved in the repression of the Syrian people.

"This month marked 13 years since the Assad regime began its violent suppression of peaceful protests in Syria," the Dept. Spokesperson Mathew Miller said in a press release, noting that the Syrian regime has committed atrocities, including war crimes and crimes against humanity. (KUNA)

Kuwait successfully meets Global Peace Index targets

KUWAIT CITY, March 30: A recent government report from the National Observatory for Sustainable Development and Future Foresight indicates that Kuwait has met its targets in the realms of community safety and security, and in managing local and international conflicts, aligning with the Third Development Plan, reports Al-Anba daily.

The report, issued by the General Secretariat of the Supreme Council for Planning and Development, puts forward eight key recommendations aimed at fostering peace within Kuwait:

Media Engagement — Media outlets are urged to promote social responsibility, particularly in the security domain, and collaborate with relevant stakeholders to reinforce citizenship, loyalty, and societal belonging.

Scientific Research — Encourage scientific research institutions to conduct field studies on crime factors, proposing solutions aligned with social responsibility principles.

Cultural Development — Emphasize citizen cultural development as a means to curb crime, advocating knowledge dissemination and creating social structures to occupy youth leisure time.

Citizen Cooperation — Encourage citizens to cooperate with security services in reporting and combating crimes.

Civil Society Collaboration — Foster cooperation with global civil society organizations to mitigate violence and conflicts, advancing peace efforts.

Legislative Amendments — Pro-

pose legislative changes to criminalize weapon possession and self-harm, enhancing societal deterrence.

Military Relations — Strengthen international military cooperation to safeguard national sovereignty and security.

Anti-Corruption Efforts — Intensify anti-corruption measures to foster a

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KUNA photo
The Kuwait Pavilion at the Doha Horticultural Expo 2023 clinched the 'Most Educational' award on Wednesday. Engineer Samira Al-Kandari, Acting Director General of the Environment Public Authority and Acting Commissioner General of the Kuwait Pavilion, expressed her delight at this achievement.

Prayer Timings

| | | | |
|------------|-------|------------|-------|
| Fajr | 04:21 | Asr | 15:23 |
| Sunrise .. | 05:41 | Maghrib .. | 18:05 |
| Zohr | 11:53 | Isha | 19:23 |

Local

Expected weather for next 24 hrs:

By Day: Rather hot and partly cloudy with light to moderate northeasterly wind to light variable wind, with speeds of 08-30 km/h.

Weather

By Night: Mild with light to moderate northwesterly wind to light variable wind, with speeds of 06-28 km/h and some scattered clouds will appear.

| Station | Max Exp | Min Rec |
|----------------|---------|---------|
| Kuwait City | 30 | 21 |
| Kuwait Airport | 30 | 19 |
| Abdaly | 30 | 17 |
| Jahra | 30 | 19 |
| Salmiyah | 27 | 22 |

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

Global, Arab, Gulf positive reaction lauded

Step towards right direction... Chinese envoy lauds Gaza ceasefire resolution

KUWAIT CITY, March 30: Chinese Ambassador Zhang Jianwei praised the United Nations Security Council's decision to implement ceasefire in the Gaza Strip during the holy month of Ramadan -- the first ceasefire resolution adopted by the Council since the outbreak of the latest round of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, reports Al-Qabas daily.

Jianwei told the daily: "The decision reflects the general expectation of the international community and enjoys collective support from Arab countries. It is a step towards the right direction and China voted in favor of the decision." He also praised the positive reaction of the international, Arab and Gulf communities to the decision.

He described the plight of Gaza as a warning to the world about the danger of the continuing historical injustice to which the Palestinian people are exposed, and the legitimate aspiration to establish an independent State of Palestine cannot be overlooked.

He added: "In almost six months since the outbreak of the conflict in Gaza; more than 32,000 Palestinian civilians have lost their lives. Although this decision came too late for the lives lost, it represents a long awaited hope for millions of people in Gaza who are still mired in the catastrophe. It is an unprecedented humanitarian move, if implemented fully and effectively. The United Nations Security Council resolutions are binding. We call on the concerned parties to fulfill their obligations under the United Nations Charter and to take measures in accordance with the resolution. We expect countries that have great influence to play a positive role in coordination with the concerned parties, such as taking all the necessary and effective measures to support the implementation of the decision."

On whether China and Russia have succeeded in pressuring America to refrain from obstructing ceasefire efforts in Gaza, the Chinese ambassador stated: "Following the repeated use of its veto against Security Council measures, the United States decided to stop obstructing the Council's demand for an immediate ceasefire. The United States is still trying to find all kinds of excuses to make accusations against China. The eyes of the international community are keen and the American accusations are unacceptable. On the contrary, China and other concerned countries have continued to adhere to the principles of justice, which forced the

United States to realize that it cannot and will not continue to obstruct the Council's efforts to take the decisive step toward this path. In the end, justice prevails."

He continued: "The Chinese side believes that the ceasefire during Ramadan is only a first step. The decision must serve as the basis for a permanent and sustainable cessation of hostilities, and the residents of Gaza who were forced to migrate must be allowed to return to their homes as soon as possible. At the same time, the blockade of Gaza and man-made barriers to humanitarian access must be lifted immediately to ensure that humanitarian supplies can enter Gaza in sufficient quantities quickly to reach those in need in a safe and timely manner."

Regarding the support of the Arab countries for China's position against the American project, he stated: "We welcome the efforts of Egypt, Qatar and the United States to push for the release of the hostages. We hope all hostages and detainees will be released as soon as possible, and that they will return to their homes as soon as possible."

He continued: "This ordeal in the Gaza Strip warns the world once again that it is not permissible to continue to ignore the reality of the long-term occupation of the Palestinian territories. It is not permissible to ignore the aspiration of the Palestinian people to establish an independent State, not to mention the continuation of the historical injustice that the Palestinian people have suffered over the generations. Without correcting the situation, it is not possible to break out of the spiral of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict once and for all, remove the fertile ground for extremist ideas of all kinds, and achieve lasting peace in the Middle East except by restoring rights to the Palestinian people and implementing the two-State solution in a comprehensive manner."

On why China is keen on playing a mediating role in resolving the Gaza crisis, Jianwei explained that his country firmly supports the just cause of the Palestinian people to restore their legitimate national rights, and has been working to find a comprehensive, just and lasting solution to the Palestinian issue. He added: "We support Palestine being a full member of the United Nations. We call on members of the United Nations Security Council to stop creating obstacles in this regard."

He stressed that "the United Nations Security Council should closely follow up the situation in Gaza and be prepared to take further measures when necessary to ensure the full and timely implementation of the resolution. China will continue to make efforts with all parties to bring an early end to the fighting in Gaza, mitigate the humanitarian catastrophe, and implement the two-State solution."



Zhang Jianwei



Al-Hamdan

Distance learning in 124 schools used as poll centers

KUWAIT CITY, March 30: Anwar Al-Hamdan, the Acting Undersecretary of the Ministry of Education, has announced the transition to distance learning for students, educational staff, and administrative personnel in 124 schools designated as polling centers for the upcoming National Assembly elections on Wednesday, April 3, 2024, reports Al-Qabas daily.

Meanwhile, traditional in-person studies will continue in the remaining schools under the Ministry of Education.

In preparation for the parliamentary elections scheduled for April 4, 2024, Al-Hamdan emphasized the Ministry's commitment to leveraging all necessary resources to ensure the provision of services before and after the voting process.

This includes meeting the requirements to facilitate a successful democratic event in the country. The Ministry is working closely with relevant departments and specialized teams to prepare the designated schools, chosen by the Ministry of Interior as polling centers, for the

electoral proceedings.

Al-Hamdan clarified that this decision aligns with the Ministry's dedication to maintaining the continuity and uninterrupted flow of education.

Following the conclusion of the electoral process, the responsible authorities will undertake cleaning procedures in the schools to prepare them for the return of students. She commended the efforts of all Ministry personnel across various sectors for their contributions to the preparation and execution of the 2024 National Assembly elections, expressing optimism for a smooth and successful democratic event in the nation.

'Grand Mosque fully prepared to greet 50,000 'Qiyam' worshipers'

Tents set up in case of rain, unstable weather: official

By Abdul Nasser Al-Aslami
Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, March 30: As the breeze graces the last ten days of the Ramadan, and the nights of deliverance from hell-fire unfold, these nights are filled with forgiveness, mercy, and abundant blessings. Among them is the "Lailat-ul-Qadr" (Night of Destiny), which is better than a thousand months of worship, marked by fervent prayers, prostrations, and earnest pleas for forgiveness throughout the night.

Two nights ago, worshippers gathered at the Grand Mosque to perform prayers on the twentieth night of Ramadan, following meticulous preparations by the Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs. Their diligent efforts were aimed to create a devout atmosphere for the multitude of visitors attending these blessed nights at the Grand Mosque.

In this regard, the Director of the Grand Mosque Administration Ali Shaddad Al-Mutairi said, "We have taken maximum readiness to receive 50,000 worshippers".

He said, "On this auspicious night, as the Grand Mosque welcomed 2,300 worshippers, everyone aspires to earn blessings and leave their mark during these sacred days".

Al-Mutairi explained in a press statement issued after the end of the prayers of the first night of the ten blessed nights that the administration of the Grand Mosque is fully prepared in coordination with relevant government agencies such as the Ministry of Interior, the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Information, the Kuwait Red Crescent Society, private supporting bodies, and volunteers of both genders and of different ages who organize the entry and exit of worshippers and provide hospitality services to worshippers during the last ten nights of Ramadan.

Tents were set up next to the mosque to receive worshippers in anticipation of rain and weather fluctuations. A special tent was also set up for mothers, another for children to take advantage of this time, and one for families to enjoy the devout atmosphere and to reassure their children that they are in the care of safe hands.

Kuwait Airways declares summer flights schedule

KUWAIT CITY, March 20, (KUNA : Kuwait Airways on Saturday declared the schedule of its summer flights with a concentration on high-demand destinations in the June-September period.

Chairman Abdulmohsen Al-Fagan said in a statement that the company would operate additional flights to some destinations, namely London, Amsterdam, Vienna and Geneva to cope with the prospected large number of passengers.

Some of the most favored summer destinations are Antalya, with two trips a week, Bodrum, three, and Trabzon, three, in addition to Sharm Al-Sheikh, two per week.

Also, the top desired destinations are Malaga, three flights per week, and Nice, twice, he said, noting that the number of summer trips would reach 54, in addition to the other constant flights.

The KAC will inaugurate the large aircraft, Boeing 300-777 B, to fly most European countries to enable clients to benefit from the Royal and business-degree services.

'Leadership keen on support for National Guard progress'

KUWAIT CITY, March 30: Deputy Chief of the National Guard Sheikh Faisal Al-Nawaf recently inspected His Highness Sheikh Salem Al-Ali Camp to follow up the ongoing expansion of the camp, reports Al-Anba daily.

Undersecretary of the National Guard Lieutenant General M. Hashim Al-Rifai and senior officials accompanied Sheikh Faisal Al-Nawaf during the visit. He was briefed on the expansion project, which comes within the framework of developing the facilities and buildings of the National Guard. He affirmed the full support of the leadership in covering all the needs of the units operating at the camp.

Sheikh Faisal Al-Nawaf visited the aircraft maintenance hangar and listened to an explanation of its contents. He also viewed the Caracal aircraft -- the nucleus of the National Guard's vertical aviation project; and listened to an explanation of the aircraft, its capabilities, and its tasks in support, backup, rescue and firefighting. He also visited the control tower and listened to an explanation of the technical team's tasks, role and equipment; and watched an aircraft take off after communicating with the tower.

He issued a directive to continue intensifying efforts to introduce helicopters into the National Guard to support the State agencies, in cooperation with the ministries of Defense and Interior and Kuwait Firefighting Force under the wise leadership of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah who is also the Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces.



Photo by Mohammad Morsi
Fasting Muslims are seen at a mosque waiting for the Azan -- call to break fast, and Maghrib prayer respectively. Mosques throughout Kuwait are providing free meals for the faithful throughout the month.

Other Voices

Memories, mosques & prayers

By Ahmad alsarraf

I have been exposed to two semi-embarassing situations in my life, the last of which was 34 years ago, when one of the brothers in the "Citizens Aid Committee in Riyadh" asked me, during Saddam's invasion of Kuwait, to lead them in prayer as an imam, and they were all Sunnis!

I apologized, but my refusal was misunderstood. The chief volunteer in the committee came up to me and said something that is still stuck in my memory: Abu Tariq, you are our leader and our president. The country is lost and we are all equal. There is no difference between Shiites and Sunnis, and we want you today as an imam. I repeatedly apologized, and it ended with someone else taking over.

After the liberation, that person was involved in a case of dishonesty, and he was a member of the Brotherhood, and he disappeared from the scene!

I remembered that incident while reading the news that "Imam Juma" in the city of Tehran had disposed of a huge plot of land worth billions, which had previously been placed at his disposal to build a cultural center and a scientific seminary. He transferred it to his name, and defended his position that people had forged his signature and registered the land in his name.

That incident reminded me of another similar incident in which a senior government official, who was a member of the Muslim Brotherhood party in Kuwait, transferred ownership of a large plot of land that the Azerbaijan government had granted to his association to build an Islamic center. He registered it in his name and disposed of it, and his matter was exposed, due to his stupidity, and he was removed from his position and he was sentenced to prison!

I also remembered the complaints of some visitors to Tehran about the lack of Sunni mosques there, and this is inaccurate, as their number is very small, and the phenomenon of the lack of mosques exists in almost all Islamic countries, and only the Gulf countries

have their governments competing with the people in building them.

A Shiite does not give prayer in mosques the same importance as the Sunni, for two reasons: First, because the timings for its performance are flexible, and thus it is difficult for the worshippers and the imam to agree to a specific hour. Also, a majority does not accept praying behind any imam, but rather specific qualities must be present in him.

With Khomeini's arrival to power, he restored Friday prayers to their historical importance, and they began to be held in all major cities, and supervised by the "Friday Prayer Organization," which follows the Supreme Leader, and from here the Friday imams gain their power and importance.

On the other hand, the "Charitable Endowments Organization," which is managed by Hojjat al-Islam Mehdi Khamoshi, appointed by the Supreme Leader, is considered one of the wealthiest charitable organizations in Iran, as it controls tens of thousands of acres of land, real estate, and properties, which their owners place at the organization's disposal for charity purposes.

According to Iranian laws, the organization must appoint a supervisor for its properties, who is often a cleric. They are allowed to dispose of the properties as they wish, as they are tax-exempt properties and are not subject to accounting, and therefore it is not possible to know the incomes generated by those supervising them.

The "Friday Imam" scandal in the city of Tehran revealed the extent to which clerics exploit donations given by citizens to charitable works, to achieve their personal and political goals, and this is exactly similar to what happens to us by some parties that receive a lot of donations, manage their own endowments, and are not subject to accountability. These parties will often aggressively exploit charitable funds in the upcoming elections, as usual!

I and many others were pleased with our visit to "Kuwait House", the home of brother Adel Al-Zawawi, to congratulate him on the month of Ramadan, and to support him, as a staunch defender of national identity. Thanks go to the rest of the members of the Gathering of Eighty for their good efforts.

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Empowerment need urged

Call to promote women's rights

KUWAIT CITY, March 30: The Women's Cultural and Social Association has urged candidates running in the 2024 National Assembly elections to champion women's issues and actively promote their rights and empowerment across all sectors.

In a statement conveyed to Al-Qabas on Thursday, the association emphasized the significant and central role Kuwaiti women have historically and presently played in the advancement of Kuwaiti society and the establishment of the association.

The association underscored its belief in the critical importance of empowering women, viewing it as an essential step towards achieving gender equality and justice. They emphasized that such empowerment not only fosters stability and sustainable progress within the nation but also contributes to addressing a spectrum of human rights concerns and facilitating overall development.

As such, the association has presented a proposed electoral agenda for empowering women and safeguarding their rights to both voters and election candidates for the 2024 National Assembly elections. They hope that these proposals will be seriously considered and incorporated into the agendas of candidates, in a manner that serves the collective welfare of the nation.

Lulwah Al-Mulla, President of the Women's Cultural and Social Association, highlighted the demonstrated competence and merit of Kuwaiti women in leadership roles and various domains. She urged voters to actively engage in the electoral process and avoid abstaining from voting, emphasizing the importance of selecting candidates who prioritize the nation's interests and the preservation of freedoms.

KU nods seat

8,646 to get admission

KUWAIT CITY, March 30: The Supreme Council of the Kuwait University decided to approve the allocation of 8,646 seats for admission to the university for the next academic year 2024-2025 without any increase in numbers as proposed by the Deanship of Admission and Registration, reports Al-Qabas daily.

The Council also decided to approve the admission and transfer policy and highlighted the proposed amendments to the basic rules for admission to the Kuwait University and the conditions for transfer for the academic year 2024/2025, while referring the issue to the Council of Public Universities for approval.

The proposed seats in each college were as follows -- 150 seats in the College of Medicine, 40 seats in dentistry, 70 seats in pharmacy, 45 in public health, and 325 seats in assistant medicine while 1,201 seats were allocated to the College of Engineering and Petroleum, 1,200 to the College of Science, 1,130 seats to Arts, and 1,000 seats to the College.

The Faculty of Social Sciences had 850 seats, Life Sciences 750 seats, Administrative Sciences 650 seats, Sharia 600 seats, Law 500 seats, and Architecture 135 seats.

Moreover, informed sources revealed that the University Council was often pressing to increase the number of seats in some colleges, to provide for the needs of the labor market and to accommodate students especially in the Faculty of Medicine, where the Council was at least increasing the number of available seats by 15 seats, but the Council approved the numbers proposed by the Deanship of Admission and Registration without any change.

'No iqama for hepatitis carriers'

KUWAIT CITY, March 30: Minister of Health Dr Ahmad Al-Awadhi recently issued a ministerial decision; stipulating that a newly arrived residency applicant will be considered medically unfit if the result of his laboratory test for hepatitis C is 'indeterminate', reports Al-Rai daily.

The use of polymerase chain reaction (PCR) test is prohibited in these cases, and the relevant decisions and regulations are applied.

An expatriate with two 'indeterminate' hepatitis C laboratory test results at least four weeks apart are allowed to undergo

a PCR test. Those with a positive PCR test result will be considered unfit, so the above-mentioned decision and the relevant regulations will be applied to him. If the PCR test result is negative, the residency permit will be renewed for a year and the PCR test will be repeated after one year. If the test result is negative again, the expatriate is considered fit.

It is worth mentioning that this decision is in line with the Council of Ministers' resolution stipulating mechanisms for dealing with positive or negative cases, adding health oversight to unspecified cases.

diwaniya ديوانية

A DIGEST OF PUBLIC OPINION

The wise leadership and deeds for benefit of a beloved nation

"LAST week, His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad, Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces, accompanied by the Prime Minister, His Highness Sheikh Dr. Muhammad Al-Sabah, paid visits to personnel from the Armed Forces, the National Guard, security and firefighters. This honorable annual custom of the leadership is an affirmation of the care and attention these institutions receive from the wise leadership, which is committed to communication with generosity and humility in character," columnist **Tarek Hamada** wrote for *Al-Anba* daily.



Tarek Hamada

"His Highness, may God protect him, issued advice, directives, aspirations, and a reminder of the great interest that the state pays to military institutions in order to develop their performance, raise their capabilities and support their men.

"During his visit to the Ministry of Interior, His Highness the Amir also appreciated the efforts of the Ministry's employees and their great roles in preserving the security of the nation and achieving safety for its good people and those residing on its hospitable land.

"His Highness pointed to the importance of continuing with digital transformation, in addition to demanding the continuation of modernizing the security system and applying the law to everyone and striking with an iron hand, everyone who dares to tamper with the security and safety of the nation and is keen to show the civilized face of our country. His Highness, may God protect him, also appreciated the great role of the security men during the recent national celebrations.

"There is no doubt that His Highness's praise of the role of the Interior Ministry men during the national celebrations in the manner that we all seek, came as an expression of what is inside the citizens, in appreciation of the security efforts, organization, and good deployment, which had a positive impact on the celebrations in the manner that we seek since years ago, when the celebrations went out of control as some violated the law and caused harm to the revelers by throwing water balloons and other things.

"His Highness's directives to implement the law equally on everyone without discrimination mean that any transgression by anyone must be met with deserved punishment according to the law.

"His Highness's call in this regard was taken during a meeting chaired by the Deputy Prime Minister of Defense and Acting Minister of Interior Sheikh Fahd Al-Yousef, Undersecretary of the Ministry of Interior Lieutenant General Sheikh Salem Al-Nawaf, and Assistant Undersecretaries of the Ministry of Interior, during which the emphasis was placed on applying the law on everyone and dealing firmly with anyone who behaves otherwise in addition to noting the need for agents to follow an open-door policy.

"The open-door policy must not be understood as a gateway to bypassing the law. Rather, it is one of the most important factors for a leader's success in following up on the needs of clients, overcoming the obstacles facing them, granting everyone their rights without exception, and adhering to the values of justice and equality. May God protect Kuwait from all harm.

"Lastly, I congratulate the distinguished brothers Major General Badr Al-Baloul, Major General Hamad Al-Munafi, Major General Youssef Al-Khadha, Major General Sheikh Fawaz Al-Khaled, Major General Mujbil bin Shawq, and Major General Ali Al-Adwani for their appointment as assistant undersecretaries in the Ministry of Interior.

"We pray to God Almighty to grant you success and to help you confront problems and difficulties. The stability and security of the nation is a responsibility. Fate requires all of us to protect this good land in order to continue the construction process and raise Kuwait's status. May God protect Kuwait from all harm."

Also:

"Many countries in the world are trying to improve the job performance of their employees in several ways, and one of these methods is conducting periodic theoretical and practical (field) tests, that is, every year, every two years, or every five years, to ensure that the employee is still mentally and physically active, and that he is able to perform the requirements," columnist **Youssef Abdul Karim Al-Zankawi** wrote for *Al-Jarida* daily.

"This is in addition to ensure that job is done to the fullest, and among the most important jobs or professions in which some countries require their professionals to pass field tests such as pilots, engineers, teachers, accountants, and lawyers. There are other professions that fall within this list according to their sensitivity or importance.

"I know that in Kuwait there are two professions which are subject to periodic field tests, such as pilots and some engineers. I do not know if they are continuing in this area or if the practice has gone with the wind and that these two professions are now treated like other professions with neglect.

"It has become common practice when someone applies for a job -- for that matter any job -- to present in his CV papers his academic or educational

certificates to ensure that they are not forged and that they are issued by an accredited university or college, and then he is given a theoretical or field exam to ensure that he has achieved scientific or academic success with merit and deservingness and not by cheating. If he succeeds in these tests, the process of selecting the best among the successful takes place.

"However, in most state institutions, this logical process of selecting the best and most appropriate does not take place. Rather, the mediation of sectarianism, tribalism, and classism plays a prominent role, which tramples under the feet international standards and the rationale in employee selection. In some state institutions, the opposite happens.

"The employee gets the job and later is asked to prove his academic certificates, or after that he is practically examined to ensure that he is "fit" and suitable for the job.

"An assistant undersecretary at the Ministry of Education issued to run a check on the educational certificates for citizens and resident employees, and an inventory of the names and data of all employees of the Ministry who hold academic qualifications above high school and obtained them from 2000 until date, both Kuwaiti and non-Kuwaiti employees, that is, during a period extending for a quarter of a century, and this ministerial decision confirms that in the Ministry Education alone employees hold hundreds of fake certificates or from unrecognized colleges or universities.

"If this is the case with the Ministry of Education then what about the other ministries, not to mention public institutions and private sector companies? During the past four years, the Kuwait Society of Engineers was able to detect hundreds of forged certificates in the field of engineering, and in April of last year, the Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Society confirmed that the KSE continues to detect forged certificates in the engineering sector, or track incorrect qualifications submitted by their holders, and all of them were referred to committees for investigations with legal authorities to take the necessary measures against them.

The strange thing is that the rest of the state ministries did nothing to detect the forged certificates, and among dozens of Kuwaiti professional public benefit associations, the Society of Engineers and the Pilots Association were the only ones committed to examining the certificates of their members."

"Ramadan is a school for time management ... The beating of a person's heart tells him that life entails minutes and seconds. So, before you die, remember it for yourself, for the remembrance of man has a second life," Imam and Preacher **Mohammad Al-Fouzzan** wrote for *Al-Seyassah* daily.

"The month of Ramadan is a school for organizing time, exploiting it and investing it in everything that brings us closer to Allah Almighty. Life is a treasure. Whoever spends it in obedience of Allah will find his treasure on the day when neither wealth nor children are beneficial.

"The predecessors had many stories about preserving their time. Al-Junaid, while in the process of death, was reading the Qur'an, and his children said to him: 'You have exhausted yourself!' He said: 'Who is more deserving of stress than me?'

"Al-Aswad bin Yazid Al-Tabai prayed most of the night and some of his companions told him: 'If I could rest a little.' He said: 'I want to rest' (meaning in the afterlife).

"Sufyan Al-Thawri was sitting in the sanctuary with people talking, then he suddenly stood up from among them and said: 'Shall we sit here while the day is doing its work?'

"Al-Hasan Al-Basri, may Allah have mercy on him, stated: 'There is no day when dawn breaks except that a caller calls out from the truth: O son of Adam, I am a new creation, and I am a witness to your deeds, so provide me with good deeds, for I will not return to the Day of Resurrection.'

"Thus Al-Shafi'i, may Allah have mercy on him, said: 'In this world, we are like people riding on a cliff. We remain seated, while time passes by us.'

"Time does not stop for a single moment and the wise person makes every moment that passes by him an opportunity to gain benefit for himself and for the people. If he fasts during the day, stays up at night, reads the Qur'an, and remembers Allah, a good deed will be recorded for him.

"If he guides a lost person or helps a helpless or weak person, a good deed will be recorded for him. If he is careful in seeking the company of good people, avoids bad people and prays the obligatory prayers on time in a group, then he has risen to a great level of advancement.

"He (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) says: 'Son of Adam: Take advantage of five things: your youth before your old age, your health before your sickness, your free time before your work, your life before your death, and your wealth before your poverty.'

"Time is like a sword. If you do not cut it, it will cut you. Time does not remain neutral. It is either a friendly friend or a bitter enemy. If you do not fill your soul with good, it will fill you with evil.

"We ask Allah Almighty to help us remember Him, thank Him and worship Him well, and to bless our lives and time."

— Compiled by PFX Fernandes

Kuwaiti blamed

Expat falsely implicated in three gross violations

KUWAIT CITY, March 30: An unidentified expatriate has filed a complaint with the Mubarak Al-Kabeer police station, accusing a Kuwaiti man of implicating him in three serious violations, reports *Al-Anba* daily.

According to the complainant, the Kuwaiti had asked for his driver's license ostensibly to rent a vehicle from a specialized company.

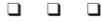
The man explained that the Kuwaiti claimed he could not rent a vehicle using his license saying there were some obstacles which prevented him from doing so.

The expatriate added, he was surprised when he received letters indicating three serious violations associated with the rented vehicle.

Upon investigation with the General Traffic Department, it was found that the vehicle rented under the informant's name had been delivered to a juvenile who did not possess a driving license and had subsequently been arrested for reckless driving.

The informant asserted that he is not acquainted with the juvenile who had misused the vehicle.

Additionally, a case was registered under the title "Handing a vehicle to a person who does not have a driving license."



'Misuse of phone': The investigator at Mubarak Al-Kabeer Police Station has referred a case file titled "Misuse of a Phone" to the District Investigation Department, reports *Al-Anba* daily.

This action follows a report filed by a citizen who stated that he had received numerous messages containing insults and defamation through 5 different mobile unknown phone numbers.

Although the plaintiff did not specifically accuse anyone, he indicated that the perpetrator was likely one person, particularly because the content of the messages was largely similar.



The meeting in progress.

Be vigilant: Maj Gen Fahd

Call to implement royal directives

KUWAIT CITY, March 30: Major General Khaled Fahd, the acting Chief of the General Fire Force, convened a meeting with the senior officials of the Directorate-General of Fire Department (DGFD), reports *Al-Jarida* daily.

During the meeting, he conveyed greetings from Sheikh Fahd Al-Yousef, the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Defense, and Acting Minister of Interior. Major General Fahd directed the leaders to implement the directives of His Highness the Amir, Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad, Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces, particularly emphasizing the instructions given during His Highness's visit in the holy month of Ramadan.

Major General Fahd reiterated the commitment of the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Defense, and Acting Minister of Interior to implementing and translating the

royal directives.

These directives emphasize maintaining vigilance, readiness to confront risks and fires, intensifying inspection visits, ensuring compliance with safety and fire prevention requirements in facilities and buildings, and conducting inspection campaigns on various commercial, investment, and industrial properties.

Moreover, Major General Fahd emphasized the importance of staying updated with developments in fire prevention and civil protection fields, enhancing preventive strategies, and strengthening crisis and disaster management plans. He urged all leaders to actively engage in fieldwork, communicate effectively with their departments and centers, and ensure that the needs of all members of the force are addressed to elevate their performance levels.



Hashish packed in colorful packets and the suspects arrested.

Mol photo

Bid to smuggle 350kg of drugs foiled by Mol

Kuwaiti, 4 Iranians, Egyptian held

By Munaif Naif

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, March 30: Six individuals - four Iranians, a Kuwaiti and an Egyptian - were arrested for attempting to smuggle 350 kilograms of hashish, worth KD 1 million, via sea from Iran.

According to security sources, the arrest was made by anti-narcotics officers based on instructions from the Deputy Prime Minister and Acting Minister of Defense and Interior Sheikh Fahad Al-Yousef. The operation was supervised by the Assistant Undersecretary for Criminal Affairs Major General Hamid Al-Dawas, Brigadier General Muhammad Qabazard, and Brigadier General Sheikh Hamad Al-Sabah.

In a press statement, the Directorate General

of Security Relations and Media of the Ministry of Interior explained that the operation was part of the efforts of the Ministry of Interior to confront drug dealers and smugglers and control the criminal networks that attempt to smuggle poisons into the country.

The Criminal Security Sector, represented by the Drugs Control General Department, with the cooperation of the General Department of Coast Guard, was able to thwart an attempt to smuggle a large quantity of narcotic substances into the country via sea.

During the intensification of search and investigation operations into the narcotic smugglers and dealers, information was obtained about some people who were trying to bring a large quantity of narcotic substances into the country by sea. As soon as the boat was spotted, it was seized and a total of 13 bags containing about 350 kilograms of hashish were found. The six individuals onboard the boat were arrested and referred to the concerned authority for necessary legal measures.

Do you need biometrics?

Man fined KD 2,000 for insulting female doctor

KUWAIT CITY, March 30: The Misdemeanor Court has imposed a fine of 2,000 dinars on a Kuwaiti citizen for insulting a doctor at Mubarak Al-Kabeer Hospital by grabbing her by the stethoscope she was wearing around her neck, reports *Al-Anba* daily.

The ruling came in response to a complaint filed by lawyer Elaf Al-Saleh.

The Public Prosecution had charged the accused, also a Kuwaiti citizen, with insulting the victim, a doctor in the emergency room of the hospital, by grabbing the stethoscope she was wearing.

The incident occurred when the accused was being examined, and he requested to speak to the victim alone. He then informed her that he had taken a dose of shabu and assured her that his condition was stable.

However, he suddenly stood up angrily, shouted at her to be quiet, assaulted her, and grabbed her stethoscope.

Lawyer Elaf Al-Saleh provided video evidence of the incident to the hospital, along with witness testimonies. The court reviewed the evidence and subsequently imposed a fine of 2,000 dinars on the accused.



Do you need biometrics?: Yousef Kazim, the spokesperson for the unified government application for electronic services, "Sahel," announced the launch of a new electronic service by the Ministry of Interior through the "Sahel" application, reports *Al-Jarida* daily.

This new service, available under the "Security Services" section within the application, enables users to verify the necessity of undergoing a biometric fingerprint process.

In a statement to KUNA on Thursday, Kazim elaborated that this service allows individuals to inquire about the need for a biometric fingerprint, whether for themselves or for others, such as family members, children, or domestic workers. This feature aids individuals in recognizing the requirement for biometric fingerprinting for various purposes.

To utilize this service, individuals who are advised to undergo biometric fingerprinting can book an appointment through the "Sahel" application.

The booking process involves navigating to the "Appointments" menu, selecting "Book an Appointment," choosing the Ministry of Interior, then selecting the General Administration of Criminal Evidence, followed by choosing the "Biometric Fingerprint" option and booking an available appointment slot.



The fire brigade arrives at the site.

One dies, three injured in accident on highway

KUWAIT CITY, March 30: A collision involving three vehicles on King Fahd Road has left one person dead and three others injured, according to the General Fire Force. The incident occurred this evening, Friday, prompting swift response from emergency teams, reports *Al-Jarida* daily.

The General Fire Force reported that their teams promptly responded to the collision and overturn accident on King Fahd Road. Tragically, one individual lost their life in the incident, while three others sustained injuries. The scene was swiftly managed by emergency personnel and subsequently handed over to the appropriate authorities for further investigation.

9-thefts burglar nabbed

KUWAIT CITY, March 30: Officers from the Criminal Investigation Department at the Interior Ministry closed nine theft cases when they arrested the thief who stole from several offices in Abdullah Al-Mubarak, reports *Al-Anba* daily quoting a security source.

This came after the department received information about the thefts in foreign offices in Abdullah Al-Mubarak, including the theft of electrical appliances. After intensifying research and investigation, the officers found out that the perpetrator is in his 30s and he has a criminal record. An entrapment led to the arrest of the thief, with some of the stolen items in his possession.



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Such endeavors to reflect on health care quality: Al-Awadhi

Kuwait's health minister signs MoU with UK hospital for children

By Nusaiba bin Shaibah

LONDON, March 30, (KUNA): Kuwaiti Minister of Health Dr. Ahmad Al-Awadhi signed a memo of understanding (MoU) with Great Ormond Street Hospital (GOSH) in London on Thursday, with Kuwaiti Ambassador in the UK Bader Al-Awadhi attending.

The Kuwaiti Health Office's Chief Dr. Abdulaziz Al-Rasheed and the minister's accompanying delegation attended the event.

Speaking to KUNA, the minister said the MoU aims at sharing expertise, reducing the number of overseas patients, drawing world medical staff to Kuwait, creating cooperation opportunities and training Kuwaiti

medics. He commended the hospital as being one of the most significant European hospitals for incurable diseases, children's cancer, organ transplants and intractable surgeries.

The minister hoped that such endeavors would reflect on health care quality for citizens and residents in Kuwait as part of the Kuwaiti politi-

cal leadership's attention to patients and to providing better health services to them.

He added that his field tour of the British hospital, visits to Kuwaiti patients, and meeting with their families would promote the Health Ministry's humanitarian role, whether at this hospital or other hospitals.

For his part, Chief Executive of the Great Ormond Street Hospital (GOSH) Mathew Shaw said the partnership with the Kuwaiti Health Ministry was launched in 2010 and has witnessed numerous mutual visits and training of Kuwaiti medics.

He added that this partnership would contribute to providing more

exchange of expertise and upgrading the quality of health services for children.

Great Ormond Street Hospital (GOSH) is one of the world's leading children's hospitals. Since its formation in 1852, the hospital has been dedicated to children's healthcare and to finding new and better ways to treat childhood illnesses.

Justice Ministry details criteria for appointments in govt institutions

Collaborative efforts support orphans: Al-Gharib

KUWAIT CITY, March 30: The Minister of Justice and Minister of Endowments and Islamic Affairs, Counselor Faisal Al-Gharib, has announced that the Ministry of Justice has issued a ministerial circular detailing the procedures and criteria for appointments to public positions within the sectors and departments under the judiciary affairs budget. These procedures are designed to ensure the selection of the most qualified candidates and uphold the highest standards of transparency, equality, and equal opportunities, reports Al-Jarida daily.



Al-Gharib

Al-Gharib emphasized the importance of utilizing automated systems to streamline processes for both employees and applicants while ensuring smooth workflow within the Ministry of Justice. This move reflects the ministry's commitment

to modernizing its operations and promoting efficiency in its administrative procedures.

In other news Al-Gharib, emphasized the government's commitment to supporting all segments of Kuwaiti society, particularly in charitable endeavors, with a special focus on orphans, a group Islam has emphasized caring for throughout history as a testament to its civilizational values.

Speaking during his participation in the Asaad Tasad initiative for orphans, organized by the Ministry of Endowments and Islamic Affairs in collaboration with the Sheikh Abdullah Al-Nouri Charitable Society, Al-Gharib highlighted Islam's teachings regarding the importance of caring for orphans, quoting the Prophet Muhammad's saying, "I and the one who sponsors an orphan will be like these in Paradise," while pointing to his middle and index fingers. This underscores the significant reward and status of those who support orphans.

Al-Gharib stressed that sponsoring an orphan extends beyond individual efforts and encompasses broader societal responsibility, where various institutions, both governmental and civil, play a role in providing comprehensive support to orphaned children. The "Happiest for Orphans" initiative, launched for the second consecutive year by the Ministry of Endowments in collaboration with the Community Guidance Office, aims to uplift the lives of orphans and send a message of solidarity and care from society.

Iman Al-Khalidi, the Head of Initiatives, emphasized the importance of collective efforts from all sectors of society, including government agencies and civil society organizations, in prioritizing the well-being of orphaned children across all aspects of life.

Similarly, Walid Al-Saif, the director of the Sheikh Abdullah Al-Nouri Charitable Society, expressed pride in the partnership established to support orphans, emphasizing the importance of continuing such collaborative efforts to serve the community and provide care for vulnerable children, with hopes for ongoing activities in the future.



KUWAIT CITY, March 30: The British Embassy recently hosted a 'Ghabqa' that brought together a diverse group of people, reports Al-Rai daily.

Embassy hosts 'Ghabqa'

Ghabqa is a great way to embrace Kuwaiti culture: British ambassador

KUWAIT CITY, March 30: The British Embassy recently hosted a 'Ghabqa' that brought together a diverse group of people, reports Al-Rai daily.



Lewis

Present at the event were representatives of the charities sector, architects, agricultural engineers, doctors, paramedics, lawyers who provided free services, artists who spread joy and helped people build confidence, and civil society volunteers keen on integrating people with disabilities into society and achieving a greater degree of

freedom including gender equality. British Ambassador to Kuwait Belinda Lewis said: "The British Embassy's 'Ghabqa' is a wonderful way to embrace Kuwaiti culture and recognize those who selflessly devote their time, energy and expertise for the benefit of local and even international communities. I hope that our meeting provides our guests with an opportunity to connect with like-minded individuals and explore opportunities for further cooperation." Lewis added: "Recognizing that giving is a fundamental pillar of the holy month of Ramadan, my team and I feel proud to give back to the people who devote so much of their time, skills and energy to helping others throughout the holy month and beyond."

Initiatives aim to bolster financial stability

Government explores opportunities to boost public benefit associations

KUWAIT CITY, March 30: The Council of Ministers has tasked the Minister of Social Affairs, Family, and Childhood Affairs Sheikh Firas Saud Al-Malik Al-Sabah with coordinating efforts between the Ministries of Finance and Municipality to form strategies for investing in public benefit associations. Within two months, the Council expects a report detailing the outcomes of these discussions, reports Al-Qabas daily.

During its recent session, the Council of Ministers received an update from the Minister of Social Affairs regarding plans to establish guidelines for investing in public benefit associations. These initiatives aim to bolster the financial stability of these associations, enabling them to better fulfill their declared objectives. The Ministry pledges its full support to these associations and endeavors to enhance the services provided by civil society institutions for the benefit of all.

In a separate development, the Public Services Committee of the Council of Ministers, convening on March 24, 2024, reviewed a proposal from the Ministry of Finance to transfer the jurisdiction of certain sites belonging to the Kuwait Public Transport Company.

These sites, including Shuwaikh Garage, Al-Naayem Scrap, and Abdullah Port, are currently under the Public Authority for Industry. Following deliberation, the Committee assigned the Minister of Commerce and Industry, in collaboration with relevant governmental bodies, to conduct a comprehensive study of the legal and procedural aspects of this transfer. They are tasked with determining the necessary actions, outlining plans for utilizing these sites, and providing a report to the Public Services Committee within one month.

In a previous meeting on October 30, 2023, the Council of Ministers discussed the Minister of Finance's communication regarding the transfer of site jurisdiction. Several issues were raised, including the failure of the Public Authority for Industry to formalize contracts despite receiving payments from the Kuwait Public Transport Company.

This lapse resulted in the company's

'KD 922m budget'

MPW spends more than KD497 million

By Mohammed Ghanem
Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, March 30: A recently-issued government report on monitoring financial management in government agencies revealed that the Ministry of Public Works spent KD 497.442 million of its total budget during the first ten months of the current fiscal year.

According to the report, the rate of the ministry's spending during the aforementioned period amounted to 53.94 percent compared to the total budget allocations estimated at KD 922 million.

The total spending on payment of the ministry workers' compensation item during the aforementioned period amounted to KD 217 million, which is 72 percent of the total allocation for the item, which is estimated at KD 297.804 million to cover the salaries, bonuses, and allowances of employees in the ministry.

The ministry's total expenditures on the purchase of non-current assets (projects) amounted to KD 229 million, or 41.6 percent of the total appropriations to cover the item, which is estimated at KD 550 million.

This item represents the projects implemented by the ministry in the fields of sanitary engineering, road maintenance, and construction projects. Among these projects are those of airport Terminal 2, Umm Al-Hayman Sewage Station, Mubarak Al-Kabeer Port, and a number of government buildings in various areas.

inability to utilize the sites effectively, leading to financial losses. Additionally, temporary contracts hindered the company's ability to develop these sites optimally, depriving it of investment opportunities and negatively impacting public funds.

KU's SC okays amendments to admission and transfer policies

KUWAIT CITY, March 30: The Supreme Council of Kuwait University has approved the proposal of the Deanship of Admission and Registration to allocate 8,646 admission seats for academic year 2024/2025, reports Al-Qabas daily.

The Supreme Council also approved the amendments to the admission and transfer policies for academic year 2024/2025, which will be submitted to the Council of Public Universities for approval.

The proposed seats in each college are as follows: 150 for the College of Medicine; 40 for Dentistry; 70 for Pharmacy; 45 for Public Health; 325 for Support

Medicine; 1,201 for Engineering and Petroleum; 1,200 for Science; 1,130 for Arts; 850 for Social Sciences; 750 for Life Sciences; 650 for Administrative Sciences; 600 for Sharia; 500 for Law and 135 for Architecture.

Sources said the Council of Public Universities has been pressing for increasing the number of seats in some colleges to provide for the needs of the labor market and to accommodate all students, especially in the College of Medicine; wherein it proposed additional 15 seats, but the Supreme Council approved the numbers proposed by the Deanship of Admission and Registration.

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MoCI introduces five new services on 'Sahel'

Marafi appoints personnel in key leadership posts at PAAAFR

KUWAIT CITY, March 30: Minister of State for National Assembly Affairs, Minister of State for Youth Affairs, and Minister of State for Communications Affairs, Daoud Marafi, has issued ministerial decisions outlining the appointments of key leadership positions within the Public Authority for Agricultural Affairs and Fish Resources, reports Al-Jarida daily.

As per these decisions, Asma Al-Otaibi has been appointed as the PAAAFR Director-General with Marzouq Al-Habi assuming the role of Deputy Director-General for the Livestock Sector.

Additionally, Fajr Al-Hanayan has been appointed as the Deputy Director for the Aesthetic Agriculture Sector, while Abeer Al-Jassar will serve as the Deputy Director-General for the Finance and Administration Sector.

5 new services added: Thursday, the Ministry of Commerce and Industry

Your Highness

Continued from Page 1

need to find effective solutions that alleviate Kuwait's numerous challenges but also to the urgent matters that affect the public. These include salaries, strengthening the industrial sector and having a reliable base in this regard, solving the crisis of disguised unemployment, improving roads and services, opening the country to serve the national economy, diversifying the sources of income, and solving the problem of subsidies and widespread corruption in all institutions.

These aforementioned matters can be resolved without waiting for the National Assembly, because many of them only require a ministerial decision. However, laws can wait until the parliament convenes.

While it is true that we must wait for the election results and the dynamics between the executive and legislative authorities, there is a saying that "a book can be judged by its cover", suggesting that the upcoming stage may be more complicated than the previous one.

This makes it imperative for the Council of Ministers to perform its work instead of wasting time, as it did in past years. This is because, in light of the complex international and regional circumstances and wars today, what is required is for Kuwait to keep its money inside, like the saying "charity begins at home".

It should initiate large-scale development projects to mitigate the impact of oil price fluctuations and break free from the cycle of manufactured crisis. It must follow the example of other nations that have long prepared for such challenges, so that we can finally say "Kuwait needs an awakening".

Eid expected

Continued from Page 1

minutes on Tuesday evening, allowing for its observation with slight deviation.

Based on astronomical calculations, Ramadan is expected to complete its 30-day duration. The Eid al-Fitr prayer is scheduled for Wednesday at precisely 5:43 am, Kuwait time. The legal decision to commence Shawwal remains under the jurisdiction of the Sharia Vision Board.

Security, military

Continued from Page 1

basis of the issuance of tens of international resolutions concerning the legitimacy of Kuwait.

He showed a map of Kuwait based on the borders adopted before 1920 -- the year specified for regarding everyone whose permanent residence is Kuwait as Kuwaiti citizens. "The map of Kuwait in 1914 covered parts of land larger than today and included cities and places that no longer belong to Kuwait, as they are now part of neighboring countries," he added. He then inquired if it is acceptable that the people living in those areas are considered Kuwaiti citizens.

Moreover, the campaign period will end on April 2; while April 3, the day before election is a 'silent day' when candidates and media are not allowed to campaign.

The 2024 National Assembly elections, scheduled on April 4, is considered the second elections held during the holy month of Ramadan in Kuwait's parliamentary history, Kuwaiti media figures noted.

In interviews with KUNA, they noted that the first election held during Ramadan was for the 14th legislative term on July 27, 2013, whereas a by-election was also held during Ramadan in the 10th constituency on December 7, 2000.

The editor-in-chief of Al-Anbaa Newspaper Youssef Al-Marzouq said that the holy month of Ramadan has special rituals and traditions and this is the second Ramadan to witness elections following the 2013 National Assembly elections.

He added that based on the previous experience, fasting does not effect active participating in the democratic process as the turnout in the 2013 elections held in July reached about 52 percent although it was held during summer break and people were fasting.

He continued that the Kuwaiti voter is aware of the importance of taking part in the elections for the country's higher interests and it is no surprise that Kuwaiti citizens are committed to their national entitlement.

He continued that the fatigue of fasting will not stop the Kuwaitis from performing their electoral and national duties, and voting will not have an impact on the their worshiping and prayer rituals, stressing that Kuwait deserves their full commitment.

For his part, mass communications professor at Kuwait University (KU) Dr. Khaled Al-Qehs said that due to the special rituals of Ramadan, the social media play an important role in the electoral process for both the candidates and voters.

He added that many Kuwaitis prefer to be in the country among their families dur-

(MoCI) unveiled the introduction of five new services pertaining to real estate management, as an extension of its offerings through the unified government application for electronic services, 'Sahel', reports Al-Jarida daily.

In a blog post shared by the Ministry of Commerce on its official social media account on "X" platform, the newly launched electronic services encompass requests for the following:

- Certificate to Whom It May Concern
- Renewal of a Brokerage Booklet
- Renewal of the Validity of a Brokerage Booklet
- Replacement of a Brokerage Booklet
- Replacement of a Lost Brokerage Booklet

These services aim to streamline and digitize various aspects of real estate management, providing greater convenience and efficiency to users through the "Sahel" application.

ing Ramadan therefore it could result in a higher turnout during elections day.

He stressed the importance that the candidates directly connect with their voters and focus on creating a mature media message in social media platforms and establishing a unique campaign on news platforms.

He noted that a well planned media and electoral plan is required on elections days by the candidates' campaigns to encourage the participation of the voters.

Dheiran Aba Al-Khail, Secretary General of Kuwait Journalists Association (KJA), said the voters were occupied at the start of Ramadan with social activities which delayed the launch of campaigns of candidates.

Candidates, he said, should urge all voters to participate in the upcoming elections and to vote to whoever they see would honor their aspirations.

He said candidates should raise awareness among voters in importance of what he considered "national duty."

Aba Al-Khail urged candidates to convey their messages through all kinds of media.

The Ministry of Justice formed Thursday a field team supervised by Undersecretary Hashem Al-Qallaf to prepare 123 schools to be premises for 764 polling stations for the upcoming National Assembly elections slated for April 4.

Five schools would be allocated for the five main electoral committees and 118 schools for polling stations in the five constituencies: 16 for the first one, 18 for the second, 22 for the third, 28 for the fourth and 34 for the fifth, the Ministry said in a statement.

Kuwait successfully

Continued from Page 1

safer, more secure society, bolstering political stability.

Kuwait has made significant strides in the Global Peace Index, climbing four places globally in 2023 while maintaining its second position in the Gulf and Arab regions.

Notably, Kuwait's economic impact of violence has decreased by over 25% from 2022 to 2023, reflecting substantial progress.

The country's commitment to community safety and security, as well as military capacity enhancement, underscores its dedication to peace-building efforts. These advancements reflect Kuwait's ongoing efforts to create a harmonious and secure environment for its citizens and residents alike.

Kuwait welcomes

Continued from Page 1

humanitarian crisis. The U.N. and international aid agencies say virtually the entire Gaza population is struggling to get enough food, with hundreds of thousands of people on the brink of famine, especially in hard-hit northern Gaza.

South Africa welcomed Thursday's decision, calling it "significant."

"The fact that Palestinian deaths are not solely caused by bombardment and ground attacks, but also by disease and starvation, indicates a need to protect the group's right to exist," the South African president said in a statement.

Hamas, an Islamic militant group sworn to Israel's destruction, said the ruling must be enforced by the international community.

"It must be implemented immediately, so that this decision does not remain a dead letter," it said.

The Palestinian Foreign Ministry thanked South Africa, calling the case "a vital step in the global effort to hold Israel accountable for perpetrating genocide."

After initially sealing Gaza's borders in the early days of the war, Israel began to permit entry of humanitarian supplies. It says it places no restrictions on the amount of humanitarian aid allowed into Gaza and accuses the United Nations of failing to properly organize the deliveries. On Tuesday, the army said it inspected 258 aid trucks, but only 116 were distributed within Gaza by the U.N.

The U.N. and international aid groups say deliveries have been impeded by Israeli military restrictions, ongoing hostilities and the breakdown of public order.

The Israeli Foreign Ministry accused South Africa of making "cynical attempts" to exploit the world court to undermine Israel's right to self-defense and to win the release of remaining hostages. Israel says Hamas continues to hold some 100 hostages and the remains of 30 others either killed on Oct. 7 or who died in captivity.

"Israel will continue to promote new initiatives, and to expand existing ones, in order to enable and facilitate the flow of aid to the Gaza Strip ... despite the operational challenges on the ground and Hamas' active and abhorrent efforts to commandeer, hoard and steal aid," it added.

Israel has been working with international partners on a plan to soon begin deliveries of aid by sea.

MEW gets MoF nod for budget approval for its power project

Minister announces changes to contractor accreditation process

KUWAIT CITY, March 30: The Ministry of Electricity, Water and Renewable Energy has obtained approval from its Finance counterpart for the proposed budget for the supply, installation, operation and maintenance of gas turbine units operating on a combined cycle system to increase electrical energy at the Subiya Electric Power and Water Distillation Site to produce 900 megawatts in the first stage of the project, reports Al-Anba daily quoting sources.

Sources revealed this approval is based on the letter that the ministry received from the Central Agency for Public Tenders (CAPT) in mid-January regarding the request to approve the cost of awarding the tender.

Sources explained that the State Audit Bureau (SAB) endorsed the project after studying the tender documents; hence, the amendment of the estimated cost from KD257.558 million to KD204.178 million.

Shortage

Sources said: "The approval of SAB, Ministry of Finance and CAPT for this vital project will contribute to addressing the electricity shortage in the coming years."

In another development, Minister of Electricity, Water and Renewable Energy and Minister of State for Housing Affairs Dr Salem Al-Hajraf has cancelled Ministerial Resolution No. 26/2024 on the formation of a committee to review and study applications for accreditation of companies and factories for various activities.

The decision included the cancellation of all qualification lists for contractors, suppliers and subcontractors; indicating that the main contractor for any project bears responsibility for selecting subcontractors, and any violation of the terms of the contract.

Regarding the contracts and projects covered by CAPT Law as per the decision of Dr Al-Hajraf, contractors and companies will be qualified according to the standards and principles followed by the agency.

As for contracts and projects handled by the Internal Purchasing Committee in the ministry; the process of qualifying the contractor or supplier will be included in the documents, as well as the proposal and technical specifications for the work that will be completed.



Dr Salem Al-Hajraf



Part of the honoring ceremony of a number of winning players.

KUNA photo

Event an important opportunity to discover young talents

Annual Ramadan Paralympic Games conclude

KUWAIT CITY, March 30, (KUNA): The annual Ramadan Paralympic Games concluded last Thursday evening, which was organized by the Kuwaiti Club for the Disabled at the club's headquarters over the past few days. It included holding competitions in a number of sports amid wide participation by the club's male and female players and a number of other clubs. For the disabled Club President Shafi Al-Hajri said in a statement to reporters after the conclusion of the tournament that it included holding competitions in wheelchair basketball for people with mobility disabilities, table tennis, fencing, weightlifting and bocce for the blind, congratulating the male and female players who won first places in the tournament.

Al-Hajri, who heads the tournament's organizing committee, confirmed that the club is keen to hold such local sports forums on a regular basis to prepare national team players and prepare them for upcoming foreign competitions. It is also an important opportunity to discover young talents, noting the distinguished organization of the club's staff for the tournament. He appreciated the sponsorship and presence of the President of the Kuwaiti Youth Association, Sheikh Fahd Nayef Jaber Al-Sabah, in addition to a number of national institutions and companies, for the tournament, praising the distinguished technical level demonstrated by the male and female players in

the tournament in various competitions. The results of the tournament competitions resulted in the Al-Nojoom team, led by Kuwaiti basketball team player for the disabled Abdullah Al-Khalidi, winning the title of the wheelchair basketball competition for the mobility disability category.

The results of the table tennis competitions (sitting) and (standing) for a number of disability categories were that players Reem Al-Jahs, Anfal Al-Dhafiri and Noura Yaqoub won the women's and girls' category, while players Munif Fahd, Hassan Ibrahim, Abdullah Hajji, Yaqoub Al-Qasim and Fahd Al-Ansari won the title in the men's and youth category competitions. The shooting competitions witnessed the victory of the shooter Abdul Rahman Salem in the 10-meter air rifle shooting competition for the motor disability category, while the shooter Salman Al-Majdi won the pistol shooting title for the same category, while the shooter Jarrah Asak won the rifle shooting competition title for the blind category. In the Bouchet competition for the blind, player Maryam Al-Bannai won first place in the women's category, while player Muhammad Mejbai came in first place in the men's category. Player Sulaiman Al-Tamimi won the title in the men's fencing competition, while player Kholoud Al-Mutairi was crowned champion in the women's competition for the same competition.

Company's CEO Al-Khatibi issues circular

KNPC makes organizational changes

KUWAIT CITY, March 30: The Kuwait National Petroleum Company has issued a number of organizational changes that included about 13 team leaders in various departments in the refineries, reports Al-Anba daily.

The circular issued by the company's CEO, Wadha Al-Khatibi, stated that these changes were implemented as of March 26.

The circular was as follows:

■ Nasser Badr Al-Mohammed was transferred to the position of "Head of the First Region Operations Team - Mina Al-Ahmadi Refinery."

■ Mishari Hassan Al-Kandari was transferred to the position of "Head of the Operations Team for the Tenth Incident Area (Environmental Fuels) - Mina Al-Ahmadi Refinery."

■ Duaj Hilal Al-Roumi was transferred to the position of "Head of the Eighth Region Operations Team (Environmental Fuels) - Mina Al-Ahmadi Refinery."

■ Muhammad Haqan Al-Ajmi, "Head of the Fourth Region Operations Team - Mina Al-Ahmadi Refinery."

■ Majed Khalaf Al-Harbi is appointed "Head of the Thirteenth Region Operations Team - Mina Al-Ahmadi Refinery."



Al-Khatibi

■ Muhammad Dahish Al-Azmi was transferred to the position of "Head of the Operations Team, Region Three - Mina Abdullah Refinery."

■ Ali Jawad Saghir is appointed "Head of the Operations Team, Region One - Mina Abdullah Refinery."

■ Abdullah Ghannam Al-Dikan is appointed "Head of the Operations Team, Region Two - Abdullah Port Refinery."

■ Mishari Miteb Ali is appointed "Head of the Operations Team, Region Six - Mina Abdullah Refinery."

■ Hadi Khaled Al-Huwaila is appointed "Head of the Operations Support Team (Environmental Fuels) - Mina Abdullah Refinery."

■ Youssef Jassim Al-Sayrafi is appointed "Head of Manufacturing Engineering (Gas) - Mina Al-Ahmadi Refinery," and he will be directly responsible to the Director of the Technical Services Department - Mina Al-Ahmadi Refinery.

■ Salman Mutlaq Al-Mayas is appointed "Head of the Manufacturing Engineering Team (II), Abdullah Port Refinery," and he will be directly responsible to the Director of the Technical Services Department - Abdullah Port Refinery.

■ Hamdi Thaeer Al-Harbi, "Head of the Laboratory Services Team - Mina Al-Ahmadi Refinery", and he is directly responsible to the Director of the Technical Services Department - Mina Al-Ahmadi Refinery.

Municipality issues decision on transferring number of officials

Emirati forum, exhibition set for next month

By Fares Al-Abdan

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, March 30: The Ambassador of the United Arab Emirates to Kuwait Matar Al-Neyadi announced the launch of the first exhibition and forum for Emirati companies in Kuwait under the title "Exploring Opportunities".

In a press statement, he revealed that the event will take place on the 28th and 29th of April under the patronage of His Highness the Prime

Minister Sheikh Dr. Muhammad Al-Sabah.

He explained that 20 of the largest Emirati companies will participate in the exhibition to explore opportunities in the Kuwaiti market, as it comes in partnership with the Director Investment Promotion Authority, the Public Authority for Industry, and the Public Authority for Manpower, and is accompanied by a forum in which companies showcase their capabilities and potential.

Kuwaiti government agencies

will also present ways of cooperation and respond to all inquiries from companies.

The exhibition will be a gateway to opening new horizons of cooperation in various sectors between the UAE and Kuwait. It also comes in implementation of the directives of the joint supreme committee between the two countries to stimulate the private sector to explore opportunities in various fields, especially with regard to infrastructure, transportation, food security, and the medical sector.

■ Badr Nasser Al-Otaibi, Director of the Municipality Branch Administration in the Capital Governorate, to Director of the Department of Oversight of Planning and Services Affairs.

■ Ammar Abdul Mohsen Al-Maqtouf, Director of the Oversight Department of the Hawalli and Al-Ahmadi Governorate Branches, to Director of the Oversight Department of the Capital and Mubarak Al-Kabeer Governorates Branches, to the Director of the Engineering Audit and Follow-up Department - Al-Jahra, to the Director of the Capital Governorate Branch.

■ Abdul Aziz Marzouq Al-Mu-

tairi, Director of the Al-Ahmadi Governorate Municipality Branch, to Director of the Department of Oversight of Planning and Services Affairs.

■ Falah Jasser Al-Rashidi, Director of the Oversight Department for Planning Affairs and Services,

to the Safety Committee (management level).

■ Muhammad Hussein Sarkhou, Director of the Farwaniya Governorate Municipality Branch Administration, to Director of the Oversight Department of the Municipality Branches in Hawalli and Al-Ahmadi Governorates.

■ Youssef Huwaidi Al-Bathali, Director of the Engineering Audit and Follow-up Department - Al-Capital to the Director of the Engineering Audit and Follow-up Department - Al-Jahra.

World News Roundup

Europe

Russia launches attacks on Ukraine energy system:

Moscow launched a large-scale attack on Ukraine's energy infrastructure Friday, with a mass barrage of 99 drones and missiles hitting regions across the country, Ukraine's armed forces said.

Air raid warnings rang out across the nation, with 10 Ukrainian regions coming under fire, the country's interior minister, **Ihor Klymenko**, said.

Russia has escalated its attacks on Ukraine in recent days, launching several missile barrages on the capital, Kyiv, and hitting energy infrastructure across the country in apparent retaliation for recent Ukrainian aerial attacks on the Russian border region of Belgorod. Such sporadic attacks, however, have been common throughout the war.

Large-scale blackouts have already affected Ukraine's eastern city of Kharkiv, where 700,000 people lost power after the city's thermal power plant was hit in a drone and missile attack on March 22.

In the winter of 2022-23, Russia targeted Ukraine's energy infrastructure, causing frequent blackouts. Many in Ukraine and the West expected that Russia might repeat that strategy this winter, but Russia instead initially focused its strikes on Ukraine's defense industries. Ukraine's state-owned grid operator, Ukrenergo, said Friday's attack deliberately targeted thermal and hydroelectric power plants across central and western regions. In a statement, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy confirmed that Ukraine's Kaniv and Dniester hydroelectric power stations had come under attack. (AP)



Klymenko

Zelenskyy fires more aides: Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy dismissed a longtime aide and several advisers on Saturday in a continuing reshuffle while Russia unleashed fresh attacks overnight.

Zelenskyy dismissed top aide Serhiy Shefir from his post of first assistant, where he had served since 2019. The Ukrainian president also let go three advisers, and two presidential representatives overseeing volunteer activities and soldiers' rights.

No explanation was given immediately for the latest changes in a wide-reaching personnel shakeup over recent months. It included the dismissal on Tuesday of Oleksii Danilov, who served as secretary of the National Security and Defense Council, and Valerii Zaluzhnyi as head of the armed forces on Feb. 8. He was appointed Ukraine's ambassador to the United Kingdom earlier this month.

Ukraine's air force said Saturday that Russia launched 12 Shakhed drones overnight, nine of which were shot down, and fired four missiles into eastern Ukraine.

Ukrainian energy company Centrenergy announced Saturday that the Zmiiv Thermal Power Plant was completely destroyed following Russian shelling. (AP)

'9 held in connection with hall attack': Nine people have been detained by Tajikistan's state security service over suspected contact with the perpetrators of last week's attack on a suburban Moscow concert hall that killed 144 people, Russian state news agency RIA Novosti said Friday.

The reported arrests came exactly a week after the massacre in the Crocus City Hall, in which gunmen shot people waiting for a show by a popular rock band and then set the building on fire. The four suspected attackers were arrested and identified as Tajik nationals.

An affiliate of the Islamic State group claimed responsibility for the attack, the deadliest on Russian soil in years. The Kremlin, however, has insisted that Ukraine and the West had a role, something Kyiv has vehemently denied.

RIA Novosti said Friday, citing an unnamed source in Tajikistan's security services, that those detained in the Central Asian country were residents of the Vakhdat district that lies east of the Tajik capital, Dushanbe. The report said those detained are suspected of having connections with IS. Russian security forces were also involved in the operation to detain them, according to the agency. (AP)

'3 hostages released in Dutch town': Three people who were held hostage for hours in a nightclub in the central town of Ede were released Saturday, police said, but they added that the "situation is not over."

Gelderland Police announced the hostage release in a message on X, formerly Twitter. They gave no further details about whether more hostages remained in the club. Heavily armed police and special arrest teams, some wearing masks, were massed outside the club.

Video from the scene showed three people walking out of the club with their hands in the air following their release.

Police said in a message on X, formerly Twitter, that "at the moment there is no indication of a terrorist motive."

Earlier Saturday, officers cordoned off a square in central Ede and evacuated about 150 nearby homes.

Police spokesman Simen Klok told The Associated Press people were being held hostage but he declined to give more details of the incident. (AP)

Charles stresses importance of kindness: King Charles III stressed the importance of friendship and acts of caring in a recorded message.

Queen Camilla welcomed her husband during the Royal Maundy Service at Worcester Cathedral, presenting bags of specially minted coins to people being honored for public service.

The personal message from Charles comes after the recent announcements that both the king and the Princess of Wales had been diagnosed with cancer. While the message made no direct reference to the royals' health problems, it marked the king's first public comment since his daughter-in-law revealed she was undergoing chemotherapy.

The king stepped back from public appearances in early February, when he announced that he would undergo treatment for an undisclosed type of cancer. He has continued to carry out his state duties, including regular meetings with the prime minister and reviewing and signing government documents.

The Princess of Wales, wife of Prince William, announced that she, too, was being treated for an undisclosed type of cancer. The news came after the princess, formerly Kate Middleton, underwent abdominal surgery in January. (AP)

Greece's gov't survives no-confidence motion: Greece's center-right government survived a motion of no-confidence that was brought by opposition parties over its handling of the country's deadliest rail disaster a year ago.

Four left-wing opposition parties accused the government of hindering an investigation into the rail crash that left 57 people dead, many of them university students returning from a spring break.

Parliament voted 159-141 against the motion following an acrimonious three-day debate. The government also rejected opposition calls to hold a snap election.

The Feb. 28, 2023 crash occurred when a passenger train smashed into an oncoming freight train which had been mistakenly placed on the same track.

Conservative Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis vowed to respect the results of an ongoing judicial investigation into the crash, and denied any wrongdoing. Opinion polls suggest that a majority of the public believe the government had not honestly addressed its responsibilities regarding the crash.

Despite its defeat, the no-confidence motion was the result of a rare collaboration between Greece's center-left and left-wing parties ahead of European Parliament elections in June. (AP)

Leader of DUP party steps down: Northern Ireland's finely balanced power-sharing arrangements were thrown into disarray Friday as the leader of the region's largest unionist party stepped down after being charged with historical sexual offenses.

Jeffrey Donaldson informed the Democratic Unionist Party that he was leaving his post due to the investigation and has been suspended from the party pending the outcome of the judicial process, the DUP said in a statement.

The announcement came after police in Northern Ireland said a 61-year-old man had been arrested and charged with non-recent sexual offenses. A 57-year-old woman was charged with aiding and abetting additional offenses, the Police Service of Northern Ireland said. Both suspects are due in court on April 24.

British police generally don't identify suspects by name.

Donaldson, who has led the DUP since 2021, is the most powerful figure in Northern Ireland's unionist movement, which seeks to maintain the region's historic ties to the United Kingdom. (AP)



US President Joe Biden, (center), and former presidents Barack Obama, (second from the right), and Bill Clinton, (far right) participate in a fundraising event with Stephen Colbert, (left) at Radio City Music Hall, on March 28, 2024, in New York. (AP)

Politics

Trump criticized for posting video

Biden campaign raising gobs of cash

WASHINGTON, March 30, (AP) — US President Joe Biden's reelection campaign is raising gobs of cash. And it has an election-year strategy that, in a nutshell, aims to spend more - and spend faster.

Not only has Biden aimed to show himself off as a fundraising juggernaut this month, but his campaign is also making significant early investments both on the ground and on the airwaves - hoping to create a massive organizational advantage that leaves Republican Donald Trump scrambling to catch up.

But while the money pouring in has given Biden and the Democrats a major cash advantage, it's also becoming clear Biden will need it. Throughout his life in business and politics, Trump's provocations have earned him near limitless free media attention. Biden, meanwhile, has often struggled to cut through the noise with his own message despite holding the presidency.

That means Biden is going to need oodles of cash to blanket battleground states where a few thousand votes could mean the difference between victory or defeat. Add to that the challenge of reaching millennials, as well as even younger voters, who formed an important part of his 2020 coalition, in a far more fractured media ecosystem that skews toward streaming services over conventional broadcast and cable.

Boosting

Biden's organizational and outreach effort began in earnest this month, with the campaign using his State of the Union address as a launching pad to open 100 new field offices nationwide and boosting the number of paid staff in battleground states to 350 people. It's also currently in the middle of a \$30 million television and digital advertising campaign targeting specific communities such as Black, Hispanic and Asian voters.

In one example of the incumbent president's organizational advantage, his reelection campaign in February had 480 staffers on the ground, compared with 311 to that of Trump and the Republican National Committee, according to Biden campaign officials. "We're ramping up campaign head-

quarters and field offices, hiring staff all across the country before Trump and his MAGA Republicans have even opened one single office," Biden boasted Friday in New York during a meeting of his national finance committee, which included 200 of his largest donors and fundraisers from in and around the city.

A massive ground game disadvantage didn't prevent Trump from winning the presidency in 2016, a fact Democrats keenly remember.

"It's one of the stubborn challenges of Trump," said Robby Mook, campaign manager for Hillary Clinton's 2016 presidential bid. "Trump is Trump's best organizer, and Trump can motivate people from the podium."

Mobilize

But, Mook added, the Biden campaign is doing what it needs to do, pointing to the State of the Union as a powerful example of how to effectively mobilize the base and harness the anti-Trump energy that will inevitably motivate many Democrats this year.

"The most magical and the scariest part of politics is, you never know until Election Day," Mook said. "And so I wouldn't want to leave anything on the table if I were them, and the great part about having a resource advantage is, you get to have all these different things."

Even Biden's bricks-and-mortar campaign is likely to be far more costly this year.

Unlike 2020, when many Americans were hunkered down due to the pandemic, Biden will need to travel more while also building a political infrastructure that will be far more expensive than the socially distanced, virtual campaign he waged from his basement the last time around.

His reelection campaign will also have expenses that Trump won't have to confront, such as reimbursing the federal government for use of Air Force One. So far, it has reimbursed \$4.5 million for use of the official presidential aircraft for political activity, according to the campaign.

Mook said decisions about how to strategically invest the campaign's cash are never as nimble as the staff

wants them to be, and there is not only a risk in spending too much, too fast - but also spending far too late in an election year.

Last fall and summer, Democrats fretted about Biden's early lack of fundraising and campaign activity. Writers' and actors' guild strikes in Hollywood didn't help, either - effectively sidelining the pro-labor union president from raising money in a region that has long bankrolled the party's political ambitions.

Fast forward to the present and the second-guessing about his fundraising operation has tamped down. Aside from raking in millions at high-dollar events around the country - and bringing in \$26 million at an event featuring Biden, Barack Obama and Bill Clinton on Thursday evening - the president has frequently pointed to the 500,000 new donors who have contributed in recent weeks, arguing that he's expanding his appeal.

Also:

WASHINGTON: Presumptive Republican presidential nominee **Donald Trump** drew criticism Friday for posting a video on social media that contains the image of US President **Joe Biden** painted on the tailgate of a passing truck.

The Biden campaign was quick to condemn the video for suggesting physical harm to the sitting Democratic president.

"Trump is regularly inciting political violence and it's time people take him seriously - just ask the Capitol police officers who were attacked protecting our democracy on January 6," said **Michael Tyler**, the Biden campaign's communications director.

Trump campaign spokesman **Steven Cheung** responded Friday night: "That picture was on the back of a pickup truck that was traveling down the highway. Democrats and crazed lunatics have not only called for despicable violence against President Trump and his family, they are actually weaponizing the justice system against him."

The US Justice Service released a statement saying it "does not confirm or comment on matters of protective intelligence."



Greece Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis, (center), is applauded by his party's lawmakers during a parliament session in Athens, Greece, on March 28. Greece's center-right government survived a motion of no-confidence that was brought by opposition parties over its handling of the country's deadliest rail disaster a year ago. (AP)



Polito



Merchan

America

2 officers shot in Nevada: Police surrounded a house in a residential Sparks neighborhood Friday where they said a suspect in an officer-involved shooting was barricaded inside shortly after two law enforcement officers were shot and hospitalized with unspecified injuries.

It wasn't immediately clear if any other people or police officers were injured in the incident that began shortly after 1:30 pm Friday. Police closed nearby streets, evacuated some residences and told other residents to shelter in place in a four-square-block perimeter in the suburban neighborhood a couple of miles east of Reno.

"I can confirm we have had an officer-involved shooting and officers have been shot," Sparks Police Lt. Chris Rowe told reporters at an initial briefing near the scene. (AP)

'Trump violated gag order': Manhattan prosecutors suggested Friday that Donald Trump violated a gag order in his hush-money criminal case this week by assailing the judge's daughter and making a false claim about her on social media.

The Manhattan district attorney's office asked Judge **Juan M. Merchan** to "clarify or confirm" the scope of the gag order, which he issued Tuesday, and to direct the former president and presumptive Republican nominee to "immediately desist from attacks on family members."

In a letter to Merchan, Assistant District Attorney Joshua Steinglass argued that the gag order's ban on statements meant to interfere with or harass the court's staff or their families makes the judge's daughter off-limits from Trump's rhetoric. He said Trump should be punished for further violations. (AP)

UNLV releases video: Images of a campus police officer diving behind a patrol vehicle to escape gunfire and then fatally shooting a gunman outside a building at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, are among footage in newly released video of a deadly rampage that left three professors dead and a fourth badly wounded last December.

The deadly shootout captured by campus surveillance cameras ended what authorities say was 10 minutes of terror unleashed by a

67-year-old former business professor from North Carolina whose applications to teach at UNLV had been rejected.

The gunman, **Anthony Polito**, was

armed with a legally purchased 9 mm handgun, carried nine bullet magazines, and had a target list of names, although none of the people shot was on that list, police said.



Barges with cranes float near a damaged section of the Francis Scott Key Bridge on March 29 in Baltimore, Md. Teams of engineers are now focused on the formidable job of hauling the shattered remains of the Francis Scott Key Bridge out of Maryland's Patapsco River, the first step toward reopening the Port of Baltimore and recovering the bodies of four workers who are still missing and presumed dead. (AP)

The university on Thursday released 20 hours of footage from campus security and officer body cameras, along with more than an hour of recordings of 911 calls made to campus police.

Sounds of the gunfire that killed three people in upper floors of the five-story business school sent people fleeing from the nearby Student Union just before noon on a sunny day. (AP)

Border Patrol stand questioned: A federal judge on Friday sharply questioned the Biden administration's position that it bears no responsibility for housing and feeding migrant children while they wait in makeshift camps along the US-Mexico border.

The Border Patrol does not dispute the conditions at the camps, where migrants wait under open skies or sometimes in tents or structures made of tree branches while short on food and water. The migrants, who crossed the border illegally, are waiting there for Border Patrol agents to arrest and process them. The question is whether they are in legal custody.

That would start a 72-hour limit on how long children can be held and require emergency medical services and guarantees of physical safety, among other things.

US District Judge Dolly Gee said evidence presented by migrant advocacy groups appeared to support the definition of legal custody. "Are they free to leave?" she asked. (AP)

Africa

Congo conflict worsens

SAfrica bus crash kills 45; girl 'lone survivor'

MMAMATLAKALA, South Africa, March 30, (AP): An 8-year-old girl was the lone survivor after a bus full of pilgrims making their way to a popular Easter festival in rural South Africa slammed into a bridge on a mountain pass and plunged more than 150 feet into a ravine before bursting into flames, killing all 45 others onboard.

It was a tragic reminder of how deadly South Africa's roads become during the Easter period, when millions crisscross the country during the long holiday weekend. Authorities repeatedly warn motorists of the danger and had issued multiple messages urging caution just a day before Thursday's horrific crash. The girl somehow survived after the bus carrying worshippers from neighboring Botswana careened off the bridge and caught fire as it hit the rocks below, according to authorities.

The girl was in a stable condition in the hospital after being admitted with serious injuries and was "in safe hands," an official with the local health department said Friday. Details of her injuries were not released.

Forensic investigators retrieved what they believed were 34 of the 45 bodies but couldn't be certain of the exact number, reflecting the gruesome nature of the crash. Many of the victims trapped inside the bus were burned beyond recognition, authorities said.



Ramaphosa

Recovered

Dr. Phophi Ramathuba, an official with the Limpopo provincial health department, said only nine of the bodies recovered were likely to be identifiable.

South African President Cyril Ramaphosa said the victims, who appeared to all be from Botswana, were on their way to the rustic town of Moria in Limpopo province for the Easter weekend pilgrimage that attracts hundreds of thousands of followers of the Zion Christian Church.

The church has its headquarters in Moria and it was the first time the full pilgrimage was being held since the COVID-19 pandemic.

The church was formed in South Africa in the early 1900s as a Christian denomination that also retains some African traditions. It has an estimated 7 million followers across the southern African region.

Ramathuba said South African authorities had asked church leaders from Botswana to come and help identify the victims.

Authorities said it appeared the bus driver lost control and the vehicle slammed into the barriers along the side of the bridge and then went over the edge. The driver was among the dead.

Zuma barred from running: Former South African President Jacob Zuma is not eligible to run in upcoming elections, the Independent Electoral Commission has ruled.

The commission said at a media briefing on Thursday that it had upheld an objection against Zuma's candidacy in the May 29 elections.

In July 2021, Zuma was sentenced to 15 months in prison for defying a court order to appear before a judicial commission that was investigating corruption allegations during his 2009-2018 presidency. He was granted medical parole after two months and allowed to serve the rest of the sentence under house arrest.

South Africa's Constitution bars people convicted and sentenced to more than 12 months' imprisonment, without an option of a fine, from holding public office.

Zuma and his legal team stormed out of the judicial proceedings when he was asked about wide-ranging allegations of corruption during his rule, including the role of an Indian family, the Guptas, who allegedly had influence over his Cabinet appointments.

Zuma, 81, has until April 2 to appeal the commission's ruling. He is the now face of a new political party, uMkhonto weSizwe Party, abbreviated as MK, that has emerged as a potentially significant player in South Africa's upcoming elections after he denounced the governing African National Congress, which he had previously led.

Tropical cyclone kills 18 in Madagascar: A tropical cyclone that swept across Madagascar has killed 18 people and left four missing after making landfall on the north of the Indian Ocean island nation earlier this week, authorities said on Friday.

The storm has also caused severe flooding that partly submerged entire villages, displaced or affected some 47,000 people and set off landslides that injured three people, the National Office for Disaster Management said.

Cyclone Gamane hit northern Madagascar on Wednesday and has now weakened considerably, leaving a trail of destruction behind it.

In the Diana and Sava regions in the north, bridges and roads were washed away and houses and rice fields were submerged. Residents paddled around their villages in canoes looking to help others trapped in their homes as the water level nearly reached the roofs of some buildings.

The cyclone red alert was lifted on Thursday morning after the worst part of the storm brought wind gusts of over 210 kilometers per hour (130 miles per hour).

Conflict worsens in eastern Congo: Under a crystal chandelier in a hall where the first Geneva Convention was signed in the mid-19th century, representatives of two armed groups in Congo signed solemn pledges this week to both their violence-wracked country and the wider world: We will do better to respect and protect civilians.

With several Western diplomats looking on, the envoys made commitments that their forces will work to end sexual violence, food insecurity and conditions of famine and to ensure greater access to health care in the parts of increasingly violent eastern Congo that they operate in and control.

The ceremony Tuesday at City Hall in Geneva, a Swiss city that's known for an internationalist bent and as home to the international Red Cross, is the culmination of years of work by the humanitarian group Geneva Call, which works to protect civilians in conflict zones.

Congo, Africa's second-largest country, has seen a recent upsurge in insecurity in its mineral-rich east, an area that has been wracked by conflict for decades. More than 120 armed groups are fighting for land and power and, in some cases, protecting their communities. However, M23, the largest and best-known group, allegedly linked to neighboring Rwanda, has not engaged with Geneva Call.



The wreckage of a bus lays in a ravine a day after it plunged off a bridge on the Mmamatlakala mountain pass between Mokopane and Marken, around 300km (190 miles) north of Johannesburg, South Africa on March 29. Inset: Family members of the bus crash victims gather at the ZCC Church, where victims used for church services in the Molepolole village near Gaborone, Botswana on Friday. (AP)



Japan's Prime Minister Fumio Kishida speaks during a press conference, in Tokyo, on March 28. Kishida reiterated his determination to work toward a summit with North Korea's Kim Jong Un to realize the return of Japanese people believed abducted by North Korean agents in the 1970s and 80s. (AP)



Milei



Boluarte

Lat/Am

Peru prez residence raided: Televised images swept Peru late Friday of government agents from an investigative team breaking into the president's residence with a sledgehammer in a raid authorized by the judiciary at the request of the attorney general's office.

Dina Boluarte is being preliminarily investigated for possessing an undisclosed collection of luxury watches since she came to power in July 2021 as vice president and Social Inclusion minister, and then as president in December 2022.

Initially, she claimed ownership of at least one Rolex as a long-held possession acquired through "personal gains" since the age of 18, urging the media not to delve into personal matters.

Earlier in the week, Attorney General Juan Villena criticized Boluarte's request to delay her appearance before the court for two weeks, emphasizing her obligation to cooperate with the investigation.

Political turmoil is nothing new in Peru, which has seen six presidents in the last five years. But many see Boluarte's recent statements as contradicting her earlier pledge to speak truthfully to prosecutors, exacerbating a political crisis stemming from her unexplained ownership of Rolex watches. (AP)

5K police to tackle violence: Haiti now needs between 4,000 and 5,000 international police to help tackle "catastrophic" gang violence which is targeting key individuals and hospitals, schools, banks and other critical institutions, the U.N. rights expert for the conflict-wracked Caribbean nation said Thursday.

Last July, William O'Neill said Haiti needed between 1,000 and 2,000 international police trained to deal with gangs. Today, he said the situation is so much worse that double that number and more are needed to help the Haitian National Police regain control of security and curb human rights abuses.

O'Neill spoke at a news conference launching a UN Human Rights Office report he helped produce which called for immediate action to tackle the "cataclysmic" situation in Haiti where corruption, impunity and poor governance compounded by increasing gang violence have eroded the rule of law and brought state institutions "close to collapse." (AP)

Asia

'Philippines not seeking trouble in SChina Sea'

Japan PM seeks meeting with NKorea

TOKYO, March 30, (Agencies): Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida reiterated his determination to work toward a summit with North Korea's Kim Jong Un to realize the return of Japanese people believed abducted by North Korean agents in the 1970s and 80s.

"I remain committed to realizing this for Japan," he told reporters, while declining to directly address the recent comments from North Korea that suggested such a meeting would be possible only if Japan stops pressing the abductions issue.

Speaking at a news conference after the government budget cleared parliament, Kishida stressed he was directly involved in high-level negotiations to fix various bilateral problems, amid growing worries about neighboring North Korea's missiles and nuclear weapons programs.

In 2002, Kim Jong Il, the late father of Kim Jong Un, told then-Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi that its agents had kidnapped 13 Japanese in the 1970s and 80s, and allowed five of them to return to Japan. Japan thinks hundreds more may have been abducted during that period and that some are still alive. Koizumi's second visit to North Korea in 2004 was the last summit between the two nations.

Deflation

Kishida, prime minister since 2021, also promised to wrest the nation out of decades-long deflation and set off "a positive cycle" of higher wages, company profits and strong productivity.

"We have this historic chance to get out of deflation," Kishida said, noting that the changes will come under his "new capitalism" program, based on economic changes such as a more mobile labor force, investments in artificial intelligence and income growth for the middle class. He promised that legal revisions and an internal investigation were underway to deal with a burgeoning scandal centered around political funding that ruling party lawmakers had allegedly secretly received through shady methods like expensive tickets for fundraising parties.

Kishida said more time is needed to sort out details, but the erring politicians will get punished, to restore public trust.

Kishida has seen his popularity plummet to record lows in recent months over the scandal. But his ouster, even if it happens, will likely result in another leader from the ruling

Liberal Democratic Party, because the opposition is weak and splintered.

There is even speculation among pundits that Japan will get its first female prime minister, such as Tokyo Gov. Yuriko Koike. As a woman, Koike would be seen as a fresh change, although she is unlikely to stray too far from the status quo.

Also:

TOKYO: China said that the preparations for the China-US Military Maritime Consultative Agreement meeting are well underway, and relevant information will be released in due course.

"The two sides are also in coordination on communication and exchanges in other areas," National Defense Ministry spokesman Wu Qian said at a press conference in Beijing, as briefed the media on the communication and coordination between the Chinese and US militaries.

Wu noted that the Chinese and US militaries have made concerted efforts to steadily resume dialogues and consultations this year on the basis of equality and respect, in a bid to implement the important consensus reached by the two heads of state in San Francisco.

The bilateral Defense Policy Coordination Talks was held in Washington from January 8-9, during which the two sides had an in-depth exchange of views on the development of military-to-military relations and on questions of mutual concern including those related to Taiwan, the South China Sea, and maritime and air security, according to Wu.

KUALA LUMPUR: The Philippines is not seeking a fight or trouble in the South China Sea but will not be silent, said Philippine defense ministry on Friday.

Recent Chinese statements show their isolation from the rest of the world on their "illegal and uncivilized activities" in the South China Sea, added ministry statement.

"It also shows the inability of the Chinese government to conduct open, transparent, and legal negotiations. Their repertoire consists only of patronizing and, failing that, intimidating smaller countries," the ministry said.

The statement was in response to its Chinese counterpart accusing the Philippines on Thursday of provocations, misinformation and treachery after Manila accused Beijing of aggressive conduct in Manila's exclusive eco-

nomic zone.

China claims ownership of almost the entire South China Sea, including the Second Thomas Shoal area, which lies within the Philippines' 200-mile exclusive economic zone and deployed hundreds of coast guard ships throughout the sea to patrol, which is against international law.

BANGKOK: A Thai court on Friday acquitted nearly 70 people of all charges related to mass protests that shut down Bangkok's two airports in 2008 for about 10 days.

The ruling by the Bangkok Criminal Court was the second this year finding that the protesters, who opposed a government headed by allies of ousted Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra, had not committed serious criminal offenses in their activities. Members of the group, the People's Alliance for Democracy, also briefly seized a state television station and occupied Government House for three months.

The court ruled Friday that the airport protests were protected under the constitution because they were peaceful and the protesters were unarmed, public broadcaster Thai PBS and Thai Rath newspaper said.

Witnesses to the 2008 protests, including Associated Press reporters, saw acts of violence and intimidation by sometimes-armed guards employed by the PAD, though not by the people acquitted in January and on Friday.

PHNOM PENH, Cambodia: Forty-five people were injured, five of them critically, when a train crashed into the side of a bus at a rail crossing in northwestern Cambodia Friday, police said.

Gen. Sar Theng, the police chief for Pursat province, said the crash in Krakor district occurred around 11 a.m. when the bus attempted to cross the tracks even though the oncoming train had loudly sounded its horn as it approached.

The train hit the middle of the bus, pushing it several meters (yards), he said. The bus driver fled, leaving behind the injured passengers, who were aided by police and villagers and taken to hospitals for treatment, he added.

Sar Theng said there used to be a barrier at the crossing but it had broken and had not yet been replaced. He said there is a large sign posted on the road warning that there is a railroad crossing ahead and urging drivers to proceed slowly.

Macron embraces Brazil's Lula: If social media is to be believed, French President Emmanuel Macron's trip to Brazil that ended Thursday left him swooning. Pictures showed him and his Brazilian

counterpart, Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, ambling through the Amazon and posing beneath the soaring canopy in white button-down shirts. Then there they were again, standing close and clasping hands on a boat as Macron looked adoringly at

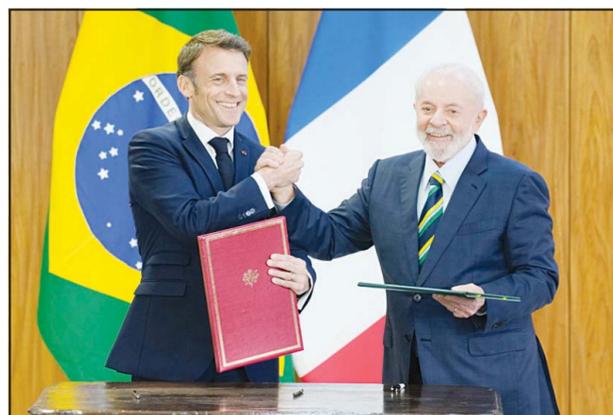
Lula, both leaders' faces lit by a gentle sun. There were hugs and handshakes aplenty: smiles and selfies, too. Lula on Thursday bestowed the highest honor for a non-citizen on Macron, draping a medal around his neck.

Brazilian social media gobbled up the bonhomie with gusto, and users posted photos of the duo that many said looked more like a wedding album than a state visit. On the last evening of his trip, Macron joined in. (AP)

Milei trades barbs with leaders: Mudslinging between Latin American populist leaders dragged on Thursday, after days of Argentina's President Javier Milei needling his leftist counterparts in Mexico and Colombia - coming to a head with a diplomatic blow the night before.

Since right-wing Milei stepped into the political spotlight last year, he has regularly traded barbs with Colombian President Gustavo Petro and Mexico's President Andrés Manuel López Obrador. But in recent days the political rivalry descended into long-winded insults launched over social media.

It heated up after Milei lashed out at Petro in an interview with CNN, excerpts of which aired Wednesday night, prompting his Colombian counterpart to order Argentine diplomats out of his country. (AP)



Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva, (right), and France's President Emmanuel Macron shake hands after signing agreements at Planalto presidential palace in Brasilia, Brazil on March 28. (AP)

gold surpasses historical high of \$2,225/oz

Kuwaiti Dar Al-Sabaek Company announced that the price of gold has surpassed \$2,225 per ounce, marking its highest historical level to date. According to a brief economic report released by the company to the Kuwait News Agency, this surge in gold prices is attributed to several factors, including escalating geopolitical tensions in Eastern Europe and the Middle East, reports Al-Jarida daily.

The report highlights that gold prices are on track to record the largest monthly

gain of approximately 8.5 percent since November 2022.

This upward trend is supported by expectations of increased monetary easing by the US Federal Reserve and the potential end to the US interest rate raising cycle.

The Federal Reserve's commitment to reducing interest rates three times this year has led to increased speculation about an interest rate cut by June, making non-yielding assets like gold more attractive to investors.

Kuwait's crude oil exports to Japan drop

Kuwait's crude oil exports to Japan in February declined 36.7 percent from a year earlier to 5.11 million barrels, or 176,000 barrels per day (bpd), down for the fifth consecutive month, government data showed Friday.

As Japan's third-biggest oil provider, Kuwait supplied 7.2 percent of its total crude imports, compared with 10.6 percent in the same month of last year, the Japanese Natural Resources and Energy Agency said in a preliminary report.

Japan's overall imports of crude oil in the reporting month fell 7.1 percent year-on-year to 2.45 million bpd, down for the third month. Shipments from the Middle East accounted for 96.7 percent of the total, down 1.4 percentage points from the year before.

The United Arab Emirates was in the top spot, with imports from the country growing 19.1 percent from the year before to 1.08 million bpd, followed by Saudi Arabia with 931,000 bpd, down 18.5 percent. (KUNA)

oil soars

Kuwait oil price rose by 92 cents to USD 86.32 pb Thursday vis a vis USD 85.40 pb Wednesday, Kuwait Petroleum Corporation said Friday.

In international markets, the Brent crude futures climbed by USD 1.39 to USD 87.48 pb and those of the West Texas intermediate crude oil rose by USD 1.82 to USD 83.17 a barrel. (KUNA)

Market Movements

29-03-2024

| | Change | Closing pts | | Change | Closing pts | | |
|-------|----------|-------------|-----------|----------|-------------|--------|-----------|
| UAE | - DFM | +13.33 | 4,246.27 | PAKISTAN | - KSE 100 | -71.75 | 67,094.63 |
| JAPAN | - Nikkei | +201.37 | 40,369.44 | | | | |

Business

Premier market up by 0.10%

Boursa Kuwait sees modest gains, increased activity

KUWAIT CITY, March 30: Trading on Boursa Kuwait this week saw modest gains, accompanied by a notable increase in liquidity, activity, and the number of transactions, reports Al-Jarida daily.

The general market index rose by 0.09 percent, closing at 7,374.02 points, with liquidity reaching 71.6 million dinars. A total of 237.1 million shares were traded across 15,277 transactions, involving 121 listed shares. Of these, 44 gained, 58 lost, and 19 remained unchanged.

The Premier Market index increased by approximately 0.10 per-

cent, closing at 8,081.99 points, with liquidity totaling 59.4 million dinars; while the trading activity involved 121.3 million shares in 10,036 transactions, with 33 shares listed in the First Market. Of these, 14 gained, 14 lost, and 5 remained unchanged.

The Main Market saw limited gains, with the index rising by 0.03 percent to close at 6,046.55 points. Liquidity amounted to 12.2 million dinars, with a total of 115.8 million shares traded in 5,241 transactions. Among the 88 shares traded, 30 gained, 44 lost, and 14 remained unchanged.

The market experienced a surge in Agility shares following the announcement of surprise dividends for the fiscal year 2022, along with the listing of its subsidiary, Agility Global, on the Abu Dhabi market.

This led to significant growth, with Agility's stock price reaching 97 fils, marking a 21.2 percent increase, the largest in two years. Other stocks, such as National Real Estate and Sultan Center, also saw gains, albeit at a lower rate.

Conversely, there was a tendency to sell shares of KFH, Watani, Zain, and Projects and Investments, possi-

bly in anticipation of further developments regarding Agility shares.

However, leading stocks like Boubyan Petrochemicals, Boubyan Bank, National Industries, and Human Soft, as well as smaller stocks like Rasiyat, Eva, and Arzan, performed well, contributing to the overall positive performance of the indices.

In the wider Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) region, most financial market indices declined, while Kuwait and Dubai's financial markets saw limited gains. Meanwhile, oil prices hovered around \$86.2 per barrel.

Kamco Invest Saudi & Flexam partner for sharia compliant leasing potential

MoU signed to offer innovative investment solutions in Kuwait City

KUWAIT CITY, March 30: Kamco Invest - Saudi and Flexam have signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to introduce European sharia compliant leasing opportunities to local investors. Flexam specializes in real asset financing and forms part of Kartesia Management, a leader in private credit across the lower mid-market in Europe, with roughly USD 7 billion in assets under management.

The MoU was signed at Kamco Invest - Saudi's headquarters in Riyadh on Wednesday 6th of March 2024 between Mohammed Al-Faris, Chief Executive Officer of Kamco Invest - Saudi and Fabrice Fraikin, Managing Partner of Flexam. The signing ceremony was attended by executives from both entities.

The collaboration between Kamco Invest - Saudi and Flexam reflects a shared commitment to providing investors with access to innovative and



Al-Faris and Fraikin exchanging agreements.

sharia compliant investment solutions. Leveraging Flexam's extensive track record, the opportunities will be presented by Kamco Invest - Saudi to eligible investors in accordance with the rules and regulations defined by the Saudi Capital Markets Authority.

The "Leasing" strategy will also leverage opportunities within the logistics and transportation sectors with a focus on the decarbonization of new and existing assets. The MoU

represents a significant step to broaden Kamco Invest - Saudi's portfolio of sharia compliant offerings and serves as Flexam's first partnership in the local market.

Al-Faris said, "We are thrilled to embark on this partnership with Flexam, which represents an additional milestone in our mission to diversify and enrich our investment offerings. This collaboration will allow us to offer our clients innovative

investment solutions that are sharia compliant while simultaneously contributing to a sustainable future. We believe that this partnership will deliver exceptional value to investors through a managed risk approach."

Fraikin, commented saying, "We are proud with this partnership which represents a great opportunity for Flexam to showcase its strong track record and penetrate the local market.

Fraikin added, "Our collaboration is based on a mutual understanding of the importance of sustainable investment solutions that comply with sharia laws. We are excited to leverage our expertise in real asset financing to contribute to this unique offering, aiming to set new standards in the leasing sector and support sustainability efforts in the logistics and transportation industries."

Al-Faris concluded, "The partnership with Flexam demonstrates the Company's ongoing commitment to innovation and its dedication to meeting the evolving needs of its clients. It highlights the Company's strategic direction towards expanding its presence in the private markets sector, offering a wider array of investment opportunities that adhere to the highest standards of compliance and ethical investment."

GCC foreign investors turn net sellers in Q4-2023

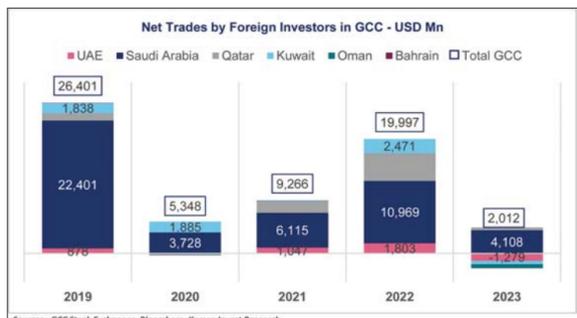
By KAMCO Invest

Foreign investors, including institutional and retail investors, were net sellers on GCC stock markets during Q4-2023 with net sales at USD 1.3 Bn as compared to USD 1.6 Bn in net buying by foreigners during Q3-2023. This came after foreign investors were net buyers consecutively for the last 14 quarters since Q1-2020, the year of the pandemic. Some of the key factors that affected the flow of foreign money in the region included regional market trends, IPOs, geopolitical issues, economic health of individual countries and crude oil prices.

The quarterly data on trading activity on GCC exchanges showed all the exchanges recorded foreigners as net sellers during Q4-2023, barring Saudi Arabia that showed foreigners as net buyers to the tune of USD 640.3 Mn during the quarter, partially offsetting the overall net sales. Foreign investors were biggest sellers of Abu Dhabi stocks with net sales of USD 975.4 Mn during the quarter as compared to USD 462.5 Mn in net buy trades during the previous quarter. Oman was next with net sales of USD 712 Mn by foreigners followed by Dubai and Kuwait exchanges with net sales of USD 98.5 Mn and USD 81.6 Mn, respectively.

Historical trend for trading by foreigners in GCC listed stocks showed declines merely in two quarter over the last five years. Foreigners bought the most stocks during Q1-2022 with net buy transactions of USD 11.0 Bn, reflecting steep increase in buying mainly in Saudi Arabia and Qatar.

The yearly trend showed continued positive activity from foreigners on GCC exchanges during 2023, although total buying witnessed a steep decline during the year. Foreigners were net buyers during the year with net purchases of USD 2.0 Bn during 2023 as compared to USD 20.0 Bn in net buying during 2022, resulting in a y-o-y decline of almost 90%. This was also the smallest aggregate net buying by foreigners in at least over the last five years. Aggregate buying by foreign in-



vestors over the last five years stood at USD 63.0 Bn with 2019 being the year with the biggest net buying by these investors to the tune of USD 26.4 Bn.

In terms of trading activity on individual exchanges, the Saudi exchange witnessed the biggest net buying by foreign investors during 2023 at USD 4.1 Bn followed by Dubai exchange and Qatar exchange at USD 1.3 Bn and USD 0.46 Bn, respectively. On the other hand, Abu Dhabi exchange recorded the biggest net sales by foreign investors during the year at USD 3.3 Bn followed by Oman and Kuwait with net sale at USD 688.6 Mn and USD 577.1 Mn, respectively.

GCC investors in other GCC exchanges were net buyers during 2023. Net buy trades of GCC investors reached USD 0.14 Bn compared to a net sale trades of USD 0.36 Bn in 2022. Qatar Exchange witnessed the biggest net buying by GCC investors during 2023 at USD 424.0 Mn followed by Saudi Exchange and UAE exchanges at USD 325.1 Mn and USD 176.8 Mn, respectively. On the other hand, Kuwait and Oman exchanges recorded the biggest net sales by GCC investors in 2023 partially offsetting the overall buying by GCC investors.

In terms of trend during 2023, aggregate trading activity by GCC Investors on other GCC exchanges peaked during May-2023 and hit the lowest trading month in December-2023.

In terms of the aggregate trading activity, total GCC volume traded during the year declined by 9.2% to reach 237.3 Bn shares in 2023 as compared to 261.4 Bn shares in 2022. Dubai topped the list with a gain of 26.2% to record 47.8 Bn in 2023 compared to 37.9 Bn in 2022, followed by Saudi Arabia with 16.6% to record 50.7 Bn in 2023 vs. 43.5 Bn in 2022. Abu Dhabi, on the other hand, declined from 73.7 Bn in 2022 to 49.7 Bn in 2023.

Similarly, the total value of shares traded during 2023 also declined and was largely broad based, Dubai and Oman were the only markets that showed a gain in value traded while the rest of the markets declined during the year. Aggregate value traded reached USD 526.6 Bn during the year vs. USD 686.0 Bn in 2022. Dubai reported the biggest increase in trading activity with value traded increasing from USD 24.2 Bn in 2022 to USD 26.0 Bn in 2023 resulting a share of 4.9% vs. 3.5% in 2022. Trading activity on the Saudi Exchange declined during the year from USD 454.3 Bn in 2022 to USD 352.0 Bn in 2023, but its share in aggregate GCC trading activity increased slightly from 66.2% in 2022 to 66.8% in 2023.

Top 10 GCC Stocks by Trading value

Five Saudi-based stocks ranked among the top 10 most traded GCC stocks by trading value in 2023. Aggregate traded value of the top 10 listed

stocks in the GCC stood at USD 112.8 Bn, accounting for 21.4% of the total value traded on the GCC exchanges during the year. International Holding Co. of Abu Dhabi topped the list by recording USD 23.2 Bn in trades followed by Saudi Aramco at USD 20.8 Bn and Al Rajhi Bank at USD 20.3 Bn.

In the below charts we have plotted several key indicators for the GCC markets against the trend in foreign inflows on the GCC exchanges by quarter. The chart highlights the correlation between these key variables and its impact on how foreign investors invest in the region.

The trends clearly shows that IPOs have a significant impact on foreign inflows in the region. We've compared GCC IPO proceeds and the volume of IPOs in the region over the last five years against the inflow/outflow of foreign money on GCC exchanges. The chart shows a clear correlation between these variables, indicating that IPOs results in higher investments from foreign investors.

The bottom charts compare the trend in regional indices against the change in foreign inflow into the region. The clearly shows a correlation between these variables but with a slight lag effect. It shows that foreign money, especially passive flow of investment funds, follow the trends in the GCC and the broader EM indices. However, the disconnect in the last quarter between these variables also indicate the flight of capital due to geopolitical issues. The region has seen minimal geopolitical events over the last five years and as a result the indices are correlated. However, the war on Gaza since the last quarter of 2023 has clearly resulted in withdrawal of money from the markets in the GCC. This was also clear during the pandemic when foreigners withdrew money from the GCC markets fearing an extended decline in benchmarks and the negative impact on the regional economy from the steep decline in crude oil prices. However, as the markets recovered, inflow of foreign capital also showed a gradual recovery.

Other Voices

Expected demand growth for fossil

Oil prices surge to higher level

By Kamel Al-Harami
Independent Oil Analyst

OIL prices have unexpectedly surged, surprising the market by reaching \$78 per barrel, with indications of further increases.

The unity within OPEC+ seems strong as they adhere closely to their production quotas. Russia has finally stepped forward to reduce its production, aiming for nine million barrels per day by the month's end.

The oil organization seems to have started realizing its effectiveness in adhering strictly to its established quota, with the hope of easing the production quota with the tightening of oil markets, potentially pushing oil prices to \$90 per barrel or even higher.

The discipline displayed by OPEC+ in fully adhering to their agreed quota is finally yielding more US dollars per barrel, thereby achieving the objectives of the oil organization through patience.

The recent announcement by Russia about reducing its production to nine million barrels per day has further boosted oil prices, with the full support of the Russian government, which requested its oil companies to comply, despite producing over 9.5 million barrels per

day at the end of February. Now it seems all factors are contributing to firmer oil prices across the board, not just for specific petroleum products.

The recent attacks on three Russian refineries have exacerbated the tightening of petroleum product markets, with one refinery operating at only 50% capacity, leading to shortages in some parts of Europe.

Despite the current surge in crude oil production in the USA, Brazil, and Canada, with the USA leading at 13 million barrels, there are no signs of reductions in oil prices. Producers are pushing further, despite unprecedented price environments.

Almost all producers are targeting increased production, expecting demand to reach about 104.5 million barrels per day this year. The future outlook is even more positive, with expectations of reaching around 120 million barrels in the next 20 years, which is certainly good news for fossil fuels.

Almost all producers are targeting for more with the expectations that demand will reach about 104.5 million barrels per day this year. The future looks more positive, with expectations of reaching around 120 million barrels in the next 20 years. This certainly is good news for fossil fuel.

With such positive factors driving the oil market, it is no wonder that our crude oil prices are expected to surge above \$90 a barrel. However, the implications for the US presidential election remain to be seen. Email: nafik Kuwaiti@yahoo.com



Al-Harami

Real estate sector vital for regional economies

Kuwaiti real estate titans among Forbes Mideast's influential list

KUWAIT CITY, March 30: Forbes Middle East has unveiled its list of the "Leaders of the Most Influential Real Estate Companies in the Middle East" for the year 2024, featuring 100 prominent real estate developers from the region who are at the forefront of innovation and shaping the future, reports Al-Qabas daily.

Among the distinguished individuals recognized in the list are seven Kuwaiti leaders, including Talal Jassim Al-Bahar, Vice Chairman and CEO of Kuwait Real Estate Company, Walid Khaled Al-Sharayan, CEO of Mabanee Company, and Khaled Al-Mishaan, Vice Chairman and CEO of Al-Argan International Real Estate Company. Also featured are Faisal Jamil Sultan Al-Issa, Vice Chairman of the Board of Directors and CEO of National Real Estate Company, Mahmoud Daoud Al-Marzouq, CEO of Tamdeen Real Estate Company, Abdul Muttalib Marafi, CEO of Commercial Real Estate Company, and

Abdulaziz Ghazi Al-Nafisi, CEO of Salhia Real Estate Company.

The list was meticulously crafted, factoring in various criteria such as financial metrics including total assets, market value, and revenues, as well as the value of completed projects and those currently under construction. Additionally, the reputation of companies in delivering properties, the extent of their land portfolio, and the number of units owned were considered.

The selected companies hail from nine countries across the region, with the UAE leading the pack with 33 representatives, six of which rank among the top 10. Saudi Arabia follows closely with 23 companies, trailed by Egypt with 20.

The real estate sector is recognized as a pivotal component of regional economies, with projections indicating promising growth driven by factors such as robust economic expansion, population growth, and substantial government investments.

Commitment to excellence in Arab banking

Fawzi Dajani appointed as Chairman of Arab Bankers Association - London

KUWAIT CITY, March 30: The Board of Directors of the Arab Bankers Association - London, has elected Fawzi Dajani, Managing Director of National Bank of Kuwait (International) plc, to serve as the new Chairman of the Association, succeeding Abdulaziz Al-Khereiji.

The Arab Bankers Association - London, renowned for its dedication to promoting cooperation, sharing expertise, and advancing professional growth within the Arab banking sector, elected Mr. Dajani for his wealth of experience. His extensive banking background positions him well to lead the association's strategic endeavors forward.

Dajani expressed his delight at his appointment as Chairman of the Association, expressing his commitment to advancing its mission of fostering excellence and innovation within the Arab banking sector. He emphasized the importance of collaborating with members and partners to drive positive change and progress in the industry.

He will oversee the strategic direction of the Arab Bankers Association - London, working closely with the Board of Directors and executive team to further strengthen the Association's position as a leading authority in Arab banking and finance.

Dajani has been a board member of



Fawzi Dajani

the Arab Bankers Association - London since 2008 and served as Vice Chairman of the Association in 2018.

The Arab Bankers Association - London was founded in 1980 as a non-profit organization with its headquarters in London. It stands as a prominent financial institution within the banking industry, comprising members employed in banks and related entities operating within the financial sectors across the Arab world and the United Kingdom.

Through an outstanding array of programs and events, the Association fosters improved relations, information sharing and understanding between Arab and British private and public financial sectors.

Small business hiring woes show signs of easing

Hiring woes may be easing for small businesses.

The CBIZ Small Business Employment Index reported a seasonally adjusted increase of 0.17% in February as the U.S. economy stays strong despite high interest rates. Small businesses have a tougher time retaining workers since they often can't offer higher salaries or other perks like health insurance. The CBIZ index tracks hiring

among thousands of companies with 300 or fewer employees across the U.S.

"The U.S. economy has shown unexpected strength amid the high interest rate environment," said Anna Rathbun, chief investment officer of CBIZ. "It's apparent that small businesses are holding onto that strength for now as they expanded their workforce steadily during February."

In February, 20% of compa-

nies in the index hired more staff while 60% made no change to their headcounts. Meanwhile, 20% cut staff.

Some industries are faring better than others. Industries with hiring gains included administrative and support services; arts, entertainment and recreation; and technology and life sciences. Decreases were observed in accommodation and food services, insurance, and utilities.

Applications for US unemployment benefits dip

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. Jobless claims dipped by 2,000 to 210,000, the Labor Department reported Thursday. The four-week average of claims, which smooths out week-to-week ups and downs, fell by 750 to 211,000. Overall, 1.8 million Americans

were collecting unemployment benefits the week that ended March 16, up 24,000 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 job cuts at Stellantis Electronic Arts, Unilever and elsewhere, 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.

Economists expect some tightening in the jobs market this year given the surprising growth of the U.S. economy last year and in 2024. The U.S. economy grew at a solid 3.4% annual pace from October through December, the government said Thursday in an upgrade from its previous estimate. (AP)

The usual funding safeguards will not apply

The EU plans to fast-track some financial aid to Egypt

BRUSSELS, March 30, (AP) - The European Union intends to fast-track some of its aid money to Egypt using an urgent funding procedure that bypasses parliamentary oversight and other safeguards, according to the president of the bloc's executive branch.

The 1 billion euros (\$1.1 billion) intended for this is part of a larger package of 7.4 billion euros (\$8 billion) in financial assistance to the North African country that the EU announced on March 17.

Egypt has for years relied on cash handouts, often from wealthy Gulf Arab states, as concerns mount that economic pressure and regional conflicts could drive more migrants from the region to Europe's shores.

The EU package includes three years' worth of grants and favorable loans for the Arab world's most populous country. Most of the funds - 5 billion euros (\$5.4 billion) - are known as macro-financial assistance, or MFA, and would be paid directly to Egypt's Central Bank.

It's rare for the EU to sidestep safeguards, but European Parliament elections are due June 6-9 - a timeline that if the checks were implemented, would slow the delivery of that money.

With those polls in mind, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen announced plans for "an urgent MFA operation for up to 1 billion euros" for Egypt, noting in a letter to EU Parliament President Roberta Metsola the country's "rapidly deteriorating economic and fiscal situation."

The letter, seen by The Associated Press, preceded the announcement of the deal with Egypt.

Von der Leyen blamed "a very large exposure to the economic effects of Russia's full-scale war of aggression on Ukraine, the wars in Gaza and Sudan, and the Houthi attacks in the Red Sea," and said it was "imperative to make sure that a first significant contribution" would get to Egypt by the end of 2024.

To do so, the commission would employ a seldom-used part of the EU treaties, Article 213, which stipulates that the 27 member countries must endorse

the funds - but not the parliament, the bloc's only democratically elected institution.

Nor even when COVID-19 spread in 2020 and the EU bailed out governments from the Balkans to the Middle East was this path taken. Nor is it used to keep Ukraine's war-shattered economy afloat, although Kyiv did benefit from it a decade ago, when Russia annexed Crimea and hiked natural gas prices.

Apart from removing the need for parliamentary oversight, the urgent funding procedure also sidesteps a requirement for an impact assessment on the effects of the assistance.

Von der Leyen said the new parliament that will be formed after the EU elections would be "fully involved" in the remaining 4 billion euros (\$4.3 billion) of MFAs to Egypt, to be disbursed when Cairo agrees to implement "more comprehensive" reforms.

The deal also includes a 1.8 billion euro (\$1.9 billion) investment plan and 600 million euros (\$647 million) in loans, including at least 200 million euros (\$217 million) that will go to Egypt for "migration management."

The fast-track money would inject much-needed funds into the Egyptian economy, which has been hit hard by years of government austerity, the coronavirus pandemic, the fallout from Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, and most recently, the Israel-Hamas war in Gaza.

Usually, MFAs are meant for governments with dire economic woes and to encourage them to introduce reforms. Yet the commission acknowledges that Egypt is "sluggish" on policy revision and already has a "backlog of domestic reforms" to address.

Migration is a key factor driving the EU-Egypt deal. As in previous years, it will be an election issue in the EU and mainstream parties want to keep arrivals down to deprive the far-right of campaign fuel.

The deal in Cairo came just weeks after a pact was sealed with Mauritania involving money to help the country - a major transit hub for people moving through Africa toward Europe - beef up border security.

A more substantial agreement was clinched with Tunisia last July, expanding on a model the bloc developed with Turkey in 2015 to stop migrants reaching Europe.

While the Egyptian coast has not been a key launching pad for human traffickers sending overcrowded boats across the Mediterranean Sea to Europe, Egypt faces migratory pressures from the region, with the added looming threat that the Israel-Hamas war could spill across its borders.

The commission, asked by the AP what conditions Egypt should respect to receive urgent funding, said that "relevant and feasible reform priorities would need (to) be selected taking into account the corresponding time horizon."

The commission's website says macro-financial assistance must be "exceptional in nature" and that "a pre-condition for granting MFA is the respect of human rights and effective democratic mechanisms."

Amnesty International has implored the EU to put rights abuses at the center of relations with Egypt - and the commission concedes that "human rights challenges in Egypt remain significant."

Still, the EU's executive branch maintains that "the political leadership in Egypt has taken several steps putting greater emphasis on the importance of the respect for human rights" in recent years.

Earlier this month, Egypt floated its currency and announced a deal with the International Monetary Fund to increase its bailout loan from \$3 billion to \$8 billion, moving to shore up an economy hit by a staggering shortage of foreign currency and soaring inflation.

Cairo's coffers will also be replenished with \$35 billion from a massive project involving an Emirati consortium to jointly develop the Mediterranean city of Ras el-Hekma.

Since coming to power in 2013, Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi has relied heavily on Gulf Arab states, from where an estimated more than \$100 billion entered Egypt via Central Bank deposits, fuel aid and other support.

Cryptocurrency mogul

Bankman-Fried jailed for 25 yrs

NEW YORK, March 30, (AP) - Cryptocurrency entrepreneur Sam Bankman-Fried was sentenced Thursday to 25 years in prison for a massive fraud on hundreds of thousands of customers that unraveled with the collapse of FTX, once one of the world's most popular platforms for exchanging digital currency.

U.S. District Judge Lewis A. Kaplan delivered a blistering analysis of Bankman-Fried and his crimes before announcing a sentence that was half of what prosecutors sought and less than a quarter of the 105 years recommended by the court's Probation officers.

"There is absolutely no doubt that Mr. Bankman-Fried's name right now is pretty much mud around the world," Kaplan said of the 32-year-old man who once seemed atop the cryptocurrency world before his businesses collapsed in November 2022, leaving customers, investors and lenders short over \$11 billion, which the judge ordered him to forfeit.

He was convicted in November of fraud and conspiracy - a dramatic fall from a crest of success that included a Super Bowl advertisement and celebrity endorsements from stars like quarterback Tom Brady, basketball star Stephen Curry and comedian Larry David.

Kaplan imposed the sentence in the same Manhattan courtroom where, four months previously, Bankman-Fried testified that he had intended to revolutionize the emerging cryptocurrency market with his innovative and altruistic ideas, not steal. The judge said Bankman-Fried repeatedly committed perjury when he told lies from the witness stand.

Kaplan said the sentence reflected "that there is a risk that this man will be in position to do something very bad in the future. And it's not a trivial risk at all." He added that it was "for the purpose of disabling him to the extent that can appropriately be done for a significant period of time."

Kaplan said he would advise the Federal Bureau of Prisons to send Bankman-Fried to a medium-security prison near San Francisco because of his notoriety, his association with vast wealth, his autism and social awkwardness are likely to make him especially vulnerable at a high-security facility.

Assistant U.S. Attorney Nicolas Roos had recommended a prison sentence of 40 to 50 years, saying it was the only way to ensure "the defendant doesn't do it again."

"The defendant victimized tens of thousands of people and companies, across several continents, over a period of multiple years. He stole money from customers who entrusted it to him; he lied to investors; he sent fabricated documents to lenders; he pumped millions of dollars in illegal donations into our political system; and he bribed foreign officials. Each of these crimes is worthy of a lengthy sentence," prosecutors had said in a court filing.

Prosecutors said Bankman-Fried misappropriated billions of dollars to fuel his quest for influence and dominance in the new industry, and had illegally used money from FTX depositors to cover his expenses, which included purchasing luxury properties in the Caribbean, bribes to Chinese officials and private planes.

Kaplan agreed with prosecutors Thursday that Bankman-Fried should not get leniency just because some investors and customers might get some of their losses back. He noted that customers lost about \$8 billion, investors lost \$1.7 billion and lenders were shorted by \$1.3 billion.

US economic growth for last quarter is revised up slightly to 3.4% annual rate

Revised rate described as healthy

Feelings about the near future are a bit more cloudy

US consumers remain confident

WASHINGTON, March 30, (AP) - The U.S. economy grew at a solid 3.4% annual pace from October through December, the government said Thursday in an upgrade from its previous estimate. The government had previously estimated that the economy expanded at a 3.2% rate last quarter.

The Commerce Department's revised measure of the nation's gross domestic product - the total output of goods and services - confirmed that the economy decelerated from its sizzling 4.9% rate of expansion in the July-September quarter.

But last quarter's growth was still a solid performance, coming in the face of higher interest rates and powered by growing consumer spending, exports and business investment in buildings and software. It marked the sixth straight quarter in which the economy has grown at an annual rate above 2%.

For all of 2023, the U.S. economy - the world's biggest - grew 2.5%, up from 1.9% in 2022. In the current January-March quarter, the economy is believed to be growing at a slower but still decent 2.1% annual rate, according to a forecasting model issued by the Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta.

Thursday's GDP report also suggested that inflation pressures were continuing to ease. The Federal Reserve's favored measure of prices - called the personal consumption expenditures price index - rose at a 1.8% annual rate in the fourth quarter. That was down from 2.6% in the third quarter, and it was the smallest rise since 2020, when COVID-19 triggered a recession and sent prices falling.

Stripping out volatile food and energy prices, so-called core inflation amounted to 2% from October

through December, unchanged from the third quarter.

The economy's resilience over the past two years has repeatedly defied predictions that the ever-higher borrowing rates the Fed engineered to fight inflation would lead to waves of layoffs and probably a recession. Beginning in March 2022, the Fed jacked up its benchmark rate 11 times, to a 23-year high, making borrowing much

more expensive for businesses and households. Yet the economy has kept growing, and employers have kept hiring - at a robust average of 251,000 added jobs a month last year and 265,000 a month from December through February. At the same time, inflation has steadily cooled: After peaking at 9.1% in June 2022, it has dropped to 3.2%, though it remains above

the Fed's 2% target. The combination of sturdy growth and easing inflation has raised hopes that the Fed can manage to achieve a "soft landing" by fully conquering inflation without triggering a recession.

Thursday's report was the Commerce Department's third and final estimate of fourth-quarter GDP growth. It will release its first estimate of January-March growth on April 25.

signal a potential recession in the near future.

Consumers' view of current conditions, however, improved to 151.0 from from 147.6.

Responses to the Conference Board's survey showed an increase in consumers' concern over food and gas prices and the U.S. political environment with the presidential election just seven months away. A poll last month by The Associated Press revealed that Americans increasingly think the economy is good, but only about half as many as those who think the economy is poor.

The board said confidence among consumers 55 years old and older improved, but deteriorated for those under 55. Respondents earning between \$50,000 and \$99,999 reported lower confidence while other income groups broadly felt more confident.

"Over the last six months, confidence has been moving sideways with no real trend to the upside or downside either by income or age group," said Dana M. Peterson, the Conference Board's chief economist.

The stagnation of consumer confidence recently comes as most economic indicators show the U.S. economy in very good shape by historical standards, yet evidence of some anxiety has begun to creep in.

The government reported last month that the nation's economy grew at an unexpectedly brisk 3.2% annual pace from October through December as Americans showed a continued willingness to spend freely. Retail sales also rose last month, but not as much as expected and a decline in January was revised even lower, suggesting that many Americans are growing more cautious with their money.

Still, the labor market continues to churn out jobs. U.S. employers added 275,000 jobs in February, and while the unemployment rate ticked up to 3.9% from 3.7%, it was the 25th straight month that joblessness has been below 4%, the longest stretch since the 1960s.

Still, environmentalists say the mine raises bigger questions about the Biden administration's willingness to adopt favorable nuclear power policies.

Using nuclear power to reach emissions goals is a hard sell in the western U.S. From the Navajo Nation to Ute Mountain Ute and Oglala Lakota homelands, tribal communities have deep-seated distrust of uranium companies and the federal government as abandoned mines and related contamination have yet to be cleaned up.

Taylor McKinnon, the Center for Biological Diversity's Southwest director, said allowing mining near the Grand Canyon "makes a mockery of the administration's environmental justice rhetoric."

"It's literally a black eye for the Biden administration," he said.

Teracita Keyanna with the Red Water Pond Road Community Association got choked up while testifying before the human rights commission in Washington, D.C., saying federal regulators proposed keeping onsite soil contaminated by past operations in New Mexico rather than removing it.

State regulators also have said the area's geology is expected to provide an element of natural protection against water from the site migrating toward the Grand Canyon.

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Uranium is being mined near the Grand Canyon as prices soar

THE largest uranium producer in the United States is ramping up work just south of Grand Canyon National Park on a long-contested project that comes as global instability and growing demand drive uranium prices higher.

The Biden administration and dozens of other countries have pledged to triple the capacity of nuclear power worldwide in their battle against climate change, and policy changes are being adopted by some to lessen Russia's influence over the supply chain.

But as the U.S. pursues its nuclear power potential, environmentalists and Native American leaders remain fearful of the consequences for communities near mining and milling sites in the West and are demanding more regulatory oversight.

The new mining at Pinyon Plain Mine near the Grand Canyon is happening within the boundaries of the Baaj Nwaavjo I'tah Kuvk National Monument that was designated in August by President Joe Biden. The work was allowed to move forward since Energy Fuels Inc. had valid existing rights.

Low impact with zero risk to groundwater is how Energy Fuels spokesman

Curtis Moore describes the project.

The mine will cover 17 acres (6.8 hectares) and operate for just a few years, producing at least 2 million pounds (about 907,000 kilograms) of uranium - enough to power the state of Arizona for at least a year with carbon-free electricity, he said.

"As the global outlook for clean, carbon-free nuclear energy strengthens and the U.S. moves away from Russian uranium supply, the demand for domestically sourced uranium is growing," Moore said.

Energy Fuels, which is also prepping two more mines in Colorado and Wyoming, was awarded a contract in 2022 to sell \$18.5 million in uranium concentrates to the U.S. government to help establish the nation's strategic reserve for when supplies might be disrupted.

Amid the growing appetite for uranium, a coalition of Native Americans testified before the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights in late February, asking the panel to pressure the U.S. government to overhaul outdated mining laws and prevent further exploitation of marginalized communities.

Carletta Tilousi, who served for

years on the Havasupai Tribal Council, said she and others have written countless letters to state and federal agencies and have sat through hours of meetings with regulators and lawmakers. Her tribe's reservation lies in a gorge off the Grand Canyon.

"We have been diligently participating in consultation processes," she said. "They hear our voices. There's no response."

Numerous legal challenges aimed at stopping the Pinyon Plain Mine repeatedly have been rejected by the courts, and top officials in the Biden administration are reticent to weigh in beyond speaking generally about efforts to improve consultation with Native American tribes.

It's just the latest battle over energy development and sacred lands, as tribes in Nevada and Arizona are fighting the federal government over the mining of lithium and the siting of renewable energy transmission lines.

The Havasupai are concerned mining could affect water supplies, wildlife, plants and geology throughout the Colorado Plateau, and the Colorado River flowing through the Grand Canyon and its tributaries are vital to millions of people across the West.

Embracing tradition and unity: A symbol of solidarity and community

Al Ahli Bank of Kuwait celebrates Ramadan with staff ghabga event

KUWAIT CITY, March 30: Embracing the spirit of unity and community, Al Ahli Bank of Kuwait (ABK) recently hosted a memorable staff ghabga event at Grand Hyatt Kuwait, marking a joyous occasion during the holy month of Ramadan.

The event was attended by members of the Executive Management as well as employees from across all of the Bank's divisions. It served as a testament to the Bank's unwavering commitment to fostering a strong sense of togetherness and camaraderie among its staff members, aligning with the profound significance of Ramadan in bringing people together.

Commenting on the occasion, Loai Muqames, said, "The staff ghabga event was a wonderful opportunity for our team to come together and share in the blessings of Ramadan. This time provides a sense of unity and connection, and it was deeply meaningful for us to gather and partake in this cherished tradition."

The event held significant importance within the Bank's corporate culture, serving as a platform to reinforce its values among staff members. It symbolized an opportunity for employees to bond in a warm and convivial atmosphere, fostering a deeper sense of solidarity within the workplace.

The evening was filled with engaging activities, including prize giveaways and entertaining content, further enhancing the spirit of joy and festivity. The event provided a platform for staff members, in addition to new-joiners, to connect, celebrate their shared identity, and build cherished memories that resonate with the Bank's vision of maintaining a harmonious and closely-knit work community.

The event was also an opportunity to recognize teams' group achievements and special accomplishments both inside and outside the work environment. On her part, Afrah AlArbush, General Manager



Loai Muqames speaking during the ghabga event.

Loai Muqames: This time provides a sense of unity and connection, and it was deeply meaningful for us to gather and partake in this cherished tradition

Afrah AlArbush: This event exemplifies our commitment to nurturing a corporate culture that values the well-being and happiness of our staff



Acting Group CEO Abdullah Al-Sumait, Loai Muqames and Afrah AlArbush.



A group shot on the sidelines of the ghabga event.



Part of the bank's employees.



Mass attendance

of Human Resources at ABK, said, "This event exemplifies our commitment to nurturing a corporate culture that values the well-being

and happiness of our staff. It underscores our belief in the importance of coming together, forging meaningful connections, and

creating a supportive environment where each individual feels appreciated."

As the holy month continues to

unfold, ABK remains steadfast in its dedication to celebrating the cultural heritage and spiritual significance of the occasion, demon-

strating its profound commitment to fostering a workplace environment that embodies harmony, collaboration, and shared joy.

As part of its Ramadan initiatives, in collaboration with the Food and Relief Bank

Gulf Bank distributes food baskets 'Machlat Ramadan' to underprivileged families



Najla Al-Eisa mediates between the Sawaed Al-Khaleej team and food bank officials.

Over 3,000 meals distributed at Al Mubarakiya

stc hosts largest Ramadan Iftar in Kuwait

KUWAIT CITY, March 30: Kuwait Telecommunications Company - stc, a world-class digital leader providing innovative services and platforms to customers, enabling the digital transformation in Kuwait, announced that it has organized the largest Iftar in Kuwait this Ramadan, serving over 3,000 meals to individuals. The initiative was handled in collaboration with the Kuwait Municipality, Zajel Volunteer Team, Gastronomica chain of restaurants as well as Jahez-Kuwait, a pioneering platform that connects customers with their favorite restaurants through online orders.

Organizing the Iftar comes as an additional initiative under stc's Ramadan 2024 campaign with the theme "With good, we go further", which aims to show the importance of giving back and doing good, whether in the community or amongst individuals.

The large scale Iftar meal took place at Al Mubarakiya on March 27th, where individuals were welcomed to receive their free meals. There were enough meals for over 3,000 individuals in commemoration of the Holy Month of Ramadan, reflecting the true essence behind this spiritual time of the year. stc, Kuwait Municipality, Zajel Volunteer Team, Gastronomica chain of restaurants as well as Jahez-Kuwait representatives were present at the location to assist in distributing meals to individuals as well as overseeing the event.

This initiative builds on the various activities launched under stc's program to give back to the community in various ways alongside the strategic partnerships the Company has formed with various entities and institutions in Kuwait.

The objectives behind stc's Ramadan 2024 campaign mirror the Company's commitment to community enrichment and social responsibility. Under the banner of its "With good, we go further" campaign, stc aims to harness the spirit of Ramadan, a month renowned for generosity and giving, to foster good and create lasting positive impacts within the community. This initiative is designed to support those who are in need through the distribution of meals, with the hopes of inspiring a ripple effect of goodwill and charity throughout society.



A group photo of Zajel and STC volunteer work teams.



Preparations for the largest Iftar table in Mubarakiya.



While distributing meals to fasting people.

stc's campaign aims to fulfil the Company's broader vision of driving digital transformation while promoting social responsibility and inclusivity. In line with our corporate vision, stc's Weyak initiative, which is focused on supporting youth entrepreneurs in addition to local small and medium enterprises and start-ups, continues its efforts to strengthen its strategic partnerships and continue its support for digital start-ups. Our collaboration during the holy month of Ramadan with "Jahez-Kuwait" application, the platform that connects customers to their favourite

restaurants through its online services is in line with our aim of enriching society's lifestyle at all aspects.

By leveraging its resources and wide network, stc intends to maximize the campaign's impact, ensuring that the benefits extend beyond the recipients of the Iftar meals.

The Company envisions this annual campaign to serve as a key component of its efforts to promote a culture of giving and support within Kuwait, encouraging individuals and organizations alike to contribute to the well-being of the community.

KUWAIT CITY, March 30: For the seventh consecutive year, as part of its diverse range of activities and initiatives organized during the holy month of Ramadan, Gulf Bank distributed food baskets "Machlat Ramadan" to underprivileged families, in collaboration with the Kuwait Food and Relief Bank.

Ms. Najla Al-Eisa, Gulf Bank's Chief Marketing Officer, affirmed Gulf Bank's ongoing dedication to organizing a wide array of activities and initiatives throughout the holy month of Ramadan. She emphasized that these initiatives reflect the bank's unwavering commitment to social responsibility, which is deeply ingrained in its pioneering efforts aimed at fostering sustainability principles within the community.

She added: "We are pleased to collaborate with the Kuwait Food and Relief Bank in supporting underprivileged families who face difficult circumstances. Through this partnership, we were able to distribute both Iftar meals and food baskets to those families."

She highlighted that providing food baskets to these families helps alleviate some of their burdens during this month, especially amid increasing living expenses. She further noted that the baskets consist of various food items, enough to sustain them for several days.

Al-Eisa also pointed out that this initiative is among Gulf Bank's charitable activities during the holy month of Ramadan, showcasing the bank's longstanding engagement with the community spanning sixty years. She emphasized its integral role in Kuwait's economic and social history.

She emphasized that Gulf Bank continues its strong commitment to sustainability programs, at societal, economic, and environmental levels, through numerous carefully selected initiatives that benefit both the bank and the community, in line with its 2025 strategy and in accordance with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals and Kuwait Vision 2035.

Al-Eisa stressed Gulf Bank's unwavering dedication to sustainability programs across societal, economic, and environmental levels. This commitment is evident through a variety of carefully selected initiatives that mutually benefit both the bank and the community. This particular initiative aligns with the bank's 2025 strategy, the United Nations

Najla Al-Eisa: Supporting underprivileged families reflects the bank's unwavering commitment to social responsibility



Gulf Bank distributes food baskets.

Sustainable Development Goals, and Kuwait Vision 2035.

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

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

Best account of its kind in Kuwait

KIB announces winners of Al Dirwaza account's weekly draw

KUWAIT CITY, March 30: Kuwait International Bank (KIB) announced the winners of the fourth weekly draw held under the Al Dirwaza account's 2024 campaign, which is distinguished by the highest number of winners throughout the year. The weekly draw, based on customers' February deposits, recently took place in the presence of representatives from the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, as well as representatives from the Bank. The KD 1,000 prize was awarded to Khaled Hashem Mohammad AlOtaibi, Mohammed Saud Mejhem AlMutairi, Hanan Hassan Abdullah Alhassan, Khashif Majeed Abdulmajeed, and Fajer Khaled Mohammad AlAbdulqader, whilst the KD 500 prize was awarded to Maha Ali Mahmud AlBaghli, Faisal Saleh Sanhat AlMutairi, Najebah Fardan Hasan Abdullah, Wajiha Habib Ramadan Awad, Suad Mohammed Abed Ali, Kamal Hassan Mohammed Ahmad, and Abdulaziz Jassim Mohammad Alkandari.

It serves to note that the AlDirwaza account is a savings account for individual customers, based on the Wakala investment principle, launched by KIB as one of its banking products for in-



Dirwaza flyer

dividuals. The account is currently the best of its kind in the sector, with annual expected profits of up to 2% disbursed on a monthly basis, where the customer gets an expected profit of 2% for the first 3 months from the account opening date and up to 1% expected rate onward. The expected profits are automatically deposited into the customer's account within the first day of the beginning of each month.

Al Dirwaza account holders are eligible to enter the weekly, monthly and annual draws on the condition of maintaining at least KD 100 in their account. For the weekly and monthly

draws, each KD 1 that has completed a full month's cycle in the account will count for one chance, and chances are calculated based on the lowest monthly balance preceding the draw. As for the mega draw, chances are calculated for each KD 1 that completes a two-month cycle in the account - based on the lowest two monthly balances prior to the draw.

Al Dirwaza account is also in compliance with the provisions of Islamic Sharia and approved by the KIB's Sharia Supervisory Board. Furthermore, the account comes with a wide range of benefits, including the ease of opening the account, which does not require a salary transfer, and the customer's ability to open it remotely without visiting a branch through KIB Online on the Bank's website or KIB Mobile application on smartphones.

Additionally, Al Dirwaza account automatically grants customers instant issuance of an ATM card, with a KD 2,000 ATM daily withdrawal limit, as well as the ability to issue credit cards against the cash collateral in the account. To open the account and participate in its draws, a minimum of KD 100 is required and can only be withdrawn upon account closure.

Emotional responses and historical critique

'Oppenheimer' finally premieres in Japan to mixed reactions

TOKYO, March 30, (AP) — "Oppenheimer" finally premiered Friday in the nation where two cities were obliterated 79 years ago by the nuclear weapons invented by the American scientist who was the subject of the Oscar-winning film. Japanese filmgoers' reactions understandably were mixed and highly emotional.

Toshiyuki Mimaki, who survived the bombing of Hiroshima when he was 3, said he has been fascinated by the story of J. Robert Oppenheimer, often called "the father of the atomic bomb" for leading the Manhattan Project.

"What were the Japanese thinking, carrying out the attack on Pearl Harbor, starting a war they could never hope to win," he said, sadness in his voice, in a telephone interview with The Associated Press.

He is now chairperson of a group of bomb victims called the Japan Confederation of A- and H-Bomb Sufferers Organization and he saw "Oppenheimer" at a preview event. "During the whole movie, I was waiting and waiting for the Hiroshima bombing scene to come on, but it never did," Mimaki said.

"Oppenheimer" does not directly depict what happened on the ground when the bombs were dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, turning some 100,000 people instantly into ashes, and killed thousands more in the days that followed, mostly civilians.

The film instead focuses on Oppenheimer as a person and his internal conflicts.

The film's release in Japan, more than eight months after it opened in the U.S., had been watched with trepidation because of the sensitivity of the subject matter.

Former Hiroshima Mayor Takashi Hiraoka, who spoke at a preview event for the film in the southwestern city, was more critical of what was omitted.

"From Hiroshima's standpoint, the horror of nuclear weapons was not sufficiently depicted," he was quoted as saying by Japanese media. "The film was made in a way to validate the conclusion that the atomic bomb was used to save the lives of Americans."

Interest

Some moviegoers offered praise. One man emerging from a Tokyo theater Friday said the movie was great, stressing that the topic was of great interest to Japanese, although emotionally volatile as well. Another said he got choked up over the film's scenes depicting Oppenheimer's inner turmoil. Neither man would give his name to an Associated Press journalist.

In a sign of the historical controversy, a backlash flared last year over the "Barbenheimer" marketing phenomenon that merged pink-and-fun "Barbie" with seriously intense "Oppenheimer." Warner Bros. Japan, which distributed "Barbie" in the country, apologized after some memes depicted the Mattel doll with atomic blast imagery.

Kazuhiro Maeshima, professor at Sophia University, who specializes in U.S. politics, called the film an expression of "an American conscience."

Those who expect an anti-war movie may be disappointed. But the telling of Oppenheimer's story in a Hollywood blockbuster would have been unthinkable several decades ago, when justification of nuclear weapons dominated American sentiments, Maeshima said.

"The work shows an America that has changed dramatically," he said in a telephone interview.

Others suggested the world might be ready for a Japanese response to that story.

Takashi Yamazaki, director of "Godzilla Minus One," which won the Oscar for visual effects and is a powerful statement on nuclear catastrophe in its own way, suggested he might be the man for that job.

"I feel there needs to be an answer from Japan to 'Oppenheimer.' Someday, I would like to make that movie," he said in an online dialogue with "Oppenheimer" director Christopher Nolan.

Nolan heartily agreed.

Hirofumi Shinju, a lawyer, noted Japan and Germany also carried out wartime atrocities, even as the nuclear threat grows around the world. Historians say Japan was also working on nuclear weapons during World War II and would have almost certainly used them against other nations, Shinju said.

Variety



This image released by Warner Bros Pictures shows Dan Stevens, left, Rebecca Hall and Kaylee Hottle in a scene from 'Godzilla X Kong: The New Empire.' (AP)

Film

Epic monster mash-up fails to impress with storytelling

'Godzilla x Kong' offers spectacular feast

By Jake Coyle

As the old saying goes, there are two kinds of people on this Earth: Those who like their movies with a giant evil ape swinging a vertebrae like a lasso while riding a kaiju controlled by a crystal, and those who don't.

The former types will have much to cheer in "Godzilla x Kong: The New Empire," a ground-stomping, radiation-spewing monster-mash feast. Technically, we are not on this Earth. We're inside it, in a subterranean jungle world that gives the movie's filmmakers an exotic, untrampled realm in which they try to chart some new ground for a pair of well-traveled beasts.

But aside from the film's strong Jules Verne streak, "Godzilla x Kong" is no drastic pivot for its long-in-the-tooth monsters. For that, you were better off catching last year's Toho-made "Godzilla Minus One," which grippingly returned to Godzilla's post-WWII origins and in the process won the 70-year-old lizard its first Oscar.

Other, less respectable creatures might have used an Academy Award as a springboard for more dramatic roles. But not Godzilla. No costume dramas for him, unless you count the robotic fist that Kong gets outfitted with midway through the movie.

No, we are back in the pure spectacle territory that has traditionally been Godzilla and King Kong's stomping ground. It's even a very small title tweak from the previous installment, "Godzilla vs. Kong," to "Godzilla x Kong." This one promises a team-up, with the frenemies joining forces to fight a mutual foe. If things keep up this way, we can look forward to "Godzilla xoxo Kong."

Returning director Adam Wingard kicks things off with his two stars separated, like star-crossed lovers, with only Earth's mantle in between. Godzilla roams above ground while Kong romps around in Hollow Earth. To humankind, this is a good arrangement that keeps city-destroying rampages to a minimum - though Godzilla's choice of bed, the Roman Coliseum, is surely unpopular among archeologists.

Every movement of each monster is closely tracked digitally. The humans in "Godzilla x Kong"

verge on being bit players - or more like roving sports commentators - who spend most of their time trying to analyze what the goliaths are up to. It's a lean crew of scientist Ilene Andrews (Rebecca Hall), conspiracy-spouting podcaster Bernie (Brian Tyree Henry) and biologist Trapper (Dan Stevens) who fly into the Earth's center when Kong is hurt and confusing distress signals seem to emanating from the underworld. With them are Ilene's adoptive daughter Jia (Kaylee Hottle), the lone surviving member of the tribe that protected Kong's Skull Island.

Being in Hollow Earth takes some of the fun out of things. What good is a colossus when you can't fling it against a skyscraper? Some of that comes later in "Godzilla x Kong." But most of the film's thrills come out of the strange dimensions that can turn up around every corner. In Hollow Earth they stumble onto a host of lost civilizations and a cavernous lair held up by giant crystals that look like the roman numerals of a Super Bowl logo.

Connections

That also leaves "Godzilla x Kong" residing in a purely CGI arena without even tenuous connections to reality. It's a empty chamber for movie spectacle and nothing else, where the only option is to pile elements on top of each other until you have, you know, a giant evil ape swinging a vertebrae like a lasso while riding a kaiju controlled by a crystal.

But this mostly a very big, very simple tag team affair. The bad guys underground - the nasty gorilla Skar King and equally unpleasant lizard kaiju Shimo - eventually battle Kong and Godzilla in a finale that strips out the last vestige of reality, gravity, in a floating melee.

Who is there to root for here? Godzilla has first billing but it spends most of its time traipsing around the globe sucking up radiation. Of the humans, Hall does the most to bring something real to the movie. Kong, as he's been throughout this iteration of the franchise, is the main guy. But he's just on the lookout for a friend or two. His most emotional scene, like Nick Nolte in "Affliction," is due to a tooth ache. That, and the resulting yank via helicopter, prompted me to wish the movie was just a series of medical is-

sues for an aging Kong. A knee replacement. Some reading glasses.

"Godzilla x Kong: The New Empire," a Warner Bros. release, is rated PG-13 by the Motion Picture Association for creature violence and action. Running time: 115 minutes. Two stars out of four.

Also:

LOS ANGELES: Martin Scorsese has already said he's working on a film about Jesus, and now he's making a project about saints.

Scorsese will host, narrate and produce an eight-part docudrama called "Martin Scorsese Presents: The Saints" for the streaming service Fox Nation, it announced Wednesday.

The series will follow the lives of eight men and women who have been beatified, including **Joan of Arc**, **Francis of Assisi**, **Thomas Becket**, **Mary Magdalene** and **Maximilian Kolbe**, a Franciscan friar who volunteered to die at **Auschwitz** to save the life of the father of a family.

The first four episodes of "Martin Scorsese Presents: The Saints" will debut in November. The remaining four will air by May 2025.

The Oscar winner, who briefly pursued becoming a priest before switching to filmmaking, told the Los Angeles Times in January that his next film would be an adaptation of Shusaku Endo's book "A Life of Jesus."



LOS ANGELES: Jonathan Glazer's best-picture nominee "The Zone of Interest" arrives on Max on Friday, April 5. The film, haunting and formalist, depicts the daily life of **Rudolf Höss** (Christian Friedel), and his wife, **Hedwig** (Sandra Hüller) while living in their home next door to **Auschwitz**. Since its premiere at last year's Cannes Film Festival, "The Zone of Interest" has been hailed as harrowing drama about human capacity for compartmentalizing atrocity. In her review, AP's **Jocelyn Noveck** wrote that "the horror assaults our senses in other, deeper ways." At the Oscars, where "The Zone of Interest" won best international film, Glazer spoke out against **Israel's** war in Gaza, sparking a backlash from some in Hollywood. (AP)

LOS ANGELES: Tori Spelling filed for divorce Friday from her husband and former reality TV co-star **Dean McDermott**.

The former "Beverly Hills, 90210" actor petitioned to end the marriage of nearly 18 years in **Los Angeles Superior Court**. She cited irreconcilable differences.

Spelling's petition says the two have been separated since June 17.

She is asking for sole physical custody and joint legal custody of their three sons and two daughters, whose ages range from 7 to 17. Physical custody determines with which parent the children primarily reside, while legal custody is who makes their major life decisions.

Spelling is asking the court to order McDermott to pay her spousal support and to pay for her divorce attorneys. No dollar amount was given.

The marriage was the subject of a reality show, originally titled "Tori & Dean: Inn Love" and later "Tori & Dean: Home Sweet Hollywood," that ran on the Oxygen network from 2007 to 2012.

Spelling, the 50-year-old daughter of the late TV magnate Aaron Spelling, starred alongside Luke Perry.

Shannen Doherty and **Jennie Garth** in the original "Beverly Hills, 90210" from 1990 to 2000. She also appeared in the films "Scary Movie 2" and "The House of Yes."

McDermott, a 57-year-old Canadian actor, appeared on the Canadian TV series "Due South" and hosted the cooking competition show "Chopped Canada."

It was the second marriage for both. (AP)

ALBUQUERQUE, N.M.: A New Mexico judge on Friday rejected an effort by a movie set armorer to challenge her conviction of involuntary manslaughter in the 2021 fatal shooting of a cinematographer by **Alec Baldwin** on the set of the Western film "Rust."

After hearing brief arguments during a virtual hearing, Santa Fe-based Judge **Mary Marlowe Sommer** said she would be staying the course and that armorer **Hannah Gutierrez-Reed** would remain in custody pending her sentencing in April.

Gutierrez-Reed was convicted by a jury in early March in the October 2021 shooting on the outskirts of Santa Fe, New Mexico, during a rehearsal. Baldwin was

indicted by a grand jury in January and has pleaded not guilty to an involuntary manslaughter charge, with trial set for July.

Defense attorneys for Gutierrez-Reed had filed a request earlier this month for a new trial and urged the judge to release their client from jail as deliberations proceeded. Attorney **Jason**



Baldwin



Spelling

Bowles told the judge Friday that his client had no violations during the trial, takes care of her father and has been in counseling.

"She hasn't done anything wrong. She's not a danger or a flight risk," he said.

The judge responded: "Keep in mind there was a death that the jury determined was caused by her

so I'm not releasing her."

Involuntary manslaughter carries a sentence of up to 18 months in prison and a \$5,000 fine. Gutierrez-Reed is being held at the Santa Fe County Adult Detention Facility.

In court filings, defense attorneys asserted that the jury instructions in the case could confuse

jurors and lead to a nonunanimous verdict. Similar objections to the jury instructions were rejected at trial, but Bowles on Friday brought up a new ruling from the New Mexico Supreme Court in an unrelated case that addressed situations when jurors have two or more specific acts to consider when deliberating a charge. (AP)

People & Places

Obit

Iconic actor & activist

Gossett Jr, 1st Black Oscar winner, dies

LOS ANGELES, March 30, (AP): **Louis Gossett Jr.**, the first Black man to win a supporting actor Oscar and an Emmy winner for his role in the seminal TV miniseries "Roots," has died. He was 87.

Gossett's first cousin Neal L. Gossett told The Associated Press that the actor died in Santa Monica, California. A statement from the family said Gossett died Friday morning. No cause of death was revealed.

Gossett's cousin remembered a man who walked with Nelson Mandela and who also was a great joke teller, a relative who faced and fought racism with dignity and humor.

"Never mind the awards, never mind the glitz and glamor, the Rolls-Royces and the big houses in Malibu. It's about the humanity of the people that he stood for," his cousin said.

Louis Gossett always thought of his early career as a reverse Cinderella story, with success finding him from an early age and propelling him forward, toward his Academy Award for "An Officer and a Gentleman."

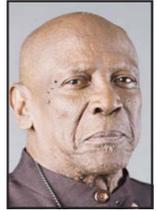
Gossett broke through on the small screen as Fiddler in the groundbreaking 1977 miniseries "Roots," which depicted the atrocities of slavery on TV. The sprawling cast included Ben Vereen, LeVar Burton and John Amos.

Gossett became the third Black Oscar nominee in the supporting actor category in 1983. He won for his performance as the intimidating Marine drill instructor in "An Officer and a Gentleman" opposite Richard Gere and Debra Winger. He also won a Golden Globe for the same role.

"More than anything, it was a huge affirmation of my position as a Black actor," he wrote in his 2010 memoir, "An Actor and a Gentleman."

He had earned his first acting credit in his Brooklyn high school's production of "You Can't Take It with You" while he was sidelined from the basketball team with an injury.

"I was hooked - and so was my audience," he wrote in his memoir.



Gossett Jr.

Drama

His English teacher urged him to go into Manhattan to try out for "Take a Giant Step." He got the part and made his Broadway debut in 1953 at age 16.

"I knew too little to be nervous," Gossett wrote. "In retrospect, I should have been scared to death as I walked onto that stage, but I wasn't."

Gossett attended New York University on a basketball and drama scholarship. He was soon acting and singing on TV shows hosted by David Susskind, Ed Sullivan, Red Buttons, Merv Griffin, Jack Paar and Steve Allen.

Gossett became friendly with James Dean and studied acting with Marilyn Monroe, Martin Landau and Steve McQueen at an offshoot of the Actors Studio taught by Frank Silvera.

In 1959, Gossett received critical acclaim for his role in the Broadway production of "A Raisin in the Sun" along with Sidney Poitier, Ruby Dee and Diana Sands.

He went on to become a star on Broadway, replacing Billy Daniels in "Golden Boy" with Sammy Davis Jr. in 1964.

Gossett went to Hollywood for the first time in 1961 to make the film version of "A Raisin in the Sun." He had bitter memories of that trip, staying in a cockroach-infested motel that was one of the few places to allow Black people.

Memoir

In 1968, he returned to Hollywood for a major role in "Companions in Nightmare," NBC's first made-for-TV movie that starred Melvyn Douglas, Anne Baxter and Patrick O'Neal.

This time, Gossett was booked into the Beverly Hills Hotel and Universal Studios had rented him a convertible. Driving back to the hotel after picking up the car, he was stopped by a Los Angeles County sheriff's officer who ordered him to turn down the radio and put up the car's roof before letting him go.

Within minutes, he was stopped by eight sheriff's officers, who had him lean against the car and made him open the trunk while they called the car rental agency before letting him go.

"Though I understood that I had no choice but to put up with this abuse, it was a terrible way to be treated, a humiliating way to feel," Gossett wrote in his memoir. "I realized this was happening because I was Black and had been showing off with a fancy car - which, in their view, I had no right to be driving."

After dinner at the hotel, he went for a walk and was stopped a block away by a police officer, who told him he broke a law prohibiting walking around residential Beverly Hills after 9 p.m. Two other officers arrived and Gossett said he was chained to a tree and handcuffed for three hours. He was eventually freed when the original police car returned.

"Now I had come face-to-face with racism, and it was an ugly sight," he wrote. "But it was not going to destroy me."

In the late 1990s, Gossett said he was pulled over by police on the Pacific Coast Highway while driving his restored 1986 Rolls Royce Corniche II. The officer told him he looked like someone they were searching for, but the officer recognized Gossett and left.

He founded the Eracism Foundation to help create a world where racism doesn't exist.

Gossett made a series of guest appearances on such shows as "Bonanza," "The Rockford Files," "The Mod Squad," "McCloud" and a memorable turn with Richard Pryor on "The Partridge Family."

In August 1969, Gossett had been partying with members of the Mamas and the Papas when they were invited to actor Sharon Tate's house. He headed home first to shower and change clothes. As he was getting ready to leave, he caught a news flash on TV about Tate's murder. She and others were killed by Charles Manson's associates that night.

"There had to be a reason for my escaping this bullet," he wrote.

Louis Cameron Gossett was born on May 27, 1936, in the Coney Island section of Brooklyn, New York, to Louis Sr., a porter, and Hellen, a nurse. He later added Jr. to his name to honor his father.

The Oscar gave me the ability of being able to choose good parts in movies like "Enemy Mine," "Sadat" and "Iron Eagle." Gossett said in Dave Karger's 2024 book "50 Oscar Nights."

He said his statue was in storage.



This cover image released by Parkwood/Columbia/Sony shows 'Act II: Cowboy Carter' by Beyoncé. (AP)

Music

'Cowboy Carter' redefines American style

Beyoncé explores music history

LOS ANGELES, March 30, (AP): "Nothin' really ends/For things to stay the same they have to change again," Beyoncé sings on "Act II: Cowboy Carter," the opening lines of the opening track, "American Requiem."

"Them big ideas, yeah, are buried here/Amen."

In some ways, it is a mission statement for the epic 78-minute, 27-track release - or at the very least, functions like a film's title card to introduce yet another blockbuster album.

In the days leading up to "Cowboy Carter," the superstar said this "ain't a Country album" but "a 'Beyoncé album' - positioning herself in opposition to country music's rigid power structures and emphasizing her ability to work with the style with her latest genre-defying opus.

A capital-C country album it is not - and of course it isn't. Beyoncé is an eclecticist, known for her elastic vocal performances: in a moment, choosing to belt close to godliness and, in another, moving with marked ease into a fractured run, inheriting histories through the vowels she stresses, the handclaps she introduces and the genres she utilizes. (That's evident in the instruments as well, which range from washboard, pedal steel, banjo, mandolin, Vibraslap, bass ukulele and mandolin, to name a few.)

If the album, five years in the making, was inspired by the racist backlash she faced after performing at the 2016 CMAs with The Chicks, as many fans have theorized, she's eclipsed it and then some. Tell Beyoncé she isn't welcomed in your space; she'll carve out a bigger one.

"American Requiem" bleeds into a reimagination of a Beatles' classic, "Blackbird." It was originally written by Paul McCartney about desegregation in American schools with particular emphasis on the Little Rock Nine, the first group of Black students to desegregate an Arkansas high school in 1957. In Beyoncé's rendition, harmonies are stacked. She's joined by Tanner Adell, Brittney Spencer, Reyna Roberts and Tiera Kennedy - some of the most exciting voices in contemporary country - who are also Black women.

They aren't the only next generation highlighted on "Cowboy Carter": Willie Jones' rich Louisiana tone turns "Just for Fun," into trail-riding gospel country. Shaboozey's country-rap marks a pivot

in the album's trajectory on "Spaghetiii," setting the listener up for the singular listening experience of the Patsy Cline-channeling "Sweet Honey Buckiin'," with its Jersey club beats.

Country veterans, too, appear: Willie Nelson is a rough-around-the-edges radio DJ on the fictional station KNTRY - the resulting effect is an alternative America where terrestrial country radio does not overwhelmingly prefer playing white performers; snippets of Sister Rosetta Tharpe's "Down by the River Side," Chuck Berry's "Maybellene" and Roy Hamilton's 1957 "Don't Let Go" bled into Nelson's smoky voice.

The '50s cuts are an inspired choice; Beyoncé has chosen to reference the decade in which format-based radio emerged and, as a result, country music's racial lines were all but codified. The effects are still felt. One frequently referenced study, conducted by University of Ottawa professor Jada Watson, examined over 11,000 songs played on country radio from 2002 to 2020 and found that artists of color made up only 3% of all airplay, two-thirds of which were men. In even her interludes, Beyoncé has taken her listeners to school.

Reimagined

"Jolene" is a reimagined take on the 1973 Dolly Parton original; it's preceded by "Dolly P," a spoken-word interlude from Parton. "Remember that hussy with the good hair you sang about?" she says, referencing "Becky with the good hair" from "Sorry" off 2016's "Lemonade." "Reminded me of someone I knew back when, except she has flaming locks of auburn hair. Bless her heart! Just a hair of a different color, but it hurts just the same."

Beyoncé's version, of course, is very Beyoncé - there's no shrinking and begging for this woman to step off; it's a warning.

Perhaps Beyoncé's clearest predecessor on this album is Linda Martell, the first Black woman to play the Grand Ole Opry. Martell's 1970 landmark record "Color Me Country" should be considered country canon; she offered Black women rare visibility in a genre stereotypically associated with whiteness.

She also appears twice on "Cowboy Carter," first providing clarity on the complicated origins of country in

"Spaghetiii."

"Genres are a funny little concept, aren't they?" she says, laughing. "In theory, they have a simple definition that's easy to understand. But in practice, well, some may feel confined."

Shared histories and families are abundant on Beyoncé's "Cowboy Carter": "Protector" begins with Beyoncé's daughter Rumi Carter asking for "the lullaby, please," leading into a tear-jerker of an acoustic ballad centering motherhood.

If listeners position "Act II: Cowboy Carter" next to "Act I: Renaissance," they might view the record as a continued dialogue in the Beyoncé mythos: "Lemonade" established Beyoncé's dedication to Black empowerment. "Renaissance" reclaimed House music for its Black progenitors in a sprawling release that placed techno, Chicago and Detroit house, New Orleans bounce, Afrobeats, queer dance culture and beyond on the same dance floor - and highlighted the frequent invisibility of Black performance in music history books. "Cowboy Carter" does something similar with country music - and, in true Beyoncé fashion, extends well beyond it, as vessel, captain and crew on this journey.

"Bodyguard" borders on soft rock; "Ya Ya" interpolates Nancy Sinatra's "These Boots Were Made for Walkin'" and The Beach Boys' "Good Vibrations"; "Riiverrdance" and "II Hands II Heaven" bring back the electronica of "Renaissance." "II Most Wanted" features the raspy-rich Miley Cyrus, and interpolates Fleetwood Mac's "Landslide." "Levi's Jeans" modernizes the timeless combination of R&B and country ballads, amplified by a surprising collaborator in a crooning Post Malone - lest we forget he also hails from Texas.

"Oh Louisiana" is helium-injected blues and funk; the classic guitars on "Daughter" lead into Beyoncé singing the famous Italian aria "Caro Mio Ben" in the original language. If you've been waiting for her opera moment, here it is.

When she's back to English in the refrain, she declares, "If you cross me, I'm just like my father / I am colder than Titanic water," reminiscent of outlaw country's murder ballads and a successor to Bey's first ever country song, "Daddy Lessons" from "Lemonade."



Mexican singer Leandro Aguilar, the son of Grammy-winning singer songwriter Pepe Aguilar, performs at the Jariepo Hasta Los Huesos Tour 2024 show at the Honda Center in Anaheim, Calif., on Friday, March 29. The show pays tribute to the Day of the Dead, a well-known Mexican celebration. (AP)

Variety

HONG KONG: The president of US-funded Radio Free Asia said Friday that its Hong Kong bureau has been closed because of safety concerns under a new national security law, deepening concerns about the city's media freedoms.

Bay Fang, the president of RFA, said in a statement that it will no longer have full-time staff in Hong Kong, although it would retain its official media registration.

"Actions by Hong Kong authorities, including referring to RFA as a 'foreign force,' raise serious questions about our ability to operate in safety with the enactment of Article 23," Fang said.

RFA's move is widely seen as a reflection of the city's narrowing space for a free press following the enactment of the Safeguarding National Security Ordinance, locally also known as Article 23 legislation.

Rep. Gregory Meeks, the ranking member of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, expressed concern over RFA's shutdown and said the new law "not only represents a significant escalation in efforts by Hong Kong and Beijing authorities to suppress free speech and expression," but "also undermines media freedom and the public's ability to obtain fact-based information." (AP)

LOS ANGELES: Green Day will headline a United Nations Human Rights-backed global climate concert on Tuesday at the famed Fillmore in San Francisco.

The intimate event, which is co-hosted by the Recording Academy, aims to bring attention to the inequalities exacerbated by climate change.

Ultra Q, an alternative rock band fronted by Green Day singer Billie Joe Armstrong's son Jakob Danger, will open.

Proceeds from the concert will go to United Nations Human Rights climate justice initiatives and a MusiCares climate fund to benefit musicians affected by climate change.

The Right Here, Right Now Global Climate Alliance will honor Green Day for their "commitment to social justice and environmental causes," according to a press release.

"As world renowned artists and activists, Green Day continues to leverage its major influence and platform to bring awareness

to the impact of climate change on the people and the environment," Volker Türk, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, said in a statement.

"The United Nations was founded in San Francisco almost 80 years ago to safeguard human rights and dignity from crisis and tragedy. It is only fitting that we are back in San Francisco," he said. (AP)

PARIS: The flamboyant former designer at



Meeks



Armstrong

Gucci, Alessandro Michele, has been named the new creative director at storied Roman luxury house Valentino, following the sudden departure last week of Pierpaolo Piccioli after 25 years.

Valentino - which stages collections in Paris - confirmed the move in a statement Thursday, calling it the "start of a new journey aimed at continuing to see the brand's unique values, its heritage and its couture codes shine around the world." (AP)

Defense Secretary Austin and Princess Kate highlight challenges of discussing cancer

Some cancer patients can find it hard to tell family, friends

NEW YORK, March 30, (AP): Ever since Anthony Bridges found out he had prostate cancer six years ago, he hasn't stopped talking about it. He told his Facebook friends immediately.

Now, the 68-year-old man from Georgia spends time working with others to encourage other men to talk to their doctor about getting screened.

Not everyone is as eager to share, for cultural or privacy reasons - or because they just don't want to talk about it. Defense Secretary **Lloyd Austin** kept his prostate cancer quiet, including from President Joe Biden. And more recently, **Kate Middleton**, Princess of Wales, waited weeks before publicly disclosing her cancer.

Austin described his diagnosis as a "gut punch" and his instinct was to keep it private. In a video statement, Kate said it was a "huge shock" and that she and her husband, Prince William, had been trying to "manage this privately for the sake of our young family."



Middleton



Austin

Their reactions hardly surprised experts. Dr. Otis Brawley says he's encountered men who don't even want to talk about their prostate cancer with their own doctors.

Brawley, a professor of oncology and epidemiology at Johns Hopkins University, recalled a time decades ago when cancer simply wasn't spoken of, called the "Big C" instead.

Public conversations around prostate cancer changed, he said, when former Sen. Bob

Dole announced his diagnosis and publicly spoke of erectile dysfunction, a side effect of treatment.

For breast cancer, it was first lady Betty Ford, who spoke openly about her surgery and treatment.

"That opened the floodgates. It was then OK to talk about cancer," Brawley said.

In the US, death rates from cancer have been declining for decades, which is attributed to progress against lung cancer, screening and better treatments. Still, it remains the nation's No. 2 killer, behind heart disease, and cases are increasing as the population ages and grows.

Elaine Smith, who counsels patients at City of Hope Cancer Center Atlanta, said a patient's openness often depends on personality. Some don't want to be identified solely as a cancer patient.

"So many of my patients say people talk to them with a different tone of voice," Smith said. "They lean into me differently, they look at me with their eyes differently."

Sometimes people worry about how their

coworkers will react when they have to miss work for appointments and treatments.

"In many cases, we may not acknowledge it, but ... that can sometimes have a role in how they are judged in their work performance," said Dr. Bradley Carthon, of Emory University's Winship Cancer Institute.

Patients usually share with their family, experts said, but even that can be difficult.

Kate noted it had taken time to explain "everything to George, Charlotte and Louis in a way that is appropriate for them and to reassure them that I'm going to be OK."

"She has the added challenges of having young children," said Dr. Christina Annunziata, a cancer doctor at the Inova Schar Cancer Institute in Fairfax, Virginia. "As hard as it is to explain to friends and family, or even coworkers. It's even harder to explain to young children."

The downside of keeping it private is that "you're dealing with this all alone," Carthon said.

Dr. Paul Monk, who treats cancer patients

at Ohio State University Wexner Medical Center, said it's important for patients to bring along a family member or other support to appointments.

"I don't think they hear everything I say," he said. "And so when you bring someone else to your doctor's visit, that's another set of ears and I think that's critically important."

Bridges' wife, Phyllis, served in that role for him when he started treatment for advanced prostate cancer in 2018. He said he had no symptoms and had only gone for a checkup at her insistence.

Bridges felt called to share his story with others, especially with Black men, and is now part of a program called Project Elevation. Working through local churches, the program's goal is to remove some of the stigma surrounding prostate cancer and provide information about screening.

"We have to change the mindset," said the Albany, Georgia, resident. "We have to dispel the fear."

Fatal supplement probed

Dengue sweeping through the Americas early this year

SAN JUAN, Puerto Rico, March 30, (AP): Dengue is surging across the Americas early this year from Puerto Rico to Brazil, with 3.5 million cases of the tropical disease reported so far, health officials said Thursday.

That tally is three times the number of cases reported at this point last year, said Dr. Jarbas Barbosa, director of the Pan American Health Organization, the regional office of the World Health Organization in the Americas.

Last year, there were a record 4.5 million cases in the region, and PAHO officials said they expect this year will set a new record.

Usually dengue spikes during the wet season, which is still months away. And some areas are reporting dengue for the first time, officials said.

The dengue virus is spread to people when they are bitten by infected mosquitoes. Driving the surge are rising temperatures, rapid urbanization, droughts and floods linked to climate change, and poor sanitation and a lack of robust health systems in some countries, health officials said.

The virus can cause crushing headaches, fever, vomiting, a rash and other symptoms. While most infected people don't get symptoms, severe cases can lead to death. There's no specific treatment other than pain medications.

Most of the current cases are in the Southern Hemisphere, with more than 80% in Brazil, followed by Paraguay, Argentina, Peru and Colombia. Some 1,000 deaths have been reported in the Americas so far this year.

In the Caribbean alone, more than 25,000 cases have been reported, with French Guiana, Martinique, Guadeloupe, Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic most affected, said Dr. Rhonda Sealey-Thomas, PAHO's assistant director.

On Monday, Puerto Rico's health secretary declared an epidemic, with more than 540 cases, with at least 341 people hospitalized. The numbers are concerning because parts of the island are currently under a moderate drought, and the rainiest month isn't until August.

The surge in cases forced Rio de Janeiro to declare a public health emergency last month ahead of Carnival. Peru did the same for most of its provinces, and others have followed suit.

There are four different dengue viruses circulating in the Americas, said the PAHO's Dr. Sylvain Aldighieri. "We have to be prepared for this."

Some countries have released specially bred mosquitoes that contain a bacteria called Wolbachia that fights dengue.

Last month, Josian Bruno, who lives in the San Juan capital of Puerto Rico, developed a fever and body aches. A lab test confirmed that the 38-year-old had kidney failure because of severe dehydration. He spent six days in the hospital, and the day after being released, his test results came back positive for dengue.

"When they tell you it's renal failure, that's scary," he said.

A month has passed, and Bruno still has difficulty moving his arms and walking, and he hasn't been able to resume his thrice-weekly runs.

While a new dengue vaccine is available in limited supply, it requires two doses with a three-month interval. Barbosa said officials are monitoring how well it actually works. He said a single-shot vaccine won't be available until next year.

Health supplement: Japanese government health officials raided a factory Saturday producing health supplements that they say have killed at least five people and hospitalized more than 100 others.

About a dozen people wearing dark suits solemnly walked into the **Osaka** plant of Kobayashi Pharmaceutical Co. in the raid shown widely on Japanese TV news, including public broadcaster NHK.

The company says little is known about the exact cause of the sicknesses, which include kidney failure. An investigation into the products is underway in cooperation with government health authorities.

The supplements all used "benikoji," a kind of red mold. Kobayashi Pharmaceuticals' pink pills called Benikoji Cholestol Help were billed as helping lower cholesterol levels.

Kobayashi Pharmaceutical, based in the western Japanese city of Osaka, said about a million packages were sold over the past three fiscal years. It also sold benikoji to other manufacturers, and some products have been exported. The supplements could be bought at drug stores without a prescription from a doctor.

Reports of health problems surfaced in 2023, although benikoji has been used in various products for years.

Company president **Akihiro Kobayashi** has apologized for not having acted sooner. The recall came March 22, two months after the company had received official medical reports about the problem.

Morning-after pill: Poland's President **Andrzej Duda** on Friday vetoed a law that would have allowed over-the-counter access to the morning-after pill for girls and women ages 15 and above, his office said. Duda said he was concerned about the health of minors and hearing the voices of parents.

A statement by Duda's office said the president sent the law back to the parliament, but was open to a debate on free access to the hormonal contraception pill for those aged 18 and above.

It said that no convincing arguments were made during the public debate that would justify free access to the pill for girls under the age of 18.

Last month, parliament approved the law, but it still needed Duda's approval to take effect.

TB cases in US hit decade high in 2023

Increase in bacterial illnesses raises meningitis, mortality risks: officials

NEW YORK, March 30, (AP): US health officials are warning of an increase in rare bacterial illnesses than can lead to meningitis and possible death.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention issued an alert to US doctors on Thursday about an increase in cases of one type of invasive meningococcal disease, most of it due to a specific strain of bacteria.

Last year, 422 cases of it were reported in the US - the most in a year since 2014. Already, 143 cases have been reported this year, meaning infections appear to be on track to surpass 2023, the CDC said. Most of the cases last year did not involve meningitis, though at least 17 died. The cases were disproportionately more common in adults ages 30 to 60, in Black people and in people who have HIV, the CDC said.

The bacteria can cause a dangerous brain and spinal cord inflammation called meningitis, with symptoms that may include fever, headache, stiff neck, nausea and vomiting. The bacteria also can cause a bloodstream infection with symptoms like chills, fatigue, cold hands and feet, rapid breathing, diarrhea, or, in later stages, a dark purple rash.

The infection can be treated with antibiotics, but quick treatment is essential. An estimated 10% to 15% of infected people die, and survivors sometimes suffer deafness or amputations.

There also are vaccines against meningococcal disease.

Officials recommend that all children should get a meningococcal conjugate vaccine, which protects against the rising strain, at around the time they enter a middle school. Since vaccine protection fades, the CDC also recommends a booster dose at age 16. Shots also are recommended for people at higher risk, like those in a place where an outbreak is occurring or those with HIV infection or certain other health conditions.

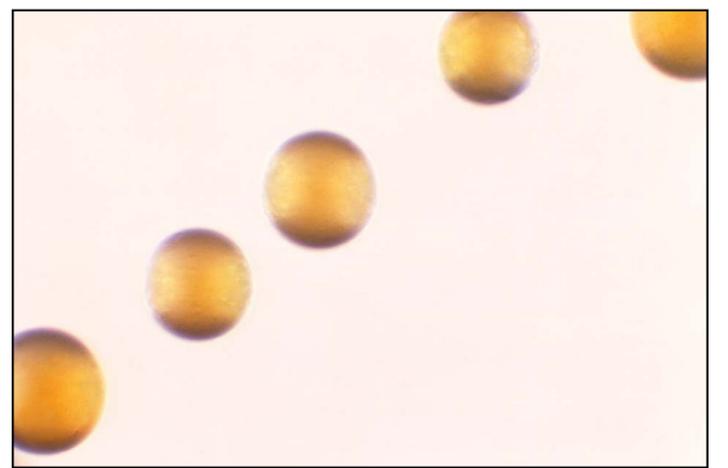
Tuberculosis: The number of US tuberculosis cases in 2023 were the highest in a decade, according to a new government report.

Forty states reported an increase in TB, and rates were up among all age groups, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said Thursday. More than 9,600 cases were reported, a 16% increase from 2022 and the highest since 2013.

Cases declined sharply at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, but have been rising since.

Most US TB cases are diagnosed in people born in other countries. Experts say the 2023 number is in part a combination of a surge in TB cases internationally - the World Health Organization said TB was behind only COVID-19 in infectious fatal diseases worldwide in 2022. And there are also increases in migration and post-pandemic international travel.

But other factors are also at play, including



This 1966 microscope photo shows five colonies of Group-B Neisseria meningitidis bacteria. On Thursday, March 28, 2024, the CDC issued an alert to US doctors about an increase in cases of one type of invasive meningococcal disease, mostly due to the serogroup Y strain of the bacteria. (AP)

other illnesses that weaken the immune system and allow latent TB infections to emerge.

CDC officials expected TB numbers would rise, but the 2023 count "was a little more than was expected," said Dr. **Philip LoBue**, director of the agency's Division of Tuberculosis Elimination.

Despite the jump, the number and rate of new TB cases each year remains smaller than it was in the past, and the US has a lower rate of new TB cases than most countries.

Tuberculosis is caused by bacteria that usually attack the lungs, and is spread through the air when an infectious person coughs or sneezes. If not treated properly, it can be fatal. In the late 1800s, TB killed one out of every seven people living in the United States and Europe. But the development of antibiotics and public health efforts succeeded in treating infections and tracking down those they infected, leading to cases falling for decades.

The new CDC statistics are not a count of how many people were newly infected in 2023, but rather of how many people developed a cough or other symptoms and were diagnosed.

An estimated 85% of the people counted in 2023 were infected at least a year or two earlier and had what's called latent TB, when the bacteria enters the body and hibernates in the lungs or other parts of the body. Experts estimate as many as 13 million Americans have latent TB and are not contagious.

When the immune system is weakened - by certain medications or other illnesses like dia-

betes and HIV - the TB wakes up, so to speak.

Nicole Skaggs said she was infected in 2020, but didn't develop symptoms until 2022 - after she got sick from COVID-19.

"Anything that can take out or lower your immune system can put you at risk," said Skaggs, 41, a property manager in **Bothell, Washington**.

CDC officials called the idea that COVID-19 has played a role in increased reactivation of TB "an important question." Scientists are still learning what causes latent TB to reactivate and "I would consider it an unknown at this point," LoBue said.

"It's too early to tell" what will happen to TB trends in the next few years, he also said.

There are TB vaccines being developed, and public health workers that were focused on COVID are now back to trying new approaches to preventing TB. **New York City**, which saw cases jump 28% last year, is hiring TB case managers and community health workers and increasingly using video monitoring of patients taking medications to keep treatment rates high, said Dr. **Ashwin Vasan**, the city's health commissioner.

On the other hand, federal TB funding for state and local health department efforts has been flat, and one of the key antibiotics used against TB has been in short supply in recent years. Plus, drug-resistant TB infections have popped up in a fraction of cases.

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Wellington-based club stretch their winning streak to six

Hurricanes stay perfect in Super Rugby Pacific

DUNEDIN, New Zealand, March 30, (AP) — The Wellington-based Hurricanes stretched their winning start to the Super Rugby Pacific season to six games Saturday with a comprehensive 47-7 win over the Highlanders in Dunedin.

The Hurricanes had almost made the game safe by halftime, scoring four tries to lead 26-0. They added another try in the first minute of the second half, then two more in the last 15 minutes to make it seven tries in all.

The only negative note for the Hurricanes, who extended their lead atop the table, was a serious injury to scrumhalf Cam Roigard who left the field in the 58th minute.

The Hurricanes are operating at a level higher than any other team in the tournament. Their set pieces are exceptional and the pace at which they play has stretched all of their opponents. Their backs are quick-witted and able to take immediate advantage of line breaks and turnovers.

No team so far can match the Hurricanes' strength from positions six to 10. They have the best backrow in Super Rugby and the best halves pairing, though Roigard's injury is a concern.

T.J. Perenara came off the bench to replace Roigard and to play a record 154th match for the Hurricanes. He scored his 60th Super Rugby try, joining Israel Folau in second place on the all-time list, one try behind former

landers fullback Jacob Ratumaitavuki-Kneepkens was sin-binned. Roigard was among the first half scorers.

Josh Moorby scored from an intercept in the opening minute of the second half. Fullback Ruben Love was outstanding throughout the match and claimed seven personal turnovers.

"We're setting ourselves up well for the season," Barrett said. "Our big guys one through eight are going so well at the moment."

"It's really nice when you can win some scrum penalties and some dominance up front."

The Fijian Drua remain unbeaten at home this season after a 31-13 win over the Western Force at Churchill Park, Lautoka.

The match was played in typical Lautoka conditions, hot and humid and with teeming rain that turned the ground into a skating rink. They are conditions in which Fijian players are brought up and thrive.

Young flyhalf Isaiah Ravula-Arm-

strong controlled the game, putting through a chip kick for a key second half try to Iosefo Masi.

The Drua led 18-5 at halftime and held on in the second half, despite a red card to Tevita Ikanivere for a dangerous clean-out.

All Blacks winger Mark Tele'a scored three tries for the Auckland-based Blues who beat Moana Pasifika 47-8 for their fifth win from six matches this season.

The game was a "home" match for Moana Pasifika but played on the Blues' home ground at Eden Park.

It was fast-paced but spoiled by handling errors from both teams. The Blues thrived on turnovers conceded by Moana Pasifika and scored seven tries to one.

Winger Caleb Clark, center Bryce Heem, flyhalf Stephen Perofeta and scrumhalf Finlay Christie also touched down as backs scored all of the Blues' points. ACT Brumbies won 20-19 at Queensland Reds in the late game.



Jordan Petaia of the Reds passes to teammate Hunter Paisami (left), during the Super Rugby match between the Queensland Reds and the Brumbies in Brisbane, Australia, Saturday, March 30, 2024. (AP)

Clemson advances to the Elite Eight



Houston's Emanuel Sharp (21) attempts to tie the score as Duke's Tyrese Proctor defends in the final seconds of a Sweet 16 college basketball game in the NCAA Tournament in Dallas, Friday, March 29, 2024. (AP)

UConn brushes aside San Diego State

LOS ANGELES, March 30, (AP) — Chase Hunter scored 18 points and converted a three-point play with 25.7 seconds remaining, and Clemson advanced to the Elite Eight for the second time in school history, beating Arizona 77-72 in a West Region semifinal on Thursday night.

PJ Hall added 17 points for the sixth-seeded Tigers (24-11), who advanced to face either top-seeded North Carolina or No. 4 seed Alabama.

Clemson last reached the final eight in 1980, when there were 48 teams in the NCAA Tournament. Coach Brad Brownell was making his second appearance in the second weekend of March Madness in his 14 seasons with the Tigers.

Oumar Ballo scored 15 points and Caleb Love 13 for second-seeded Arizona (27-9), which had a horrific shooting night, going 5 of 28 (17.9%) from 3-point range. Love missed all nine of his attempts beyond the arc as the Wildcats failed to reach the Elite Eight for the 12th time overall and first time since 2015.

Alabama 89, North Carolina 87

In Los Angeles, Grant Nelson converted a go-ahead three-point play with 38 seconds remaining, and Alabama beat top-seeded North Carolina to reach the Elite Eight of the NCAA Tournament for the second time in school history.

Nelson finished with a season-high 24 points, 19 in the second half, and he blocked RJ Davis' attempt at a tying layup after giving Alabama the lead. Rylan Griffen added 19 points, tying his career high with five 3-pointers, and Aaron Estrada also scored 19 for the fourth-seeded Crimson Tide (24-11).

Bacot finished with 19 points and 12 rebounds for UNC (29-8). Cormac Ryan had 17 points and made five 3-pointers and Davis had 16 points.

East Region

UConn 82, San Diego State 52

In Boston, Stephon Castle had 16 points and 11 rebounds for top-seeded UConn and the defending NCAA champion advanced to the Elite Eight with another double-digit victory, beating San Diego State 82-52 in a rematch of last year's title game.

Cam Spencer scored 18 points and Tristen Newton added 17 points and seven rebounds for the

Huskies (34-3), who will play the winner of the other East Region semifinal between No. 2 Iowa State and No. 3 Illinois for a spot in the Final Four in Glendale, Arizona.

Seven-footer Donovan Clingan, who played just 23 minutes after getting into foul trouble, had eight points and eight rebounds.

Jaedon LeDee scored 15 of his 18 points in the first half for fifth-seeded San Diego State, which followed up the only Final Four appearance in school history with another Sweet 16 run.

Illinois 72, Iowa State 69

In Boston, Terrence Shannon Jr. scored 29 points and Illinois reached the Elite Eight for the first time since 2005, beating Iowa State.

Shannon had 20 points in the

BASKETBALL

first half for the third-seeded Illinois (29-8), who never trailed. He broke away for a dunk in the closing seconds and later hit two free throws to help Illinois finally put away the second-seeded Cyclones (29-8).

Illinois made a regional final for the fourth time in the past 40 years and will meet defending champion UConn on Saturday for a trip to the Final Four.

Curtis Jones scored 26 points to lead Iowa State, which came into March Madness having blown out Houston for the Big 12 Tournament title.



Duke's Kyle Filipowski, right, shoots a basket against Houston's Ja'Vier Francis (5) during the second half of a Sweet 16 college basketball game in the NCAA Tournament in Dallas, Friday, March 29, 2024. (AP)

Bangladesh's Shakib takes 1-60

Sri Lanka reach 314-4 at stumps on opening day of 2nd Test

CHATTOGRAM, Bangladesh, March 30, (AP) — Sri Lanka dominated the opening day of the second and final cricket test against Bangladesh, riding on strong contributions from its top three batters.

No. 3 Kusal Mendis struck 93, Dimuth Karunaratne hit 86 and his fellow opener Nishan Madushka added 57 as Sri Lanka reached 314-4 in 90 overs at stumps on Saturday.

Star all-rounder Shakib Al Hasan, whose last international match was at the 2023 World Cup in India, returned figures of 1-60 in 18 overs.

CRICKET

Dinesh Chandimal (34 not out) and captain Dhananjaya de Silva (15 not out) will resume Sunday. De Silva hit centuries in both innings of the first test, which Sri Lanka won by 328 runs.

Fast bowler Hasan Mahmud claimed 2-64 on his test debut.

After winning the toss and opting to bat first, the tourists made a fluent start but Bangladesh wasted chances.

Madushka was dropped on 9 when Mahmud Hasan put down a straightforward chance off Mahmud at second

Caleb Porter fined by Major League Soccer for criticizing replacement referee

NEW YORK, March 30, (AP) — New England Revolution coach Caleb Porter was fined by Major League Soccer on Friday for criticizing the replacement officials who worked his team's games while the unionized referees and assistants were locked out.

MLS did not announce the amount of the fine. New England has the worst record in the 29-team league with four losses and one draw. The 49-year-old Porter, hired in December, spoke after Saturday's 1-1 tie against Chicago. He was angered by referee Kyle Johnston, who gave the Revolution's Carles Gil a yellow card for diving in the fifth minute of second-half stoppage time.

"We haven't received one big call, and we had a lot of calls against us and I think today was another day like that and I'm a bit tired of it, to be honest with you," Porter said. "And I think it's just a lack of respect, and especially when Carles was in on a break for us to score what I believe to be the game-winning goal, and he's one

of the best players in the league, and the guy just kills the play and at a minimum it's a foul - in my view it's a foul and a yellow card because he's killing the play and the referee doesn't even call a foul."

"I don't know how that happens. It's just shocking. And then they have the exact same play on the other sideline and the linesman raises his flag and it's actually

SOCCER

a lot softer, that call, than the one on our side."

Regular MLS officials were locked out for 37 days before the announcement of a seven-year labor contract Tuesday. They are set to return this weekend. Replacement officials were used in the first 69 games over the opening five weeks of this season.

slip. Karunaratne was also lucky to survive when he top-edged Mahmud's delivery but Shakib fumbled the ball over the boundary line to give the batter a six.

Madushka reached his second test fifty off 80 balls, when he punched off-spinner Mehidi Hasan to mid-off for a single.

But just after his half-century, he was run out after sharing a 96-run

opening stand with Karunaratne.

Karunaratne raised his 37th test half-century off 93 balls. He and Kusal further frustrated Bangladesh's bowlers, sharing 114 for the second wicket.

Mahmud finally got the better of Karunaratne for his first test wicket when the batter dragged a length delivery back on to his stumps.

Mendis, who brought up his 18th

test fifty off 87 balls, appeared to be heading toward his 10th century. However, after sharing 53 runs with Angelo Mathews, Mendis was baffled by the turn that Shakib extracted from the pitch. He hit 11 fours and one six in his innings.

Mahmud dismissed Mathews for 23, when he got the outside edge of the bat.

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Kuwait Club maintains lead in Basketball League

By Hassan Musa

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, March 30: Kuwait Club retained its top position in the Golden Quarter competitions of the Basketball League after a commanding 116-95 victory over Al-Arabi in their recent encounter. The match marked the commencement of the second division of the tournament, where Al-Qadisiya also secured a hard-fought win against Kazma with a narrow margin of 73-71.

With this triumph, Al-Abyad elevated their tally to 8 points, leading ahead of Al-Qadisiya with 7 points, followed by Kazma with 5 points and Al-Arabi with 4 points.

The semi-finals are slated to take place in a league format across two divisions. Subsequently, the top-ranked team from the first division will clash with the fourth-ranked team, while the second-ranked team will face off against the third-ranked team in the semi-finals. These matches will adopt a "play-off" system consisting of three matches, with the team securing two wins advancing to the final, which will follow the same format.

The intensity of the second encounter was palpable from the outset, with both teams exchanging leads until the midway point of the first quarter. Eventually, the advantage tilted towards the Orange team, leveraging the prowess of their American professional, Clint Chapman, to conclude the quarter with a score of 18-12. Kazma maintained control in the second quarter, propelled by Ahmed Al Balushi's stellar leadership in offensive

BASKETBALL

maneuvers, complemented by the contributions of Americans Chapman and Leslie under the basket. Despite this, the Yellow team's hastened offensive efforts resulted in a halftime score of 34-26 in favor of the Orange team.

However, Al-Qadisiya staged a remarkable comeback in the third quarter, with their American professional, Robert Lowry, showcasing exceptional shooting from beyond the arc, alongside Muhammad Ashkani's prowess under the basket. This resur-

gence narrowed the gap to just one point by the end of the third quarter, with the score standing at 51-52.

The final quarter witnessed heightened

excitement and intense competition, with both sides exchanging leads until Al-Qadisiya ultimately secured victory with a final score of 73-71.



Al-Qadisiya player shoots over an opponent.

The attendance remarkable

Behbehani Tire Center – Pirelli organizes a Ramadan sports event in Kuwait Motor Town

KUWAIT CITY, March 30: Behbehani Tire Center Co., the authorized dealer for Pirelli tires in Kuwait, hosted a special event at Kuwait Motor Town. Special invitations were extended to a large number of its customers, owners of sports cars in Kuwait, to attend and test their cars' capabilities on the main track of KMT.

This comes as part of Behbehani Tire Center's policy of supporting several sports cars events and activities in Kuwait, and its encouragement for safe local motorsports, demonstrated by its sponsorship of Kuwait Motor Town and its high-level international track since its opening in 2019. The KMT hosts various outdoor car races, featuring multiple tracks for different car sports categories, all while ensuring all safety measures are in place for participants and attendees, catering to enthusiasts and fans of this sport in Kuwait.

Managers from Pirelli Middle East, headed by Mr. Raad Haddad who came from Dubai, were specially present for this event, alongside the entire team and management of Behbehani Tire Center Co. Leading them was Mr. Abdul-Ghani Behbehani, the company's CEO.

As the blessed nights of Ramadan unfolded, Behbehani Tire Center arranged a Gabqa gathering, offering a platform for attendees to interact with the company's management, sales teams, and after-sales services away from formal work.

The attendance was remarkable with owners of high-performance sports cars, who thoroughly enjoyed this event and their personal driving experience on the

main racing track, especially using Pirelli tires that provide driving confidence by granting drivers complete control and unparalleled stability.

All attendees commended the outstanding organization of the event, eagerly anticipated in Kuwait, and expressed appreciation for the gracious invitation and the chance to participate. Mr. Abdul-Ghani Behbehani, the company's Director, said: "We have organized this event for the first time for our esteemed clients in Kuwait, knowing that it is an annual tradition organized by Pirelli Middle East every year in Abu Dhabi. Given the tremendous success of this event, we look forward to the possibility of hosting it on a regular annual basis."

Behbehani Tire Center offers Pirelli tires with specifications and measurements that cater to various American, Japanese, European, Korean, sports, and luxury cars, including those requiring tires with special specifications approved by renowned global car manufacturers such as Mercedes, Porsche, Jaguar, Audi, and Land Rover. Additionally, the center provides the largest selection of motorcycle tires in Kuwait. Pirelli tires are distinguished by their superior performance, strength, stability, and ability to withstand tough weather conditions, high temperatures, and high speeds. Therefore, they are ideal for operating in Gulf and Kuwaiti environments in particular. Pirelli tires are available at reasonable prices, suiting various budgets, and they offer longer lifespan and resistance to damage and wear, providing customers with long-term benefits.



Abdul Ghani Behbehani with Raad Haddad and a number of participants.



Officials check the condition of the track.



A mechanic check the condition of the tires.



A participant prepares to test a car.

Kuwait aims to gear up skiers for the 2026 Winter Olympics

KUWAIT CITY, March 30, (KUNA): Mishal Flaiteh, Secretary General of the Kuwait Winter Games Club (WGC), affirmed the club's commitment to preparing national skiers for the forthcoming Winter Olympic Games (Milano-Cortina 2026) in Milan. This preparation involves engaging them in rigorous international competitions under the auspices of the International Ski and Snowboard Federation (FIS).

Flaiteh disclosed to KUNA on Friday that athlete Faris Al-Obaid is presently competing in the International Winter Sports Championship hosted by the Hellenic Athletics Federation at the Parnassos resort. This event provides a crucial opportunity for Al-Obaid to accumulate points for Winter Olympic qualification.



KUNA photos Secretary General of Kuwait Winter Games Club (WGC) Mishal Flaiteh.



Skier Faris Al-Obaid.

OLYMPICS

He noted that Al-Obaid underwent comprehensive training in France, Switzerland, and Austria in preparation for the championship. Flaiteh expressed optimism for Al-Obaid and his teammate Abdulrahman Al-Wahaibi, who showcased commendable performances in recent tournaments in Switzerland and France, to sustain their momentum in upcoming competitions.

In a conversation with KUNA, Al-Obaid expressed his contentment with participating in his second championship of the season. His ambition is to become the first Kuwaiti skier to qualify for the Winter Olympics. He acknowledged the continuous support of the club in his training and participation in major tournaments.

Skiing is an expensive sport due to equipment costs and the necessity of training in snowy regions. Skiers often

spend prolonged periods abroad to hone their skills. Despite these challenges, Al-Obaid emphasized the determination of Kuwaiti youth to excel in the sport.

Al-Arabi set to battle Kazma for bronze

By Khaled El Anzi

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, March 30: Al-Arabi will clash with Kazma at the Volleyball Association hall in the Sheikh Saad Al-Abdullah Complex, vying for third place and the bronze medal.

The "Green" team faced defeat in the league's semi-final encounters against Kuwait club twice, mirroring the fate of the "Orange" team, which succumbed to Al-Qadisiya in the semi-finals.

Kazma secured third place at the conclusion of the league, while Al-Arabi settled for fourth. As per the tournament structure, Al-Arabi competed against the table-topper, Kuwait Club, in the golden square using the

playoff format, suffering two losses. Similarly, Kazma encountered Al-Qadisiya, the second-place finisher, in the playoffs and also faced defeat twice.

VOLLEYBALL

The finals will witness a showdown between the "White" and "Yellow" teams, featuring a playoff system comprising three matches, with the victor of two matches claiming the volleyball league title.

Notably, Kuwait Club clinched the Al-Itihad Refresher Championship and the Super Cup during the 2023-2024 seasons, while Al-Qadisiya emerged victorious in the Al-Itihad Cup.



A file photo of Kazma and Al-Arabi players in action.

Al-Qadisiya soar to league summit

Zain Premier League relegation group set to kick off

By Hassan Musa

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, March 30: Al-Qadisiya soared to the summit of the Zain Premier League (Championship Group) following a resounding 5-2 victory over Al-Fahaheel on the preceding Friday. With this triumph, the "Yellow" team amassed 45 points, edging past Al-Arabi with a superior goal difference. Al-Arabi, in contrast, contested Al-Salmiya late yesterday, maintaining their previous score of 24 points.

Badr Al-Mutawa netted twice alongside Eid Al-Rashidi, who also found the net twice and Muhammad Sawla from a penalty kick, sealing the win for Al-Qadisiya. Meanwhile, William Barros and Fawaz Al-Rashidi scored for Al-Fahaheel.

SOCCER

In a related development, the third round of the tournament faces postponement due to the National Assembly elections. The round is rescheduled for early next week after initially slated for March 3rd and 4th.

The inaugural round of Zain League's relegation group commences tonight, featuring Al-Jahra against Kazma at Nasser Al-Osaimi Stadium, while Khaitan visits Al-Shabab. Both matches kick off at nine-thirty in the evening.

In the opener, Al-Jahra, with 8 points, strives for victory to bolster its chances of remaining in the Premier League next season. Any other outcome would significantly dent its competitive prospects, given the points gap with its three contenders: Kazma leads with 20 points, followed by Al-Shabab (14 points), and Khaitan with 12 points.

Relegation group matches are conducted in a home-and-away league format.

On the other hand, Kazma aims to secure survival early, needing 6 points to achieve this objective. The Orange team previously triumphed over Al-Jahra in all three encounters this season, with victories of 2-0 and 2-1 in the league, and 2-0 in the Crown Prince Cup.

In the second clash, parity reigns between the adversaries, setting the stage for a grueling encounter. A win for Al-Shabab augments its survival chances and widens the gap from its rival, while Khaitan seeks victory to claim third place from "the sons of Al-Ahmadi." The teams previously traded wins in the league, with Al-Shabab winning the first leg 4-1, and Khaitan securing a 2-1 victory in the second leg.

Tomoooh Sports Club hosts the annual Girgean



Sheikha Sheikha Al Abdullah with other dignitaries.

KUWAIT CITY, March 30: The Kuwaiti Tomoooh Sports Club for Mental Disabilities, in collaboration with the Kuwaiti Association for Families of Persons with Disabilities, hosted the annual Girgean ceremony at Saleh Shehab School in the Mushrif area.

The event was graced by the presence of Sheikha Sheikha Al-Abdullah Al-Sabah, along with the Chairman and members of the Board of Directors of the Al-Ambuh Club and the Kuwaiti Society for Families of Persons with Disabilities, as well as guardians and a sizable gathering of club and association members.

Sheikha Sheikha expressed her delight at the festive atmosphere and the joy radiating from the faces of children with mental disabilities during this celebration. She emphasized the significance of reviving our ancient heritage customs,

which serve to connect contemporary generations with their cultural legacy while preserving Kuwaiti heritage and identity.

Commending the efforts of the club and the association in providing comprehensive care for children with mental disabilities – encompassing athletic, social, and psychological support – Sheikha Sheikha highlighted their dedication to nurturing these individuals to attain championship levels and remarkable achievements. She extended her gratitude to Jassim Al-Nouri, Chairman of the Board of Directors of Tomoooh Sports Club, Rehab Bouresli, Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Kuwaiti Society for Families of Persons with Disabilities, and all members of both organizations' boards, as well as to all staff who wholeheartedly contributed to the success of this heartwarming event.

Versailles Palace gardens get ready for equestrian events

VERSAILLES, France, March 30, (AP): Preparations are underway for the gardens of the Versailles Palace to welcome Olympic horse riders and tens of thousands of visitors when it hosts equestrian and modern pentathlon events during this summer's Paris Games.

Temporary facilities including

grandstands are being built across the park, where up to 40,000 people are expected to attend the cross-country part of the event.

The main arena will hold over 16,000 seated spectators for the dressage and showjumping competitions. Located at one end of the Grand Canal, the largest basin in the park, it will

offer a spectacular view of the palace, once home to Louis XIV and Marie Antoinette.

"It's a real opportunity to be able to organize such an event in such an amazing and iconic venue. We feel very honored and respectful," said Anne Murac, who is in charge of the Versailles site for the Paris 2024 organizing committee.

OLYMPICS

On the western side of the park, temporary stables, with air conditioning, remain to be built. A nearby track with both grass and sand surfaces has already been set up to allow horses to warm up before the competition.

In addition, the 5-kilometer (3-mile) cross-country path is being carefully prepared, Murac said.

"We are working the ground very deeply to put some sand and drainage to make sure the cross-country track will be consistent and to be able to guarantee the safety of the horses and the riders," she said.

Pontoon bridges, tested last summer, will enable horses to cross the Grand Canal during the cross-country.



Badr Al-Mutawa vies for the ball with an opponent.



Kolkata Knight Riders' Phil Salt plays a shot during the Indian Premier League cricket match between Royal Challengers Bengaluru and Kolkata Knight Riders in Bengaluru, India. (AP)

Sports

Latest sports scores at — <http://sports.arabtimesonline.com>

Third-seeded Medvedev overwhelmed

Sinner, Dimitrov advance to Miami Open final

MIAMI GARDENS, Fla., March 30, (AP) — Jannik Sinner is starting to dominate.

Sinner overwhelmed third-seeded Daniil Medvedev 6-1, 6-2 in the semifinals of the Miami Open to improve to 21-1 this year.

The second-seeded Sinner, rock-solid with his firecracker forehand, became the first man to reach back-to-back Miami Open finals since John Isner did it in 2019. In last year's Miami final, Medvedev prevailed over Sinner at Hard Rock Stadium, home of the Miami Dolphins.

This time, Medvedev's three games tied his career low for wins in a match. He committed 22 unforced errors.

"I'm happy about this season - who wouldn't be happy?" Sinner said. "I know the players will get to know me more and study me so I have to be ready."

Sinner, 22, will play in the final Sunday against 11th-seeded Grigor Dimitrov, who beat No. 4 seed Alexander Zverev in the other semifinal after knocking out top-seeded Carlos Alcaraz in the quarterfinals.

Sinner began his revenge against Medvedev for last year's Miami final by beating him in the Australian Open final in January - rallying from two sets down - and setting the stage for a wonderful 2024 campaign.

Sinner posted his fifth straight win over Medvedev, all in the past 12 months.

"He's serving ten times better," Medvedev said. "He always served well but now he serves big, big."

This match was a lot easier than Australia in the 80-degree South Florida heat as the Italian jumped to a 5-0 lead at the outset



Sinner

in posting two straight breaks of the Russian's serve. It was over in 69 minutes.

Sinner's opponent in the final, the surging Bulgarian Dimitrov, backed up his upset of Alcaraz by pulling off a win over the German

Zverev in a three-setter, 6-4, 6-7 (4), 6-4.

With fans chanting "Gri-gor, Gri-gor" and several Bulgarian flags waving, the match went on for two hours, 36 minutes.

The victory gave the veteran Dimitrov back-to-back wins over top-5 opponents for the second time in his career.

As such, Dimitrov should surge into the top 10 for the first time since 2018.

"Whatever I say doesn't do it justice," Dimitrov said. "I fight my own battles. I run my own race. All that comes with the work we all put in as a team. I'm at a very different path in my life and my career. ... I kept on believing. This is just a cherry on the cake."

Dimitrov has lost two of three matches all-time to Sinner.

Sinner, who said his serve has improved because he's gotten stronger, broke Medvedev four times, didn't get broken, had seven aces and won 80% of his first serves.

"This year, I have another chance," Sinner said in the on-court interview. "I don't think he played his best tennis and I tried to stay focused and in my rhythm."

TENNIS

In the match's second game, Sinner hit a cross-court forehand winner on a third break point for a 2-0 lead. Medvedev motioned a thumbs down at his player's box.

The Italian went up 4-0 after cashing in on his fourth break point of the game, flicking away a short ball by Medvedev, who was flustered by two net cords during the game.

Sinner broke Medvedev in the first game of the second set and was on his way. Late in the second set, down 5-1, Medvedev heard jeers and whistles when he appeared to frustratingly hit a ball back to a ball girl with extra zest.

Sinner, whose only loss this year was to Alcaraz in the Indian Wells final, said Friday was "one of the best matches in how I handled everything."

"It's a great feeling," he said.

Long ago touted as the next major champion, Dimitrov is now 32 years old and has never been to a final of any of the four majors.

On serve at 5-4, Dimitrov broke Zverev for the first set, hitting a spectacular backhand volley after which the German then got tight. Zverev committed two straight unforced errors, including on set point a shanked forehand that sailed 2 feet long.

After losing the second-set tiebreaker, Dimitrov stayed resilient. At 3-3 he broke Zverev after a forehand winner and falling-down volley winner as he acrobatically blocked back a shot that caromed off the net cord.

That gave him a 4-3 lead. He held both his service games to close it out.

Kohli 83 in vain as Kolkata thumps Bengaluru in IPL

BENGALURU, India, March 30, (AP) — Virat Kohli's meticulous unbeaten 83 went in vain for Royal Challengers Bengaluru as they were hauled down by Kolkata Knight Riders in the Indian Premier League.

Kohli followed his 77 on Monday with a 59-ball knock that anchored Bengaluru to 182-6 on a two-paced pitch that became easier to bat on later.

Kolkata opening batters Sunil Narine, playing his 500th Twenty20, and Phil Salt made a rocket start of 85 in the power play. They reached a winning 186-3 with 3.1 overs to spare.

Narine, 47 off 22, smashed five sixes and two fours. Salt made 30 off 20. They plundered the likes of fast bowlers Mohammed Siraj (0-46) and Yash Dayal (1-46).

Narine was yanked by Mayank Dagar and Salt followed him soon when he pulled impact player Vijay Kumar Vyshak (1-23) to deep square leg.

But Venkatesh Iyer played some exquisite pull shots and used his feet well in a 75-run stand with Shreyas Iyer to seal

the game. Venkatesh offered a straightforward catch to Kohli at deep midwicket soon after his 50 off 30 with four sixes and three fours. Shreyas was 39 not out.

Earlier, Kolkata's multi-million-dollar pacer Mitchell Starc went wicketless at 0-47, but Andre Russell bowled well with 2-29 despite Kohli's early domination.

CRICKET

Bengaluru captain Faf du Plessis fell to a brilliant off-cutter by Harshit Rana in the second over. Cameron Green looked to accelerate alongside Kohli but Russell broke their threatening stand by clean-bowling the Australian in the ninth over.

Kohli raised his second successive half-century off 36 balls but it helped Bengaluru only to a par score.

Kolkata has two wins from two matches, and Bengaluru one from three.



Grigor Dimitrov, of Bulgaria, can't reach a shot from Alexander Zverev, of Germany, during the Miami Open tennis tournament in Miami Gardens, Fla. (AP)

Conley, Edwards lead Timberwolves past Nuggets and into 1st-place tie

Spurs overcome Brunson's 61 points to edge Knicks in OT

DENVER, March 30, (AP) — Anthony Edwards scored 25 points and Mike Conley added 23 in Minnesota's 111-98 rout of Denver on Friday night that sent the Timberwolves into a first-place tie in the Western Conference - and the defending NBA champion Nuggets into third place.

The Nuggets (51-23) failed to reach 100 points for the second straight game and fell a-half game behind the Timberwolves and the Oklahoma City Thunder, who easily handled Phoenix 125-108 on Friday night.

The Nuggets were without star point guard Jamal Murray (ankle, knee) for a fourth consecutive game, and once again their lack of depth was exposed as their bench provided very little help in Denver's second straight loss at home.

BASKETBALL

Nobody missed Murray more than MVP favorite Nikola Jokic, who had consecutive cringing turnovers to end the third quarter and missed 11 of his first 17 shots against Minnesota's pestering double teams before rallying to finish with 32 points.

Rudy Gobert added 21 points for Minnesota, which has won four in a row. Playing on the court where their playoff run ended last season, the Timberwolves took the lead for good on Gobert's alley-oop dunk in the opening minutes and never let up in cruising to their biggest victory of the season.

After going 15-2 coming out of the All-Star break, the Nuggets find themselves in a sudden slump with back-to-back losses at home for the first time all season. They lost to Phoenix 104-97 on Wednesday night.

Before the game, Nuggets coach Michael Malone hinted Murray might also miss the Nuggets' Sunday matinee against the Cleveland Cavaliers, but he said he wasn't worried that his star point guard would be out for much longer.

Thunder 128, Suns 103

In Oklahoma City, Oklahoma City's No. 4 scorer has been playing more like a first option lately.

Josh Giddey scored 23 points to help the Thunder roll past the Phoenix Suns, despite All-Star guard Shai Gilgeous-Alexander sitting out with a bruised right thigh.

Giddey, who averages about 12 points, has averaged 26.3 in his past three games. He made 10 of 15 field goals against Phoenix and had nine assists and seven rebounds. He's helping the Thunder stay well-positioned for the postseason - Oklahoma City tied with the Minnesota Timberwolves for the best record in the Western Conference.

Giddey said he struggled early in the season as he struggled with his shot teams sagged off of him.

The effort to fill Gilgeous-Alexander's void was collective Friday. Chet Holmgren scored 20 points and Jalen Williams and Cason Wallace each added 16 for Oklahoma City. Without Gilgeous-Alexander, the NBA's No. 3 scorer at 30.4 points per game, the Thunder still shot 56.3% and made 16 of 30 3-pointers.



New York Knicks guard Jalen Brunson (11) drives to the basket against San Antonio Spurs center Victor Wembanyama (1) during the second half of an NBA basketball game in San Antonio. (AP)

Spurs 130, Knicks 126 OT

In San Antonio, Victor Wembanyama had a career-high 40 points and added 20 rebounds and seven assists, and the San Antonio Spurs overcame Jalen Brunson's career-best 61 points to beat the New York Knicks in overtime.

Brunson finished one point shy of Carmelo Anthony's franchise record of 62 points on Jan. 24, 2014, missing a 3-pointer that would have given the Knicks the lead with 5.4 seconds remaining in OT.

Brunson had the fifth-highest point total in the NBA this season.

Wembanyama made a 3-pointer to give San Antonio a four-point lead in OT. He also had a blocked shot and a steal while collecting his 39th double-double in 65 games.

Devin Vassell added 23 points for the Spurs, who won three straight for the first time this season.

New York took its first lead at 113-112 with 4:39 remaining in regulation on a 3-pointer by Donte DiVincenzo. There were five ties in the final minutes of regulation to set up overtime.

Pacers 109, Lakers 90

In Indianapolis, coach Rick Carlisle believes his Indiana Pacers are already in playoff mode.

If Friday night is any indication, that could be a promising sign for a team that has lost nine straight postseason games and hasn't won a playoff series in a decade.

Pascal Siakam finished with 22 points and 11 rebounds, Tyrese Haliburton added 21 points, eight assists and eight rebounds and the Pacers beat the Los Angeles Lakers in a pivotal game in the conference standings.

And yet the Pacers allowed a season-low point total, holding the Lakers 60 points below Sunday's previous meeting with Indiana.

LeBron James (left ankle) and Anthony Davis (left knee) both started despite injuries and played like perennial All-Stars as the Lakers tried to improve from starting the night seeded No. 9 in the West.

Cavaliers 117, 76ers 114

In Cleveland, Evan Mobley drained a go-ahead 3-pointer with 28.2 seconds left and Cleveland All-Star Donovan Mitchell - in his first game back from injury - made two late free throws as the Cavaliers edged the Philadelphia 76ers before hitting the road.

Georges Niang scored 25 points against his former Philly teammates

and Mobley had 18 of his 20 in the second half as the Cavs, who struggled without Mitchell and won for just the second time in six games.

Darius Garland added 14 points and 12 assists for Cleveland, currently holding the No. 4 seed in the East.

The back-and-forth game featured 27 lead changes, seven in the fourth quarter.

Wearing a protective mask, Mitchell came back after missing six straight games and scored 12 in 32 minutes.

Warriors 115, Hornets 97

In Charlotte, Stephen Curry scored 23 points with four 3-pointers in his annual Charlotte homecoming game and the Golden State Warriors beat the Hornets for their third straight win.

Andrew Wiggins turned in another

strong game with 20 points, eight rebounds and eight assists and Trayce Jackson-Davis added 18 points for the Warriors, who entered the game in 10th place in the Western Conference standings and battling the Houston Rockets for a spot in the play-in tournament.

Miles Bridges had 22 points and nine rebounds to lead Charlotte, which failed in its bid to win back-to-back games for the first time since the All-Star break.

The Warriors broke open a tight game at halftime by outscoring the Hornets 39-26 in the third quarter behind 12 points from Curry and seven from Wiggins.

Clippers 100, Magic 97

In Orlando, Kawhi Leonard and Paul George hit decisive jump shots in the final seconds for the Los Angeles Clippers, the Orlando Magic did not, and LA won for the fifth time in six road games.

The Clippers, who have lost five straight at home, held on to fourth place in the Western Conference with nine games left in the regular season.

Leonard, who scored 25 of his 29 points in the second half, put the Clippers ahead with a mid-range jumper with 34 seconds left. George scored with 5.2 seconds to play before Orlando's Franz Wagner missed a couple of 3-point attempts just before the buzzer.

Paolo Banchero led Orlando with 23 points and eight rebounds, but had two of his seven turnovers in the final minute. The 21-year-old power forward took the blame for the Magic's third straight loss.

Jalen Suggs scored 15 for the Magic and Moritz Wagner came off the bench for 12 points and nine rebounds.



Utah Jazz guard Kris Dunn (rear), defends against Houston Rockets guard Fred VanVleet during the second half of an NBA basketball game in Salt Lake City. (AP)