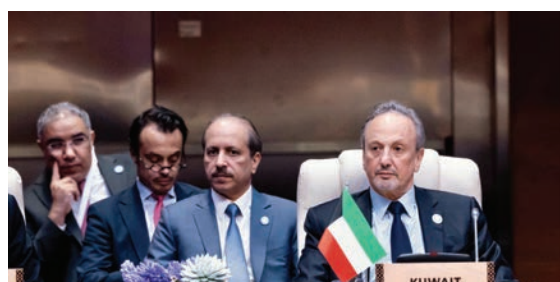


2 Amir's representative delivers Kuwait speech at NAM summit



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5 Outrage grows as Greece admits 'failures' after deadly train crash



14 Women's sport wins as money pours into India cricket league



MP asks about injuries, fights, water use during celebrations

Lawmaker proposes forming supreme health council to upgrade services

BNK Group sponsors Ari Sanchez



KUWAIT: BNK Group Chairman Bader Al-Kharafi signs the contract of sponsorship of top-ranked padel player Ari Sanchez. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat (See Page 16)

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: MP Khalil Al-Saleh on Thursday sent questions to three ministers inquiring about the number of people admitted to hospitals during the National and Liberation Day celebrations, which were criticized this year as being chaotic. Another lawmaker called on the government to organize the celebrations in a civilized manner based on a well-prepared program.

In his questions to Health Minister Ahmad Al-Awadhi, MP Saleh asked about the number of people admitted to emergency departments at hospitals and the types of injuries they suffered from. He also asked about reports claiming some people suffered eye injuries.

Saleh asked the interior minister about the number of traffic tickets the ministry issued during the celebrations and the number of fights, and whether some people were hit by vehicles. The lawmaker also asked the minister of electricity and water about the quantity of water consumed during the celebrations, amid claims that large quantities of water were wasted by people participating in the celebrations.

MP Shuaib Shaaban called on authorities to organize celebrations marking the National and

Liberation Days in a dignified way that suits the two noble occasions. He proposed that the two occasions, which fall on Feb 25 and 26, should be celebrated at sports clubs in each governorate and that authorities should hold a major celebration that includes folkloric programs as a sign of respect for the two national events.

National Assembly Speaker Ahmad Al-Saadoun meanwhile invited MPs to attend regular sessions next week, although the new Cabinet has not been formed. Under Kuwaiti law, the presence of at least one minister is essential to convene parliamentary sessions. The government resigned about six weeks ago, but no one has been asked to form a new Cabinet, although HH the Crown Prince held customary consultations to name a prime minister over a week ago. A number of lawmakers have called to hold Assembly sessions even if the government does not attend.

MP Saud Al-Asfour said on Thursday he will submit a proposal to establish a supreme health council to oversee and regulate health services in the country, which he criticized as backward. The lawmaker said Kuwait spends some KD 3 billion on health services every year, which is the highest among the oil-rich Gulf Cooperation Council

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News in brief

Ban on livestock exports

KUWAIT: Commerce and Industry Minister Mazen Al-Nahedh issued a decision banning the sale and export of local and imported livestock of all kinds for four months to combat rising prices. The ban will be in place until July 1, 2023. The move aims to prevent a rise in livestock prices during the holy month of Ramadan, which is forecast to begin on March 23.

Man brings bomb in baggage

NEW YORK: The FBI has arrested a man who allegedly attempted to bring an explosive device onto an airplane in Pennsylvania, US authorities said. The bomb was discovered by Transportation Security Administration (TSA) personnel on Monday, after the man's checked bag set off an alarm at Lehigh Valley International Airport in the city of Allentown. The suspect, identified as Mark Muffley, left the airport after being called to the security desk, and was later arrested at his home. — AFP

210 civilians killed in Somaliland

MOGADISHU: More than 200 people lost their lives over 24 days of clashes between security forces and clans in a disputed part of Somalia's breakaway Somaliland region, an official said on Thursday. "210 civilians were killed and 680 others were wounded in the fighting, which broke out between Somaliland forces and the local community in Las Anod," the mayor of the contested town, Abdirahim Ali Ismail, told a press conference, adding 200,000 families had fled from their homes following the clashes. — AFP

Rocket carrying UAE astronaut blasts off for ISS

CAPE CANAVERAL, Florida: A SpaceX Falcon 9 rocket blasted off on Thursday to the International Space Station carrying two NASA astronauts, a Russian cosmonaut and the second Emirati to voyage to space. The SpaceX Dragon Crew-6 mission launched at 12:34 am (0534 GMT) Thursday from Launch Complex 39A at NASA's Kennedy Space Center in Florida, a livestream of the launch showed. The launch had been scrubbed on Monday just minutes before liftoff because of a clog in a filter that supplies ignition fluid to start the rocket engines.

"Congratulations to the NASA and SpaceX teams for another history-making mission to the International Space Station!" NASA Administrator Bill Nelson said in a statement. The Dragon crew capsule, dubbed Endeavour, is scheduled to dock with the ISS at 1:17 am (0617 GMT) on Friday after a 24-hour voyage. NASA's Stephen Bowen and Warren Hoburg, Russia's Andrey Fedyaev and Sultan Al-Neyadi of the United Arab Emirates are to spend six months on the orbiting station.

Neyadi, 41, will be the fourth astronaut from an Arab country and the second from the oil-rich UAE to journey to space; his compatriot Hazzaa Al-Mansoori flew an eight-day mission in 2019. Neyadi, Hoburg, the Endeavour pilot, and Fedyaev, the

Continued on Page 6



DUBAI: People watch the launch of NASA and SpaceX Dragon Crew-6 mission to the International Space Station at the Mohammed bin Rashid Space Centre (MBRSC) on March 2, 2023. (Inset) Sultan Al-Neyadi — AFP

Rescuers save dog 3 weeks after quake

ISTANBUL: Rescuers pulled a dog alive from a collapsed building in southern Turkey three weeks after last month's 7.8-magnitude deadly earthquake, local media reported on Thursday. The teams from a local municipality in central Turkey saved Aleks the dog on Wednesday and delivered him to Haytap, a Turkish animal protection association in the city of Antakya. A video from DHA news agency shows rescuers reaching between two large concrete slabs and calling to the trapped canine.

"Is he coming?" one rescuer was heard saying, crouching inside a small hollow in the debris of the collapsed building. "Aleks, come, my dear," one rescuer calls to the dog. "Well done, my son." Images then showed the rescuers embracing the dog, who appears to be alert and in good health, and offering him water.



Rescuers give a dog water after it was rescued from a collapsed building on March 1, 2023, 23 days after last month's deadly earthquake. — AFP

"Every living thing matters to us, human beings or animals," one local was quoted as saying by the privately-owned DHA agency after the miracle rescue. Rescue workers have saved hundreds of trapped cats, dogs, rabbits and birds cherished by the locals in Antakya, one of the cities flattened by the disaster.

Continued on Page 6

Blinken meets Lavrov at G20 riven by rifts

NEW DELHI: US Secretary of State Antony Blinken urged his Russian counterpart to end the Ukraine war on the sidelines of G20 talks on Thursday, in their first face-to-face contact since the invasion. Blinken and Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov spoke briefly at the meeting of the world's top diplomats in New Delhi, which failed to reach a joint final declaration after objections from Moscow and Beijing.

"I told the foreign minister what I and so many others said last week at the United Nations, and what so many G20 foreign ministers said today - end this war of aggression, engage in meaningful diplomacy that can produce a just and lasting peace," Blinken told reporters. The last time Blinken and Lavrov were in the same room - at a G20

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Local

Foreign Minister delivers speech at NAM summit

Summit discusses means of curbing repercussions of COVID



BAKU: Kuwait's Foreign Minister meets with Azerbaijan counterpart. —KUNA photos



BAKU: Kuwait Foreign Minister Sheikh Salem Abdullah Al-Jaber Al-Sabah on Thursday met with Serbian Foreign Minister Nikola Selakovic. The meeting took place in the Azerbaijani Capital, Baku, on the sidelines of the Non-Aligned Movement Summit.



BAKU: Participants are pictured at the Non-Aligned Movement Contact Group summit currently held in the capital of Azerbaijan.

BAKU: Representative of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, Foreign Minister Sheikh Salem Al-Abdullah Al-Jaber Al-Sabah led the Kuwaiti delegation to the Non-Aligned Movement Contact Group summit currently held in the capital of Azerbaijan, Baku on Thursday. The summit discusses means of backing joint international efforts to curb the economic, security and health repercussions of the COVID-19 pandemic.

In the speech, Sheikh Salem expressed his honor to represent His Highness the Amir in the summit, conveying his greetings and keenness of Kuwait's partaking in such an event due to its great impor-

ance, in light of continued repercussions imposed by the pandemic. Sheikh Salem thanked Azerbaijan's President Ilham Aliyev and government for the warm reception, hospitality and good preparation of this meeting.

He referred to the world's experiment during the spread of the COVID-19 and its impacts that represent an exceptional challenge, which had no geographical border, economic levels or social divisions. He stated that the repercussion of the pandemic affected all political, social and economic aspects of life. "All of us are required more than ever to back the current policies on boosting cooperation and joint

international action," he told the attendees.

The Kuwaiti minister called for innovative solutions to put an end to these new crises, in line with unifying efforts and views, as well as a sincere political will. Sheikh Salem pointed to huge casualties resulted from the pandemic that reached 8.6 million deaths and 672 million others infections. He further highlighted that the pandemic aggravated the lack of food security crisis and severe economic shrank. He went to say that Kuwait was one of the countries that achieved the highest rate in terms of providing vaccines to both citizens and expats.

Globally, Kuwait is continuing backing interna-

tional efforts to combat COVID-19, seeking to enhance global health security, he affirmed. "Therefore, we as NAM member states bear responsibility for bolstering cooperation among us to face the repercussions of this pandemic, and other unprecedented challenges and circumstances facing our world," the Amir's representative said.

He underlined the importance of boosting mutual cooperation and coordination to create an international environment to achieve development and prosperity for nations. Sheikh Salem also demanded enhancing international security and safety, commending the effective and constructive role of Azerbaijan in managing this crisis. —KUNA

News in brief



Fire erupts in a school

KUWAIT: Fire erupted in one of the classrooms of Surra middle school for girls on Thursday. The school's rescue team was able to evacuate the students successfully. Safety measures were taken after which they reported the incident to the Kuwait Fire Force officials who swiftly extinguish the fire.



Sabiya accident kills 1

KUWAIT: One person died, and seven others were injured in a road accident in Sabiya area. The Kuwait Fire Force public relations department received a report on early Thursday and rushed to the scene. The Sabiya Fire Station center sent fire teams to the area where they rescued the injured people.



Customs arrest suspects

KUWAIT: Kuwait Customs at Kuwait airport Terminal 5 seized 16 pieces of Hashish and arrested a Bangladeshi passenger. The officers also detained an Egyptian passenger with illicit substance. Airport supervisor said one of the customs inspectors suspected the Bangladeshi passenger who arrived to Kuwait from Dhaka. He searched him and found 16 pieces of Hashish hidden in his clothes. Legal procedures have been taken against the suspects. They were transferred to the concerned departments for further procedures.



Arab Interior Ministers discuss combating terrorism and cybercrime. —KUNA photos

Arab Interior ministers tackle terror, crimes

TUNIS: Arab Interior Ministers have approved a new plan to implement the Arab strategy to combat "terrorism", as well as the formation of a working group for the immediate exchange of information on drugs. This came at the conclusion of the 40th session of the Council, which was hosted by Tunisia, said the General Secretariat of the Council of Arab Interior Ministers. The Council adopted a new plan to implement the Arab strategy to combat terrorism, it added. It also decided, at a proposal from the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, to activate its mechanisms to combat drugs in order to reduce their dire repercussions on the Arab world.

Interior ministers discussed developing security action in the Arab

world, mainly combating cybercrimes, and approving the Arab strategic executive plan to combat terrorism. This came during the 40th session of the Council of Arab Interior Ministers in Tunis, with the participation of Arab League Secretary General Ahmad Aboul-Gheit and Kuwait's First Deputy Prime Minister, Interior Minister and Acting Defense Minister Sheikh Talal Khaled Al-Sabah.

In his inaugural speech, Tunisia's Interior Minister Reda Sharfel-Din said that the Arab region is facing great security challenges that necessitate further cooperation and coordination among Arab security apparatuses. He called for backing his country in the face of unorganized crime, and doubling joint security efforts among the Arab countries to face those challenges. Meanwhile, Saudi Interior Minister and Honorary president of the Council Prince Abdulaziz Al Saud warned against the widespread security challenges, topped with drugs.

For his part, Aboul-Gheit said that



Kuwait's First Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Interior, and Acting Minister of Defense Sheikh Talal Al-Khaled at the 40th meeting of the Arab Interior Ministers.

security solutions are insufficient to address the flow of immigrants and the spread of terrorist groups as well as drugs dealers. He stressed working on finding radical solutions and political settlements to those problems. Mohammad bin Kuman, Secretary

General of the Council, said the session discusses some key topics topped with activating work in cybersecurity and combating e-crimes. Tunisian President Kais Saeed received Arab Interior Ministers ahead of the launch of their session. —KUNA



KRCS delivers aid to Palestinian refugees in Turkey and Syrians

ANKARA: Kuwait Red Crescent Society (KRCS) on Thursday delivered relief aid and necessities to Palestinian refugees in Osmaniye Province affected by the recent earthquakes in Turkey. Speaking to KUNA, KRCS's Deputy Chairman of the Board Anwar Al-Hasawi said that it was paramount to deliver relief aid to Palestinian refugees residing in Turkey.



Palestinian refugees took advantage of clear areas between residential buildings to construct their makeshift dwellings, he indicated, adding that such locations were prone the impact of tremors and aftershocks. He affirmed that KRCS would continue to aid refugees in Turkey and Turkish citizens especially in their current predicament, noting that they would focus on reaching all those in need wherever in the country. On February 6, southern Turkey and northern Syria were impacted by a strong 7.7- magnitude earthquake followed by 7.6-magnitude aftershock, leading to huge losses in lives and devastation to infrastructure and buildings.

In another development, Kuwaiti Red Crescent



Society (KRCS) in cooperation with its Qatari counterpart distributed aid to around 600 Syrian families affected by the destructive earthquake of February 6. KRCS' envoy to Turkey Dr Musaed Al-Enezi stated to Kuwait News Agency (KUNA) that the each package is enough for families of five to seven people for a duration of about two weeks, includes foodstuff of rice, flour dates, canned food as well as blankets. This type of relief aid, indicated Al-Enezi, alleviates burdens and leaves a positive impact on those afflicted, and thanked donors for all they have provided. He added that Kuwait extended air and sea bridges to deliver aid to Turkish and Syrian people in the aftermath of the quake. —KUNA

42,000 pilgrims register for hajj

KUWAIT: Awqaf and Islamic Affairs Ministry Undersecretary Mohammed Al-Olaime announced at the hajj campaign exhibition that out of a total 42,000 people who have registered for hajj, 8,000 have been accepted so

far. The exhibition will continue for a week.

"The pilgrims were distributed according to certain criteria, with priority given to citizens who had not previously performed hajj, before being grouped from the eldest to the youngest. The hajj exhibition gives an opportunity for operators and pilgrims to meet to learn about the prices of campaigns and services. The pilgrim has five days, starting from the arrival of a message, to choose the campaign they want," Olaime said.

"Central registration allows competition between hajj campaigns, as competition gives us quality services at competitive prices," he said. "The ministry of awqaf submitted a request to authorities to increase the number of pilgrims from Kuwait. We submitted another request to allow pilgrimage for bedoons, and are awaiting the approval of competent authorities to our requests," he added.

Hajj and umrah director at the ministry

Sattam Al-Muzain said: "This is the first year in which we applied central registration after amending the regulations. We have noticed a decrease in prices provided this year in comparison to last year. The licensed campaigns for this year are 56 campaigns and companies that operate hajj campaigns, as there is great competition among campaign providers in presenting distinguished services at competitive prices for all residents of Kuwait."

Local

Kuwait MoH stresses the need to invest in healthcare services

Festival creates awareness on hearing problems



Group photo of the participants.

KUWAIT: Assistant Undersecretary of the Ministry of Health for External Health Services Affairs, Dr Yaqoub Al-Tamar on Thursday underlined the necessity of preventing people from being infected with hearing problems and curing them by investing in healthcare services. Speaking to reporters on the sidelines of a festival held at Sheikh Salem Al Ali Al Sabah Center for Speech and Hearing Therapy under the patronage of Minister of Health Dr Ahmad Al-Awadhi on World Hearing Day, Al-Tamar said the festival aims at enhancing awareness and knowledge on hearing problems, and opportunity of prevention and therapy.

Hearing diseases are common

as 460 million people all over the world are suffering from them, and this requires shedding light on means of prevention, he said. He referred to a World Health Organization (WHO) report that the number of those who are dealing with hearing loss reached 2.5 billion. Meanwhile, head of hearing and speech department at the center Dr Mariam Al-Kandari said the facility receives 1,500 patients monthly, in addition to other centers in Al-Ahmadi, Jahra and Jaber Hospital. She indicated that hearing loss affects negatively all people and makes them feel severely depressed, adding that this also results in some other diseases. —KUNA



Part of the exhibition marking 2023 World Hearing Day. —KUNA photos



Dr Yaqoub Al-Tamar

Dr Mariam Al-Kandari

Municipality removes 9,500 cubic meters of waste in Wafra

KUWAIT: Kuwait Municipality announced the general hygiene and public works department at its Ahmadi governorate branch held field campaigns in Wafra as part of the campaign "Our country deserves it", which has been launched in all governorates to improve the aesthetics of public spaces. Department director Nawaf Al-Mutairi said: "The field campaigns come within the keenness of the municipality to raise the level of hygiene in the country, as the campaign concluded with removing around 9,500 cubic meters of waste, which has been sent to the municipality's landfills." He pointed out that all inspectors in all departments will continue their field campaigns to follow up on violations to the rules and regulations of the municipality and take necessary measures.



Kuwait ambassador receives honorary Palestinian order

AMMAN: Kuwait's Ambassador to Palestine Aziz Al-Daihani was the recipient of an honorary order bestowed upon him on Wednesday by Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, in recognition of his contributions towards bilateral ties. The Kuwaiti envoy has contributed immensely towards the development of bilateral relations, the Palestinian president told the Kuwaiti diplomat amid talks at the Palestinian embassy in Jordan, expressing his gratitude for Kuwait's firm backing for the Palestinians. Upon receiving the honorary order, known as the "Star of Jerusalem," the Kuwaiti envoy said the gesture was a testament to Kuwait's "historic and overwhelming" support for the Palestinians. —KUNA



Kuwait's Ambassador to Palestine Aziz Al-Daihani receives an honorary order bestowed upon him by Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas. —KUNA

Ministry takes measures to improve educational system, fight fraud

KUWAIT: Minister of Education and Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research Dr Hamad Al-Adwani affirmed that the Ministry has taken a number of actual measures to combat negative phenomena that disturb the educational system in cooperation with Institutions concerned with the education process in the country. Al-Adwani said in a press statement after chairing the first meeting of the Joint Higher Committee for Examinations in cooperation with relevant state institutions on Thursday that the Ministry is serious in implementing its strategy aimed at developing education and making a quantum leap in the educational system.

He added that there will be a program on integrated work of executive procedures to address negative phenomena in preparation for the second semester exams in accordance with the recommendations and decisions taken by the Joint Higher Committee for Examinations in cooperation with the relevant state institutions represented by the Anti-Crime Department electronic media to work on taking legal measures against suspicious websites and social media accounts that interfere with the conduct of exams.

Al-Adwani explained that all necessary measures have been taken against those responsible for publishing in violation of the provisions of the law, praising the positive cooperation with the Ministry of Interior and the speed of its move to arrest those in charge and participants in those sites.

He stressed the Ministry's keenness to make efforts and harness all capabilities to advance

reform and keep abreast of educational developments; to put Kuwait in the ranks of developed countries in the educational field, and to create a generation capable of working and giving. The Ministry vowed to reduce fraud, in addition to reviewing the role of representatives of the participating entities.

The Joint Higher Committee for Examinations is responsible for carrying out several tasks, including collecting information on the causes of cheating, putting forward appropriate recommendations to end it, and developing an educational plan to educate the community and those working in the educational field of the dangers of this phenomenon and examining the reasons that lead to it.

Also the committee, in coordination with the relevant authorities will study the proposal to cut off transmission from smart phones while studying the amendment of the current format of the examination paper to ensure that it is not leaked.



Judicial team implements court ruling

KUWAIT: The judicial enforcement team from the Ministry of Electricity and Water cut off elec-

tricity and water supply to a private residence in Ishbiliya based on a court ruling after the property owner's failure to implement a ruling to remove building violations. "The team, in cooperation with Kuwait Municipality and the Ministry of Interior represented by the public security, opened a case and placed a block based on a municipality letter after a building violation ruling was issued due to the lack of commitment of the real estate owner to implement the ruling and



remove building violations," head of the team Adnan Dashti said.

"The electricity and water services will not be restored to the violating property except after the removal of building violations and a letter from the Kuwait Municipality addressed to the ministry and payment of the electricity and water bill in full, as well as the issuance of clearance from concerned departments," Dashti clarified.

News in brief

Hygiene allowances revoked

KUWAIT: Municipality General Director Ahmad Al-Manfouhi has revoked the shift allowances of 44 employees in the hygiene department for a period of one month. The employees have been proven to having been absent from work without an excuse. Ninety other employees have been sent for investigations. The move comes as part of the director's decision to review the financial benefits given to hygiene inspectors and take action against those who found performing inadequately. Punitive action ranges from warnings to suspension of benefits. The decision is meant to crack down on violators and improve the level of hygiene across the country.

MoH processing allowance requests

KUWAIT: The health ministry announced Thursday that it has asked all departments to prepare lists of employees who submitted requests to exchange their vacation days for cash. The lists will include the names, employment date, resumes and ranks of Kuwaiti and non-Kuwaiti employees whose requests have been entered into the civil service commission system. The lists, to be approved by the director of the medical zone or the department, will also take into consideration any promotions the employee might have received during the period. After the administrative affairs department reviews the lists and ensures all conditions have been met, the requests will be submitted to the Public Employment Department's Special Contracts Department no later than March 12.

Kuwaiti oil price goes up 86 cents

KUWAIT: Kuwait's crude oil price went up 86 cents to reach \$83.85 per barrel in Wednesday's trading, compared with \$82.99 the previous day, said Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) on Thursday. In the global market, the Brent crude price rose by 86 cents to settle at \$84.31 per barrel, the same with the West Texas Intermediate, which went up by 64 cents to \$77.69 pb. —KUNA

Photo of the day



KUWAIT: Electricity pylons stand tall on a cloudy day. —Photo by Fouad Al-Shaikh

GCC's security linked with development in Asia: Experts

Panel discussion explores Asia-GCC cooperation



KUWAIT: Experts discuss the importance of deepening GCC-Asia ties in preserving energy security in south and east Asia.



Former Japanese Ambassador to Qatar and the United Arab Emirates Kazuo Sunaga. —KUNA photos

KUWAIT: The exchange of trade and information between Asian countries and Gulf Corporate countries (GCC) is invaluable for the energy security of south and east Asia, experts say. The remarks came during a panel discussion held as part of the "Looking East: Future prospects of Asia" conference organized by Kuwaiti think tank Reconnaissance Research.

The panel featured three experts from India and Japan who discussed the stability of the energy market, with a special focus on the security of the GCC region for the future of major Asian economies such as India, Japan, China and South Korea. Reconnaissance Research Founder and CEO Abdulaziz Mohammed Al-Anjeri moderated the discussion.

As Gulf countries, including Kuwait, are key players in

world energy market, the security of the GCC region is something that "cannot be overstated," said Senior Fellow at the Japanese Ministry of Defense and Former Ambassador to Qatar and the United Arab Emirates Kazuo Sunaga. Japan, he added, has had a prominent role in maintaining maritime security and will continue to uphold that commitment in the future.

Managing Director at the Institute of Energy Economics in Japan Yukari Yamashita emphasized that cooperation in the energy and technology fields between oil importing and producing countries "could accelerate cost reduction, in particular, to the advancement of decarbonization."

The world faces many challenges threatening the stability of the energy market, she said, with climate change and finding clean energy alternatives being the biggest. The worldwide shortage in natural gas supplies cause by the Russian-Ukrainian conflict has led many Asian countries to reconsider using coal and fossil fuels, especially as people suffer from harsh weather conditions. Until better energy alternatives are found, "fossil fuel is still required not only in the short term but medium and long terms," she said.

Director of the Gulf Studies Program at India's Jawaharlal Nehru University Aftab Kamal Pasha called for continued cooperation between Asia and the GCC, whereby the GCC continues to supply Asia's energy needs. "We

look at the security and peace issue in the GCC as directly linked with the security of South and East Asia, as our economies and prosperities are interconnected," he said. Pasha noted the global trend to look east. He said the region has been gaining more attention over the past three decades, "because nobody can contain the explosive growth of some of the Asian countries".

Pasha hailed Kuwait's early adoption of democracy led by the late Amir Sheikh Abdullah Al-Salem Al-Sabah. He added that Kuwait's support for developing countries through the Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development has gained it allies across the world. India, he said, received funding for more than 80 energy and infrastructure projects through the fund's soft loans.

Sunaga also spoke of Kuwait's effective role as an intermediary in regional conflicts and the contributions the country has made by hosting international conventions aimed at discussing and implementing peaceful resolutions. He highlighted the decades-long relationship between Japan and Kuwait, calling it "a productive and a friendly relation that witnessed multiple historical events such as Iraq's invasion in 1990 and Japan's earthquake in 2011." "Kuwait and Japan showed us the way countries should behave when facing such calamities," he said. —KUNA



'My Metro Pharmacy' opens with unique children play area

KUWAIT: Metro Medical Group, a leading healthcare chain in Kuwait, has announced the opening of its fourth pharmacy, My Metro Pharmacy, located in the newly inaugurated Super Metro Specialized Medical Center in Fahaheel. The opening was celebrated on Feb 24, 2023, with a ribbon-cutting ceremony in the presence of several dignitaries, including ambassadors, ministers, and socio-cultural leaders.

My Metro Pharmacy offers a range of high-quality medicines and healthcare products to cater to the needs of patients and customers. It operates from 6 am to 2 am, providing round-the-clock service to patients in need. As part of the launch, the pharmacy is offering an exclusive discount of up to 10 percent on all medicines for the first three months. This offer is a testament to Metro Medical Group's commitment to providing affordable healthcare to the people of Kuwait.

Apart from providing pharmaceutical products, the new clinic also offers a unique feature that sets it apart from other clinics in Kuwait. It houses a "play station", the first of its kind in the country, which provides children accompanying patients an opportunity to indulge in a little entertainment while waiting for their loved ones. The aim is to make optimal use of the extra time and provide a memorable experience for children,



making it a fun and happy visit for everyone.

The opening of My Metro Pharmacy is part of Metro Medical Group's commitment to expanding its healthcare services and reach to patients in Kuwait. The Super Metro Specialized Medical Center, where the pharmacy is located, offers a range of medical services, including cardiology, neurology, urology, internal medicine, pediatrics, family medicine, and much more. It also offers specialized dental and pediatric dental services, in addition to an ENT, eye specialist, optical specialists, a hearing center, derma and cosmetology services, laser procedures, MRI, CT & DEXA scans, digital x-rays, endoscopy, colonoscopy and radiology. The center also provides 2D, 3D, and 4D ultrasound, MoH-approved PCR tests, laboratory, pharmacy, ambulance and home care services.

The center accepts all insurance cards and provides other conveniences such as a cafeteria, auditorium, and ample car parking facilities for visitors. On top of this, it also offers discounted medical procedures, free doctor consultations, and a full body checkup for KD 10 for the first three months from the inauguration date.



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Behind bars, women of Iran’s Evin prison refuse to give in



LARISSA: Police and emergency crews examine the debris of a crushed wagon on the second day after a train accident in the Tempi Valley near Larissa, Greece, March 2, 2023. —AFP

Greek rail crash toll hits 48

Greece admits ‘failures’ as government apologizes after deadly collision

ATHENS: The Greek government on Thursday acknowledged failures in state management of its rail system, following a train collision that killed 48 and has triggered angry protests.

As crews continued to work in the charred wreckage at the crash site, the local station master admitted negligence in Greece’s worst-ever rail disaster and the government has apologised.

An investigation would examine the “chronic delays in implementing railway works, delays caused by chronic public sector malaise and decades of failure,” said government spokesman Yiannis Economou.

The crash happened late Tuesday when a freight and passenger train were allowed to speed towards each other for several kilometres before colliding near a tunnel outside Larissa in central Greece.

The 59-year-old station manager was arrested after officials determined “human error” was involved in the collision in which two carriages were demolished and a restaurant car caught fire, trapping many victims inside.

“I believe the responsibility, the negligence, the error has been confessed by the station master,” Economou told reporters in Athens.

Five years after the state-owned Greek rail operator Trainose was privatised and sold to Italy’s Ferrovie Dello Stato Italiane and became Hellenic Train, safety systems on the Athens-Thessaloniki line are still not fully automated.

Train unionists have said safety shortcomings for the Athens-Thessaloniki railway line had been known for years. The country’s transport minister resigned Wednesday amid claims that safety warnings on the line had been neglected for years, and his replacement on Thursday offered his “apologies” to families of the victims and vowed a “complete evaluation of the political system and the state”.

“I want to say, while looking these people straight in the eye, that there will be an inquiry and everything will be presented to Greek citizens,” Giorgos Gerapetritis said.

A fire department spokeswoman told AFP that rescue crews had worked all night in search for survivors, but chances of finding more were dwindling. “Time is not on our side,” she said.

‘Crumpled like paper’

After visiting the site Wednesday, Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis said that “Everything shows

that the drama was, sadly, mainly due to a tragic human error”. Passengers described scenes of horror and chaos from the crash, many dodging smashed glass and debris as the train keeled over, and breaking windows to climb out.

The train’s restaurant car erupted in flames after the collision, with temperatures inside reaching 1,300 degrees Celsius (2,370 Fahrenheit), the fire department said. For hours after the crash it was not immediately clear how many people were on board, complicating efforts to determine how many are missing.

Roubini Leontari, the chief coroner at Larissa’s general hospital, told state broadcaster ERT on Thursday that over 10 people were still unaccounted for, including two Cyprus nationals.

TV footage from the wreck site showed a crane lifting the mangled remains of a carriage, under which a body was believed to be trapped.

“It was a student train, full of kids... in their 20s,” Costas Bargiotas, a senior orthopaedic doctor at Larissa General Hospital, told Skai TV. “It was truly shocking... the carriages crumpled like paper,” he said. Many bodies were charred beyond recognition and some victims were being identified only from

their remains. Seventeen biological samples have been collected from remains, and from 23 relatives seeking a match, the police said.

Angry protests

Angry demonstrators rallied outside the Athens office of Hellenic Train on Wednesday evening, as police used tear gas to disperse protesters who threw rocks at the building.

Earlier in Larissa, demonstrators held a silent vigil and brought white roses to form the word Tempe, the name of the valley where the accident took place. Nikos Savva, a medical student from Cyprus, told AFP that the disaster was only a matter of time. “The rail network looked problematic, with worn down, badly paid staff,” he said.

Authorities have declared three days of national mourning. Hospitals in three cities — Larissa, Thessaloniki and Katerini — were treating the dozens of wounded, six of whom are in intensive care. Hundreds of people also gathered in Larissa to donate blood needed to treat the injured. The tragedy will loom large in the coming re-election bid by Prime Minister Mitsotakis, who was expected to announce an election for April. — AFP



PANAMA CITY: File photo shows vultures over garbage, including plastic waste, at the beach of the Costa del Este neighborhood in Panama City, during the World Oceans Day. —AFP

Leaders gather in Panama to discuss world’s oceans

PANAMA CITY: Leaders were set to gather in Panama on Thursday to discuss the world’s oceans and the multiple threats they face, from climate change and pollution to overfishing and mining. About 600 government officials, businesspeople, environmental activists and academics are expected to rub shoulders at the two-day Our Ocean conference in the Central American country.

Covering three-quarters of the Earth, the oceans are home to 80 percent of all life on the planet, and provide nourishment for more than three billion people as well as a crucial avenue for global trade. Topics on the agenda include expanding marine protected areas (MPAs), assuring a sustainable ocean-derived “blue economy”, and reducing stressors on an invaluable but at-risk resource.

The conference’s opening panel will feature John Kerry, a former US secretary of state who was appointed as White House special envoy for climate. Delegates will be under pressure to turn rhetoric into action. At a meeting ahead of the summit, representa-

tives of the European Union, the United States, Latin America and the Pacific Islands called on the treaty on the high seas, which has been under discussion at the United Nations for more than 15 years, to be signed as soon as possible.

“Let’s seal the agreement,” said France’s Secretary of State for the Sea, Herve Berville. “We are very close,” said Maxine Burkett, US Deputy Assistant Secretary for Oceans, Fisheries and Polar Affairs. The high seas, which are not under the jurisdiction of any country, represent more than 60 percent of the oceans and nearly half of the planet. UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres called on Wednesday for negotiators from member states to conclude a “robust and ambitious” treaty on the high seas. “Our ocean has been under pressure for decades. We can no longer ignore the ocean emergency,” he said.

Since the first conference in 2014, participants in over 70 countries have announced commitments worth more than \$108 billion and protected more than five million square miles of ocean, according to organizers. The conference “is key to maintain political will on ocean action,” according to Courtney Farthing, policy director at Global Fishing Watch. By bringing governments, activists and industry together, “we are able to increase our collective understanding of the issues our ocean is facing and successful initiatives that could be more widely adopted,” she told AFP. — AFP

Indonesia parents seek justice after cough syrup crisis

JAKARTA: Dinosaur-themed birthday decorations still hang on the walls of Safitri Puspa Rani’s Indonesian home, where the family celebrated their youngest son’s birthday last year. “Knock knock! Hey everyone! It’s my eighth birthday!” said a beaming Panghegar Bhumi in a video in September, while making a heart-shaped gesture with his arms.

A month later he died from acute kidney injury, days after a doctor prescribed him a cough syrup containing ingredients that have been linked to more than 200 child deaths in Indonesia, according to the country’s health ministry. “I whispered in his ears: ‘The medicine is coming, please hang in there a little bit more,’” Rani said, crying in her home in West Java province as she recalled the final days of her son’s life. “But I lied, there was no medicine.”

The 42-year-old mother is among more than two dozen Indonesian families seeking justice for their children, whom they allege were either killed or sickened by contaminated cough syrups. Their class-action lawsuit targets the country’s health ministry, food and drug agency, and eight companies they accuse of selling the syrups — which the World Health Organization said contain an “unacceptable amount” of diethylene glycol and ethylene glycol.

“These contaminants are toxic chemicals used as industrial solvents and antifreeze agents that can be fatal even taken in small amounts, and should never be found in medicines,” the WHO said in January. Since October last year, the WHO has issued alerts for The Gambia, Indonesia and Uzbekistan over syrups containing the two chemicals.

Five-year-old Farrazka was required to undergo dialysis for his failing kidneys after he took one of the medicines, his mother Indah Septian told AFP. “When I heard that he had to have dialysis, I was so confused and did not know what to do. He is just a kid,” Septian said at her home.

“Now he gets easily fatigued even when he only does a bit of activity,” the 31-year-old said. But Septian and her husband Riski Agri consider themselves luckier than other families. “Until today I still wake up in the middle of the night and check on him.



JAKARTA: In this picture taken on February 7, 2023 parents of children, who they alleged were either killed or left sickened by tainted cough syrups, attend a hearing as part of a lawsuit at the South Jakarta district court, while wearing black shirts reading “I thought it was medicine, it was poison” to the court. —AFP

We almost lost him,” 34-year-old Agri said.

‘Not a priority’

Since the government sounded the alarm in October, Indonesia’s food and drug agency has recalled 105 products after tests revealed excessive amounts of the two chemicals. It has also revoked the licenses of six pharmaceutical firms. Police have launched an investigation into five companies and arrested four suspects. But the plaintiffs say that is not enough.

“From the beginning, this case was not considered a priority,” said Awan Puryadi, the lawyer representing the families. “All of the victims who are still alive, and are still being treated, must all be covered by the government for the rest of their lives.”

They are seeking compensation of 2 billion rupiah (\$131,000) for every person killed and 1 billion rupiah for every person injured. In a hearing last month, parents wore black shirts that read “I thought it was medicine, it was poison”. The next hearing is scheduled for March 9. One of the accused companies in the lawsuit contacted by AFP denied putting the chemicals in its cough syrups and blamed a distributor for any contamination. Indonesia’s drug regulator, like the WHO, says the chemicals should never be used in syrup medicines because they can be toxic for humans. — AFP

Behind bars, women of Iran’s Evin prison refuse to give in

Campaigners reject the amnesty as a PR stunt, key figures remain detained

PARIS: “Listen to this! One. Two. Three!” Down the crackling phone line from the women’s wing of Tehran’s Evin prison, a chorus of prisoners then launch into raucous song. It’s a Persian rendition of the Italian protest song “Bella Ciao”.

“All for one and one for all!” they sing, laughing in shared defiance in support of the “Woman, life, freedom” protests that have shaken Iran’s clerical authorities for five months. The audio clip of the January telephone call, released on social media by a daughter of one of those held, has become a symbol of the courage of the women held in Evin prison and their refusal to stop campaigning even behind bars.

Many such as environmental activist Niloufar Bayani, arrested in 2018, have been held for several years. Others including the activist Narges Mohammadi, tipped by supporters as a Nobel Peace Prize contender, have spent much of the past decade in and out of jail.

Some were arrested well before the women-led protests sparked by the September 16 death in custody of Mahsa Amini, a young Iranian Kurd who had been detained for allegedly violating the strict dress code for women. But their numbers swelled in the ensuing crackdown. Several women have been released in recent weeks, including Alieh Motalebzadeh, a journalist and women’s rights campaigner whose daughter posted the viral clip of the “Bella Ciao”

protest song, and French-Iranian academic Fariba Adelkhah.

‘Basic rights and freedoms’

But campaigners have rejected the amnesty as a PR stunt and key figures remain detained. They include Bayani and Mohammadi and also environmental campaigner Sepideh Kashani, arrested in the same case as Bayani, the labour activist Sepideh Gholian, journalist Golrokh Iraee, arrested in the protest crackdown, and German-Iranian Nahid Taghavi.

Also held in Evin are Fariba Kamalabadi and Mahvash Sabet, two members of the Bahai faith not recognised by the Islamic republic who were detained in July and are now serving a 10-year prison sentence apiece for the second time in their lives. These women remain deprived of their freedom because Iran’s clerical authorities under supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei “tremble at their words”, said Jasmin Ramsey, deputy director of the New York-based Center for Human Rights in Iran (CHRI).

“The hijab headscarf is a pillar of the Islamic revolution and so is the subjugation of women. They hate it when women speak out and say ‘I can do anything!’” she told AFP. Ramsey dismissed the recent amnesty, saying: “The doors of Iranian prisons are revolving when it comes to political prisoners... The prisons will swell when there are more protests.” Of those who remain jailed,

she said: “Many need medical help and their basic human rights have been violated for so many years.” The CHRI is now leading a petition signed by almost 40 other rights groups and directed at the current European Union presidency holder Sweden urging EU nations to summon Iranian ambassadors in unison for International Women’s Day on March 8.

The ambassadors should be told to “stop detaining and committing violence against women who are calling for basic rights and freedoms in Iran” and to “end the physical and sexual violence against women detainees and protesters”, it said.

‘Sound of a revolution’

Mohammadi, a member of the chorus in the “Bella Ciao” song, has in the last months emerged as among the most outspoken of those held, denouncing the conditions in Evin and vocally supporting the protests.

“Narges does not stay silent. This is not acceptable for the Iranian government,” her Paris-based husband Taghi Rahmani told AFP in October. In December, she released an open letter from prison denouncing the sexual assault of detainees and detailing shocking cases of women being raped by their interrogators.

“I believe that we, the brave, resilient, lively and hopeful women of Iran, will come to the streets and will continue to fight despite the government’s repressive and violent measures and despite the



TEHRAN: File picture dated September 4, 2001 shows Iranian peace activist Narges Mohammadi at her home in Tehran following her release from prison after posting 100 million rials (\$12,000) in bail. — AFP

danger of assault and even rape.” Sepideh Gholian, who is serving a five-year sentence on national security charges after supporting a strike by workers, in a lacerating letter published by BBC Persian in January described the methods used by interrogators to force confessions and the screams heard within the prison. “Today the sounds we hear... across Iran are louder than the sounds in interrogation rooms; this is the sound of a revolution, the true

sound of ‘Woman, life, freedom’,” she said. The women have also launched appeals published on the Instagram account of Mohammadi for the Islamic republic to halt executions, after four men were hanged in cases related to the protests.

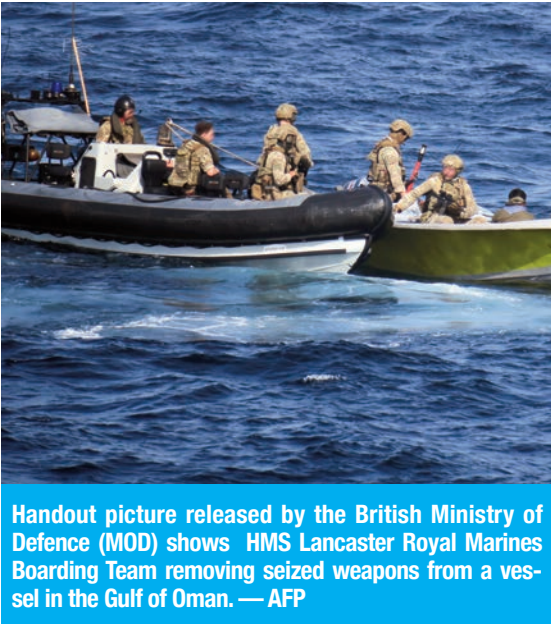
“The women have shown they are voices of change, freedom and equality. One reason Narges is still there is they (the authorities) are scared of her. She makes them quiver,” said Ramsey. — AFP

UK navy seizes Iran weapons shipment

DUBAI: A British warship intercepted a boat smuggling Iranian weapons, including anti-tank missiles, off the coast of Oman in a joint operation with US forces last week, officials said Thursday.

The small craft, travelling at “high speed” after dark in international waters, was initially spotted by US aerial surveillance, the British embassy in the United Arab Emirates said. The boat, travelling south from Iran, was intercepted by forces from British frigate HMS Lancaster before it could navigate back to Iranian territorial waters on February 23. The weapons discovered on board included medium-range ballistic missile components as well Iranian versions of Russia’s Kornet anti-tank missile, a statement said. The seizure took place along a route historically used to smuggle weapons to Yemen, according to the Bahrain-based United States Fifth Fleet.

“This is the seventh illegal weapon or drug interdiction in the last three months and yet another example of Iran’s increasing malign maritime activity across the region,” said US Vice-Admiral Brad Cooper. In January, the US Navy said it had seized more than 2,000 assault rifles smuggled on a fishing boat along a maritime route from Iran to Yemen.



Handout picture released by the British Ministry of Defence (MOD) shows HMS Lancaster Royal Marines Boarding Team removing seized weapons from a vessel in the Gulf of Oman. — AFP

The Iran-backed Huthi rebels took control of the Yemeni capital Sanaa in 2014, prompting a Saudi-led coalition to intervene the following year.

Since then, a grinding war has killed hundreds of thousands and pushed the impoverished nation to the brink of famine. Fighting has largely been on hold since a UN-brokered ceasefire took effect in April last year, even after the agreement expired in October. The UN Security Council expanded an arms embargo on the Huthis in February 2022. — AFP

Macron says era of French interference in Africa is ‘over’

LIBREVILLE: President Emmanuel Macron on Thursday said the era of French interference in Africa was “well over” as he began a four-nation tour of the continent to renew frayed ties. Anti-French sentiment runs high in some former African colonies as the continent becomes a renewed diplomatic battleground, with Russian and Chinese influence growing in the region.

Macron said France harboured no desire to return to past policies of interfering in Africa ahead of an environment summit in Gabon, the first leg of his trip. “The age of FrancAfrique is well over,” Macron said in remarks to the French community in the capital Libreville, referring to France’s post-colonisation strategy of supporting authoritarian leaders to defend its interests.

“Sometimes I get the feeling that mindsets haven’t moved along as much as we have, when I read, hear and see people ascribing intentions to France that it doesn’t have.” “Francafrigue” is a favourite target of pan-Africanists, who say that after the wave of decolonisation in 1960 France propped up dictators in its former colonies in exchange for access to resources and military bases.

Macron and his predecessors, notably Francois Hollande, have previously declared that the policy is dead and that France has no intention of meddling in sovereign affairs.

Ahead of his visit, Macron on Monday said there would be a “noticeable reduction” in France’s troop presence in Africa “in the coming months” and a greater focus on training and equipping allied countries’ forces.

France has in the past year withdrawn troops from former colonies Mali, Burkina Faso and the Central African Republic. The pullout from Mali and Burkina Faso, where its soldiers were supporting the Sahel nations battle a long-running jihadist insurgency, came on the back of a wave of local hostility.

In his remarks on Thursday, Macron insisted the planned reorganisation was “neither a withdrawal nor disengagement”, defining it as adapting to the needs of partners. More than 3,000 French soldiers are deployed in Senegal, Ivory Coast, Gabon and Djibouti, according to official figures. Another 3,000 are in the Sahel region of West Africa, including in Niger and Chad.

Macron landed in Libreville on Wednesday and will later head to Angola, Congo-Brazzaville and the neighbouring Democratic Republic of Congo.

His comments came before several heads of state were due to attend the One Forest Summit in Libreville, which will focus on preserving rainforests that play a vital role in the global climate system. The forests of the vast Congo River basin represent the planet’s second-largest carbon sink after the Amazon. —AFP

MP asks about injuries, fights...

Continued from Page 1

members, which include Saudi Arabia, Bahrain,

Rescuers save dog 3 weeks...

Continued from Page 1

Haytap has rescued dogs, rabbits, cows and even birds from the rubble in Antakya, after

Rocket carrying UAE astronaut...

Continued from Page 1

Russian mission specialist, will all be making their first space flights. Fedyaev is the second Russian cosmonaut to fly to the ISS aboard a SpaceX rocket. NASA astronauts fly regularly to the station on Russian Soyuz craft.

Space has remained a rare venue of cooperation between Moscow and Washington since the Russian offensive in Ukraine placed them in sharp opposition. Bowen, a veteran of three space shuttle missions, said politics rarely come up while in space. “We’re all professionals. We keep focused on the mission itself,” he said. “It’s always been a great relationship we’ve had with cosmonauts once we get to space.”

While aboard the ISS, the Crew-6 members will conduct dozens of experiments including studying how materials burn in microgravity and researching heart, brain and cartilage functions. The current crew is the sixth to be transported by a SpaceX rocket to the ISS. The Endeavour cap-

Qatar, UAE and Oman, in addition to Kuwait.

But he added that despite massive spending, the standard of health services in Kuwait is the worst among Gulf states. He said the health ministry is the provider, operator, monitor and financier of health services in the country and problems will remain unless this equation is broken by forming the health council to plan health strategies and monitor their implementation.

receiving calls from tearful owners or neighbors. In the organization’s tent, vets are providing care and treatment for the wounded animals.

Animal rescue stories are a balm for the country, which has been left in shock by the worst natural disaster in Turkey’s post-Ottoman history. The earthquake has killed over 45,000 people in Turkey and thousands more in neighboring Syria and completely devastated hundreds of thousands of buildings. — AFP

sule has flown into space three times previously. NASA pays SpaceX to ferry astronauts to the ISS roughly every six months.

The agency expects Crew-6 to have a handover of several days with the four members of Crew-5 who have been on the ISS since October. Crew-5 will then return to Earth. Also aboard the ISS are cosmonauts Dmitry Petelin and Sergei Prokopyev and NASA astronaut Frank Rubio. They had been scheduled to return to Earth on March 28 but the cooling system of their Soyuz MS-22 capsule was damaged by a tiny meteoroid in December while docked with the ISS.

An uncrewed Russian Soyuz capsule, MS-23, was launched from Kazakhstan last month to bring them home. They are now scheduled to return in September. Construction of the ISS began in 1998 at a time of increased US-Russia cooperation following the Cold War space race. Russia has been using the ageing but reliable Soyuz capsules to ferry astronauts into space since the 1960s. But in recent years, Russia’s space program has been beset by a litany of problems that have led to the loss of satellites and vehicles. —AFP

Blinken meets Lavrov at G20...

Continued from Page 1

meeting in Bali last July – the latter stormed out, according to Western officials. Until Thursday, there had been no high-level in-person contacts between the US and Russian governments since Moscow invaded Ukraine in February 2022, with Washington firmly backing Kyiv and spearheading international efforts to isolate Russia. Russian diplomatic spokeswoman Maria Zakharova sought to downplay the significance of the encounter, telling state news agency RIA Novosti that Blinken had initiated it and that it had been fleeting. Lavrov “spoke to him, standing, as part of the second session of the G20”, she said. “No talks or real meeting took place.”

Thursday’s G20 meeting drew to a close without a joint statement – the second such meeting of the bloc to fail to reach an accord in as many weeks. Lavrov told the assembled foreign ministers that Western representatives had derailed the meeting in an effort to scapegoat Russia for their own failings, disrespecting efforts by the Indian hosts to reach agreement on other issues.

“I want to apologize to the Indian presidency and to our colleagues from countries of the global South for the obscene behavior of some Western delegations, which have turned the G20’s agenda into a farce,” Lavrov said, according to Russian news agency TASS. Discussions over the joint statement faltered on several issues including Russia’s insistence on an investigation into the sabotage of the Nord Stream pipeline last year, the foreign minister told reporters through an interpreter.

Russia and Western countries have traded accusations of responsibility for the September explosions. Despite the apparent significance of Lavrov and Blinken’s meeting, analysts said there was no sign it would presage an end to the war. “They have not said anything that convinces anyone of this crisis moving towards significant or serious resolution. It seems we are in for a long haul,” said Harsh V Pant, a professor with King’s College London.

With no final joint declaration, a statement issued at the conclusion of the G20 meeting showed China had joined Russia in refusing to support the bloc’s demands that Moscow cease hostilities in Ukraine. The two countries were the only G20 members not to agree to the statement demanding Russia’s “complete and uncondi-



NEW DELHI: US Secretary of State Antony Blinken speaks during a press conference on the sidelines of the G20 foreign ministers’ meeting. — AFP

tional withdrawal”. A meeting of G20 finance ministers in the Indian city of Bengaluru last week had also failed to agree on a common statement after Russia and China sought to water down language on the war.

Western delegates fear China is considering supplying arms to Russia and said ahead of the summit they intended to discourage Beijing from intervening in the conflict. “Were China to engage in material lethal support for Russia’s aggression or were it to engage in the systematic evasion of sanctions to help Russia, that would be a serious problem for our countries,” Blinken said Thursday.

Since Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, China has framed itself as a neutral party, while retaining close ties with its strategic ally Moscow. Beijing has reacted furiously to the claims it may be contemplating arms transfers, and in February it issued a position paper calling for dialogue to resolve the conflict.

Russia’s war in Ukraine crowded out other agenda items at the meeting of the Group of 20, which comprises the world’s 19 largest economies and the European Union. The differences frustrated India, which said it wanted to use its year as host to focus on issues such as alleviating poverty and climate finance. Earlier in the day, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi said global governance had “failed” and urged attendees to come together for the sake of developing countries not represented there.

While India shares Western concerns about China, it is also a major buyer of Russian arms and has ramped up Russian oil imports. India has not condemned the invasion of Ukraine, but Modi told Russian President Vladimir Putin last year this was “not a time for war”. — AFP

International

Nigeria's president-elect extends hand to rivals disputing vote

United States congratulates Nigerians and Tinubu: State Department

LAGOS: Nigeria's president-elect Bola Tinubu on Wednesday called on his rivals and their supporters to "join hands" with him, after a contested election with opposition parties looking to challenge a vote they say was tainted by fraud.

The 70-year-old former Lagos governor was declared winner of Saturday's presidential election, securing his life-long ambition of heading Africa's most populous nation. With President Muhammadu Buhari stepping down in May after two terms, many Nigerians hoped the vote would usher in a leader capable of tackling growing insecurity, righting the economy and easing poverty.

The final results gave Tinubu, candidate of the All Progressives Congress (APC), 8.8 million votes against 6.9 million for opposition Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) candidate Atiku Abubakar. The Labour Party's Peter Obi notched 6.1 million votes, confirming his success as a surprise third candidate. The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) confirmed Tinubu as president-elect after he secured the required number of votes across two-thirds of Nigeria's states—a rule meant to ensure broad representation.

But the February 25 election was marked by long delays and the slow arrival of online results, angering voters and opposition parties who claimed massive vote-rigging. "The purported results did not meet the minimum criteria of a transparent, free and fair election," said Obi's running mate, Yusuf Datti Baba-Ahmed. "We will go to court," he said, while urging supporters to "remain peaceful and calm".

Candidates who want to contest the election have 21 days following the announcement of results to bring their case to the courts. At a ceremony on Wednesday where Tinubu was handed the official certificate stating he won the election, he asked his



ABUJA: Nigeria's President-elect Bola Tinubu (C) signs papers during the presentation of the certificate of return to the President-elect by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) in Abuja. — AFP

opponents "to come in so that we may begin the task of rebuilding our national home together".

"I ask that you not allow the disappointment of this moment to keep you from realising the historic national progress we can make by joining hands and hearts in common endeavour to pull this nation through," said Tinubu, a Muslim from the southern Yoruba community.

The long-time political kingmaker had campaigned on his experience as Lagos governor from 1999 to 2007, charging ahead with the slogan "It's my turn" to govern Africa's largest economy. But his promise of reviving hope was attacked by rivals, who questioned his health, past graft accusations and ties to Buhari, who was criticised for failing in his vow to make Nigeria safer.

Tight race

Mixed reactions greeted Tinubu's election victory on Wednesday. In the northern city of Kano, some residents celebrated the news. "I'm delighted that Tinubu has won the election despite the challenges and gimmicks by the opposition in trying to scuttle the election by calling for its cancellation," said butcher Anas Ibrahim, 32. Elsewhere, other voters were angry, expressing concerns over how the INEC managed the tallies.

"The INEC chairman has failed to make the results transparent. Nobody is happy... we are definitely going to court. Tinubu can't be the president," said Edwin Oluma, 23, a student in the capital Abuja.

The election was a tight race for the first time since Nigeria ended military rule in 1999, after Obi, 61, drew many voters with a message of change. He scored a major victory in Lagos, Tinubu's traditional bastion.

Abubakar, a 76-year-old businessman and former vice president, lost his sixth attempt at the presidency. Saturday's voting was mostly peaceful but was troubled by long delays at many polling stations, technical problems and some intimidation by thugs.

Observer group Yiaga Africa estimated that, based on the number of people who successfully registered on the day of the vote, turnout was just over 29 percent. The United States congratulated Nigerians and Tinubu, State Department spokesman Ned Price said Wednesday, while acknowledging the discontent among some voters over the outcome.

"Nigerians are clearly within their rights to have such concerns and should have high expectations for their electoral process," Price said, urging political leaders to register their concerns through established legal "mechanisms". "We call on all parties to refrain from violence or inflammatory rhetoric at this critical time," he added.—AFP

Sunken Philippine tanker leaks fuel oil into sea

MANILA: A sunken Philippine tanker carrying 800,000 litres (210,000 gallons) of industrial fuel oil has leaked some of its cargo into the sea, authorities said Thursday, as they raced to find the vessel and contain the spill. The Princess Empress was travelling from Bataan province, near the capital Manila, to the central province of Iloilo on Tuesday when it had engine trouble and sank in rough seas off Oriental Mindoro province.

The Philippine Coast Guard initially reported the spillage was diesel fuel, which had been powering the vessel, and not industrial fuel oil from the ship's cargo. But water sample test results showed some of the cargo had also leaked into waters off Naujan municipality, the coast guard said Thursday, sparking concern for the region's rich marine life and coral reefs.

The spill had spread over 24 square kilometres (nine square miles) of water by Wednesday, coast guard said previously. It is not known how much diesel

fuel and industrial fuel oil is in the water. Provincial governor Humerlito Dolor said a search was still underway for the stricken tanker, estimated to be 460 metres (1,500 feet) below sea level, and stop it leaking.

"The coast guard made assurances to us that they are ready to syphon off the oil once they identify (the location)," Dolor told local media. "Unfortunately, after two aerial surveillance (flights) we still can't find the exact location of the ship." In the meantime, the coast guard has deployed oil spill booms to try to contain the material and sprayed chemicals to break down the oil. Fishermen and tourism operators along the coast depend heavily on the waters for their livelihoods and there are concerns these could be at risk.

Oil has been spotted along a roughly 60-kilometre stretch of water between Naujan and Bongabong municipality, said Ram Temena, Oriental Mindoro disaster operations chief. "We have many fish sanctuaries along the coast," Temena said. "It could have a huge impact due to the possibility that the oil could attach to the coral reefs, affecting the marine biodiversity." Some spillage has washed up on the shores of at least two villages in Naujan and one in Pola municipality.

Resort worker Andrea Riva said she and her colleagues were "keeping our fingers crossed" that the waves did not bring the spillage to the waters off Pinamalayan municipality, south of Pola. Bongabong



NAUJAN: Handout photo shows, a coast guard personnel collecting water sample from an oil spill in the waters off Naujan, Oriental Mindoro. — AFP

municipal disaster officer Michael Fanoga said fishermen had complained of a "foul smell" about two kilometres offshore. "If it spreads in the shoreline, our beaches will be destroyed as well as the remaining coral," Fanoga said.—AFP



TOKYO: A picture bearing the image of Ryuho Okawa, the leader of the Japanese "Happy Science" religious organisation, is seen on an advertisement of his book in front of the spiritual movement's headquarters in Tokyo on March 2, 2023. — AFP

Japan 'Happy Science' cult leader dies

TOKYO: Ryuho Okawa, the leader of the Japanese "Happy Science" cult who claimed to be able to communicate with spirits, died Thursday aged 66, local media reported. He was rushed to a hospital after collapsing at his home in Tokyo earlier this week, and his death was confirmed on Thursday, according to major media, including national broadcaster NHK and Jiji press agency. The cause of the death was not immediately known, Fuji TV said. Officials from the group could not be reached for immediate comment on the reported death. Okawa was the singular leader and founder of the Happy Science group, which was started in 1986 and claims to have members in more than 168 countries.

The group believes in spiritual reincarnation and the construction of a global utopia, but faced public opposition for the personality cult around Okawa, including from his own son Hiroshi. In 2020, he told the New York Times his father had "relentlessly lied to his followers." "I believe what my father does is complete nonsense." Among Japan's public, Okawa was perhaps best known for claiming to be able to channel the spirits of the rich and famous, as well as the books he authored based on what he said the spirits told him.

While Okawa stayed away from popular media, he was a constant presence in newspapers that carried advertisements for his latest books, as well as occasional movies and music. He claimed to have had an epiphany at age 24, when he acquired an ability to communicate with spirits and realised his mission was "to lead humanity to happiness".

Okawa launched a political party in 2009 that advocates for a small government based on religious teaching, along with containing the rise of China and limiting the rights of the LGBTQ community. The "Happy Realization" party has yet to win national seats, though its members have won local assembly seats. Fringe religious groups have historically been able to operate in Japan with relatively few restrictions, but they have come under renewed scrutiny since the assassination of former prime minister Shinzo Abe. His alleged assassin, Tetsuya Yamagami, reportedly targeted Abe over his links to the Unification Church. In the wake of the killing, ties between the Church and senior politicians were revealed, and Japan's government passed new legislation intended to prevent religious groups from extracting massive donations from followers. Okawa was born in 1956 in the rural Tokushima region. He graduated from the University of Tokyo, Japan's top academy, and joined a trading firm before quitting to start the cult.—AFP

Three heroines of the French Resistance

PARIS: Without firing a gun or shedding any blood, Odile de Vasselot, Odette Niles and Michele Agniel were among the thousands of women who took part in the resistance against the Nazi German occupation of France during World War II.

Their acts—which included ferrying messages across enemy lines, smuggling packages and helping Resistance fighters and Allied airmen escape—carried the risk of imprisonment, torture and even death.

And yet for decades after the war, the roles played by unsung war heroes like these were greatly underestimated and rarely documented. Aged 101, 100 and 96 respectively, de Vasselot, Niles and Agniel spoke to AFP on the eve of International Women's Day about their part in combatting tyranny.

Odile de Vasselot

For 18-year-old de Vasselot, doing nothing was not an option in 1940 when Nazi banners and propaganda posters—either in German or from the collaborationist regime led by Marshal Philippe Petain—started appearing on the streets of occupied France.

"I want to fight back!" she said to herself, without knowing how she, a young woman from a well-to-do Catholic family, could help defend her country. Born in 1922 into a military family, she moved to Paris with her mother and sisters after her father, a soldier, was imprisoned by the Germans. On November 11, 1940, she took a homemade pompom in blue, white and red to join a student demonstration on the Champs-Élysées avenue, defying a curfew in one of the first public acts of resistance in France. Two years later, she joined the Resistance as a courier, ferrying packages every week by train between the occupied northern half of the country and the southeastern Free Zone, without daring to peek at the contents.

In 1943, the young woman who went by "Jeanne" on her missions began helping Allied airmen cross France — picking them up from the Belgian border, providing them with papers and buying their tickets to Spain on their circuitous route back to Britain. Several times she barely escaped arrest. On January 4, 1944, she was accompanying two British soldiers on a train when the Gestapo raided the carriage. They arrested the two men, who were sitting a few rows away from Odile to avoid drawing attention to her. "I still had their ticket stubs in my pocket," she told AFP. "I ate them".

Odette Niles

A young Communist militant before the war broke out, Niles sprang into action as soon as the war started, handing out fliers on the streets of Paris while still at school. On August 13, 1941, she was arrested along with 16 boys on her way to a demonstration.

Three of the boys were executed and the others imprisoned. Niles was sent to the Choisel internment camp in western France, where she was kept in barracks swarming with vermin that had wooden crates for beds. At the camp, the 18-year-old found fleeting romance with Guy Moquet, one of the young heroes of the Resistance, who was executed by firing squad in October 1941. She was moved from camp to camp for three years before escaping in 1944 and joining the Resistance in Bordeaux. There she met her future husband, Resistance fighter and fellow Communist Maurice Niles. The pair remained active in left-wing politics for the rest of their lives.



PARIS: French World War II resistant Odette Niles poses in Drancy near Paris on January 24, 2023. — AFP

Michele Agniel

Agniel was the 14-year-old daughter of a World War I veteran when the armistice was signed in the summer of 1940, beginning Germany's occupation of France. "Right away my father said, 'We have to do something,'" said Agniel, who grew up in the Paris suburb of Saint-Mande in a family she described as "profoundly patriotic".

She started smuggling fliers in her schoolbag "between her music copy and her history book". At checkpoints she would open her bag, but never got searched. Who, after all, would suspect a schoolgirl? In 1942, the family joined an underground cell that hid escaped prisoners of war, mostly US and British pilots.

Agniel's job was to meet them in the countryside and have them follow her back to Paris by train. She then took them to a photo booth in central Paris to get pictures for false documents. If anyone asked what she is up to, she had her answer ready: "They're deaf mutes on their way to a special facility in Toulouse", a city in southwest France.—AFP

US selling Taiwan \$619m worth of F-16 munitions

WASHINGTON: The United States has approved the sale to Taiwan of \$619 million in munitions for F-16 fighter jets, the Pentagon announced Wednesday, in a move China said "seriously damages" relations between Washington and Beijing.

The sale will boost Taiwan's "capability to provide for the defense of its airspace, regional security, and interoperability with the United States," the Pentagon said in a statement. The package will include anti-radar missiles, advanced air-to-air missiles, launchers and dummy missiles to be used for training, it said.

The US and China have increasingly sparred over Taiwan since a high-level US visit to the self-ruled island—which China claims as its territory—last year. Diplomatic tensions were further raised last month after the downing of a balloon over US airspace that Washington said was a Chinese surveillance craft.

The US State Department said separately that Wednesday's sale was consistent with Washington's One China Policy, in which the US recognises Beijing, and acknowledges the Chinese position that Taiwan is part of China.

The Pentagon said the deal would "not alter the basic military balance in the region." On Thursday, China condemned the sale, with a foreign ministry spokesperson saying it "seriously damages China's sovereignty and security interests, and seriously damages Sino-US relations and peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait."

"China will continue to take resolute and forceful measures to firmly defend its sovereignty and security interests," spokesperson Mao Ning told reporters. At least 54 Chinese warplanes were detected in airspace around Taiwan on Tuesday and Wednesday, according to the island's defence ministry, with 40 of those crossing into Taipei's air defence identification zone.

Chinese incursions into airspace around Taiwan have become increasingly common, with 275 aircraft reported to have done so this year, according to an AFP tally. Taiwan welcomed its first US arms deal of the year, which is the ninth so far under US President Joe Biden. "In the face of China's continued military expansion and provocative behavior, Taiwan will continue to actively improve its self-defence capabilities," foreign ministry spokesman Jeff Liu said.—AFP

Business

FRIDAY, MARCH 3, 2023

Saudi Aramco inks deal to invest in Geely-Renault engines venture

Oil giant to become a potential minority stakeholder

RIYADH: Oil giant Saudi Aramco is preparing to join carmakers Geely and Renault in a new joint venture in hybrid and internal-combustion vehicles, the three firms said Thursday. Aramco has signed a letter of intent "to become a potential minority stakeholder" in the subsidiary, the joint statement said.

French automaker Renault said in November it was teaming up with China's Geely to develop and produce engines, gearboxes and other components for hybrid, petrol and diesel vehicles.

The 50-50 partnership called "Horse" was announced as part of a sweeping overhaul at Renault as it expands its electric vehicle business. Aramco's investment will "contribute to key research and development across synthetic fuels solutions and next-gen hydrogen technologies", according to the statement.

Renault chief executive Luca de Meo said the Aramco partnership would give the joint venture "a head start in the race towards ultra-low-emissions ICE (internal-combustion engine) powertrain technology".

"Aramco's entry brings to the table unique know-how that will help develop breakthrough innovations in the fields of synthetic fuels and hydrogen," de Meo said in the statement. The new "Horse" subsidiary will have 19,000 employees in Europe, China and South America, with 17 factories and five shared research and development centers. Saudi companies to invest \$51 billion

under government-backed plan. Meanwhile, Saudi Arabia has launched \$51.2 billion of investments led by local companies, including oil giant Aramco, Sabic and Maaden, under a government-backed initiative, state news agency SPA reported.

The projects are part of a program called Shareek, a 5-trillion-riyal investment initiative announced by Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman in 2021, as the kingdom works with the private sector to diversify away from oil by 2030. The program has approved the first batch of projects, including five investments by Aramco in petrochemicals, cloud computing and ship engines, SPA reported, citing a statement from Abdulaziz Al-Arifi, the chief executive of Shareek.

ACWA Power will get backing to build the world's largest green hydrogen plant, Ma'aden will receive support to boost production of phosphate fertilizers and SABIC will build the kingdom's first catalyst manufacturing hub, SPA added. Other investments in the telecommunications and logistics will also receive Shareek support.

Prince Mohammed had announced 12 trillion riyals of investments that the kingdom is planning by 2030, which include the Shareek program, 3 trillion riyals from the Public Investment Fund (PIF) and 2 trillion in foreign investment. As part of the plans, officials have also pressed international companies to invest in Saudi Arabia and move their regional headquarters to Riyadh in



Oil giant Saudi Aramco is preparing to join carmakers Geely and Renault in a new joint venture in hybrid and internal-combustion vehicles, the three firms said Thursday.

order to benefit from government contracts. But the kingdom has struggled to attract foreign direct investment (FDI), one of the pillars of Vision

2030, which reached just under \$4.1 billion in the first half of 2022, a fraction of the \$100 billion target for the end of the decade. — Agencies

Lebanese supermarkets mark prices in dollars as local currency tanks

BEIRUT: Supermarkets in Lebanon started pricing items in US dollars on Wednesday instead of the nose-diving local currency, after a government announcement allowing the practice in a country heavily reliant on imports. Since late 2019, Lebanon has been facing a dramatic economic crisis that has seen poverty rates climb to reach more than 80 percent of the population, according to the United Nations.

The local currency, now officially pegged at 15,000 to the greenback, was trading Wednesday at almost 90,000 to the dollar, compared to 60,000 in late January. An AFP photographer said a large supermarket chain in Beirut had begun displaying prices in dollars on Wednesday, while the exchange rate of 89,000 pounds was displayed on a screen at the entrance. Domestically produced fruit and vegetables were still priced in the local currency.

"Every week, or every day even, products are becoming more and more expensive," said Susane Zeitoun, 28, who was shopping at the supermarket. "Now I have to calculate prices into Lebanese pounds," she added. In February, Economy Minister Amin Salaam announced that supermarkets would be able to start pricing items in dollars, while customers could pay in dollars or Lebanese pounds at the volatile market rate.

Each store would have to clearly announce the exchange rate it was using each day, he had added. Since the start of the crisis, stores had begun to adjust their prices in pounds, sometimes daily, to



BEIRUT: People check prices at a supermarket in Beirut in this file photo. Supermarkets in Lebanon started pricing items in US dollars on Wednesday instead of the nose-diving local currency.

keep up with the fluctuating exchange rate-or at times pushing prices higher.

Some restaurants and clothing shops had already begun to display prices in dollars in recent months. Shopper Sarah Rida, 37, said that "pricing items in US dollars is better". "If a product is priced at \$2, we can be sure that it will stay the same and will not increase or decrease in price from one day to the next." Lebanon is being run by

a caretaker government and is also without a president, as lawmakers have repeatedly failed to elect a successor to Michel Aoun, whose mandate expired at the end of October. Authorities announced in late February that customs charges would be tripled, a move that risks pushing prices up further. The World Bank has said that Lebanon food price inflation reached 332 percent year on year in June 2022, the worst in the world. —AFP

Stocks diverge as investors worry about rates

LONDON: Major stock markets diverged Thursday as concerns over further hikes to US interest rates lingered, with officials warning on the need to keep fighting stubbornly-high inflation. Many indices reversed direction a day after gaining on forecast-busting Chinese data that reinforced optimism the world's number two economy would bounce back strongly this year as it emerges from its pandemic isolation.

Sentiment soured, however, after Federal Reserve policymakers Raphael Bostic and Neel Kashkari pointed on Wednesday to rates going higher than forecast and for an extended period.

The eurozone annual inflation rate meanwhile fell by less than expected to 8.5 percent in February, the EU's statistics agency said Thursday. "Stock market investors found no reason to cheer..., which meant that the likes of the (Frankfurt) DAX showed an immediate negative reac-

tion to the numbers," noted City Index analyst Fawad Razaqzada.

European Central Bank chief Christine Lagarde said after the data was released more interest rate hikes may be needed in the eurozone after the half percentage point hike it has already signaled comes later this month. Previously, the ECB said it would review look at the pace of its rate hikes.

"The latter is a burgeoning fear for the market as it relates to the March FOMC meeting," said Briefing.com analyst Patrick O'Hare, referring to the rate-setting committee at the US Federal Reserve.

He noted more investors are expecting a half percentage point hike, although most still expect a quarter-point hike. "In terms of the broader market, the going concern is that policy rates and market rates are headed higher, and are apt to stay higher for longer because inflation is loitering at levels above the Fed's comfort level," he added. There is a growing expectation rates would top out around 5.5 percent, though some commentators are tipping six percent, from the current 4.5-4.75 percent.

The comments came as the yield on 10-year US Treasuries—a proxy



for future rates—broke four percent for the first time since November. Talk of more aggressive US rate hikes boosted the dollar Thursday. In the United States, Atlanta Fed chief Bostic warned Wednesday American interest rates could go well above five percent, adding that once inflation had come down to the bank's two percent target, officials should not loosen policy too soon.

"History teaches that if we ease up on inflation before it is thoroughly

subdued, it can flare anew," he wrote. "That happened with disastrous results in the 1970s." Minneapolis boss Kashkari said he was still "open-minded" about backing a half-percentage-point hike at the next policy meeting, double the most recent increase.

"We're not yet seeing much of a sign of our interest-rate increases slowing down the services sector of the economy and that is concerning to me," he said. —AFP

32% of Shadadiya industrial project complete: Al-Nahedh

KUWAIT: Commerce and Industry Minister Mazen Al-Nahedh revealed the completion rate of the Shadadiya industrial project has reached 32 percent, showing the keenness of all concerned parties to finish the project within the planned period. "The project aims to achieve all the needs of economic and industrial growth by providing the basis of developing a modern industrial area as well as providing it with the latest technologies," Nahedh said.

"The project will consist of three main sectors - chemical, food and mixed sectors, on 1,036 industrial plots. The project will be operated using sustainable development techniques during the contractual period. Accessing the area is relatively easy, whether by the current or future roads," he said. "Industrial development has become one of the targets of non-oil growth for Kuwait, as the trend is to strengthen and support this sector within the objectives of the New Kuwait 2035 development plan, ensuring the industrial sector is one of the main non-oil resources of the state," Nahedh added.

In other news, the minister added three new activities including building private universities and colleges to commercial activities in the unified guide for categorizing economic activities in the GCC, along with selling used clothes as well as sales of agricultural, water and electricity equipment.

Shamal Az-Zour Co posts KD 14.4m net profit in 2022

KUWAIT: Shamal Az-Zour Al-Oula Power and Water Company announced Thursday a net profit of KD 14.4 million (\$43.6 million) in 2022, an increase of 6.8 percent, compared with KD 13.5 million (\$40.9 million) in 2021.

The company's earnings per share in 2022 amounted to KD 13 fils, an increase of 8.3, compared with KD 12 fils in 2021, stated the company in a published disclosure on Boursa Kuwait website.

The company attributed the positive results in the financial statements during the comparison period to the high performance of Shamal Az-Zour station, while the Board of Directors approved a recommendation of a cash dividend of four fils.

Shamal Al-Zour Company was established in 2013, and listed on the Kuwait Stock Exchange in 2020, to construct and operate Az-Zour North One Power and Water Plant, with an authorized capital of KD 110 million (about \$333.3 million). —KUNA

Advent of chatbots is only pushing AI further into public imagination

* As of end of week closing

Business

Musk eyes torrid growth at Tesla, but offers no big new reveals

Tesla team promises streamlined manufacturing, smart design and focus on costs

NEW YORK: Elon Musk presented a heady vision Wednesday to turbocharge Tesla's growth at an investor day filled with ambitious targets but short on details sought by Wall Street. Reviewing the company's quickly expanding electric vehicle (EV) production, Musk and a team of executives promised more outsized growth through streamlined manufacturing processes, smart design and a relentless focus on costs.

"There is a clear path to a fully sustainable Earth with abundance," Musk said early in the presentation, at which the company set annual production of 20 million vehicles as an eventual aspiration.

But shares fell throughout the event as Musk and his team avoided specifics on what the next generation of vehicles would look like, or when they might be ready. "Long on aspiration, short on detail," Gary Black of the investment advisor organization Future Fund said on Twitter.

"Lot of discussion on production and engineering but didn't address demand side how to get from 1.8M (deliveries) this year to 20M (delivery) target by 2030." The only major new announcement of note was Musk's confirmation of plans to build a new electric car factory the northern Mexican city of Monterrey. "We're excited to announce that we're going to be building a new Giga Factory in Mexico," Musk said.

"It's simply about expanding our total global output," said Musk, who emphasized expansion plans for already-built factories such as California and Shanghai. Lars Moravy, vice president for engineering at Tesla, said the Mexico factory would

produce "next generation" vehicles in "the next couple of years," but also did not provide any further clues about specific plans.

Mexican officials had announced the plant earlier Wednesday, describing an approximately \$5 billion new factory in a venture touted by Mexican President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador.

Affordability conundrum

Heading into the event, Musk had called Wednesday's gathering part of a "path to a fully sustainable energy future for Earth." After years of losses, Tesla has hit its stride in terms of financial performance, scoring an impressive string of earnings records as it has added factories and ramped up production.

The company has also acted as a major catalyst for a revolution in transportation, with much of the automobile sector's innovation efforts moving away from the internal combustion engine and towards EVs. Even with that success, Musk has fallen short on some of his outsized goals.

The company's lowest-price vehicle, the Model 3, begins at \$43,000 in the United States—too pricey for many consumers for a vehicle that had been pitched as aimed at the mass market. Musk has also missed his own deadlines for a fully autonomous vehicle, with Tesla driver-assistance technology spurring US regulatory probes. Analysts had hoped the mercurial billionaire would elaborate on the roadmap to a new vehicle, or perhaps unveil a design for a vehicle in the \$25,000 price range.



NEW YORK: Elon Musk presented a heady vision Wednesday to turbocharge Tesla's growth at an investor day. —AFP

While executives outlined fundamental changes envisioned to streamline manufacturing, Musk said he would be reluctant to retrofit current plants to incorporate improvements, not wanting to suspend output. "Demand for our vehicles might as well be infinite," he said. "The issue is affordability."

Asked late in the question and answer session

about timing and design for new vehicles, Musk cut off a questioner. "We will have to decline to answer," he said, turning to another analyst. "We will have a proper product event but we would be jumping the gun if we were to answer your question." Shares of Tesla fell 5.6 percent to \$191.40 in after-hours trading. —AFP

Blinken demands Russia extend Ukraine grain deal

NEW DELHI: US Secretary of State Antony Blinken demanded at a Group of 20 meeting attended by Russia that Moscow renew a deal to allow exports of Ukrainian grain. "Russia has deliberately and systematically slowed its pace of inspections, creating a backlog of ships that could be delivering food to the world today," Blinken told foreign ministers from the club of major economies meeting in New Delhi.

"It is imperative the G20 speak up on behalf of extending and expanding the grain initiative to strengthen food security for the most vulnerable," Blinken said, according to his prepared remarks. The Black Sea Grain Initiative was brokered by the UN with Turkey last July and has helped reduce spiraling food prices that contributed to hunger in the developing world. The deal is set to expire this month.

The deal was renewed in November but UN humanitarian chief Martin Griffiths has warned of difficulties in securing another extension before it expires on March 18. The agreement has allowed the export of some 20 million tons of grain. Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 had held up ships from the major breadbasket, with Moscow voicing concern over Ukrainian naval action.

Under last year's deal, Russia in turn was promised the right to export fertilizer free of Western sanctions. Moscow insists that part of the agreement is not being respected. The United States says it has not targeted fertilizer or other agriculture as part of its sweeping sanctions on Russia. —AFP

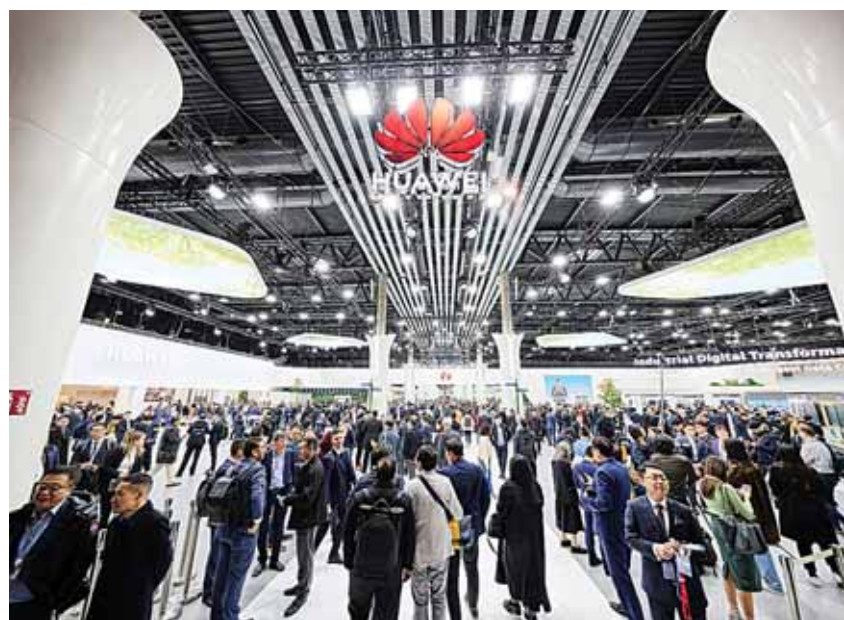
Apple to spend extra \$1.1bn on Munich chip hub

NEW YORK: US tech giant Apple said Thursday it would spend an additional one billion euros (\$1.1 billion) on expanding its microchip design hub in the German city of Munich. The investment, to be spread over the next six years, comes on top of an earlier one-billion-euro commitment announced in 2021, when Apple made Munich the European headquarters of its "Silicon Design Centre".

"Our Munich engineering teams are on the cutting edge of innovation, helping imagine new technologies at the heart of the products we make," said Tim Cook, Apple's CEO.

The move is part of Apple's strategy to develop its own chips for iPhones, iPads, MacBooks and other products, in order to reduce reliance on outside suppliers. Supply chain changes during the pandemic caused a global semiconductor shortage, hampering important industries and prompting Europe and the United States to look at ways to become less dependent on Asian production.

Apple said its latest investment would fund the creation of three new research and development sites at the existing Munich hub, housing some 2,000 engineers. The R&D teams in Munich would contribute to developing products that deliver "greater performance, efficiency, and power savings," said Johnny Srouji, Apple's senior vice president of hardware technologies. Apple has around 4,500 employees in Germany and has had a presence in Munich since 1981. —AFP



Huawei creates a 'tech oasis' to light up MWC 2023

KUWAIT: Huawei Consumer BG showcased their innovative technologies, flagship products, ecosystem, etc at the Mobile World Congress 2023 (MWC 2023), held in Barcelona from February 27 to March 2, 2023. With "GUIDE to the Intelligent World" as the theme, the exhibition area of Huawei Consumer BG is designed after the global high-end flagship store to create a "tech oasis" for an immersive experience integrating smart technology and trendy life scenarios.

The diverse range of innovative products showcased at the exhibition include Huawei Mate 50 Pro and Huawei Watch Buds. Huawei also held brand and technology exchange activities, in-depth conversations with global industry and ecological partners, and demonstrations of their latest innovations and future strategies.

"Huawei Consumer BG made a major appearance at MWC 2023 and believes in providing high-value innovative experiences and services for global consumers with high-end brands, innovative technologies, and high-quality products," said Kevin Ho, Chief Operating Officer of Huawei Consumer BG. "Moving forward, Huawei will share more research and development results, and provide more innovative products and services, for users worldwide to enjoy."

Malabar Gold & Diamonds unveils gold rate protection offers

KUWAIT: With an impressive retail network of over 305 outlets across 10 countries, Malabar Gold & Diamonds, the 6th largest jewelry retailer globally is providing customers with the best opportunity to invest in gold, through the 10 percent advance booking option, be it for personal use or as an investment.

The brand has announced this offer as part of the upcoming festive season, through which, customers can just pay 10 percent advance for their favorite jewelry and block the gold rate until the 23rd of April 2022, protecting themselves from any increase in gold rate during this period. If gold rate increases at the time of purchase, customers can avail the blocked rate and if it reduces, they can still draw mileage of the reduced rate ie a customer intending

Smartphone innovations

In 2022, Huawei maintained the lead in smartphone innovation with the breakthrough of the Huawei Mate Xs 2, well-received Huawei Mate50 Pro, and the stylish Huawei nova 10 Series. At MWC 2023, these leading-edge products were on display to demonstrate Huawei's imaging capabilities, leading folding technology, and understanding of the needs of younger users.

The Huawei Mate50 Pro—the futuristic tech flagship smartphone with the ultimate Ultra Aperture XMAGE camera, leads the way with several breakthroughs. From the XMAGE imaging system to the ultra-reliable Kunlun Glass, it delivers the ultimate technological innovation experience. The ultra-light, ultra-flat, and super durable Huawei Mate Xs 2 propels the folding screen mobile phone to a new level. Huawei nova 10 Series continues leading the innovation of smartphone selfie camera imaging technology, providing features such as Portrait Close-up Camera, Front Dual-View Video, and Showcase Focus Front Camera.

At this year's MWC, Huawei launched two innovative wearable products, demonstrating state-of-the-art innovations in wearable technology. Earbuds and Watch Come into One with the Huawei Watch Buds smartwatch combining the features of TWS earbuds and a smartwatch, offering users enhanced convenience by integrating these two devices into a single unit. The Huawei Watch Buds is coming soon to the MEA region by end of March, 2023, where consumers will be enticed by the all-new and innovative wearable without a shred of doubt. In addition to its highly innovative hardware products, Huawei has made breakthroughs in the software capabilities. Through self-developed innovations such as Huawei TruSeen,

Huawei TruSport, Huawei TruSleep, Huawei's wearables deliver professional health and exercise monitoring for users globally. Moving forward, Huawei wearables will continue to integrate the capabilities and advantages of software and hardware services to bring the ultimate sports and health experience to consumers worldwide.

HMS ecosystem

Huawei Mobile Services (HMS) ecosystem exhibition demonstrated to global developers the full-range capabilities. From app development, distribution, operation growth, to customer monetization, HMS ecosystem is accelerating its empowerment of application developers with full-scenario capability exposure and global platform deployment, providing developers with full life-cycle services. AppGallery has served over 170 countries and regions globally, with monthly active users reaching 580 million and maintaining growth; AppGallery helps partners achieve efficient distribution by providing partners with various high-quality promotion resources and provides consumers with diverse apps to meet global consumer digital life needs.

Huawei leads the number of global patent applications, and has achieved impressive results in intellectual property strategy. According to data released by IFI CLAIMS Patent Services, a global patent database provider, Huawei saw steady patent applications in the past two years, rising from ninth in 2020 to fourth in 2022. Having achieved 2,836 patents, an increase of 2 percent, Huawei has become one of the largest patent holders globally. In the past decade, it has invested more than RMB 845 billion in R&D expenses. It has held more than 45,000 valid authorized patent families (over 110,000 pieces) worldwide, with over 90 percent of the patents being invention patents, and its patent value has been fully recognized by the industry.

to buy gold jewelry worth KD 1,000 just needs to pay KD 100 to avail the advance booking offer and in turn get protected from the increasing gold rates.

This offer will be valid across all Malabar Gold & Diamonds showrooms. Customers can either pay the advance directly at the outlet or online, via Malabar Gold & Diamonds' mobile app.

"Even though gold has retained its status as a safe haven investment, the constant fluctuation in prices can cause doubts amongst potential customers looking to invest in gold. With the gold rate protection offer, we are providing our customers with a great opportunity to invest in gold by paying just a 10% of the overall value in advance. With this offer, customers can be assured that they can reap the benefits of the fluctuating gold rates, regardless of whether it goes up or down.

This is also a golden opportunity for customers looking to buy their favourite jewelry in light of the festive season that is fast approaching," commented Shamlal Ahamed, MD-International Operations, Malabar Gold & Diamonds.

With the upcoming festive season, this exclusive

offer from Malabar

Gold & Diamonds

will help customers

shop for their

favorite jewelry,

without having to

worry about the

gold price. Gold

being a reliable

investment is one

of the intrinsic reasons

for people buying

gold jewelry while

also serving as an

adornment. It

is the ease to liquidate

the metal for cash

without losing much

value even during

difficult times that

has further increased

its dependability.

In addition to the

10 percent advance

option, customers

can also pay 50

percent and 100

percent of the

amount as advance

to get gold rate

protection for 90

days and 180

days respectively.

This option will

be available to

customers

throughout the

year across all

stores of Malabar

Gold & Diamonds.





In this picture model presents a creation by Egyptian designer Hani Al-Biheri (left) during a fashion show in Muscat.



Models present creations by Egyptian designer Hani Al-Biheri during a fashion show in Muscat. — AFP photos

Power scarves and punk elegance for Dior and Saint Laurent's strong women



Dior and Saint Laurent both combined nostalgia with homages to strong, independent women as the two French fashion giants presented their latest collections in Paris on Tuesday. Under a giant surreal flower made of fluorescent textiles, Dior offered a softer reworking of its classic New Look from the 1950s. A few hours later, Saint Laurent drew on very different traditions, with golden chandeliers, tinkling piano music-and the giant shoulder pads and aviator shades of a 1980s fever dream. Dior designer Maria Grazia Chiuri said she was particularly inspired by three early clients of Dior: his sister Catherine, who was a Resistance fighter and businesswoman who refused to marry; the muse of the existentialists Juliette Greco and the "tough-as-leather" singing icon Edith Piaf.

"In addition to being very elegant, they had a bit of a punk attitude," she told AFP ahead of the show. To the sounds of Piaf's "Non, Je Ne Regrette Rien", the new collection softened the rigid lines of the New Look's fitted jackets with mid-length skirts and dresses, floral motifs and more flexible fabrics. "It creates something which adapts to every body and allows a reinterpretation of the 1950s into something much softer and more personal," said Chiuri.



Power scarves

At Saint Laurent, the vibe was much more about classic evening wear, but the professionals in the audience were impressed by designer Anthony Vaccarello's ability to add a modern twist. "Anthony Vaccarello did it again," said Simon Longland, director of buying for London's Harrods department store. "A strong and powerfully feminine collection-no one is messing with this Saint Laurent woman!"

On display were billowing tops in silk and chiffon, slit pencil skirts-and many examples of the extreme 80s power-shouldered blazers, which Longland said were "guaranteed to be on the must-have list for the season".

"We may also have seen the invention of the 'Power Scarf'," he added. Despite the very different vibe, that chimed well with Chiuri's vision of a "strong and independent" Dior women, breaking with her image as "romantic and fragile". One big difference is the heels. Saint Laurent's models were all teetering atop razor-sharp talons.

Chiuri has largely refused to include them on feminist grounds, though they have started to sneak into recent collections-this time in a twisted question-mark shape. "Personally, I hardly ever wear them," she told AFP. "But for some occasions, I like to wear heels, though not too excessive." Among the celebrity guests were actors including Charlize Theron and star-of-the-moment Bella Ramsey, from hit show "The Last of Us". The giant flower overhead, which looked somewhat like a trippy octopus, was the work of Portuguese artist Joana Vasconcelos, who said she was inspired by Catherine Dior-"a woman who was strong and sensitive". — AFP



Models present creation from Christian Dior Womenswear Fall-Winter 2023-2024 collection during Paris Fashion Week in Paris. —AFP photos





Honoree Canadian singer-songwriter Joni Mitchell (center) performs during the Library of Congress Gershwin Prize for Popular Song ceremony in Washington. — AFP photos

Joni Mitchell honored at star-studded concert gala

Artists spanning the genres came together Wednesday to celebrate the peerless Joni Mitchell, honoring her vast contributions to popular song. The pioneering singer-songwriter behind poignant hits including "A Case Of You," joins an elite coterie of composers including Stevie Wonder, Paul McCartney, Tony Bennett and Carole King in receiving the US Library of Congress' Gershwin Prize, which is named for the brothers behind American standards such as "I Got Rhythm" and "Rhapsody In Blue."

long, bedazzled teal dress. "Her music, it gets into you, and it sort of becomes part of the mix," Taylor told AFP on the red carpet prior to the event in Washington. "Blue" saw Mitchell mine her own heartache, including breakups with Taylor and Nash, to produce the record that's a regular on critics' all-time-best lists.

Nash later took the stage for a rendition of "A Case Of You"—another song on "Blue," which many people believe she wrote about him. "It's a very simple song," he told journalists prior to the event. "I think it's

"There's so many people that I care about in here tonight, from different parts of my life." "New friends, old friends... it's thrilling!"

Comeback

The trailblazing Mitchell has experienced something of a renaissance over the past year, making a return to public life after she suffered a brain aneurysm in 2015 that left her temporarily unable to speak. She has since undergone extensive physical therapy that's allowed her to return to performance, which at one point seemed a long shot. Last summer she delivered her first full set in more than 20 years, surprising attendees at the Newport Folk Festival alongside folk-rockers Brandi Carlile, who was also a performer integral to Wednesday's setlist. "Her resilience is palpable," said Carlile before the gala. "There are huge elements of her voice and vibrato that are back." Mitchell is slated to headline a "Joni Jam" show this June at Washington state's Gorge Amphitheatre, again alongside Carlile.

'Opened doors'

Wednesday's gala was a testament to the foundations Mitchell laid for women creating art in a world controlled by men. "Joni was the first woman that I really related to as a singer-songwriter—as a creative woman," said Annie Lennox on the red carpet. "There wasn't anything like her." "She was this ethereal beauty that had this deep, profound insight into the world."

Lennox gave the room chills with a performance of the ballad "Both Sides Now," starting at the piano before standing to belt out the final stanzas. She later collaborated with a bevy of women including Angelique Kidjo, Cyndi Lauper and Carlile to perform Mitchell's environmentally conscious classic "Big Yellow Taxi." "This business is so men-dominated," Kidjo told AFP. "And we have to find our space in there, and she has opened doors for many, many women in this country and in the world."



US singer-songwriter Brandi Carlile embraces Honoree Canadian singer-songwriter Joni Mitchell.

'Freeing'

Born in a small town in western Canada, Mitchell had her start playing small clubs and eventually moved to Los Angeles, where she became a pivotal figure in the 1960s Laurel Canyon music scene and beyond. She punctuated her deceptively simple songs with a distinctive, wide-ranging voice and open-tuned guitar, which lent an idiosyncratic sound to the standard rock and folk of the era.

Mitchell also received praise for her integration of jazz, collaborating with greats including Wayne Shorter and Herbie Hancock, the latter of whom performed "River" on Wednesday. "She's like, up on a pedestal somewhere up there with Zeus," Hancock told AFP.

"She bares her soul," the superstar pianist—who dedicated an entire album to Mitchell's covers and won one of the top Grammy's off it—continued. "Sometimes you try to hide things from others, and she addresses those kinds of issues." "I think it's freeing for everybody that listens." —AFP



English-US musician Graham Nash performs during the Library of Congress Gershwin Prize for Popular Song ceremony.

Not one but two of her muses—James Taylor and Graham Nash—performed; both were among the lovers and collaborators she counted throughout her storied career. Wearing a newsboy cap, Taylor perched on a stool with an acoustic guitar to perform the song "California" off her seminal 1971 album "Blue," to Mitchell's delight.

The 79-year-old kept the beat with her cane, donning oversized sunglasses along with a metallic gold beret and a

very profound in what it says." "I loved it from the day that I first heard it and I'll sing my a** off tonight."

He certainly did but of course it was Mitchell herself who stole the show: after accepting her award she stunned the audience with a soulful, smoky performance of "Summertime," an aria George Gershwin composed for the opera "Porgy and Bess." "This is overwhelming," she said onstage, the crowd giving her a standing ovation.



Oman folk troupe performs 'Shubani' at book fair

Oman's folk ensemble on Tuesday gave an amazing performance of the sultanate's renowned art "Shubani" (sailors' songs) as part of South Al Batinah Governorate's activities on the sidelines of the 27th version of the Muscat International Book Fair. The troupe's performance, met with the guests' loud applause, reflected the Omani people's affection for their ancestors' profession of sailor in pursuit of livelihood and trade. — KUNA



Justin Bieber tour dates cancelled

Following the announcement of his indefinite touring hiatus, Justin Bieber's tour dates appear ultimately to be scrapped, with fan sites and ticketing outlets reporting cancellations. All of his concerts, including in the United States, Ireland and France, are marked as cancelled on Ticketmaster's website. Neither Bieber, 29, nor his representatives have provided reasons for or official confirmation of the cancellations.



Justin Bieber

The superstar announced he was taking a break from performing last year, saying he'd been diagnosed with Ramsay Hunt Syndrome, a rare complication of shingles that for him caused partial facial paralysis. "I need to make my health the priority right now," he said at the time. "I'm going to be OK, but I need time to rest and get better. I've been so proud to bring this show and our message of justice to the world." Bieber had dozens of performances across the globe scheduled through March 2023. Ramsay Hunt Syndrome is a rare neurological disorder that can inflame and paralyze the facial nerve and cause a painful rash around the ear or mouth. In addition to facial paralysis, it can cause hearing loss. — AFP

Gorillaz return: 'We're living in a world of cults'

Gorillaz have started a cult on their new album. Just don't ask Keith Richards to join. The animated band—the brainchild of British musician Damon Albarn and cartoonist Jamie Hewlett—are back with their eighth collection "Cracker Album". It sees the cartoon foursome of Murdoc, Noodle, Russel and 2D heading for Los Angeles and starting their own ridiculous cult.

It came from conversations between Albarn and Hewlett about our increasingly tribal world, as well as the need to flee London "because of Brexit and Boris Johnson and the fact the country is on its knees." "All of us are living in a world where we're being separated from one another into cults," Hewlett told AFP. "There are cults we don't even think of as cults. You take something like Fox News—it's a cult. "If you're not wearing what I'm wearing, not following the news that I'm following... it's about being segregated."



In this file photo French actress Emma De Caunes (right) and her husband British cartoonist Jamie Hewlett pose as they arrive for the premiere of the film "The Revenant" in Paris. — AFP

Friendly meetings

Gorillaz have become an institution, and are known for their huge list of collaborations, featuring everyone from Snoop Dogg and Elton John to De La Soul and Mos Def. The new album sees appearances by Bad Bunny, Beck and Fleetwood Mac's Stevie Nicks. Not everyone has given them a warm welcome, however—not least Rolling Stones legend Keith Richards, who inspired the character Murdoc.

Hewlett puts the band's continued success down to his long-standing friendship with Albarn. They came up with the concept for Gorillaz when living together in the late 1990s. Hewlett was the author of cult graphic novel "Tank Girl" and Albarn was looking for a new project that could take him away from his frontman duties with Britpop megastars Blur. Their instant success naturally led to attempted imitators. "After the second Gorillaz album, we heard that another record company was attempting to put together an animated band," Hewlett said. —AFP

Sports

Korda survives 'little oopsy' as Szokol takes surprise LPGA lead

Saso hunts for first LPGA victory



Nelly Korda of the US

SINGAPORE: Former world number one Nelly Korda survived a "little oopsy" to card a four-under-par 68, four strokes behind surprise leader Elizabeth Szokol, after the first round of the HSBC Women's World Championship in Singapore on Thursday. Olympic champion Korda was in a tie for third place after she managed to scramble a par following a wayward tee shot on the short fourth hole and stay in touch with Szokol.

Korda's fellow American, who is ranked 153 in the world, shot a superb eight-under-par 64 at Sentosa Golf Club. The 2021 US Women's Open champion, Japan's Yuka Saso, was lying second, three shots back, after a 67 at the \$1.8 million LPGA event. "I played really solid," said Korda, who is ranked second in the world and was coming off a tie for sixth place at LPGA Thailand last weekend. "I kind of had one little oopsy, and that

was on the par three." Szokol put daylight between herself and a star-studded field containing the top five in the world and 18 of the top 20.

Szokol opened with a bogey at the 10th, her first hole, but from there never looked back, carding seven birdies and an eagle to surge to the top of the leaderboard. "It's great. I'm really happy about the start," said Szokol, who is on the comeback trail after sitting out the second half of last season with a herniated disc in her back. "I was out for about four or five months and I didn't touch a golf club for about 12 weeks," the 28-year-old said. "I was really focused on getting better and feeling healthy. So I'm really happy to be back playing, and especially here."

Saso, who was born in the Philippines, started her front nine strongly with four birdies to turn in 32, but could add only one more to finish with 67. The 21-year-old, who models her swing on Rory

McIlroy, is still searching for her first LPGA win since her major breakthrough in 2021. "Winning on the LPGA is not easy," said Saso. "I just have to keep grinding and give myself chances every week. But it's tough. I just have to be patient and enjoy the journey."

The bunched leaderboard saw Lee6 Jeong-eun and Kim Hyo-joo of South Korea also at four-under alongside Japan's Ayaka Furue, the Thai pair Patty Tavatanakit and Ariya Jutanugarn, and Korda. "Today was a good day. I feel like I stayed really within the present a lot, didn't really think about what's going to happen on the next hole," said Tavatanakit, who won a major at the 2021 ANA Inspiration but has slid to 65th in the world. World number one Lydia Ko of New Zealand was in a share of 14th place after a two-under 70 and defending champion Ko Jin-young of South Korea posted a level-par 72.—AFP

Kuwait Triathlon Team participates in championship

KUWAIT: Kuwait Triathlon National Team will participate in the world championship to be held in Abu Dhabi on Saturday and Sunday. The team left on Wednesday

to UAE with a delegation headed by Sufyan Al-Khalil, administrator Waleed Al-Hajiri and coach Ricardo. The team has ten players: Ali Dashti, Abdulaziz Al-Duaij, Usama Burahma, Yousuf Dashti, Abdulaziz Al-Huwaidi, Abdulmohsen Al-Fouzan, Huda Al-Saleh, Loulwa Al-Refae, Noura Al-Barrak and Fai Al-Mulla. Sufyan Al-Khalil said participation in the World Cup in the UAE is extremely important especially that the Triathlon Club and Federation have highly talented athletes who had significant achievements. He pointed to the support of the Club and Federation in supporting the players.



IndiGo engages travel agents in tournament

KUWAIT: IndiGo, India's leading carrier, organized its first-ever cricket tournament in Kuwait, in partnership with Travelpart. The knockout tournament took place at the Boulevard Cricket Ground, Salmiya on February 03, 2023. Ten teams from various travel agencies in Kuwait participated in the event.

The final match was won by Al Rashid Riders (Al Rashed Intl Travel) after exhilarating encounters and

the grand finale with Caesars Invaders (Caesars Travels). Moiz Mustafa Bhai of Al Khaleej Travel, one of the travel agencies, won an IndiGo ticket in the raffle. Another event highlight was an exhibition game between Travelpart + IndiGo players and Travel Agent Managers.

Commenting on the occasion, Vinay Malhotra, Head of Global Sales, IndiGo said, "IndiGo, in collaboration with Travelpart, successfully organized a captivating cricket tournament in Salmiya, witnessing encouraging participation from a large number of travel agents from Kuwait. This tournament helped us in connecting with various travel agents in Kuwait as well as strengthening our relationships with them. The attendees provided us with positive feedback. We hope to be able to host more events like this for others in the industry."

Indonesia postpones match between rivals

JAKARTA: Indonesian football chiefs have postponed a match between two fierce rivals whose last game ended in one of the deadliest disasters in the sport's history, officials said Thursday. October's stampede in Malang city killed 135 people, including more than 40 children. It happened after police fired

tear gas into packed stands when home supporters invaded the pitch at the end of a match between East Javan rivals Arema FC and Persebaya Surabaya.

The tragedy forced Indonesian officials and fans to confront failings in every aspect of the domestic game, which has been blighted for years by shaky infrastructure, mismanagement and violence. Authorities recommended Sunday's return fixture be held outside East Java and without fans, because of risks including crowd trouble, provincial police spokesperson Dirmanto told AFP.

"Persebaya and Arema supporters have a high history of rivalry," said Dirmanto, who like many Indonesians goes by one name.

Fans were banned from attending football matches after the league resumed in December, having been cancelled entirely in the disaster's aftermath, but some have since been allowed back in at select games. Persebaya failed to secure another venue and asked for the game to be rescheduled, according to a press release by the country's premier league, known as BRI Liga 1. The fact that Persebaya's stadium is undergo-

ing repairs-ahead of hosting matches for the FIFA Under-20 World Cup in May-was another factor, said Dirmanto. Liga 1 said it would announce a new date for the match soon. Persebaya fans were banned from the initial October match because of crowd trouble fears. Police described the October 1 pitch invasion-after Arema lost 3-2 - as a riot and said two officers were killed, but survivors and investigators said the police used excessive force. Five Indonesian men including three police officers were charged with negligence after the tragedy and remain on trial.—AFP

Andrew Barr wins Toyo Golf Tournament 2023

KUWAIT: Toyo Golf Tournament was organized on Friday 17th Feb 2023 at the Sahara Golf Club. Held in February each year for commemorating the National & Liberation Days, the trophy is appropriately called the Liberation Cup. It was the 38th year of this prestigious event, which started in 1983 and since then has been held each year with the exception of 1991 and the pandemic years.

The tournament is quite popular among golf enthusiasts, as it is limited not just to Sahara Club members but open to golfers from all over. This year particularly there was an overwhelming request for participation, as it was being held after a gap of 3 years. The game was played in the 'Stableford' format as usual with the players categorized into two divisions based on their handicap levels : Division A (Handicap 0 to 14) and Division B (Handicap 15 to 28).

The highlight of the day was a superlative performance by Andrew Barr who scored a brilliant 34 points net to win the trophy in Division A. Not only that, he won the prize for Longest Drive (Men's) also. Andrew



was followed by Farhan Al-Shammari who was the runner-up with a score of 32 points.

In Division B, Mustapha Tomsuw was the winner with 34 points, followed by Vasudha Malhotra on 31 points. Among other prizes, Nearest to Pin(Mens) was won by Matthew Compton and Longest Drive (Womens) by Ali Peterson. Thankfully the cold weather system which had developed over Kuwait over the last week had subsided, giving way to pleasant playing conditions over the week-end with ambient temperature and a mild cool breeze.

Prize distribution was organized in the afternoon in the gracious presence of the Chief Guest Morino Yasunari, Ambassador of Japan to Kuwait, who is a keen golfer. Also, gracing the event was Shoji Hirao, General Manager, Toyo Tires, who had specially flown in from Japan for the tournament. Speaking on the occasion, Kuldeep Lamba, Managing Director, Al Mailem Group expressed his satisfaction at the enthusiastic response, and complimented Razmic, Richard, Leonard and other Sahara Club staff for their professional administration of the game.

Osasuna edge Athletic Bilbao in Copa Semis

PAMPLONA: Ez Abde's fine solo goal earned Osasuna a slim 1-0 Copa del Rey semi-final first leg win over Athletic Bilbao on Wednesday. The on-loan Barcelona winger burst into the box early in the second half and drilled home superbly to separate the teams in an even clash at El Sadar. Osasuna, who last reached the semi-finals 18 years ago, eventually losing in the final against Real Betis, will take a narrow lead to the San Mames for the second leg on April 4.

Athletic have won the cup 23 times, more than any other side apart from Barcelona, and were playing in the semi-finals for the fourth consecutive season. However, the last time they won the competition was back in 1984, and the Basque side have lost six times in finals since then.

"It was a very even game, and that start to the second half and moment of genius from Abde gives us a little advantage," said Osasuna coach Jagoba Arrasate. "In general the two teams neutralised each other well, and there weren't many opportunities." Ernesto Valverde brought defender Inigo Martinez into the Athletic starting line-up after injury, for his first appearance since November. Abde, who scored the winner in Osasuna's 3-2 win over Sevilla in La Liga last weekend, fizzed an early deflected strike wide of the far post.

At the other end Inaki Williams finished well but his goal was disallowed for a clear offside. The first half offered few clear chances, in a cagey encounter, but Abde broke through early in the second half. Moi Gomez found the Morocco international, who brilliantly beat defender Daniel Vivian and drilled a low effort across goal and into the far corner. It proved the difference between the sides, with Osasuna holding off Athletic in the nervy final stages.

Sergio Herrera made a solid save late on to keep out an effort from Athletic striker Gorka Guruzeta at his near post. "The game was scrappy, I don't know if it was because both teams had a lot of respect for each other, but there was no one team who kept the ball," said Athletic coach Valverde. "The game was broken up with Abde's goal, we threw ourselves into it (after that), we went forward more and more, but it wasn't to be." —AFP



Sports

Durant shakes off pre-game jitters; Suns win in Charlotte

Bucks beat Orlando Magic; Tatum powers Celtics

LOS ANGELES: Kevin Durant shook off pre-game jitters to score 23 points in his Phoenix Suns debut, helping his new team to a 105-91 victory in Charlotte that halted the Hornets' five-game NBA winning streak. Durant was acquired from Brooklyn in a blockbuster trade three weeks ago but was sidelined until Wednesday with a sprained knee ligament. As Durant announced his arrival in the Western Conference, back in the East the Milwaukee Bucks and Boston Celtics continued to jockey for dominance.

The Bucks beat the Orlando Magic 139-117, their 16th straight victory which keeps them half a game ahead of the Celtics atop the conference. The Celtics, with 41 points from a resurgent Jayson Tatum, beat the Cleveland Cavaliers 117-113 in Boston. Durant was efficient playing restricted minutes, scoring 23 points on 10-of-15 shooting in less than 27 minutes on the floor.

He added six rebounds, a pair of assists and a couple of blocked shots, complementing new teammate Devin Booker's 37 points. "I've played in almost a thousand basketball games, but today I was nervous," admitted Durant, who scored his first points as a Sun with a silky layup less than two minutes into the contest. "But once the ball was tipped my teammates were incredible in making me feel comfortable and I just tried to go out there and play my game."

Phoenix are in fourth place in the West, 10 games behind conference leaders Denver and three behind the third-placed Sacramento Kings. Even as he continues to return to full fitness, Durant showed what an asset he can be as they try to climb the table. Durant scored 12 points in the first half as the Suns took a 16-point lead. The Hornets, whose ris-

ing star LaMelo Ball had season-ending surgery on a broken ankle earlier Wednesday, had trimmed the deficit to six points going into the final quarter.

Durant started the period and helped the Suns pull away. "Man, I missed the game," Durant said. "I'm glad my knee's back right, I'm glad I'm on the road to playing more and more minutes each game. "I'm looking forward to what we can build from this." In Milwaukee, Giannis Antetokounmpo scored 31 points to lead the Bucks, who knocked down 26 three-pointers.

Milwaukee's winning streak is their longest since they won 18 straight in the 2019-20 season, and it's the longest in the league since the Suns won 18 in a row last season.

In Boston, the Celtics turned the tables on a Cavs team that beat them twice in overtime early this season. Tatum, who was ejected late in Boston's loss to the Knicks in New York on Monday, bounced back to notch his ninth 40-point game of the season. "Got off to a good start and just kept staying aggressive," said Tatum, who added that it "just felt good to get back home. "All-Star break, Indiana, it's been two weeks since I slept in my own bed."

Knicks keep rolling

Al Horford added 23 points and Jaylen Brown scored 16 for the Celtics, who withstood a 44-point outburst from Cleveland guard Donovan Mitchell, who soldiered through an apparent right thigh injury suffered early in the third quarter. Elsewhere, the Knicks won their seventh straight, trouncing Brooklyn 142-118 at Madison Square Garden. Jalen Brunson scored 30 of his 39 points in the first half for the Knicks, who seized control with a 47-point



CHARLOTTE: Kevin Durant #35 of the Phoenix Suns warms up before their game against the Charlotte Hornets at Spectrum Center on March 01, 2023. — AFP

first quarter and sailed home. Philadelphia's Tyrese Maxey scored 27 points and James Harden added 23 as the 76ers beat the Heat 119-96 in Miami, despite the late scratch of star center Joel Embiid with a sore left foot.

The injury-depleted Los Angeles Lakers - with LeBron James sidelined by a foot injury and Anthony Davis held out to manage the stress reac-

tion in his right foot - beat the Oklahoma City Thunder 123-117. New Orleans forward Brandon Ingram scored 40 points and teammate CJ McCollum added 24 against his former team as the Pelicans beat the Trail Blazers 121-110 in Portland. Damian Lillard scored 41 for the Blazers, who were up by one going into the fourth but were outscored 31-19 in the final period. — AFP

Morant accused of punching teen

LOS ANGELES: Memphis Grizzlies star Ja Morant was accused in police reports last year of punching a 17-year-old, US media reported Wednesday, his agent saying the rising NBA star acted in self defense. No criminal charges were filed against Morant in the incident, which took place during a pickup basketball game at Morant's Tennessee house in July 2022.

In police records obtained by the Washington Post, the unnamed teenaged boy accused Morant of punching him "12-13 times" during a pickup basketball game at Morant's Tennessee house in July 2022. In interviews with police the teen said that after their altercation Morant went into his house and "re-emerged with a gun visible in the waistband of his pants."

Morant told police he "swung first" but felt he was acting in self-defense after the teenager threw a basketball that hit him in the head, later making a comment that Morant found threatening. Morant's agent Jim Tanner strongly denied in a statement

issued Wednesday that the player had a gun. "The July 26 incident was purely self-defense," Tanner said in a statement that was posted on Tandem Sports and Entertainment's Twitter feed.

"Again, this was fully investigated by law enforcement, they came to the decision not to charge Ja with any crime. "Any of the dozens of witnesses will confirm Ja acted in self-defense and that he did not have a firearm." Days before that incident, the head of security at a Memphis mall told police he felt "threatened" by Morant and a group of his associates after an incident in the shopping center's parking lot. Although a police report was made, no charges were filed.

TMZ reported in January that the teenager and his mother had sued Morant, and Tanner called it "disturbing that unsubstantiated rumors and gossip are being put out by people motivated to tear Ja down and tarnish his reputation for their own financial gain." Morant, the second overall pick in the 2019 draft and a two-time All-Star, was embroiled in controversy in early February, when the NBA investigated allegations by the Indiana Pacers that Morant's entourage "aggressively confronted" members of their traveling party, possibly pointing a red laser at them. — AFP



Ja Morant of the Memphis Grizzlies

Verstappen begins F1 title defense at Bahrain bogey track

SAKHIR: Three months on from his season-ending victory in Abu Dhabi, Max Verstappen returns to the Gulf this weekend set on claiming another win to ignite his bid for a third consecutive world title. The 25-year-old Dutchman, who reeled off 15 triumphs in 22 races last year on his way to becoming a double world champion with Red Bull, has never won a season-opener or a race in Bahrain.

Last year, he retired from second place as Ferrari's Charles Leclerc took pole position, fastest lap and a convincing victory, leaving Verstappen to play catch-up in the early part of the season before dominating. It is a memory he and Red Bull keen to banish with a brisk start to the 2023 season in front of a sell-out crowd at the Bahrain International Circuit at Sakhir where the teams completed three days' testing last week.

Red Bull shone at the test with Verstappen topping the times on the opening day and team-mate Sergio Perez doing the same on the final day with the fastest lap overall. Satisfied, but determined, the champion has kept a low profile and on Wednesday said he hoped to be doing his talking on track. "I stayed out after that test so it has been nice to lead up to the race like that and we head into the weekend in a good position," he said. "There's a lot to be said about reading into the data from testing, but each track is very different in terms of how a car can behave."

'Positive days'

"So, I think that we, as a team, now have to focus on improvement and carry on throughout the year. We have three positive days, but this is when it counts - at the race." Verstappen's overall record in Bahrain includes two second places, in 2020 and 2021, and three retirements so he will be seeking a change of fortune on Sunday when Ferrari, again, are likely to be Red Bull's closest rivals. Leclerc won last year in a memorable one-two ahead of team-mate Carlos Sainz and they will hope for something similar to welcome new team chief Fred Vasseur, formerly at Alfa Romeo, having replaced Mattia Binotto. Question marks still hang over the potential of Mercedes after an unimpressive test. Despite eradicating the chronic bouncing problems from their improved car, seven-time champion Lewis Hamilton and George Russell conceded they face an uphill task to deliver race-winning speed and performance.

"We didn't have the smoothest test," admitted team boss Toto Wolff. "We had reliability problems and struggled with set-up on day two, but we did lots of learning and made progress on the final day. "Our expectations are that we will be playing catch-up to the front." For Hamilton, who enters the final year of his current contract, hopes of a sixth Bahrain win seem remote especially after registering the first winless season of his career last year. —AFP



SAKHIR: Red Bull Racing's Dutch driver Max Verstappen arrives in the paddock at the Bahrain International Circuit in Sakhir on March 2, 2023. — AFP

United reach FA Cup Quarters; Spurs out

LONDON: Alejandro Garnacho and Fred struck late as Manchester United came from behind to beat West Ham 3-1 and reach the FA Cup quarter-finals on Wednesday but Tottenham were stunned by Championship side Sheffield United. In the evening's other fifth-round ties, fourth-tier Grimsby embarrassed Premier League strugglers Southampton 2-1 and Burnley beat 10-man Fleetwood 1-0.

Manchester United, who made six changes to the team that started Sunday's League Cup final win against Newcastle, lacked fluency in front of an expectant Old Trafford crowd. United goalkeeper David de Gea thwarted Michail Antonio when the West Ham forward bore down on goal midway through the opening period and Emerson Palmieri flashed an inviting ball across the box. United manager Erik ten Hag brought on Casemiro for Scott McTominay at half-time but the home side remained sluggish.

Said Benrahma made them pay in the 54th minute, rifling the ball past De Gea after the home defenders stopped, thinking the ball had gone out for a throw-in. The goal prompted Ten Hag to introduce top-scorer Marcus Rashford but Antonio had a glorious chance to double West Ham's lead, only to be denied again by De Gea. Casemiro had the ball in the net in the 72nd minute but his header from a Bruno Fernandes free-kick was ruled out for offside following a VAR review.

United finally drew level five minutes later when



MANCHESTER: (From left) West Ham United's Moroccan defender Nayef Aguerd, Manchester United's Austrian midfielder Marcel Sabitzer and West Ham United's English defender Ben Johnson fight for the ball during the English FA Cup fifth round football match between Manchester United and West Ham on March 1, 2023. — AFP

Fernandes sent in a corner and Nayef Aguerd headed into his own goal. The home side-still on a high after ending their six-year trophy drought at the weekend-poured forward in search of a winner. They got their reward when Argentine teenager Garnacho produced a superb right-footed curler in the 90th minute to edge United ahead followed by a

stoppage-time strike by Fred.

"The best teams never stop believing," United captain Harry Maguire told ITV. "I am not saying we are one of the best teams yet. "We have a lot to do but we are getting there, we are taking steps forward... It felt like the Stretford End was sucking the goal in at the end there." — AFP

and most valuable domestic women's sport competition globally after US professional basketball. "That's an unprecedented amount of investment into the women's game," James Savage of the Deloitte Sports Business Group told AFP.

"That level of investment has come around because of the huge growth potential." The Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) is betting big on the WPL and women's sport is attracting higher levels of viewership, media coverage, TV rights and sponsorships globally. More than 86,000 people watched the 2020 Women's T20 World Cup final at the Melbourne Cricket Ground between hosts Australia and India, the highest ever for a women's cricket match.

And television audiences-a crucial metric for boosting media rights revenue for organizers-have also been hitting records across women's sport. "It's additional confirmation that... women's sports is the

next economy for sport," said Thayer Lavielle of The Collective, the women's division of US sports marketing agency Wasserman. "I believe that marketers need to really start to pay attention to what satisfies us," she told AFP. Underlining global interest in the WPL, British broadcaster Sky Sports said on Wednesday that it will show matches live. The final of the tournament is on March 26. All games are in Mumbai.

The BCCI last year sold the media rights for five IPL seasons for a record \$6.2 billion and hopes the women's equivalent will eventually prove similarly lucrative. "The initial response to the WPL has definitely showcased the potential the league has to become the biggest women's domestic sporting tournament," BCCI secretary Jay Shah told AFP. "The WPL will set a template for other sports to follow suit." Top players lined up for the WPL auction, with India's Smriti Mandhana the top pick, earning \$410,000 for her services. — AFP

Women's sport a winner as money pours into cricket

MUMBAI: India's inaugural Women's Premier League cricket has generated hundreds of millions of dollars even before a ball is bowled on Saturday, with experts calling it a game-changing moment for women's sport. The Twenty20 tournament's five debut franchises together sold for nearly \$200 million-more than the eight founding teams of the men's Indian Premier League in 2008.

Together with media rights for the first five seasons, the WPL has already earned India's cricket board a shade under \$700 million, making it the sec-

Sports

Arsenal go five points clear

Martinelli stars as Arsenal crush Everton 4-0

LONDON: Gabriel Martinelli starred as Arsenal moved five points clear at the top of the Premier League with a 4-0 rout of struggling Everton on Wednesday. Bukayo Saka broke Everton's stubborn resistance late in the first half before Brazilian forward Martinelli doubled Arsenal's lead at the Emirates Stadium. Martin Odegaard bagged the third and Martinelli wrapped up Arsenal's biggest victory since October on a night that could serve as another landmark moment in their surge towards the title.

It was essential for Mikel Arteta's side to win their game in hand on second-placed Manchester City as the title race approaches its climax. With 13 games left, the victory keeps Arsenal in pole position to win the title for the first time since Arsene Wenger's 'Invincibles' in 2003-04. "Once we scored the first goal, the game unlocked. We needed a magic moment and Bukayo produced that. After that we grew and deserved to win the game," Arteta said.

"It's a statement that we're here and want to continue to do this." After wobbling during a run of three league games without a win that culminated with City knocking them off top spot with a 3-1 win at the Emirates, Arsenal have bounced back impressively. Three successive wins since the City defeat have taken the Gunners to 60 points, which is their joint-highest total after 25 Premier League fixtures, along with that famous 2003-04 campaign and 2007-08.

"I'm delighted when I see the team play the way we want to. This league is a different story," Arteta said. "We had big proof of that at Goodison. I'm really happy with the maturity and quality we

showed." Sean Dyche started his Everton reign with a shock 1-0 win against Arsenal at Goodison Park on February 4. But Everton have lost three times and won just once since then, leaving them sitting third bottom of the table. Everton have played a game more than all the teams around them at the bottom and remain the league's lowest scorers this season with just 17 goals.

Unless Dyche can fix their malaise, Everton are in grave danger of playing in the second tier for the first time since 1954. Arteta was rewarded for naming the same team that won 1-0 at Leicester on Saturday, with Leandro Trossard again selected in attack instead of Eddie Nketiah. In a rare spell of Everton pressure, Aaron Ramsdale had to save from Neal Maupay twice in quick succession, but both times the striker's efforts lacked the power to truly test the keeper.

Slick Saka

Arteta had insisted everything was "fine" between Gabriel and William Saliba despite the Arsenal centre-backs' heated confrontation on the pitch following the Leicester game. Gabriel certainly looked unaffected by the fuss when he slid across with a perfectly timed block to stop Maupay from unloading a shot.

Everton's rearguard action lasted until the 40th minute when Saka opened the floodgates. Oleksandr Zinchenko's pass found Saka in the Everton area and the 21-year-old held off Vitaliy Mykolenko before smashing a fierce strike into the top corner for his 11th goal this season. Maupay almost mustered an immediate reply for Everton with a long-range blast that whistled just



LONDON: Arsenal's Brazilian midfielder Gabriel Martinelli celebrates scoring the team's fourth goal during the English Premier League football match between Arsenal and Everton on March 1, 2023. — AFP

wide. Despite that escape, Arsenal were firing on all cylinders and Martinelli increased their lead in first half stoppage-time.

Saka was the provider this time as he seized possession from the dozing Idrissa Gueye and found Martinelli, who slotted home from close-range for a goal that was confirmed after a VAR

check for a tight offside claim against the Brazilian. Odegaard put the result beyond doubt in the 71st minute when Arsenal's captain beat Jordan Pickford with a deflected strike from Trossard's cross. There was still time for rampant Arsenal to net again in the 80th minute as Nketiah's cutback was tapped in by Martinelli at the near post. — AFP

Liverpool tame Wolves to climb into EPL top six

LIVERPOOL: Liverpool moved into the Premier League's top six as goals from Virgil van Dijk and Mohamed Salah deepened Wolves' relegation fears with a 2-0 defeat at Anfield. Jurgen Klopp's men were again far from the force of recent seasons, but have now taken 10 points from a possible 12 in their last four league games to remain in the hunt for a top-four finish. The Reds close to within six points of fourth-placed Tottenham with a game in hand over Spurs still to come.

Wolves remain just three points above the relegation zone in 15th as the visitors were made to pay once more for the lack of a goal threat going forward. A fourth meeting between the sides in less than two months bred boredom rather than contempt for the first 45 minutes. Harvey Elliott headed wide the best chance of the opening half and then tested Jose Sa with a drive from outside the box.

One week on from Liverpool's record-equalling home European defeat in a 5-2 humiliation at the hands of Real Madrid, there was far less to get the crowd at Anfield off their feet. But Klopp sees signs of progress in a fourth consecutive Premier League clean sheet. "We had a knock against Real Madrid," said the German coach. "We played a really good first half then we started the second really bad. We looked a lot more stable today, we have to carry that on."

Klopp should at least have more forward options to choose from for the run in with Diogo Jota back available and Luis Diaz close to a return. A foul by Jota on Max Kilman denied Darwin Nunez the open-



LIVERPOOL: Liverpool's Dutch defender Virgil van Dijk (right) heads at goal before scoring from the rebounded save during the English Premier League football match between Liverpool and Wolverhampton on March 1, 2023. — AFP

ing goal midway through the second half as the Uruguayan's strike was ruled out after a VAR check. But Jota did have a hand in breaking the deadlock as he teed up Van Dijk to head into an unguarded net after Sa had parried the Dutch centre-back's first effort. The home side's second goal was much more like the Liverpool of old as Wolves were cut open by a rapid counter attack. Konstantinos Tsimikas played a one-two with Cody Gakpo before the Greek galloped into the Wolves box and picked out Salah to

force the ball in with his thigh for his 20th goal of the season. A rampant Manchester United will pose a far tougher test of Liverpool's road to recovery when the Red Devils visit Anfield on Sunday.

"It's a big game anyway, against a team in form," added Klopp. "We have to be ready, and we will give them a big fight." Wolves boss Julen Lopetegui lamented his side's second half performance as they were unable to match the highs of a 3-0 win over Liverpool when the sides met at Molineux last month. "I think

French Cup winners, did equalise in the 96th minute when a cross by teenage substitute Francois Regis Mughe sailed into the net to the delight of the home fans.

With no extra time before the final, that meant penalties, but it was Annecy, sitting in mid-table in Ligue 2, who prevailed in sudden death when Marseille's Leonardo Balerdi put the crucial kick wide. "That was great! This is why we do this job," said the Annecy coach, Laurent Guyot. "I am pleased for the players, many of whom are new to Ligue 2 and whose careers have been a bit chaotic. We will savor this on the bus home."

Annecy, who were a regional league club a decade ago, now join three top-flight sides in Thursday's draw for the semi-finals, with Lyon, Nantes and Toulouse already having progressed. Holders Nantes remain on course to retain the trophy after beating Lens 2-1 earlier on Wednesday with Andy Delort scoring two penalties for the Canaries. Toulouse outclassed second-division Rodez 6-1, while Lyon beat Ligue 2 side Grenoble 2-1 on Tuesday as they hope to win their first silverware since last lifting the French Cup in 2012. — AFP



MARSEILLE: Annecy's French goalkeeper Thomas Callens dives for the ball during the penalty shootout of the French Cup quarter final football match between Marseille and Annecy on March 1, 2023. — AFP

English Premier League table

LONDON: English Premier League table after Wednesday's matches (played, won, drawn, lost, goals for, goals against, points):

| | | | | | | | |
|----------------|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|
| Arsenal | 25 | 19 | 3 | 3 | 56 | 23 | 60 |
| Man City | 25 | 17 | 4 | 4 | 64 | 25 | 55 |
| Man Utd | 24 | 15 | 4 | 5 | 41 | 28 | 49 |
| Tottenham | 25 | 14 | 3 | 8 | 46 | 35 | 45 |
| Newcastle | 23 | 10 | 11 | 2 | 35 | 15 | 41 |
| Liverpool | 24 | 11 | 6 | 7 | 40 | 28 | 39 |
| Fulham | 25 | 11 | 6 | 8 | 36 | 31 | 39 |
| Brighton | 22 | 10 | 5 | 7 | 39 | 29 | 35 |
| Brentford | 23 | 8 | 11 | 4 | 37 | 30 | 35 |
| Chelsea | 24 | 8 | 7 | 9 | 23 | 25 | 31 |
| Aston Villa | 24 | 9 | 4 | 11 | 30 | 38 | 31 |
| Crystal Palace | 24 | 6 | 9 | 9 | 21 | 31 | 27 |
| Nottm Forest | 24 | 6 | 7 | 11 | 18 | 42 | 25 |
| Leicester | 24 | 7 | 3 | 14 | 36 | 42 | 24 |
| Wolves | 25 | 6 | 6 | 13 | 18 | 35 | 24 |
| West Ham | 24 | 6 | 5 | 13 | 23 | 29 | 23 |
| Leeds | 24 | 5 | 7 | 12 | 29 | 39 | 22 |
| Everton | 25 | 5 | 6 | 14 | 17 | 36 | 21 |
| Bournemouth | 24 | 5 | 6 | 13 | 22 | 48 | 21 |
| Southampton | 24 | 5 | 3 | 16 | 19 | 41 | 18 |

Note:

Top four qualify for Champions League; team in fifth qualifies for the Europa League; sixth-placed team qualifies for the Europa Conference League; bottom three are relegated. — AFP

that we did not play in the game plan we had in our head. In the first half much better, in the second we did not keep the ball. It was a shame, but they deserved to win," said Lopetegui. "Today is not easy for me to keep positive thinking, maybe in a few days." — AFP

Marseille dumped out of French Cup

PARIS: Marseille were dumped out of the French Cup in the quarter-finals in sensational fashion on Wednesday as the tournament favorites lost 7-6 on penalties at home to second-division outsiders Annecy after a 2-2 draw at the Velodrome. OM were strongly fancied to go all the way and win the competition after beating Paris Saint-Germain in the previous round, but instead they went out against opponents who had never previously reached the quarter-finals.

Jordan Veretout had Marseille in front at half-time after opening the scoring on his 30th birthday, but Annecy equalised early in the second half through young Ivorian striker Moise Sahi. Defender Kevin Mouanga then headed Annecy in front, and the home side squandered a chance to equalize when Alexis Sanchez had a penalty saved, a spot-kick that had been awarded for handball following a VAR check. Yet Marseille, the 10-time

Classifieds

Change of Name

I have changed my name from (old name) SHAB HABIB IRFAN HABIB AMAR to (new name) IRFAN HABIB AMAR BINSHAHAB. (C#3174) — 1-03-2023

Automated enquiry about the
Civil ID card is 1889988

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Hospitals & Clinics

| | |
|---------------------------|------------|
| Sabah Hospital | 24812000 |
| Amiri Hospital | 22450005 |
| Maternity Hospital | 24843100 |
| Mubarak Al-Kabir Hospital | 25312700 |
| Chest Hospital | 24849400 |
| Farwaniya Hospital | 24892010 |
| Adan Hospital | 23940620 |
| Ibn Sina Hospital | 24840300 |
| Al-Razi Hospital | 24846000 |
| Physiotherapy Hospital | 24874330/9 |

Clinics

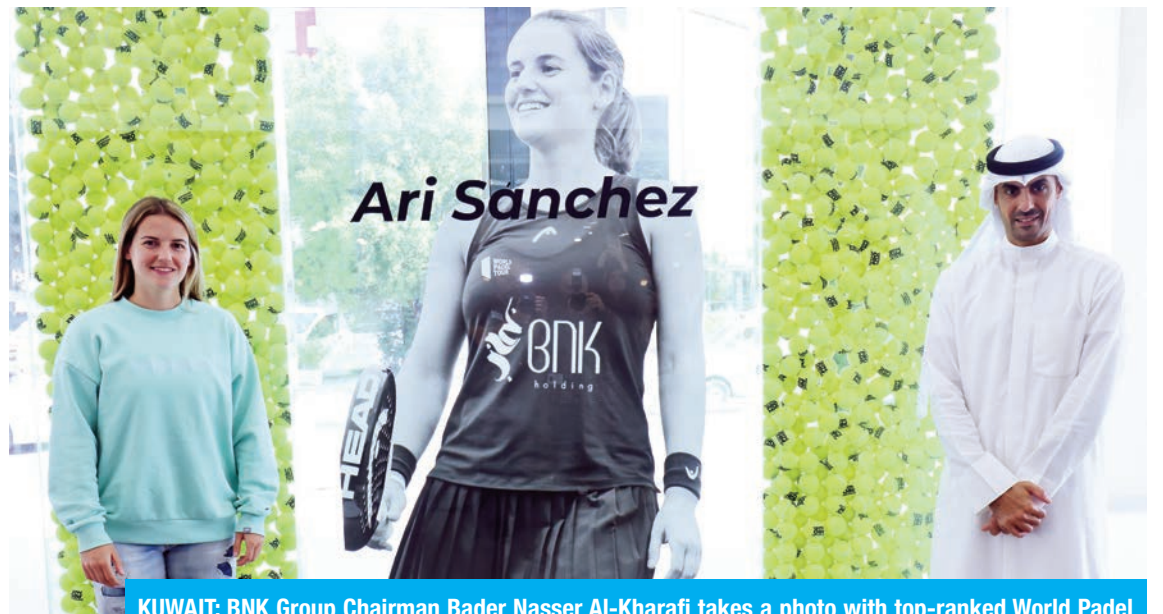
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| Kaizen center | 25716707 |
| Rawda | 22517733 |
| Adaliya | 22517144 |
| Khaldiya | 24848075 |
| Kaifan | 24849807 |
| Shamiya | 24848913 |
| Shuwaikh | 24814507 |
| Abdullah Salem | 22549134 |

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|---------------------|----------|
| Nuzha | 22526804 |
| Industrial Shuwaikh | 24814764 |
| Qadsiya | 22515088 |
| Dasmah | 22532265 |
| Bneid Al-Gar | 22531908 |
| Shaab | 22518752 |
| Qibla | 22459381 |
| Ayoun Al-Qibla | 22451082 |
| Mirgab | 22456536 |
| Sharq | 22465401 |
| Salmiya | 25746401 |

BNK Group signs sponsorship deal with padel player Sanchez



Bader Al-Kharafi signs the contract of the sponsorship with Ari Sanchez.



KUWAIT: BNK Group Chairman Bader Nasser Al-Kharafi takes a photo with top-ranked World Padel Tour (WPT) female player Ari Sanchez after signing the agreement.

By Faten Omar

KUWAIT: BNK Group held a signing ceremony on Thursday to officially announce its sponsorship of international padel player Ari Sanchez at Volvo Studio. After the official signing agreement between BNK Holding and Sanchez, BNK Group Chairman Bader Nasser Al-Kharafi told Kuwait Times that the top-ranked World Padel Tour (WPT) female player Sanchez will represent Kuwait and BNK in international tournaments.

"We loved to have a female element representing us at world padel tournaments, and Sanchez is considered one of the best players, not only because she is one of the highest ranked, but also because of her morals and how she can deal with people. She is in harmony with the BNK brand, and for this reason, we were keen to have her represent us at global tournaments," he said. Kharafi indicated that BNK group is satisfied with padel world number one Juan Lebron and Ari Sanchez for this season, revealing BNK will be signing other players in the near future.

Ashraf Tamim, General Manager at BNK Automotive and BNK Motion, said BNK has always adopted the principle of gender equality. "Like we signed a contract with Lebron as the top WPT men's player, we are signing Sanchez in the women's category," he said. He pointed out that with Sanchez joining BNK, they will have the two top players in the world in padel, which is considered an important sport in Kuwait, and with their joining, the BNK name will be raised at all tournaments.

Sanchez expressed her joy to join BNK Group. "I will work hard to make BNK proud with this partnership," she said, adding she will strive for years to



Bader Al-Kharafi (third right) takes a group photo with Volvo team.

remain on top of the WPT rankings. On her second visit to Kuwait, Sanchez said she is excited to return, adding she enjoyed the country and plans to come many more times in the future.

Regarding the padel scene in Kuwait, she said: "I have played with different local padel players, and was impressed with the level of Kuwaiti youth. The Kuwaiti padel scene will keep growing in popularity

on a global scale." Sanchez, a young Spanish padel player, is one of the best players on the World Padel Tour circuit. The year 2022 was one of her best, as she won several padel tournaments.



Ari Sanchez signs autographs for BNK.



Ari Sanchez signs T-shirts for fans at Volvo studio.



Bader Al-Kharafi (center) poses for a group photo with BNK team. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat