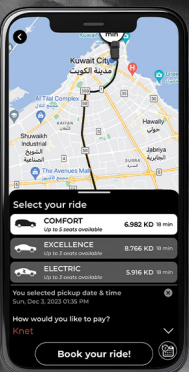



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2 Combatting the rise in food waste during Ramadan




13 Revived TV drama breaks Iraq taboos



14 The pain and money behind the Afghan game of buzkashi





Ramadan KAREEM

Fajr	: 04:34
Shrooq	: 05:53
Dhuhr	: 11:56
Asr	: 15:23
Maghrib	: 17:59
Isha	: 19:15

Zionist carnage at Gaza hospital

Gaza world’s biggest ‘open-air graveyard’, famine used as ‘weapon of war’



GAZA: (Left) Palestinians rush for cover as smoke billows after Zionist bombardment in central Gaza City on March 18, 2024. (Right) Palestinians rush to the aid of a wounded youth. — AFP photos

RAMADAN KAREEM

Firmness of faith

By Hassan Twaha Bwambale

Firmness or steadfastness in the religion of Almighty Allah is a basic requirement for every sincere Muslim who wants to follow the Straight Path with determination and understanding. This matter is of great importance for many reasons. After informing Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) that He will most surely fill the Hell-fire with the jinn and impious people, Almighty Allah told Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) this: “Yet all that We relate to you, (O Muhammad), from the tidings of the messengers (who preceded you), is but to set firm your own heart...” (Houd 11: 120)

We understand from the above-quoted verse — among others — that the stories of the Prophets in the Noble Quran are not mere narratives or just histories. They involve three things: a. they teach the highest spiritual Truth, b. they give advice, direction, and warning, as to how we should govern our lives, and c. they awaken our conscience and recall to us how God’s Law works in human affairs.

Polytheists try to scare Prophet Muhammad (PBUH): Due to the fact that the battle of Uhud ended in a stalemate, and the polytheists of Makkah did not achieve their goals, they resorted to what we can call psychological warfare. They sent some people to scare the Muslims by saying they were amassing a huge army, armed to the teeth to annihilate them. They wanted the Muslims to surrender. In response to those empty threats, Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said, “Allah is sufficient for us, and He is the Most Excellent Guardian.”

Almighty Allah tells us the following about that event, describing the extremely pious people who excelled in doing good deeds, and to whom He promised a magnificent reward: “(They are) the ones to whom the faithless (people) said, ‘Indeed, the people (i.e., the polytheists of Makkah and their allies) have

Continued on Page 6

GAZA: Heavy fighting raged Monday in and around Gaza’s largest hospital complex where the Zionist army said it was battling Hamas fighters and told Palestinian civilians to flee the “dangerous combat zone”. While the army launched the predawn raid at Gaza City’s Al-Shifa Hospital, the Zionist government deployed Mossad chief David Barnea to Qatar for renewed talks toward a ceasefire and captive release deal.

Qatari and Egyptian mediators hope to pause or end the war that has devastated Gaza since Oct 7 attack — even as Zionist Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has doubled down on his vow to destroy Hamas. Gaza’s soaring civilian death toll, the large-scale devastation and the looming threat of famine

‘Record’ win for Putin; Amir sends congratulations

MOSCOW: President Vladimir Putin has won a fifth term in the Kremlin with 87.28 percent of votes, Russia’s electoral commission said Monday, after a three-day ballot. The result, which did not include votes from abroad, showed that the three other candidates who ran won 4.31, 3.85 and 3.20 percent of the vote. The election commission hailed what it said were “record” results for Putin.

HH the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah sent on Monday a cable of congratulation to Putin on winning the presidential elections. HH the Amir wished the president good health and success, and further progress in the relations between the two countries. HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Dr Mohammad

for its 2.4 million people have hardened opposition to the Zionist entity’s military campaign and siege.

A UN-backed food security assessment warned that half of Gazans are experiencing “catastrophic” hunger, and that “all evidence points towards a major acceleration of deaths and malnutrition”. EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell said the Zionist entity’s military campaign had turned Gaza from the world’s “greatest open-air prison” into its biggest “open-air graveyard” and that the Zionist entity was using famine as a “weapon of war”.

“Gaza was before the war the greatest open-air prison. Today it’s the greatest open-air graveyard,” Borrell said at a meeting of EU ministers in Brussels.



MOSCOW: Russian President and presidential candidate Vladimir Putin meets with the media at his campaign headquarters on March 18, 2024. — AFP

Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah sent a similar cable to Putin. “Almost 76 million people” voted for Putin, Kremlin-friendly election chief Ella Pamfilova said.

Continued on Page 6

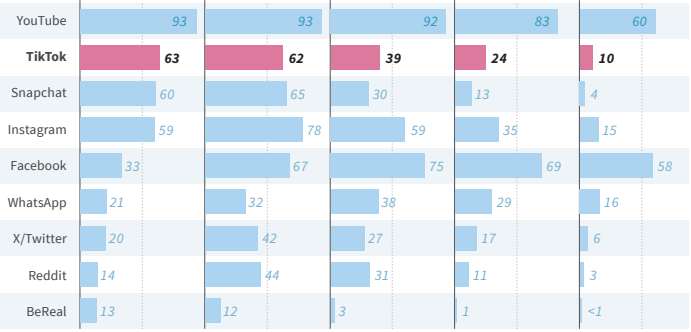
TikTok and its ‘secret sauce’ caught in tussle

SEOUL: As a US campaign to sever TikTok from its Chinese parent heads to the Senate, analysts say Beijing’s response to a forced sale of the app — and its ‘secret sauce’ algorithm — will be clear: Hands off. Under new legislation that passed the House of Representatives last week, TikTok could be banned in the United States if it does not cut all ties with Chinese tech giant ByteDance. (See Page 10)

Most popular social media platforms in the US

Pew Research Center surveys

% of US respondents aged between 13 and 65+ who say they ever use ...



*Survey conducted Sep 26 - Oct 23, 2023, among 1,453 US teens

Survey conducted May 19 - Sep 5, 2023 among 5,733 US adults

AFP

Court to rule on barring candidates March 20 and 21

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: The administrative court on Monday said it will issue its verdicts on decisions by the elections committee to bar some candidates from running in the April 4 elections on March 20 and 21. The elections committee has disqualified 14 candidates from contesting the snap polls, saying they do not fulfil all conditions to become candidates.

Three of the 14 barred candidates, former MPs Marzouq Al-Khalifa, Marzouq Al-Hubaini and Jaber Al-Azemi, have challenged the elections committee’s decisions in court. The court said it will rule on the case of Khalifa on Wednesday and the cases of Hubaini and Azemi on Thursday. The court’s rulings are not final and can be appealed before the court of appeals.

The three former lawmakers had been convicted in previous years of taking part in outlawed tribal primary elections and their conviction was considered as a crime by the elections committee, which disqualified them. Under Kuwaiti law, people who are convicted of crimes against honor and trust are barred from taking part in elections. A number of other disqualified candidates have said they will challenge the elections committee’s decisions.

The courts must issue final decisions on the cases before the election date to allow these candidates to run if they are cleared. The snap polls were called after HH the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah dissolved the National Assembly on Feb 15 following remarks made by some MPs deemed offensive to HH the Amir.



Combatting the rise in food waste during holy month

Annual output of 400,000 tons of wasted food



Food leftovers dumped in the garbage.



Neamati volunteers packing food baskets.

By Passant Hisham

KUWAIT: Despite Ramadan's intended purpose of fostering self-discipline through abstaining from eating and drinking, there's a paradoxical increase in food wastage, contributing to Kuwait's annual output of 400,000 tons of wasted food, according to official records and insights from Mohammad Al-Muzaini, head of the "Nemati" initiative, a project dedicated to preserving and reducing food waste. Through extensive investigation, Kuwait Times explores the causes of this phenomenon, proposes viable solutions to overcome it, and recommends non-profit initiatives aimed at redistribution of excess food to those in need.

Reasons behind food waste

One of the primary reasons is excessive cooking, particularly for social gatherings like ghabga, a significant part of Kuwait's Ramadan culture. This practice often leads to leftovers, compounded by the extravagant buffets provided by hotels and restaurants during Ramadan events.

Other Kuwaiti traditions, such as nuqsa, the exchange of food between neighbors and relatives, also contribute to the abundance of food already present in households, as emphasized by Muzaini. He further pointed out that Muslims shopping during fasting hours is another problem, leading to purchasing unnecessary items beyond their needs, just to sustain their cravings.

This trend not only disregards those in need, but also contributes to the spread of toxins in landfills and has a negative effect on the country's economy, emphasized Muzaini. He said each ton of wasted food costs the country KD 7,200.

Tips for minimizing food waste

In response, the Public Authority for Food and Nutrition in Kuwait has suggested multiple tactics to help in limiting food waste in this month.

- Cooking food in appropriate quantities that meet the needs of family members.
- Making a shopping list beforehand to prevent impulsive purchases while shopping during fasting hours.
- Utilizing food leftovers by incorporating them into new recipes or recycling them in creative ways.
- Donating food leftovers to those in need rather than discarding them. Notably, ensuring food safety, validity for eating, and proper packaging for preservation.
- Refraining from overfilling plates while eating at any restaurant or hotel, especially in open buffets, to minimize food waste.
- Properly storing food leftovers in a healthy and safe manner to allow for reheating and consumption later.
- Providing food leftovers to animals and birds.

Initiatives delivering excess food to those in need

Following are a few non-profit projects and initiatives aimed at facilitating the process of donating food waste to people in need.

Etaam Kuwait

This is a project operating under the auspices of the Kuwait Food Bank, dedicated to collecting surplus food from social dining events, parties, and banquets. The project coordinator emphasized the importance of contacting them in advance of the event to arrange for food collection. This allows them to mobilize their drivers and ensure a smooth process for gathering the excess food in designated boxes, which is then distributed to individuals facing food insecurity. It is recommended that donors provide enough food to fill 20 to 30 boxes to maximize the impact of their contribution, he said.

Preservation of Grace (Hefz Alneama) Association

This is a personal nonprofit association that is managed and operated by Faten Alloughani, who also prefers to be contacted in advance of any event. She said she collects any amount of excess food donations from individuals and distributes them to orphans, widows, elderly and those who are sick and in need. The number of the association is 99544361.

Nemati (My grace)

Nemati is a non-profit initiative that presents an excellent option for companies, hotels, restaurants and retailers seeking to donate excess products nearing expiration or left-over meals. It specifically selects near-expiration products that are still safe to consume and uses them to create a "food basket", offering a variety of food options for a nominal fee. People can access this service through a link provided in the biography section of their Instagram account.



Mohammad Al-Muzaini

Fridges of Kuwait

Another method for people to donate their left-over food is through public fridges, with over 100 spread across various areas of Kuwait, conveniently placed near mosques and houses in residential areas. The initiative's volunteers advise packing food in securely sealed containers, clearly marking the date of packing on the containers, and storing them in designated fridges. You can find the locations of these fridges by clicking on a link provided in the biography section of the initiative's Instagram account.

Municipal Council approves donation for Darwaza tunnel

KUWAIT: The Municipal Council approved in its main session on Monday a donation provided by the commercial bank towards the restoration of the tunnel under the Darwaza Al-Abdulla Square. The donation, which amounts to KD 650,000, will be used for the project, following the municipality's technical review and with approval from the Council of Ministers.

Work on the Darwaza Al-Abdulla Square project resumed last Wednesday following a nearly five-year suspension. The repairs on the project involve both the upper and lower sections of the tunnel to guarantee comprehensive safety of the junction and facilitate transportation on the road. Work on the project had been paused for years due to a dispute related to the tunnel.

Head of the Council Abdullah Al-Mohri also approved the minutes of the fourteenth ordinary meeting of the second session, which was held on March 4. He also took note of a letter penned by the general secretary of the Council of Ministers regarding the municipal council's approval of a complaint submitted by the residents of the Abu Al-Hasani area regarding the area's name. The residents had submitted the complaint in February 2023, calling on the municipal council to maintain the names of blocks 1 and 2 in the area as its historical name of Abu Al-Hasania, instead of the newly bestowed name of Abu Fatira. The residents said the new name was causing them issues when doing government paperwork. Former Municipal Minister Fahad Al-Shula approved the municipal council's decision to heed the residents' complaint and keep the historical name of Abu Al-Hasania. — Agencies

KU registers patent to facilitate process of baggage collection

KUWAIT: Kuwait University, through the office of patents and intellectual property rights of the Vice Rector for Research, has registered a patent entitled (Luggage Storage System) from the United States patent and trademark office, which aims to facilitate the process of baggage collection at airports. The university said in a press release on Monday that the patent for the luggage storage system was under the supervision of a faculty member at the College of Engineering and Petroleum, Dr. Abdullah Al-Azmi, and students Batul Saleh, Badur Al-Mutairi, and Fatima Mohammed.

The statement clarified that the patent will save time and effort, as the new system is characterized by safety by avoiding obstacles related to the easy loss or theft of bags at airports. He added that the project is designed to facilitate and speed up the



Lesotho Ambassador Boomo Sofonia in Kuwait Times Studio.
— Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat

Lesotho ambassador visits Kuwait Times, Kuwait News

KUWAIT: Ambassador Boomo Sofonia of Lesotho paid a visit to the offices of Kuwait Times and Kuwait News on Monday, where he engaged in discussions about the history of Kuwait Times and aimed to educate the world about Lesotho. During his tour of the newspaper's departments, he explored the archive room, where he was fascinated by the historical events covered

by Kuwait Times in the past. Walking through the editorial department, he observed the intricate process of publishing news from scratch.

Next, he visited the printing press, where he learned about how the massive printing machines work to deliver newspapers daily. He also toured the warehouse, where vintage printing equipment is preserved. On his last stop, he



Lesotho ambassador receives first copy of Kuwait Times newspaper from Jana Alnaqeb, Kuwait Times PR and CSR manager

visited the studio, and was invited by archivist Yousef Abu Ghazaleh to film a video and shares intriguing insights about his country. Beginning with an exploration of the Lesotho flag's symbolic representations, he then delved into the significant date of Lesotho's independence and shared interesting facts including Lesotho's nickname and its national dish. Lesotho, a small landlocked country, is characterized by tall mountains and narrow valleys. Its independence is attributed to the protective mountains surrounding it. Despite its small size of 30,000 sq km,



Lesotho boasts captivating natural and cultural attractions.



Photo shows the entrance of Kuwait University.

Al-Ghabra, stressed in a statement the importance of this invention, which will help improve the quality of services at airports, contribute to providing a better experience for travelers, and save time and effort. She added that this innova-

tion is expected to have a "positive impact" on the travel and tourism industries, where the development of baggage claim processes is one of the key steps towards improving the overall travel experience. — KUNA

Local

Zain hosts iftar banquet at Abdali Border Port

Recognizing efforts of MoI and Customs personnel during Holy Month



Colonel Waleed Al Azmi and Waleed Al Khashti with Zain and MOI officials.



Officials are seen during the visit.

KUWAIT: Zain hosted a special Ramadan iftar banquet at Abdali Border Port for Ministry of Interior (MoI) and Customs personnel. The step, held under Zain's annual Ramadan social campaign, Zain Alshuhoor, came in recognition of the unwavering commitment demonstrated by the port's staff year-round, particularly during the Holy Month, to protect Kuwait and its people.

The initiative was joined by Abdali Border Port

Director, Colonel Waleed Faleh Al Azmi, Zain Kuwait Chief Corporate Affairs and Relations Officer, Waleed Al Khashti, along with Zain officials and port personnel from the Ministry of Interior and the General Administration of Customs. Zain's team visited the headquarters of Abdali Border Port, located at northern Kuwait, to share the blessings of Ramadan with staff members from MoI and Customs who operate at the border to keep the nation and community safe.

Zain hosted the iftar banquet as a gesture of gratitude and appreciation to those who dedicate their time and effort to Kuwait's safety, especially during the Holy Month. This year, six of Zain's strategic community partners from both the public and private sectors join its annual Ramadan social campaign, Zain Alshuhoor. The campaign features a wide range of humanitarian, charitable, social, religious, health, and sports programs that continue throughout the

Holy Month of Ramadan.

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

In my view

Our youth are perishable cells

Dr Khalid A Al-Saleh

Local@kuwaittimes.com

Biologists, scientists who study biology with a particular interest in cytology, assert that living cells are more sensitive while in the growing stage, whereas mature cells are harder to damage. As a specialist in radiology treating cancer cells, I can attest to the validity and accuracy of this information. Therapeutic radiation doesn't kill mature cells; instead, it halts the growth of cells in the growing stage, which are the young cells that can be easily destroyed.

Given that creation is an integrated unit, principles that apply to cells also extend to other structures of creation, regardless of their distance. We live in a universe that gets its teachings from one Creator. Dr Ahmad Zaki, the first editor-in-chief of Al-Arabi magazine, stated, "The eye is created because of the sun; without the sun, there would be no need for eyes."

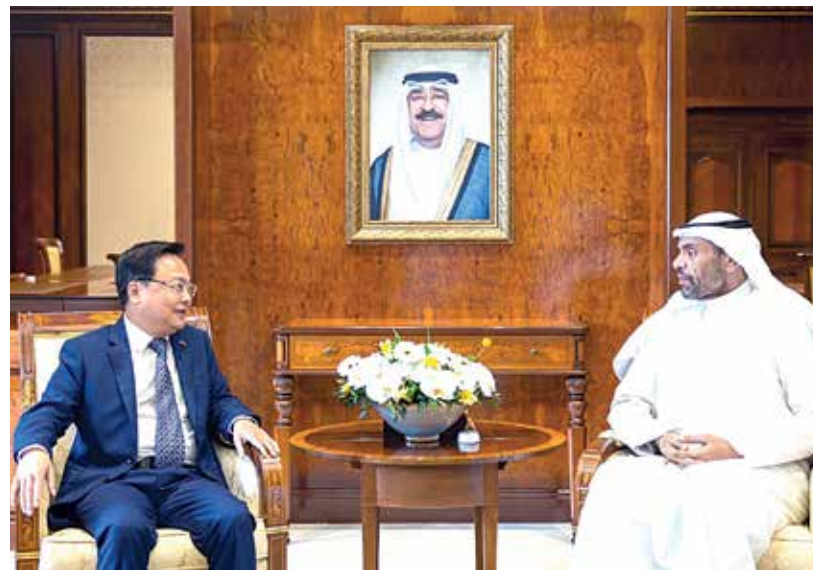
This analogy applies not only to physical bonding but also to inorganic bonding. Just as young cells are vulnerable to damage, young souls are similarly susceptible. Therefore, the spread of corruption and nepotism disproportionately affects youth, who are like the growing cells in society. Negative influences pervade our society, leading youth to prioritize connections over merit. We must recognize that the negative influences we impart on our youth are akin to the destructive radiation faced by cells. By fostering positive beliefs and behaviors, we can mitigate the destructive impact on our society.

Our mature leaders, like members of parliament, often perpetuate negative practices, imparting the first negative doses and lessons of waste and nepotism to the youth. It's crucial for adults to cease such negative deeds and for the next generation of leaders to prioritize merit and integrity over connections. Adults must shield youth from negative practices, as the future of our society depends on understanding the consequences of our actions and instilling positive values in our youth.

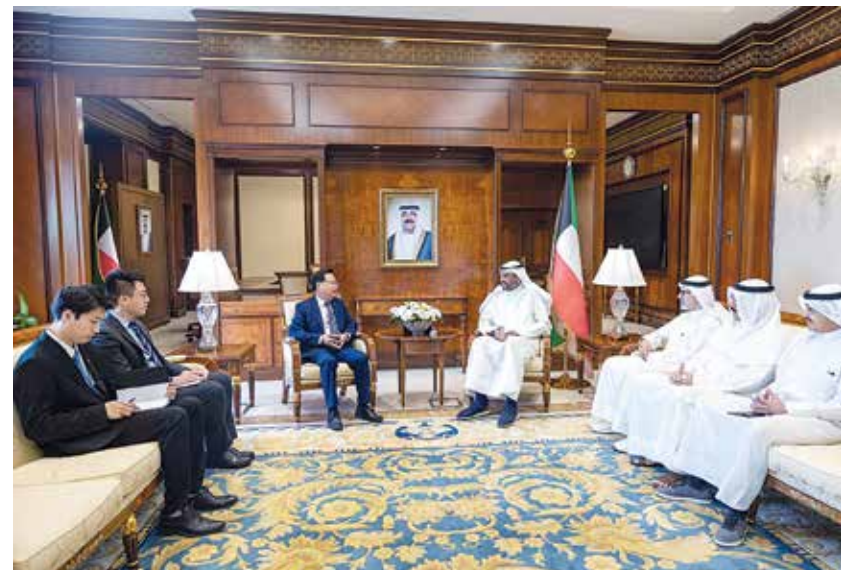
CSC nominates 1,270 for jobs

KUWAIT: The Civil Service Commission (CSC) announced on Monday the nomination of 1,270 citizens for the new batch of candidates to work in government agencies registered with the commission and wishing to work in ministries and state institutions. The Civil Service Commission confirmed through its official account on the social networking site (X) that it will continue to nominate new batches to government agencies in accordance with the job needs plan, calling on candidates to review the employers to which they were nominated directly. — KUNA

FM, Chinese envoy discuss bilateral ties



KUWAIT: Minister of Foreign Affairs Abdullah Al-Yahya received on Monday Chinese Ambassador to Kuwait Zhang Jianwei. During the meeting, the two officials discussed ways to enhance bilateral ties and strategic cooperation in various fields between the two countries. — KUNA photos



Kuwait takes solid stand against land monopoly

By Ghadeer Ghloom

KUWAIT: In a stand against those monopolizing land for investment purposes or other reasons, Kuwait has enacted a new law to curb this phenomenon. To know more about the law, Kuwait Times spoke to attorney Sultan Al-Shimali and international lawyer Bedour Al-Rasheed.

Shimali told Kuwait Times that the law 126/2023 has significant implications for landownership anti-monopoly measures. Under this law, there is a fine for unused or undeveloped land that has remained so for two years. After the initial two-year period, there will be a fine of KD 10 per square meter for every plot exceeding 1,500 sq m.

This means a potential fine of KD 15,000 per year. Additionally, the fine increases every two years, until it reaches KD 100. In order to avoid these fines, plots must be at least 50 percent under construction and connected to the power grid. Failure to meet these requirements will result in serious fines, and no procedures such as leasing, selling or buying can proceed without paying the fines.

In cases where the penalty amount becomes substantial, the only way to make use of the land is by selling it through a public auction, supervised by the court. However, the fines must be paid first before any money can be collected. According to Rasheed, Kuwait had implemented law 8/2008 to prevent land monopolization. This law specifically applies to residential plots and houses.

The measures taken to prevent land monopolization include the imposition of fees on the designated area as outlined by the law. Under the new law 126/2023, these measures have been enhanced to effectively prevent monopolization. Rasheed also confirmed that the annual fine has been increased from half a dinar to KD 10, and will continue to increase

annually until it reaches KD 100 per square meter for the designated area.

Furthermore, the new law has reduced the area exempted from paying the fine. Shimali elaborated that this change is expected to have a drastic impact on the market value of all types of land, housing and apartments. It is a long-awaited change that aims to bring about serious alterations in Kuwait's housing market, as the current prices make it difficult for average families with fixed incomes to afford a house.

Understanding the concept of monopoly is crucial in analyzing the market structure. "The monopolization of land in Kuwait poses a significant challenge that requires immediate attention. Privatization, displacement and habitat destruction all stem from unchecked development and greed. It is crucial for the government and local authorities to implement policies to protect and preserve Kuwait's natural landscapes. Sustainable development



Sultan Al-Shimali



Bedour Al-Rasheed

and community engagement are key to ensuring the preservation of Kuwait's diverse landscapes for future generations," Yousef Abdulaziz, a Kuwait businessman, told Kuwait Times.



KUWAIT: Photo shows the skyline of Kuwait. In a stand against those monopolizing land for investment purposes or other reasons, Kuwait has enacted a new law to curb this phenomenon. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

Minister praises medical cadres

KUWAIT: Kuwait's Minister of Health, Dr. Ahmad Al-Awadhi, affirmed that the national medical cadres had achieved significant contributions in global scientific research across various medical specializations, which gained praise at international forums. Speaking at a Ramadan 'Ghabga'

(dinner banquet), hosted by the Kuwait Medical Association on Sunday, the minister lauded the relentless efforts of the national medical cadres to enhance the quality of healthcare services, in line with the national Kuwait Vision 2035.

He emphasized the importance of establishing a comprehensive vision to address challenges and create a supportive working environment for national doctors, aligning with the objectives outlined in the government's 100-day working program. For his part, Dr. Ibrahim Al-Tawala, the President of the Association, commended the ministry's efforts to

improve the qualifications of medical personnel and highlighted the successful implementation of Article 80 of Law 70/2020.

This has led to the establishment of fixed allowances for doctors and other positive measures initiated by the Minister of Health. Al-Tawala highlighted the Minister of Health's dedication to supporting national medical cadres by offering them opportunities for exchanging experiences and securing scholarships, as well as through internal programs such as the Kuwaiti Board. These efforts are expected to have a lasting impact on the development of the medical field. — KUNA

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Ramadan health tips

Benefits of exercise

Exercising regularly has been shown to:

(1) Maintain and improve your cardio-respiratory fitness and capacity thus reducing the risks of complications from an acute respiratory infection.

(2) Prevent and manage chronic medical problems like obesity, diabetes, hypertension and heart disease, which are risk factors for COVID-19 infection and its complications.

(3) Maintain and improve your immunity against all infections.

(4) Maintain and improve muscular strength and endurance.

(5) Prevent a physical decline in function due to prolonged rest and inactivity, especially in older adults, thus improving mobility and reducing the risk of falls.

(6) Reduce fatigue and lethargy, thus allowing you to function better in school or at work.

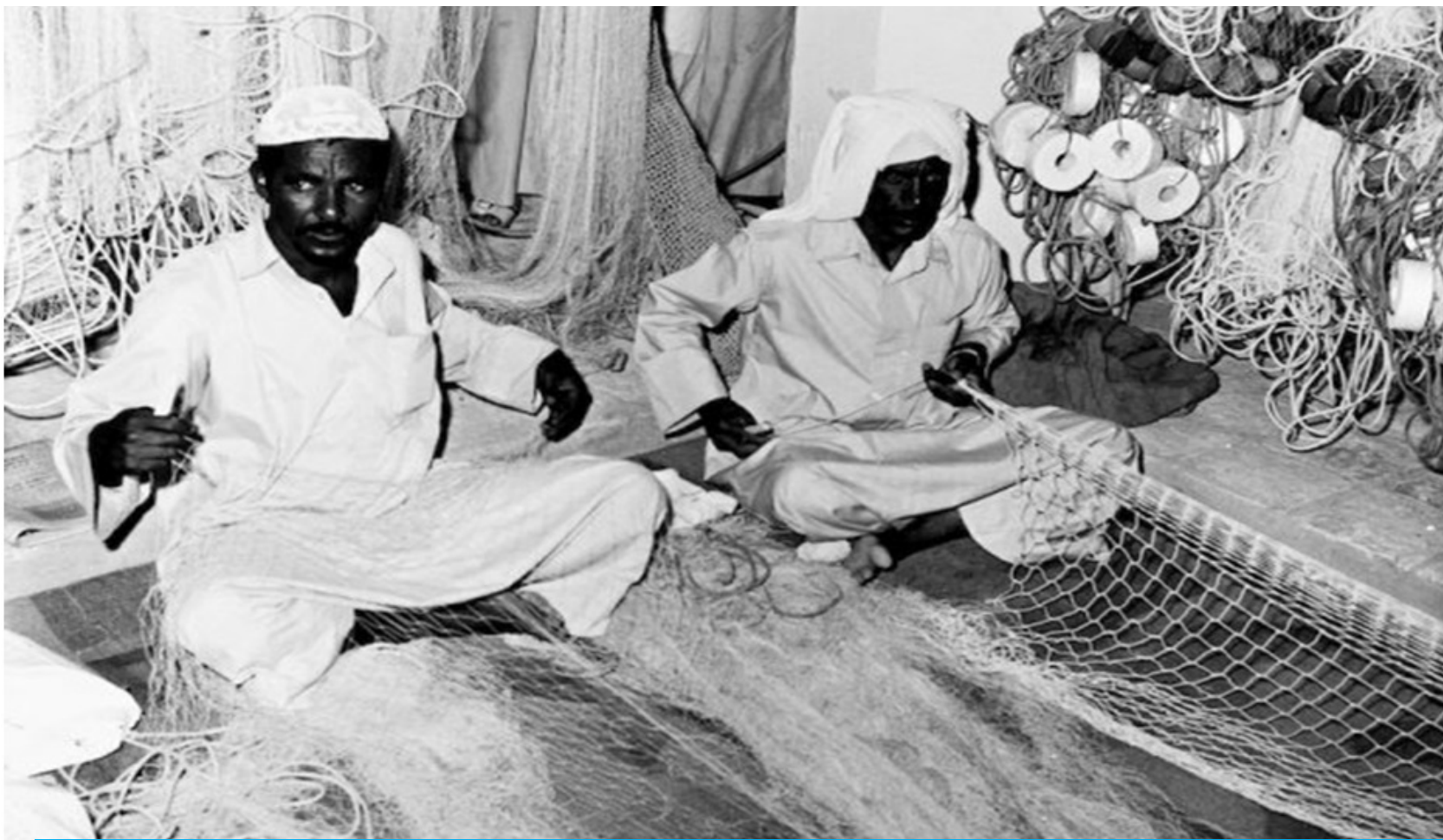
(7) Maintain and improve cognitive function thus allowing one to function better during home-based learning or at work.

(8) Maintain and improve cognitive function, thus allowing one to think and plan better in the fasting state.

(9) Manage stress and improve your mood especially during this challenging period.



Kuwait Heritage



KUWAIT: Photo shows fishing net makers in a shop in old Kuwait. — Photo from KOC archive, provided by Mahmoud Zakaria, heritage researcher at Ministry of Information.

NBK warns customers against unexpected offers promising quick and high profits

Bank promotes 'Let's Be Aware' awareness campaign

KUWAIT: National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) always seeks to promote financial awareness and inclusion among all segments of society. In this context, the bank continues to intensify efforts to promote the "Let's Be Aware" campaign launched by the Central Bank of Kuwait, in collaboration with local banks and Kuwait Banking Association (KBA).

During this month, the bank intensified awareness material on all its social media platforms with the aim of increasing public awareness of various misleading fraud techniques to steal customers' banking information. In this regard, NBK highlights the various evolving fraud techniques, especially unexpected offers promising high profits, which may seem attractive to some investors or retirees due to the high fixed income they provide compared to traditional investments that do not provide the same.

NBK warned of such unverified ads that may impersonate well-known companies and banks aiming to trick

victims using various professional fraud schemes to steal their money, including offering fictitious or worthless investment opportunities, unlicensed financial investments like forex trading and investments promising exaggeratedly high returns.

Therefore, NBK drew customers' attention to the necessity of choosing their investments very carefully, paying attention to all details such as the people with whom they invest their money, as well as consulting third parties like licensed brokers or financial advisors before taking the investment decision, to ensure avoiding falling victim to fraud.

The bank advised customers to adhere to banks' guidelines and the Central Bank's circulations on how to steer clear of the risks of fraudulent messages, fake ads, hacking of banking apps, advising customers to beware of suspicious transactions. It also called them to follow security tips and to refrain from sharing banking information with any person, as

well as to take all other precautions to protect their passwords/PINs.

NBK always employs innovative methods to promote financial literacy among large segments of the public, thus maximizing the exposure of this campaign's messages. It also harnesses its tremendous capabilities in communicating with customers including its digital channels, which are the most popular among all Kuwaiti banks, to serve the same end.

The bank makes consistent efforts to educate customers, regarding this as a crucial part of its strategy. To this end, it always uses all communication channels to advise them to keep their passwords/PINs and financial/personal account information strictly confidential, and not to share them with anyone impersonating a bank employee. It is worth mentioning that NBK is a key supporter and partner in all CBK's campaigns and initiatives to increase financial and banking awareness among different segments of society.



As a leading financial institution in Kuwait, NBK frequently organizes various activities to raise awareness on all topics related to the banking sector, as well as various training courses for its employees to enhance their experience in the areas of combating fraud and financial crime. As a leading financial institution in Kuwait and across the region, NBK firmly observes its responsibilities towards the communities it serves. It is always taking the initiative to provide all necessary support to important and strategic campaigns, like the "Let's Be Aware" campaign, which serve the interests of the national economy and society at large.



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Minister of Education approves 19 projects

KUWAIT: The Minister of Education and Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research, Dr. Adel Al-Adwani, has approved the 19 projects included in the government work program for the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research after coordination and follow-up with all concerned authorities. The minister urged officials to follow up on the projects in accordance with the systems prepared for the General Secretariat of the Supreme Council for Planning and implement them on the ground according to the specified schedule.

He explained in a press statement that building human capital, reforming the education system, and financial sustainability have been top priorities in the work programs of the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research, and the bodies affiliated with the minister. He stressed his determination towards achieving the vision of the Amir His Highness Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah in developing education in the country and investing in the people with the support and directives of His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Dr. Mohammad Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah.

The projects included in the government work program of the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research are 18. They are divided into two main programs under the human capital axis. 12 projects are under the ed-

ucational system reform program, and 6 projects are under the program to promote innovation, scientific research, and development, in addition to a project under the economic and financial axis of the financial sustainability program.

As for the projects related to the Public Authority for Applied Education and Training, Al-Adwani said that they are summarized in two projects: a project for branches and colleges of the Public Authority in the Sabah Al-Ahmad area, and a project to expand the Department of Chemical Engineering at the College of Technological Studies.

He noted that there are two projects for Kuwait University and Abdullah Al-Salem University, namely the project of applying the academic accreditation system for all programs at Kuwait University and the research oasis project for Kuwait University, in addition to launching three research centers for Abdullah Al-Salem University and the launch of graduate programs in several disciplines at Abdullah Al-Salem University.

With regard to the Institute of Scientific Research, the minister confirmed that three projects have been introduced: the project of establishing sustainable economic farming using modern technologies, developing a model for the economic production of multiple marine species of fish, and developing the network of national laboratories. Al-Adwani added that the inclusion of the project to enhance investments and revenues in the Public Authority for Applied Education and Training under the economic and financial axis within the public financial sustainability program has been approved, and this comes in an effort by the Ministry to reach financial sustainability by creating investment opportunities, whether in the short or long term.

KISR develops home energy management system using AI

KUWAIT: Kuwait Institute for Scientific Research (KISR) announced on Monday the completion of a research project entitled 'Development of a home energy management system based on active control' - using artificial intelligence and machine learning to find innovative solutions and consolidate a steady step in the path of sustainability.

The head of the project from the Energy and Construction Research Center, engineer Farid Al-Ghumlas, said in a press release from the institute that this project was implemented with the

latest strategies for controlling air conditioning units through the use of artificial intelligence and machine learning in order to reduce energy consumption while maintaining heat.

Al-Ghumlas added that the project methodology lies in building a model house similar to the Kuwaiti construction style to test innovative control strategies and develop modern systems for optimal control of air conditioning, lighting, and window blinds in this newly built model house, as well as reducing energy consumption in residential units by at least 20 percent using an optimal control system.

He pointed out that the research project achieved its goals by building a model house, and experiments were conducted to control air conditioning devices using three machine learning models. The results showed that the artificial neural network achieved the highest energy savings of 26 percent of the three models. — KUNA



IS children left to rot in Syria

Monsters, asteroids, vampires: AI conspiracies flood TikTok



Palestinian mechanic and garage owner Motaz Qassrawi shows cars wrecked during an attack by Zionist settlers in Huwara.



A picture shows a view of Huwara and the new bypass road the Zionist entity built diverting traffic from the town.

Zionist settlements choke Huwara

Illegal settlers, development projects make living in West Bank village ‘like dying’

HUWARA: Once a bustling Palestinian town with sought-after restaurants and auto mechanics, Huwara in the occupied West Bank has been hit hard by Zionist settlement expansion.

The forced closure of businesses and construction of a new bypass diverting traffic from the town of about 7,000 people has choked off economic activity, driving merchants to despair.



HUWARA: Palestinian famer Jamila Hamdan herds sheep in Huwara town in the occupied West Bank on March 13, 2024. — AFP photos

“Huwara, it’s over. There is no future,” butcher Nidal Jbour told AFP this week, standing in front of the bloody carcasses of cows and sheep hanging from hooks. His shop is located on Route 60, which crosses from north to south through the center of town.

Like around 500 other traders located along the road, Jbour had to close his shop after October 7 on the orders of the Zionist army, which also blocked access to the town.

The decision was explained as a necessary response to security fears stemming from the Hamas attack as well as past episodes of violence between Huwara residents and Zionist settlers living in the

surrounding hills. While the traders were gradually allowed to reopen after three months, business is nowhere near pre-war levels.

‘Vital artery’ blocked

The Zionist entity’s military campaign in Gaza has killed at least 31,341 people, mostly women and children, according to the health ministry in the territory. The entity claims it’s in response to the Hamas attack, which resulted in the deaths of about 1,160 people, according to an AFP tally of Zionist figures.

The West Bank, meanwhile, has also experienced a surge of violence, with the Palestinian Authority reporting at least 430 deaths at the hands of Zionist forces or settlers since the war broke out.

In Huwara, security issues related to the conflict are coupled with more parochial problems, specifically related to the construction of the new bypass — completed at the end of last year — that has left Route 60 a shadow of its former self.

Route 60 was previously “a vital artery”, said Huwara mayor Jihad Odeh, tracing it on a map hanging in his office. The closure of shops and the temporary blocking of the road led to “a breakdown in social and economic life”, he said, and now the bypass funnels traffic elsewhere.

A journey to Nablus, the large West Bank city a few kilometers (miles) away, now takes hours because of the bypass and new checkpoints. Movement restrictions make it difficult for farmers to access and take care of their land.

Many Huwara residents have lost work permits in the Zionist entity. “Huwara is death!” said Jamila Hamdan, a 74-year-old in traditional dress who grazes her sheep near her house. “Day after day, the situation is getting worse,” added the mother of 12 who said she was especially frightened by settlers who “come down from the hills to shout at us and throw stones”.



A Palestinian youth walks past a building which housed a restaurant and supermarket until it was demolished by the Zionist army.

Recurring violence

The Zionist entity has occupied the West Bank since the Six-Day War of 1967. Excluding annexed east Jerusalem, the territory is now home to around 490,000 Zionists who live in settlements considered illegal under international law.

The settlements overlooking Huwara, including one called Yitzhar, are among the most radical in the West Bank. Violence in the area escalated after Palestinians in Huwara killed four Zionists last year before the Gaza war broke out.

In February 2023, after two brothers from the nearby Har Brakha settlement were shot dead in their car, hundreds of settlers responded by destroying stores and burning dozens of vehicles.

Mechanic Motaz Qassrawi still has charred cars from that incident on his lot. “There are even some that belong to them (the settlers), waiting to be repaired!” he said, explaining that settlers often rely on Palestinian mechanics. Bashar Dmeidi, a 30-year-old who returned to Huwara in 2023 after eight years in Dubai, said he “cannot sleep at night” as settlers frequently “come to sing and dance under our windows”. “Living in Huwara, it’s like dying. You’re dying every day a little bit, you cannot do anything,” he added. The Zionist army has said it acts to prevent all violence by Zionists against Palestinians. The police, for their part, told AFP they were “not aware of any complaints filed by the residents of Huwara for acts of violence”. — AFP

Tensions high after Pakistan air strikes kill 8 in Afghanistan

KABUL: Eight civilians were killed Monday in “reckless” air strikes by Pakistan’s military in the border regions of Afghanistan, prompting Afghan forces to retaliate against Pakistani military outposts, Taleban officials said. Border tensions between the two countries have steadily escalated since the Taleban government seized power in 2021, with Islamabad claiming militant groups are carrying out regular attacks from Afghanistan.

Taleban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid said Pakistani aircraft “bombed civilian homes” in Khost and Paktika provinces near the border with Pakistan at around 3:00 am (2230 GMT Sunday), adding that all of the dead were women and children. Afghanistan’s defense ministry said its border forces retaliated in response to the airstrikes, targeting Pakistan’s military posts along the disputed border with “heavy weapons”.

Cross-border skirmishes in the region were reported by both sides on Monday, the latest in a string of incidents on the disputed frontier. The Taleban government “strongly condemns these attacks and calls this reckless action a violation of Afghanistan’s sovereignty”, Mujahid said in his statement. “Such incidents can have very bad consequences which will be out (of) Pakistan’s control.”

The Pakistani foreign ministry confirmed on Monday evening it had carried out “anti-terrorist operations in the border regions inside Afghanistan”. It said in a statement it was targeting the Hafiz Gul Bahadur group, one of several factions of the homegrown Pakistani Taleban, Tehreek-e-Taleban Pakistan (TTP), that are responsible for a surge in border violence against police and security officials.

Drones and jets

Malak Noor Khan, a tribal elder in the Sperah district of Khost, said he saw at least four explosives dropped from drones and jets and that multiple homes were destroyed, one with a woman and her children inside.

“When the drone came first, we all, including women and children, left our homes and went into the trees on the mountainside, it was very cold as there was snow on

the ground,” he told AFP. A local government official in Pakistan’s border regions, who asked not to be identified, told AFP residents had been instructed to evacuate the area during the skirmishes. Islamabad has accused Kabul’s Taleban government of harboring militant fighters, allowing them to strike on Pakistani soil with impunity. Kabul has denied the allegations.

In the first half of 2023, attacks rose by 80 percent, with 112 people killed in August, according to the Pakistan Institute for Conflict and Security Studies. A senior government official based in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, who asked not to be identified, told AFP that, despite repeated complaints, “Afghanistan does not seem to be taking the matter seriously”.

Regional analyst Saira Aqil said that, while increased attacks in Pakistan are “prompting inevitable retaliation”, the country “cannot afford to lose Afghanistan as an ally”. “Pakistan must bear this in mind, as maintaining a friendly relationship with Afghanistan presents greater opportunities than having them as an adversary,” said Aqil, a professor at the defense and strategic studies department of Quaid I Azam University in Islamabad.

‘We will respond’

The Afghan foreign ministry said in a statement posted on X it had summoned the head of the Pakistani embassy in Kabul to protest against Monday’s strikes.

It called on Pakistan’s new government to “not allow some circles to complicate the relationship between two neighboring Muslim countries” — an apparent reference to certain Pakistani military leaders.

The Pakistan foreign ministry in turn said that “certain elements among those in power in Afghanistan are actively patronizing TTP and using them as a proxy against Pakistan”, urging them “to make a clear choice to stand with the people of Pakistan”.

Monday’s strikes came after seven Pakistani troops were killed in an attack by an armed group inside Pakistan’s territory on Saturday, for which President Asif Ali Zardari vowed retaliation. “Pakistan has decided that whoever will enter our borders, homes or country and commit terror, we will respond to them strongly, regardless of who it is or from which country,” he said while attending the funeral prayers of the soldiers, who included a lieutenant colonel. A Pakistani military statement said security forces also carried out an operation overnight Sunday in North Waziristan district, which borders Khost and Paktika, killing eight militants accused of being involved in Saturday’s attack. — AFP



PYONGYANG: This picture taken on March 15, 2024 and released by North Korea’s official news agency shows Kim Jong Un (front right) and his daughter Ju Ae (front left) on an official visit in Pyongyang. — AFP

Daughter of North Korea’s Kim might be heir apparent

SEOUL: Seoul’s Unification Ministry on Monday added its voice to growing speculation around Kim Jong Un’s succession plans, saying they have not “ruled out” that his daughter could be next in line to lead North Korea. Pyongyang state media on Saturday referred to Kim’s teenage daughter as a “great person of guidance” — “hyangdo” in Korean — a term typically reserved exclusively for top leaders and their successors.

Analysts said it was the first time Kim’s daughter — never named by Pyongyang, but identified as Ju Ae by South Korean intelligence — had been described as such by the North.

It has doubled speculation that the teen, who often appears next to her father at key public events, could have been chosen as the next leader of the nuclear-armed North, for a third hereditary succession.

“Usually the term ‘hyangdo’ is only used to refer to the highest-ranking official,” Koo Byoung-sam, a spokesman for Seoul’s Unification Ministry, said at a

briefing Monday. “We are not ruling out the possibility of Ju Ae’s succession”, he said, adding that Seoul was “monitoring the situation and remaining open to possibilities.” However, he warned that if Ju Ae were to take her father’s place as the fourth leader of the reclusive state, “North Korean people will bear the brunt of the fallout”, he said.

Ju Ae was first introduced to the world by state media in 2022, when she accompanied her father to the launch of an intercontinental ballistic missile. Since then, the North’s official outlets have referred to her in various ways, including the “morning star of Korea” and “beloved child”.

She has been seen at many of her father’s official engagements, including military drills, a visit to a weapons factory, and a stop at a new chicken farm. In an image released by Pyongyang on Saturday, Ju Ae was seen using binoculars to observe recent paratroop drills, standing beside her father and senior military officials.

Before 2022, the only confirmation of her existence had come from former NBA star Dennis Rodman, who made a visit to the North in 2013 and claimed he’d met a baby daughter of Kim’s called Ju Ae.

Seoul had initially indicated that Kim and his wife Ri had their first child, a boy, in 2010, and that Ju Ae was their second child. But last year, Seoul’s unification minister said that the government was “unable to confirm for sure” the existence of Kim’s son. — AFP

Monsters, asteroids, vampires: AI conspiracies flood TikTok

Banning TikTok unfair, but disinformation should be part of debate about the app: Experts

WASHINGTON: From vampires and wendigos to killer asteroids, TikTok users are pumping out outlandish end-of-the-world conspiracy theories, researchers say, in yet another misinformation trend on a platform whose fate in the United States hangs in the balance.

In the trend reported by the nonprofit Media Matters, TikTok users seek to monetize viral videos that make unfounded claims about the US government secretly capturing or preserving mythical monsters that include — wait for it — King Kong.

It is the latest illustration of misinformation swirling on the platform — a stubborn issue that has been largely absent in recent policy debates as US lawmakers mull banning the Chinese-owned app on grounds of national security. Often accompanied by spooky background music, the videos — many of which garner millions of views — feature imperious AI-generated voices, sometimes mimicking celebrities.

“We are all probably going to die in the next few years. Did you hear about this?” said a voice impersonating podcaster Joe Rogan in one viral video. “There’s this asteroid that is on a collision course with Earth,” the voice claims, citing information leaked by a government official who stumbled upon a folder titled “keep secret from the public.” At least one account peddling that video appeared to be deactivated after AFP reached TikTok for comment.

Conspiracy theory videos, often posted by anonymous accounts, typically had the tell-tale signs of AI-generated images such as extra fingers and distortions, said TikTok misinformation researcher Abbie Richards. Peddling such theories can be financially rewarding, Richards said, with TikTok’s “Creativity Program” designed to pay creators for content generated on the platform.

It has spawned what she called a cottage industry of conspiracy theory videos powered by artificial intelligence tools including text-to-speech applications that are widely — and freely — available online. A TikTok spokeswoman insisted that “conspiracy theories are not eligible to earn money or be recommended” in user feeds. “Harmful misinformation is prohibited, with our safety teams removing 95 percent of it proactively before it’s reported,” she told AFP.

Still, tutorials on platforms such as YouTube show users how to create “viral conspiracy theory videos” and profit off TikTok’s Creativity Program. One such tutorial openly instructed users to start by making up “something outrageous” such as “scientists just got caught hiding a saber-toothed tiger.” “Financially incentivizing content that is both highly engaging and cheap to manufacture creates an environment for conspiracy theories to thrive,” Richards wrote in the Media Matters report.

Threat of AI

Such concerns, driven by rapid advancements in AI, are particularly high in a year of major elections around the world. Last week, the European Union wielded its powerful Digital Services Act (DSA) to press several platforms including TikTok on the risks of AI — including from deepfakes — for upcoming elections in the 27-nation bloc.

In the United States, where the app has some 170 million users — roughly half the country’s population — lawmakers last week overwhelmingly backed a bill to ban TikTok unless Chinese parent company ByteDance divested itself within six months.

The bill, which still needs to pass the more cautious upper house of the US Congress, risks riling young voters in a key election year. US policymakers have repeatedly expressed concerns about TikTok’s alleged ties to the Chinese government, user data safety and its apparent impact on national security.

According to a report from the US Office of the Director of National Intelligence, the Chinese government is using TikTok to expand its global influence operations to promote pro-Beijing narratives and undermine American democracy, including through disinformation. “Disinformation should be part of the debate about TikTok,” Aynne



NEW YORK: In this photo illustration, the TikTok app is seen on a phone screen. — AFP

Kokas, a media studies professor at the University of Virginia, told AFP.

Many experts, however, as well as young users who rely on the app as their primary source of news, oppose banning TikTok, saying it’s unfair to single out the platform. “There’s lots of misinformation on TikTok, just as there is on other social media platforms. Some of that misinformation is

dangerous,” Jameel Jaffer, director of the Knight First Amendment Institute at Columbia University, told AFP.

“(But) investing the government with the authority to suppress misinformation — or to ban Americans from accessing platforms that host misinformation — is not a sensible response to this problem. Nor would it be a constitutional one,” he added. — AFP

‘Tied to the bed’: Horrors of giving birth in Serbia

BELGRADE: Biljana Cicic-Stanic still bristles when she remembers the pain, violence, and humiliation she endured while giving birth to her son in Serbia, an experience many women say is normal in the Balkan country’s hospitals.

Cicic-Stanic said medical staff tied her to the bed with restraints and nurses used their elbows to press against her stomach. “Everything was so violent,” Cicic-Stanic told AFP, saying doctors and nurses screamed insults at her: “They put you in a bed and require you to lie motionless, while someone violently opens your cervix, pierces your membrane and tells you to be quiet,” she added.

The story is a familiar one for many in Serbia, where violence against women in labor and those getting gynecological treatment remains common, according to experts. As elsewhere in the Balkans, a combination of patriarchal values and a weak legal system has allowed for medical violence against women to often go unchecked.

“Here the idea persists that if you complain about any aspect of motherhood, you are not a good enough mother nor are you a good enough woman,” said Jelena Riznic, an activist with the Serbia-based Female Solidarity collective.

The issue again hit the headlines after Marica Mihajlovic — an ethnic Roma woman — accused her gynecologist of “jumping on her stomach” and racially abusing her

while she was in labor earlier this year.

Her newborn later died, with Mihajlovic telling local media that an autopsy report said the death was caused by “violent childbirth”. The story sparked a torrent of outrage online and protests on the streets, as women shared similar stories of their treatment. Serbia’s Minister of Health Danica Grujicic largely dismissed the accounts, saying “everyone has different tolerance for pain”.

‘Stop being hysterical’

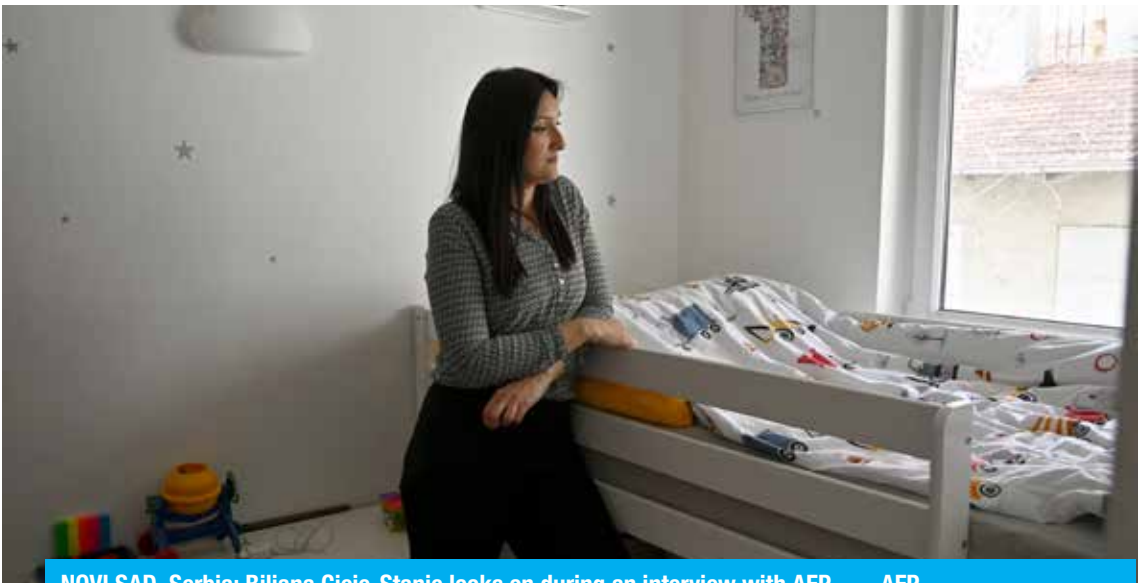
Women in Serbia are regularly subjected to various forms of violence at maternity clinics and hospitals, a 2022 report by leading lawyers found, including having their stomach pushed during labor and being given invasive procedures without consent.

Women testified that they were subjected to insults, shouting, and shaming from the medical staff, including at the capital’s main Gynecology and Obstetrics Clinic in downtown Belgrade. “In many cases health workers conduct procedures against patients’ will,” said the report.

“Patients are restrained with belts in case they complain about pain, and after the labor they are exposed to stitching without anesthesia,” it added.

The investigation also highlighted the treatment of patients with miscarriages, saying they were “left alone, without medical supervision, and forced to undergo the procedure” in front of women in labor or those who had just given birth. For Biljana Brankovic, 37, the testimonies ring especially true. In 2021, Brankovic went to a Belgrade clinic to terminate a pregnancy after a test result confirmed the fetus had serious birth defects.

Brankovic said medical staff largely ignored her ahead of the procedure, as they watched a popular reality TV



NOVI SAD, Serbia: Biljana Cicic-Stanic looks on during an interview with AFP. — AFP

show, and told her to “stop being hysterical” when she called for help as the fetus emerged.

“After ten minutes I recognized the feeling and I gave birth. Alone, with nobody around, no nurse, no doctor,” she said. “I screamed for 10 minutes that it’s over,” Brankovic added. “It was irrelevant because my baby was dead.”

Medical staff later removed her placenta and performed a post-abortion scraping procedure without anesthesia, which Brankovic said left her infertile, according to

three separate doctors. A gynecologist who spoke to AFP on the condition of anonymity acknowledged the issues outlined in the report but argued that most doctors in Serbia “do their job properly”.

“Hospitals need to document those cases [of abuse]. The responsibility for that kind of work lies with those who run those institutions and don’t sanction errors made during childbirth,” the Belgrade-based doctor told AFP. — AFP

Zionist carnage at Gaza hospital...

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gunfire and artillery shelling”. World Health Organization chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said that “we are terribly worried” about the fighting which was “endangering health workers, patients and civilians”.

The Zionist military told Gazans to evacuate the area amid the raid that it said was based on intelligence “indicating the use of the hospital by senior Hamas (fighters)”. The Zionist military dropped Arabic-language leaflets warning residents that “You are in a dangerous combat zone!” and urging them to flee the area. The Hamas government media office condemned as a “war crime” the “storming of the Al-Shifa medical complex with tanks, drones and weapons and shooting inside”.

The army previously raided Al-Shifa in November, sparking an international outcry. The Zionist entity has carried out a relentless bombing campaign and ground offensive that Gaza’s health ministry says has killed at least 31,726 people, most of them women and children. As the fighting flared around Al-Shifa, the Zionist army announced that the number of its soldiers killed in the Gaza ground invasion launched in late October had risen to 250.

Global concern has focused on Gaza’s far-south-

ern city of Rafah, where about 1.5 million Palestinians now live in crowded shelters and tent cities near the Egyptian border. Netanyahu’s repeated warnings of a looming ground invasion have raised fears the civilians would be in the line of fire, and the Zionist entity’s top ally the United States has stressed the Zionist entity must ensure civilians are “out of harm’s way”. The Zionist premier on Sunday reiterated that civilians would be evacuated from Rafah before any ground attack, without detailing where to.

Efforts toward a truce and hostage release deal — which have involved US, Qatari and Egyptian mediators — were expected to resume in Qatar, following a week-long ceasefire in November. Hamas had so far called for a complete withdrawal of Zionist forces, a demand which Netanyahu has rejected as “delusional”.

A new Hamas proposal calls for a Zionist withdrawal from “all cities and populated areas” in Gaza during a six-week truce, and for vastly more aid, according to an official from the group. It proposes a 42-day truce during which it would release about 42 captives — each in exchange for between 20 and 50 Palestinian prisoners to be released from Zionist custody.

The exchange could include women, children, elderly and ill hostages, whereas male soldiers and the bodies of dead hostages would be returned during a later, comprehensive exchange to coincide with a full ceasefire. Netanyahu’s office said on Friday that Hamas’s new proposal was “unrealistic” but that the government would send a delegation to Doha for another round of talks. — AFP

bardments of border regions — as proof Russians were behind Putin’s assault on Ukraine. Putin’s victory, which was inevitable, paves the way for him to become the longest-serving Russian leader in more than two centuries. All of the 71-year-old’s major opponents are dead, in prison or in exile and voting took place a month after Putin’s main challenger Alexei Navalny died in an Arctic prison.

In power since the last day of 1999, Putin has cultivated a strong man image, telling Russians he is fighting to preserve Moscow’s national identity he claims is under threat. His offensive in Ukraine has been accompanied by a huge crackdown at home, with the number of political prisoners in Russia rising fast. Thousands responded to the opposition’s call to protest the election by forming long queues at polling stations — both inside and outside Russia.

Ballots were also spoiled by green dye and there were several incidents of voting booths being set on fire. Putin vowed that Russians who spoiled their

Firmness of faith...

Continued from Page 1

amassed against you. So, fear them! This, then, (only) increased them in faith. Thus they said to them: ‘Allah is sufficient for us, and He is the Most Excellent Guardian.’” (Al-Imran – the Family of Imran 3: 173)

In whatever situation you are, you should stay firm in your belief because Almighty Allah is in control of everything. Anas bin Malik RA (companion of Prophet Muhammad PBUH) narrated that Allah’s Messenger (PBUH) said, “Time will come upon people when whoever patiently perseveres in sticking to his religion will be like someone holding a firebrand or an ember.” (Al-Albani rated it as authentic in Sahih Al-Ja’mei # 8, 002 and At-Tirmidhi # 2, 260)

Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) always supplicated to Almighty Allah to keep him firm on faith: An-Nawas bin Sam’an related that Allah’s Messenger (PBUH) said, “There is not a heart except that it is between two among the fingers of Almighty Allah; whomever He wills, He makes him firm on religion, and whomever He wills, He lets him deviate from (true) faith.” The narrator continues that Allah’s Messenger (PBUH) used to supplicate thus to Almighty Allah: “O Allah, the Turner of hearts, (I beseech You) to keep my heart firm on faith.” (Al-Albani rated it as authentic in Sahih Ibn Ma’jah # 119)

If the above was the most frequent supplication (dua’a) of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) yet he was infallible, what about you and me? So the most frequent supplication a believer should always repeat is to beseech Almighty Allah to keep his heart firm upon His religion, and to keep him away from

ballots “have to be dealt with” and dismissed opposition protests as having “no effect”. He said the vote showed Russians had “trust” in him. The three-day vote — also held in Russian-occupied parts of Ukraine — and saw a surge of deadly Ukrainian bombardments on Russian border regions. Authorities said Ukrainian attacks killed 11 people were killed in Russia’s Belgorod region in the last week.

Whereas the previous four presidential elections Putin won since 2000 saw Western leaders pour in their congratulations, his victory this time was met with scathing statements. “This is not what free and fair elections look like,” UK Foreign Minister David Cameron said. In Ukraine, battling Russian forces, President Volodymyr Zelensky lashed out at Putin as a “dictator” who was “drunk from power.”

But others sent their congratulations including China, India, North Korea, Venezuela and Myanmar. Russia has said it is seeking new allies after ties with the West have been severed over Ukraine. Putin reaffirmed late

sins. One of the biggest means of steadfastness is the uprightness of the heart and sincerity to the Majestic Allah.

True believers are ready to sacrifice everything to please Almighty Allah: Khabbab in Al-Ara’i (RA) narrated, “I was a blacksmith in Makkah, and once I made a sword for Al-’Asi bin Wa’il As-Sahmei (one of the staunchest enemies of Prophet Muhammad PBUH). When I went to him (Al-’Asi) to ask for my money, he told me, ‘I will not pay you until you disbelieve in Muhammad (PBUH).’ I said, ‘I swear by Allah, I will never disbelieve in Muhammad (PBUH) until Almighty Allah causes you to die and then resurrects you.’ He (Al-’Asi) replied, ‘Then leave me alone until I die then get resurrected, be given a lot of wealth and children, then pay you (for your sword).’”

The following verse was then revealed, translated as: “Then have you seen, (O Prophet), the one who disbelieved in Our (revealed) signs and said, ‘I will, most surely, be given wealth and children should resurrection occur? Has he looked into the (realm of) the unseen? Or has he taken with the All-Merciful God (Allah) a (binding) covenant?” (Maryam – Mary 19: 77 – 78) (Al-Bukhari # 4, 733)

Steadfastness in Ramadan: Ramadan is definitely a month for us to increase our good deeds and establish good habits. We are trained to defy the devil by avoiding his snares. Fasting does not only prevent us from eating and drinking, it also requires us to abstain from foul speech and acts — thus controlling our hearts. A large part of Ramadan revolves around us increasing steadfastness. We should well understand that among the aims of fasting during the month of Ramadan is to firm up our faith for the rest of the year. — Courtesy of Kuwaiti Society for Cultural Dialogue

on Sunday that Moscow intends to strengthen ties with its Chinese neighbor in particular. “Our relations are stable, they complement each other,” he said. “The most important thing is that state interests coincide.”

In Berlin, which has a large Russian emigre community, Yulia Navalnaya had queued outside Moscow’s embassy at noon, saying she wrote her late husband’s name on the ballot. “Obviously, I wrote Navalny’s name,” the 47-year-old, who has vowed to continue her husband’s work, said to supportive crowds. Putin has throughout his rule not tolerated real opposition and for around a decade refused to publicly pronounce in public the name of his main rival: Alexei Navalny.

He broke that tradition Sunday, uttering his name as he acknowledged his challenger’s death for the first time. “As for Mr Navalny. Yes, he passed away. This is always a sad event,” he said late on Sunday. The Russian leader confirmed what Navalny’s allies have said: That he had agreed to free Navalny in a prisoner swap with the West days before his death. — Agencies

‘Record’ win for Putin; Amir sends...

Continued from Page 1

“This is a record figure,” Putin has steered Russia into isolation from the West by launching the 2022 Ukraine campaign. “In the face of the West, we are united,” Pamilova said.

In a victory speech late on Sunday, Putin vowed Moscow would resist outside pressure. “No matter who or how much they want to intimidate, no matter who or how much they want to suppress, our will, our consciousness — no one has ever succeeded in anything like this in history,” he said. “It has not worked now and will not work in the future. Never.”

The Kremlin has presented the weekend election — marred by ballot spoilers and Ukrainian bom-

International



This aerial picture taken on January 27, 2024 shows a view of Al-Hol camp.

IS children left to rot in Syria

‘It’s not a life for children ... they are paying the price for something they didn’t do’

Al-HASAKAH, Syria: Ali is 12 and has survived things no child should see, spending half his life in what amounts to a prison camp for jihadist families in an arid corner of northeastern Syria. He knows not to dream of freedom. Instead, he fantasizes about having a football. “Can you get me one?” he said, as if he was asking for the Moon. Five years after the fall of the Islamic State group’s brutal “caliphate”, tens of thousands of women and children linked to the jihadists are still being held by the US-backed Kurdish forces in camps rife with violence and abuse, with seemingly no clear plan of what to do with them.

**Al-HASAKAH:** Children gesture as they walk through the Al-Hol camp in Syria’s northeastern Al-Hasakah Governorate, on October 10, 2023. — AFP photos

More than 40,000 inmates — half of them children — are cooped up behind the barbed wire fences and watchtowers of the windswept Al-Hol camp run by Washington’s Kurdish allies. The children of the jihadists’ failed project live out a grim existence in tattered, tightly packed together tents with little water and limited access to sanitation. Few go to school. Many have never seen a television or tasted ice cream.

Some boys are taken from their mothers by the guards once they reach 11 in violation of international law, a UN expert found, with the Kurdish authorities claiming it is to stop them being radicalised. They admit the jihadists still exercise control in parts of the camp through fear, punishments and even murder.

One former inmate told AFP that IS paid pensions to some widows. Even Ali is old enough to be terrified of them. “They enter tents at night and kill people,” he said. “It’s not a life for children ... they are paying the price for something they didn’t do,” an aid worker told AFP. The Al-Hol camp ballooned as the coalition and its allies in the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) closed in on IS’s last bastion in eastern Syria, putting an end to their five-year reign of terror marked by beheadings, rapes, massacres and enslavement.

When the extremists were finally defeated in March 2019, families of suspected jihadists were trucked north to Al-Hol from the last holdout in Baghouz. Five years on, dozens of countries are still refusing to take back their nationals with SDF leader Mazloum Abdi — whose soldiers guard the Western-funded camp — calling it “a ticking time bomb”.

‘Acute deprivation’

AFP interviewed IS widows, aid workers, security forces and administration employees in the difficult to access camp, including inside the high-security “annex”, the camp within a camp where “foreign” and more radical women and their children from 45 countries are held apart from the “local” Syrians and Iraqis. Some asked not to be named for fear of what might happen to them. To complicate matters, some 3,000 men are held with the women and children in the Syrian and Iraqi sector of the camp. Some are ordinary refugees, but suspicion lingers over others detained by Kurdish fighters as the

caliphate collapsed. Not even the guards venture into the rows of tents at night unless they are carrying out a raid.

The huge dusty camp — first built for refugees fleeing the wars in Iraq and Syria — dwarfs the nearby town of Al-Hol, with its small houses and narrow streets. Its thousands of white tents are crammed so closely together that it is almost impossible to walk between them without bumping into something.

Privacy is nonexistent, with the communal kitchens and toilets squalid and insufficient, say humanitarian workers who provide some basic services on top of the food aid on which the inmates survive. Behind the camp’s high fences, kids roam dirt roads, bored and frustrated, some throwing stones at visitors. A blond boy blinked at the camera and then drew his finger across his throat to mimic a beheading.

Most children do not go to the makeshift schools. Instead, they try to earn a little by carrying water, cleaning or fixing tents for those whose families wire them money. Others work in the camp’s market, or trade their food aid. “Al-Hol is a suffocating place for children to live and grow-up,” said Kathryn Achilles from Save the Children. They “have endured acute deprivation, bombardment and have now been in the camp for almost five years. They need more,” she said.

‘We’ll be left here’

“How can our children dream if they’ve never seen the outside world?” a mother of five held in the high-security annex reserved for foreign women and their children told AFP. Two thirds of the annex’s 6,612 inmates are children, according to the camp’s administrators.

The 39-year-old gave birth to her youngest child in Al-Hol after fleeing Baghouz in 2019 after her husband — an IS fighter — was killed there. Like all of the women in the camp, she was covered head-to-toe in a niqab and black gloves, a thin slit in the face covering showing her wide, dark eyes.

Although the niqab is banned in the smaller Roj camp holding IS members’ families close to the Turkish border, women in Al-Hol told AFP they would not dare to take it off, fearing punishment from hardliners. “It is a bitter life, and what’s worse, they say we’ll be left here,” the mother lamented, with the authorities starting to build new sections where each tent will have its own toilet and kitchen.

**A boy poses with fishnet bag on his head at the camp.**

Jihan Hanan, the head of the camp’s civil administration, confirmed that the work was being done “because the camp may be in place for the long term”. She admitted life was “difficult for residents, but it’s also difficult for us given the security situation.”

Murder and sexual abuse

But it is what is happening to the children that most worries humanitarian organizations. In 2022, two Egyptian girls, aged 12 and 15, were murdered in the annex, their throats cut and their bodies dumped in an

**Women walk past a garment shop at the Al-Hol camp.**

open septic tank. Rana, a Syrian girl, was shot in the face and shoulder in 2022 by armed men who accused her of having a child out of wedlock when she was 18. “They kidnapped me for 11 days and hit me with chains,” she told AFP.

Other children are being sexually abused and harassed, a health worker told AFP. In three months in 2021, she treated 11 cases of child sexual abuse. Some cases were children abusing other children. “They may not know they are hurting each other,” she said, adding that a child who abuses is likely to have been a victim of sexual assault or witness to it.

Children in Al-Hol have seen or heard murders as well as “shootings, stabbings and strangulations on their way to buy food from the marketplace or while on their way to school,” Save the Children said in a 2022 report on the camp. The trauma triggers sleeping disorders, bed-wetting and aggressive behavior, it said.

“I try not to let my kids socialize to keep them out of harm, but it is almost impossible because the camp is packed,” said Shatha, an Iraqi mother-of-five. “Every time my kids go out, they come back beaten.” Yet keeping children confined to their tents was tantamount to holding them “in a prison inside a prison”, a social worker told AFP.

‘Coming for my son’

Every mother AFP spoke to in Al-Hol — particularly those in the annex — were terrified about their boys being taken from them and sent to “rehabilitation centers” by the guards. The high-security camp within a camp contains women from 45 countries including France, the Netherlands and Sweden, with large numbers from Turkey, Tunisia, Russia, the Caucasus and the Central Asian republics.

Security forces regularly take boys over 11 from the annex in night raids or sweeps of the marketplace, a policy a UN expert condemned as “forced arbitrary separation”. Zeinab, an Egyptian mother, said her 13-year-old son was taken away from her a year ago. Now she worries it will soon be her 11-year-old’s turn. “I can’t sleep at night. When I hear sounds outside, I fear they are coming for my son,” she said.

Some mothers hide their boys from the guards in holes and trenches or prevent them from going outside. “Some boys may have turned 20, but we don’t know where they are hiding,” a member of the security forces admitted. Authorities say they take the boys to protect them from “sexual abuse” and a “radicalized” environment. The Pentagon told AFP that it was aware that some youths were removed “to both youth centers and detention facilities” but said “we keep the well-being of children at the center of our policies and encour-

age local authorities to ensure their actions consider the best interests of children.”

IS cells

Kurdish forces have long warned about IS cells in the camp, with a spike in murders, arson and escape attempts in 2019. Rifles, ammunition and tunnels have also been found in regular security sweeps. A Syrian woman who fled the camp in mid-2019 recalled how an IS member known as Abu Mohamed would visit widows monthly and pay them \$300 to \$500. “He used to come in a security forces uniform and promise that the group will return,” she said.

In the annex’s squalid marketplace, women pore over the few available pieces of meat through the slits in their niqabs, while others haul away bottles of water and rugs in three-wheeled carts or on makeshift sleds made from cardboard attached to a rope. Seeing journalists, some raised a gloved index finger to the sky, a gesture frequently used by IS signifying the “oneness of God”.

While many women are repentant, others don’t hide their continued allegiance to IS. IS “are still here, and they have a stronger presence in certain sectors of the camp,” according to Abou Khodor, a 26-year-old Iraqi man who has been in the camp for seven years. He complained that diehards from IS’s last bastion in Baghouz had “ruined” the camp. But one of the women captured there said it was more complex.

‘Death does not scare us’

“There are supporters of IS, and those who have become even worse,” she said. Others, however, “don’t want anything to do with it anymore.” At a protest over searches in the camp earlier this year, one woman was filmed shouting at the guards, “We are

here now but one day it will be you!

“The Islamic State is not going away, even if you kill and beat us ... Death does not scare us.” But an Egyptian woman was seen urging calm, saying, “We don’t want problems.” Such is the mistrust that some women resist being treated with what they call “Western medicine” leading to outbreaks of disease, most recently of measles.

Women and children in the annex also have to get permission to go to the health centers outside the camp, and it sometimes takes “days, weeks or even months” for less critical cases, according to Liz Harding, head of Doctors Without Borders mission in northeastern Syria. “Fear, movement restrictions, insecurity and lack of emergency services at night” was cutting them off from care, she added.

Some smuggle in medication and at least one woman performs clandestine dental procedures, which has led to cases of sepsis. “She doesn’t have the tools, but there is no other dental care,” a Russian woman complained.

Huge burden

The grim desperation of the situation weighs heavy on the Syrian Kurds running the camp. Many lost comrades to IS militants whose family members they now have to guard. “It’s a major problem ... a burden both financially, politically and morally as well,” the head of the Syrian Democratic Forces Mazloum Abdi told AFP.

Humanitarian groups in the camp said children should not have to live in such conditions and insist they should not be defined by their parents’ actions. “Mothers want their children to go to school, to grow up healthily and hope they won’t be discriminated against because of all they have experienced,” said Save the Children’s Achilles.

Kurdish authorities have repeatedly urged countries to repatriate their citizens, but hold out little hope of it happening anytime soon. Hanan, the camp’s civilian chief, said many “nationalities have no one asking about them”. Asked by AFP what it plans to do with the women and children, the Pentagon said “the only long-term, durable solution for the residents ... is the return or repatriation of displaced persons to their areas or countries of origin.”

While Iraq has started slow but successful repatriations, thousands of Syrians are stuck in Al-Hol awaiting tribal sponsorship to return to areas under Kurdish control. For now, a return for those from Syrian government-held areas looks impossible. “We wish everyone could go home,” Hanan said. “We don’t intend to lock anyone up and leave them.” But it was little comfort to a Russian mother of two who told AFP she felt the world had abandoned her and her children. “There is no place to go. There is no solution,” she said. — AFP

**A girl stands next to stall selling socks.**

TUESDAY, MARCH 19, 2024

Business

Iranians tightening belts for Persian New Year festivities

Economic troubles in sanctions-hit country weighing on celebrations



TEHRAN: People shop at a market in Tehran as they prepare for Nowruz, the Persian New Year. — AFP

TEHRAN: Millions of Iranians will travel to be with their families for Nowruz, the Persian New Year, on Wednesday but economic troubles in the sanctions-hit country are weighing on the festivities. Iranians will celebrate the start of the year 1403 at exactly 26 seconds past 6.36am (0406 GMT) on March 20, matching the astronomical time of the spring equinox.

Globally, some 300 million people will wish each other “Happy New Year” (“Nowruz mobarak”) including in Iran, Afghanistan, Kazakhstan and among Kurds in Turkey, Iraq, Syria and elsewhere.

“It’s the most important holiday of the year, the one where we forget our problems to get together with our loved ones and dream of a better year,” said Marjan, a young woman from Tehran who, like the other people AFP spoke to, declined to give her full name. Celebrated for 3,000 years, Nowruz marks a two-week break when Iranians travel within the country or, for the more fortunate, abroad. Yet many have plans for diminished feasts this year.

“Food products are far too expensive because of inflation,” Afshar, a 44-year-old accountant, told AFP at the Tajrish bazaar in northern Tehran. Annual inflation officially stands at 44 percent, according to local media, after hitting 46 percent last year.

“I bought meat at 700,000 toman (around \$12) per kilo, but I only earn 9.8 million (\$160) per month after a 30-year career,” said a 68-year-old resident of Tehran who did not wish to be named.

In a bid to simplify transactions, Iranians have long referred to their currency as the toman and chopped off a zero. “The situation is deplorable,” said Ghassemi, a 28-year-old real estate agent, calling on the government “to mobilize to improve the situation and better manage the country”.

Last Nowruz, Iran’s supreme leader Ali Khamenei acknowledged that Iranians felt “bitterness” due to “high prices, particularly of food and basic necessities”.

He then tasked the government with measures to implement “inflation control”. Authorities in Iran

have blamed Western economic sanctions for the surge in prices. The sanctions were reimposed by the United States in 2018 after Washington unilaterally withdrew from a 2015 agreement that eased sanctions in return for curbs on Tehran’s nuclear program.

Since then, the Islamic republic has suffered from the continued devaluations of its currency and a surge in prices. Despite the headwinds, Iran recorded stronger growth than expected in 2023.

The International Monetary Fund estimated that growth reached 5.4 percent last year and increased its 2024 forecast from 2.5 percent to 3.7 percent. Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi recently denounced “the enemy’s strategy” which he said aimed “to create despair within society”.

He was speaking two weeks after the March 1 legislative elections, which had a turnout of just 41 percent, the lowest since the 1979 Islamic Revolution.

“Dissatisfaction” is high with the “economic, employment, poverty or inequality” situation,

Hassan Khomeini, the grandson of the late Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini who founded the Islamic republic, told reformist newspaper Etemad on Saturday. Many experts in Iran have attributed the low voter turnout to popular dissatisfaction, in particular over economic issues.

For the second year in a row, Nowruz festivities coincide with the Muslim fasting month of Ramadan, which began on March 11 in Iran. Eating, drinking and smoking in public are banned in the Islamic republic during Ramadan, when the faithful fast from dawn to dusk.

In recent years, however, the authorities have somewhat relaxed the strict rules during Ramadan.

Certain cafes and restaurants, in specified areas, such as in the vicinity of hospitals, are allowed to open during the day. The restaurants however must observe strict conditions, including covering their windows so that the interior is not visible to fasting passers-by. — AFP

Australian taxi drivers win \$178m payout from Uber

SYDNEY: Australian taxi drivers impacted by the rise of ridesharing giant Uber have won US\$178 million in compensation, their lawyers said Monday after settling a grueling legal battle. More than 8,000 taxi drivers and hire car owners banded together to launch legal action in 2019, arguing they lost substantial income when Uber entered Australia in 2012.

Lead lawyer Michael Donnelly said the A\$271.8 million (US\$178.3 million) settlement was the “fifth highest class action settlement in Australian legal history”. “Uber fought tooth and nail at every point along the way, every day, for the five years this has been on foot — trying at every turn to deny our group members any form of remedy or compensation for their losses,” said Donnelly, from legal firm Maurice Blackburn.

“But on the courtroom steps and after years of refusing to do the right thing by those we say they harmed, Uber has blinked, and thousands of everyday Australians joined together to stare down a global giant.” Lawyers alleged that Uber engaged in “a variety of shocking conduct” when it launched in the country, including using “unlicensed cars with unaccredited drivers”.

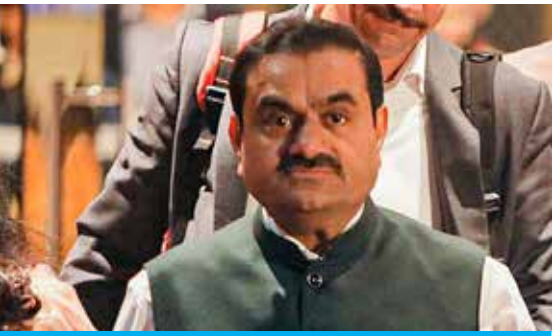
Taxi driver Nick Andrianakis told reporters he was forced to close his taxi business of 40 years when Uber launched. “I lost my passion for work... and I lost my income that provided food on the table for my family,” he said.

Uber said it was “inappropriate” to comment on the size of the settlement until it was signed off in court. “When Uber started more than a decade ago, ridesharing regulations did not exist anywhere in the world, let alone Australia. — AFP

India’s Adani Group shares plunge on news of US probe

MUMBAI: Shares of Indian conglomerate Adani Group’s all 10 companies plunged on Monday amid reports that the US government was looking into the conduct of the group. The stock of the Adani Enterprises Ltd fell nearly 4 per cent in early trade, while Adani Ports and Special Economic Zone Ltd shed nearly 3 per cent, according to reports.

The Adani Wilmar Ltd and Adani Power Ltd were also down over a per cent, while Adani Total Gas Ltd,



Gautam Adani

Adani Energy Solutions Ltd, Adani Green Energy Ltd, and Adani Energy Solutions Ltd were trading 2-3 per cent lower on Monday.

According to Bloomberg, investigators are

Polish farmers launch blockade on Germany border

WARSAW: Polish farmers blocked two major border crossings with Germany on Monday in a protest against farm imports from outside the European Union and the bloc’s environmental red tape. Farmers have been blocking checkpoints with Ukraine, complaining that imports from the neighboring war-torn country undercut their profits, and now expanded the protest to the country’s western border.

The two blockades at the Swiecko and Gubiniek crossings “will continue until Wednesday evening”, a spokesman for the local police, Marcin Maludy, told AFP.

The farmers have parked their tractors on the A2 highway, blocking traffic in both directions.

Polish farmers last month briefly blocked the border with Germany in Slubice, with the passage currently open but congested as drivers divert from the clogged routes.

The EU has come forward with propositions to revamp the bloc’s subsidy program, known as the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), in a bid to assuage the farmers across the continent.

The proposed changes to the CAP still need to be negotiated between EU member states and the European Parliament. One would exempt small farms under 10 hectares (25 acres) from checks and penalties tied to CAP conditions.

Another would free farmers of the obligation to keep part of their land fallow, though they would still be incentivized to do so. Poland’s agriculture minister announced new talks with the disgruntled farmers for Tuesday. — AFP

digging into if Adani Group, or people linked to the conglomerate including Gautam Adani, were involved in paying officials in India for favorable treatment on an energy project. The US attorney’s office for the Eastern district of New York and the Justice department’s fraud unit in Washington are handling the investigation and are also looking at Indian renewable energy company Azure Power Global, the report added. In its clarification, Adani Group told Bloomberg that they are not aware of any investigation against its chairman.

Adani Group’s stocks and bonds saw a massive selloff in January 2023 after US-based short-seller Hindenburg Research issued a damning report that alleged improper governance practices, stock manipulation and the use of tax havens by the group. The Indian company has denied these allegations. — Agencies



MADRID: Farmers hold banners reading “We are not hooligans, we are farmers”, “The agriculture sector is dying” during a protest organized by “Union de Uniones” union, in central Madrid, on March 17. — AFP

Business

Gulf Bank distributes iftar meals as part of Ramadan initiatives

In collaboration with Kuwait Food Bank and with participation of Sawa'ed Al-Khaleej team



Gulf Bank and Kuwait Food Bank officials with Sawa'ed Al-Khaleej volunteers pose for a group photo.

KUWAIT: As part of its Ramadan events and initiatives this year, Gulf Bank distributed Iftar meals to underprivileged people across Kuwait. This effort is part of its strategic partnership with the Kuwait Food Bank and marks the seventh consecutive year of collaboration, with active involvement from Gulf Bank's Sawa'ed Al-Khaleej volunteer team.

Najla Al-Eisa, Deputy General Manager of Consumer Banking at Gulf Bank's Marketing

Department, stated on this occasion, "At Gulf Bank, we are dedicated to actively participating in community events, spreading joy and happiness among those in need, particularly during the holy month of Ramadan. This commitment reflects our distinctive role in advocating for societal sustainability, both internally and externally."

She added, "For more than 60 years, Gulf Bank has been an important part of Kuwait's history, always using its resources to help the underprivileged in society. We know these efforts make a positive difference for many families during this time of the year."

Al-Eisa mentioned that Gulf Bank remains steadfast in its dedication to launching sustainability programs, particularly focusing on social sustainability. These initiatives are thoughtfully chosen to benefit both the bank and the community, aligning with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals and Kuwait Vision 2035. She added, "Gulf Bank, as a financial institution, is dedicated to supporting active Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) like the Kuwait Food Bank, recognizing its prominent social and humanitarian contributions. We firmly believe that the private sector holds a significant responsibility in raising awareness about these vital issues."

Al-Eisa expressed her gratitude and appreciation to the officials of Kuwait Food

Bank for their efforts in providing meals for distribution to the underprivileged. She also expressed the bank's anticipation of continued collaboration with them in various charitable initiatives aimed at promoting sustainability within the community. 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.



Najla Al-Eisa distributes iftar meals.

China's sound economic momentum a strong boost to global growth in 2024

By Zhang Jianwei
Chinese Ambassador to Kuwait

In early March 2024, China concluded this year's session of the National People's Congress (NPC) and session of the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, known as the "two sessions" that are of great importance in China's political calendar. The report on the work of the government delivered on the session proposes an array of new objectives and measures regarding China's economic growth, demonstrating the determination and confidence of China in focusing its efforts on advancing high-quality development.

In 2023, China's high-quality economic development has made continuous progress. Overall economic recovery and growth were boosted. Significant progress was made in building a modernized industrial system. New breakthroughs were made in scientific and technological innovation. And reform and opening up were deepened. Specifically, China's gross domestic product (GDP) surpassed 126 trillion yuan, about \$17.89 trillion, an increase of 5.2 percent, ranking China among the fastest-growing major economies in the world. The report of the International Financial Forum demonstrates that China contributes 32 percent to the global economic growth in 2023. China's trade in goods ranked the top in the world for seven years in a row, and its trade in services operated in a more balanced manner and maintained the momentum of rapid recovery. The influx of foreign investment remained at a historical high level. The number of newly established foreign-invested enterprises reached 53,766, representing a growth of 39.7 percent year-on-year. The actual foreign direct investment hit \$163.25 billion. The return on foreign direct investment in China had been around 9.1 percent, while in Europe and the US, it was around 3 percent. In addition, China's outbound investment and cooperation rose steadily last year. Its overall outbound direct investment increased 5.7 percent to 1.04 trillion yuan, about \$147.9 billion. The non-financial outbound direct investment grew 16.7 percent.

In 2024, China's economic development will be committed to the principles of pursuing progress while ensuring stability. After considering evolving



Zhang Jianwei

dynamics at home and abroad and other relevant factors as well as what is needed and what is possible, the Chinese government has set this year's growth rate at around 5 percent. China will strive to modernize the industrial system and develop new quality productive forces at a faster pace. China will continue to deepen reform and boost internal momentum for development. China will promote integrated development between urban and rural areas, advance coordinated development between regions, and optimize regional economic layout. China will enhance ecological conservation and promote green and low-carbon development. With distinctive institutional strengths and the advantages of vast market demand, a complete industrial system to ensure supply, and a huge and high-caliber workforce, China has confidence and ability to overcome difficulties and challenges and promote sound and steady economic growth.

China will collaborate with global partners on pursuing mutual benefits. In 2023, China's trade with countries participating in the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) accounted for 46.6 percent of its total foreign trade, and non-financial outbound direct investment in these countries rose 28.4 percent year on year. In 2024, China will continue to expand high-standard opening up. To this end, China will intensify efforts to attract foreign investment, strive for solid progress in high-quality Belt and Road cooperation, and deepen multilateral, bilateral and regional economic cooperation. We are convinced that a more open China will bring more opportunities for the steady and sustained growth of the world economy to truly achieve mutual benefits.

There will be wider room for China-Kuwait economic and trade cooperation. In 2023, China's trade with Kuwait reached \$22.39 billion, making China the largest trading partner of Kuwait for nine consecutive years. China has remained the second largest source of foreign direct investment in Kuwait, with a notable growth in engineering contracts signed with Kuwaiti partners. In September last year, the two heads of state had a successful meeting and witnessed the signing of seven cooperation documents, which has instilled strong impetus in the future development of bilateral relations. Relevant Chinese authorities have set up their specialized working groups, and Kuwaiti Cabinet has established a dedicated committee, they are collaborating with each other on advancing and implementing the outcomes of the two leaders' meeting.

Both sides have had several rounds of communication, and multiple working groups have exchanged visits. This year marks the 10th anniversary of China and Kuwait signing Belt and Road cooperation documents. The greater synergy between China's BRI and the Kuwait Vision 2035 will further unleash the tremendous potential of China-Kuwait cooperation. China will work together with Kuwait to earnestly implement the important common understandings reached by the two heads of state and accelerate the progress of bilateral cooperation on certain projects, so as to support Kuwait's diversified economic development and make greater contributions to realizing the global recovery as well as a universally beneficial and inclusive economic globalization.

S&P affirms Saudi rating at 'A/A-1'; outlook stable

RIYADH: Standard and Poor's Global Ratings affirmed its "A/A-1" long- and short-term foreign and local currency unsolicited sovereign credit ratings on Saudi Arabia with a stable outlook. "The stable outlook reflects that we expect the government's wide-ranging reforms will continue to underpin the development of the non-oil sector and support non-oil growth and fiscal receipts," said S&P.

"This is balanced against the cyclical nature of a still hydrocarbon-focused economy, and fiscal pressures tied to the country's transformation plan and ex-

panding population." "Saudi Arabia has embarked on a significant, rapid economic and social transformation program under the Vision 2030. In the lead-up to 2030, we expect to see an acceleration of investment projects that seek to establish new industries, such as tourism, and diversify the economy away from its primary reliance on the upstream hydrocarbon sector," it added.

"Over the long term, we anticipate that Vision 2030 projects will bear fruit by creating a more diversified economy and revenue base, jobs for a young population, and broader workforce participation," it stressed. Moreover, it noted: "Large hydrocarbon reserves and low cost of production provide Saudi Arabia some resilience to a global energy transition to low-carbon alternatives, especially in a future scenario where fossil fuel demand will largely be met by a smaller number of the most efficient producers." — Agencies

Methane: A powerful gas heating the planet

PARIS: Climate talks often revolve around reducing the most dangerous greenhouse gas CO2. But other powerful heat-trapping emissions — of methane — will be in the crosshairs at a global forum in Geneva this week. Methane — which is potent but relatively short-lived — is a key target for countries wanting to slash emissions quickly and slow climate change.

That is particularly because large amounts of methane are simply leaking into the atmosphere from oil and gas projects. Methane emissions from the fossil fuel industry have risen for three consecutive years, according to the International Energy Agency (IEA), hitting near record highs in 2023.

Atmospheric methane (CH4) occurs abundantly in nature and is the primary component of gas fuel. It is the second largest contributor to climate change, accounting for roughly 30 percent of global warming since pre-industrial levels, according to UN climate experts. Methane remains in the atmosphere for only about 10 years, but has a much more powerful warming impact than CO2.

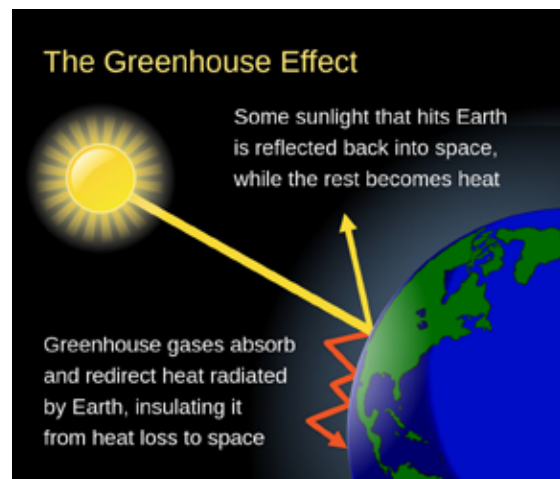
Its warming effect is 28 times greater than CO2 over a 100-year timescale (and 80 times over 20 years).

Exactly how much methane is released in the atmosphere remains subject to "significant uncertainty", according to the IEA, despite progress in the monitoring of emissions through the use of satellites.

And scientists are puzzling over a steady increase of methane in the atmosphere, with concentrations currently over two-and-a-half times greater than pre-industrial levels.

The majority of methane emissions — around 60 percent — are linked to human activity, the IEA says, and the rest from natural sources, mainly wetlands. Agriculture is the biggest culprit, responsible for roughly a quarter of that pollution. Most is from livestock — cows and sheep release methane during digestion and in their manure — and rice cultivation, where flooded fields create ideal conditions for methane-emitting bacteria.

The energy sector — coal, oil and gas — is the second largest source of human caused methane, which leaks from gas pipelines and other energy infrastructure, or is deliberately released during maintenance procedures. A study published in the journal Nature in March found that



oil and gas projects in six major producing regions of the United States were emitting three times as much methane as estimated by the government — losses worth \$1 billion. Discarded household waste also creates large amounts of methane when it decomposes if left to rot in landfills.

The IEA estimates that rapid cuts in methane emissions linked to the fossil fuel sector could prevent up to 0.1 degrees Celsius of warming by mid-century. That might sound modest, but such a reduction would have an impact greater than "immediately taking all cars and trucks in the world off the road", the agency said. IEA Executive Director Fatih Birol called it "one of the best and most affordable" options for reducing global warming.

It could be achieved by repairing leaky infrastructure and eliminating routine flaring and venting during pipeline maintenance. This month, the IEA said the fossil fuel industry could avoid about 40 percent of its methane emissions at no net cost. "Leakage is far too high in many areas where natural gas is extracted but some countries, notably Norway, have shown that it is possible to extract and supply natural gas with minimal levels of leakage," Energy Programme Director William Gillett at the European Academies Science Advisory Council (EASAC) told AFP.

In the case of agriculture, it is possible to modify animal diets by, for example, adding a compound to improve their health and that of the planet. For rice fields, changes to water management are the "most promising" way to reduce emissions, according to a report by the UN's Food and Agriculture Organization. — AFP

Business

TikTok and its ‘secret sauce’ caught in US-China tussle

App could be banned in US if it does not cut all ties with ByteDance

SEOUL: As a US campaign to sever TikTok from its Chinese parent heads to the Senate, analysts say Beijing's response to a forced sale of the app—and its ‘secret sauce’ algorithm—will be clear: Hands off.

Under new legislation that passed the House of Representatives last week, TikTok could be banned in the United States if it does not cut all ties with Chinese tech giant ByteDance. But in the battle over TikTok's future in the United States, what strikes many as a contradiction has emerged: while the company tries to convince Congress of its independence from Beijing, China has come out swinging in its defense. Beijing does not want a precedent to be set where a Chinese company is strong-armed into selling one of its most valuable assets, including an algorithm that is the envy of competitors, analysts say.

“This kind of threat is like daylight robbery,” Mei Xinyu, a Beijing-based economist, told AFP. “All things considered, the Chinese government's actions so far have been very mild.”

“What the US government is proposing is way over the line.” US lawmakers and security agencies say TikTok presents a threat because China can access and use the vast troves of data the app collects for influence and espionage. TikTok has denied the allegations, saying it has spent around \$1.5 billion on “Project Texas”, under which US user data would be stored in the United States.

However, many lawmakers and bodies including the FBI remain unconvinced. Some critics have said the data itself is only part of the issue, and that the algorithm that produces personalized recommendations for TikTok users must also be disconnected from ByteDance.

That ByteDance algorithm has helped drive TikTok's stratospheric success since the app was launched for the international market in 2017. It crunches huge amounts of user data, such as their interactions on the app and their location, to provide more content tailored for them.

Its precise details are a closely guarded secret, but it helped propel TikTok to one billion users in

just four years. Facebook, by comparison, took more than eight years to reach that milestone.

Other social media platforms also deploy tailored recommendations based on algorithms that analyse user data, but analysts say TikTok's has been so successful that it is considered by some to be the company's most precious asset. The algorithm is “valuable because TikTok is sticky. People spend more time on TikTok than they do on other social media”, James Andrew Lewis, a technology expert at the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), told AFP.

“This is the secret sauce that makes TikTok a success.” The algorithm has been at the centre of discussions about any potential sale of TikTok since the administration of then US president Donald Trump sought to ban TikTok in 2020. That year, the Chinese government designated algorithms that provide recommendations based on user data analysis as a protected technology, meaning their export would require Beijing's approval. While no specific app or firm was cited, the economist Mei said the move was “to a very large extent” because of US pressure against TikTok.

TikTok has said that under Project Texas, its recommendation algorithm for US users is stored along with their data on Oracle servers in the United States.

However, The Wall Street Journal reported in January that ByteDance employees in China updated the TikTok algorithm so frequently that Project Texas workers could not track all changes.

TikTok did not respond to AFP's questions about the Wall Street Journal report or about where its algorithm is updated. CEO Shou Zi Chew has said previously that TikTok will not be “manipulated by any government” and that it has never been asked by the Chinese government for US user data.

In Beijing, however, officials have not minced words in their opposition to the TikTok bill, saying China will take all necessary measures to protect its interests. “You've got the desire to protect the option for a relationship with the intelligence services,



SHANGHAI: A man walks past a Tiktok booth during the Appliance & Electronics World Expo (AWE) in Shanghai. — AFP

and you've got a little bit of nationalist pride because it's so successful,” said Lewis at CSIS.

“Some of it is just (being) annoyed with the Americans for trying to force them to sell. All of that puts Beijing right behind ByteDance.” Beijing wants to avoid a forced sale to protect Chinese firms, Zhang Yi, founder of the Guangzhou-based tech research firm iiMedia, told AFP.

“Once the precedent is set, there may be count-

less other Chinese companies that will face a similar fate in the future.” Hu Xijin, a former editor of the nationalist Chinese newspaper Global Times, urged ByteDance not to give in to US pressure.

“The essence of this matter is commercial plunder,” he wrote this month. “As long as ByteDance remains firm, willing to shut down TikTok rather than give up ownership, it will create reverse pressure on the passage of the bill.” — AFP

Loans provided by Saudi finance firms record 73% jump

RIYADH: Saudi Arabia's efforts to boost its economy and encourage local investments have led to a significant rise in loans provided by finance companies, reaching the highest levels in almost four years. These loans increased by 73 percent to SAR 84.9 billion (\$22.6 billion) by the end of 2023, compared to SAR 49.3 billion (\$13.1 billion) in 2019, according to reports.

Real estate financing took the largest share at 28 percent, while personal financing saw a massive increase of over 666 percent. Finance companies, different from banks, specialize in providing loans and credit services to individuals and businesses. They aim to finance purchase and sale transactions for goods and services, often charging higher interest rates than banks to make profits.

These companies play a crucial role in providing financial solutions to individuals and businesses facing money problems. By the end of 2023, Saudi Arabia had 59 licensed finance companies, with total assets of SAR65.5 billion, up by 68 percent from 2019. According to data from the Central Bank of Saudi Arabia (SAMA), the capital of these companies increased by 25 percent to 15.4 billion Saudi riyals during the same period. The lending surge was driven by Saudi Arabia's strong economic growth, leading to increased demand for financing from individuals and businesses. Loans from finance companies have positively impacted the economy by increasing investment, creating jobs, and boosting consumption. The finance sector enjoys high liquidity, with non-performing loans accounting for only 5 percent of total loans by the end of 2023 and this trend is expected to continue due to robust economic growth.

Saudi Arabia's finance sector continued to grow with net income reaching SAR 1.6 billion by the end of 2023, up by 20 percent from 2019. Additionally, competition has increased as finance companies expand their services and new players enter the market. Residential financing hit SAR23.1 billion by 2023-end, making up 28 percent of total financing. However, real estate finance companies may move away from the sector toward corporate and other activities. At the start of this year, the National Housing Company, part of the ministry of municipal and rural affairs and housing, announced a reduced financing margin for residential projects in suburbs and urban areas.

This move, in collaboration with four local banks, aimed to benefit the first 10,000 sales contracts without setting salary limits. — Agencies

China retail sales show shaky economic recovery

BEIJING: The performance of China's economy in the first two months of 2024 was mixed, official figures showed Monday, with sluggish household consumption alongside increased industrial production reflecting an uneven recovery.

The highly anticipated comeback after Beijing lifted stringent COVID control measures in late 2022 was less robust than expected, and the world's second-largest economy now grapples with turbulence in the property sector, high youth unemployment and flagging consumption.

In January and February combined, retail sales—the main indicator of household consumption—increased 5.5 percent year on year, China's National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) said. But the figure was down from December, which saw an increase of 7.4 percent, and was slightly below the result anticipated by a Bloomberg survey of analysts, who had pre-



LIANYUNGANG, China: Employees work on a doll production line at a toy factory in Lianyungang, in eastern China's Jiangsu province. — AFP

dicted a rise of 5.6 percent.

The recording period included China's major Lunar New Year holiday—this year falling in early February—which generally drives a consumption spike in the preceding weeks. Industrial production, meanwhile, was up 7.0 percent year on year in January and February, NBS data showed, beating the 6.8 percent rise in December and the 5.2 percent pre-

dicted by Bloomberg. China typically releases combined data for the first two months of the year, due to the Lunar New Year holiday. Fixed asset investment was up 4.2 percent year on year during the period.

The figure is a key indicator for spending on real estate, infrastructure, equipment and machinery—sectors in which Beijing has sought to stimulate activity of late.

Investments specifically in property development, however, were down nine percent year on year, the NBS said. The property sector—long a vital growth engine for China's economy—is now under unprecedented pressure, with several major developers on the verge of bankruptcy and falling prices dissuading investment in real estate.

The country's urban unemployment rate rose slightly to 5.3 percent in January and February from 5.2 percent in December. The figure was 14.6 percent for the 16-24 age bracket, according to a new criterion that excludes students, introduced after a record high was notched last year. Beijing has set a target of five percent annual growth in gross domestic product (GDP) this year—among the slowest official goals in decades. China's economy emerged from deflation in February for the first time in six months. — AFP

Cubans stage rare protests demanding electricity, food

HAVANA: Cubans staged rare street protests Sunday over food and electricity shortages as the country suffered long outages that left parts of the island without power for up to 14 hours a day. “People were shouting ‘food and electricity’,” a 65-year-old resident, who asked not to be named, told AFP by phone from the island's second-largest city of Santiago de Cuba, 800 kilometers (500 miles) east of the capital Havana.

Electricity was restored to the city later in the day and “two truckloads of rice” were delivered, the witness said. Social media platforms were filled with images of protests in Santiago de Cuba, a city of 510,000 people located in the east of the island. There were also images of protests in another large city, Bayamo. Cuba has been experiencing a wave of blackouts since the start of March due to maintenance works on the Antonio Guiteras thermoelectric plant, the island's largest.

But this weekend, the situation was worsened by a shortage of fuel needed to generate the electricity.

The outages left some areas such as Santiago de Cuba without power for up to 14 hours a day. “Several people have expressed their dissatisfaction with the electricity situation and food distribution,” Cuban President Miguel Diaz-Canel said on X, warning that “enemies of the Revolution” aimed to exploit the situation.

There are “terrorists based in the United States, whom we have denounced on several occasions, who are encouraging actions that go against the internal order of the country,” he added. The US embassy in Havana said on X that it was aware of reports of “peaceful protests” in Santiago, Bayamo and other parts of Cuba. It urged the Cuban government to “respect the human rights of the protestors and address the legitimate needs of the Cuban people.”

Cuban Foreign Minister Bruno Rodriguez responded on X, urging Washington not to “interfere in the country's internal affairs”. Cuba's power comes from eight old thermoelectric power plants, generators and eight floating electricity plants leased from Turkey, which were also affected by the fuel shortage.



HAVANA: A man is arrested during a demonstration against the government of Cuban President Miguel Diaz-Canel in Havana. — AFP

The cash-strapped island nation imposed a more-than 400 percent fuel price hike earlier this month as part of an economic recovery plan. The nation of 11 million is experiencing its worst economic crisis since the collapse of the Soviet bloc in the 1990s due to fallout from the coronavirus pandemic, the recent tightening of US sanctions and structural weaknesses in the economy. According to official estimates, the Cuban economy shrank by two percent in 2023, while inflation reached 30 percent. Independent experts say this is likely an underestimation. There are chronic shortages of fuel and other basics, and the government subsidizes almost all of the goods and services consumed by Cubans.

Large swathes of Cuba including the capital have been hit by power outages, authorities said, as the country grapples with a dire economic crisis. “Almost the whole country has been affected since yesterday at 11pm (03:00 GMT Saturday), including Havana,” Energy Minister Vicente de la O Levy told state television. “There have been areas in the dark since the early hours of the morning,” and this has lasted “practically all day in almost the whole country,” he added.

Cuba has been experiencing a wave of blackouts since the start of March due to maintenance

works on the Antonio Guiteras thermoelectric plant, the island's largest.

Authorities have promised that the plant, located about 100 kilometers from the capital, will be fully operational again on Sunday. This weekend, the situation was worsened by a shortage of fuel needed to generate the electricity. The cash-strapped island nation imposed a more-than 400 percent fuel price hike earlier this month as part of an economic recovery plan.

De la O Levy said that “the situation will improve” somewhat, but that power supplies “will continue to be strained” due to Cuba's financial hardships in importing oil.

The nation of 11 million is experiencing its worst economic crisis since the collapse of the Soviet bloc in the 1990s due to fallout from the coronavirus pandemic, the tightening of US sanctions in recent years and structural weaknesses in the economy. According to official estimates, the Cuban economy shrank by two percent in 2023, while inflation reached 30 percent. Independent experts say this is likely an underestimation. There are chronic shortages of fuel and other basics, and the government subsidizes almost all of the goods and services consumed by Cubans. — AFP

Lifestyle

TUESDAY, MARCH 19, 2024



Rapper Lil Jon

Rapper Lil Jon converts to Islam at King Fahad Mosque in California

Lil Jon, the American rapper and producer, adopted Islam at a mosque located in California. Jon on Friday visited the King Fahad Mosque in Los Angeles and publicly announced his conversion to Islam in front

of a large congregation. A video shared on social media showed the American rapper reciting the shahada in Arabic and then in English, under the guidance of the mosque's imam. Born in Atlanta, Georgia, in 1972,

and known by his real name Jonathan H. Smith, the rapper gained fame for his pioneering role in promoting the hip-hop subgenre in the early 2000s. With over 1 million followers on social media, Lil Jon's recent meditation album

has received significant attention. Following American writer and activist Shaun King, Lil Jon became the second known famous American to embrace Islam in the first week of Ramadan.

ROPES, BRASS, SALT, STONE: REINVENTING JEWELLERY IN KENYA



Kenyan designer Ami Doshi Shah crafts jewellery using a blow torch at her home studio.



Kenyan designer Ami Doshi Shah crafts jewellery pieces from brass metal at her home studio.



Kenyan designer Ami Doshi Shah crafts jewellery from brass metal at her home studio.



Kenyan designer Ami Doshi Shah works on some of her eclectic jewellery pieces.



A staff member arranges a display of Kenyan designer Ami Doshi Shah's hand-crafted jewellery.



Kenyan designer Ami Doshi Shah (right) fits a client with one of her eclectic jewellery pieces at her home studio.



A staff member arranges a display of Kenyan designer Ami Doshi Shah's hand-crafted jewellery.



A staff member arranges a display of Kenyan designer Ami Doshi Shah's hand-crafted jewellery at a showcase of designs by several local artists, called Jamaa (swahili for community) fashion pop-up, in Nairobi.—AFP photos

as leather, mango wood and zoisite, a cast-off from ruby mining in the East African country. The result is jewellery that is deeply personal and sometimes political, with prices ranging from \$75 to \$375. "Not everyone's going to love my work, not everyone's going to understand it and that's ok," she said, emphasising that she approaches jewellery-making as "a labour of love", not a business venture. Her acclaimed 2019 collection explored salt's dual nature as a life-giving mineral that is also destructive and corrosive. It also reflected on Britain's colonial past, with punitive salt taxes prompting Mahatma Gandhi to stage a historic protest march in 1930 in the Indian state of Gujarat, where Shah's grandparents emigrated from. "That was the first time I felt like jewellery could be

political, like it could be a thread connecting so many things," she said.

'Tell our own story'

Her latest collection Memento Mori was born out of grief, reflecting on the loss of her father in 2021 and their final days together in the Indian Ocean town of Watamu along Kenya's coast. Even though her work is sold and



A photograph shows the digital and the printed versions of the 2024 Michelin Guides.

Michelin to announce 62 newly starred French restaurants

The Michelin Guide unveils its annual list of the best French restaurants on Monday, with its boss praising the "cultural dynamism" of a new generation of chefs. After a long period of resting on the laurels of its gastronomic reputation, France has seen a flourishing of new establishments in the last decade or so, absorbing international ideas and with a greater focus on sustainability. "It's no longer just about heritage," Gwendal Poullennec, head of the Michelin Guide, told AFP ahead of the ceremony to launch its new edition.

"French gastronomy is no longer stuck in the past," he said, with the 2024 crop marking "the emergence of a whole generation that we could feel coming up". A total of 62 restaurants will receive a star -- most for the first time and including 23 that have been open for less than a year.

The details will be made public at 5pm (1600 GMT), including the names of restaurants that have achieved the pinnacle of three stars.

Many put a focus on sustainable, locally-sourced cuisine. "There is a very clear emphasis on the 'terroirs' -- the local agricultural fabric," said Poullennec.



International Director of the Michelin Guides Gwendal Poullennec poses at the Vaudeville brasserie in Paris.—AFP photos

Michelin announced a few demotions two weeks ago -- done in advance to avoid any bitter taste at the annual ceremony, which this year is being held in the Loire Valley city of Tours. Michelin has turned the guide's launch into a touring affair around France since the pandemic, having hosted the last two in Strasbourg and Cognac.

That reflects the spread of France's best restaurants beyond Paris, with regional eateries accounting for most of the new stars in recent years. Some 40 small municipalities and villages will find themselves with a Michelin-starred restaurant in the new edition.

Tours, known for castles and wine, has been less associated with great cuisine, but that is changing, said Poullennec. "It's a region that's developing and it's time to highlight it," he said, highlighting the tributaries of the Loire River that have become a popular source of freshwater fish. Among top chefs, the Michelin Guide is as feared and criticised as it is respected.

Its anonymous reviewers can make or break reputations, with very tangible impacts on the fragile bottom lines of restaurants. A total of 28 lost a star this year, including one three-star establishment.

Tyre-manufacturing brothers Andre and Edouard Michelin launched their first guide in 1900 to encourage motorists to discover restaurants around France. —AFP



Kenyan designer Ami Doshi Shah (right) chats with a client about pieces from her previous collection displayed on portraits of models hanging at her home studio.



An Austin car coffin belonging to member Kevin Heyward.



Members of the coffin club work on coffins.



This photo shows a jigsaw-themed coffin.

New Zealand’s ‘coffin clubs’ bury taboos about death



A member of the coffin club painting a coffin.



A member of the coffin club showing a small bear that goes into a coffin for a baby.



This photo shows an Austin car coffin belonging to member Kevin Heyward during the work day at the Coffin Club's workshop in Hastings. — AFP photos

It's a task of grave importance, but there's nothing to stop New Zealanders having a laugh as they work on DIY caskets in the country's "coffin clubs". Elderly club members meet for cups of tea, a bit of banter, and to literally put the final nail in one-of-a-kind coffins that will carry them to their eternal resting place. Kevin Heyward plans to be sent off in a box resembling a vintage Austin Healey.



Coffin Club member Kevin Heyward poses next to his Austin car coffin that he made at the Coffin Club's workshop.



A member of the coffin club working on coffins.



This photo shows unfinished coffins during a work day at the Coffin Club's workshop in Hastings.



A Coffin Club member works on a coffin.



A coffin with fake arms coming out of it.



Coffin Club members working on coffins.



A member of the coffin club shows a coffin for a baby.

Registration plate: DEAD1A.
"My daughter came up with the idea," the 79-year-old car enthusiast said with a grin, brushing sawdust off his overalls. It's fully equipped with a mock steering wheel, windscreen, rubber wheels with metal hub caps, wooden mudguards, a bonnet, painted-on side doors, and wing mirrors.
"The trickiest part was getting the mudguards lined up because of their curve," Heyward told AFP at the workshop of the Hawke's Bay Coffin Club in Hastings.
The hefty casket, which can be carried with six wooden handles, even has working headlights. The batteries, naturally, are currently dead. "It weighs quite a bit and I'm a big man," he said.
"I have said to my six grandsons they had better start weight-training, because they will be carrying it one day," Heyward chuckled.
"There is a bit of humour in this car."
The club is one of four that have sprung up around New Zealand, with the first opening in 2010 in Rotorua on the country's North Island.

Some clubs boast as many as 800 people on their books, though one admitted "not all of them are above ground".
At the Hastings club, Jim Thorne, a spritely 75-year-old motorcycle fan, used his skills as a cabinet maker to build a casket painted with a motorbike track. It's stored in his garage, alongside a collection of motorbikes. Thorne said most friends "are a little aghast and say 'why are you doing that?'" when they hear about his coffin-making hobby.
"Apart from the fact that I like the look of mine, it's my input into my final days."
'Dying to get a coffin?'
"There is a certain mindset in some people that this is almost a taboo subject that they find very, very difficult to talk about," Thorne said.
"They tend to overcome it. At the end of the day, it's a reality of life, unfortunately." He breaks the ice with newcomers by asking: "Are you dying to get a coffin?"
But the club's atmosphere is far from morbid. Banter flows during the morning tea break as members chat over scones and hot drinks.
"We're a bit unique, but we are happy. There are al-

ways lots of jokes," said club secretary Helen Bromley.
Most members are seniors. The club provides a space to open up about death and dying during weekly meetups.
"I think everybody here has accepted that they are going to die, whether they're decorating their coffin or helping others with theirs," Bromley said.
"We're a club that tries to empower people to plan their coffin, to plan what happens if they get sick." She said some members want to spare relatives the burden of meeting rising funeral costs. The club will also build and decorate coffins for grieving families.
On average, a funeral in New Zealand costs around NZ\$10,000 (US\$6,200), according to the national funeral directors association.
Coffin prices range from NZ\$1,200 to NZ\$4,000.
'Remember Me'
For a NZ\$30 membership, the Hastings club gives each new member a pressed-wood coffin in one of three designs, ready to be decorated.
The coffins come in four sizes, each costing around NZ\$700, extra for paint and a cloth lining.
During a tea break, Bromley announced that a member suffering from cancer was in intensive care

after a fall. Her brother had asked the club to finish her coffin as a priority. The club also builds ash boxes, which they sell to the local crematorium, and small coffins for infants, which they give away.
"The midwives and nurses at Hastings hospital have asked us to not ever, ever stop making the little coffins for them," Bromley said.
"We donate to whoever. If there's a miscarriage at home and they want a coffin, we donate."
Members help knit blankets, teddy bears, pillows and hearts to go in the infants' coffins.
Committee member Christina Ellison, 75, lost an infant daughter in 1968 and said she was comforted to know the club helps other families grieving the loss of a child. "The little baby coffins are so beautiful and done with so much care. The knitting that the ladies do is incredible," she said. Ellison is moving away soon and plans to take her coffin, which has been painted a blue-grey colour called "Remember Me". — AFP

UK SINGER STEVE HARLEY DIES AT 73: FAMILY

Steve Harley - the frontman of British glam rock band Cockney Rebel - has died at the age of 73, his family announced on Sunday.
He was best known for the song "Make Me Smile (Come Up and See Me)", which topped the UK charts in 1975.
Harley wrote the hit, which went on to sell more than 1.5 million copies worldwide and has been covered over 120 times.
His daughter said in a statement that Harley had "passed away peacefully at home."
"We know he will be desperately missed by people all over the world," she added.
The BBC reported that Harley had still been touring until recently, but cancelled dates to undergo



UK singer Steve Harley

treatment for cancer.
He was born in London in 1951.
Cockney Rebel registered four UK top ten singles and two top ten albums. — AFP

Acclaimed primatologist Frans de Waal dies at 75: Emory

Primatologist Frans de Waal, whose study of chimpanzees and apes helped reveal the reconciliatory and empathic nature of primates - including humans - has died at age 75, said the university where he worked for decades.
De Waal, who won multiple awards over his long career, wrote several popular books and in 2007 made Time magazine's list of the world's 100 most influential people, succumbed to stomach cancer on March 14, Emory University said Saturday in a statement and tribute on its website.
The Netherlands-born scientist spent decades studying chimpanzees and apes, and his biological research eventually helped debunk the theory that primates including humans were naturally "nasty" and aggressive competitors.
"De Waal shattered long-held ideas about what it means to be an animal and a human," Emory, based

in Atlanta in the US state of Georgia, said in its statement.
"He demonstrated the roots of human nature in our closest living relatives through his studies of conflict resolution, reconciliation, cooperation, empathy, fairness, morality, social learning and culture in chimpanzees, bonobos and capuchin monkeys."
Lynne Nygaard, chair of Emory's Department of Psychology, remembered de Waal as "an extraordinarily deep thinker" who could offer "insights that cut across disciplines."
"It's difficult to sum up the enormity of Frans de Waal's impact, both globally and here at Emory," she said in the statement. — AFP



Lifestyle

Revived TV drama breaks Iraq's taboos

After a 27-year hiatus, an Iraqi TV programme banned by Saddam Hussein for its gritty depiction of life under sanctions has returned to portray drug lords thriving in the war-scarred country. Television viewership in the Middle East traditionally peaks during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan, when the faithful tune in to their favourite shows after breaking their daily fast at sunset.

This Ramadan, a revived "Wahiba's World" is one of several Iraqi shows focusing on social issues such as drug addiction,

entelism, a weak economy, poor public services and high unemployment.

'Drug-fuelled wealth'

Decades of instability have created "a class of people who have profited from the chaos," Hikmat said, pointing in particular at newly wealthy drug dealers. "Young people fall victim to this dark path." Iraq, traditionally mainly a transit country for drugs, has faced an explosion in narcotics use in recent years, mainly of the amphetamine-like



An Iraqi director supervises the filming of scenes from an Iraqi series in Al-Waziriya in Baghdad.—AFP photos



Iraqi actors film scenes of a television series to be broadcast during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan in the Sheikh Omar neighborhood in Baghdad.



Iraqi actors film scenes of a television series to be broadcast during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan.



tion, crime, divorce and unemployment. It delves into "issues troubling our society as a consequence of war and chaos," the programme's director Samer Hikmat told AFP. Iraqis have suffered through decades of turmoil since the Iran-Iraq War in the 1980s and former dictator Saddam's invasion of Kuwait in 1990, which triggered harsh economic sanctions.

They were followed by a US-led invasion in 2003, civil war, sectarian violence and the jihadist proto-state of the Islamic State group, which was only defeated in late 2017.

The oil-rich country of 43 million, still recovering from those conflicts, is now plagued by endemic corruption and cli-

stimulant captagon and crystal meth.

The first series of "Wahiba's World", released in 1997, told the story of Wahiba, a nurse who makes every effort to help her neighbours amid the crippling international sanctions that plunged many Iraqis into poverty and crime. Seventeen minutes into the broadcast of the first episode, authorities banned the programme, fearing it could incite people against the regime.

A year later, the show received a regional prize and authorities allowed it to be aired, but only at midday, considered a dead time slot. This year, the show began airing on the first day of Ramadan during prime time on the Iraqi local private chan-

nel UTV. Several actors had died during the long hiatus, but many others reprised their roles. In the revival, Wahiba plays a supporting part to her granddaughter and namesake, a psychiatrist, as the main character.

In a busy industrial area in Baghdad's centre, in the same garage where scenes from the first series were shot, director Hikmat filmed a segment in which drug lord Alaa threatens to behead a member of his gang. Actor Zuhair Rashid, who portrays the drug dealer Alaa, said the programme showed the grim reality of "drug-fuelled wealth, its consequences and tragic endings".

'Sensitive issues'

Despite these efforts, Iraq's worn-out entertainment industry is still far from

gaining recognition in a region where Syrian and Egyptian programmes have long held the top spot. After the rise of IS, Iraq's drama shows, which only air on local television, have focused chiefly on telling stories of the jihadists' brutal rule and the war to defeat them. But critic Mehdi Abbas said there is a noticeable trend this Ramadan, with "the majority of this year's shows tackling issues that are a threat to society".

Another new show, titled "Nay" -- flute in Arabic -- addresses unemployment, especially among art students, and the growing gap between rich and poor. Actress Suzanne Salehi, who stars in it, said the programme recounts the "yearning for an opportunity" of youth.

"Separation", another Iraqi show, is based on real divorce stories that writer Hassaallah Yehya followed in court, reflecting increasing break-up rates in the country. It also tackles child marriage, which is not uncommon in Iraq, especially in rural areas. The legal age of marriage in Iraq is 18, but it can be lowered to 15 in cases of parental or judicial consent.

"People usually avoid sensitive issues," Yehya said, adding that "we're trying to break taboos."—AFP

Controversial 'Civil War' movie prompts debate over US schism

A major film that imagines a second civil war in the near-future United States has highlighted fears about the divided state of the nation ahead of November's presidential election. "Civil War," which premiered at the SXSW Festival this week and hits theaters April 12, pictures a three-term US president in Washington DC battling secessionist forces from California and Texas.

The movie stars Kirsten Dunst as a journalist traveling through a broken, dystopian nation. The FBI has been disbanded, and military drone strikes launched on US citizens. In early reviews, The Atlantic noted an "uncomfortable resonance in these politically polarized times." Rolling Stone said "you might accidentally mistake" the film's futuristic premise for the present. So, just how plausible is the film's scenario?

The presumptive Republican presidential nominee, Donald Trump, was recently criticized for seemingly joking he would be a "dictator" on "day one" if he wins a second term as president. He faces charges of conspiring to overturn the results of the 2020 election, which he lost to Democrat Joe Biden. Biden has accused his predecessor of embracing "political violence."

A survey by the Brookings Institution and the Public Religion Research Institute (PRRI) last year showed 23 percent of Americans agree "true American patriots may have to resort to violence in order to save our country." But William Howell, a University of Chicago political science professor, said while there is cause for concern about rising political violence, "talk about 21st-century muskets being fired at one another isn't very helpful."

Political elites and Congress are more divided than ever, but polarization among the public is "overstated," said Howell. Survey responses to vaguely worded questions do not necessarily speak to on-the-ground realities about how people will actually behave, he added. "I don't think we're on the brink of a civil war," said Howell.

"It's more diffuse than that... a hollowing out of the state, a sabotage of administrative agencies, the



disaffection of the larger public." "All that can be true, and it also not be the case that we're about to line up as we did in 1861, and en masse begin slaughtering one another."

'Horrific'

On the other hand, author Stephen Marche believes "the United States is a textbook case of a country headed for civil war" -- just not in the way depicted by the movie. Marche's book, "The Next Civil War: Dispatches from the American Future," uses political science models to suggest five scenarios that could plausibly trigger widespread internecine conflict.

These include anti-government militias clashing with federal forces, or a president being assassinated. Political violence "becomes acceptable, and in a certain sense, inevitable, because people don't feel that their government is legitimate, and that therefore violence is the only response," said Marche.

"I would say that to a certain extent, that has already happened in America." Cautioning that he has not yet seen the movie, Marche says a conflict fought along geographical lines like the North-South civil war of the 1860s is unlikely. More likely than state-on-state violence would be a "massive, splintering chaos," reminiscent of the late 20th-century "Troubles" in Northern Ireland.

In Marche's book, retired US Army colonel Peter Mansoor says a new conflict "would not be like the first civil war, with armies maneuvering on the battlefield." "I think it would very much be a free-for-all, neighbor-on-neighbor, based on beliefs and skin colors and religion. And it would be horrific."

'Fault lines'

In the film, director Alex Garland deliberately

leaves the specific origins and politics of the conflict vague. He has said the movie is intended to be "a conversation" about polarization and populism. It offers little exposition, and focuses on the horrific daily reality for American citizens and journalists.

"We don't need it explained -- we know exactly why it might happen, we know exactly what the fault lines and the pressures are," Garland told the audience at Thursday's premiere in Texas. The movie's "three-term president" appears to invoke the fears

held by many Americans that Trump -- if re-elected -- could ignore the US Constitution's two-term maximum, and refuse to step down after four years. "It's hard to think otherwise, if you just take him at his word -- and I think we would be mistaken not to," said Howell.

If that scenario was reached, said Marche, talk of a civil war may already be redundant. "If there's a three-term president, America has already ended," he said. "There's no United States anymore."—AFP

'Kung Fu Panda' again beats sandworms in North America box office

For a second weekend running "Kung Fu Panda 4" battled its way to the top of the North American box office, narrowly edging out "Dune: Part Two," according to industry watcher Exhibitor Relations.

"Panda," a martial arts comedy from Universal and DreamWorks Animation, took in an estimated \$30 million for the Friday-through-Sunday period, while the Warner Bros. "Dune" sequel, about war and survival in a sand-covered planet inhabited by giant worms, earned a respectable \$29.1 million.

"Panda" has now taken in \$107.7 million in theaters in the United States and Canada plus an additional \$176.5 million internationally. "Dune," released a week earlier, has seen domestic ticket sales of \$157.2 million and international sales of \$210 million. After those two films, there was a sharp dropoff in North America, with Lionsgate's new release "Arthur the King" taking in just \$7.5 million.

"Arthur," the story of an adventurer who befriends an injured stray dog, may have an identity problem, said analyst David A. Gross of Franchise Entertainment Research. "It's not a family film or a comedy, but it's not a hard adventure for moviegoers who like edgier entertainment. All of that complicates the sell."

Mark Wahlberg plays the man; Arthur, for those keeping track, is played by Ukai, an Australian shepherd/border collie/Bouvier mix, according to dogtime.com.

In fourth, down one spot from last weekend, was horror film "Imaginary" from Lionsgate and Blumhouse Productions,



at \$5.6 million. DeWanda Wise plays a woman who rediscovers her childhood teddy bear -- and ends up wishing she hadn't.

And in fifth, also down one spot, was Angel Studios' "Cabrin," at \$2.7 million. Cristiana Dell'Anna plays Francesca Cabrini, an Italian nun in 19th-century New York who clashes with politicians and church officials while trying to care for impoverished immigrants. — AFP

Sports

Bangalore clinch eight-wicket WPL final win after Delhi collapse

Bangalore triumph 115-2 with three balls to spare in their chase of 113

NEW DELHI: Aggressive knocks from Ellyse Perry and Sophie Devine buoyed Royal Challengers Bangalore at the right moment to seal an eight-wicket Women's Premier League final win Sunday after a Delhi Capitals batting collapse. Bangalore triumphed 115-2 with three balls to spare in their chase of 113 all out, with Delhi surrendering the fight at their home ground after their 64-run opening partnership was broken.

Australia's Perry top-scored for Bangalore with 35 not out surpassing New Zealander Devine, whose 32 included five fours and a six in the 27 balls she faced. Four of those boundaries came in the seventh over off Radha Yadav, closing a 36-run gap from the same point in Delhi's innings.

"We did the job," Devine said. "We had all the parts last season as well, it was just about putting them together." Devine departed in the ninth after an unsuccessful review of her lbw trapping by Shikha Pandey, with captain and fellow opener Smriti Mandhana anchoring the innings before she was sent back after a catch off Minnu Mani for 31.

Delhi skipper Meg Lanning and Shafali Verma made a barnstorming start after opting to bat with eight boundaries between them in seven overs. But slow bowler Sophie Molineux brought the home side's innings to a screeching halt with three dismissals off four balls in the eighth over.

The Australian forced Verma to misjudge a sweep and drive a catch to mid-wicket then bowled both Jemimah Rodrigues and Alice Capsey off consecutive deliveries. A deflated Delhi conceded their remaining seven wickets for just 49. "It all happened relatively quickly, as it tends to do," Lanning said of the collapse. "Crazy things happen, and every game has been pretty crazy," she added. "They deserved the win."



NEW DELHI: Royal Challengers Bangalore's players hold the trophy after winning the Women's Premier League (WPL) Twenty20 cricket final match against Delhi Capitals at the Arun Jaitley Stadium in New Delhi on March 17, 2024. — AFP

Unexpected finalists

Bangalore were unexpected finalists for the WPL's second edition after a narrow five-run win in Friday's eliminator over Mumbai Indians, who beat Delhi in the inaugural season's final. The franchise has long had a reputation as an also-ran competitor.

Bangalore was one of the founding teams of the Indian Premier League but has never won that tournament despite three finals appearances and a roster

featuring star batsman Virat Kohli and former South Africa captain Faf du Plessis. The WPL was first staged last year as a curtain-raiser for the IPL and has already proved a tidy earner for the country's cash-rich cricket board.

Franchise rights were auctioned off last January for \$572.5 million, while media rights for the first five seasons were sold to Viacom18 for \$116.7 million. The two deals made the WPL the world's second-most

valuable women's sports league after WNBA women's basketball in the United States.

Match crowds have grown steadily for the second edition with a near-capacity crowd in Delhi for the final. "You can gauge the popularity of women's cricket by the fact that in the first season they were giving out tickets for free," Bangalore fan Asif Chaudhary, 34, told AFP outside the stadium. "But this time you can't get tickets, even if you want to buy them." — AFP



Fawaz Al-Subaie wins showjumping championship

KUWAIT: Rider Fawaz Al-Subaie came out winner of Khalid Saeed Showjumping Championship that was held at Hawally Equestrian Club as riders from local clubs participated.

Al-Subaie won first place in the grand prize heat at a height of 140cm in 55.07 seconds, he

also won third place while Abdullah Al-Awadhi won second and Antonio Morozzo won fourth place, followed by Pavel Voronko, Ghazi Al-Jraimi and Khalid Al-Khubaizi.

Al-Saeed said the championship was organized in support of the riders to encourage them to continue in this noble sport. He said competition was strong in all heats and categories, adding "we are proud that the championship was organized by Kuwaiti youth who are always outstanding in various fields."

The third heat at the height of 125cm was won by Steven Daniels defeating Fawaz Rashid, Hamad Al-Otaibi, Mohammad Ghuloum, Khalid Al-Khubaizi and Enaz Al-Enaz.

The pain and money behind the Afghan game of buzkashi

MAZAR-I-SHARIF: Afghan rider Sarwar Pahlawan blinked away pain from the fresh stitches between his eyes as his buzkashi team chased victory in a tournament for an ancient sport still steeped in risk but now offering modern-day rewards. Played for centuries in Afghanistan's northern steppes, the national sport at the heart of Afghan identity has evolved from a rough, rural pastime to a professionalised phenomenon flush with cash. "The game has changed completely," the horseman, soon to turn 40, told AFP after returning home victorious from the tournament final in the northern city of Mazar-i-Sharif earlier this month.

After 20 years as a buzkashi rider, or "chapandaz", Sarwar welcomes the changes to the game, which is played across Central Asia and features elements akin to polo and rugby. "They used to pay us with rice, oil, a carpet or a cow," he said, but today the chapandaz have professional contracts. The best players can now earn \$10,000 per year, with winning teammates sharing \$35,000, three camels and a car offered by sponsors after clinching the title. Traditionally, buzkashi is played with the headless body of a goat.

Today, more often a 30-kilogramme (66-pound) leather sack stands in for the carcass that riders try to pull from a fray of horses and drop in a "circle of justice" traced on the ground after doing a lap of the arena at full gallop with competitors in hot pursuit.

Training has changed too as the national league's top teams have evolved. Robust horsemen no longer hang from trees or split wood to build muscle—they lift weights in gyms. "Before, when we returned from a tournament, cold water was poured on our shoulders, now we have hammams (bath houses) and saunas," said Sarwar, known as "the lion" for his strength.

Being one of the league's best players has also filled Sarwar's coffers. "I didn't even have a bike, and now I have a car. I had almost no sheep and now I have many. I had no house, and now I have two." But he says he

remains "a simple man". Between tournaments, he cultivates his land and raises his sheep.

Fresh investment

Oil tycoon Saad Karim, who splits his time between Mazar-i-Sharif, Dubai and Istanbul, is the biggest financier of the new buzkashi. The Afghan businessman set up the winning team that bears his company's name, Yama Petroleum, five months ago. Karim acquired the two best chapandaz in the country, including Sarwar, and around 40 competition horses, which can cost up to \$100,000 each. "In this team, we invested around a million dollars in horses, riders, stables and other equipment," he told AFP. "I just want to serve my people," he said. "When my team wins, it's an honour for me." It can cost around \$300,000 a year to take care of the team's stallions, fed on barley, dates, carrots and fish oil, as well as 15 riders and 20 groomers.

For the comfort of his men—who commonly suffer broken ribs, fingers and legs—Karim had a four-hectare ranch built for recuperation and stabling horses. While Karim's homeland in northern Afghanistan remains the centre of buzkashi in the country, the sport has made recent inroads in the south—the birthplace of

Afghanistan edge out Ireland to level T20I series

PARIS: Led by captain Rashid Khan, Afghanistan proved too strong for Ireland with the ball as they won the second T20 international of their three-match series by 10 runs in Sharjah on Friday. Afghanistan's victory ties up the series 1-1 as Ireland's multi-format tour against Afghanistan approaches its end.

A valiant knock of 39 off 18 balls by Gareth Delany was in vain as Ireland failed to score the 18 runs necessary off the last over to win. One six was not enough as the penultimate ball was stopped for no run and the last saw Delany caught on the boundary off Fazalhaq Farooqi.

The visitors started their run chase of 153 strongly as opening pair Andy Balbirnie and Paul Stirling put on a 49-run stand, before Stirling's dismissal in the sixth over. The Irish captain was followed by Lorcan Tucker for 10 and a first-baller for Harry Tector, both courtesy of star spinner Khan, and Ireland's run chase halted.

When Balbirnie was dismissed lbw by Nangeyalia Kharote on 45 with just 5.1 overs left, it left Ireland's tail with too much to do, despite Delany's late heroics. Khan took four wickets for just 14 runs and his double-wicket 16th over effectively won the match for the hosts when he saw off George Dockrell and Mark Adair. Afghanistan earlier won the toss and elected to bat first, putting on a total of 152-9 in their 20 overs. Mohammad Nabi top-scored for the hosts with 59 off 38, including six fours and three sixes, before he was caught by Stirling from Ben White's bowling.—AFP



CHITTAGONG: Sri Lanka's Pathum Nissanka (L) plays a shot as Bangladesh's wicketkeeper Mushfiqur Rahim watches during the one-day international (ODI) cricket match between Sri Lanka and Bangladesh. — AFP

Tanzid, Rishad power Bangladesh to series win against Sri Lanka

CHITTAGONG: Rishad Hossain played an attacking innings of 48 after substitute Tanzid Hasan Tamim hit 84 off 81 balls Monday, steering Bangladesh to a four-wicket win and a 2-1 ODI series victory over Sri Lanka. Set a modest target after Janith Liyanage's unbeaten 101 guided Sri Lanka to 235 all out in 50 overs, Bangladesh raced to 237-6 in 40.2 overs. Rishad remained unbeaten on 48 off just 18 balls. The hosts were in danger when Wanindu Hasaranga forced Mehdi Hasan Miraz, the last recognised batsman, to give a catch to Pramod Madushan for 25, with Bangladesh still 58 runs away from victory.

But Rishad dispatched the first ball he faced over midwicket for six and did not look back. He hit four sixes and five fours in his whirlwind innings before Mushfiqur Rahim, 37 not out, finished the game with a boundary off Maheesh Theekshana. Tanzid led the initial charge, replacing Soumya Sarkar in the second innings as a concussion sub, despite Lahiru Kumara wreaking havoc with 4-48.

'A lot of character'

"Tanzid batted really well at the start. The way Mushi (Mushfiqur) batted, I think it helped Rishad's innings," Bangladesh captain Najmul Hossain Shanto said. "On a wicket like this, the bowlers showed a lot of character." Liyanage earlier staged a lone battle en route to his maiden century after Bangladesh made regular strikes, with Taskin Ahmed leading the way for the home side with 3-42. Skipper Kusal Mendis (29) and Charith Asalanka (37) made a good start but lost their wickets before they could build bigger innings. "I think we were 40-50 runs short but we bowled well in few overs," Mendis said.

"Janith (Liyanage) batted really well, a couple of wickets fell in the middle overs, and he then batted very well." Sri Lanka won the toss and elected to bat first, only to lose both openers inside four overs. Taskin struck early, trapping in-form opener Pathum Nissanka leg-before for one, then dismissing the other opener Avishka Fernando for four in his next over.

Mustafizur Rahman, playing his first match in the series, removed Sadeera Samarawickrama off his first ball for 14 to leave Sri Lanka reeling at 41-3. Leg-spinner Rishad made Mendis his first ODI wicket, also off his first ball of the game. Mustafizur ended Asalanka's counter-attacking innings before Mehidy claimed two back-to-back wickets to expose the tail. But Liyanage held one end firm to ensure Sri Lanka batted out 50 overs, hitting Taskin over the cover for a four in the final over to reach his century off 101 balls.

Mustafizur and Mehidy claimed 2-39 and 2-38, respectively. Bangladesh won the opener by six wickets, with Sri Lanka taking the second by three wickets on Friday. The two teams will now play a two-match Test series, beginning on Friday in Sylhet. — AFP



MAZAR-I-SHARIF: This photograph taken on March 8, 2024 shows Afghan riders of the Yama Petroleum (orange) and Baghlan teams competing at the Buzkashi league tournament final in Mazar-i-Sharif. — AFP

the Taliban authorities, who banned the sport between 1996 and 2001 but have allowed it since returning to power in 2021.

"Buzkashi is this nation's passion," the president of the Buzkashi Federation, Ghulam Sarwar Jalal, told AFP. "The Taliban know that it makes people happy, that's why they authorise it." They also collect taxes from the professional league, started in 2020, which includes 13 teams from 10 provinces. Likewise, some order has been brought into the brutal contests, and yellow or red cards rain down in the event of a foul.

But above all, the influx of money has transformed buzkashi. "More fans come because they know there are more good horses and good teams have been added to the field," said Karim. Ten thousand men filled the Mazar-i-Sharif stadium for the final, braving Taser shocks or blows from club-wielding Taliban authorities tasked with holding back the crowds.

The spectators—devoid of women, who are kept away by both cultural stigma and government restrictions—said they feel safer attending matches, as security has improved since the Taliban ousted the Western-backed government and ended their two-decade insurgency.—AFP

Sports

Mbappe bags hat-trick as PSG hit six, David continues scoring streak

Defeat for Montpellier leaves them just a point above third-bottom Nantes

PARIS: An unstoppable Kylian Mbappe hit a hat-trick as Paris Saint-Germain romped to a 6-2 win away to Montpellier on Sunday that allowed them to open up a huge 12-point lead at the top of Ligue 1. Vitinha put PSG ahead at the Stade de la Mosson and Mbappe doubled their advantage midway through the first half, only for an Arnaud Nordin header and a Teji Savanier penalty to bring Montpellier back level at the interval.

However, a marvellous Mbappe goal restored PSG's lead shortly after the break and Lee Kang-in made it 4-2 before the France captain completed his hat-trick. Nuno Mendes put the seal on the victory late on, as Luis Enrique's side ended a run of three successive draws in Ligue 1 and extended an unbeaten domestic record stretching back to September.

A 1-1 draw for nearest challengers Brest against Lille means the Parisians are 12 points ahead at the Ligue 1 summit with only eight games left, and a 10th title in 12 seasons is an inevitability. Mbappe completed the whole 90 minutes of a Ligue 1 game for the first time since informing the club in mid-February that he intended to leave at the end of the season when his contract expires.

His hat-trick, his third of the campaign, took him to 24 goals in Ligue 1 this season, and 38 in all competitions. Mbappe's second of the evening, PSG's third, was the pick of the bunch, as he found the net with a superb shot from range which went in off the underside of the crossbar.

"Mbappe was exceptional. We need to make the most of having him, as much as we can, and when we can no longer enjoy having him we will have to raise our game," said Luis Enrique. The downside of their performance came with the way in which they surrendered their 2-0 lead in the first half, conceding the penalty when Tanguy Coulibaly pounced on Danilo Pereira's short back-pass and was then clattered by PSG goalkeeper Gianluigi Donnarumma.

The defeat for Montpellier leaves them just a point above third-bottom Nantes, who are in the relegation play-off place and on Sunday sacked coach Jocelyn Gourvennec. Canadian striker Jonathan David continued his superb form in front of goal by scoring for Lille in their draw away to fellow Champions League contenders Brest. David gave Lille the lead midway through the second half in Brittany with his 22nd goal of the season in all competitions, and his 15th since the turn of the calendar year.



MONTPELLIER: Montpellier's French midfielder #11 Teji Savanier (L) fights for the ball with Paris Saint-Germain's French forward #07 Kylian Mbappe (R) during the French L1 football match between Montpellier Hérault SC and Paris-Saint-Germain (PSG) at Stade de la Mosson in Montpellier, southern France. - AFP

The 24-year-old has netted 10 times in his team's last nine Ligue 1 outings. His total of 15 in Ligue 1 this season is bettered only by Mbappe. However, that goal was not enough to win the game, as Uruguayan striker Martin Satriano poked in a late equalizer for Brest, who remain second.

Ito hits winner for Reims

Monaco could have climbed above Brest with a win at home to Lorient, but they were held to a 2-2 draw after Tiemoue Bakayoko headed in a 95th-minute equalizer for the struggling away side in the principal. Monaco remain third, three points above Lille who reclaimed fourth from Nice, 3-1 winners at Lens on Saturday. The top three in Ligue 1 go straight into next season's Champions League, with fourth entering the competition in the third qualifying round.

Rennes boosted their hopes of qualifying for Europe with a 2-0 win at home to Marseille, as Martin

Terrier put the hosts ahead in the first half and Benjamin Bourigeaud added a late penalty. Both sides are now three points adrift of the final European qualifying spot. Japan star Junya Ito fired in a superb 79th-minute strike to give Reims a 2-1 win over Metz which keeps his club in the European picture. Oumar Diakite had put Reims in front early on but Arthur Atta equalized before the decisive goal from Ito, who was left out of the Japan squad to face North Korea in upcoming World Cup qualifiers.

Ito left the Asian Cup last month after Japanese police said he was under investigation over an alleged sexual assault in Osaka last year. The player denies the allegation and is suing his accusers for damages.

Reims coach Will Still described the 31-year-old winger as "mentally strong and faithful to himself". Bottom side Clermont kept their outside survival hopes alive by beating Le Havre 2-1 with a brace from Muhammed Cham. - AFP



Tomooh launches Ramadan sports health program

KUWAIT: Tomooh Sports Club launched the Ramadan Sports Health Program (Your Health in Your Step 4) in cooperation with Kuwait Special

Olympics with 70 special needs players of various age groups participating. The program will continue until April 4th.

The weight of all participants was taken before the start of the program as each participant walks for three kilometers per day then at the end of the program the weight of the participants will be weighed again and the top three boys and top three girls who lost the most weight will be awarded, that in addition to honoring all participants. The program will have accompanying ac-

tivities including nutrition consultations and medical examinations. President of Kuwait Special Olympics, Tomooh Treasurer Hanaa Al-Zawawi was happy with the turnout of players to participate in the 4th consecutive program, bearing in mind that the previous three programs achieved a positive effect on physical and mental fitness in addition to having a competitive atmosphere.

Al-Zawawi thanked the administrations of the club and Special Olympics for providing all that is necessary to ensure the program's success.

the hands of Atletico Madrid on Wednesday, as their league winning streak ended at 10 matches.

"We're disappointed how the match went... We were really good in the first half and at the start of the second and after that we dozed for the goal which cost us the win," said Inzaghi to DAZN. "Napoli had more of the ball but (goalkeeper Yann) Sommer had basically nothing to do."

It was a symbolic fixture for Inter as they are outperforming Napoli's incredible charge to their historic third league crown. Even after Sunday's draw, Inter have more points, have scored more goals and have a significantly better goal difference than Napoli did at the same stage last season.

However, their dream of securing the title with a record-equalling five matches to spare by beating Milan in next month's derby is now less realistic than before kick-off. Napoli were missing Victor Osimhen after the Nigeria forward picked up a hamstring problem in training and put up a brave fight after being dumped out of Europe by Barcelona on Tuesday. - AFP



MILAN: Inter Milan's Argentine forward #10 Lautaro Martinez (L) fights for the ball with Napoli's Ivorian midfielder #08 Hamed Traore during the Serie A football match between Inter Milan and Napoli at San Siro stadium in Milan. - AFP

Inter's title charge hits bump in the road with Napoli draw

MILAN: Inter Milan's march towards a 20th Serie A title was slowed down on Sunday by reigning champions Napoli who escaped the San Siro with a creditable 1-1 draw. Juan Jesus nodded home Napoli's leveller with nine minutes remaining after fighting back from Matteo Darmian's opener shortly before half-time to snatch a deserved point.

Leaders Inter still need 14 more points from their remaining nine fixtures to claim the Scudetto after their huge advantage on AC Milan was cut to 14 points with their local rivals winning 3-1 at Verona. It was another disappointing result for Simone Inzaghi's Inter following a painful exit from the Champions League at

Lewandowski-powered Barca thrash Atletico to stay in title race

BARCELONA: Robert Lewandowski inspired a resurgent Barcelona to a 3-0 triumph at Atletico Madrid on Sunday to keep their faint La Liga title hopes alive. Lewandowski set up goals for Joao Felix and Fermin Lopez either side of striking himself to pull Barcelona second, eight points behind leaders Real Madrid. The Catalans, who returned to the Champions League quarter-finals this week after four years, became the first team to beat Atletico at the Metropolitano stadium this season.

Barcelona were the last team to win at Atletico in the top flight too, in January 2023, with Diego Simeone's team going 25 matches without defeat in between. They crumbled against Xavi Hernandez's side, who now have five consecutive wins over Atletico and are unbeaten in 10 matches since the coach said he would leave at the end of the season.

Barcelona moved two points clear of third-placed Girona, while Atletico are now fifth, after Athletic Bilbao moved above them on Saturday. "I'll push the (players) more than ever," Xavi told DAZN, refusing to throw in the towel on Barcelona's title defence.

"And now that I'm leaving, even more so — we will try to improve and compete for La Liga and the Champions League, the two most important trophies." Atletico played 120 minutes on Wednesday against Inter Milan in Europe and although Barcelona saw off Napoli a day before, it was Simeone's side who started sharper.

Pablo Barrios spurned a good early chance and 17-year-old starlet Pau Cubarsi blocked Alvaro Morata's effort. However Barcelona took the lead against the run of play after 38 minutes. Ilkay Gundogan glided forward from midfield and found Lewandowski, who squared for on-loan forward Felix to turn home against his parent club. The Portuguese striker scored the only goal when the teams met in December and again proved a thorn in Atletico's side while being whistled by home fans throughout.

'They were superior'

Xavi was dismissed before the break for dissent but his team kicked on regardless in the second half. Simeone sent on Antoine Griezmann and Memphis Depay, searching for more spark in the final third. Lewandowski quickly doubled Barcelona's lead with a lethal finish, after Rodrigo de Paul gave the ball away in a dangerous area.

Barca goalkeeper Marc-Andre ter Stegen made a superb save to deny Marcos Llorente but Atletico were starting to tire after their mid-week exploits. Lopez headed home Barca's third after Lewandowski set him up with an inch-perfect cross, with the veteran Polish striker offering one of his best performances for the club. The goal capped a superb week for Lopez, who also scored in the win over Napoli.

"We're believing until the end, (now we're in) second place, trying to cut the points gap and fight for La Liga," Lopez told DAZN. Atletico's Nahuel Molina was sent off for bringing down Vitor Roque late on as Barcelona saw out their impressive win, keeping a fourth consecutive clean sheet in the league.

"They were superior, they put away their first chances for goals," Someone told DAZN. "We'll keep pushing for fourth place, it will be difficult, tricky, that's normal ... we have to keep improving, a lot."

'Liberation'

Earlier Almeria ended a miserable streak by earning their first La Liga win of the season, edging Las Palmas 1-0. The Andalusian side went 31 league games without victory stretching back to May last season, but Leo Baptistao's 14th-minute goal snapped their terrible run in coach Pepe Mel's first match in charge.

Despite winning on the road, Mel's side are still 20th and 14 points from safety with nine matches remaining. Almeria's 31-match run is the longest winless streak in the division's history, but they are now level with Sporting Gijon's lowest ever points tally from 1997-98. "Winning today means a liberation (for the team) ... winning three points and changing the dynamic," said Mel. Victory ensured Almeria will not tally fewer points than Derby County's 11 in the Premier League in 2007-08, which is the lowest total across Europe's top leagues since teams started earning three points for a win. - AFP

Classifieds

Clinics & Hospitals

Clinics

Kaizen center	25716707
Rawda	22517733
Adaliya	22517144
Khaldiya	24848075
Kaifan	24849807
Shamiya	24848913
Shuwaikh	24814507
Abdullah Salem	22549134
Nuzha	22526804

Industrial Shuwaikh	24814764
Qadsiya	22515088
Dasmah	22532265
Bneid Al-Gar	22531908
Shaab	22518752
Qibla	22459381
Ayoun Al-Qibla	22451082
Mirqab	22456536
Sharq	22465401
Salmiya	25746401

Hospitals

Sabah Hospital	24812000
Amiri Hospital	22450005
Maternity Hospital	24843100
Mubarak Al-Kabir	25312700
Chest Hospital	24849400
Farwaniya Hospital	24892010
Adan Hospital	23940620
Ibn Sina Hospital	24840300

Change of Name

I, **Bayanaboyina** Sumalatha, W/o. Bayanaboyina Lakshmi Narasaiah, D.No.2/65, Upparapalli, Asramam, Kadappa, A.P-516247, have changed my name from Binaboena Sumalatha (old name) to Bayanaboyina Sumalatha (new name), Passport No. S7633005. **(#5185) 17/03/2024**

Lost & Found

I hereby invite the attention of the public that my mark list of the 5th Semester (Improvement) B-Tech examination held in March 1997 with Register No 3170 of the University of Calicut has been irrecoverably lost during travel. Consequently, I intend to apply for the duplicate mark list. If anyone happens to get the original, kindly notify the undersigned or the University. Felis Muhammed Velasseril Basheer (PP No. Z3081282) Kuwait 00965-66277699 **(#5186) 19/03/2024**

Man Utd fightback ends Liverpool's quadruple quest in FA Cup classic

Erik ten Hag's men confident of reaching final for a second consecutive season



MANCHESTER: Liverpool's Egyptian striker #11 Mohamed Salah (2L) shoots to score their second goal during the English FA Cup Quarter Final football match between Manchester United and Liverpool at Old Trafford in Manchester, north west England. — AFP

MANCHESTER: Manchester United ended Liverpool's quest for a quadruple of trophies in Jurgen Klopp's final season after Amad Diallo's winner edged a thrilling FA Cup quarter-final 4-3 after extra-time. The Ivorian winger was sent off for a second booking after taking his shirt off in celebration at the end of a chaotic 120 minutes that kept United's chances of ending the season with silverware alive.

Erik ten Hag's men will be confident of reaching the final for a second consecutive season after being paired with Championship side Coventry in the last four. Two goals in three minutes from Alexis Mac Allister and Mohamed Salah towards the end of the first half had swung the game in Liverpool's favor after Scott McTominay opened the scoring.

Antony's first goal at Old Trafford for more than a year kept United alive to send the game into extra-time. Liverpool edged in front once again when Harvey Elliott's deflected shot found the bottom corner.

But Marcus Rashford, who had missed a glorious chance to win the tie deep into injury time, made amends by drilling home to make it 3-3. Diallo then scored just his second ever United goal in added time of extra-time at the end of a breakneck counter-attack from a Liverpool corner, led by the impressive Alejandro Garnacho.

"When it's Manchester United against Liverpool, it's one of the world's best football matches. It is his-

torical," said Ten Hag. "The team showed resilience and determination to win this game. "We've had so many set backs. We are very strong mentally. We energized the fans, they got behind us and we won."

United trail Liverpool by 17 points in the Premier League and having made an early exit from both the Champions League and League Cup, the pressure was on Ten Hag if he is to remain in charge for a third season.

The home team started like a side who knew their season depended on victory as they flew out of the traps and got their reward. Garnacho's effort was saved by Caoimhin Kelleher but only looped up for McTominay to blast home his ninth goal of the season.

Liverpool 'struggling' physically

Liverpool have had a far more intense schedule in recent weeks than United as they remain in three competitions, having already lifted the League Cup last month. "That was the first time I saw my team really struggling. That's how it is, we played a lot of football recently," said Klopp.

"Congratulations to United, they fought extremely hard as well." Klopp's men took half an hour to awake from their slumber, but once they did were far more effective in the final third. The visitors turned the tie around in the dying embers of the first half as Mac Allister's deflected strike had too much power for Andre Onana.

looking forward with renewed confidence to next week's hardcourt tournament in Miami and beyond. "Obviously winning tournaments helps a lot coming to the next ones," said Alcaraz, whose tournament included not only a semi-final victory over red-hot Sinner but also a brush with a swarm of bees in his quarter-final win over Alexander Zverev — the man who ousted him in Melbourne.

"Obviously winning a Masters 1000 again — it is a really difficult tournament to win — gives you extra motivation to keep going, extra, extra confidence for Miami right now and for what's next," said Alcaraz, who joined compatriot Rafael Nadal as the only players to win five Masters 1000 titles before turning 21.

Earlier, Iga Swiatek has become used to rubbing shoulders with celebrities in two years at the top of women's tennis, and if Hollywood A-lister Zendaya needs work with her game, the four-time Grand Slam champion will be happy to help. Zendaya and boyfriend and fellow actor Tom Holland were among the crowd Sunday as Po-

Three minutes later, Liverpool led as Salah struck once more against his favored opponents. United pleaded in vain for a foul on Bruno Fernandes by Joe Gomez and Salah was left with a simple task to knock in his 13th goal in 14 games against United after Onana parried Darwin Nunez's initial effort.

Liverpool enjoyed far more control of the game after the break but they were also guilty of not taking their chances to kill the game off. United were blunt and lacking ideas going forward as they chased the game until Antony became an unlikely hero.

The Brazilian had scored just once in his previous 38 games but showed no sign of a lack of confidence as he spun and fired into the far corner three minutes from time. Rashford should have completed the comeback as, after taking a brilliant first touch to cushion the ball into his path, he slotted wide with just Kelleher to beat.

A frenetic encounter continued to rage from end-to-end in extra-time as Elliott's deflected effort looked set to again put Liverpool into the last four. But United did not lie down as Rashford was more deadly when handed a second chance after Nunez gave the ball away deep inside his own half.

And as Liverpool sensed the chance to win it from a corner at the death, Garnacho broke clear and timed his pass to Diallo to perfection before he fired in off the far post. — AFP

land's Swiatek beat Maria Sakkari 6-4, 6-0 to win the prestigious Indian Wells WTA title for the second time.

After the match, Zendaya posed with Swiatek and her trophy. "For sure, meeting Zendaya was crazy, but on the other hand, she's a human like all of us," Swiatek said of the "Dune" star, who is also the star of the forthcoming tennis-themed "Challengers" movie.

In the film, Zendaya plays a former tennis prodigy turned coach whose tennis champion husband is in a slump. "I was just happy that she's enjoying tennis and she's, you know, having this movie with a tennis theme coming out," Swiatek said.

"So that should be really exciting. She can practice with me any time if she wants to." While Swiatek sounded far from star-struck, she said she was pleased to get a chance to meet the actress. "For sure it was fun and she's a really great person," Swiatek said. "I feel pretty privileged that I'm in this place where I can meet these kind of people." — AFP

Giannis-less Bucks stun the Suns behind Lillard's big game

WASHINGTON: Damian Lillard delivered with teammate Giannis Antetokounmpo out due to a hamstring injury, scoring 31 points and distributing 16 assists in Milwaukee's 140-129 NBA triumph over Phoenix on Sunday.

Reserve Bobby Portis added 31 points and 10 rebounds for the host Bucks, who improved to 44-24 and tightened their grip on second in the Eastern Conference. Lillard, the first player in Bucks history with 30 points and 15 assists in the same game, praised Portis and others for stepping up with Greek superstar Antetokounmpo sidelined.

"It was huge," Lillard said. "One of our biggest strengths is our depth. Bobby Portis is a starter on any other team but for our team he knows what his job is. "Down a guy like Giannis, you know everybody is going to have to step their game up. We've been in this situation a couple of times this year and every time he has come through and delivered."

"I knew I wouldn't have to come out and overdo it. Feed him. Feed everybody else, pick my spots and be aggressive." Lillard had 14 points and 12 assists in the first half as Milwaukee took an 82-60 half-time edge, the Bucks matching an NBA record held by the Suns and Utah by making 18 first-half 3-pointers.

Portis had 25 first-half points on 10-of-13 shooting, going 5-of-5 from beyond the arc as the Bucks went 24-of-41 from 3-point range overall. "It's fun after all the work you put in," Portis said. "Just having good teammates and coaches that believe in you. We go through this marathon 82-game season together and try to build great camaraderie and chemistry."

Lillard made 10-of-19 shots from the floor, 7-of-7 free throws and 4-of-8 from 3-point range, including a buzzer-beater from the mid-court logo to give the Bucks a 109-94 lead after three quarters. "They probably thought with Giannis out, I was going to just try and force it. I just took advantage of what their defense was doing," said Lillard. "When we play that way, we play our best — and I think I play my best."

Milwaukee's Khris Middleton, who missed 16 games with a sprained left ankle, added 22 points in his return. Bradley Beal led the Suns with 28 points while Grayson Allen added 25 and Devin Booker netted 23.

Kyrie Irving sank a left-handed 20-foot floater shot at the final buzzer to give Dallas a 107-105 home victory over Denver, snapping the Nuggets' five-game win streak. Denver's Jamal Murray scored 12 of his 23 points in the fourth quarter, hitting a 3-pointer to cap a 20-4 Nuggets run for a 105-102 lead.

NBA scoring leader Luka Doncic, the Slovenian guard who had 23 of his game-high 37 points in the first half, answered on a 3-pointer and a Murray miss set up Irving's winner. Irving finished with 24 points, nine assists and seven rebounds as Dallas improved to 39-29, seventh in the Western Conference. — AFP

Alcaraz tops Medvedev to repeat as Indian Wells champion

INDIAN WELLS: World number two Carlos Alcaraz cruised home in a 7-6 (7/5), 6-1 victory over Daniil Medvedev on Sunday to win a second straight Indian Wells ATP title, both coming at the Russian's expense. Alcaraz captured his first title since Wimbledon last July and became the first repeat winner at Indian Wells since Novak Djokovic won three straight titles from 2014-16.

For the 20-year-old Spaniard, 12 days in the California desert proved just what he needed after a stuttering start to the season, which included a quarter-final exit at the Australian Open and an ankle injury that forced him out of his opening match at Rio de Janeiro in February. "A lot of doubts for me," he said of his mindset coming in amidst his longest title drought since he burst through for his first Grand Slam title at the 2022 US Open.

For Alcaraz, however, it wasn't just about ending the drought, it was about rediscovering his joy in the game. "It means a lot to me, lifting this trophy, winning this tournament, because I overcome a lot of problems in my head, a lot of problems physically," he said.

"Not that I didn't win a tournament since Wimbledon. For me, it doesn't matter, it's about the feelings ... It's about enjoying playing tennis, once I step on the court, putting my game. It's what only matters. "That's why I'm really, really happy to lift this trophy, because I found myself at this tournament."

As he did last year, Alcaraz denied Medvedev's bid to capture the only one of the ATP's six hardcourt Masters 1000 titles he has yet to win. More importantly, after a week in which he ended Australian Open champion Jannik Sinner's 19-match winning streak, Alcaraz was



INDIAN WELLS: Spain's Carlos Alcaraz poses with the championship trophy after defeating Russia's Daniil Medvedev in the ATP-WTA Indian Wells Masters men's final tennis match at the Indian Wells Tennis Garden in Indian Wells. — AFP photos



INDIAN WELLS: Poland's Iga Swiatek reacts as confetti flies while receiving her championship trophy after defeating Greece's Maria Sakkari during the ATP-WTA Indian Wells Masters women's final tennis match.