



Bahrain King invites Amir to Arab Summit



Amiri Diwan photo His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah receives Foreign Minister Abdulla Al-Yahya and the newly appointed Ambassador to Nigeria Salem Al-Muzain.

Amir receives FM, ambassador to Nigeria

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received on Monday Minister of Foreign Affairs Abdulla Al-Yahya at Bayan Palace, where he presented Kuwait's newly appointed Ambassador to Nigeria Salem Al-Muzain who took the constitutional oath.

Top officials attended the ceremony. His Highness Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah also received on Monday at Bayan Palace Chairman of Supreme Judicial Council and the Head of Court Cassation Dr. Adel Majed Bourseli. (KUNA)



Amiri Diwan photo His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah on Monday received a written letter from Bahraini King Hamad bin Issa bin Salman Al-Khalifa inviting him to the 33rd regular session of the Arab League Council at the summit level, due in Manama in May. The letter was handed to His Highness the Amir by the Bahraini Ambassador to the State of Kuwait, Salah Ali Al-Malki. State officials attended the meeting of the envoy with His Highness the Amir at Bayan Palace.

Opinion

Social Affairs and zakat funds, have mercy on those in prison

By Ahmed Al-Jarallah

Editor-in-Chief, the Arab Times

IT is commendable that the Minister of Social Affairs, Family, and Childhood Affairs Sheikh Firas Al-Malik launched a campaign to settle the debts of those in debt, as this aligns closely with the core mission of his ministry.

However, this "campaign" should not be limited to the month of Ramadan but should also continue until this file is closed.

Those in debt suffer from many problems. There are some who were thrown in prison due to their inability to settle their debts, especially women who were subjected to unbearable physical coercion. There are some others whose services in all ministries have been suspended due to their insolvency. Some have become wanted by ruling enforcement agencies.

Individuals profiting from the continuation of physical coercion, often in collusion with money lenders and deceitful MPs, have attempted to obstruct the resolution of this dilemma. Corrupt interventions have prevented the amendment of laws for ensuring that beneficiaries retain their leverage over debtors.

While most countries worldwide have abolished laws permitting physical coercion, travel bans, and other measures restricting debtors' freedom, citing human rights violations, Kuwait continues to incarcerate indebted individuals. This practice not only burdens the state but also exacerbates social issues, depriving these individuals of the opportunity to work and support their families.

In previous articles about zakat

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Day by Day

DO not burden yourselves by carrying the weight of the world on your shoulders. God has placed it beneath your feet, for you to tread upon it.

The story of Prophet Moses (peace be upon him) illustrates a profound truth: he did not succumb even at his weakest, while Pharaoh met his downfall at the height of his power. This serves as a reminder that strength devoid of Divine Guidance is futile.

True strength lies in placing trust in God and maintaining unwavering faith in His wisdom. It brings about both inner peace and resilience.

... Yet tomorrow is another day.

Zahed Matar

Cabinet denounces 'unity' threats

273,000 people expected to travel during Eid

— Details Page 5 —



PM Diwan photo His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Dr. Mohammad Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah chairs the Cabinet's weekly session on Monday, March 25.

Citizen held

KUWAIT CITY, March 25, (Agencies): The Cabinet expressed on Monday its denunciation of all acts that harmed national unity especially via social media platform.

In a press statement, official spokesman of the government Amer Al-Ajmi the Cabinet, during its meeting headed by His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Dr. Mohammad Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah, condemned all actions leading to disunity within Kuwaiti society.

The cabinet would like to express its respect to all sectors of society, he affirmed, adding that the government stood against any actions aimed at creating strife and spread hatred against individuals or groups.

He indicated that the Cabinet had lauded the firm role played by the Interior Ministry to confront such acts of bigotry via apprehending those responsible and bringing them to justice.

Al-Ajmi affirmed that no one was above the law when it came to Kuwait's security, stability, and harmony.

The Interior Ministry has started taking legal measures against

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NewsWatch

KUWAIT CITY: The Central Bank of Kuwait (CBK) announced the most recent issues of CBK Bonds and related Tawarruq at a total value of KWD (240) million for (6) months with Rate of Return (4.500%).

KUWAIT CITY: Kuwait's International Islamic Charity Organization (IICO) said on Monday that its chairman **Dr. Abdullah Al-Matouq** has retained his position as UN Secretary General **Antonio Guterres**'s special adviser for the eighth consecutive year.

In a statement, the Kuwaiti official said that he was thankful for the UN chief's trust in him, and that it was a recognition of Kuwait's efforts towards regional and global humanitarian endeavors and important partnership to achieve UN's sustainable development 2030.

Al-Matouq has served as the UN chief's advisor since 2017, he also served as UN Secretary General's Envoy for Humanitarian Affairs for four consecutive years from 2012 to 2016. (KUNA)

16 complexes to accommodate 3,000 Residential city for low-income workers in progress

Kuwait implements ban on carton waste exports

KUWAIT CITY, March 25, (KUNA): Minister of Commerce and Industry and Chairman of the Public Industries Authority Abdullah Al-Joan on Monday declared the banning of exports and re-export of the carton waste for three months.

The ministry said in a statement that the minister's decision was in line with the approach to recycle carton boxes.

Carton is a basic material for Kuwaiti factories and providing some products for the local market at reasonable prices, it said, noting that the local factories need up to 30,000 tons of carton per month.

It also indicated that the factories' need for cartons could not be possible without recycling the waste.

The official statement affirmed that recycling is quite important for the State of Kuwait because it aims at preserving the environment, halting drainage of the natural resources and staying abreast with advanced nations in investing in used materials.

KUWAIT CITY, March 25, (KUNA): Kuwait's Municipality announced Monday that the site for the first integrated residential city project for low-income workers was officially handed over to the investing company.

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Municipality photo Photo during the contract signing.

Candidates kick off electoral campaigns

By Saeed Mahmoud Saleh Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, March 25: A number of candidates have launched their electoral campaigns for the National Assembly Election on April 4, 2024.

Former MP and Third Constituency candidate Saadoun Hammad Al-Otaibi stated after launching his electoral campaign that the dissolved Assembly voted in favor of the request of the government to postpone for one month the discussion of popular bills like increasing the salaries and cost of living allowance of citizens. He intends to prioritize the ratification of these bills if he wins in the election,

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Ramadan Timings

Iftar Tuesday 18:04
Imsak Wednesday 04:21

Prayer Timings

Fajr	04:27	Asr	15:23
Sunrise ..	05:46	Maghrib ..	18:02
Zohr	11:54	Isha	19:19

Local

Expected weather for next 24 hrs:

By Day: Warm with light to moderate northwesterly wind to variable wind, with speeds of 08-28 km/h.

By Night: Rather cold with light

Weather

to moderate northerly wind to light variable wind, with speeds of 06-22 km/h.

Station	Max Exp	Min Rec
Kuwait City	25	20

Kuwait Airport	24	20
Abdaly	25	19
Jahra	25	20
Salmiyah	22	20
Nuwaisib	24	20
Wafra	25	19

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

OGDCL intends to offer shares

Pakistan eyes Gulf states investments for oil hunt

KUWAIT CITY, March 25: The Pakistani government is contemplating seeking investments from Gulf countries for its largest oil exploration entity, the Pakistan Oil and Gas Development Corporation (OGDCL), in a bid to secure better valuation for the company, reports Al-Qabas daily.

According to sources familiar with the matter, Pakistan intends to offer shares of OGDCL to potential investors from Saudi Ara-

bia, the UAE, and Qatar, anticipating attractive pricing offers, as reported by Pakistani newspaper The Express Tribune.

Previous attempts to sell OGDCL shares on the stock market had resulted in significant challenges. Allegations of stock market manipulation led to a sharp decline in the company's share prices, plummeting from Rs 216 to Rs 117 per share when shares were floated in 2014 by the Pakistan Muslim

League-Nawaz government.

The government's offer of 311 million shares at a minimum price of 216 rupees per share received lukewarm response, with only 52% of the shares subscribed for by local institutional investors during the bidding process.

In light of these setbacks, the Petroleum Department had recommended halting the divestment process in February 2020 due to the significant decline in OGD-

CL's share price. However, the government is now exploring alternative avenues to attract investments, considering Gulf countries as potential strategic partners.

Officials emphasized the need for immediate action to address circular debt issues, which would improve cash flow and incentivize OGDCL to expand its oil and gas exploration activities, urging the new government to prioritize these concerns.

Bulgaria to grant Kuwaitis 5-years, multiple-entry 'Schengen' permits

Applications open March 31; 'Can visit other Schengen countries'

By Fares Al-Abdan

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, March 25: The Ambassador of Bulgaria to Kuwait Dimitar Dimitrov announced that the embassy will start receiving Schengen visa applications from the end of this month at the Bulgarian embassy headquarters.

In a speech he gave while receiving visitors at the office of the Bul-

garian Embassy the day before yesterday evening regarding the visa procedures after Bulgaria and Romania joined the Schengen area, the ambassador explained that the decision will come into effect as of March 31, 2024. From this date, those applying for a short-term visa will be granted a Schengen visa and not the Bulgarian national visa that the embassy was granting until now, provided that they meet the required conditions. Short-term visas are those that allow their holder to stay for not more than 90 days during a six-month period. The visa will allow its holder to go to other countries in the Schengen area after visiting Bulgaria as long as the visa is valid.

As for Kuwaiti citizens, they will be granted a multiple-entry Schengen visa extending for five years and allowing a stay of 90 days during every six-month period. The visa law does not allow the granting of a Schengen visa whose validity exceeds the validity period of the passport.

Therefore, in order to receive a visa valid for five years, the validity of the passport must exceed five years.

The embassy will strictly adhere to the visa conditions and requirements, although they will not differ from the conditions and requirements applied by other countries affiliated with the Schengen area, such as documents and papers supporting the visa application.

Regarding the period of its issuance, he revealed that it will be within a period of 15 days from the date of receipt of the application as determined by the visa law or what is known as the "Visa Code", adding that a longer period may be required in some cases to make the necessary coordination with the rest of the Schengen countries.

Ambassador Dimitrov called on those wishing to apply for a visa to submit their applications well before the date of travel, that is at least 15 days, indicating that the maximum period for submitting a visa application is six months.

He stressed that the embassy does not currently use the services of any external office within the framework of visa granting procedures, adding that the applications from the visa applicants are received in the consular section of the embassy's headquarters in Jabriya.

The ambassador said, "This transformation places a great responsibility on us and on the shoulders of officials in the concerned authorities in our country. The decision to grant a visa reflects the interests, security and safety of all countries affiliated with the Schengen area. We are aware of the extent of this responsibility, considering that Bulgaria represents an external border of the European Union."

He stressed the need to adhere to the advance appointment system, which allows for the correct and smooth organization of work, as appointments can be made either through the embassy's email or by phone during the official working hours.

Ambassador Dimitrov stated that the summer tourism season in Bulgaria will begin in coordination with the local agent of Bulgarian Airlines by operating direct flights from Kuwait to the cities of Burgas and Varna on the shores of the Black Sea, with the local agent providing them with other tourism services such as accommodation in resorts preferred by tourists from Kuwait.

He revealed that thousands of tourists visit Bulgaria annually, and there are many Kuwaitis who own real estate in Bulgaria.

Regarding the month of Ramadan, and the tradition of diwanias and receiving well-wishers, Ambassador Dimitrov explained that the idea of holding this modest diwaniya is an expression of admiration for the Kuwaitis' preservation of their heritage and their respect for the customs of their fathers and their popular traditions.

He said, "Diwaniya is a unique example of those traditions that represent social life in Kuwait. There is no doubt that it is a special place during the month of Ramadan in Kuwait."

MoE starts disbursing delayed bonus to staff

KUWAIT CITY, March 25: The Ministry of Education has started transferring the delayed incentives for eligible employees to the Central Bank in preparation for depositing them to the bank accounts of these employees, reports Al-Anba daily.

Acting Assistant Undersecretary for Financial and Administrative Affairs Matrook Al-Mutairi revealed that the total amount of the delayed incentives is KD18 million. He said the beneficiaries include teachers and administrators in charge of grading tests, and those assigned in confidential printing presses and adult education; as well as controllers (scientific and literary) who are members of an educational, administrative, supervisory, and leadership body.

He affirmed that employees in the administrative and financial sectors intensified their efforts over the past days in reviewing the forms and presenting them to the Financial Supervision Authority for approval.

He explained that in coordination with the Central Bank, the incentives are deposited into the accounts of beneficiaries in batches starting Monday until Tuesday.

'No more hiring': The Ministry of Health has closed the door for the recruitment of the members of the medical services team for Hajj with about 2,000 registered applicants, reports Al-Anba daily quoting sources who clarified this is exclusive for Kuwaitis.

Sources disclosed the applications are currently being sorted in accordance with the rules and regulations in preparation for submitting them to the health minister for approval and issuance of a ministerial decision in this regard.

The conditions for doctors to join the team include specialization in internal medicine or one of its branches, family medicine, general practitioner and emergency medicine (internal surgery); must have a valid license to practice the profession in Kuwait, and with a registered job title or above.

Amir congratulates Greek president

KUWAIT CITY, March 25, (KUNA): His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah sent a cable of congratulation on Monday to President of Greece Katerina Sakellariopoulou on the occasion of her country's national day.

In the cable, His Highness the Amir wished the president wellbeing and Greece further progress and

prosperity.

PM sends cable

His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Dr. Mohammad Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah sent a cable of congratulation on Monday to President of Greece Katerina Sakellariopoulou on the occasion of her country's national day.



Photo from the event

US Spartan Force at Arifjan replaced

KUWAIT CITY, March 25: Major General Khalid Ali Zayed, the Land Force Commander, recently participated in a ceremony marking the replacement of the American Spartan Force at Camp Arifjan. This event signifies the transition of responsibilities and operations at the camp, reports Al-Jarida daily.

In addition to attending the ceremony, Major General Zayed hosted an iftar banquet at the Mubarak Armored Brigade - 15. The banquet was held in honor of the

delegations from Gulf Cooperation Council countries and the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan that participated in the ceremony.

The presence of Major General Zayed at both the ceremony and the banquet highlights the importance of cooperation and collaboration among regional partners in military operations and security endeavors.

Such events serve as platforms for strengthening relationships and fostering mutual understanding among participating nations.

Other Voices

Games, ploys to get citizenship

By Ahmad alsarraf

Al-Jimi touched on serious matters, and clarified that restoring citizenship is a sovereign right of the authority, not of the judiciary. At that time, he opposed presenting the issue of withdrawn nationalities to the judiciary, but rather saw that the only way forward for him was to return to leadership. This is what happened and thus citizenship was returned, through the committee of which he was a member, to the majority of those from whom it was withdrawn!

He also explained that the issue of forging nationalities is true and old, and that the number of counterfeiters is very large, but not in the hundreds of thousands, and that they discovered in the committee the presence of an officer from 'Saddam's Fedayeen' who holds Kuwaiti citizenship!

He added that counterfeiting had many methods, its market was known, and its brokers were also known to those who wished to buy or sell Kuwaiti citizenship, and the prices were also known.

He also explained that some types of forgery are planned early, and the process continues for 18 years. It begins with the "dishonest citizen" bringing a forged birth certificate for a son born abroad, registering it in his file, and immediately receiving a child allowance amounting to 600 dinars annually, or 9,000 dinar over 18 years. Then he sells the fake birth certificate to whoever wants to bear his name and become his son, and obtain a civil and nationality card for him, in exchange for a sum of money as well!

Some people would also not report the death of a family member, if it occurred abroad, and would offer the deceased's nationality for sale. Then he and the forger would submit

to the authorities a request to issue a "replacement for the lost" nationality, and provide them with a photo of the forger, in exchange for a sum of money, or due to poor verification. Or because of the family or tribe name, attention is overlooked, and the citizenship is issued with a photo of the person who bought the citizenship, and other fraudulent methods!

What greatly facilitated the manipulation of nationality was the backwardness of the government preservation and archive system, whether in the administration of birth certificates, or in the administration of Kuwaiti passports and nationality. Those with weak and despicable souls in such places also played a dangerous role in facilitating the forgery process, and the motive was often financial, in addition to tribal, sectarian, or family reasons!

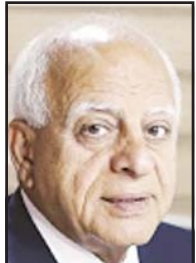
Although Mr. Al-Jimi is aware of the judiciary's position on the issue of revoking the citizenship of a counterfeiter, he, citing someone I trust, did not hesitate recently to demand that the prosecution be stopped and that the cases of counterfeiters be brought before the judiciary!

The issue of forgery and dual nationality is a serious matter, and must not be tolerated, with the need to continue pursuing this issue. The more those violating the decision to reveal cases of forgery scream, the more it confirms that the number is huge and has big heads!

Yesterday, a citizen, wanted by justice, was arrested. It was later revealed that he was the Syrian identified as 'A.A.', whose father had previously purchased Kuwaiti citizenship for him when he was young. Then the forger joined a security agency and worked there for 25 years, until he retired, at the age of over fifty!

A question for former representatives, including brother Haif: What is the public interest in refusing to reveal these dangerous forgers and saboteurs?!

✂ ✂ ✂
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Dimitar Dimitrov

Minister introduces transfer policies

Two decisions approval rejected

KUWAIT CITY, March 25: In a recent development, the Minister of Municipality Dr. Noura Al-Mashaan, has declined to ratify two decisions made during Meeting No. 13 of 2024 by the Municipal Council, reports Al-Qabas daily.

In a letter addressed to the President of the Municipal Council, Abdullah Al-Mahri, Dr. Al-Mashaan outlined her refusal to ratify the decisions.

Firstly, she objected to the approval of removing parking lots adjacent to Al-Waleed Bin Abdul Malik School, citing violation of internal regulations and emphasizing the importance of maintaining adjacent parking for the public interest and traffic management.



Dr. Al-Mashaan

Secondly, she opposed the Ministry of Finance's request to permanently reallocate a site in the Salmiya area, arguing that it contradicted the original temporary allocation based on the executive branch's study.

Additionally, Dr. Al-Mashaan issued a decision to revoke the former Minister of Municipality's regulations regarding citizen donations and private sector contributions.

She also introduced new transfer policies, mandating specific dates for issuing transfer decisions, imposing a two-year waiting period for newly appointed employees before they can request transfers, and restricting female employees from transferring to the Department of Funeral Affairs. Furthermore, residence in certain areas is excluded from transfer dates for three years, subject to compatibility with the new work center.

These decisions reflect Dr. Al-Mashaan's commitment to upholding regulations and implementing efficient municipal policies.

5-star ratings awarded

AU gets QS World University Ranking

KUWAIT CITY, March 25: The Australian University's (AU) achievements in numerous areas were recognized in the latest QS World University Rankings, which awarded the university with five-star ratings in the fields of Teaching, Employability, Inclusiveness, Internationalization and Academic Development following a comprehensive audit which evaluated dozens of indicators across eight categories.

The QS World University Rankings is a portfolio of comparative college and universities rankings compiled by the higher education analytics firm Quacquarelli Symonds. QS is the world's leading provider of services, analytics, and insight to the global higher education sector, whose mission is to enable motivated people anywhere in the world to fulfill their potential through educational achievement, international mobility, and career development.

The QS Stars system is their internationally recognized comprehensive rating system that's designed to offer a thorough evaluation of education institutions. QS Stars recognizes diversity between universities and student preferences by employing a multi-layered evaluation system that aligns with the unique strengths of each institution. By leveraging QS Stars, applicants can pinpoint universities



Professor Isam receiving the award.

that excel in areas significant to them, ensuring a perfect match between their interests and the institution's strengths.

In a prestigious event: "QS Higher Ed Summit: Middle East 2024 Conference and Exhibition" QS hosted AU to officially recognize its 5 stars Ranking, during which they presented an award to Prof. Isam Zabalawi, President of AU, in acknowledgement of the university's successes. On this occasion Prof. Isam quoted: "The roots of excellence are bitter, but the fruit is sweet."

Deadline shifted to May 2

Time to appoint teachers increased

KUWAIT CITY, March 25: Amid efforts to streamline educational processes, Minister of Education and Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research, Dr. Adel Al-Adwani, has directed the extension of the period for appointing new teachers and transitioning into their roles, reports Annahar daily.

Acting Undersecretary of the Ministry of Education, Anwar Al-Hamdan, issued a decision to extend this period until the end of the working day on Thursday, May 2, 2024, instead of the initial deadline of April 4.

Al-Hamdan emphasized that this decision followed a comprehensive study by the relevant public education sector, considering the completion of procedures for appointing new members of the educational body after the end of the suspension period.

The decision also allows the new batch of male and female citizens registered in the central employment system, nominated by the Civil Service Commission to work in the ministry, to finalize their transactions.

Al-Hamdan urged all relevant authorities to adhere to and implement this decision promptly from its issuance date. He emphasized the ministry's commitment to preparing for the upcoming academic year 2024-2025 and utilizing all available resources to ensure a suitable and safe learning environment for students and teachers



Dr. Al-Adwani

PADA overruled

Disabled wins right

KUWAIT CITY, March 25: The Court of Appeals has obligated the Public Authority for Disabled Affairs (PADA) to issue a certificate to a citizen stating that his motor and visual disabilities are severe and permanent, and then grant him all the benefits he deserves retroactively, reports Al-Anba daily.

Attorney Mohammad Al-Sayegh, the citizen's lawyer, revealed that his client has had severe permanent motor and visual disabilities since birth. However, he was surprised in 2022 when the authority issued a certificate stating that his motor disability is moderate and permanent. He filed a grievance, but it was rejected.

Based on the arguments and pieces of evidence presented by both sides, the court canceled the decision of PADA and obliged it to classify the plaintiff's motor and visual disabilities as severe and permanent, in addition to granting him the corresponding benefits retroactively, especially the certificate stating the correct disability classification.

across schools.

This endeavor will be carried out in collaboration with the relevant sectors within the Ministry of Education and the educational regions' departments.

diwaniya ديوانية

A DIGEST OF PUBLIC OPINION

Ripples of parliamentary life, Sheikh Mohammad's mission

"THE circumstances surrounding the inaugural sessions of the National Assembly in the early sixties posed challenges to the creation of a comprehensive document outlining the key objectives envisioned by Sheikh Abdullah Al-Salem, the Amir of Kuwait," columnist **Abdullah Bishara** wrote for **Al-Qabas** daily.

"He sought to encapsulate these goals in a constitutional framework that would blend constitutional legitimacy with the collective will of the Kuwaiti people, fostering a coalition founded on direct dialogue and strengthening the foundations of stability. This envisioned document aimed to pave a tranquil path forward, mutually agreed upon by all stakeholders, serving as a governing charter born from a shared conviction embraced by both the ruling authority and the populace.



Abdullah Bishara

"Sheikh Abdullah Al-Salem aspired for this agreement between the government and the people to resemble a documented marriage, symbolizing the commitment of Kuwaiti citizens to the principles enshrined within it. Under this arrangement, the people would exercise their right to choose their representatives through free and fair elections, resulting in the formation of a fifty-member Parliament tasked with representing their interests.

"This Parliament would work in concert with the Council of Ministers, the Prime Minister, and his deputy ministers, all operating under the auspices of His Highness the Emir, who embodies both legitimacy and the guardian of the nation.

"The Kuwaiti Constitution emerged as a product of this partnership between the government and Parliament, wherein both entities collaborate in governing the country. This collaborative partnership is exemplified through regular meetings between the two sides, aimed at devising optimal mechanisms to realize the shared objectives outlined in the Constitution, with consensus-building serving as the cornerstone of parliamentary-governmental relations.

"Without consensus, the government faces significant hurdles in achieving its objectives, as the essence of the governing document hinges on participation. The constitution does not anticipate opposition or discord; rather, its effectiveness relies on consensus. Without parliamentary-governmental consensus, neither the goals nor the efficacy of the constitution can be realized.

"The absence of a pamphlet elucidating objectives and outlining the consensus mechanism inherent in the marriage formula created a void, leading to jurisprudential interpretations that weakened government-parliamentary cohesion. This void culminated in confrontation and opposition, particularly evident during the late 1963 elections and the controversy surrounding Article 131, which prohibited trade with parliamentary membership.

"Sheikh Abdullah Al-Salem's response to the Article 131 crisis involved replacing the cabinet with a different group, allowing the emerging opposition to voice their concerns within the spirit of inter-connectedness inherent in the government-parliament partnership.

"However, representatives who championed the effectiveness of Article 131 continued to engage in opposition and criticism, paving the way for various opposition groups. These included religious factions and representatives aligned with Arab ideological parties, who capitalized on avenues for criticism and objection. They formed a cohesive opposition, particularly in matters concerning diplomacy and the Kuwait Oil Company.

"The collective spirit of the Constitution has waned as the opposition's influence has grown, bolstered by increased scrutiny and motions of no confidence against ministers. This shift has introduced new dynamics into constitutional practice, with interrogations becoming easier and their outcomes often resulting in confidence votes.

"Consequently, there has been a decline in the attractiveness of ministerial positions, particularly among specialized individuals who seek to avoid the inconveniences associated with scrutiny. Moreover, the allure of parliamentary membership has diminished, posing a risk to the vibrancy that ministerial roles once held.

"Amidst the backdrop of the parliamentary experience's mounting challenges and past tribulations, and in light of His Highness Sheikh Mohammad Al-Sabah Al-Salem's appointment as Prime Minister, I echo the sentiment of the Kuwaiti people in warmly welcoming him to lead the government. We hope that he fosters a collaborative relationship with Parliament, enabling the realization of his comprehensive development agenda through a competent and experienced team.

"I express the hope that Sheikh Mohammad Al-Sabah Al-Salem remains steadfast in his mission, unwavering in his determination to propel Kuwait forward from its current state of lethargy and stagnation.

"It is imperative that he confronts parliamentary objections with transparency, drawing upon the broad support of the Kuwaiti populace across all segments. This will facilitate his efforts in advancing political, intellectual, and developmental progress, fulfilling the nation's aspirations.

"The Kuwaiti people understand that progress cannot be rushed and requires sustained effort, patience, and unity. They recognize that achieving the goals set by His Highness Sheikh Mohammad

Al-Sabah's government will take time and collective support. Kuwait's future depends on the unwavering presence of this government, continuously working without succumbing to fatigue or impatience, bolstered by a cooperative partnership with Parliament to implement the approved program.

"It's essential to maintain a balanced perspective on achievements, avoiding exaggerated claims that may inflate expectations or downplay challenges. Kuwaitis value honesty and transparency in media reporting, rejecting sensationalism that distorts reality, as seen in other Arab nations' media. The people expect truthful communication, detailing both progress and obstacles encountered in the development process.

"Effective communication with all segments of society is paramount, necessitating ongoing dialogue through the media. Providing comprehensive information about the development process, including challenges faced and progress made, fosters understanding and trust among the populace.

"The media can be a valuable tool for the government when it upholds truthfulness in reporting achievements and obstacles alike. Fortunately, His Highness the Prime Minister recognizes the media's role in monitoring the government's progress, its interactions with Parliament, and the strength of their partnership.

"There's a strong sentiment among the populace that Sheikh Mohammad Al-Sabah's ministry is capable of navigating the complexities to uphold the integrity of the relationship between Parliament and the government.

"However, a challenging aspect that His Highness must prepare for is the interference of some representatives in mediations that defy both legal principles and parliamentary norms. These interventions often stem not from genuine legal or political concerns but from a desire to appease constituents in pursuit of votes.

"It's evident that confrontations between competent ministers and representatives seeking interrogation are marked by rigid language and tense behavior. These situations arise from the priorities of MPs who prioritize securing votes over supporting development initiatives and government programs. Sheikh Mohammad may benefit from forming alliances with supporters who can help diffuse tensions arising from such secondary issues, which MPs prioritize based on their own agendas.

"It's crucial for Sheikh Mohammad to be equipped with all possible avenues for success, especially amidst the rising tide of popular optimism accompanying his appointment to lead the government. The people of Kuwait earnestly pray for the realization of the program they eagerly anticipate under his leadership."

Also:

"A little calm... What is the response of the protesting brothers who refused to talk about forgers of Kuwaiti citizenship, and to those who demanded that the government expose them?" Sheikh **Ali Al-Jaber Al-Ahmad** wrote for **Al-Seyassah** daily.

"Did the citizen make a mistake when he called for the protection of national identity in order to preserve the rights of future generations, after revealing this number, which increases day after day as long as the research continues as per the law, which does not accept division? As for those who froze and denounced the Interior Ministry's announcement -- whether Kuwaitis or others, and described the announcement as 'striking national unity', they uttered nothing but an electoral slogan that will not affect the government. Whoever has a feather on his head should feel it.

"It is with deep regret that some of those who appear on social media programs consider themselves knowledgeable despite their excessive talk and incorrect information. Let everyone who objects know that the government's demand to inform it about citizenship forgers is more important than informing it about corruption, electronic crimes and other incidents that require someone to guide it to them. The saying, 'Every citizen is a sentinel,' was only for this reason and others, which bring harm to the homeland and the citizen. The government is not a sign of the unseen. Its agencies cannot detect everything prohibited, such as reporting quantities of alcohol and drugs from their informants, both abroad and domestically. There is no need for people to doubt or compare the issue to espionage, as the issue does not go beyond the application of the law.

"As for those who keep repeating these phrases 'Kuwaiti people refuse' and 'Kuwaiti people want' in every speech and statement, they do not know that the people, the children of this land, do not agree with all of your opinions.

"May and perhaps... In the past, children needed to be raised by their parents and teachers at school, but today, some parents need to be raised by their children. This is our current reality. Regrettably, this is due to poorly used social media programs. We are in the blessed month of Ramadan, when seeking for forgiveness is required, instead of asking for forgiveness. Refrain from insulting people and making comments that are outside of good manners and morals. We ask Allah to guide these people.

"In the end, differences in opinions, just like differences in tastes, ideas and colors, should not arouse discord, enmity and hatred between people. My disagreement with you does not prevent me from shaking your hand and accompanying you, just like a family living in one house that do not make difference in opinion an issue, because both of us have no power to decide."

— Compiled by PFX Fernandes



Food packages for needy in Yemen.

KUNA photo

Kuwait distributes 2,200-food baskets in Yemen

Kuwait's Direct-Aid Society launched on Sunday a campaign to distribute 2,200 food baskets to the needy in the governorates of Aden and Hadhramaut south of Yemen.

This campaign is part of the (Kuwait is By

Your Side) relief aid campaign entering its ninth year.

The Direct-Aid regional manager in Yemen Ali Batit told KUNA that the campaign would provide food baskets to the needy, noting that there were around 15,000 Yemenis suffering

from harsh conditions, disease, and other plights.

He affirmed that the Direct-Aid Society would continue to work with local Yemeni entities to distribute aid, saying that the aid would reach all those in need. (KUNA)

Hasty decision to shut down schools due to rain criticized

'Decision illogical, disruptive'

KUWAIT CITY, March 25: The Ministry of Education's abrupt decision to suspend in-person schooling and transition to online learning via the 'Teams' program due to rain-fall has drawn criticism from various quarters, reports Al-Jarida daily.

The decision, perceived as illogical and disruptive, has raised concerns about the preparedness of students and teachers for such a shift and the efficacy of online education compared to in-person classes.

Critics argue that the decision to suspend schools based on rainfall, which did not pose any imminent danger, reflects a lack of foresight and disregard for the importance of classroom instruction. They highlight the challenges faced by students and teachers in accessing and utilizing the online learning platform, particularly as many were not adequately prepared for such a sudden transition.

Moreover, concerns have been raised about the effectiveness of distance learning

compared to traditional classroom teaching, with many asserting that online education fails to provide the same level of benefit. The low participation rate in the Teams program further underscores the impracticality of relying solely on remote learning methods, especially when faced with technical difficulties and lack of experience among teachers.

The Ministry's decision has also sparked frustration among educators who feel under-supported, particularly regarding internet access and device provision. The absence of screen allowances for teachers during the pandemic further compounds their grievances, as they are now required to conduct remote classes without adequate compensation.

While the Ministry cited concerns for student safety based on weather forecasts, critics argue that the decision was disproportionate and unnecessary, given the relatively mild weather conditions. They emphasize the need for more considered and evidence-based approaches to decision-making, especially regarding educational matters that impact students' learning and development.

As the debate continues, the Ministry faces scrutiny over its handling of the situation and calls for more thoughtful and transparent decision-making processes in the future.



Municipality workers dismantling a campsite in Al-Ahmadi area.

Municipality dismantles 114 tents for violations

KUWAIT CITY, March 25: The supervisory teams of Kuwait Municipality, under the public hygiene departments in Jahra and Al-Ahmadi governorates, initiated the removal of non-compliant spring camps following the official camping period, which concluded last Friday, reports Al-Rai daily.

Across the northern and southern regions, municipal teams issued 231 warnings and dismantled 114 camps, while 35 camps were voluntarily taken down.

Kuwait Municipality expressed appreciation for the cooperation of licensed camp owners who voluntarily complied with the end of the official camping period. Emphasizing continued vigilance, municipal teams will persist in monitoring all camping sites to ensure adherence to the designated camping season and enforce Kuwait Municipality's regulations."

Nationality forger on the run held

KUWAIT CITY, March 25: Officers from the Criminal Investigation General Department in the Ministry of Interior arrested a Syrian wanted by law for evading a 12-year prison sentence on charges of forging Kuwaiti citizenship, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

Security sources revealed the Syrian, who was identified as A.H. and born in 1972, was arrested in Fintas and that his citizenship was withdrawn in 2019. Sources revealed he is wanted by law for forging citizenship as his father registered him under the name of a Kuwaiti identified as S.A. when he was five years old in exchange for an undisclosed

amount. When he grew up, he joined the Army after the invasion until he retired after 25 years in service. He has two sons with his Saudi wife and they are living with her.

'Girguyan' items checked: The Capital Emergency Team at the Ministry of Commerce and Industry inspected shops selling sweets and other Girguyan goodies in the wholesale market in Shuwaikh as part of the ministry's plan to monitor the prices of these items during the holy month of Ramadan, reports Al-Anba daily.

'Procuring licenses'

Indian man run over by compatriot, loses life

KUWAIT CITY, March 25: The First Ring Road witnessed a tragic accident that resulted in the death of a 54-year old Indian expatriate who was run over by a vehicle driven by another 44-year old Indian expatriate.

According to a security source, when the Operations Room of the Ministry of Interior received a report about the accident on the First Ring Road opposite Shuwaikh, security officers immediately rushed to the location, and found that the deceased was a 54-year-old Indian who was run over by a vehicle driven by a 44-year-old Indian. The body was referred to forensic medicine and the motorist was referred to Shamiya Police Station.

Smart driving licenses: The Ministry of Interior has initiated a recent practice aimed at procuring two million smart driving licenses and associated printing materials for the General Traffic Department, reports Al-Qabas daily.

Three months ago, the Interior Ministry issued a directive to transition solely to electronic driving licenses for residents within the country, effective from October 12, 2023. This decision eliminates the need for physical printing of licenses, with license renewal processes conducted electronically through the Ministry of Interior website and the government's unified electronic services application, "Sahel."

Applicants who meet the stipulated conditions and regulations will be accepted electronically, and their licenses will be activated through the Ministry of Interior's documents within the "My Identity" application.

Drug addict nabbed: Officers from the Ahmadi Security Directorate apprehended an individual in his forties with a history of criminal activity in the Ahmadi region, Sunday evening. The individual was found in a state of drug intoxication and was in possession of illicit substances, reports Al-Anba daily. According to a security source, suspicion arose when a parked car on the roadside drew attention. Upon approaching the vehicle, the driver attempted to flee but was subsequently apprehended. It was determined that the individual was under the influence of drugs.

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Egyptian ambassador underscores deep-rooted ties between Egypt and Kuwait

Egyptian Coptic Church celebrates love, brotherhood across religions

KUWAIT CITY, March 25: In a heartwarming display of unity and fellowship, the Egyptian Coptic Church in Kuwait hosted its annual "Gathering of Love" event, bringing together diverse members of society including sheikhs, clerics, church priests, diplomats, and

political and social figures. reports Al-Qabas daily. The event exemplified the spirit of Ramadan with its atmosphere of love and camaraderie. Egyptian Ambassador to Kuwait, Osama Shaltout, underscored the deep-rooted and enduring ties between

Egypt and Kuwait, spanning political, economic, and cultural spheres. He lauded the contributions of the Egyptian community in Kuwait to the country's development, emphasizing Egypt's national unity as a model for the world. Expressing gratitude to Kuwait's

leadership, government, and people for their unwavering support of the Egyptian community, Ambassador Shaltout commended the tradition of the "gathering of love" as a cherished practice of the Egyptian Church in Kuwait, fostering bonds of affection among the Egyptian diaspora.

Father Bigul, Bishop Bishoy, of the Egyptian Coptic Church highlighted the unique Ramadan atmosphere in Kuwait, characterized by unity and joy. He affirmed the bonds of friendship and love among Kuwait's diverse populace, underscoring the country's environment of

safety, security, and harmony. Dr. Siham Al-Qabandi, a professor at Kuwait University, praised the gathering as a reflection of Kuwait's civilized and humanitarian ethos, nurtured under the leadership of His Highness the Amir, Sheikh Meshaal Al-Ahmad.

KU council approves admission policies and academic projects

Amendments to faculty promotion system regulations at PAAET

KUWAIT CITY, March 25: During its recent session, the Kuwait University Council made significant decisions regarding admission policies and academic projects for the upcoming academic year, reports Al-Qabas daily.

The Council endorsed the proposal put forth by the Deanship of Admission and Registration concerning the admission and transfer policy for the academic year 2024-2025. Additionally, it gave nod for a proposal from the College of Graduate Studies to reserve admission seats in graduate programs for countries with diplomatic representation in Kuwait.

Furthermore, the Council granted approval to the request from the Higher Education sector to extend the tenure of the founding Board of Directors members of Abdullah Al-Salem University, who are also professors at Kuwait University, until September.

Dr. Fayez Al-Dhafiri, Acting Secretary General of Kuwait University and the university's official spokesman, highlighted the outcomes of the meeting. He stated that the Council endorsed the academic accreditation project and included the research oasis project in the university's development plan and government work program.

Moreover, the Council approved amendments to the academic system regulations of the Faculty

of Law and reviewed and approved the financial reports of the Scientific Publishing Council, Scientific Journals, and the Authorship, Arabization, and Publishing Committee for the fiscal year 2022/2023.

Additionally, the Council announced the promotion of 8 faculty members to the positions of professor and associate professor across various colleges, further enhancing the academic excellence of Kuwait University.

Meanwhile, informed sources within the Public Authority for Applied Education and Training have revealed significant amendments to the regulations governing the faculty promotion authority's colleges, reports Al-Jarida daily.

system in the

Responsible The committee responsible for developing these regulations, composed of the authority's administration and the Faculty Association, has recently finalized the amendments.

Key amendments include the introduction of an online application process for promotions and the removal of student evaluations of faculty members from the criteria. Additionally, there are updates to the standards for scientific journals in which promotional research is published.

These amendments are awaiting official approval from the authority's board of directors and will be implemented upon review. Major changes in the promotion criteria include the elimination of teaching performance evaluation and the requirement for applicants to have a minimum of four years of teaching experience.

For promotions from assistant teacher to teacher, individuals must have four consecutive or separate years of actual work in the position of assistant teacher, with teaching performance no longer a consideration.

Similarly, promotions from teacher to lecturer require four years of actual work as a teacher, with teaching performance criteria removed.

For promotions from assistant professor to associate professor, additional requirements include obtaining a doctorate degree and submitting a scientific production consisting of peer-reviewed research papers.

Amendments to the rules for promotions from associate professor to professor also include the requirement for a doctorate degree and the submission of peer-reviewed scientific research papers.

Furthermore, there are specifications regarding the standards for scientific journals where research is published, ensuring they are issued by accredited universities or approved institutes.

Overall, these amendments aim to streamline the promotion process and ensure consistency in evaluating faculty members' qualifications and contributions to academia.



Dr. Al-Dhafiri



A photo from the event.



The Kuwaiti ambassador to Jordan honoring Syrian refugees who have memorized the Holy Quran in Jordan. KUNA photo

Zakat establishes residential village in Ma'rib

Kuwait humanitarian societies boost activities in Jordan during Ramadan

AMMAN, March 25, (KUNA): Since the beginning of Ramadan, Kuwait's charities augmented humanitarian activities in Jordan to support refugees in the area and contribute to improving their living conditions.

In attendance of and under patronage of Kuwait's Ambassador to Jordan, Hamad Al-Mari, Nama charity society held a ceremony to honor 143 Quran memorizers of orphaned Syrian refugees.

Nama's Khaled Al-Shamri told KUNA after the ceremony that this is to honor the children's achievements and to further encourage them.

Al-Shamri affirmed Nama's intent on providing sufficient care to orphaned children, and hailed the role Kuwaitis in supporting such endeavors.

Kuwait Red Crescent Society (KRCS), in cooperation with its Jordanian counterpart organized fast breaking event for some 600 orphans in Al-Aqaba.

The event included distribution of Eid clothing coupons as well as entertaining shows and contents for the children.

Throughout the month KRCs gave out around 15,000 fast breaking meals, and will continue to do so for the rest of the month.

As for Rahma Society, it distributed some 2,500 food baskets to 12,000 Syrian

and Palestinian refugees. Its Arab sector chief, Abdullah Al-Ajmi, took note of the coordination with local charity organizations to facilitate effective distribution of aid.

The International Islamic Charity Organization, alongside Al-Ghara local charity, put together a fast breaking project that included distribution of 700 food baskets.

Meanwhile, the Undersecretary of Ma'rib Governorate, AbdRabbuh Muftah, inaugurated Sunday Khawla residential village, which consists of 53 units for the displaced, funded by the Kuwaiti Zakat House, as part of the "Kuwait Next to You" campaign.

In a press statement during the opening ceremony, the Yemeni official praised the humanitarian role of the government and people of Kuwait and its humanitarian interventions in supporting the displaced in Yemen.

He pointed out that the village includes all services, including a school, a health unit, a mosque, and a water well.

He also expressed his thanks and appreciation to Kuwait for its constant support for the Yemeni people at various stages and circumstances, appreciating this generous humanitarian gesture from the Kuwaiti Zakat House in this holy month.

'Age limit set to avoid penalties'

New scholarship regulations in Kuwait offer financial incentives for employees

KUWAIT CITY, March 25: Employees wishing to obtain a scholarship, study leave or diploma must inform their employers; as the new scholarship regulations stipulate lucrative and encouraging financial benefits, especially for those who obtain admission to a distinguished university, reports Al-Anba daily quoting sources.

Sources said the choice of specialization plays a vital role in the career path of employees, particularly in terms of obtaining financial support.

Sources revealed the tasks of the Missions Sector at the Civil Service Commission (CSC), which is supervised by Assistant Undersecretary Narges Dashti, include conducting thorough review, audit and examination of the scholarship and study leave plans for State employees with the aim of limiting them to the specializations needed by the labor market including the government agencies. Sources said the mechanism for selecting specializations is done by asking government agencies about the specializations they need; while the Job Arrangement Department is responsible for excluding specializations in abundance and maintaining specializations with short manpower supply.

Asked about the justifications for setting an age limit for those wishing to obtain a scholarship or study leave, sources stated that one of the conditions for scholarship is for the student to serve the

State for a period similar to the sabbatical leave period. "If the employee is above 50 years old, when can the employee serve the State considering the legal retirement age? Therefore, an age limit was set to prevent the employee being subject to penalties, such as recovering debt if he is unable to fulfill the State service condition," sources explained.

Sources continued saying that the tasks of the Department for Following up the Scholars' Issues start from the beginning of the study period until their graduation and return to the homeland. It also studies debt recovery cases, which is done in case of failure to obtain the qualification within the specified period or resignation after obtaining the qualification, sources added.

Sources confirmed that the CSC recovered an undisclosed amount from scholarship and graduate students who did not obtain qualifications within the specified period, those who resigned after obtaining their qualifications, and those who did not serve the State for a period similar to their scholarship or academic leave period.

On the other hand, sources praised the national nursing program, which extends for 10 years and aims to send any employee interested in obtaining a bachelor's degree in nursing without conditions and disbursing salaries in full; indicating about 90 employees benefit from the program annually.

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Automated link with rest of hospitals to be completed gradually: Dr Radwan

MoH implements digital transformation in blood transfusion services

KUWAIT CITY, March 25: Director of the Blood Transfusion Services Department at the Ministry of Health Dr Reem Al-Radwan has affirmed completion of the automated link between the department and the Blood Bank at Mubarak Al-Kabeer Hospital in order to facilitate the process of requesting blood and its derivatives electronically to speed up the response and avoid errors, reports Al-Anba daily.

Dr Al-Radwan stated that this is in compliance with the directives of Health Minister Dr Ahmed Al-Awadhi and one of the health projects in the 100 working days program.

She pointed out this follows the previous automated link with the Blood Bank at Farwaniya Hospital; revealing at the same time that the link with the rest of the hospitals will be completed gradually according to the plan. She indicated that the department is in the process of completing the

digital transformation of its technical and administrative transactions to keep pace with technological developments in line with the New Kuwait 2035 vision, which aims to activate the role of health information in the health sector and improve the quality of services.

She reiterated this is within the department's plan to electronically connect with public and private hospitals to easily determine the blood supply in each hospital and provide blood to hospitals as needed.

She said blood is distributed to hospitals through the Central Blood Bank in Jabriya and the Sheikhha Salwa Al-Sabah Center for Stem Cells and Umbilical Cord in Sabah Health District. She added 200,000 units of blood bags and blood derivatives were distributed last year; covering 14 public hospitals, 26 private hospitals and a health facility in the private sector.

273,000 people expected to travel during Eid al-Fitr holidays: DGCA

Dubai, Cairo, Jeddah to be most in demand destinations

By Mohammad Al-Misleh
Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, March 25: With the approach of Eid al-Fitr holidays, Kuwait International Airport is working on taking a number of proactive measures to deal with the holiday season, in coordination with the operating authorities.

The Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) announced that the number of passengers during the Eid al-Fitr holiday is expected to reach 273,000 passengers on board 2,037 flights during the period from April 9 to April 14.

According to the official spokesman of DGCA Abdullah Al-Rajhi, the destinations expected to be most in demand during this period are Dubai, Cairo, Jeddah, Istanbul and Doha.

The upcoming summer season will witness the entry of new airlines operating to and from Kuwait International Airport, such as Acacia India and Air Italy, in addition to Sun Express, which started operating since the last winter season.

Assistance

Al-Rajhi affirmed that all employees at Kuwait International Airport are fully prepared to provide assistance and facilities to the traveling public and airline companies to achieve the highest levels of satisfaction.

In this regard, a source explained that the agencies operating at the airport held several meetings with ground service providers during the past days to review field plans for dealing with the holiday season.

The passenger traffic will be active and crowded during the holiday period, especially in light of the international and local airlines offering flights to various destinations around the world, including the Middle East, Europe, Asia, North America, and Africa.

The airport is ready to deal with the increasing number of passengers in light of the development of operational plans based on raising the performance of the operational sectors and improving the services provided to travelers in a way that ensures smooth movement of passengers from the parking lots to the aircraft gates.

The source stated that levels of preparedness will be raised, and staff numbers will be increased to improve the services provided to travelers and enhance the operating efficiency during the travel seasons.



Abdullah Al-Rajhi

Kuwaiti naval force to carry out marine live ammo practice

KUWAIT CITY, March 25, (KUNA): The Kuwaiti military announced Monday that the naval force would carry out a shooting practice with live ammunition on Tuesday, from 7:00 am until 6:00 pm (local-time).

The marine shooting range will take place 16.5 nautical miles east of Ras Al-Julaia, extending to Qaruh Island, and six nautical miles east of Ras Al-Zour, extending to Umm Al-Maradim Island, said a statement by the Ministry of Defense.

The ministry asked all citizens and residents to refrain from traversing that area during the aforementioned time for everyone's safety.



Ambassador Lewis planting the Kuwaiti-British partnership tree.

Event held to plant Kuwaiti-British partnership tree

British envoy affirms strong bilateral ties with Kuwait

KUWAIT CITY, March 25: In a press statement Sunday, the British Ambassador to Kuwait, Belinda Lewis, emphasized the enduring depth of relations between her country and Kuwait, dating back 125 years of historical partnerships, reports Al-Qabas daily.

Ambassador Lewis made these remarks during the planting event of the Kuwaiti-British partnership tree at the Kuwait National Library's garden, in the presence of

National Library Director General Siham Al-Azmi and Sheikhha Hala Al-Sabah.

Ambassador Lewis explained that she planted the inaugural tree in the memorial garden, with each subsequent tree symbolizing a significant milestone and memory in the bilateral relationship. She expressed hope for the planting of many such trees, serving as tangible markers of the shared history and mutual cooperation between

the two nations.

Siham Al-Azmi, the Director General of the National Library, highlighted the significance of planting the Kuwaiti-British partnership tree as a celebration of the longstanding friendship between the two countries. She emphasized the Kuwait National Library's commitment to transforming its garden into a diplomatic space, fostering stronger ties and fostering cooperation with all friendly nations.



Photo by Rizk Taufiq

A photo from the annual Iftar organized by the German Embassy.

German visa center ready to receive multiple-entry visa applications from Kuwaitis, says ambassador

By Fares Al-Abdan

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, March 25: The German Ambassador to Kuwait Hans-Christian Freiherr von Reibnitz announced that the embassy will hold a music festival at the Jaber Cultural Center next month.

In a press statement issued on the occasion of the annual Iftar organized by the embassy yesterday evening, the ambassador affirmed that cultural relations do not rise to the required level, and the two sides sought to develop this aspect of their relations.

Ambassador Reibnitz also affirmed that the German visa center is ready to receive all multiple-entry visa applications from Kuwaitis.

He stressed the need to submit applications early, well in advance of travel, and to bring all the required documents.

Ambassador Reibnitz said, "We are ready to receive visa applications for the next summer season from now to avoid crowding. This was discussed with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs."

He highlighted his country's support for exempting Kuwaitis from the Schengen visa, adding, "However, this will take a long process, and I am not the magic wand that can do this quickly."

Ambassador Reibnitz warned those who wish to travel to his country against dealing with illegal offices and people who fill out the forms and complete the papers required for the visa on their behalf, as they resort to some fake reservations for hotels and tickets, which will eventually lead to the visa getting rejected.

He insisted that the embassy does not work with travel agencies,

as the applications are received only through the approved visa office.

Regarding the possibility of Article 17 holders obtaining a visa to enter Germany, Ambassador Reibnitz said, "The travel document carried by the Bedouin residents is not considered as a passport approved by us in Germany. However, there are cases that can be studied and taken into consideration individually."

In terms of medical treatments, the ambassador said obtaining a visa for medical treatment in Germany is only for simple cases, but the problem lies in the foreign companions who accompany the patients, as it will take a long time for them to obtain a visa.

Regarding scholarships, he said there are many scholarships granted by German universities to Kuwaitis, but the Kuwaitis refrain due to the requirement of studying in the German language, adding, "Our system differs from the British and American systems."

The ambassador added, "I am proud that there are a number of Kuwaiti doctors who are graduates of German universities. They are highly qualified and constitute an important component in the Kuwaiti health system."

In response to a question about military cooperation, Ambassador Reibnitz said, "I would like to call it defense and security cooperation. There is a permanent invitation from Germany to discuss defense and security cooperation between the two countries because it is a pivotal point in the bilateral relations. There are ongoing discussions between the two countries regarding a security agreement, which includes training, cooperation, information exchange, and

joint analysis. We attach the utmost importance to the naval forces, as the situation in the Gulf requires a bilateral review between the two countries."

Highlighting the presence of a European mission in the Red Sea, he pointed out the security of maritime navigation in the Red Sea, which allows the flow of trade.

Meanwhile, Ambassador Reibnitz praised the Kuwaiti tradition of visiting diwanias, revealing that it was their second year in Kuwait and they visited a large number of diwanias so far, reaching about 28 diwanas belonging to well-known Kuwaiti families, and seven small ones this month.

He praised the topics discussed in the diwanias, which include all legal, political and social aspects. Ambassador Reibnitz expressed his happiness at the good reception and hospitality he received during his visit to these diwanias, adding, "This is what we miss in Germany. The Kuwaiti ambassador to Germany also misses this because it is difficult for him to communicate with the German community, unlike my communication with the Kuwaiti community."

He highlighted that Kuwait has not yet named its ambassador to Berlin, adding, "We expect that to happen before this summer after the formation of the new government".

Ambassador Reibnitz praised the relations between the two countries in various fields.

Regarding the heated situation in the Middle East, he explained that his country's foreign minister began her sixth tour to the Middle East in October 2023 in an attempt to find a solution to the conflict in the region, adding, "Germany's stance regarding this crisis is to stop the bloodshed".



KUNA photo

KRCS delivering meals to the displaced Palestinian refugees in Gaza.

KRCS distributes meals to Palestinian refugees

Kuwait Red Crescent Society (KRCS) announced, Monday, its preliminary action plan in the iftar (breaking fast) project, providing 30,000 warm meals to displaced Palestinians in Southern Gaza.

The Director General of the Palestinian Wafaa Capacity Building and Microfinance Foundation, Muhaisen Al-Atawna, said in a statement to KUNA that the KRCS "distributed 30,000 warm

meals to displaced Palestinians in Deir Al-Balah, Khan Yunis, and Rafah in the south of Gaza."

This is the first phase of the iftar project in Ramadhan, Al-Atawna emphasized, with consecutive phases ahead which include distributing food parcels and aid relief to fasting Palestinians during the catastrophic conditions forced on them by the Israeli occupation. (KUNA)

Social Affairs

Continued from Page 1

funds, which have a substantial amount of money, we highlighted their misuse and inappropriate allocation. Despite ongoing talk about "localizing charitable efforts" in the country, it appears to be more of a slogan used for local and political purposes rather than actual implementation.

Therefore, if the intention is serious about resolving this problem, these funds must be used to get rid of this nightmare that is troubling about 120,000 citizens who have fallen under the temptations of those with bad intentions in loans.

They deliberately push the needy to sign dud cheques or trust receipts, and then they will use them against those individuals in the courts.

It is true that the "Your campaign is a joy for them" drive relieves the distress of the needy. Even though it is appreciated by the Minister of Social Affairs, it requires a lot from the government and the relevant ministries in terms of changing the legal approach, releasing the debtors, and only using the electronic bracelet. This is especially for women who were victims of their husbands' fraud, and are now in prison because of that, or ensuring zakat funds, which have billions, are used to pay these fines on behalf of insolvent people, as all countries worldwide do, especially the Gulf, which closed this file a long time ago.

Furthermore, there is a need to amend the law regarding creditors who lend without conducting proper due diligence. It should not fall upon the victim to ensure this diligence. Lenders should not exploit debt for purposes that lack integrity.

In this regard, if the Constitution makes Islam the religion of the state, and the Islamic law a main source of legislation, then it is important to draw inspiration from that legal rule, which is that the person who does not conduct due diligence before lending should be held responsible.

Also, the debtor has the right to the zakat money, unless the intention is to maintain this problem to serve users and money lenders. If so, then these campaigns will be nothing but slogans. This is the greatest calamity.

Finally, the Ministry of Social Affairs, the zakat funds, and those in charge of the donation campaigns must bargain with the beneficiaries of the dud cheque to reduce their value, especially since they deliberately put the signatories in prison, and did not fear Allah in their procedures.

Residential city

Continued from Page 1

The site is in Sabhan with an area of 40,000 square meters, to accommodate 3,000 workers, it will hold 16 residential complexes with bedrooms, a kitchen, bathrooms, living rooms and laundry rooms on every floor.

The project will also include two commercial complexes consisting of restaurants, cafes, and shops, in addition to administrative and government buildings, and facilities such as a police station and a mosque.

The contract was signed by a representative of the Kuwait Municipality, Mishal Al-Aradah, and the project was handed over to be implemented within a year and a half.

Candidates

Continued from Page 1

in addition to addressing the housing issue.

He will also submit a bill on allowing Kuwaiti women to obtain a house or a flat; indicating they are currently granted a housing loan of KD70,000 but this amount is not enough for the construction of a house or flat.

Former MP and Fourth Constituency candidate Saadoun Hammad has stressed the need for political stability in order to issue legislation that the citizens need. He said certain parties are taking advantage of the unstable political conditions. He thinks that combining the crown prince and prime minister positions could lead to political stability and minimize disputes.

Meanwhile, the Salafi Movement has declared its support for Fifth Constituency candidate Abdullah Muhammad Al-Kandari.

In addition, First Constituency candidate Mohammad Al-Matar now represents the Islamic Constitutional Movement (ICM), replacing former MP Osama Al-Shaheen who decided not to run for the 2024 election.

In related news, Minister of Information, Abdulrahman Al-Mutairi discussed on Sunday with the ministry's officials the progress of the plan to cover the National Assembly elections and facilitate work of media professionals participating in coverage from inside and outside Kuwait.

Cabinet denounces

Continued from Page 1

anyone who harmed national unity through statements deemed offensive for tribes and various groups in society, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

In a press statement, the Public Relations and Security Media General Department at the ministry stressed that there is no tolerance for abusive words or deeds, incitement of sectarian or tribal strife, and attempt to justify or promote any form of hatred or discrimination or incitement of such act. It warned that the ministry will deal firmly with anyone who engages in abuse through social media and other means; thus, reinforcing the principle that "no one is above the law."

The Ministry of Interior's Public Relations and Security Media General Department has confirmed the arrest of a citizen, handing them over to the Public Prosecution in compliance with an arrest order. This action follows the Ministry's implementation of necessary legal measures against individuals found to have jeopardized national unity through expressions insulting various societal groups via media and social communication channels, in accordance with the National Unity Law.

In a press statement, it emphasized its firm stance on the matter, asserting that no individual is exempt from the law. It stressed the importance of every citizen's commitment to speech and action that preserves national unity.

The Interior Ministry reiterated its previous statement, declaring zero tolerance for verbal or behavioral abuse, incitement of sectarian or tribal discord, or any promotion of hatred, discrimination, or incitement thereof.

World News Roundup

Europe

Kyiv endures air strike

4 charged in Russia concert hall 'attack'

MOSCOW, March 25, (AP): Four men accused of staging the Russia concert hall attack that killed more than 130 people appeared before a Moscow court Sunday on terrorism charges showing signs of severe beatings. One appeared to be barely conscious during the hearing.

Court statements said two of the suspects accepted their guilt in the assault, though the men's condition raised questions about whether they were speaking freely. There had been conflicting reports in Russian media outlets that said three or all four men admitted culpability.

The investigators charged Dalerdzhon Mirzoyev, 32; Saidakrami Rachabalizoda, 30; Shamsidin Fariduni, 25; and Mukhammadsobir Faizov, 19, with committing a terrorist attack resulting in the death of others. The offense carries a maximum sentence of life imprisonment.

Moscow's Basmany District Court ordered that the men, all of whom were identified in the media as citizens of Tajikistan, be held in custody until May 22 pending investigation and trial.

Russian media had reported that the men were tortured during interrogation by the security services, and Mirzoyev, Rachabalizoda and Fariduni showed signs of heavy bruising, including swollen faces.

Rachabalizoda also had a heavily bandaged ear. Russian media said Saturday that one of the suspects had his ear cut off during interrogation.

The fourth suspect, Faizov, was brought to court from a hospital in a wheelchair and sat with his eyes closed throughout the proceedings.

Court officials said Mirzoyev and Rachabalizoda admitted guilt for the attack after being charged.

The hearings came as Russia observed a national day of mourning for the attack Friday on the suburban Crocus City Hall concert venue that killed at least 137 people.

Russian authorities arrested the four suspected attackers Saturday, with seven more people detained on suspicion of involvement in the attack, Russian President Vladimir Putin said in an address to the nation Saturday night.

Kyiv endures a third air attack: Multiple explosions were heard in Kyiv on Monday morning as a Russian attack hit the Ukrainian capital for the third time in five days, part of an apparent escalation of aerial bombardment of cities by the Kremlin's forces as the war stretches into its third year with the front line largely stationary.

City authorities said a residential building was damaged in one district of the city. Debris from interceptions fell on various districts of the city during the daylight attack.

Kyiv Mayor Vitalii Klitschko said two women were injured.

Emergency services were on their way to the sites, officials said. Further details were not immediately available.

The attack came three days after a concert hall attack in Russia that killed more than 130 people.

Poland demands explanation: Poland demanded an explanation from Russia on Sunday after one of its missiles strayed briefly into Polish airspace during a major missile attack on Ukraine, prompting the NATO member to activate F-16 fighter jets.

It was Russia's third big missile attack on Ukraine in the past four days, and the second to target the capital, Kyiv.

The governor of the Lviv region, Maksym Kozzytskyi, said on the Telegram platform that critical infrastructure was hit, but he didn't specify what precisely was struck. No deaths or injuries were reported.

Later, authorities said that rescuers had just put out a fire at a critical infrastructure facility in the Lviv region, which had been attacked with missiles and drones at night and in the morning.

Ireland poised to get youngest PM: Ireland is poised to get its youngest-ever premier next month after Simon Harris secured the leadership of the Fine Gael party on Sunday, replacing Leo Varadkar who announced his surprise resignation last week.

The 37-year-old Harris, who has been the coalition government's further and higher education minister, was the only candidate to put his name forward to succeed Varadkar, who had been Ireland's previous youngest prime minister, or what Ireland calls its taoiseach.

Harris is expected to be formally elected premier in the Irish parliament in early April after lawmakers return from their Easter break.

In his victory speech in the central Ireland town of Athlone, Harris said this was a "moment for Fine Gael to reconnect" with the people and pledged to fight against populist forces in Irish politics.

France launches anti-drug crackdown: The French interior minister announced multiple nationwide anti-drug crackdowns Monday, reflecting the government's commitment to show it's serious about tackling the drug trade and crime in cities ahead of European elections.

Interior Minister Gerald Darmanin said that police units conducted raids and made several arrests in the northern city of Lille as well as Villeneuve-d'Ascq and Roubaix. He said that authorities are "going to multiply the operations that we have prepared for months to hit very hard."

The operations were set to continue with checks and searches of residential buildings, Darmanin wrote on X, formerly Twitter. The first raid of the operation took place last week in Marseille.

Kate, William moved by support: Kate, the Princess of Wales, and her husband, Prince William, are said to be "extremely moved" by the public's warmth and support following her shocking cancer announcement as tributes continued to pour in Sunday from around the world.

After weeks of frenzied speculation on social media about her health and well-being, Kate said in a candid video message on Friday that she is undergoing chemotherapy for cancer following major abdominal surgery. The 42-year-old princess said the cancer discovery was a "huge shock" and she was now in the early stages of preventative chemotherapy.



Putin



US President Joe Biden, (left), greets people at a campaign event March 19, 2024, in Phoenix. As Biden campaigns for reelection at a furious pace, Republican presidential candidate former president Donald Trump is lying low. The differing approaches underscore the deficits both sides are facing. (AP)



Mikey Reynolds, an employee at The Works on Main Street in Brattleboro, Vt., shovels the sidewalk in front of the restaurant as a person who is facing homelessness sleeps in a door entryway while seeking refuge from the snow storm on March 23. (AP)



Farris



Bailey

America

Former lawmaker arrested: A former Virginia lawmaker was arrested over the weekend on felony gun and drug charges and a misdemeanor charge of violating a protective order, according to a sheriff's office official and jail records.

Matt Farris, who had served in the House of Delegates as a Republican since 2012 before running unsuccessfully last year as an independent, was booked at a Blue Ridge Regional Jail facility early Sunday, online jail records show.

He faces charges of possession of a Schedule I or II drug, a felony, possession of a Schedule I or II drug while possessing a firearm, also a felony, and misdemeanor violation of a protective order. Lt. Jarrett Rea of the Campbell County Sheriff's Office said by phone.

Rea said that apart from confirming the charges, which were also listed in jail records, he had no other details to share about the allegations against Farris or what led to his arrest. He said more information would likely be available Monday. (AP)

Storms sweep US: Heavy rain and quarter-sized hail fell in Southern California Sunday as the National Weather Service predicted lightning and wind gusts approaching 60 mph (97 kph) in the mountain area earlier in the day.

The California storm was moving south from the Sierra Nevada, where areas around Lake Tahoe received about a foot (30 cm) of new snow and Mammoth Mountain reported up to 18 inches (45 cm) by Sunday morning. A day earlier, the resort was forced to close several ski lifts after a 91-mph (147-kph) wind gust was recorded.

A 35-year-old woman was rescued after being swept away in the storm-swollen Los Angeles River, the LA Fire Department said. She was airlifted to a hospital with minor injuries and hypothermia, the department said.

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

Entrepreneur Bean dies: Linda L. Bean, a granddaughter of famed outdoor retailer L.L. Bean who became an entrepreneur, philanthropist and conservative activ-

Politics

NJ first lady suspends Senate campaign

Biden visits swing states, Trump fundraising

WASHINGTON, March 25, (AP): As US President Joe Biden visited five cities in a multiday trip last week, former president Donald Trump was hardly seen in public, spending most of his time in South Florida.

Trump has held just a single public campaign event since he locked up the Republican presidential nomination on March 12: a rally in Ohio funded not by his campaign but by backers of a Senate candidate whom he had endorsed. The events page on his campaign website has had nothing listed.

Biden, meanwhile, has been barnstorming the country. After a trip to North Carolina on Tuesday, the Democratic president will have touched down in all of the 2024 swing states in the less than three weeks since his State of the Union address.

The differing approaches reflect the deficits each side is facing.

Trump's campaign faces a serious money shortfall and mounting legal bills as he fights four criminal indictments. His focus in recent weeks has been on wooing potential donors as his campaign builds its infrastructure across battleground states to catch up to Democrats, who have a significant head start.

Oldest

For Biden, 81, the tempo is a message in and of itself as he aims to combat persistent voter concerns about his age. Whoever wins in November will be the oldest president to be inaugurated, though polls find that voters see the issue as more pressing for Biden. Trump is 77.

Both sides are projecting confidence and accusing the other of trying to hide its candidate's problems.

Biden "looks like a lost puppy any time he ventures onto the campaign trail," said Trump spokesperson Karoline Leavitt, who accused Biden's campaign of limiting his events to "stops at field offices with a few paid staffers who look less enthused than attendees at a funeral."

Trump, she went on to say, "is greeted by crowds of enthusiastic Americans everywhere he goes, and he will continue to hold massive rallies around the country with tens of thousands of

supporters who want to 'Make America Great Again.' Joe Biden's campaign is a failing, boring, disaster. President Trump is building the greatest political movement in history."

Biden campaign spokesperson Ammar Moussa disagreed.

"We are two weeks into the general election and Donald Trump can't raise money, is hiding at his country club, and is letting convicts and conspiracy theorists take over his campaign," he said in a statement. "That is not a winning strategy."

Concerns

Biden's team is trying to sell the public on his accomplishments as concerns persist that voters are unaware of what he's done in office and are instead focused on frustrations over high grocery costs and concerns about the sharp rise in illegal crossings at the US-Mexico border.

"We have not been talking to folks about the issues that President Biden has been delivering on," said Yolanda Bejarano, the state Democratic chairwoman in Arizona, where Biden campaigned last week. "That's what we are determined to do."

His aides have packaged his campaign stops with official White House events designed to promote his policy agenda and legislative achievements.

Trump has been spending his days in and around his Mar-a-Lago club in Palm Beach, Florida - fundraising, hosting elected officials who frequently visit, and meeting aides.

But Trump has also made time for other pursuits. He recently said he won two championships at his Palm Beach golf club, writing on his social media site that they were "very exciting" wins on a "GREAT and difficult course." He visited his golf club in West Palm Beach on Sunday to accept two trophies from a cheering audience.

Trump faces a slew of pressing legal challenges. That includes a Monday deadline to pay more than \$454 million in fines and interest. If Trump doesn't come up with the money, New York's attorney general could start the process of seizing his assets.

Instead of his signature large rallies,

aides say, Trump has been attending fundraising events five to six days a week. That includes lunches and dinners that bring in immediate cash as well as relationship-building meetings that could result in future checks.

On Thursday, his super political action committee held a \$100,000-person roundtable with Hispanic leaders at his golf club in Doral, Florida, according to a copy of the invitation obtained by The Associated Press.

"There is great enthusiasm in the community," said Miami-Dade County Commissioner Kevin Cabrera, one of the hosts.

Not holding events also saves the campaign cash it does not have to waste. Trump's rallies cost "half a million a pop," Trump senior advisor Chris LaCivita said in a podcast interview last year.

Also:

WASHINGTON: New Jersey first lady Tammy Murphy on Sunday suspended her US Senate campaign to replace Democratic Sen. Robert Menendez as he faces federal corruption charges.

Murphy said in a video posted to social media that winning the Democratic primary would require her to wage "a very divisive and negative campaign."

"With Donald Trump on the ballot and so much at stake for our nation, I will not in good conscience waste resources tearing down a fellow Democrat," Murphy said.

Her decision to drop out probably clears the way for US Rep Andy Kim in the Democratic primary on June 4. Kim is mounting a more formidable challenge than is typical against a well-connected political figure in a state where connections count for a lot.

Menendez announced that he would not run in that primary but did not rule out seeking reelection as an independent.

Murphy, a first-time candidate, was running with the backing of influential Democratic figures. Kim has centered his campaign in part on upending the state's unique ballot design, widely viewed as favoring candidates preferred by county party insiders.

ed," the statement said. "Our hearts go out to her family and friends."

Bean's grandfather, Leon Leonwood Bean, founded the company in 1912. It grew through its popular catalogue, offering durable products such as rubber-bottomed boots that came with a lifetime guarantee.

Linda Bean served on the company's board for nearly half a century. She also bought lobster dealerships, founded the Perfect Maine Lobster brand in 2007, and owned general stores, inns and vacation rentals on Maine's central coast, where she lived in Port Clyde. (AP)

Indianapolis shooting kills 1: One person was killed and five others including a police officer were wounded during an early morning shooting Sunday in Indianapolis, police said.

Two Indianapolis Metropolitan Police Department officers in full uniform were working in off-duty employment at a bar in the 9400 block on East Washington Street when a disturbance erupted in the parking lot around 1:30 am. Chief Christopher Bailey said during a news conference.

Both officers exchanged gunfire with at least one suspect and one officer was shot in the upper thigh and sustained an additional shoulder injury that may have occurred when he fell after being shot, according to Bailey, who said the officer was in stable condition and expected to be released from a hospital on Sunday. (AP)



Saidakrami Murodali Rachabalizoda, a suspect in the Crocus City Hall shooting on Friday, is escorted by police and FSB officers in the Basmany District Court in Moscow, Russia on March 24. Four men accused of staging the Russia concert hall attack that killed more than 130 people appeared before a Moscow court Sunday on terrorism charges showing signs of severe beatings. (AP)

Lat/Am

16 rescued in Mexico

'Masterminds' in killing of Brazil councilor held

RIO DE JANEIRO, March 25, (AP): Brazil's federal police arrested two men Sunday for allegedly ordering the killing of a popular Rio de Janeiro councilwoman in 2018, a long-awaited step after years of society clamoring for justice.

The assassination of **Marielle Franco**, a 38-year-old city councilwoman, in a drive-by shooting shook Brazil profoundly and reverberated around the world. She stood out as one of the only Black women on the council. Her assertiveness and mere presence ruffled some people, but she remained unbowed.

Police investigators said federal legislator Chiquinho Brazão and his brother Domingos Brazão, a member of Rio state's accounts watchdog, were detained on suspicion of ordering the killing of Franco. Both are allegedly connected to criminal groups, known as militias, which illegally charge residents for various services, including protection.

Ubiratan Guedes, the lawyer representing Domingos Brazão, denied the accusations against his client. "He did not know Marielle, had no connection with Marielle," he told reporters.

Lawyers for Chiquinho Brazão, who served on Rio's council at the same time as Franco and is now a congressman, and former police chief Rivaldo Barbosa, said their clients denied any wrongdoing, according to local media.

Federal Justice Minister Ricardo Lewandowski said at a news conference that the motivation for the crime was "complex because that group (the Brazãos) has multiple interests." He said investigations suggested lawmaker Chiquinho Brazão was especially upset about a bill that his then-colleague Franco sponsored at the city council about regulation of land to build public housing in Rio.



Franco

Seized

"At this moment we have it very clear who are the perpetrators of this hateful, heinous crime of political nature," said the minister, who added that four other people had documents seized. Among them, he said, is a police detective who also investigated the case, Giniton Lages. Lewandowski also said the men jailed earlier will be transferred from Rio to the capital Brasilia.

The arrests of the men who allegedly ordered Franco's killing came four days after Brazil's Supreme Court validated a plea bargain for the shooter, who was arrested along with the getaway driver in 2019.

The investigation into Franco's murder had been troubled for years. Rio's state civil police couldn't break the case after the arrest and indictment of the shooter and getaway driver. The lead detectives were changed four times prior to February 2023. Federal authorities then attempted to take control of the case, but were not allowed to, which also increased suspicions of obstruction, according to Lewandowski.

The getaway driver admitted to the double murder of Franco and her driver. The shooter, disgraced former police officer Ronnie Lessa, signed a plea bargain deal with authorities in January and his admission led to Sunday's arrests.

Barbosa, the head of Rio's police when the murder took place, was also arrested for alleged obstruction of the investigation, federal police chief Andrei Rodrigues said in a press conference.

Investigating

Franco worked as an assistant to then-state lawmaker Marcelo Freixo in 2008 as he presided over a special committee investigating militias in Rio's state assembly. Freixo's final report indicted 226 suspected militia members and politicians and government employees, including Domingos Brazão. While Brazão was mentioned in the report, he wasn't indicted.

Political violence isn't uncommon in Rio, and such killings are often linked to territorial and political disputes. But they typically go unsolved and never elicit the same level of outcry as Franco's death did. She had been a rising political star, making her name by exposing police abuse and violence against residents of working-class neighborhoods known as favelas.

Known universally by her first name, Franco grew up in a favela herself - the Mare neighborhood near Rio's international airport. She became a human rights activist there after her friend was killed by a stray bullet in a shootout between police and drug traffickers. She worked for Freixo investigating organized crime then went on to win a seat on Rio's city council in 2016. She kept receiving and sharing complaints of police abuse until just days before she was killed.

She stood out as one of the only Black women on the council and, while her assertiveness and mere presence ruffled some, she remained unbowed.

Also:

RIO DE JANEIRO: Heavy rains in Brazil this weekend killed at least 23 people in the southeastern states of Rio de Janeiro and Espírito Santo.

Espirito Santos' state government said Sunday that 15 people died and almost 5,000 were out of their homes due to heavy rains falling since Friday night. Rio authorities reported eight deaths Saturday.

Thirteen deaths in Espirito Santo were registered in Mimoso do Sul, a countryside city 74 kilometers (46 miles) south of the state capital, Vitoria.

Rescue teams in both states had to stop their work Friday night because of risks of new landslides, with efforts restarting Saturday afternoon.

Mayors and governors of Brazil's southeast region had alerted residents of potential problems for the weekend since Thursday.



MEXICO CITY: Mexican authorities Sunday rescued another 16 people kidnapped by criminal gangs two days earlier in the northern city of Culiacan. Forty-two people were released Saturday amid a wave of violence.

Also on Sunday, a member of Mexico's national guard was killed in the region as he took part in the rescue efforts in the capital of Sinaloa state.

Sinaloa Gov. **Rubén Rocha** said in his profile on the X platform, formerly known as Twitter, that the number of people released had been updated to 58, including 36 adults and 22 children.

Rocha did not provide details on how and where the 58 people were rescued, but said another eight are still missing.

Sinaloa's public security secretary, **Gerardo Mérida**, said none of the people released agreed to formally accuse their kidnappers.

Federal authorities sent 600 special forces troops to Sinaloa to search for the missing people. An additional 300 soldiers and a National Guard battalion are also operating in the area.



This photo provided by the North Korean government shows North Korean leader Kim Jong Un, (center), is surrounded by soldiers during his visit to his top tank group, the Seoul Ryu Kyong Su Guards 105th Tank Division, in North Korea on March 24. (AP)

Asia

S'pore's 1st ministerial corruption case expands

'Japan PM offered to meet with NKorea's Kim'

SEOUL, South Korea, March 25, (AP): North Korea said Monday that Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida offered to meet with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un "as soon as possible," but stressed that prospects for their countries first summit in about 20 years would depend on Tokyo tolerating its weapons program and ignoring its past abductions of Japanese nationals.

In a parliamentary session, Kishida said that a meeting with Kim is "crucial" to resolve the abduction issue, a major sticking point in bilateral ties, and that his government has been using various channels to hold the summit.

Kim's sister and senior official, Kim Yo Jong, said in a statement that Kishida recently used an unspecified channel to convey his position that he wants to meet Kim Jong Un in person "as soon as possible."

She said there will be no breakthrough in North Korea-Japan relations as long as Kishida's government is engaged in the abduction issue and interferes in the North's "exercise of our sovereign right," apparently referring to the North's weapons testing activities.

"The history of the DPRK-Japan relations gives a lesson that it is impossible to improve the bilateral relations full of distrust and misunderstanding, only with an idea to set out on a summit meeting," Kim Yo Jong said, using the abbreviation of the North's official name, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea.

"If Japan truly wants to improve the bilateral relations and contribute to ensuring regional peace and stability as a close neighbor of the DPRK, it is necessary for it to make a political decision for strategic option conformed to its overall interests," she said.

is declining approval rating at home.

Also:

SEOUL, South Korea: North Korean leader Kim Jong Un supervised a tank exercise and encouraged his armored forces to sharpen war preparations in the face of growing tensions with South Korea, the North's state media said Monday.

Kim made those comments Sunday while visiting his top tank group, the Seoul Ryu Kyong Su Guards 105th Tank Division. The unit's name marks how it was the first North Korean military unit to reach the South Korean capital in 1950 when a North Korean surprise attack triggered a war that

dragged on for almost four years. Tensions on the Korean Peninsula have heightened after Kim in past months dialed up his military demonstrations, including tests of nuclear-capable missiles designed to target South Korea, the United States and Japan, while issuing threats of nuclear conflict against its rivals.

is declining approval rating at home.



Myanmar's trucks carrying aid leave from the customs checkpoint near the border with Myanmar, in Mae Sot, Tak province Thailand on March 25. Thailand delivered its first batch of humanitarian aid to war-torn Myanmar sending ten trucks over the border from the northern province of Tak in what they hope will be a continuing effort to ease the plight of millions of people displaced by fighting. (AP)

Philippines lodges 'strongest protest' against China over an assault in sea

MANILA, Philippines, March 25, (AP): The Philippines lodged its "strongest protest" against Beijing on Monday and summoned a senior Chinese diplomat over a water cannon assault by the Chinese coast guard that injured Filipino navy crew members and heavily damaged their boat in the disputed South China Sea, officials said.

Two Chinese coast guard ships hit a Philippine navy-operated supply boat with water cannons Saturday in the latest and most serious confrontation between the rival Asian claimants near the disputed Second Thomas Shoal, which is surrounded by Chinese vessels in a bid to dislodge Philippine forces from there.

The repeated high-seas confrontations since last year have sparked fears of a larger conflict that could put China and the United States on a collision course. The US has warned repeatedly that it's obligated to defend the Philippines - its oldest treaty ally in Asia - if Filipino forces, ships or aircraft come under an armed attack, including in the South China Sea.

China accused Philippine vessels of "intruding" into Chinese waters and its Defense Ministry warned Sunday that Beijing will continue to take "resolute and decisive measures to firmly safeguard its territorial sovereignty and maritime rights."

PNG quake kills 3: A magnitude 6.9 earthquake has hit a remote part of western Papua New Guinea killing at least three people

and causing extensive damage to around 1,000 homes, officials said.

The quake rocked the East Sepik region at about 6:20 am Sunday (2020 GMT Saturday) near the town of Ambunti, about 470 miles (756 kilometers) northwest of the capital of Port Moresby, and at a depth of 25 miles (about 40 kilometers), according to reports by the Australian Broadcasting Corporation.

East Sepik province Governor **Ailan Bird** posted on Facebook Sunday that initial estimates show the earthquake had destroyed about 1,000 homes in the area which was already "dealing with widespread flooding" from earlier in March.

is declining approval rating at home.

with the government. **S.Jswaran**, a former senior politician in the long-ruling People's Action Party, pleaded not guilty to the eight charges that bring the total against him to 35. He was first hauled to court two months ago for two graft charges, 24 charges for receiving gifts as a public servant and one for obstructing the course of justice.

Iswaran, 61, pleaded not guilty to obtaining 10 bottles of whisky, 12 bottles of wine and other items from November 2021 to November 2022 from **Lum Kok Seng**. The items were worth a total of nearly 19,000 Singapore dollars (\$14,111).

minimize water loss through evaporation and recharges groundwater. This is increasingly important as human-caused climate change is leading to prolonged seasons of drought, scientists say, and the simple sand dam solution has gained traction across dry regions of Kenya and some other parts of Africa looking for reliable water sources. But experts also warn that finding the right sites for structures is key to making them work.

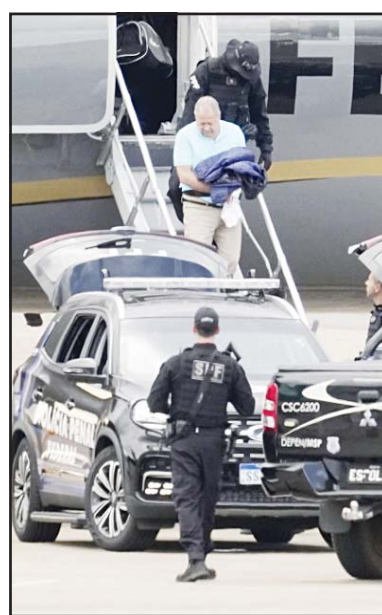
Kasengela village is in Machakos County, which, alongside other counties of Makueni and Kitui in southeastern Kenya, is classified as arid and semi-arid. For many communities here, sand dams built on seasonal rivers have grown in popularity. Kenya's president is **William Ruto**.

That's true for Kyalika village in Makueni County, where Rhoda Peter and her well-fare group have built three sand dams along a nearby river. When The Associated Press met her, she was fetching water from one of the dams to clean utensils and wash clothes.

Peter put a yellow container on the shallow well platform and walked to the pump, pulling it up and pushing it down until it was full. Nearby, a donkey stood with two containers hanging on its back.

"When I think about sand dams, I feel happy," said Peter, a farmer. "Our shallow well does not dry. It goes all through the dry seasons."

Before the sand dams were built, she and her children would walk many miles to fetch water in springs in the faraway Mbooni Hills. (AP)



Federal Deputy Chiquinho Brazão, a suspect implicated in the killing of Rio de Janeiro councilwoman Marielle Franco, disembarks from a police plane at the airport in Brasilia, Brazil on March 24. (AP)



Sall



Ruto

Africa

Senegalese await results: Senegalese anxiously awaited the results of the presidential election Monday, following months of uncertainty and unrest that tested its reputation as a stable democracy in a region rife with coups.

The vote Sunday was largely peaceful with a high turnout, said observers. Results from polling stations that had completed counting were posted overnight on social media with official announcements expected later this week.

More than 7 million people were registered to vote, in a country of roughly 17 million. To win in the first round, candidates must gain more than 50% or it goes to a runoff.

Analysts say a second round is likely, between opposition candidate Bassirou Diomaye Faye and the former Prime Minister Amadou Ba and candidate for the ruling party.

Still, some opposition supporters Sunday night were adamant their candidate had already won. In the capital, Dakar people sat on car rooftops chanting, while others carried flags, banners and set off fireworks saying Faye would win outright.

"The news is circulating ... there will be no second round," said Dime Jueye, a local vendor.

This is Senegal's fourth democratic transfer of power since gaining independence from France more than six decades ago and took place one month later than initially scheduled after President **Macky Sall** tried to delay it until the end of the year. Sall is constitutionally barred from seeking a third term and is expected to step down on April 2 when his mandate ends.

After the polls closed Sunday, voters praised the peaceful outcome amid concerns after months of deadly protests ignited last summer by the jailing of the popular opposition leader Ousmane Sonko and concerns that the president wanted to stay in power. Rights groups said dozens were killed, while hundreds more were jailed.

In a move that defused tensions just ahead of the election, Sonko was released after months in prison along with Faye, to jubilant celebrations on the streets of Dakar. Sonko was barred from the race in January due to a prior conviction and Faye ran in his place. (AP)



Kenyans build sand dams: On a dry riverbed one recent sunny morning, residents of Kasengela village toiled away mixing cement and sand to make concrete. The sound of their shovels resonated through the valley while other residents, working in pairs, carried rocks to the site in wooden frames.

Iranian currency hits record low amid Nowruz celebrations

Iran's currency fell to a record low on Sunday, plunging to 613,500 to the dollar, as its people celebrated the Persian New Year.

On Sunday, people were trying to exchange rials for foreign currency at Tehran's main hub of exchange shops in Ferdowsi Street, but most were closed due to the Nowruz holidays, which are run from March 20 to April 2.

Mohsen, a 32-year-old employee at one of the exchange shops, said the holiday was contributing to the low prices,

"The price is not real, the demand for purchasing dollars is very high, but there are just a few exchange shops open." He and other Iranians spoke on condition their last names not be used, because of potential repercussions for speaking to foreign media about the country's economic struggles.

The two-week holiday is an opportunity to travel abroad, driving demand for U.S. dollars and Euros.

Mojtaba, a 49-year-old father, was shocked: "The rial fell 5% compared to

the last six days, while the whole country is on vacation!"

Niloufar, 28-year-old wife and her husband Behzad, 30, said that they'd booked a weeklong tour of Turkey at a discount rate, but were now looking at spending as much as full-price tour.

The exchange rate strongly affects other markets, including housing and rentals. The price was 590,000 to the dollar on March 18, the last workday before the holiday.

Many Iranians have seen their life sav-

ings evaporate as the local currency has depreciated. Today, it's worth about one-twentieth as much as it was in 2015, when Iran signed a nuclear accord with world powers.

Since then, it's fallen from 32,000 rials to the dollar to the hundreds of thousands. In February 2023, it briefly reached a nadir of 600,000 rials to the dollar, and since then has not risen above 439,000.

The government's Statistics Center put the country's inflation rate for Feb. 2024

at 42.5%, while Central Bank said it was more than 46%. There is no explanation for the discrepancy.

Iran's relations with the west have been at exceptional lows since then-U.S. President Donald Trump abandoned a deal that called for the country to end its nuclear program in return for access to frozen funds and other benefits. President Joe Biden said he was willing to re-enter a nuclear deal with Iran, but formal talks to try to find a roadmap to restart the deal collapsed in August 2022. (AP)

Market Movements

25-03-2024

	Change	Closing pts		Change	Closing pts		
UAE	- DFM	+1.20	4,281.55	SAUDI	- Tadawul	-139.15	12,656.94
PAKISTAN	- KSE 100	+366.25	65,545.00	JAPAN	- Nikkei	-474.31	40,414.12
				PHILIPPINES	- PSEI	-28.87	6,853.10

Business

Tech dominance competition reshapes global economic landscape

NBK Wealth insights on geopolitical shifts and economic trends for '24

KUWAIT CITY, March 25: The year 2024 is set to witness a historic wave of elections in 80 nations, involving over 2 billion voters, including major countries. This democratic exercise will shape the global geopolitical landscape amidst increasing polarization, governance challenges, and geoeconomic fragmentation. The outcomes of these elections will have implications for macroeconomics, financial markets, and international order, with potential effects on fiscal discipline and long-term sustainability.

2024 is anticipated to be one of the busiest election years, with over 80 nations and territories, representing more than half the world's population, participating in the democratic process. Countries like India, the United States, Indonesia, Pakistan, Russia, Mexico, and South Africa, along with the European Union and the UK, are among those holding elections. Around 2 billion voters, will be casting their votes. Some countries, such as Bangladesh, Taiwan, Pakistan, Indonesia, Iran, Russia, and Egypt, have already conducted their elections.

The global geopolitical landscape is influenced by increasing polarization and governance challenges, leading to a shift in the balance of power. Geopolitical events, like the US presidential election, have a significant impact on global markets through changes in fiscal policies, trade relations, and regulatory measures. Geoeconomic fragmentation and power struggles can result in inflation, supply chain disruptions, and market volatility. The interplay between geopolitics and economics shapes market dynamics and international cooperation.

The ongoing geopolitical tensions have led to the formation of new alliances and blocs, challenging the existing global order. Regional conflicts and financial sanc-

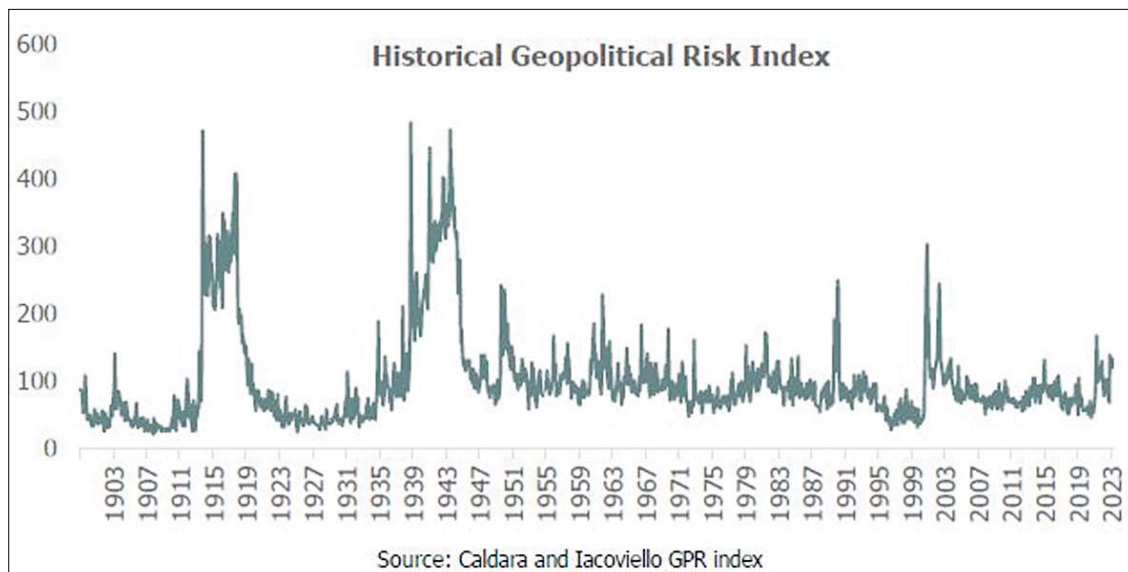


NBK Wealth logo

tions have increased, affecting economic stability. The intertwining of geopolitics and economics has created winners and losers, with countries like India and Mexico adapting to changing trade patterns. The competition for technological dominance between China and the US, along with geopolitical rivalries, has reshaped global economic dynamics.

The upcoming global election cycle poses challenges to fiscal discipline in both Developed and Emerging markets due to the rise of populism and increased deficit spending. Public debt levels have surged, impacting long-term sustainability and market volatility. Geopolitical risks, combined with economic uncertainties, create a complex environment for businesses and investors, affecting market cycles and investment decisions.

The US elections are crucial for global economic prospects, as shifts in policy areas like trade, fiscal stance, and regulatory policies can influence interest rates, currency markets, and equity markets. The potential outcomes of the US elections will have far-reaching implications on international relations and market dynamics. Geopolitical events can lead to changes in economic growth expecta-



Source: Caldara and Iacoviello GPR index

tions, impacting asset valuations and market performance.

The evolving geopolitical landscape could affect the GCC region, Kuwait, through changes in oil prices and global trade dynamics. Diplomatic efforts and geopolitical stability play a key role in shaping economic outcomes for oil-exporting countries. A peaceful international order can lead to positive changes in energy transition and economic cooperation, while geopolitical tensions may result in higher inflation and economic challenges.

In conclusion, the intersection of geopolitics, economics, and elections in 2024 will shape the global landscape and market dynamics. The outcomes of these elections will have implications for international cooperation, economic stability, and market performance. Navigating through geopolitical uncertainties and economic challenges requires a strategic approach and a forward-looking perspective to address the complexities of the modern world.

Boursa Kuwait sets off trading session calmly

Marginal changes in stock market as trading ends

KUWAIT CITY, March 25: The trading session at Boursa Kuwait began with a sense of calm, leading to limited changes by the end of the day, reports Al-Jarida daily.

The general market index experienced a marginal loss of 0.01 percent, closing at 7415.72 points, with liquidity remaining below 30 million dinars. Trading saw 148.5 million shares exchanged through 6986 transactions, with 39 gaining, 61 losing, and 17 remaining unchanged.

Meanwhile, the Premier Market Index managed a slight gain of 0.02 percent, closing at 8,119.15 points, with liquidity totaling 21.6 million dinars. Trading involved 85.1 million shares through 3,428 transactions, with 11 gaining, 17 losing, and 5 unchanged.

However, the main market index saw a decline of 0.13 percent, closing at 6,113.06 points, with liquidity reaching 8.1 million dinars. A total of 63.2 million shares were traded through 3,558 transactions, with 28 gaining, 44 losing, and 12 unchanged.

The beginning of the trading week showed initial strength, particularly in shares of KFH, GFH, Projects, Watani, and Agility. However, profit-taking activities ensued, impacting early gains and leading to a cautious atmosphere among investors.

The market witnessed fluctuations, influenced by global economic news and geopolitical tensions, including the tragic event in Moscow resulting in loss of lives. This uncertainty prompted investors to retain liquidity, resulting in its lowest levels.

In the Gulf region, four indices saw gains, while oil prices closed at \$85.5 per barrel after recent fluctuations driven by geopolitical tensions.

Gold prices experience volatility amid dollar demand

KUWAIT CITY, March 25: Gold prices witnessed fluctuations, closing at \$2,165 per ounce by the end of last week's trading, following a peak of \$2,223 per ounce midweek, reports Al-Jarida daily.

A report from Kuwaiti Dar Al-Sabak Company attributed the decline in gold prices from its record high to renewed demand for the dollar, leading to a 1 percent rise in the US currency index against major currencies.

Despite the decline, gold prices remain stable at record levels after the US Federal Reserve, led by Chairman Jerome Powell, opted to maintain interest rates. Powell's indication of three expected cuts in interest rates this year propelled gold

to all-time highs in both futures and spot prices.

The report noted that several major central banks might initiate interest rate cuts ahead of the Federal Reserve. The Swiss National Bank unexpectedly reduced its main interest rate, citing the strength of the Swiss franc, while the Bank of England halted interest rate hikes. Additionally, the Bank of Japan shifted its stance against negative interest rates, hinting at a potential future hike.

Looking ahead, the report highlighted the significance of upcoming American reports, including personal consumption expenditure prices, along with reports on personal income and spending. Statements from

Federal Reserve officials will also influence future gold trends.

Investors in precious metals are closely monitoring geopolitical developments, such as military operations in the Red Sea and Bab al-Mandab, as well as the escalating conflict between Russia and Ukraine. These factors are expected to impact gold prices in the short and medium term.

In the local market, the report revealed that the price of a gram of 24 karat gold stood at 21.53 dinars (approximately \$66), while 22 karat gold was priced at 19.74 dinars (approximately \$60) per gram. Meanwhile, silver closed at 289 dinars (approximately \$881) per kilogram.

Call for action to elevate innovation ecosystem

Kuwait proposes virtual incubator to boost innovation & entrepreneurship

KUWAIT CITY, March 25: A government report from the National Observatory for Sustainable Development, under the Ministry of Planning, has recommended the establishment of a virtual business incubator in Kuwait aimed at fostering innovation, reports Al-Qabas daily.

The initiative seeks to provide emerging companies in the innovation sector with free services such as financial, administrative, legal, and marketing consultations, while also facilitating partnerships between investors, inventors, innovators, and entrepreneurs across all sectors.

The report underscores Kuwait's need to enhance its innovation and entrepreneurship ecosystem, particularly in light of its performance falling below average in the Global Innovation Index for 2023. Despite ranking 64th globally, Kuwait maintains the fourth position among Arab and Gulf countries.

Identifying two waves of promising innovations, the report highlights the digital innovation wave driven by artificial intelligence, supercomputing, and automation, as well as the deep scientific innovation wave rooted in biotechnologies and nanotechnology.

However, the report also acknowledges challenges such as anemic growth, high inflation, and the ongoing effects of the pandemic, which are impeding global innovation efforts.

The following are recommendations for promoting innovation in Kuwait:

-- Establishing a virtual business incubator for emerging companies in the field of innovation and providing them with free services, such as financial, administrative, legal and marketing consultations.

■ Increase spending on scientific research and development and support research institutions to lead innovation and spread community awareness of its importance.

■ Spreading the culture of digital use at the level of individuals and companies to enhance digital skills to keep pace with the developments of the industrial revolution and to enter the world of digital economies and justice, especially cognitive skills and information and communication technology skills.

■ Enabling innovation strategies in education at all levels, encouraging education and training in the field of artificial intelligence, and seizing

opportunities related to digital commerce and e-commerce by adapting commercial policies to new challenges, limited to data flows and electronic payments.

■ Establishing partnerships between investors, inventors, innovators and entrepreneurs in all sectors to improve the innovation and entrepreneurship system and encourage investors to support smart applications that improve daily life and achieve technological progress.

■ Establishing a culture of creativity and innovation as a basis and engine for building a society that believes in a culture of innovation and developing a diversified, competitive and sustainable economy based on knowledge and innovation.

■ Identifying the country's future programs and needs with the aim of directing innovation and research to meet those needs.

■ Encouraging and supporting innovations in developing artificial intelligence applications, and embracing and applying relevant ideas and projects.

■ Launching initiatives and strategies, and formulating targeted policies, to advance innovation and creativity in all fields in the country.

DMA aims to break up closed tech ecosystems, promote fair competition

European commission probes big tech compliance with new Digital Markets Act

LONDON, March 25, (AP) European Union regulators opened investigations into Apple, Google and Meta on Monday, the first cases under a sweeping new law designed to stop Big Tech companies from cornering digital markets.

The European Commission, the 27-nation bloc's executive arm, said it was investigating the companies for "non-compliance" with the Digital Markets Act.

The Digital Markets Act that took effect earlier this month is a broad rulebook that targets Big Tech "gatekeeper" companies providing "core platform services." Those companies must comply with a set of do's and don'ts, under threat of hefty financial penalties or even breaking up businesses. The rules have the broad but vague goal of making digital markets "fairer" and "more contestable" by breaking up closed tech ecosystems that lock consumers into a single company's products or services.

The commission said in a press release that it "suspects that the measures put in place by these gatekeepers fall short of effective compliance of their obligations under the DMA."

It's looking into whether Google and Apple are fully complying with the DMA's rules requiring tech companies to allow app developers to direct users to offers available outside their app stores. The commission said it's concerned the two companies are imposing "various restrictions and limitations" including charging fees that prevent apps from freely promoting offers.

Google is also facing scrutiny for not complying with DMA provisions that prevent tech giants from giving preference to their own services over rivals. The commission said it is concerned Google's measures will result in third-party services listed on Google's search results page not being treated "in a fair and non-discriminatory manner."

Google said that it has made "significant changes" to the way its services operate in Europe to comply with the DMA.

"We will continue to defend our approach in the coming months," Google's director of competition, Oliver Bethell, said.

The commission is also investigating whether Apple is doing enough to allow iPhone users to easily change web browsers.

Apple said it's confident that its plan complies with the DMA, and it will "continue to constructively engage with the European Commission as they conduct their investigations." The company said it has created a wide range of new developer capabilities, features, and tools to comply with the regulation.

The commission is also looking into Meta's option for users to pay a monthly fee for ad-free versions of Facebook or Instagram so they can avoid having their personal data used to target them with online ads.

"The Commission is concerned that the binary choice imposed by Meta's 'pay or consent' model may not provide a real alternative in case users do not consent, thereby not achieving the objective of preventing the accumulation of personal data by gatekeepers," it said.

Meta said in a prepared statement that, "Subscriptions as an alternative to advertising are a well-established business model across many industries, and we designed Subscription for No Ads to address several overlapping regulatory obligations, including the DMA. We will continue to engage constructively with the Commission." — See Also Page 9

BUSINESS

Pakistan to seek long-term IMF loan to stabilize economy

Pakistan plans to seek a long-term loan from the International Monetary Fund to help stabilize the country's ailing economy after the end of the IMF's current \$3 billion bailout package, the country's newly appointed finance minister said Friday.

Muhammad Aurangzeb, who plans to meet with IMF officials in Washington in April, did not specify the amount that Pakistan would seek in comments to reporters in

the capital, Islamabad. However, officials previously have said Pakistan wants to get up to \$8 billion from the IMF over three years.

Cash-strapped Pakistan has been facing one of its worst economic crises since last year when weekly inflation at one point crossed 40% amid fears the impoverished Islamic nation could default on its payment of foreign debt.

In June 2023, the IMF approved

the current, one-year \$3 billion loan package to Pakistan after the country agreed to slash subsidies and raise taxes to comply with the bailout terms. Pakistan is to receive the final \$1.1 billion tranche in April.

Aurangzeb said the inflation rate has since come down to 23%, and that he would seek to bring it down further, to provide some relief to residents who have struggled to pay electricity and gas bills. (AP)

Japanese official warns against currency moves

Japan's top currency diplomat warned on Monday that the government will take appropriate steps to respond to excessive weakness of yen without excluding any measures, as the yen touched a fresh four-month low against the dollar.

"The recent yen weakness does not reflect fundamentals. There are clearly spec-

ulations behind the moves," Japanese Vice Minister of Finance for International Affairs Masato Kanda told reporters.

"Yen weakness from speculative moves has huge negative effect on the national economy, and it should not be tolerated," said Kanda.

The official also affirmed

that the government has been closely watching foreign exchange moves with high sense of urgency, and is "always ready" to take actions to curb excessive fluctuations. Kanda made the remarks after the Japanese yen fell to JPY 151 range against the dollar, the lowest level in four months. (KUNA)

Text to be sent back to lower house of parliament

Macron regrets Senate's vote to reject the EU-Canada trade deal

BRUSSELS, March 25, (AP): French President Emmanuel Macron said Friday he "regrets" the Senate's vote to reject legislation to ratify a trade deal between the European Union and Canada that has been criticized by farmers as bringing unfair competition from abroad.

The EU-Canada Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement, or CETA, provisionally went into effect in September 2017 after all EU governments agreed to it, but its full implementation requires approval by each national parliament.

Thursday's vote in the French Senate does not necessarily mean that the country ultimately will reject ratification.

The text is to be sent back to France's lower house of parliament for further discussion, Macron said in a news conference at an EU summit in Brussels. He did not say whether he would like the vote at the National Assembly to be held before or after June's European elections. "It's a very good agreement" that benefits to the French farming industry, Macron argued.

"Is it good or bad for our agriculture? The assessment is extremely clear. It's

very good for milk, it's very good for cheese, it's very good for wine."

French senators' vote comes after farmers across France and Europe demonstrated on their tractors earlier this year in protests over low earnings, heavy regulation and what they call unfair competition from abroad, often criticizing free-trade agreements, including the CETA.

While Macron's centrist alliance advocated for the CETA, conservative and leftist senators joined their votes to reject the ratification bill.

Major farmers' unions and food producer organizations in France welcomed the Senate's move. They say the agreement would in the long term hurt the country's food industry.

Arnaud Gaillot, president of the Young Farmers union, pointed to the "lack of guarantees" provided by the CETA regarding Canada's alignment on EU standards that "would have threatened our livestock sector."

The Confederation Paysanne, a farmers' union, said in a statement that the European market of beef meat would be "deeply impacted" if the agreement was to

become definitive.

The French Interprofessional Livestock and Meat Association Interbev called the Senate's vote "a first victory" and a "strong signal sent towards the protection of the French and European standards, which regarding health, environment and animal welfare are the strictest in the world."

From 2017 to 2023, French exports to Canada rose by 33%, all sectors together, including the food industry.

French Minister for Foreign Trade Franck Riester said cheese exports had jumped by 60% and wine exports by 24% over the past six years.

The French Federation of Exporters of Wine and Spirits deplored the Senate's decision. "It's a setback for France and a blow to the wine and spirits sector," the group said in a statement.

"Those who rejected this agreement will have to explain tomorrow to French wine and spirits producers why they risk losing the markets they have been developing since 2017 in Canada," said the president of the federation, Gabriel Picard.

Economic crisis has them hungry today

Rationed food kept Cubans fed during the Cold War era

HAVANA, March 25, (AP): Like millions of other Cubans, Maria de los Angeles Pozo thinks back fondly to when a government ration book fed her family everything from hamburgers, fish and milk to chocolate and beer. People would even get cakes for birthdays and weddings.

The "libreta," as Cubans know it, was launched in July 1963 and became one of the pillars of the island's socialist system, helping people through crises including the cutbacks in Soviet aid that led to the 1990s deprivation known as the "Special Period."

That system is undergoing a deep economic crisis that has prompted the exodus of almost half a million Cubans to the U.S. over the last two years, with thousands more heading to Europe. It also has led to a dramatic reduction in the availability of rationed food for those who do not leave.

Many Cubans feel ill-equipped to handle their new, more unequal country, a feeling that has worsened as small private markets have opened, charging prices similar to international ones in a country that hasn't allowed non-state commerce in recent decades and where incomes remain between \$16 and \$23 monthly.

"Everything comes in small portions and delayed," said Pozo, 57, a school worker who retired to care for her disabled sister and father in the apartment they share in Old Havana. They earn \$10 a month between the three.

Basic goods like a kilo (2.2 pounds) of powdered milk can cost as much as \$8.

"We don't have the goods that we were used to anymore," Pozo said. "We're suffering a lot of deprivation."

Protesters took to the streets in the eastern city of Santiago this month decrying power outages lasting up to eight hours and shortages of food. State media confirmed the protests in Santiago and videos showing people chanting "electricity and food" were quickly shared by Cubans on and off the island on platforms like X and Facebook. A nongovernmental human rights group that monitors Cuba said there had been at least three arrests.

Pozo pays only \$2 at the subsidized state stores at current exchange rates. In February she got a few pounds of rice, beans, some sugar and salt, oil, processed meat

and soap for her family of three.

Pozo said that she doesn't receive money from relatives overseas, a major marker of class differences in 2024 Cuba, and one that about 70 percent of families do get.

While there are no official figures, many experts estimate that Cubans overseas sent \$3 billion home in 2019.

Cuba has long struggled with a lack of production.

The lack of hard currency and needed equipment is making the situation even worse without agricultural supplies like insecticides and fertilizers, said Ricardo Torres, an economist at American University in Washington.

Without a functioning market economy, Cuban agriculture has long measured itself by socialist production goals that it has rarely been able to meet.

Camaguey, one of Cuba's main ranching hubs, only produced 42.8 million liters (11.3 million gallons) of milk last year, out of 81.3 million liters (21.5 million gallons) that producers had agreed to sell.

Producers, for their part, complain that government prices don't cover expenses.

The Cuban government blames the economic damage wrought by COVID-19, along with U.S. sanctions and macroeconomic changes dating to recent years that have led to severe inflation.

"You can see today private stores that have all the products that you want: milk, bread, sugar - whatever you want - at prices that are not accessible to the majority of the population," Deputy Foreign Minister Carlos Fernández de Cossío said in an interview with The Associated Press. "The government continues to be committed to provide an equal amount to all."

Official figures show Cuba's average annual inflation of nearly 50% a year over the last three years and a 2% contraction in the Gross Domestic Product.

Faced with that scenario, the government has been trying to reduce the number of people who receive subsidized food from an estimated four million libretas.

For most Cubans, the government is failing to take on the most serious issue: low take-home pay as a result of low productivity and inflation.

"Salaries must rise," said maintenance man Hilmer Pagán, 53.

New Zealand slips into its 2nd recession in 18 mths

WELLINGTON, New Zealand, March 25, (AP): New Zealand has entered its second recession in 18 months after the latest round of GDP figures confirmed its economy contracted in the last quarter of 2023.

The country's economy shrank by 0.1% in the quarter to December, and 0.7% in per capita terms, the New Zealand's official statistics agency, Stats NZ, announced on Thursday.

The latest slip follows a 0.3% contraction in the September quarter, which fulfils the technical definition of a recession. It is New Zealand's second recession event in the past 18 months.

Stats NZ said the country New Zealand had returned negative GDP figures in four of the last five quarters, and had a stagnant annual growth rate of just 0.6%.

The slump was largely expected with New Zealand's central bank forecasting a flat figure, while bank economists suggested a range of re-

sults between a narrow contraction and fractional growth.

The data made for worse reading in a per capita context with the last five quarters all retreating by an average of 0.8%.

Helping to prop up the south Pacific island nation's economy has been a record migration intake, which hit a record peak of 141,000 new arrivals in 2023.

Without that population growth stimulating an otherwise stagnant economy, New Zealand's economic position would be slipping at an even faster rate.

Regulation Minister David Seymour said the current economic conditions would lead to cuts in the country's forthcoming budget, including cutting the number of government workers.

"We're in a slump, but that won't be news to you, because you've already been living in it," Seymour said.

Average long-term US mortgage rate climbs back to nearly 7 pct

Two-week slide grinds to a halt

LOS ANGELES, March 25, (AP): The average long-term U.S. mortgage rate climbed back to nearly 7% this week, pushing up borrowing costs for home shoppers with the spring homebuying season underway.

The average rate on a 30-year mortgage rose to 6.87% from 6.74% last week, mortgage buyer Freddie Mac said Thursday. A year ago, the rate averaged 6.42%. The average rate is now just below where it was two weeks ago.

Borrowing costs on 15-year fixed-rate mortgages, popular with homeowners refinancing their home loans, also rose this week, pushing the average rate to 6.21% from 6.16% last week. A year ago it averaged 5.68%, Freddie Mac said.

When mortgage rates rise, they can add hundreds of dollars a month in costs for borrowers, limiting how much they can afford in a market already out of reach for many Americans.

"After decreasing for a couple of weeks, mortgage rates are once again on the upswing," said Sam Khater, Freddie Mac's chief economist.

Investors' expectations for future inflation, global demand for U.S. Treasuries and what the Federal Reserve does with its short-term interest rate can influence rates on home loans.

After climbing to a 23-year high of 7.79% in October, the average rate on a 30-year mortgage has remained below 7% since early December. Rates eased amid expectations that inflation was cooling enough for the Fed to begin lowering its short-term interest rate by this spring. But a spate of stronger-than-expected reports on inflation, the job market and the economy in recent weeks dimmed that outlook, sending mortgage rates higher through most of February.

Many economists expect that mortgage rates will ultimately ease moderately this year, but that's not likely to happen before the Federal Reserve begins cutting its benchmark interest rate. On Wednesday, the central bank kept its rate unchanged and signaled again that it expects to make three rate cuts this year, but not before it sees more evidence that inflation is slowing.

"The Fed's announcement that it is holding interest rates steady for now was not unexpected, but it does



A "for sale" sign is displayed in front of a home in Mount Prospect, Ill., Monday, March 18, 2024. On Thursday, March 21, 2024, the National Association of Realtors reports on existing home sales for February. (AP)

Mortgage rates ease & more houses hit mkt

Feb home sales hit strongest pace in a yr

LOS ANGELES, March 25, (AP): Sales of previously occupied U.S. homes rose in February from the previous month to the strongest pace in a year with homebuyers encouraged by a modest pullback in mortgage rates and more properties on the market.

Existing home sales climbed 9.5% last month from January to a seasonally adjusted annual rate of 4.38 million, the National Association of Realtors said Thursday. That's the strongest sales pace since February last year and topped the 3.93 million sales pace economists were expecting, according to FactSet.

Sales rose on a monthly basis in February for the second month in a

row, but fell 3.3% from a year earlier.

The pickup in sales helped push up home prices compared with a year earlier for the eighth month in a row. The national median sales price climbed 5.7% from a year earlier to \$384,500. That's the highest median sales price for February on records going back to 1999.

While the supply of homes on the market remains below the historical average, the typical increase in homes for sale that happens ahead of the spring homebuying season gave homebuyers a wider selection of properties to choose from.

At the end of last month, there were 1.07 million unsold homes on

the market, a 5.9% increase from January and up 10.3% from a year earlier. That's the highest inventory of homes for sale for February since 2020, the NAR said.

Even so, the available inventory at the end of last month amounted to a 2.9-month supply, going by the current sales pace. That's down from a 3-month supply in January, but up from a 2.6-month pace in February last year. In a more balanced market between buyers and sellers, there is a 4- to 6-month supply.

"Additional housing supply is helping to satisfy market demand," said Lawrence Yun, the NAR's chief economist.

mean that mortgage rates are going to remain higher for longer," said Lisa Sturtevant, chief economist at Bright MLS.

The U.S. housing market is coming off a deep, 2-year sales slump triggered by a sharp rise in mortgage rates and a dearth of homes on the market. The overall decline in rates since their peak last fall has helped

lower monthly mortgage payments, providing more financial breathing room for homebuyers facing rising prices and a shortage of homes for sale this year.

Sales of previously occupied U.S. homes rose in February from the previous month to the strongest pace in a year. That followed a month-to-month home sales increase in Janu-

ary.

Still, the average rate on a 30-year mortgage remains well above where it was just two years ago at 4.42%. That large gap between rates now and then has helped limit the number of previously occupied homes on the market by discouraging homeowners who locked in rock-bottom rates from selling.

How Europe's regulatory battle with Apple could signal what is to come for American consumers

LONDON, March 25, (AP): It'll likely take years before the U.S. government's massive antitrust lawsuit against Apple is resolved - but the iPhone maker's troubles with European regulators offer a glimpse of what changes American consumers may see down the line.

The U.S. lawsuit seeks to stop Apple from undermining technologies that compete with its own apps in areas such as streaming, messaging and digital payments. The Department of Justice also wants to prevent the tech giant from building language into its contracts with developers, accessory makers and consumers that lets it obtain or keep a monopoly.

These are similar to themes that the European Commission, the bloc's executive arm and top antitrust enforcer,

and Apple have been wrangling over for years.

EU antitrust watchdogs have launched multiple antitrust cases accusing Apple of violating the 27-nation bloc's competition laws, while also imposing tough digital rules aimed at stopping tech companies from cornering digital markets.

Brussels' efforts will soon start to have an impact on the way the company does business and the experience iPhone users have in Europe. And the changes could signal what's to come for U.S. Apple users - if the Justice Department has its way, at least.

Here's a closer look: Music streaming users typically weren't able to pay for their Spotify subscriptions directly through their iPhone

apps. They couldn't even be informed by email of subscription prices, promos and offers by Spotify or other music streaming services. That's because Apple puts tight restrictions on apps that compete with its own Apple Music service.

But when Spotify complained to the European Union, antitrust regulators opened a yearslong investigation that resulted in an order for Apple to stop such behavior and came with a whopping 1.8 billion euro (\$2 billion) fine aimed at deterring the company from doing it again.

Margrethe Vestager, the European Commission's competition chief, said Apple's practices were "illegal" and "impacted millions of European consumers who were not able to make a free choice as to where, how and at

what price to buy music streaming subscriptions."

Apple tried to resolve a second EU antitrust case by proposing to let third party mobile wallet and payment service providers access the tap and go payment function on its iOS operating system.

Apple offered the concession to the European Commission, the bloc's executive arm and top antitrust enforcer, after it accused the company in 2022 of abusing its dominant position by limiting access to its mobile payment technology.

The commission had been examining whether Apple Pay's rules require online shops to make it the preferred or default option, effectively shutting out rival payment systems.

Private sector collaboration key to enhancing opportunities for people with disabilities

AmCham Kuwait successfully organizes first Disabilities Focus Group Meeting

KUWAIT CITY, March 25: AmCham Kuwait is proud to announce the successful organization of its inaugural Disabilities Focus Group Meeting at the Crowne Plaza Hotel. The meeting brought together a diverse array of stakeholders to discuss pertinent issues surrounding the employment and training of people with disabilities in Kuwait's private sector.

The meeting commenced with an overview of AmCham Kuwait and the challenges faced by private sector entities in employing and training individuals with disabilities. Participants engaged in a comprehensive discussion, identifying key needs, gaps, and opportunities within the work environment.

Key points raised during the meeting included:

Establishment of Focus Group: Pete Swift Chairman of the Board ABCK-AmCham Kuwait, provided insights into the establishment of the focus group, emphasizing the aim to understand and address challenges, opportunities, and solutions surrounding PWD employment.

Partnerships and Initiatives: Hanaa Al Baghdady community resource-



Group photo during the AmCham Kuwait's inaugural Disabilities Focus Group Meeting at the Crowne Plaza Hotel.

es manager at Kuwait Society for the Handicapped highlighted ongoing partnerships with companies such as IKEA and KFH, focusing on training and employment opportunities for PWD.

Challenges and Solutions: Attendees discussed various challenges faced by both employers and people with disabilities, including a lack of understanding in the work environment and

legislative obstacles.

Education and Training: Participants emphasized the importance of education and training for PWD, calling for a comprehensive approach to

address long-term needs.

Technological Solutions: Naeem Mirza, Vice President – Generative AI, Cloud Modernizations and Robotics at Ai Doctrine highlighted the role of

technology and AI in enabling education and training for people with disabilities, proposing collaboration opportunities with AmCham Kuwait.

The meeting concluded with a call to action for the private sector to prioritize accessibility, training, and development initiatives for employees with disabilities. Attendees underscored the importance of societal trust and awareness in fostering inclusive environments for PWD.

Moving forward, AmCham Kuwait reaffirms its commitment to driving meaningful change and facilitating partnerships to support the integration and empowerment of people with disabilities in Kuwait's workforce.

ABCK-AmCham Kuwait: Is a non-profit organization operating since 1985 and is composed of Fortune 500 corporations, small and medium-sized companies, and prominent business leaders and entrepreneurs, both American and Kuwaiti. ABCK-AmCham Kuwait has acted as an advocate for American interests in the state of Kuwait. For More Information, please visit our website at www.amchamkuwait.org or follow us on our social media channel @abck1985.

Bank's commitment to enhancing banking experience and advancing societal prosperity

KIB offers customers exclusive promotion to celebrate Mother's Day in collaboration with Ever and J's Bakery

Exclusive benefits to motivate children to save

Gulf Bank officially launches Neo kids account

KUWAIT CITY, March 25: In its commitment to providing the best products and services to all customer segments, Gulf Bank officially launched the Neo kids savings account during a special event organized by the bank on the occasion of Gargai'an, at Homz Mall, in the presence of a large number of bank officials and a gathering comprising both children and parents.

On this occasion, Najla Al-Eisa, Deputy General Manager of Consumer Banking at Gulf Bank's Marketing Department, said, "We are delighted to launch the Neo savings account for children, which is the revamped version of the 'Nassour' account. This corresponds with the substantial advancements observed by the bank and its commitment to delivering high-quality products and services."

She highlighted Gulf Bank's acknowledgment of the importance of initiating connections with customers at a young age to promote financial inclusion across society and raise awareness about the importance of saving. The Neo account, which offers two aesthetically designed cards in either red or blue to cater to both boys and girls, comes with exclusive benefits aimed at motivating them to save.

She explained that the Neo account provides a simple and secure way for parents to build their children's financial future, helping them learn the value of saving and financial responsibility from an early age. It is worth noting that the account is suitable for all children up to the age of 14, and parents can open the account without a minimum balance or fees at all Gulf Bank branches.

Al-Eisa mentioned that Gulf Bank's efforts do not stop at providing the best and most advanced banking solutions and services to all customers, especially children. These efforts reflect the bank's ongoing commitment to solidifying its leading position in Kuwait as a bank of the future.

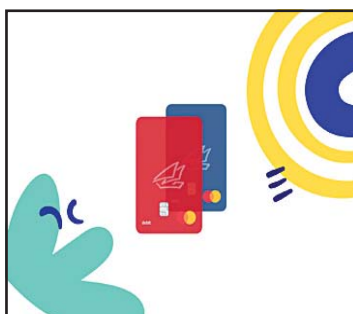
She further highlighted Gulf Bank's diverse range of savings accounts tailored to meet the needs of various segments of society. These include electronic savings accounts, Gulf savings accounts, golden investor accounts, and the Al-Danah Millionaire account. The Al-Danah account offers the world's largest prize linked to a bank account, with a value of KD 2 million in the annual draw, and KD 1 million in the semi-annual draw, alongside monthly and quarterly draws.

Al-Eisa concluded her statement by extending an invitation to all customers to enjoy a unique experience and high-quality digital services. Gulf Bank distinguishes itself as one of the most user-friendly, efficient, and best financial institutions in the local banking sector, equipped with new technology that exceeds customer expectations.

It's also worth mentioning that the Neo Gargai'an celebration witnessed a large turnout of parents with their chil-



Najla Al-Eisa mediates with the Gulf Bank team.



Red and Blue NEO Account Cards.

ren, who enjoyed various activities, diverse performances, and games.

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.



Some of the offers offered to children.

KUWAIT CITY, March 25: Kuwait International Bank (KIB) recently announced an exclusive offer for its customers to mark the celebration of Mother's Day, in collaboration with dessert brands Ever and J's Bakery. The offer was extended to all KIB cardholders, whether credit, debit, or prepaid. This step came within the framework of the Bank's continuous support for Kuwaiti entrepreneurs. It also embodied its commitment to enhancing its customers' experience and elevating their level of prosperity, while engaging them in such vital societal occasions.

Commenting on the occasion, Mariam Al-Nasser, Area Manager of Retail Banking at KIB said: "We are always delighted to be a constant partner for our customers in celebrating their social occasions that embody the concepts of love and loyalty, such as Mother's Day. We also extend our warmest wishes to all mothers in Kuwait on this occasion," adding: "At KIB, we pride ourselves on being among the leading banks supporting local enterprises owned and managed by Kuwaiti entrepreneurs, through solidifying strategic partnerships aimed at enhancing the efficiency and reach of these enterprises, as part of our efforts to achieve sustainable development plans."

This offer presented by KIB, along with the Ever branch in Dar Al Awadhi and the J's Bakery



Mariam Al-Nasser, Area Manager of Retail Banking at KIB

branch in the Surra area, enabled all customers to enjoy an exclusive discount on cakes for Mother's Day celebrations. To utilize the offer, customers only needed to visit the branches and present their credit, debit, or prepaid bank cards at the counter.

It is worth mentioning that KIB continues to offer promotions and benefits that add value to its overall banking experience, rewarding customers during social occasions as an appreciation for their loyalty, as well as fulfilling their aspirations. This also meets their needs in a manner that suits their modern lifestyle, in line with the Bank's main slogan, "Bank for Life".

Unwavering commitment to well-being of community

KMWA hosts spectacular Interfaith Iftar Meet

KUWAIT CITY, March 25: The Karnataka Muslim Welfare Association in Kuwait recently hosted a remarkable "Interfaith Iftar Meet," bringing together esteemed guests, dignitaries, and members of the interfaith community for an evening of unity and diversity.

The program commenced with a recitation of the Holy Quran, setting a contemplative tone for the evening. KMWA General Secretary, Atheeq Bayazeed, delivered a heartfelt introduction to the Karnataka Muslim Welfare Association, highlighting its mission and unwavering commitment to the well-being of the community.

The event, held at the SIMS Salmiya, was graced by distinguished Guests of Honor from Kannada Community such as Dr. Diwakar Chaluvaiiah, (President IDF Kuwait) Mr. Reaven D'Souza, (Executive Managing Editor – Times Kuwait) Mr. Anant Mangalgi (President Kuwait Kannada Koota), Mr. Ramesh Kediyoora (Founder President Mogaveera Association Kuwait), Mr. Naveen V Mascaren (President KCWA), Dr. Surendra Naik (Ex-President IDF Kuwait), and Mr. Jafar Sadiq (General Secretary IMA Kuwait), who added prestige and significance to the gathering. All the Guests has expressed their views on Message Of Ramadan and Fasting and its Significance to health benefits.

The guest of honors was welcomed by KMWA team (Atheeq Bayazeed, Abdulnaseer Khan, Tanveer Udupi, Irshad Kudroli, Hameem Hamzah, Shakeel Ahmed) presenting them with Flower Bouquet. The guests started with Felicitation Speech, highlighted benefits of fasting and drawing parallels between Ramadan fasting practices started 1400 years ago and their relevance to today's Intermittent fasting practices as well as empathizing benefits associated with it.

The highlight of the evening was the inspiring speech delivered by Renowned Motivational Speaker Mr. B.S. Sharafuddin, whose words resonated with all attendees, fostering a sense of unity and mutual understanding. Mentioning the revelation of Quran during the month of Ramadan and its message to entire humanity, also highlighting the benefits of fasting.

KMWA President Jameel Ahmed conveyed vote of thanks and expressed his heartfelt gratitude to all Guest of Honors, Dignitaries attendees, volunteers, and participants who contributed to the success of the event. Their participation and support were instrumental in making the "Interfaith Iftar Meet" a memorable and meaningful occasion.

As the evening concluded, a spirit of unity and harmony prevailed, setting the tone for future endeavors and collaborations within the community.



Photos during the KMWA's Interfaith Iftar Meet.

The event concluded with the dinner. The Karnataka Muslim Welfare Association looks forward to continued support and participation from all attendees in their upcoming initiatives,

as they strive to promote inclusivity and cooperation among diverse communities. KMWA continues to play a vital role in the well-being and progress of the community.

Stage

'I just fell in love with the idea of comedy'

Kevin Hart joins elite group honored with Mark Twain Prize

WASHINGTON, March 25, (AP): Kevin Hart wiped away tears on stage as he looked up from the bronze bust on a pedestal to the trio of comedy legends who had come to witness his professional highlight.

In the VIP balcony of the Kennedy Center opera house, Jerry Seinfeld, Chris Rock and Dave Chappelle sat side by side, watching Hart accept the Mark Twain Prize for lifetime achievement in comedy Sunday night.

"I didn't start doing what I was doing to get awards," Hart said. "I just fell in love with the idea of comedy."

Hart rose from the open mics and comedy clubs of his native Philadelphia to become one of his country's most recognizable performers - honing a signature style that combines his diminutive height, expressive face and motor-mouth delivery into an arena-packing stand-up act. He became the latest recipient of the Mark Twain Prize for American Humor in a raucous ceremony at the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts.

Celebrities and prominent comedians joined in the tribute to Hart, with several specifically citing the comic's work ethic, positivity and relentless dedication to his art.

"He's just inspirational," said comic Nikki Glazer on the red carpet. "He's one of the most naturally talented people I've met. But he also loves himself, which is not something you can say about

every successful comic."

Comedic actor J.B. Smoove (Leon on "Curb Your Enthusiasm") recalled a young up-and-coming Hart as almost problematically eager.

"Honestly, when he was first starting out, he was a pest," Smoove said. "But he was always picking up pieces from here or there, always learning from people and never afraid to learn."

Presentation

The show kicked off with a high energy duet by Robin Thicke and Nelly. What followed was closer to a celebrity roast than an award presentation, as a parade of comedians took easy swipes at Hart's height while others poked at the sometimes uneven quality of his prolific output. According to IMDB, Hart has appeared in 93 movies and television shows with nine in development.

"Kevin really cares about the quality ... of the check," said his frequent co-star Regina Hall. "Not the product - honestly some of that stuff is pretty bad - but the man knows how to get PAID!"

Rock referred to the very public breakup of Hart's first marriage by complimenting his appearance and saying Hart "has got that second wife happiness!"

Chappelle, who received his own Mark Twain Prize in 2019, kept his remarks serious - calling Hart "a very powerful dreamer."

He spoke of Hart selling out a 53,000-seat football stadium - Philadelphia's Lincoln Financial Field in 2015 - as a level of ambition and achievement was inspirational to himself and Rock.

"You made me dream bigger, and you're younger than me," he told Hart.

In addition to his stand-up career, Hart made his movie debut in the 2002 film "Paper Soldiers" and came to mainstream fame through a string of scene-stealing cameos in hits such as 2005's "The 40-Year-Old-Virgin." His films have grossed more than \$4.23 billion globally.

Now in its 25th year, the Mark Twain Prize annually honors performers who have made a lasting impact on humor and culture. Honorees receive a bronze bust of Twain, the iconic American writer and satirist whose real name was Samuel Clemens.

Mark Twain recipients are honored with a night of testimonials and video tributes, often featuring previous award winners. Other comedians who have received the lifetime achievement award include inaugural recipient Richard Pryor, George Carlin, Whoopi Goldberg, Bob Newhart, Carol Burnett and Dave Chapelle. Bill Cosby, the 2009 recipient, had his Mark Twain Prize rescinded in 2019 after allegations of sexual assault.

Sunday's ceremony will be broadcast on Netflix beginning May 11.

Variety



This image released by Neon shows Sydney Sweeney in a scene from the film 'Immaculate.' (AP)

Film

'Furiosa' to premiere at Cannes Film Festival

Sweeney dives into horror with 'Immaculate'

By Lindsey Bahr

It's not your imagination: Sydney Sweeney is everywhere. In the past four months, she's been in a romantic comedy that turned into a sleeper hit, a superhero movie that didn't and, as of this weekend, a bloody horror. Results have varied, quality-wise, but for someone the culture seems to want to (unfairly) pigeonhole as a specific type, she is really blowing through movie genres in record time.

She also happened to produce the horror, "Immaculate," in which she plays a young American nun, Cecilia, who's decided to join an Italian convent. Her character found God after a near-death experience at a young age and, after her parish closes, she gets a lifeline to go abroad and help tend to older, dying nuns. The prettiness of the new surroundings is just a front, of course, and she starts to discover some sinister happenings within the ancient walls.

"Immaculate" is a project that Sweeney originally auditioned for a decade ago, when she was 16. If anything, it is a great showcase for Sweeney's range (she gets to go from somewhat meek to primal scream) and is full of interesting visuals, beautiful costumes and accomplished makeup work showing all manner of bloody, mangled faces and limbs. But it's also a movie that does not seem as sure of itself or the point it's trying to make.

It's not hard to make a remote Italian convent creepy, or say something provocative and interesting about organized religion - quite a few horrors have succeeded here in the past. But "Immaculate" is not even confident enough to let us experience this place exclusively through Cecilia. No, it opens with a nightmarish prologue to give us a tease of what's in store for our innocent heroine, like it's a straight-to-streaming film that doesn't want you to click onto something else. Being a theatrical release, however, you have to imagine that ticket buyers are going to give the movie the benefit of the doubt and not flee 15 minutes into an 89-minute run.

Or perhaps horror audiences want as much carnage and jump scares as possible - if that is the case, this should be satisfying enough. There are plenty of comically squeaky doors and close-ups of a terrified face wandering around corners in the dark by only candle-

light. And the finale is fiery and violent and gruesome as well, with a very silly and perhaps unearned explanation of everything that's been happening. At least it's wrapped up, I guess?

But it also doesn't stand up to much interrogation. Take, for example, its use of subtitles. Cecilia doesn't yet understand Italian so is beholden to bilingual nuns to translate - which they don't do entirely accurately or faithfully. Later, when she's being interrogated by the cardinal (Giorgio Colangeli), we the audience are not privy to any subtitles and have to rely on Father Sal (Alvaro Morte) to translate. Are we to take him at his word when everyone else has proven to be unreliable? Again, why not just trust us to be in Cecilia's shoes throughout?

This script, written by Andrew Lobel and directed by Michael Mohan, does not seem to really care much about Cecilia and what makes her tick beyond that one story from her childhood. The main nuance she gets is through Sweeney's performance, which shows us that she does have a spark and the personality to rebel. There were some lofty ideas behind "Immaculate" that seem underserved (about bodily autonomy and such) and she gets several memorable movie star moments, but I want more for Sweeney than whatever this adds up to. She has the chops (a reminder to watch Tina Satter's great film "Reality"), she just needs the material.

"Immaculate," a Neon release hit theaters recently, is rated R by the Motion Picture Association for "some language, nudity, grisly images, strong violent content." Running time: 89 minutes. Two stars out of four.

Also

LOS ANGELES: "Furiosa: A Mad Max Saga," **George Miller's** eagerly awaited follow-up to "Mad Max: Fury Road," will make its world premiere at the Cannes Film Festival in May.

"Furiosa," a prequel to "Fury Road" starring **Anya Taylor-Joy**, will roar down the Croisette nine years after Miller's previous "Mad Max" film did. After its 2015 bow at Cannes, "Fury Road" went on to gross \$380 million worldwide and win six Oscars.

"Furiosa," screening out of competition at Cannes,

will premiere May 15. The film, co-starring **Chris Hemsworth** and **Tom Burke**, features Taylor-Joy in the role played by **Charlize Theron** in "Fury Road."

"The idea of this prequel has been with me for over a decade," Miller said in a statement. "I couldn't be more thrilled to return to the Festival de Cannes - along with Anya, Chris and Tom - to share 'Furiosa: A Mad Max Saga.' There is no better place than La Croisette to experience this film with audiences on the world stage."

Miller's previous film, 2022's "Three Thousand Years of Longing," also premiered at Cannes.

"Furiosa" will land in US theaters May 24. The 77th Cannes Film Festival runs May 14-25.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

NEW YORK: Ghost busting is still a good business.

"Ghostbusters: Frozen Empire" collected \$45.2 million in ticket sales over the weekend, according to studio estimates Sunday, handing Sony Pictures the studio's first No. 1 film since last summer.

The opening weekend for "Frozen Empire," in 4,345 theaters, was nearly exactly the same as the \$44 million launch for "Ghostbusters: Afterlife" in 2021. "Afterlife" rebooted the franchise with a sequel built around the descendants (**Carrie Coon**, **Finn Wolfhard**, **Mckenna Grace**) of **Harold Ramis' Egon Spengler**, along with **Paul Rudd's** seismologist **Gary Groberson**.

Neither film has been a hit with critics, but audiences have been more receptive. "Frozen Empire" garnered a B+ CinemaScore from moviegoers, a tick down from the A- score for "Afterlife." "Frozen Empire" isn't assured of profitability, but it will hope for sustained business over spring break.

"Ghostbusters" films tend to make a low impact internationally. In 25 overseas markets, "Frozen Empire" added \$16.4 million. The latest "Ghostbusters" cost about \$100 million to make. After **Jason Reitman** took over directing duties from his father, **Ivan Reitman**, to helm "Ghostbusters: Afterlife," "Frozen Empire" is directed by **Gil Kenan**, co-writer of "Afterlife."

Those two sequels took "Ghostbusters" in a more family-oriented, albeit PG-13 rated, direction, with original cast members **Dan Aykroyd**, **Ernie Hudson** and **Bill Murray** returning in supporting roles. After the 2016 female-led "Ghostbusters" prompted a backlash, Sony rebooted the franchise.

The weekend's other new wide release was "Immaculate," the horror film starring **Sydney Sweeney** as an American nun at a remote Italian convent. The film, released by Neon following a premiere at SXSW, debuted with \$5.4 million on 2,354 screens. Sweeney's ascending star power helped make "Anyone But You" one of the most successful rom-coms in years. But "Immaculate," an independent production that cost less than \$10 million make, isn't getting the same bounce.

"The movie features the popular Sydney Sweeney, but horror movies are not cast-driven," wrote **David A. Gross** for the consulting firm Franchise Entertainment Research. "They're driven by the hook: the evil doll, the wicked smile, the invisible or silent presence, the found footage, the possessed child. That's what terrifies



Chalamet



Diaz

the horror crowd. The hook is not completely clear here."

The No. 2 spot went to "Dune: Part Two," which continues to hold well. The **Denis Villeneuve**-directed sci-fi sequel starring **Timothée Chalamet** added \$17.6 million in its fourth weekend of release, bringing the Warner Bros. release's domestic total to \$233.4

million. Overseas sales are just as strong, adding up to a \$574.4 million worldwide haul. (AP)

LOS ANGELES: Actress **Cameron Diaz** and her musician husband, **Benji Madden**, say they are "blessed and grateful" to have welcomed a baby boy - **Cardinal**

Madden - to their family. The couple announced the arrival of their son in an Instagram post they each shared Friday. "He is awesome and We are all so happy he is here! For the kids safety and privacy we won't be posting any pictures," said a caption on the post, adding that Cardinal is "really cute." (AP)

People & Places

Obits

'Babar' author dies

Acclaimed pianist Pollini dead at 82

ROME, March 25, (AP): **Maurizio Pollini**, a Grammy-winning Italian pianist who performed frequently at La Scala opera house in Milan, has died. He was 82.

Pollini died on Saturday, La Scala said in a statement. The announcement didn't specify a cause of death, but Pollini had been forced to cancel a concert at the Salzburg Festival in 2022 because of heart problems.

During a six decades-long international career, Pollini's repertoire expanded beyond the standard classics. He embraced early 20th-century masterpieces by Igor Stravinsky, Arnold Schoenberg and Anton Webern and postwar modernists such as Karlheinz Stockhausen, Pierre Boulez and Luigi Nono.

La Scala defined the pianist as "one of the great musicians of our time and a fundamental reference in the artistic life of the theater for over 50 years."

Pollini was considered a pianist with unique intellectual power, whose unrivalled technique and interpretive drive compelled listeners to think deeply.

He was born in Milan on Jan. 5, 1942, into a family of artists. His father, Gino Pollini, was a violinist and a leading rationalist architect. His mother, Renata Melotti, sang and played the piano, as did her brother, Fausto Melotti, who was also a pioneer of abstract sculpture.

"I grew up in a house with art and artists," Pollini said in an interview. "Old works and modern works coexisted together as part of life."

Pollini began giving concerts before his 10th birthday, performing Chopin's Etudes at age 14 and then winning the International Chopin Piano Competition at 18, as the youngest foreign pianist among a group of 89 contestants.

Arthur Rubinstein, president of the jury, reportedly said that the young pianist "already plays better than any of us."

Recognition

After his first international recognition, however, Pollini put his career on hold to study, explaining that performing right away would have been for him "a little premature."

"I wanted to study, get to know the repertoire better, play the music of Beethoven, Schubert, Brahms," he said.

In the late 1960s, Pollini participated in improvised concerts in factories and programs for students and workers at La Scala, conducted by longtime friend Claudio Abbado.

During his long international career, he also collaborated with other famous conductors, including Riccardo Muti, Daniel Barenboim and Riccardo Chailly.

Pollini performed his first American tour in 1968. From the 1970s to the '90s, he made a series of recordings with the Deutsche Grammophon label, becoming a celebrated interpreter of classics like Beethoven, Schumann and Schubert.

His albums won several awards, including a Grammy in 2007 for Best Instrumental Soloist Performance (without orchestra) for Chopin: Nocturnes.

He is survived by his wife Marilisa, and his son Daniele, also an acclaimed pianist and conductor.



"Babar" author Laurent de Brunhoff, who revived his father's popular picture book series about an elephant-king and presided over its rise to a global, multimedia franchise, has died. He was 98.

De Brunhoff, a Paris native who moved to the U.S. in the 1980s, died Friday at his home in Key West, Florida, after being in hospice care for two weeks, according to his widow, Phyllis Rose.

Just 12 years old when his father, Jean de Brunhoff, died of tuberculosis, Laurent was an adult when he drew upon his own gifts as a painter and storyteller and released dozens of books about the elephant who reigns over Celesteville, among them "Babar at the Circus" and "Babar's Yoga for Elephants." He preferred using fewer words than his father did, but his illustrations faithfully mimicked Jean's gentle, understated style.

The series has sold millions of copies worldwide and was adapted for a television program and such animated features as "Babar: The Movie" and "Babar: King of the Elephants." Fans ranged from Charles de Gaulle to Maurice Sendak, who once wrote, "If he had come my way, how I would have welcomed that little elephant and smothered him with affection."

De Brunhoff would say of his creation, "Babar, c'est moi" ("that's me"), telling National Geographic in 2014 that "he's been my whole life, for years and years, drawing the elephant."

The books' appeal was far from universal. Some parents shied from the passage in the debut, "The Story of Babar, the Little Elephant," about Babar's mother being shot and killed by hunters. Numerous critics called the series racist and colonialist, citing Babar's education in Paris and its influence on his (presumed) Africa-based regime. In 1983, Chilean author Ariel Dorfman would call the books an "implicit history that justifies and rationalizes the motives behind an international situation in which some countries have everything and other countries almost nothing."

Expression

Adam Gopnik, a Paris-based correspondent for The New Yorker, defended "Babar," writing in 2008 that it "is not an unconscious expression of the French colonial imagination; it is a self-conscious comedy about the French colonial imagination and its close relation to the French domestic imagination."

De Brunhoff himself acknowledged finding it "a little embarrassing to see Babar fighting with Black people in Africa. He especially regretted 'Babar's Picnic,' a 1949 publication that included crude caricatures of Blacks and American Indians, and asked his publisher to withdraw it.

De Brunhoff was the eldest of three sons born to Jean de Brunhoff and Cecile de Brunhoff, a painter. Babar was created when Cecile de Brunhoff, the namesake for the elephant's kingdom and Babar's wife, improvised a story for her kids.

"My mother started to tell us a story to distract us," de Brunhoff told National Geographic in 2014. "We loved it, and the next day we ran to our father's study, which was in the corner of the garden, to tell him about it. He was very amused and started to draw. And that was how the story of Babar was born. My mother called him Bebe elephant (French for baby). It was my father who changed the name to Babar. But the first pages of the first book, with the elephant killed by a hunter and the escape to the city, was her story."



This image released by Disney Theatricals shows Michael James Scott as Genie, (background left), and Michael Maliakel as Aladdin, (background right), during a performance of 'Aladdin' on Broadway. (AP)



Eiza Gonzalez poses for photographers upon HMS Belfast at the photo call for the film 'The Ministry Of Ungentlemanly Warfare' on Friday, March 22, in London. (AP)



Beyoncé



Moore

Variety

BUCHAREST, Romania: A court in Romania's capital on Friday denied a request by online influencer **Andrew Tate** to return assets that were seized during investigations into the case in which he is charged with human trafficking, rape and forming a criminal gang to sexually exploit women.

The Bucharest Tribunal ruled that all assets seized will remain in possession of Romania's anti-organized crime agency, DIICOT. Tate's spokesperson said, adding that the decision will be appealed. Tate, 37, won an appeal in January challenging the asset seizures, which triggered a retrial.

The former professional kickboxer was arrested in December 2022 near Bucharest along with his brother Tristan Tate and two Romanian women. Romanian prosecutors formally indicted all four in June last year. They have denied the allegations.

After the Tates were detained, Romanian authorities seized 15 luxury cars, 14 designer watches and cash in several currencies. The fleet of automobiles included a Rolls-Royce, a Ferrari, a Porsche, a BMW, an Aston Martin and a Mercedes-Benz. The total value of the goods, authorities said at the time, was estimated at 3.6 million euros (\$3.9 million).

DIICOT also said it had identified more than 10 properties and land owned by companies registered to the Tate brothers, and that their assets could be used to fund investigations and compensate victims if the authorities could prove they were gained through illicit activities. (AP)

NEW YORK: Lorrie Moore won the prize for fiction on Thursday, while **Judy Blume** and her longtime ally in the fight against book bans, the American Library Association were given honorary prizes by the National Book Critics Circle.

Moore, best known as a short-story writer, won the fiction prize for her novel, "I Am Homeless if This Is Not My Home." Committee chair **David Varno** said in a statement that the book is a heartbreaking and hilarious ghost story about a man who considers what it means to be human in a world infected by, as Moore puts it, "voluntary insanity." It's an unforgettable achievement from a landmark American author.

Blume was the recipient of the **Ivan Sandrof Lifetime Achievement Award**.

Stage

Genies share their magical stories

'Aladdin' marks 10 years on Broadway

NEW YORK, March 25, (AP): James Monroe Iglehart's mom took him to see the animated Disney movie "Aladdin" as a high-school graduation gift in 1992. He fell in love with the Genie, naturally.

Fast-forward more than two decades and Iglehart found himself playing the first Genie on Broadway, killing it, and on his way to a Tony Award.

"To play the role that I loved so much and be able to be my full, silly self with the volume at 20 to 25 and go crazy was just so cathartic," he says.

"Aladdin" turns 10 this month and it has done more than become Broadway's go-to for young people experiencing their first musical. It has also become an incubator for Black actors like Iglehart leading a big Disney musical with joy and humor.

There are currently Genies on Broadway and on tour in the United Kingdom and United States, in Japan and Spain, all doing cartwheels, high kicking and singing "Friend Like Me." They call it a Genie Brotherhood.

"I kind of just tell the guys, 'Listen, make sure that you give your authentic self. You don't have to play it like me,'" Iglehart says. "As long as you bring your brand of silliness and comedy and heart and realism to it, the audience will accept it."

After "Aladdin," Iglehart went on to land TV and voice work, the Broadway dual roles of Marquis de Lafayette and Thomas Jefferson in "Hamilton," King Arthur in the new "Spamalot" revival and will next star as Louis Armstrong in "A Wonderful World."

"It's made me the actor I am today. And it's given me a legacy that I can be thoroughly proud of," he says. "It changed my life."

At the Tony Awards in 2014, Iglehart sang, danced and lifted one of the coveted statuettes for best featured actor in front of millions of viewers.

Hundreds of miles away, a Genie-to-be was watching, his life changing.

Marcus Martin was 16 at the time, an aspiring actor in Akron, Ohio, who sat transfixed as Iglehart filled the Tony stage.

"I was always told that I would have a hard time in this business because the best roles were for skinny white tenors, and I'm not any of those things," says Martin. "So seeing James gave me permission to dream a new dream."

He had grown up going to Broadway shows with his mom when they came through Ohio. Watching the Tony telecast, he decided he would one day play the Genie and began memorizing the music and lines. Naturally, he and his mom saw "Aladdin" when the first national tour came to Cleveland.

He graduated Baldwin Wallace University in May 2020 - not the best time to have a degree in performing live for large groups of people. But he persisted. He auditioned for Disney four times and got his dream role.

Career

He is now the Genie on the second national tour.

He started in Schenectady, New York, and has performed in over 50 cities, from Little Rock, Arkansas, to Los Angeles. He's geeked out over playing historic venues like The Fabulous Fox Theatre in St. Louis and the Fox Theatre in Atlanta.

"I'm such a theater nerd. I always say I'm a fan first, actor second," he says. Martin likes to look for famous autographs on the walls or under desks in his new dressing rooms.

"All the greats, and some that I've even looked up to as a young performer, I'm now in the same space as them, sharing dressing rooms," he says. "This is a very special way to start my career."

He has become friends with Iglehart

The committee cited the way her novels including "Are You There God? It's Me, Margaret" have "inspired generations of young readers by tackling the emotional turbulence of girlhood and adolescence with authenticity, candor and courage."

It also praised her role as "a relentless

opponent of censorship and an iconic champion of literary freedom."

The American Library Association was given the **Toni Morrison Achievement Award**, established to honor institutions for their contributions to book culture. The committee said the group had a "longstanding commitment to equity, including its

20th century campaigns against library segregation and for LGBTQ+ literature, and its perennial stance as a bulwark against those regressive and illiberal supporters of book bans."

Blume, who accepted her award remotely from a bookstore she runs in Key West, Florida, thanked the ALA for "their tireless work in protecting our intellectual freedoms."

The awards were handed out at a Thursday night ceremony at the New School in New York.

Other winners included poet **Safiya Sinclair**, who took the autobiography prize for her acclaimed memoir "How to Say Babylon," about her Jamaican childhood and strict Rastafarian upbringing. (AP)



LOS ANGELES: Days after **Beyoncé** releases her highly anticipated eighth studio album, she'll make an appearance at the 2024 iHeartRadio Music Awards to receive its innovator award.

Beyoncé will appear at the Dolby Theatre in Los Angeles to accept the honor during the April 1 ceremony hosted by **Ludacris**. She's being recognized for her pioneering career: for decades of creative risks and influencing pop culture on a mass scale, as well as last year's groundbreaking Renaissance World Tour.

Ludacris will also perform, joining a previously announced lineup of **Justin Timberlake**, **Green Day**, **TLC**, **Jelly Roll**, **Lainey Wilson**, and **Tate McRae**.

Cher will be presented with the iHeartRadio icon award.

Beyoncé's upcoming "Act II: Cowboy Carter" is the follow-up to 2022's acclaimed "Act I: Renaissance." (AP)



Kevin Hart attends the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts 25th Annual Mark Twain Prize for American Humor presented to Kevin Hart, Sunday, March 24, in Washington. (AP) - Details Page 11

The Conversation

Over 90% of patients have 20/20 vision with glasses after surgery

Demystifying cataract surgery: Myths, realities and expert advice

By Allan Steigleman, University of Florida and

Elizabeth M. Hofmeister, Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences

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

Cataract surgery is one of the most popular and commonly performed procedures in the world. The vast majority of patients have excellent outcomes with few complications.

Here are the numbers:

■ By age 80, over half of all Americans have cataracts.

■ Close to 4 million cataract surgeries are performed in the US every year.

■ Over 90% of patients have 20/20 vision with glasses after surgery, although those with other eye conditions may not do as well, including those with glaucoma, a progressive disease typically associated with elevated pressure within the eye; diabetic retinopathy, which ultimately can cause leakage in the retinal tissues; and macular degeneration, a disease that is typically related to age.

■ The rate of post-surgery infection from endophthalmitis is less than 0.1%.

As ophthalmologists who have performed thousands of these procedures, we know that many patients have misconceptions about both cataracts and the surgery. For example, some think a cataract is a growth on the eye's surface.

We like to compare a cataract with the frosted glass of a bathroom window, where light can be transmitted but details cannot. Or when turbulence from a storm causes normally clear water in the ocean to become murky. In much the same way, the eye's once transparent lens becomes cloudy.

Cataract surgery removes the clouded lens of the eye and replaces it with a new, clear lens to restore your vision. Most patients report the procedure is painless.

It's typically an elective surgery that is performed on an outpatient basis. The patient is often awake, under local anesthesia, with sedation similar to that used for dental procedures. We like to say patients receive the equivalent of three margaritas in their IV.

Disorders

Numbing drops are then applied to the eye's surface, along with an anesthetic inside the eye. Patients with claustrophobia, or movement disorders such as Parkinson's disease, may not be suitable candidates for awake surgeries and require general anesthesia.

Before surgery, patients receive dilating drops to make the pupil as large as possible. The surgeon makes a tiny incision, usually with a small pointed scalpel, between the clear and white part of the eye to gain access to the lens capsule, a thin membrane similar in thickness to a plastic produce bag at the grocery store.

This capsule is suspended by small fibers called zonules, which are arranged like the springs that suspend a trampoline from a frame. The surgeon then creates a small opening in the capsule, called a capsulotomy, to gain access to the cataract. The cataract is then broken into smaller parts so they are removable through the small incision.

This is similar to a tiny jackhammer, breaking the large lens into smaller pieces for removal. That sounds scary, but it's painless. Ultrasound emulsifies the lens and vacuum power then aspirates it from the eye.

Laser-assisted cataract surgery has been found to have similar outcomes to traditional cataract surgery.

Serious complications, such as postoperative infection, bleeding in the eye or a postoperative retinal detachment are rare; they occur in approximately 1 in 1,000 cases. But even in many of these situations, appropriate management can salvage useful vision.

Capsular complications deserve additional

discussion. According to some studies, they occur in up to 2% of cases. If a hole or tear of the posterior capsule is encountered during cataract surgery, the clear gel in the vitreous - the back chamber of the eye - may be displaced into the front chamber of the eye.

If that happens, the gel must be removed at the time of the cataract surgery. This will reduce the likelihood of additional postoperative complications, but those who have the procedure, known as a vitrectomy, have an increased risk for additional complications, including postoperative infections and postoperative swelling.

Patients usually go home right after the procedure. Most surgery centers require that the patient have someone drive them home, more for the anesthesia rather than the surgery. Patients begin applying postoperative drops that same day and must wear an eye shield at bedtime for a few weeks after surgery.

Patients should keep the eye clean and avoid exposure to dust, debris and water. They should try not to bend over and should avoid heavy lifting or straining in the first week or so after surgery. Lifting or straining can cause a surge of blood pressure to the face and eye. Known as a choroidal hemorrhage, it can lead to bleeding into the wall of the eye and be devastating to vision.

Cause

Things that cause only moderate increases in heart rate such as walking are OK. Routine postoperative examinations are usually completed the day after surgery, about a week after surgery and about a month after surgery.

The plastic lens used to replace the cataract, or intraocular lens, requires careful sizing for optimal results and a nuanced discussion between patient and surgeon.

Early intraocular lens technologies were monofocal, and most patients with these lenses chose distance correction and used reading glasses for near tasks. This is still the preferred approach for approximately 90% of patients having cataract surgery today.

Recent advances have led to intraocular lenses that offer multifocality - the opportunity to have near as well as distance vision, without glasses. Some multifocal lenses are even in the trifocal category, which includes distance, near, and intermediate vision, the latter of which in recent years has become very important for computer and phone use.

Most patients with these advanced technology multifocal lenses are happy with them. However, a small percentage of patients with multifocal lenses can be bothered by visual disturbances - notably night glare and halos around light sources in the dark - that they request removal of the multifocal lens to exchange it for a standard intraocular lens. These exchanges are a reasonable option for such situations and offer relief for most affected patients.

Determining who's an ideal candidate for a multifocal intraocular lens is an area of active research. Most clinicians would recommend against such a lens for a patient with a detail-oriented personality. Such patients tend to fixate on the shortcomings of these lenses despite their potential advantages.

As with many technologies, current generation advanced technology intraocular lenses are much better than their predecessors. Future offerings are likely to offer improved vision and fewer side effects than those available today.

But these newer lenses are often not reimbursed by insurance companies and often entail substantial out-of-pocket costs for patients.

Deciding on what type of lens is best for you can be complicated. Fortunately, except in unusual circumstances, such as when a cataract develops after trauma to the eye, there is seldom a hurry for adult cataract surgery. (AP)

Is it unusual to find cancer after surgery?

What is known about Kate's cancer



Britain's Kate, Princess of Wales, attends the Remembrance Sunday service at the Cenotaph on Whitehall in London, Sunday, Nov. 12, 2023. (AP)

Not enough evidence

What's the breast cancer risk calculator backed by Munn?

LOS ANGELES, March 25, (AP) — When Olivia Munn revealed recently that she was diagnosed with breast cancer and had a double mastectomy, she urged people to ask their doctors to figure out their score on a breast cancer risk calculator.

Munn said her score prompted further tests and the discovery of an aggressive form of the disease.

"I'm lucky. We caught it with enough time that I had options," the 43-year-old actor posted on Instagram. "I want the same for any woman who might have to face this one day."

A look at the calculator, the Breast Cancer Risk Assessment Tool:

What is the Breast Cancer Risk Assessment Tool?

It's a questionnaire on the National Cancer Institute's website that is designed for health care providers to use with patients. The tool received a "dramatic increase in visits" since Munn's post, according to an NCI spokesperson.

First developed in 1989, it was originally based on data from only white women. Updates have made it more accurate for Black, Hispanic and Asian and Pacific Islander women.

It doesn't take everything into account and can't actually predict whether any one person will get breast cancer.

It asks about age, age at first menstrual period, age when the woman's first child was born or if the woman has not given birth, family history of breast cancer, past breast biopsies, results of past biopsies, race and ethnicity.

The result is a lifetime risk and a five-year risk based on factors that have been tied to a higher risk of breast cancer. For comparison, it also gives an average risk for U.S. women of the same age, race and ethnicity.

Dr. Elizabeth Comen, who treats breast cancer at Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center in New York, said women should

do the assessment with their doctors, not by themselves.

"It's very important to talk to your doctor about doing that together, and then making decisions about what imaging techniques are appropriate" based on the results, Comen said. Munn's high score prompted additional imaging tests that aren't recommended for women of average risk.

Should everyone use the tool?

It's not the best risk calculator for some women. If you have a certain gene mutation or a previous history of breast cancer, it's not for you. It also doesn't take into account dense breast tissue, which can make cancer harder to spot.

The National Cancer Institute says the tool may underestimate risk in Black women with previous biopsies and Hispanic women born outside the U.S.

"The model needs further validation for Hispanic women and other subgroups," the institute's website says. "Researchers are conducting additional studies to gather more data to test and improve the model."

There are dozens of similar tools, said Ashley Johnson, a nurse practitioner at Vanderbilt University Medical Center, who has studied them. Many health groups recommend that women over age 25 have such an assessment, she said, but there's not enough evidence to say which tool is best.

What do the scores mean?

A five-year risk score of 2%, for example, means a woman's estimated risk of developing breast cancer over the next five years is 2%.

A lifetime risk score of 7% means a woman's estimated risk of developing breast cancer through age 90 is 7%.

Mammogram guidelines are for women at average risk, said Dr. Arif Kamal, chief patient officer at the American Cancer Society. Guidelines vary but the society says women can choose to start annual mammograms at age 40.

LONDON, March 25, (AP) — Kate, the Princess of Wales, has disclosed that she has cancer and is undergoing chemotherapy — though in a video announcement Friday, she did not say what kind of cancer or reveal details of her treatment.

Here's what is known:

What kind of surgery did Kate have?

Kate had what was described as abdominal surgery on Jan. 16. The news wasn't announced until the next day, when Kensington Palace revealed that Kate was recovering from a planned operation.

At the time, officials said her condition wasn't cancerous but did not specify what kind of surgery, saying only that it was successful.

When was Kate's cancer found?

During the video announcement Friday, Kate said: "Tests after the operation found cancer had been present," and that she was in the early stages of treatment.

Kate, the Princess of Wales, said she is undergoing chemotherapy for cancer. Here's what you need to know.

She didn't say what kind of cancer was found, nor did she give details of her chemotherapy. The statement from Kensington Palace said Kate found out about the cancer after post-surgery tests were done.

Is it unusual to find cancer after surgery?

While it's rare to find cancer after surgery for a noncancerous problem, it does happen in about 4% of such surgeries, said Dr. Yuman Fong, a surgeon at City of Hope cancer center in Southern California.

"That 4% figure represents someone who's going to the operating room for what is thought to be benign disease" such as a procedure to remove the gallbladder or ovarian cysts, Fong said.

Is it unusual to find cancer in someone so young?

Yes, cancer is rare in young adults. But in developed countries, rates of some cancers are rising among younger adults. Kate is 42. "We hate it when young people get cancer, but at the same time, they are the ones that recover best," Fong said.

What kind of treatment is Kate having?

The palace statement said no details would be provided about her cancer or her treatment, other than she started it in late February.

"We will not be sharing any further private medical information. The Princess has a right to medical privacy as we all do," the statement said.

After successful surgery, chemotherapy is often used to help kill any stray cancer cells and to prevent the cancer from coming back. Treatments have evolved, and when chemo is used now, it's sometimes for shorter periods or lower doses than it once was.

What are the side effects of chemotherapy?

Fatigue, nausea, tingling in the hands and feet, and sometimes hair loss are side effects of chemotherapy, said Dr. Monica Avila of Moffitt Cancer Center in Tampa, Florida. But there are medications for improving these side effects. And cold caps that cool the scalp can prevent hair loss, Avila said.

"A patient can take anywhere from a few weeks to a month or two to recover from those effects," Avila said. Numbness and tingling can take longer to disappear, she said.

How long will Kate's treatment last?

The palace statement said that will be up to her doctors. "The princess is now on a recovery pathway," the statement said.

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Samson scores 82 not out off 52 balls

Rajasthan and Gujarat enjoy winning starts in IPL

JAIPUR, India, March 25. (AP): Sanju Samson scored 82 not out off 52 balls as Rajasthan Royals beat Lucknow Super Giants by 20 runs on Sunday to make a winning start in cricket's lucrative Indian Premier League, and Gujarat Titans did enough in the final over to defeat Mumbai Indians by six runs.

Samson's half-century helped anchor the Royals' innings, as the team reached 193-4 in 20 overs.

In reply, Nicholas Pooran's 64 not out went in vain as Lucknow faltered in its chase to end up with 173-6. Skipper Lokesh Rahul scored 58 off 44 balls.

Opting to bat first, Rajasthan made a speedy start but also lost its openers early. Jos Buttler was caught behind for 11 and rising star Yashasvi Jaiswal made 24 off 12 balls, including three fours and a six, before chipping a catch straight to mid on.

With the score at 49-2 in five overs, Samson came together with Riyan Parag, who was promoted to No. 4 after showing good domestic form, and it paid off.

The duo added 93 off 59 balls for the third wicket, with Parag scoring 43 off 29 balls. He hit three sixes to provide a launch pad for Samson at the other end.

Samson scored 50 off 30, including two fours and four sixes. He hit another two sixes, adding another 32 runs off the last 22 balls he faced.

Afghanistan pacer Naveen ul Haq picked up 2-41 in four overs, including Parag who was out caught in the 15th over.

While Shimron Hetmyer was out cheaply to Ravi Bishnoi's wrist spin, Dhruv Jurel hit 20 not out off 12 balls.

Samson and Jurel added 43 off 22 as the Royals finished strongly.

New Zealand pacer Trent Boult

(2-35) then provided two early breakthroughs as Lucknow was down to 11-3 in 3.1 overs.

Quinton de Kock was caught for four, while Devdutt Padikkal - who had transferred from Rajasthan to Lucknow in the winter window - was bowled for a three-ball duck.

Impact substitute Nandre Burger had Ayush Badoni caught behind for just one but Rahul and Deepak Hooda resisted with a 49-run partnership off 26 balls for the fourth wicket.

Just when things appeared to look settled, wrist spinner Yuzvendra Chahal dismissed Hooda who had come in

CRICKET

as an impact sub. He scored a 13-ball 26.

Pooran and Rahul added 85 off 52 balls for the fifth wicket, and their partnership put Lucknow back on track.

Rahul scored 50 off 35 deliveries, while Pooran got to 50 off 30 balls, as the chase looked on with 49 runs needed off the last four overs.

The skipper was out caught immediately after the timeout break, puncturing Lucknow's momentum.

Ravichandran Ashwin sent back big hitting Marcus Stoinis for just three. With 38 runs needed off the last two overs, Pooran couldn't finish things off for Lucknow. He finished unbeaten, hitting four sixes and four fours in all.

Sandeep Sharma bowled immaculately at the death, finishing with 1-22 in three overs.

Gujarat wins thriller

Mumbai's bid to finally beat Gujarat at Ahmedabad's Narendra Modi Stadium

was foiled again in a thrilling finish to Sunday's late game. Hardik Pandya, who led Gujarat in the 2022 and 2023 seasons, came back to his former home ground only to watch Shubman Gill make a winning start as Titans captain.

Chasing 169 to win, Mumbai was propped up by 46 runs from impact substitute Dewald Brevis. Former skipper Rohit Sharma scored 43 off 29 balls.

The duo added 77 runs off 55 balls for the third wicket. Sharma fell in the 13th over, out lbw to left arm spinner Sai Kishore (1-24). But Mumbai was in the driver's seat, needing 48 runs off the last 36 balls with seven wickets in hand.

Gujarat's pacers then scripted a brilliant turnaround. Impact substitute Mohit Sharma (2-32) held a return catch from Brevis, and then had big hitting Tim David caught in the deep for 11.

Australian pacer Spencer Johnson sent back Tilak Varma (25) and Gerald Coetzee, leaving Mumbai struggling at 150-7.

Pandya smacked 11 off four balls to raise hopes of victory, but he was caught at the boundary in the final over. Veteran pacer Umesh Yadav (2-31) defended 19 off the last over and restricted Mumbai to 162-9 in 20 overs.

Earlier, Gujarat rode on Sai Sudharsan's 39-ball 45 to score 168-6 after losing the toss.

Gill made a quick start, scoring 31 off 22 balls, and was aided by Wriddhiman Saha who scored 19 off 15 balls.

Jasprit Bumrah applied the brakes throughout Titans' innings, bowling four one-over spells, and finished with 3-14. He bowled Saha, while both Sudharsan and David Miller (12) were caught off the bowler. Sudharsan's dismissal in the 17th over left Gujarat at 134-5, but then Rahul Tewatia's 22 off 15 balls turned out to be crucial.



Dream Academy champion of the tournament.

Dream Academy crowned champions

The second Ramadan "Mini Goal" tournament concluded on the grounds of the late Samir Saeed Stadium at the Social Culture Society. Organized by the Kuwaiti Game Committee in collaboration with the Coordination of the Popular Conference for Palestinians Abroad, the event featured 16 teams representing Kuwaiti football clubs and academies. These teams were named after Palestinian media professionals from Gaza, adding a competitive edge to the matches.

The "Dream Academy" team, named "Abboud," clinched the championship title by defeating the "Pharaohs Academy" team, named after journalist "Imad Eid," with a solitary goal.

Following the tournament's conclusion, Hassan Al-Khawaja, Chairman of the Kuwaiti Committee for "Mini Goal," alongside Nader Abu Hanina, Head of the Coordination of the Popular Conference for Palestinians Abroad, Ahmed Lari, former MP, and Ahmed Dashti, President of the Social Culture Society, presented cups and medals to the first and second-place winners.

Al-Khawaja highlighted that the tournament aligns with this year's calendar of events, aiming to inspire young talents to engage in sports and facilitate the early identification of promising individuals. This initiative underscores the Social Committee's commitment to both individual and societal well-being.

Malnati wins Valspar to earn Masters trip



Nelly Korda holds up the trophy after winning during the final round of LPGA's Fir Hills Seri Pak Championship golf tournament in Palos Verdes Estates, Calif. (AP)

Korda returns to No. 1 with win

PALM HARBOR, Fla., March 25, (AP): Peter Malnati got a great break and followed that with an even better shot Sunday, a 5-iron to 6 feet for birdie on the 17th hole that carried him to a 4-under 67 and a two-shot win at the Valspar Championship on Sunday and earn his first trip to the Masters.

Malnati tapped in for par on the final hole for only his second PGA Tour victory. He won by two over Cameron Young, who made it easier on him by taking bogey on the final hole for a 68. Young now has seven runner-up finishes without a win.

Malnati's approach on the 16th went long and left into gnarly rough some 50 feet from the pin, leaving him a tough chip to try to save par and stay tied. But his foot was on a sprinkler head, which entitled him to a free drop. With the extra club length, he was able to drop it on the fringe and use putter, which he sent down to short range for par.

On the par-3 17th into wind, Malnati hit a laser to 6 feet for birdie. Up ahead, Young hit his drive well left, got it on the green and three-putted from 50 feet for bogey.

Malnati goes to the Masters for the first time and gets a two-year exemption. He also is assured of getting into the remaining four \$20 million signature events without any help.

In Palos Verdes Estates, Calif., Nelly Korda made bogey on her final two holes to fall into a playoff and atoned for it quickly, making a 12-foot birdie putt to beat Ryann O'Toole in the Fir Hills Seri Pak Championship to return to No. 1 in the world.

Korda, who closed with a 2-under 69, won for the second time this year, both of them involving surprising collapses and amazing revivals.

Korda was playing for the first time

since the end of January, when she lost four shots over three holes before an eagle-birdie finish to win. She seized control Sunday with an 18-foot eagle on the par-5 14th.

O'Toole holed a 20-foot par putt on the 18th for a 66, and that looked to be good only for second place until Korda's bogey-bogey finish. They finished at 9-under 275, and the playoff ended quickly.

GOLF

Korda, who now has 10 LPGA titles, replaces Lilia Yu at the top of the women's world ranking.

In Singapore, Jesper Svensson of Sweden closed with a 9-under 63 and beat Kiradech Aphibarnrat on the final hole to win the Porsche Singapore Classic for his first European tour title.

Svensson tapped in for par at the par-5 18th on the third extra hole. Aphibarnrat could only make bogey after his third shot rolled over the green and down the slope at the Laguna National Golf Resort Club.



Peter Malnati blasts from the sand trap on the 14th hole during the final round of the Valspar Championship golf tournament at Innisbrook in Palm Harbor, Fla. (AP)

Svensson matched the course record and was one shot better than his Thai opponent. Both finished on 17-under 271 to force a playoff. Both players made birdies on the first playoff hole and the matched pars on the second before the decisive third trip up the 18th.

Overnight leader David Micheluzzi finished in a share of seventh place after a final-round 73 left him five shots behind. Shane Lowry had a 72, leaving the former British Open champion nine shots off the lead.

In Newport Beach, Calif., Padraig Harrington won the Hoag Classic at windy Newport Beach Country Club for his seventh PGA Tour Champions victory, rebounding from a double bogey with birdies on the final two holes.

After driving left into trouble and dropping two strokes on the par-4 16th, Harrington made a downhill 15-footer on the par-3 17th and got an 8-footer to fall on the par-5 18th for a one-stroke victory over Thongchai Jaidee.

Harrington closed with a 2-under 69 to finish at 14-under 199. The 52-year-old Irishman will be inducted into the World Golf Hall of Fame in June. He won British Open in 2007 and 2008 and the PGA Championship in 2008.

Pole to checkered flag

Byron dominates NASCAR's 1st road course race of season, wins at COTA

AUSTIN, Texas, March 25. (AP): William Byron won the Daytona 500 with an agonizing final lap under a caution flag. He took the checkered flag on Sunday at the Circuit of the Americas at full throttle.

Byron started from pole position and delivered a dominant drive in NASCAR's first road course race of the season. The Hendrick Motorsports driver led 42 of 68 laps and built the big lead he needed to hold off a hard-charging run from Joe Gibbs Racing's Christopher Bell over the final two laps.

Bell shaved nearly three seconds off Byron's lead to create some late drama before Byron slammed the door over the final corners.

"I was trying to not make mistakes," Byron said. "I knew that last lap he was going to be pushing hard."

Even when he was building the lead, Byron said he knew the victory would be tight at the end.

CAR RACING

"Everyone is too good, and that car (was) too close," Byron said.

A self-taught racer who used computer equipment to hone his skills, Byron earned career win No. 12 and his second on a road course.

The Circuit of the Americas, a track built for Formula One, has been the first road course for NASCAR each of the last four seasons. And unlike the crash-filled triple-overtime race of 2023, Sunday's race was mostly incident free as Byron made easy work of the field.

Byron led 23 laps of the first two stages, but found himself quickly dropped to third at the start of the final stage as Ross Chastain, who won at COTA in 2022, jumped to the front.

Byron fought back to pass him with 25 laps to go and both cars pitted on the same lap. Chastain then got hung up in



William Byron celebrates after winning a NASCAR Cup Series auto race at Circuit of the Americas in Austin, Texas. (AP)

traffic on the re-entry and fell several cars behind.

That gave Byron the chance to open the gap he needed to keep Bell behind him at the end. Ty Gibbs, the 21-year-old grandson of team owner Joe Gibbs, finished third after getting passed by Bell with three laps to go.

"Another lap I would have gotten there for sure," Bell said. "Passing (Byron) would have been difficult. I needed him to make a mistake and he didn't make a mistake."

Penalties
The course had few track limits, but the ones enforced by race officials brought a hefty penalty for drivers who got caught.

Chase Elliott, who won here in 2021 and leads active drivers with seven road course wins, was running sixth early in the final stage before driving out of bounds in the s-curve section of the racetrack.

That forced him to a pit lane drive-thru and took him out of contention when he rejoined in 16th. Elliott, a former Cup Series champion, hasn't

won since 2022.

Ford falters

Ford drivers have yet to win this season and did not expect big results on the road course. They delivered on the low expectations. Chris Buescher was the top Ford driver on Sunday in eighth.

Coming back to Cota

The Circuit of the Americas is the only track to host both NASCAR and F1, and all signs point to the stock cars coming back next year.

Circuit of the Americas President Bobby Epstein said this week he has a deal for NASCAR to return in 2025, but provided no details. Marcus Smith, president of Speedway Motorsports, which runs the event and rents the track for the week, said he also plans a return.

"We love bringing NASCAR to Austin," Smith said. "Nothing is final until the official NASCAR schedule comes out, but we're planning for another big event in Austin at COTA in 2025."

Japan have to wait in World Cup Asian qualifying

Australia, Saudi Arabia get a chance to advance

JEDDAH, March 25. (AP): Australia and Saudi Arabia are among the Asian Football Confederation heavyweights aiming to secure a spot in the next stage of World Cup qualifying with wins Tuesday, while Japan's bid to advance will have to wait after North Korea cancelled a home game in Pyongyang.

Just hours after a 1-0 loss to Japan in Tokyo last week, the North Koreans informed tournament organizers that they could not host the return match.

FIFA, the sport's world governing body, later canceled the qualifier after deciding the game "shall neither be played nor rescheduled" because North Korea couldn't come up with an alternative venue and there was no room in the calendar for a postponement.

"The matter and match outcome will be referred to the FIFA disciplinary committee," FIFA announced, which indicates North Korea will be sanctioned with a 3-0 forfeit.

North Korea has so far only one win from three games - all away from home - in Group B of Asia qualifying. Japan has nine points from three consecutive wins.

The top two teams from each of the nine groups will advance to the third round, where Asia's allocation of eight automatic World Cup slots for

2026 is available.

Like Japan, Saudi Arabia has won all three games so far and can secure its spot in the next stage if it can complete back-to-back wins over Tajikistan in Group G following its win at Riyadh last week.

"We know that Tajikistan is a strong team and has been improving," Saudi Arabia coach Roberto Mancini said. "It will be a tough game for us but we are looking forward to the challenge."

SOCCER

Australia also has nine points and can guarantee its progression to the next stage from Group I with a victory over Lebanon in Canberra. The game was originally scheduled to take place in Beirut but due to the security situation in the region Lebanon remained in Australia following its 2-0 loss in Sydney last week.

Qatar, Iraq and United Arab Emirates also have maximum points and are potentially one win away from the last 18. South Korea, however, slipped up against Thailand with a 1-1 draw in Seoul.

It was South Korea's first appearance since Jurgen Klinsmann was fired as head coach last month fol-

lowing a disappointing Asian Cup campaign.

The teams will meet again in front of an expected sell-out crowd of 60,000 in Bangkok.

"We have to approach the game calmly and with one mind," South Korea's interim coach Hwang Sun-hong said. "We know what we need to do, and will do our best."

Son Heung-min's goal in Seoul last week was his 45th for South Korea, five behind Hwang's mark. "I hope he breaks my record quickly as I will continue to do well in the future," said Hwang, who retired in 2002 after playing more than 100 games for South Korea's national team.

The South Koreans leads Group C, three points above Thailand and China, which let a two-goal lead slip against No. 156-ranked Singapore to draw 2-2 last week.

It was the first game under new coach Branko Ivankovic appointed after the Asian Cup in which China exited at the group stage and didn't score a single goal.

"We had a good situation in the first half, but I told the players that 2-0 was a dangerous score," Ivankovic said. "We were prepared to take three points but we only took one and now we are looking forward to the next match. We know what we have to do."

Encouraging teamwork spirit and promoting active lifestyle during Holy Month

Zain hosts thrilling Ramadan soccer tournament for staff



Waleed Al Khashti awards the first-place winners.



Awarding the second-place winners.

KUWAIT CITY, March 25: Zain hosted a thrilling Ramadan soccer tournament for its employees, with 16 teams competing for the championship title at Nazwa Football Fields in Bnaid Al-Gar. The competition encouraged the teamwork spirit between members of the Zain family and promoted a healthy and active lifestyle during the Holy Month.

SOCCER

Sports competitions are a key part of Zain's internal communications strategy, which closely focuses on bringing engaging health and sports programs to employees. The company remains committed to the well being of its staff by organizing competitions in various sports all year round, especially dur-

ing Ramadan to promote an active and healthy lifestyle during the month of fasting.

The Zain Employees Ramadan Football Tournament witnessed a high turnout, with employees from across the company's divisions and departments joining the thrills of the competition. The tournament featured sixteen 8-player teams competing in exciting knock-out matches. The best two teams won the first and second place titles and received cash prizes.

Zain spares no efforts to organize activities and programs that cater to its employees' talents and interests. The company is keen on encouraging employees to pursue healthier lifestyles and take part in different sports and health programs all year round. Previous competitions included soccer, volleyball, padel, bowling, and penalty kicks.

Over 630 players participated throughout the 10 days

stc concludes sponsorship of 3rd Al Qabas Padel Tourney



Crowning the winners of the tournament in several categories.

Lakers 'survive' Pacers late rally

Bucks roll past Thunder

MILWAUKEE, March 25, (AP): Giannis Antetokounmpo had 30 points and a season-high 19 rebounds, Khris Middleton recorded his second career triple-double and the Milwaukee Bucks trounced the Oklahoma City Thunder 118-93.

Middleton had 11 points, 10 rebounds and 10 assists for his first triple-double since Jan. 20, 2018.

Milwaukee broke open a close game in the second half as Oklahoma City fell out of the Western Conference lead. The reigning NBA champion Denver Nuggets didn't play Sunday and moved a half-game ahead of the Thunder.

Timberwolves 114, Warriors 110

In Minneapolis, Anthony Edwards scored 23 points and made 3 of 4 free throws in the final 12 seconds for Minnesota in a victory over Golden State.

Naz Reid had 20 points and a season-high-tying 12 rebounds, and Rudy Gobert added 17 points and 12 rebounds for the Wolves, who matched their season best with 21 made 3-pointers.

Steph Curry scored 31 points for the Warriors, but he missed the tying 3-point try with 1:27 to go. Gobert converted both free throws at the other end for a five-point lead.

After rebounding a forced airballed 3-pointer by Edwards with 22.6 seconds left, Curry took the rebound all the way for a layup that cut the lead to one. But Edwards got fouled and made two foul shots. Then, he rebounded Klay Thompson's missed 3-pointer from the wing.

Lakers 150, Pacers 145

In Los Angeles, Anthony Davis had 36 points and 16 rebounds, LeBron James added 26 points and 10 assists, and the Los Angeles Lakers survived Indiana's strong fourth-quarter comeback for a victory.

Spencer Dinwiddie had 26 points in his biggest offensive game since joining the Lakers, who have won three straight and five of seven. Los Angeles



New Orleans Pelicans guard Jose Alvarado (left), is fouled by Detroit Pistons guard Jared Rhoden (8) in the second half of an NBA basketball game in Detroit. (AP)

led 116-99 entering the fourth quarter, but Indiana closed the gap to three points down the stretch.

The Lakers held on by scoring 10 points in the final minute - including six free throws by Austin Reaves, who finished with 25 points in the Lakers' highest-scoring performance of the season.

76ers 121, Clippers 107

In Los Angeles, Tobias Harris scored 24 points and Tyrese Maxey added 19 of his 24 in the second half of Philadelphia's victory over James Harden and the Los Angeles Clippers.

Harden had 12 points and 14 assists in his first game against the 76ers since he forced his way out of Philadelphia last November. After going 0 for 6 on 3-pointers to jeers from a small but vocal cheering section of Sixers fans in Los Angeles, the 10-time All-Star and 2018 MVP will head back to Philadelphia with the Clippers on Wednesday for the rematch.

Cameron Payne had a season-high 23 points with five 3-pointers for the Sixers, who rebounded from a loss to the Lakers on Friday by hitting 18 3-pointers in just their fourth victory in 11 games.

Philadelphia blew an early 17-point lead over the Clips before taking control with a 15-2 run to open the fourth quarter led by Maxey, who started slowly and finished strong for the second straight game in L.A.

Pelicans 114, Pistons 104

In Detroit, Zion Williamson scored 36 points and led New Orleans to a victory over short-handed Detroit.

BASKETBALL

Williamson shot 13 for 14 from the floor and 10 for 14 from the line in 36 minutes. He added seven rebounds and six assists and received applause from the crowd at Little Caesars Arena when he left the game with 1:20 remaining.

CJ McCollum scored 23 points for the Pelicans, who have won five of six.

The Pistons played without four of their five starters. Cade Cunningham (knee), Jalen Duren (back), Isaiah Stewart (hamstring) and Ausr Thompson (illness) missed the game, and sixth man Simone Fontecchio (toe) was also sidelined. Jaden Ivey was the only available player to have scored more than 500 points this season.

Heat 121, Cavaliers 84

In Miami, Haywood Highsmith scored 18 points, part of a 59-point effort by Miami's reserves, and the Heat built what was their biggest lead in more than a decade on the way to beating Cleveland.

Bam Adebayo had 15 points and 16 rebounds and Jimmy Butler scored 15 points for the Heat, who led by 45 in the fourth quarter. Their biggest lead this season entering Sunday was 33, also against Cleveland on Nov. 22, and the 45-point cushion was their largest since leading Chicago by 46 in a playoff game on May 8, 2013.

Miami started the day seventh in the Eastern Conference and ended there as well, tied with Philadelphia at 39-32. The 76ers won at the Los Angeles Clippers earlier Sunday, but currently trail the Heat because of the head-to-head tiebreaker.

KUWAIT CITY, March 25: Kuwait Telecommunications Company - stc, a world-class digital leader providing innovative services and platforms to customers, announced the conclusion of its sponsorship of the 3rd Al Qabas Padel Tournament held from March 14th till the 23rd. The event witnessed a large number of attendees that came to watch the thrilling matches and participate in the various activities organized at the venue, including the programs organized at the 'stc village'. stc was also recognized for its main sponsorship role of the tournament, which came as part of its 2024 Ramadan campaign bearing the title, "With good, we go further", organized under the Company's extensive CSR framework.

This year's tournament included a range of categories that drew in a crowd of attendees of over 5000 on a daily basis that cheered on their favorite players. A total of 630 players as well as families with their children participated in the Al Qabas Padel tournament, the largest of its kind in Ramadan. It worth mentioning that tournament lasted for 10 continuous days and witnessed intense matches across the 9 different categories. Additional activities and programs were organized throughout the tournament's duration for attendees, with different opportunities to win valuable prizes from the sponsors, especially at the 'stc village' pavilion.

Recognized for its role as a main sponsor

During the closing ceremony held on the last day of the event, solutions by stc's CEO, Mohammed Al-Nusif and General Manager of Corporate Communications at stc, Danah Al-Jasem and Manager of PR & Social Media at stc Ahmad Al Nuwaibet were recognized by the organizers, represented by Mr. Walid Abdel-Latif Al-Nisf, Editor-in-Chief, Mr. Abdullah Ghazi Al-Mudhaf, Deputy Editor-in-Chief, and Mr. Nasser Al-Moamen, Executive Director of Al Qabas for the Company's main sponsorship role in the tournament for the last 3 years. In this regard, stc commended Al-Qabas for the outstanding organization and for building an active community around the support during the Holy Month of Ramadan. Additionally, stc highlighted that its active involvement and sponsorship of such initiatives



Fans attending to support their teams.



stc was honored during the closing ceremony of the tournament.

contributes to the objectives it aims to achieve under its CSR program.

Engagement and innovation at stc village

During the tournament days, the 'stc village' stood out as a vibrant reflection of stc's dedication to innovation, community engagement, and upholding Ramadan traditions, both new and old. Showcasing the latest in digital and telecom solutions, stc provided the attendees with the new exclusive "youth all the way" plans designed for the youth, the first of its kind in Kuwait. The launch of the new plans reflects stc's commitment to the growing demand of the younger generation for telecom and digital solutions.

The collaboration with Flare Fitness introduced the "Your calories = internet" competition, emphasizing stc's commitment to health and wellness. Additional activities and programs were also launched for all ages at the village, with the opportunity to win a range of prizes from the Company.

Furthermore, the Girgean activity brought a festive and cultural dimension to the event, enhancing the atmosphere with traditional acts in addition to the distribution of sweets to chil-



stc village.

dren, which highlighted stc's efforts to foster community spirit and create lasting memories. Through such initiatives, stc continues to reinforce its role in enriching community events, eagerly anticipating future opportuni-



A snapshot of the tournament matches.

ties to bring joy and excitement to Ramadan and other occasions through its 'stc village'.

"With good, we go further"

stc's 2024 Ramadan campaign this year focuses on the collective impact of individuals acts of kindness and how they contribute to the wider community's well-being. This initiative is rooted in the belief that every good deed, no matter how small, sets off a ripple effect, creating a stronger, more connected society. Through a series of community-focused activities and digital engagements, stc aims to inspire and empower individuals to make positive contributions that resonate far and wide. stc intends to remain an active participant in the community, aligning with its CSR framework, and contribute to initiatives that will benefit the younger generation, who are the future leaders of the community.

To find out more about stc's events, promotions, and sponsorships, follow stc's official social media platforms, visit one of stc's branches, download mystc mobile application, visit www.stc.com.kw or contact the customer service center by dialing 102 for around the clock assistance.



Casper Ruud, of Norway, hits a return to Alejandro Davidovich Fokina, of Spain, during the Miami Open tennis tournament in Miami Gardens. (AP)

Sports

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Blues grapple with the absence of key players

Pinto readies Kuwait for Qatar challenge in qualifiers

By Khaled Al-Enezi

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, March 25: Kuwait is set for a pivotal clash against Qatar in the Asian qualifiers for both the 2026 World Cup in the United States, Canada, and Mexico, as well as the 2027 Asian Cup in Saudi Arabia at Ali Sabah Al-Salem Stadium at 10:00 pm.

Simultaneously, the Indian and Bangladesh teams are scheduled to compete at 2:30 pm in the same group stage fixtures.

Qatar currently leads the standings with 9 points, followed by the Indian team with 4 points. Kuwait occupies third place with 3 points, while Afghanistan trails behind in fourth place with only one point.

Kuwait commenced its qualifying journey with a narrow loss

against the Indian team on home turf, followed by a resounding 4-0 victory against Bangladesh in the second round last November. However, their momentum faltered with a 3-0 defeat to the Qatar last Thursday in Doha.

SOCCER

Securing a positive outcome against the reigning Asian champions poses a significant challenge, particularly as Al-Azraq has grappled with the absence of key players such as Sultan Al-Anazi, Bandar Al-Salama, Fahd Al-Hajri, Sami Al-Sanea, Shabib Al-Khalidi, and Meshari Ghannam.

Portuguese coach Rui Pinto acknowledges that achieving a favorable result and sustaining qualification hopes demands exemplary



A Kuwaiti sits on the ball after training break.

efforts from all team members. He emphasizes the importance of focus, precise organization, and rec-

tifying past mistakes to seize the three crucial points.

Since its return from Doha, Pinto has been diligent in addressing the team's shortcomings, especially after conceding two goals in just three minutes against Qatar. Today's lineup is anticipated to witness alterations from the previous match, with a focus on reintegrating absent players into the fold.

Pinto's strategic acumen will be tested as he devises plans to counter the strengths of the Qatari national team, particularly their prolific scorer Akram Afif and industrious player Al-Moez Ali, alongside other standout talents in the Qatari squad favored by their Spanish coach Marques Lopez, who aims for another victory to secure top position in the group ahead of the remaining fixtures.

Gauff 'advances' to 4th round of Miami Open against Garcia

MIAMI GARDENS, March 25, (AP): Third-ranked Coco Gauff came from behind in the first set to beat Oceane Dodin 6-4, 6-0 and advance to the fourth round of the Miami Open for the second time in her career.

Gauff won 10 straight games after Dodin took a 4-2 lead in the opening set, thanks partly to nine double-faults by Dodin at critical moments.

Gauff has just one loss in her past 23 matches in the United States. That defeat came against Maria Sakkari at Indian Wells earlier this month.

Gauff, who turned 20 on March 13, is the youngest American player to hold a top-three seed at Miami. The reigning U.S. Open champion, who is from South Florida, attended the event

growing up and said capturing a title there would be special.

"It would be really cool to win here at home," said Gauff, who was born in Delray Beach, Florida. "I think the best part about winning here is just being able to drive home with the trophy and not have to fly and pack. ... And I'm a Dolphins fan, so maybe if I win



Gauff

TENNIS

here they can win another trophy at the Super Bowl."

Gauff will face No. 27 Caroline Garcia, who defeated Naomi Osaka 7-6 (4), 7-5 on Sunday in a match in which the pair combined for 28 aces. Osaka, a four-time Grand Slam champion, came up short despite playing some of her best tennis of the season in Miami. She beat 17th-ranked Elina Svitolina 6-2, 7-6 (5) on Saturday, which was her second win over a top-20 opponent in her previous four matches.

US win 3rd straight CONCACAF Nations League

Jamaica finish 3rd

ARLINGTON, Texas, March 25, (AP): Tyler Adams stood on the field cradling 2-month-old son Jax, a wide smile on his face. The 25-year-old midfielder had just scored the goal of his life, propelling the United States to a 2-0 win over Mexico on Sunday night and the Americans' third straight CONCACAF Nations League title. Jamaica beat Panama 1-0 in the third-place game on Dexter Lembikisa's 41st-minute goal.

"People have a lot of question marks about this, about that," Adams said. "But to see what we do week in, week out when we have the opportunity to work together, we continue to grow."

Adams scored from about 35 yards in his first start in more than a year for club or country, putting the U.S. ahead in the 45th minute when he received a pass from Weston McKennie, took a touch and curled a shot that just eluded the right hand of diving goalkeeper Guillermo Ochoa.

SOCCER

Limited to one league start this season for Borussia Dortmund and Nottingham Forest, Reyna scored his eighth international goal in the 63rd minute. Christian Pulisic's cross was blocked by defender Johan Vásquez. The ball deflected off American forward Haji Wright back to Vásquez, who headed a clearance attempt. Reyna let the ball bounce and beat Ochoa to the near post from 16 yards.

U.S. coach Gregg Berhalter motivated his players earlier in the week to win their third straight title with the example of Michael Jordan and the 1991-93 Chicago Bulls.

"The Jordan slide, when he's holding up the three fingers with the trophy," Berhalter said, "we Photoshopped the Nations League trophy into the same picture with Michael Jordan."

After June exhibitions against Colombia and Brazil, the U.S. faces Bolivia, Panama and Uruguay in the group stage of the Copa América, where six teams from North and Central America and the Caribbean are invited guests.

"It's good for momentum," Reyna said. "We've been together with our core group for a while now and I think we know what it takes to win big games and tournaments and hopefully we can carry that in Copa America and have a great run there."

Reyna was picked as top player and Matt Turner as best goalkeeper.

Berhalter nearly sent Reyna home from the 2022 World Cup for lack of hustle in training, sparking a Reyna-Berhalter family feud that led the U.S. Soccer Federation to appoint interim coaches for much of last year. Berhalter returned in September and Reyna a month later after recovering from an injury.

"When I took over the team again, I talked about it needing time," Berhalter said. "And that was something that we both acknowledged. And the more you work together and the more that he believed that intentions were true and that the whole staff has his best interests in mind, I think we started to gain trust."

The U.S. stretched its unbeaten streak against Mexico to seven games since a September 2019 defeat, including five wins.



United States players celebrate on the podium after a win over Mexico in a CONCACAF Nations League final soccer match in Arlington, Texas. (AP)



United States defender Chris Richards, (top), heads the ball over Mexico forward Henry Martin during the first half of a CONCACAF Nations League final soccer match in Arlington, Texas. (AP)

"They were a lot more focused than we were. They pressured us," Mexico coach Jaime Lozano said.

The match was suspended twice by Canadian referee Drew Fischer because of homophobic chants among the mostly pro-Mexican crowd of 59,471 at AT&T Stadium. He stopped play in the 88th minute, resumed after a 4 1/2-minute wait, then halted it again six minutes into stoppage time. Play restarted 1 1/2 minutes later.

Last year's Nations League semifinal in Las Vegas was ended about four minutes early because of chants from Mexican fans, who for years have directed a slur at opposing teams' goalkeepers.

Troubled by a right hamstring injury that twice required surgery, Adams had not played for the U.S. since the 2022 World Cup before entering in the 63rd minute Thursday, then leaving in the 100th because of a minutes restriction.

Rajitha's heroics lead the way Sri Lanka secure dominant victory over Bangladesh in first Test

SYLHET, Bangladesh, March 25, (AP): Kasun Rajitha claimed 5-56 as Sri Lanka bowled Bangladesh out for 182 in its second innings Monday to clinch a 328-run victory in the first cricket test.

Rajitha, who returned 3-56 in the first innings, finished with career-best match figures of 8-112 in a test match. All 20 Bangladesh wickets were taken by seamers.

Mominul Haque played a lonely defiant innings for the hosts, stranded on 87 from 148 deliveries when the final wicket fell in the middle session on Day 4. His innings contained 12 boundaries and a six.

Bangladesh was set an improbable 511-run victory target after Sri Lanka

CRICKET

rode on centuries in each innings from Kamindu Mendis and skipper Dhananjaya de Silva.

"When we saw it looked like a fast bowling wicket, we went with three seamers," de Silva said. "I think if you can get the new ball moving in any wicket, that's the wicket-taking options for the captain. Rather than going with the spinners, I am happy to go with the fast bowlers."

Sri Lanka made early inroads in Monday's morning session when Rajitha trapped Taijul Islam lbw for six in the second over after Bangladesh had resumed at 47-5.

Mominul and Mehidy Hasan combined for a 66-run seventh-wicket stand but Rajitha struck again to break up the partnership. Mehidy scored 33 from 50 deliveries before he played an

expansive drive and got a thick outside edge.

"Mominul showed the value of the experience," Bangladesh captain Najmul Hossain Shanto said. "If he gets support from other end, the match could have gone to fifth day. But it's our mistakes that we played reckless shots, specially in the second innings."

Mominul also had a 47-run partnership with Shoriful Islam (12) for the eighth wicket, which only reduced the

margin of the defeat.

Rajitha broke the partnership when he took a return catch to dismiss Shoriful. With his next delivery he had Khaled Ahmed caught by Kusal Mendis for a duck to complete the second five-wicket haul in his test career.

Kumara, who returned figures of 2-39, ended Bangladesh innings by dismissing Nahid Rana for duck.

Vishwa Fernando couldn't add to his three-wicket haul from Day 3 and

finished with figures of 3-36 from 15 overs.

After recovering from an early batting collapse at the start of the match, Sri Lanka posted 280 in the first innings with de Silva and Mendis each scoring 102.

After dismissing Bangladesh for 188, de Silva (108) and Kamindu (164) again hit centuries as Sri Lanka reached 418 in its second innings to set up victory.



Rajasthan Royals' Yuzvendra Chahal bowls a delivery during the Indian Premier League cricket match between Rajasthan Royals and Lucknow Super Giants in Jaipur, India. Rajasthan Royals beat Lucknow Super Giants by 20 runs. (AP) — See Page 14