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RAMADAN TIMINGS

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Isha	19:23



Assembly panels finalizing election commission law

Legislation aims to guarantee free, fair and fully transparent polls

Marking Ramadan at Camp Arifjan



KUWAIT: Muslim US army soldiers perform Maghrib prayers led by Kuwaiti cleric Mohammad Al-Naqwi at the end of the day's fast during the holy month of Ramadan at a chapel tent at Camp Arifjan on March 28, 2023. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat (See Page 3)

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: The National Assembly's legal and legislative committee on Wednesday discussed in a meeting a draft law calling to establish an independent higher election commission to oversee parliamentary polls. Rapporteur of the panel MP Hisham Al-Saleh, a member of the court-reinstated Assembly, said the committee will vote on the draft law in a meeting on Sunday.

He said the draft legislation states that the commission board will comprise of seven representatives from each of the judicial, legislative and executive authorities, in addition to representatives from civil societies. The bill places controls on election campaigns and limits spending on such campaigns. It also has a set of controls to ensure free and fair elections.

The legal committee only ensures that the draft law is in line with the constitution and existing laws. The bill will be given final approval by the interior and defense

committee. A number of MPs from the reinstated 2020 Assembly have alleged that the Sept 2022 elections witnessed wide-ranging rigging and MP Obaid Al-Wasmi has called for an investigation.

Speaker Marzuq Al-Ghanem last week called for fresh and fair elections as a way out of the ongoing political crisis in the country. But he insisted that any elections must be held only after establishing a high election commission to oversee the polls.

Head of the Assembly's interior and defense committee MP Saadoun Hammad on Wednesday called on the legal committee to refer the election commission draft law to his committee to study it. Hammad said that the committee wants to ensure that the legislation will guarantee free, fair and fully transparent elections. He said the law will ensure that candidates will have representatives at election centers and during the counting of votes, and that they will have complete access to monitor the election process.

KIA sells €1.4bn Mercedes stake

KUWAIT: Kuwait Investment Authority, the country's sovereign wealth fund, has sold shares worth about €1.4 billion (\$1.5 billion) in Mercedes-Benz Group AG — roughly a quarter of its stake — after

the carmaker's stock almost quadrupled over the last three years. KIA will own around 53 million shares after the share placement of about 20 million shares, which is part of an effort to diversify its portfolio, according to a statement.

The stake sale, which represented about 1.9 percent of Mercedes' share capital, was priced at €69.27, according to the terms seen by Bloomberg. The price was a 3.6 percent discount to the

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RAMADAN KAREEM

Benefits of reconciliation

By Yasmeem Mohammad Salim

A man might say, "This guy has betrayed me, insulted me and harmed me so many times, I'm furious. I'll get back at him and make him beg for mercy." That right there is an example of a vengeful person, holding a grudge against someone. A grudge is defined by the Oxford Dictionary as "a persistent feeling of ill will or resentment resulting from a past insult or injury".

Many of us are prone to bearing a grudge against each other for different reasons. However, in doing so, we would never end up harming ourselves because hatred and resentment lead to both physical and mental destruction therefore, letting go of a grudge is the best for your health. This is proven by both science and religion.

By seeking revenge and having malicious thoughts, a man will only inflict long-term grief and torment on himself. This in return, will reflect negatively on his health. According to one study, long-term resentment can lead to cognitive decline in adults. Another study shows that holding a grudge can cause various mental disorders, namely, anger, anxiety, depression, and mood swings and it can get as bad as, self-harm or suicide. Living with all these negative emotions can be stressful and exhausting.

Regrettably, mental illnesses are not the only outcome of resentment. Hatred and resentment can also have detrimental physical effects on the human body. It has been proven that harbouring grudges and stressful emotions can cause serious symptoms that include heart diseases, digestive issues, insomnia as well as a weak immune system.

Continued on Page 6

Big facelift as Bahrain bids to join Gulf boom

MANAMA: With a multibillion-dollar economic revamp in full swing, Bahrain is vying to keep pace with its Gulf neighbors after more than a decade beset by political unrest. It's a difficult path for the island nation that is a neighbor to gas-rich Qatar and connected by a causeway to Saudi Arabia, a key ally and the world's biggest oil exporter. The United Arab Emirates, another regional powerhouse with well-developed trade, tourism and financial industries alongside its large oil sector, is just a short flight away.

Bahrain has witnessed turbulence since the crushing of an uprising in 2011 but has since begun a modernizing facelift, instigating economic and fiscal reforms. Extensive land reclamations are literally changing the shape of the country, while a host of gleaming new buildings dot the skyline and cranes work above nascent housing developments.

The small, non-OPEC oil producer, is seeking to decrease its reliance on its oil sector which accounts for 80 percent of revenues, much of that from refining. "The principles are clear: We want to grow. We want to grow faster than the world," Khalid Ibrahim Humaidan, head of the government's Economic Development Board, told reporters this month in Manama, the capital.

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MANAMA: Workers work on the construction site of the Golden Gate towers at Bahrain Bay on March 25, 2023. — AFP

Saudi moves in on aviation market in Gulf

RIYADH: Undeterred by a crowded Gulf market, Saudi Arabia is going all in on an aggressive aviation expansion, with a massive jet order and the launch of a new national carrier. The project aligns with a bid to remake the once closed-off kingdom as a business and tourism

magnet, but analysts say that even with official backing, its path to success is complicated.

This month Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman unveiled Riyadh Air, the new airline which is intended to transform the capital into "a gateway to the world", according to state media. Two days later, officials said Riyadh Air and Saudia, the kingdom's existing flag-carrier based in Jeddah, would purchase 78 Boeing 787 Dreamliner jets.

The deal, which the White House valued at "nearly \$37 billion" with options for up to 121 planes, constitutes the fifth largest by commercial value in Boeing's history. Riyadh Air's chief executive, Tony Douglas,

told AFP that the airline would serve the international, regional and domestic markets — putting it in direct competition with Gulf heavyweights Emirates and Qatar Airways. That raises hard questions about how Riyadh Air will grab market share, especially at a time when long-haul non-stop flights that avoid the Middle East altogether are on the rise, said independent aviation analyst Alex Macheras. "Replicating and then building on the successful business models of Gulf airline neighbors is going to be tricky in a crowded market where passengers are spoilt for choice," Macheras said. Saudia, also known as Saudi Arabian Airlines, was

Continued on Page 6

One of biggest black holes ever recorded found

PARIS: One of the largest black holes ever recorded has been discovered using a new technique that could spot thousands more of the insatiable celestial monsters in the coming years, according to astronomers. The ultramassive black hole, one of just four

ever observed, is more than 30 billion times the mass of the Sun, a new study said.

It is the first black hole ever observed using a phenomenon called gravitational lensing, in which light travelling towards us from a distant galaxy appears to magnify and bend inwards, giving away the presence of a dark giant. James Nightingale, an astronomer at the UK's Durham University and the study's lead author, told AFP the process was "similar to shining light through the base of a wine glass".

He said it was "very fortuitous" that the light of a galaxy in the distant universe travelled extremely

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An artist's impression of a black hole in the Milky Way galaxy, which distorts light passing near it, creating a phenomenon known as "gravitational lensing". — AFP



Local



Al Khashti and Al Ansari with Zain and Food Bank teams.



Zain serves fasting individuals throughout the Holy Month.

Zain distributes nearly 40,000 iftar meals throughout Holy Month

Company visited Mubarakia Market to distribute meals with Kuwait Food Bank

KUWAIT: Zain, Kuwait's leading digital service provider, announces the distribution of nearly 40,000 iftar meals throughout the Holy Month as part of its Ramadan social campaign. The company provides the meals daily at its iftar hall in Ardiya, as well as across the nation via trucks in collaboration with its strategic partner, the Kuwait Food Bank. Zain recently visited Mubarakia Market at the heart of Kuwait City to distribute Iftar meals.

The visit was attended by Chief Corporate Affairs and Relations Officer Waleed Al Khashti, Vice Chair-

man of the Kuwait Food Bank Meshal Al Ansari, as well as Zain and Food Bank teams and volunteers. Zain's Iftar initiative, which comes back in its 16th year, is one of the main pillars of the company's Ramadan campaign, springing from its Corporate Sustainability and Social Responsibility Strategy. Zain is proud to be one of the local private sector's leading companies that exert huge charitable and volunteer efforts during the Holy Month.

Zain offers the daily iftar meals to fasting individuals at its hall in Ardiya, as well as via special trucks

that deliver the meals daily across the country in strategic partnership with the Kuwait Food Bank. Trucks visit the most populated areas to secure the daily Iftar meal for workers, underprivileged individuals, families, and others who are in most need during Ramadan.

This annual initiative is considered a main pillar of Zain's comprehensive Corporate Sustainability and Social Responsibility (CSSR) campaign during the Holy Month of Ramadan. The Iftar meals distribution is supervised by Zain's team as part of its commit-

ment to present an added value to the community.

This initiative is part of a series of programs the company is organizing throughout the Holy Month of Ramadan with the aim of having a deep positive impact on the community's various segments, especially the most vulnerable ones. The company's solid CSSR strategy primarily focuses on the wellbeing of the entire nation. For this reason, the company has maintained its support of numerous initiatives that spread awareness and help make a difference to people's everyday lives.



ALGIERS: Algerian parliament launched the Algerian-Kuwaiti parliamentary friendship group to bolster legislative ties between the two countries and share expertise on all levels. — KUNA photos

Algeria launches Kuwaiti-Algerian parliamentary group

ALGIERS: Algeria's parliament has launched the Algerian-Kuwaiti parliamentary friendship group to bolster legislative ties between the two countries and share expertise on all levels. Delivering a speech on this occasion, deputy speaker of Algeria's National People's Assembly Ammari Abdullah said that the relations between the two countries trace back to the phase of national struggle against colonialism, referring to Kuwait's efforts to support the Algerian revolution against French colonialism.

Political and economic cooperation between the two sides continued after the independence in order to achieve social and economic development, he noted. He elaborated that the bilateral ties are based on cooperation, friendship and mutual respect as well as sharing similar views on several regional and inter-

national issues. Abdullah said that the two countries look forward to building distinguished partnerships, mainly after the official visit paid by President Abdelmadjid Tebboune to Kuwait last February.

He extolled distinguished parliamentary ties between the two countries enhanced by varied activities like official visits, training courses and talks between heads of the two legislative bodies in several arenas. Meanwhile, Khaled Al-Yoha, Acting Charge d'Affaires at Kuwait Embassy in Algeria, termed the Kuwait-Algerian ties as 'sisterly strong and historical'. Launching the parliamentary group aims at strengthening ties between Kuwait and Algeria, he stressed. — KUNA



Deputy speaker of Algeria's National People's Assembly Ammari Abdullah

FM receives call from US Secretary of State

KUWAIT: Foreign Minister Sheikh Salem Abdullah Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received a phone call on Tuesday from US Secretary of State Anthony Blinken. Blinken conveyed, at the beginning of the call, the greetings and blessings of the US political leadership to Kuwait, its leadership, government and people, and sincere congratulations on the advent of the holy month of Ramadan, expressing his sincere wishes for further development and prosperity for the historical relations between the two nations.

During the call, the two sides discussed bilateral relations, stressing on the depth and distinction of these relations and their aspiration for the State of Kuwait to host the sixth round of the strategic dialogue between the two countries during the third quarter of this year in support and strengthening of the close historical partnership that binds the two countries.

They also discussed the recent developments on the regional and international arenas and the frameworks for joint coordination between the two countries in this regard. A number of issues in the region were discussed, and an emphasis on commitment and cooperation towards maintaining the security of the region and enhancing its stability. — KUNA



Foreign Minister Sheikh Salem Abdullah Al-Jaber Al-Sabah



US Secretary of State Anthony Blinken

Foreign Ministry condemns Al-Aqsa Mosque's storming

KUWAIT: Kuwait's Foreign Ministry condemned the storming of Al-Aqsa Mosque's courtyard by settlers from the Zionist entity under protection of occupation forces. "The recurrence of these illegal practices is provocative to Muslims and a violation to international law and legitimacy," the ministry said in a statement Wednesday. It urged an action from the international community to stop the Zionist entity's repeated violations and provide full protection to the Palestinian people and Muslim holy sites.

The Arab Parliament on Wednesday affirmed its unwavering support for the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people. The parliament, marking the 47th anniversary of the Land Day, renewed in

a statement solidarity with the Palestinian people in defending their territories, history, sanctities and national identity.

It underscored the need for attaining peace according to UN resolutions and the Arab Peace Initiative that envisages establishing an independent Palestinian state with East Jerusalem as its capital. Marking Land Day this year coincided with dangerous escalation against the Palestinian people in the West Bank and Jerusalem. This has been the situation since formation of a radical rightwing government early this year. The right-wing Zionist government has pressed ahead with coercive relocation of the Palestinian people.

Moreover, there has been acceleration of settlements' construction, further lands misappropriation amid unprecedented attacks by settlers' militias, it said, also alluding to recurring desecration of Al-Aqsa Mosque. The Arab Parliament urged the international community to take serious action for ending the occupation, establishing the Palestinian state and protecting the Palestinian people. — KUNA

129 camps removed

KUWAIT: The Department of Sanitation in Jahra and Ahmadi governorates organized campaigns that resulted in the removal of 129 camps in the northern

and southern regions, Kuwait Municipality said on Wednesday. The Municipality confirmed in a press release, the continuation of field campaigns launched by the spring camps committee in Jahra and Ahmadi governorates to remove the camps which coincide with the end of the camping season. — KUNA



5,400 people from Kuwait apply for asylum abroad

Many asylum seekers prefer Europe

By Faten Omar

KUWAIT: A report conducted by Arabian Gulf Center for Studies and Research (CSRGULF) – the first think tank in Kuwait – revealed 5,400 people residing in Kuwait have applied for asylum since 2018 to foreign countries, most notably the United Kingdom, Canada, United States and European countries such as France, Germany and Scandinavian countries, while Iraq and the United Arab Emirates were the top Arab destinations.

The report mentioned the percentage of Kuwaiti citizens out of the total asylum seekers has not been determined, but it is unlikely to be a large number, as most of those seeking asylum are non-Kuwaitis, specifically stateless residents known as bedoons.

Some of them are motivated by the idea of emigration out of desperation to wait for solutions and out of the desire to obtain documents and permanent residence in other countries that grant basic rights.

It is estimated that about half of those seeking asylum from Kuwait prefer European destinations, as the UK alone accounted for more than a third of the applications. However, more than half of these requests are usually rejected, especially by European authorities, unlike Canada and UK, which are more favorable towards humanitarian cases related to people who are exposed to risks and restrictions in expressing freedoms and opinions, or those who do not enjoy full residence rights or are subject to abuse or threats.

In general, the number of asylum seekers from Kuwait decreased to around 565 people in 2022

compared to 2018, when it reached about 1,359. Despite the significant decrease in demand for asylum in 2022, Kuwait remains the top in the Gulf in exporting "refugees".

Within a classification prepared by CSRGULF on trends in seeking asylum from Arab countries to Europe in 2022, based on European statistics, residents of Kuwait ranked 16th in the ranking of the most Arabs seeking asylum, as about 254 people applied for asylum to the European continent in 2022, and 257 in 2020. The number of asylum seekers decreased significantly compared to 2019, when around 790 applicants sought asylum from Kuwait to Europe.

In recent years, asylum applications have been received from people from Ethiopia, Eritrea, Pakistan, Afghanistan and Lebanon residing in Kuwait

with various justifications. However, Syrians and Yemenis are considered among the most fortunate non-Kuwaiti nationalities residing in the country in obtaining asylum, although Kuwait had exempted some Syrian and Yemeni residents from deportation due to the war in their countries of origin. These exemptions stopped in 2018.

In 2021, about 1,029 people from Kuwait applied for asylum, according to data from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, which is approximately 0.024% of the entire population of the country. The most common asylum destinations were the United Kingdom, France and Austria. Overall, 61 percent of asylum applications were rejected, but the most fortunate refugees chose destinations such as Canada and Luxembourg.



KUWAIT: Deputy Foreign Minister, Ambassador Mansour Al-Otaibi on Wednesday received the outgoing Brazilian Ambassador to Kuwait Francisco Mauro Brasil de Holanda. The deputy foreign minister, during the meeting, lauded the envoy's role in cementing the Kuwaiti-Brazilian relations and expressed good wishes for the outgoing chief diplomat. — KUNA

Minister underscores pharmacists' role in the health system

KUWAIT: The Minister of Health Dr Ahmed Al-Awadi said that pharmacists, through their competencies, are considered key players in the treatment chain and play a key and important role in the health system. The minister of health stressed in his speech during a Ramadan lunch held by the Kuwaiti Pharmacists Association on Tuesday, the role played by workers in the pharmacy sector, indicating that there are ministerial committees dedicated to this sector and this is the greatest evidence of its importance.

He called on those working in this field, whether in the ministry or in the private sector, to submit proposals that can contribute to the issuance of decisions and laws that promote integration between the government and private sectors. And the value of the outstanding efforts of pharmacists in hospitals and centers. He noted the challenges they face in checking medicines, dispensing and many of the tasks they perform.

The director of the medical warehouses department at the Ministry of Health Dr Adel Al-Salem, said that the ministry is concerned with drug pricing and maintaining non-manipulation of prices, pointing out that prices are reviewed periodically within specific controls with care to reduce prices for many drugs.

Al-Salem pointed out that prices in Kuwait are

close to those in the Gulf countries, and even that some medicines in Kuwait may have lower prices than neighboring countries, pointing out that the ministry is always keen to provide various types of medicines and that the issue of shortage of some types. It is not limited to Kuwait only, but it is a global issue and has many reasons, including the lack of availability of raw materials, increased prices and means of transportation.

He pointed out that the ministry is constantly working to provide medicines, but there are things that may be beyond the will, "but the strategic stock is safe and reassuring, and we have been able to solve about 70 percent of the shortage problem in the past period". On a related note, Dr Al-Salem said that the law on practicing the profession of Pharmacy has reached the final draft stage and will be submitted within the next few days to the undersecretary of the ministry to take the necessary measures.

The president of the association Dr Abdullah Al-Enezi, said that the association continues its projects which is aimed at enhancing the status of the pharmacy profession and pharmacists as they work hard and sincerely to improve the level of distinguished pharmacy performance typical within the evolving health system. He pointed out that there are boundless ambitions to achieve.

He expressed pride and appreciation for the existing positive cooperation and permanent understanding of the Ministry of Health, headed by the minister, undersecretary and assistant undersecretaries - stressing the keenness to push this cooperation in order to benefit the pharmaceutical services of Kuwait, its people and residents. — KUNA

Sheikha Al-Zain Al-Sabah visits Camp Arifjan

KUWAIT: Kuwaiti Ambassador to the United States Sheikha Al-Zain Al-Sabah visited Camp Arifjan accompanied by US Charge d'Affaires James Holtsnider. "Had a great tour of Camp Arifjan today with Sheikha Al-Zain, the newly appointed Kuwait Ambassador to US. Looking forward to further advancement of the longstanding partnership between our two countries," Holtsnider tweeted.



Kuwait partakes in Berlin dialogue on energy transition

BERLIN: Kuwait is partaking in the ninth edition of the Berlin Energy Transition Dialogue Conference that addresses plans and methods for cutting usage of fossil fuel in favor of renewable energy resources. Najib Al-Badr, Kuwait Ambassador to Germany and head of the Kuwaiti delegation partaking in the convention that kicked off late on Tuesday and would end later on Wednesday, said in remarks to KUNA that the Kuwaiti delegation took part in debates on various issues such as the quest for a safe environment.

Other topics were addressed in the talks namely solutions for climatic issues, establishing energy partnerships and the green hydrogen economy, ambassador Al-Badr said. He touched on the Kuwaiti-German cooperation namely participation of German companies and scientific institu-



Kuwait's ambassador to Germany Najib Al-Badr

tions in green energy ventures, in line with Kuwait vision 2035, citing in particular Al-Shagaya solar energy project.

He expressed desire to broaden the cooperation with Berlin at this level and affirmed the State of Kuwait's keenness on staying abreast of international efforts regarding the climatic changes and its repercussions on mankind. The conference has lured delegations from more than 130 countries, business leaders, scientists, representatives of international organizations and NGOs. — KUNA

Muslim US soldiers break their fast at Camp Arifjan



KUWAIT: Photos show Muslim US army soldiers breaking their fast and performing the Maghreb prayer at the end of the day's fast during the holy month of Ramadan at the US Camp Arifjan, about 60 kilometers south of Kuwait City, on March 28, 2023. Kuwaiti cleric Mohammad Al-Naqwi gave a sermon before US army soldiers at the event. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat

News in Brief

Lottery to be held for military academies

KUWAIT: The Saad Al-Abdullah Academy for Security Sciences announced that a public lottery will be held for applicants to join the program for students looking to specialize. Eligible students must hold a university degree. This will be the thirty-first batch to be enrolled in the program. The lottery will be carried out on Tuesday, April 4 in two sessions: a morning session for science majors and an evening session for literary majors. Applicants will be notified about the lottery through the "Sahel" app, according to a press release from the General Directorate of Security Relations and Media, the media arm of the Ministry of Interior. The academy had opened registration for the course dedicated to non-commissioned officers and individuals on March 26, following orders from Deputy First Prime Minister and Minister of Interior Sheikh Talal Khalid Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah. The course is meant to encourage Kuwaiti youth to enroll in the military and support the security department of the Ministry of Interior with needed personnel. In other news, Ali Al-Sabah Military Academy announced that a lottery will be held for batch 23 applicants on April 11. Eligible applicants must hold university degrees. The academy is also holding the lottery over two periods: a morning session for science majors and an evening session for literary majors. Applicants will be notified of the lottery through email and the Mobile ID app. —KUNA

Unstable weather expected in Ramadan

KUWAIT: The unstable weather that the country is currently witnessing can be attributed to the transition in and overlap of seasons, said Al-Ujairi Scientific Center Wednesday. The change of seasons, added the center, results in high variable winds, thunderstorms and hail. "The periods of 'Sabq Al-Sarayat' and 'Al-Sarayat' that we are experiencing now result from an overlap between 'Al-Hamim' season, which ends on April 2, followed by the 'Thar'aan' season. This results in continuously changing weather conditions," the center said in a statement. "Al-Thar'aan season is characterized by the Sarayat. During this period, the sun is at an angle which allows it to heat the soil directly without heating the air. This increases the speed of air currents. Hot air then replaces cold air, causing dust." Al-Thar'aan is also known for continuous changes in the speed and direction of wind, which makes it more difficult to predict weather conditions during the season. Sharp differences in temperature are also a hallmark of the season. Unstable weather conditions due to the season are expected throughout the second half of Ramadan, said the center. —KUNA

Renowned Kuwaiti playwright premieres play at Tunisian festival

Play opens doors for collaboration with other Arab artistes

KUWAIT: Kuwaiti director and playwright Sulayman Al-Bassam presented Tuesday his new play "silence", which talks about the Beirut port explosion. The script relies on a mix of music and sounds to relay the extent of the catastrophe to the audience. The show was part of a workshop held by Bassam in Tunisia at the Tunisia World Theater festival, which kicked off Monday and will go on until April 4.

"The play opens new doors for using Arabic combinations to create a contemporary theatrical language," Bassam told KUNA.

A well-known Arab modern theater director and playwright, Bassam's work explores themes of identity, war and individual sovereignty. According to a biography published on his website, he often sets his work against the backdrop of civilizational overlap and tension between the Arab-Islamic world and the West.

Bassam often collaborates with multinational creative teams and his newest play is not an exception. "Silence" was a fruit of the cooperation between artists in the Tunisian theater scene and Bassam's independent Kuwaiti theater group "SABAB theatre".

"The cooperation creates a window of opportunity

for more collaboration in the Arab theater scene. It also strengthens partnerships in the field, especially that playwrights and artists who work in theater across the Arab world are somewhat isolated," he said.

Bassam described the script of his new play as "poetic and political", given that it addresses the August 2022 Beirut port explosion. The massive blast ripped through Lebanon's capital, killing 218 people, injuring 7,000 and leaving 300,000 displaced.

Considered one of the biggest non-nuclear explosions to have been recorded, the Beirut explosion damaged 77,000 apartments and caused an estimated \$3.8 to \$4.6 billion in material damage.

In his play, Bassam tries to approach various forms of resistance in the face of unprecedented brutality. He borrows the personality of the thinker, the artist and the regular Joe who chooses absolute silence as a sovereign form of expression.

The team behind "silence" is made up of a diverse group of artistes, including the Syrian-French actress Hala Omran, members of "Team Dragon", musicians Ali Hout and Abdel-Ridha Kobeissi from Lebanon and Tunisian production director Oussama Jamaï. —KUNA



TUNISIA: Kuwaiti playwright and director Sulayman Al-Bassam gives a workshop at the festival. — KUNA



KUWAIT: Thirty-five students from five private schools pose for a picture after competing in EcoQuest to develop innovative approaches that tackle climate change.

Students compete for sustainability at LAPA's EcoQuest

KUWAIT: The LOYAC Academy of Performing Arts (LAPA) has held the "EcoQuest" contest for the fifth time, in accordance with its mission to lead environmental efficiency at the Kuwait and regional level. Thirty-five students from five private schools participated in a full-day competition to develop innovative approaches that contribute to preserving natural resources and protecting the eco-sys-

tem, particularly as the world faces many challenges caused by climate change. The competition was sponsored by Kout Food Group in partnership with LOYAC and Shaheed Park with support from Klue.

The day began with an awareness session, followed by a farming activity, during which students participated in digging and planting. It also included a treasure hunt game, where students worked on solving 10 puzzles distributed across the park. Each participating school was represented by a team of seven members. Theatrical performances were presented by LAPA teachers in order to entertain students and urge them to think and innovate.

Students competed for points by solving puzzles, participating in activities or through getting

the required badges. Winners must collect all the badges during the least possible time. Each school presented an environmental project related to the challenges of climate change in Kuwait, the scarce water resources and the increased desertification rates resulting from the climate crisis. The English Academy (TEA) won first place, Lycee Francais Koweit came in second place and The American School of Kuwait was third.

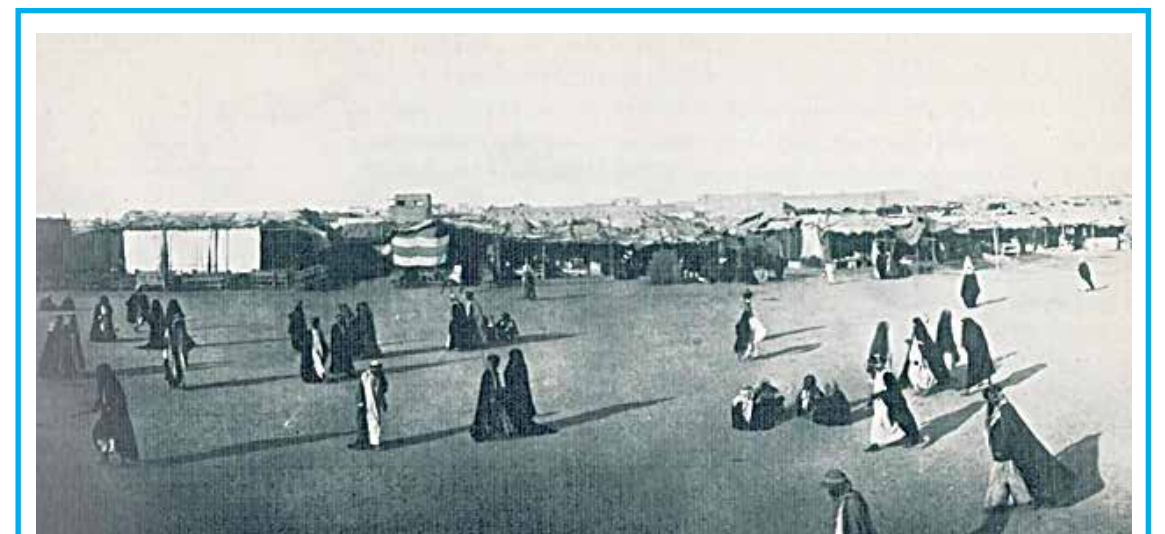
Chairperson of LAPA Fareah Al-Saqqaq said the "EcoQuest" competition is important because it helps students understand the challenges and risks resulting from climate change and develop their skills in presenting serious solutions that contribute to protecting Kuwait's environment and ensuring a better future for them and upcoming generations.



Students participate in a farming activity as part of the competition.



The winning team representing the The English Academy (TEA) pose for a photo after the contest.



KUWAIT: People walk around old Kuwait in the early 1900s. (Source: 'Kuwait' by Ralph Shaw, London, 1976. Prepared by: Mahmoud Zakaria Abu Al-Ella, researcher in heritage at the Ministry of Information.)



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Philippine fishermen struggle as oil spill keeps them ashore

Zionist parties discuss justice reforms after Netanyahu U-turn

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VIENNA: Handout photo made available by the IAEA shows Rafael Grossi (C), Director General of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) posing for a photo with senior staff members before leaving on a trip to Ukraine from Vienna International airport. — AFP

IAEA chief arrives at Ukraine nuke plant

Europe's largest atomic facility currently controlled by Russian forces

KYIV: The UN atomic watchdog chief arrived Wednesday at Ukraine's Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant in a rare visit to Europe's largest atomic facility currently controlled by Russian forces. There are persistent fears over the safety of the nuclear plant in the southern Zaporizhzhia region, where there has been frequent shelling since Russian troops invaded last year. The Ukrainian nuclear power operator Energoatom and Russian news agencies announced on social media that the International Atomic Energy Agency's Rafael Grossi had arrived with his delegation.

Energoatom distributed footage of a convoy of civilian and military vehicles marked with the letter Z, a symbol emblazoned on Russian military hardware in Ukraine. "Raphael Grossi plans to see how the situation at the ZNPP has changed, speak with the nuclear engineers at the plant, and act as a guarantor of the rotation of members of the IAEA permanent mission," it said on social media.

This is Grossi's second visit to Zaporizhzhia since Russia invaded Ukraine last February and the aim of the visit is to "assess first-hand the serious nuclear

safety and security situation at the facility," the IAEA said. The agency has had a team of experts inside the plant since September 2022, but Grossi has said the situation "is still precarious".

'Anything can happen'

Earlier this week, he met with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, who said it was not possible to restore safety at the plant with Russia in control. "Without the immediate withdrawal of Russian troops and personnel from the Zaporizhzhia nuclear plant and adjacent territory, any initiatives to restore nuclear safety and security are doomed to failure," Zelensky told Grossi.

Renat Karchaa, an advisor to Russia's Rosenergoatom, which runs the facility, said Wednesday ahead of the visit that it would unlikely bring about any major breakthroughs. "We are far from having any illusions that Grossi's visit will dramatically change anything. For us, this is an ordinary working event," he was cited as saying by Russian news agencies.

"Of course anything can happen," he added. The plant needs reliable electricity supply to ensure es-

sential nuclear safety and security functions. But it has suffered repeated electricity outages during the war, causing alarm in the IAEA and the international community. The Russian invasion has caused devastation across swathes of the country, and despite more than 13 months of gruelling battles, Ukraine's top diplomat on Tuesday struck a defiant tone.

"Russia has to withdraw from every square meter of Ukrainian territory," Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba said in a virtual session ahead of the Summit for Democracy, which US President Joe Biden will formally kick off on Wednesday. "There should be no misinterpretation of what the word withdrawal implies."

'Crime of aggression'

In Ukraine's eastern Donetsk region, fighting in recent months has been concentrated on the eastern city of Bakhmut, with Kyiv saying it is holding out in the urban hub to exhaust Russian troops. The key military objective of Russia's invasion is the complete capture of Donetsk, which it already claimed to have annexed last year even as fighting there is ongoing.

Moscow said Tuesday it had for the first time downed a long-range rocket supplied by the United States to Ukraine. These devices have a range of up to 150 kilometres (93 miles), which could threaten Russian positions and supply depots far behind the front lines. Russian authorities said Wednesday that Ukrainian forces had used US-supplied HIMARS systems to strike Melitopol in the Zaporizhzhia region. The city controlled by Moscow lies some 65 kilometres from the frontline and analysts have speculated it could be a target for a highly-anticipated Ukrainian counter offensive.

Since the invasion, more than 850 health facilities in Ukraine have been attacked, according to the World Health Organization—creating a massive gap in health and emergency services. A Norway and EU-backed project is conducting medical evacuation flights, carrying Ukraine's war wounded to hospitals across Europe. Vladyslav Shakhov, who had to leave Ukraine on a medical flight for treatment after he was hit by shrapnel, said he was "not happy about leaving my country". "I hope they will get me back on my feet quickly so I can get back," the 24-year-old said. — AFP



NASHVILLE: People pay their respects at a makeshift memorial for victims at the Covenant School building at the Covenant Presbyterian Church following a shooting, in Nashville, Tennessee. — AFP

Nashville school shooter hid seven firearms in house

NASHVILLE: The 28-year-old who shot dead six people at an elementary school in Nashville was able to buy and conceal multiple weapons in the family home despite evidence of mental health issues, police said Tuesday. Two nine-year-old girls, a nine-year-old boy, two teachers and a school custodian died in the Monday attack, which recharged the bitter debate over gun rights in the United States. Parents with their children joined a steady stream of mourners in front of a makeshift memorial to the victims of the massacre at the Covenant School in Nashville as the sun set Tuesday, many of them in tears.

"It's just unimaginable to think that these beautiful kids are not going to come home again," Lisbeth Melgar, who brought her two children to see the memorial, told AFP as she gently tucked her daughter's hair behind her ear. Earlier, Nashville police chief John Drake told reporters that the shooter, Audrey Hale, had been receiving treatment for an "emotional disorder," and that Hale's parents believed their child—who lived at home with them—had bought and later resold a single gun.

But Hale, who was killed during the attack, was armed with two assault rifles and a handgun upon entering the small Christian academy of about 200 students, which the shooter had once attended as a pupil.

Identified by police as a female who had used male pronouns on social media, the shooter had maps of the school and left a manifesto that suggested seven attacks were planned. "Audrey bought seven firearms from five different local gun stores here legally," Drake said. — AFP

Biden vows funds to stop democratic backsliding

WASHINGTON: President Joe Biden on Wednesday opened his second "Summit for Democracy" with pledges of nearly \$700 million in funds and a joint alliance against surveillance technology as US concern mounts over China and Russia. Hoping to show a more global front after his US-focused inaugural summit in 2021, Biden will co-lead the mostly virtual meeting with the president of South Korea—who also agreed to host the next summit—as well as the leaders of Zambia, Costa Rica and The Netherlands. But the 121-member gathering comes as rights groups allege backsliding in countries invited to the summit including Israel and India, both close US partners whose prime ministers have been accused of growing authoritarianism.

Biden will announce \$690 million in US funding to promote democracy overseas including through programs to manage free elections, advance independent media and strengthen action against corruption, a US official said, a fresh commitment after \$424 million offered at the first summit.

The Biden administration will also announce a joint effort with around 10 partners to counter the misuse and proliferation of spyware—which the United States fears has become a growing tool of China as its technological clout increases.

The effort will come two days after Biden banned the US government from using commercial spyware programs and as Biden's Republican rivals lead a controversial push in Congress to ban TikTok, the popular Chinese-owned video-sharing app.

"The idea here is these technologies of course have lawful applications, but have also been shown to be heavily misused by authoritarian states," the US official told reporters ahead of the summit. "We want to kind of get states on the record in terms of promoting rules of the road for their use."

Walking line on invitations

Biden took office vowing to restore US credibility on democracy after the norms-shattering presidency of Donald Trump, whose supporters rampaged at the Capitol on January 6, 2021 instead of accepting the Republican tycoon's defeat. But Biden has come under fire from some allies for seeking to work with leaders from whom he once promised greater distance including Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, Egypt's military ruler turned president Fatah al-Sisi and Recep Tayyip Erdogan, who has led Turkey for two decades.

None of the three leaders were invited to the summit. The United States also shunned Hungary,



WASHINGTON: Elizabeth Rosenberg, assistant secretary of the Treasury for Terrorist Financing and Financial Crimes, speaks during the 2023 Summit for Democracy at the US Treasury Department in Washington. — AFP

where Prime Minister Viktor Orban has challenged liberal values, as well as a number of close US partners including Bangladesh, Singapore and Thailand. Israel will take part but Biden on Tuesday made clear his unease over Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's bid to diminish the independence of the judiciary, which the right-wing leader finally paused after mass protests and a general strike.

"Like many strong supporters of Israel I'm very concerned," Biden told reporters. "They cannot continue down this road, and I've sort of made that clear." The United States has mostly stayed silent over India, seen as a bulwark against China, where authorities under Prime Minister Narendra Modi have clamped down on media and last week expelled opposition leader Rahul Gandhi from parliament.

Biden also invited India's historic rival Pakistan, where Imran Khan a year ago was ousted as prime minister and hit by a slew of charges, although Islamabad, a close partner of China, said it would work with the United States bilaterally rather than participating in the summit.

The United States has identified China as the sole long-term adversary to threaten the US-led liberal international order. Chinese foreign ministry spokeswoman Mao Ning said the summit "hypes up confrontation" and will "stoke division in the name of democracy." The United States has invited Taiwan, a self-governing democracy, even though it does not recognize it as a state, and has given prominent space to Ukraine as it fends off a Russian invasion. Russia's ambassador to Washington, Anatoly Antonov, accused the United States of hypocrisy, pointing to the country's problems of "racism, gun violence, corruption and social inequality." "Democracy is not built on templates, but is a product of the internal development of a particular society," he wrote in an essay. "We have seen the disastrous consequences of the attempts to forcibly export American democracy to Iraq, Libya and Afghanistan." — AFP

Race against time to save dozens missing after Ecuador mudslide

ALAUSI: Rescuers raced against time in southern Ecuador on Tuesday to find survivors of a weekend landslide that left at least 11 people dead and more than 60 missing. Torrential rain overnight Sunday triggered a mudslide that buried dozens of homes and injured 30 people in the village of Alausi some 300 kilometers (180 miles) south of the capital Quito, officials said. As hopes faded of finding survivors under the rubble, rescuers with dogs and neighbors alike worked feverishly at removing debris, some with their bare hands. "My daughter is here, my granddaughter, my whole family," Carlos Maquero told AFP among the ruins, desperate for a breakthrough. "I want you to understand the pain we're going through," the 40-year-old merchant said. The same region was hit by an earthquake just over a week earlier in which 15 people were killed. There is a "buildup of tons and tons of earth," making it difficult to find survivors, Fernando Yanza, a firefighter working to rescue those trapped, told AFP.

Decreasing oxygen was "the main problem" facing those still trapped, added Yanza, who had been digging down through four meters (13 feet) of mud looking for signs of life. "As you dig, it becomes more dangerous" because the ground becomes less stable, he added. Another firefighter, Adriana Guzman, said removing all the rubble was nigh impossible, "and truly what is found, if it is found, will be bodies." The mudslide's death toll had grown to at least 11 with 67 missing, the SNGR risk management secretariat said in an update Tuesday after four bodies were recovered. "We feel powerless not being able to do anything," said Carmen Quiroz, whose sister-in-law "was buried" along with several others, including infants, under the mud.

'As long as it takes'

President Guillermo Lasso visited Alausi, in Chimborazo province, on Monday night where he was met with jeers of "Lasso out!" by some who felt the tragedy could have been avoided. Lasso held a meeting with local authorities and later tweeted the rescue efforts would go on "as long as is necessary."

The army is also taking part in the operation. The government opened three shelters for those affected by the landslide, which covered an area of more than 24 hectares (59 acres). More than 160 homes were damaged. Alausi, a town of some 45,000 people surrounded by green hills, also saw several public buildings hit by the deluge, which damaged roads and closed schools. As a light rain fell on Alausi, resident Carmen Gavilanez, 65, told AFP: "We are afraid that there will be another mudslide and that we will be left with nothing." — AFP

International

Zionist parties discuss justice reforms after Netanyahu U-turn

Biden urges Netanyahu to negotiate in good faith

JERUSALEM: Zionist entity's hard-right government and opposition parties were set for a second day of talks Wednesday on controversial judiciary reforms that sparked a general strike and mass protests in the country's most severe domestic crisis in years.

Scepticism remained high over the negotiations on the judicial overhaul, which would curtail the authority of the Supreme Court and give politicians greater powers over the selection of judges. US President Joe Biden, one of several Zionist entity's allies to have voiced concern, urged Netanyahu to negotiate in good faith and warned against simply ploughing ahead with the reforms.

A first day of talks between the government and the two main centrist opposition parties — Yesh Atid and the National Unity Party — was hosted by President Isaac Herzog Tuesday.

"After about an hour and a half, the meeting, which took place in a positive spirit, came to an end," the president's office said. "Tomorrow, President Isaac Herzog will continue the series of meetings," it added. After three months of tensions that split the nation, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu bowed to pressure in the face of a nationwide walkout Monday.

The strike hit airports, hospitals and more, while tens of thousands of opponents of the reforms rallied outside parliament in Jerusalem. "Out of a will to prevent a rupture among our people, I have decided to pause the second and third readings of the bill" to allow time for dialogue, the prime minister said in a broadcast. The decision to halt the legislative process marked a dramatic U-turn for the premier, who just a day earlier announced he was sacking his defence minister who had called for the very same step.

'Ruse or bluff'?

The move was greeted with suspicion in Zionist entity, with the president of the Zionist Democracy

Institute think-tank remarking that it did not amount to a peace deal. "Rather, it's a ceasefire perhaps for regrouping, reorganizing, reorienting and then charging—potentially—charging ahead," Yohanan Plesner told journalists.

Opposition leader Yair Lapid reacted warily, saying on Monday that he wanted to be sure "there is no ruse or bluff". A joint statement Tuesday from Lapid's Yesh Atid and the National Unity Party of Benny Gantz, a former defence minister, said talks would stop immediately "if the law is put on the Knesset's (parliament's) agenda".

The US president warned that Zionist entity "cannot continue down this road" of deepening division. "Hopefully the prime minister will... try to work out some genuine compromise, but that remains to be seen," Biden told reporters during a visit to North Carolina. In a statement, Netanyahu said he appreciated Biden's "longstanding commitment to Zionist entity". But, he added: "Zionist entity is a sovereign country which makes its decisions by the will of its people and not based on pressures from abroad, including from the best of friends." In an earlier statement, Netanyahu had said that the goal of the talks "is to reach an agreement".

Activists, meanwhile, vowed to continue their rallies, which have persisted for weeks, sometimes drawing tens of thousands of protesters.

"We will not stop the protest until the judicial coup is completely stopped," the Umbrella Movement of demonstrators said.

'No turning back'

The crisis has revealed deep rifts within Netanyahu's fledgling coalition, an alliance with far-right and ultra-Orthodox parties.

Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich, in a tweet Monday, asserted "there will be no turning back" on the judicial overhaul. Fellow far-right cabinet mem-



JERUSALEM: Protesters gather with Zionist national flags during a rally against the Zionist government's judicial reform, outside the presidential residence in Jerusalem. — AFP

ber, National Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir, had pressed his supporters to rally in favour of the reforms. Ben-Gvir's Jewish Power party revealed on Monday that the decision to delay the legislation involved an agreement to expand the minister's portfolio after he threatened to quit if the overhaul was put on hold. Writing in the left-wing daily Haaretz, political correspondent Yossi Verter said the pause was "a victory for the protesters, but the one who

really bent Netanyahu and trampled on him is Itamar Ben-Gvir". The affair has hit the coalition's standing among the Israeli public, just three months after it took office.

Netanyahu's right-wing Likud party has dipped seven points, according to a poll by Zionist's Channel 12, which predicted the government would lose its majority in the 120-seat parliament if an election were held now. — AFP

Lisbon Muslim centre stabbing not terror attack

LISBON: Investigators said Wednesday they had uncovered no indication a knife attack that left two women dead at a Lisbon Islamic centre was terror-related. The alleged assailant, identified as an Afghan refugee, may have suffered a mental health crisis before the violence on Tuesday that ended with officers shooting and wounding him, police said.

"There is no indication that this is a terrorist attack" or involved the radicalisation of the suspect, said judicial police chief Luis Neves. "What may be involved here, but only a psychiatric evaluation can determine it, is that it was a mental crisis", Neves said, adding the inquiry was ongoing.

According to witnesses, the suspect was taking a language class at the Ismaili Muslim centre on Tuesday when his behaviour changed suddenly after taking a phone call. A teacher was attacked and then two women who worked at the centre were fatally wounded before the assailant was shot by police. The suspect was in hospital on Wednesday.

Investigators have managed to trace the suspect's route from his home nation to his arrival in Greece, where his wife died in a fire. The alleged perpetrator, a father of three young children, arrived in Portugal in 2021 and planned to travel to Germany in the coming days with them, said Neves. — AFP

Morocco treads fine line between Zionist entity, Palestinians

RABAT: Morocco is struggling to balance its alliance with Zionist entity with support for the domestically popular Palestinian cause, an increasingly complex challenge with Zionist entity ruled by its most right-wing government ever.

The North African country normalized its ties with Zionist entity in December 2020, part of a series of deals known as the Abraham Accords, backed by the administration of then-US President Donald Trump.

In exchange, Rabat won a key concession from Washington: Recognition of its sovereignty over the disputed Western Sahara, where the Polisario movement seeks independence. But the move was at odds with a strongly pro-Palestinian public mood in Morocco.

That square has been harder to circle in recent months as violence has surged in the Zionist-Palestinian conflict, with the army carrying out deadly raids in the occupied West Bank. But Rabat has been quick to defend itself. A case in point is the royal palace's reaction after the opposition Islamist Justice and Development Party (PJD) "deplored" the Foreign Minister Nasser Bourita for allegedly defending Zionist entity publicly, even as it commits "criminal aggression against our Palestinian brothers".

King Mohammed VI's office hit back, accusing the PJD of voicing "irresponsible excesses and dangerous approximations regarding relations" between Morocco and Zionist entity. "Morocco's position towards the Palestinian question is irreversible," it said, adding that Rabat's foreign relations are the prerogative of the monarch.

'Game-changer'

Rabat regularly reiterates its commitment to Palestinian rights, and the king chairs the international Al-Quds committee, which works to preserve the "Arab-Muslim character" of Jerusalem. The Palestinian cause continues to draw immense sympathy from Moroccans, and civil society groups have launched a campaign to push back against normalization. Yet Moroccan journalist and writer Jamal Amiar argues that "having relations with Zionist entity and supporting the Palestinian cause are not mutually exclusive if we defend the two-state solution."

Rabat officially supports the establishment of a Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza, with east Jerusalem as its capital. Since the 2020 deal, Morocco's ties with Zionist entity have developed fast, with Rabat buying advanced drones and other military equipment as well as cybersecurity products.

"The Abraham Accords were a game changer, and a lot of things are rapidly changing", Amiar said. Amiar said Rabat's "partnership with Zionist entity is based on common security interests and long-standing relations that have helped build trust".

But some observers have warned of an arms race between Morocco and its regional arch-rival Algeria, which backs both the Palestinians and the Polisario. Algiers cut ties with Morocco months after the Zionist deal citing "hostile acts".

Normalisation, with conditions

Moroccan-Zionist cooperation is growing in other areas too. Bilateral trade grew by a third in 2022, while some 200,000 Zionists visited Morocco, according to official figures. Some 700,000 Zionists are of Moroccan descent, and many have maintained strong ties. "This human and cultural link reinforces the idea of consolidating the link with the Jewish state, regardless of the political and geopolitical situation," said Zakaria Abouddahab, professor of international relations at Mohammed V University in Rabat.

But the rise of ultra-nationalist Zionist parties, which brought veteran hawk Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu back to power in December, has threatened to undermine deeper ties. Zionist Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich's comment this month that "there are no Palestinians" sparked criticism, including from Zionist's ally Washington. Bourita responded by saying that "Morocco rejects any attitude that could have a negative impact".

Amiar admits that "any prolonged deterioration in relations between Zionists and Palestinians on the ground, in the West Bank or in Gaza, can only negatively impact public opinion on Zionist-Moroccan relations." — AFP



LISBON: People gather in front of the Ismaili Islamic centre in Lisbon, after two people died following a knife attack that wounded several others. — AFP

Benefits of reconciliation....

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Additionally, more than 1,400 years ago it was revealed to us that we must not hold a grudge towards each other. To be forgiven, one must always

One of biggest black holes ever...

Continued from Page 1

close to this black hole, which is roughly two billion light years from Earth. It could even be the biggest black hole ever recorded, but it was difficult to say for sure given the varying techniques and uncertainties involved, he added.

Supermassive black holes sit at the center of galaxies using their vast gravitational pull to gobble up stars like specks of dust, not even allowing light to escape. Previous black holes of this size have been

try to forgive, no matter what. Even if the person wrongs us, we can be the bigger person and reconcile, and that will be better for us. Almighty Allah says what can be translated as: "Be gracious, enjoin what is right, and turn away from those who act ignorantly." (Quran 7:199) When someone harms us and we forgive for the sake of Allah, then Allah (SWT) will reward us infinitely for not being wrathful and egoistic. — TIES Center

observed when their voracious devouring gives off huge amounts of light at the margins — or by measuring the orbit of stars that speed up as they pass by. But these techniques only work for galaxies relatively close to Earth.

Gravitational lensing allows astronomers to "discover black holes in the other 99 percent of galaxies that are currently inaccessible", Nightingale said. There are currently around 500 known gravitational lenses — at least one of which we now know is a supermassive black hole. But "the landscape is about to dramatically change," Nightingale said. The European Space Agency's Euclid mission, planned to launch into space in July, will open a "big data era" for black hole hunters by creating a huge high resolution map of the universe, he said. — AFP

Prince Mohammed's "Vision 2030" reform agenda intended to help transition the world's biggest crude oil exporter away from fossil fuels. Officials talk it up as a rival to Gulf business hub Dubai, predicting that its current population of eight million will balloon to 15-20 million by 2030. Last November, officials announced plans for a new airport in Riyadh that is set to accommodate 120 million travelers per year by 2030, up from roughly 35 million today. The projected growth makes Saudi's current model — in which it effectively has two hubs, Jeddah and Riyadh — untenable, Saudi Finance Minister Mohammed Al-Jadaan told AFP. "Jeddah alone needs one airline to concentrate on it with the hajj and umrah... So you need an airline that is focused on Riyadh," Jadaan said. — AFP

Big facelift as Bahrain bids to...

Continued from Page 1

An unexpected boost could come from the announcement of diplomatic ties between Saudi Arabia and Iran, which Bahrain accused of stoking unrest during the 2011 protests. "In an optimistic scenario, the Saudi-Iran rapprochement would gather pace and create a more conducive environment for political reconciliation within Bahrain which in turn could derisk the economy," Gulf economist Justin Alexander, director of consultancy group Khalij Economics, told AFP.

Bahrain, a monarchy whose cabinet is appointed by the king, boasts a rich commercial tradition dating back to its days as a flourishing pearling center. Consisting of one large island and about 30 smaller ones, it was a British protectorate until 1971, becoming a financial hub that initially led its neighbors in terms of economic diversification.

Increased regional competition, mainly from Dubai and Doha, but also political instability and economic challenges, especially after global oil prices plunged in 2014, have

all hurt Bahrain. In 2018, wealthier Gulf countries agreed to support Bahrain's economic goals with \$10 billion in loans, giving rise to the current building spree. As well as land reclamations for new housing projects and skyscrapers around Manama, Bahrain is building diving centers including an underwater park. A new \$1 billion passenger terminal at its international airport opened last year, doubling annual capacity to 14 million passengers. Bahrain has also built one of the region's biggest conference centers, aiming to attract international events and visitors.

The country's financial planners aim to balance the national budget by next year, with its Economic Vision 2030 focused on reducing reliance on oil and gas and developing finance, logistics and tourism. Many visitors to Bahrain stream across the 25-km King Fahd Causeway from Saudi Arabia where alcohol is banned, unlike its more laid-back neighbor.

Manama wants tourism to contribute 11.4 percent of GDP by 2026, up from around seven percent currently. Last year, real GDP increased 4.9 percent, the kingdom's highest growth since 2013, the finance ministry said on Monday. "We're confident that we will continue going down that path and achieve the results that we desire," said Humaidan, who spoke as Bahrain hosted its annual Formula One Grand Prix, an event it has held since 2004. — AFP

KIA sells €1.4bn Mercedes stake...

Continued from Page 1

stock's closing price Tuesday. The sale will reduce its stake to less than 5 percent.

Mercedes shares dropped 2.4 percent on Wednesday, after having surged about 50 percent from July through the start of March and having more than quadrupled since their March 2020 pandemic low. The KIA had informed the company of its decision and it plans to remain a key shareholder in the automaker, the German company said in a separate statement.

Chief Executive Officer Ola Kallénius has focused the automaker on more profitable segments and pared back its offerings of entry-level models, leading to a 43 percent surge in the average price of a Mercedes since 2019. He also split the luxury-car company from its commercial vehicle operation, spinning off Daimler Truck Holding AG in late 2021.

While the luxury strategy has boosted earnings, signs of strain have emerged, with Mercedes having cut the price of flagship electric models in China, while the European and the US economies are weakening. Kuwait owned 6.84 percent of Mercedes prior to the sale, making it the third-biggest holder, according to data compiled by Bloomberg. The KIA — the world's oldest and one of the largest wealth funds — has been a Mercedes shareholder for almost 50 years. — Agencies

Saudi moves in on aviation...

Continued from Page 1

founded in 1945, receiving its first jet as a gift from US President Franklin Roosevelt. At the time, instead of Riyadh, foreigners were more likely to enter the kingdom via Jeddah on the Red Sea coast, which remains the "Gateway to Makkah", welcoming millions of Muslims performing the hajj and umrah pilgrimages each year. Foreign embassies did not relocate to Riyadh, in central Saudi Arabia, until the 1980s.

These days, however, Riyadh is at the heart of

International

China vows to 'fight back' if Taiwan leader meets US speaker

Tsai's trip follows Honduras's decision to open diplomatic relations with Beijing

TAIPEI: China vowed on Wednesday to "fight back" should Taiwan President Tsai Ing-wen meet the US House speaker during a trip to the United States. Tsai left on Wednesday for the United States, from where she will head to Guatemala and Belize to shore up ties with diplomatic allies. On her way back to Taiwan she will stop in California, where US House Speaker Kevin McCarthy had said he would meet her.

China claims the democratic island as part of its territory to be retaken one day and, under its "One China" principle, no country may maintain official ties with both Beijing and Taipei. Beijing warned Wednesday that it was "resolutely opposed" to any meeting between Tsai and McCarthy and vowed to take "resolute measures to fight back" if it goes ahead.

"If (Tsai) engages with US House Speaker McCarthy, it will be another provocation that seriously violates the One China principle, undermines China's sovereignty and territorial integrity, and undermines peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait," Taiwan Affairs Office spokesperson Zhu Fenglian said.

Tsai's trip follows Honduras's decision this month to open diplomatic relations with Beijing, leaving Belize and Guatemala among just 13 countries that have official ties with Taipei. "External pressure will not hinder our determination to go global," Tsai told reporters at the airport before leaving. "We are calm and confident. We will not succumb and we will not provoke (others)."

US call for calm

After first visiting New York, Tsai will meet her Guatemalan counterpart Alejandro Giammattei and Belize Prime Minister John Briceno in their respective countries, her office said. She will then stop in Los Angeles on her way home. McCarthy has said he will meet Tsai in California, although the talks are yet to be confirmed by Taiwanese authorities.

A visit by McCarthy's predecessor to Taiwan last year sparked an angry response from Beijing, with the Chinese military conducting drills at an unprecedented scale around the island. "There's absolutely no reason for China to use that as a pretext to overreact or to engage in further coercion directed at Taiwan," a senior US administration official told reporters on condition of anonymity, adding that the stopover did not represent a change in US policy. Beijing's foreign ministry said Washington "blindly connives with and supports Taiwan independence and secessionist forces". Ministry spokesperson Mao Ning urged the United States at a briefing on Wednesday to stop any form of official exchanges with Taiwan and to "stop the dangerous act of undermining the political foundation of China-US relations".

Official vs unofficial ties

Analysts say the US stopover comes at a key time, with Beijing having ramped up military, economic and diplomatic pressure on Taiwan since Tsai came to power in 2016, poaching nine of its diplomatic allies.

"Beijing's attempts to poach Taiwan's diplomatic partners will lead to Taiwan developing closer ties with the United States," said James Lee, a researcher on US-Taiwan relations at Academia Sinica. The United States remains Taiwan's most important ally—and its biggest arms supplier—despite switching its diplomatic recognition to Beijing in 1979.

"The loss of official relations with third countries will be offset by a deepening of Taiwan's unofficial relations," Lee said. Recent visits by a Czech delegation and a German minister met rebukes from Beijing.

One of Tsai's most prominent domestic opponents, ex-president Ma Ying-jeou, was in China on Wednesday, the first such trip by a former Taiwanese leader. Ma spoke of the need for peace at a war memorial in Nanjing. "Both sides should avoid war, seek peace," Ma told Chinese media. "Because once a war happens, there is nothing that can make up the losses."

Diplomatic battleground

China has increased investment in Latin America, a key diplomatic battleground between Taipei and Beijing since the two sides split in 1949 after a civil war. Taiwan accused China on Sunday of using "coercion and intimidation" to lure away its allies after Honduran Foreign Minister Enrique Reina and his Chinese counterpart Qin Gang officially launched relations in Beijing.

Honduras, one of the poorest countries in the region,



TAOYUAN: Taiwan President Tsai Ing-wen waves as she arrives at the boarding gate of the international airport in Taoyuan on March 29, 2023. Tsai was due to leave for the United States on March 29, a stop on her way to firm ties with Guatemala and Belize. —AFP

made the switch due to economic necessity, Reina had said earlier. The move continued a trend in Latin America, with Nicaragua, El Salvador, Panama, the Dominican Republic and Costa Rica all switching diplomatic recognition to Beijing in recent years.

In addition to Guatemala and Belize, Taiwan still has official ties with a handful of countries in Latin America and the Caribbean, including Paraguay and Haiti. —AFP

India offers arms hardware to Africa

PUNE: India showed off domestically made helicopters, drones and artillery at a gathering of army chiefs and officials from 31 African nations on Wednesday, as the world's largest arms importer seeks to become a major exporter too. India has pumped billions into its defence sector in an effort to become less reliant on imports, including from Russia, as it faces off against China on their disputed border.

At the same time it has been trying to sell more of its domestically produced hardware to other countries, particularly poorer nations unable to afford more expensive Western-made kit. "We are making equipment which is affordable and reliable," retired Indian army general VG Patankar told AFP at the event.

On Wednesday, the Indian military showed off the goods on offer with a simulated operation featuring commandos abseiling from helicopters, armoured vehicles and bomb disposal robots. Also on display in Pune in western India—the country's key defence manufacturing hub—were assault rifles, artillery shells and models of missiles.

The gathering, which followed nine days of joint military drills with soldiers from 23 African countries, included delegates from Ethiopia, Egypt, Kenya, Morocco, Nigeria, Rwanda and South Africa. India opened its largest helicopter manufacturing plant in February, months after it unveiled its first locally made



PUNE: Chief of Indian Army Staff General Manoj Pande (C) meets army delegates during the India-Africa Army Chief's conclave in Pune. —AFP

aircraft carrier and test-fired a ballistic missile from its maiden domestic nuclear-powered submarine.

The country aims to more than double its annual arms exports to \$5 billion in the coming years, from about \$1.7 billion currently. Less than 20 percent of its arms exports currently go to Africa, with customers including Egypt,

Ethiopia, Mozambique, Mauritius and the Seychelles, officials said on condition of anonymity. S.P. Shukla, head of the Society of Indian Defence Manufacturers, told AFP that the focus of the Africa sales pitch was "defensive" in nature, including armoured vehicles, radars, telecommunication equipment. —AFP

India welcomes birth of four cheetah cubs

NEW DELHI: India announced on Wednesday the birth of four cubs to one of the cheetahs that were relocated from Namibia, decades after they were declared extinct in the South Asian country. India's Environment Minister Bhupendra Yadav tweeted a photo and video of the cubs, calling it a "momentous event".

"Wonderful news," tweeted Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Eight Namibian cheetahs arrived in India last year as part of an ambitious project to reintroduce the spotted big cats, the world's fastest land animal. A second cheetah from Namibia is also due to deliver soon, according to Indian media reports.

Last month, 12 more cheetahs were brought to India from South Africa. The announcement of the new cubs comes just days after one of the eight Namibian cheetahs died at the Kuno National Park, a wildlife sanctuary 320 kilometres (200 miles) south of New Delhi, due to kidney failure.

India was once home to the Asiatic cheetah but it was declared extinct there in 1952. The critically endangered subspecies, which once roamed across the Middle East, Central Asia and India, are now only found, in very small numbers, in Iran. —AFP

Europe rights court hears climate cases against governments

STRASBOURG: Cases opened Wednesday before the European Court of Human Rights against France and Switzerland over alleged failings to protect the environment, marking the first time governments are in the court's dock for alleged climate change inaction.

The case against Switzerland is based on a complaint by an association of elderly people—who call themselves the "Club of Climate Seniors"—concerned with the consequences of global warming on their living conditions and health, the ECHR said.

They accuse the Swiss authorities of various climate change failings which they say amount to a violation of the government's obligation to protect life and citizens' homes and families. "We've been fighting for years," said Bruna Molinari, 81, who lives in the southern Tessin canton "where the pollution is the worst". "I hope the court will find in our favour so that Switzerland does better than it has done so far," he added ahead of the hearing.

The average age is 73 in the Swiss club, which is backed by Greenpeace Switzerland. Around 50 of its 2,000 members were expected in Strasbourg for the hearing.

'Heat kills'

Alain Chablais, representing the Swiss government, told the court that it was "baseless to claim or suggest that Switzerland is doing nothing". The ECHR "has no business becoming the place where national climate protection policy is decided," he added.

But the plaintiffs' lawyer Jessica Simor said her clients were "already suffering the effects of climate change" that Switzerland was not doing enough to stop. Temperatures were rising "twice as quickly" in the Alpine nation as the global average, she added.

"Heat kills... increasing the risks of kidney problems, asthma attacks, cardiovascular difficulties... and causes particularly acute symptoms in elderly people, more especially elderly women". The case against France was brought by Damien Careme, a former mayor of Grande-Synthe, a suburb of



STRASBOURG: German protesters demonstrate ahead of the European Court of Human Rights hearing in two climate change cases involving France and Switzerland, in Strasbourg, eastern France, on March 29, 2023. —AFP

Dunkirk in northern France, who also argues that the central government has failed to meet its obligation to protect life by taking insufficient steps to prevent climate change.

When he was mayor, Careme brought his case to the French judiciary on behalf of his town but also on his own behalf, saying climate change was raising the risk of his home being flooded. France's highest administrative court ruled in favour of the town against the central government in 2021, but threw out the individual case brought by Careme, which he then took to the ECHR.

'Extremely high stakes'

"The stakes are extremely high," said Corinne Lepage, a former French ecology minister and one of Careme's lawyers in the case. "If the European court recognises that climate failings violate the rights of individuals to life and a normal family life, then that becomes precedent in all of the council's member states and potentially in the whole world," she told AFP.

The European Court of Human Rights—whose members are the 46 states belonging to the Council of Europe—acknowledged in a statement

ahead of the hearings that the European Convention on Human Rights, on which it must base its judgements, does not actually include a right to a healthy environment.

But its decision to take Wednesday's cases was based on the fact that the exercise of the convention's existing rights could be undermined by harm to the environment or exposure to environmental risks. A third pending case, without a date for a hearing so far, was brought by young Portuguese applicants claiming that climate inaction by dozens of states had contributed to heatwaves in Portugal which they said was affecting their rights.

Although the cases are a first for the ECHR, governments have in the past been taken to court in their national jurisdictions. In 2019, the Dutch Supreme Court ordered the government to cut greenhouse gas emissions following a complaint by an environmental organisation.

Two years later, a court in Paris found the French government guilty of climate inaction and ordered it to pay for resulting damages after four NGOs filed a case. Wednesday's hearings are only the start of proceedings that are likely to take several months before the court hands down its verdicts. —AFP

Philippine fishermen struggle as oil spill keeps them ashore

POLA: A crab covered in oil creeps across the sand as Philippine fishermen wearing white protective suits, rubber gloves, and respirator masks scrape toxic sludge from the rocks along the shore. Four weeks after a Philippine tanker loaded with 800,000 litres (210,000 gallons) of thick oil sank off the central island of Mindoro, the vessel is still leaking.

More than half the oil has been discharged and dispersed over hundreds of kilometres of waters famed for having some of the most diverse marine life in the world. Experts estimate the two main slicks northwest and southeast of the tanker could span 162 square kilometres (62 square miles).

It took two days for the spill to reach Buhay na Tubig, a remote village in Pola, one of the island's worst-affected municipalities. Some villagers got sick after oil smeared the shoreline, turning rocks black and leaving dark globs on the beach.

Authorities have banned fishing and swimming indefinitely, leaving thousands of fishermen wondering how long they can survive. "They say this might take six months, but what if we are unable to fish for an entire year?" asked Arvie Anonuevo, 32, who has three children. For more than two weeks, Anonuevo and other fishermen have spent four hours a day cleaning up oil in exchange for a daily wage of 355 pesos (\$6.50) from the government—a little over half what they used to make from fishing. —AFP



POLA: Fishermen wearing personal protective equipment assemble an oil spill boom during a clean-up operation from the sunken tanker Princess Empress along the shore in Pola, Oriental Mindoro province. —AFP

Business

THURSDAY, MARCH 30, 2023

Lebanon inflation hits 190% in February

IMF calls for govt, CB to act urgently to stabilize economy

BEIRUT: Inflation in Lebanon hit an annual rate of about 190 percent in February as the International Monetary Fund called on the country's government, parliament and central bank to close ranks and take decisive actions to stabilize the economy. Hyperinflation continued for the 32nd consecutive month, led by soaring communication, health, restaurant and hotel prices, as well as rising food, water and energy costs, the Central Administration of Statistics' Consumer Price Index showed.

The CPI increased by about 26 percent from January 2023. After hitting 155 percent in 2021, inflation in the country surged to 171.2 percent in 2022, the highest in about four decades as the country's worst economic and financial crises in decades continued during a political deadlock that has blocked the formation of a new government and the enactment of reforms required to unlock billions of dollars in aid from the IMF and other international donors.

Communication costs increased nearly five-fold in February compared with the same month in 2022, while health costs increased more than four times. Clothing and footwear prices and the rates of restaurant and hotels leapt more than threefold. The prices of food and non-alcoholic beverages increased more than three times while transportation costs rose by a similar proportion.

Lebanon's economy contracted about 58 percent between 2019 and 2021, with GDP falling to \$21.8 billion in 2021, from about \$52 billion in 2019, according to the World Bank — the largest contraction on a list of 193 countries.

Lebanon's tax revenue more than halved between 2019 and 2021 in the face of the deepest economic crisis since the end of the civil war, according to the IMF. The fund estimates that the mis-valuation of customs, excises and Vat at the border caused a loss of revenue worth 4.8 percent of Lebanon's gross domestic product in 2022.

"Despite the severity of the situation, which calls for immediate and decisive action, there has been limited progress in implementing the comprehensive package of economic reforms ... notwithstanding some efforts by the government," the IMF said



BEIRUT: Lebanese forces secure a private bank in Beirut during a demonstration by members of the banks depositors committee against monetary policies. — AFP

last week after the end of a staff mission visit to Beirut from March 15 to 23.

"This inaction disproportionately harms the low-to-middle-income population and undermines Lebanon's long-term economic potential. The government, parliament, and the Central Bank (BdL) must act together, rapidly and decisively to tackle long-standing institutional and structural weaknesses to stabilize the economy and pave the way for a strong and sustainable recovery."

The World Bank has described the country's crisis as one of the worst in modern history, ranking it among the world's worst financial crises since the mid-19th century. Lebanon's political elite have yet to enforce critical structural and financial reforms required to unlock \$3 billion of assistance from the IMF. Securing the IMF funds would pave the way for an additional \$11 billion in assistance that was pledged by international donors at a Paris conference in 2018.

Reforms hinge on the formation of a new gov-

ernment, the election of a president and consensus among the country's political elite. Politicians are deadlocked over the formation of a new cabinet 10 months after parliamentary elections were held and nearly five months after the six-year term of former president Michel Aoun expired at the end of October. Inflation is likely to remain elevated as the Lebanese pound continues to lose value on the parallel market and on the official exchange rate since a 90 percent devaluation at the start of February. — Agencies

Canada budget doles out incentives for clean economy

OTTAWA: Canada unveiled a budget on Tuesday that aims to make it a clean energy "superpower" and secure a leading place in global supply chains for critical minerals and electric vehicles. The basket of measures—including 15 to 30 percent tax credits to spur new investments in tidal and nuclear energy, for example, as well as the extraction of critical minerals for EV batteries—seeks to narrow a gap with major US subsidies.

The Canadian incentives, expected to cost about Can\$80 billion (\$50 billion) over a decade, build on previous tax credits and investments in "clean economy" projects such as the production of hydrogen from renewable sources. The upbeat budget however included scaled back expectations for economic growth this year, including a possible worst-case scenario of a shallow recession.

Finance Minister Chrystia Freeland said in a speech to parliament that the world is undergoing "the most significant economic transformation since the Industrial Revolution" as it moves to fight climate change. "Today, and in the years to come, Canada must either meet this historic moment—this remarkable opportunity before us—or we will be left behind as the world's democracies build the clean economy of the 21st century," she said.

Green technology production has taken on greater urgency after the United States unveiled a \$370 billion program of tax credits and subsidies for electric vehicles, batteries and renewable energy projects. According to the International Energy Agency, the clean technology sector is expected to be worth



OTTAWA: Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, flanked by Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance Chrystia Freeland (left) and Foreign Minister Melanie Joly (right) attend a meeting with a visiting US delegation. — AFP

over \$630 billion worldwide by 2030, more than three times the current level.

China currently dominates in many of the sectors including semiconductors, critical minerals, batteries and solar panels. Freeland noted that Canada's allies are moving to "friendshore their economies" and build critical supply chains with likeminded democracies. Ottawa has been wooing investments in advanced lithium-ion batteries manufacturing for electric vehicles and critical minerals mining. Earlier this month, German auto giant Volkswagen announced it was building its first North American battery factory in St. Thomas, Ontario. Stellantis and LG Energy Solution have also partnered on a new battery plant in Canada.

Ottawa's budget earmarked billions of dollars to lure more private investments in the sector, and announced it would backstop future energy and tradable carbon credit prices in case market rates fall

Wednesday's announcement was sparked after Broadcom declined to address the UK regulator's initial concerns. The CMA already warned that the deal "could make computer servers more expensive for UK businesses".

The tie-up could harm innovation and drive up the cost of computer parts used by key clients including government, banks and telecoms, the watchdog insisted. It added that the deal may result in Broadcom obtaining "commercially sensitive information" that hardware rivals supply to VMware.

The CMA will give its ruling by September 12, following the European Union's antitrust decision by May 11. The bloc's competition regulator, the European Commission, said that in addition to concerns regarding server competition, a deal could prevent or restrict the use of VMware software.

At the time of the cash-and-stock bid for VMware in May, Broadcom said it wished to offer customers "greater choice and flexibility to build, run, manage, connect and protect applications at scale". Under the transaction, VMware shareholders can elect to receive either \$142.50 in cash or slightly more than one-fourth of a Broadcom share for each VMware share. That represented a premium of almost 50

percent compared with VMware stock before news reports of the deal surfaced.

Broadcom will also assume \$8 billion of VMware debt. VMware was spun out of Dell Technologies in 2021. The CMA said Broadcom's blockbuster deal was the second largest it had investigated. The biggest is Microsoft's proposed \$69-billion purchase of US video game giant Activision, which is also facing an in-depth UK investigation. However, the CMA last week narrowed the scope of its Microsoft/Activision probe to cloud gaming, after concluding it would not harm competition in console gaming in the UK. — AFP

Musk and experts call for halt in 'giant AI experiments'

SAN FRANCISCO: Billionaire mogul Elon Musk and a range of experts called on Wednesday for a pause in the development of powerful artificial intelligence (AI) systems to allow time to make sure they are safe. An open letter, signed by more than 1,000 people so far including Musk and Apple co-founder Steve Wozniak, was prompted by the release of GPT-4 from San Francisco firm OpenAI.

The company says its latest model is much more powerful than the previous version, which was used to power ChatGPT, a bot capable of generating tracts of text from the briefest of prompts.

"AI systems with human-competitive intelligence can pose profound risks to society and humanity," said the open letter titled "Pause Giant AI Experiments". "Powerful AI systems should be developed only once we are confident that their effects will be positive and their risks will be manageable," it said.

Musk was an initial investor in OpenAI, spent years on its board, and his car firm Tesla develops AI systems to help power its self-driving technology, among other applications. The letter, hosted by the Musk-funded Future of Life Institute, was signed by prominent critics as well as competitors of OpenAI like Stability AI chief Emad Mostaque. — AFP

Russia announces deal to boost oil supplies to India

MOSCOW: Russian energy giant Rosneft announced a deal on Wednesday to ramp up oil sales to India, as Moscow seeks new buyers in the wake of tensions with the West over the Ukraine conflict. The Kremlin's decision to deploy its military to Ukraine last February saw Russia's share of the European market collapse as Kyiv's allies levied sanctions on the Russian oil sector.

Rosneft said in a statement that its CEO Igor Sechin had travelled to India and brokered an agreement with the head of the Indian Oil Corporation. "Rosneft Oil Company and Indian Oil Company signed a term agreement to substantially increase oil supplies as well (as) diversify the grades to India," Rosneft said in a statement. Rosneft however did not specify the volumes stipulated in the agreement nor its value. The announcement comes one day after Russian Deputy Prime Minister Alexander Novak said Moscow's oil sales to India had surged more than twentyfold last year. Rosneft said that representatives of the two oil companies also discussed the "possibilities of making payments in national currencies," pointing to Russia's efforts to de-dollarize its economy. — AFP

Britain extends probe into big US tech tie-up

LONDON: Britain on Wednesday deepened a probe into US semiconductor maker Broadcom's planned takeover of cloud computing firm VMware, citing competition concerns. Broadcom's \$61-billion offer "may be expected to result in a substantial lessening of competition" for goods and services in the UK, the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) said in a statement.

It comes after the European Union in December launched its own in-depth probe into the deal over concerns it may stifle competition in the server sector. Broadcom is seeking to expand into the software market to boost its server business and has already acquired two complementary firms, CA Technology and Symantec. The CMA will conduct an in-depth or phase two investigation into Broadcom's latest pursuit after launching an initial probe last year.



Business

Germany to open its doors as labor shortages hit businesses

Vast cohorts of older employees go into retirement

BERLIN: An apprenticeship at a steelmaker brought Steven Maillot from the French island of Reunion in the Indian Ocean to Eisenhuettenstadt in Germany, a stone's throw from the Polish border.

Better pay and better job prospects were the deciding factors for Maillot—a relief for ArcelorMittal, where the group's Germany chief Reiner Blaschek acknowledged that attracting young trainees like the 23-year-old is becoming “increasingly difficult”. A shortage of skilled workers has become a major headache for businesses in Europe's largest economy, as vast cohorts of older employees go into retirement. Chancellor Olaf Scholz's government is battling to find an answer to the challenge of Germany's rapidly ageing population.

Just under two million job posts were unfilled at the end of 2022 in Germany, according to the federal Institute for Employment Research (IAB). Job seekers from the European Union, like Maillot, can already work in Germany with no additional visa hurdles, but even the pool of human resource is insufficient. On Wednesday, Scholz's cabinet is due to discuss a draft bill aimed at easing immigration rules to attract more workers from further afield to the country.

Making the most out of the workers already in Germany would “not be enough” to fill the gap, Scholz told parliament earlier this month. “We will also attract urgently needed workers by opening up legal migration channels,” he said. The bill will create a new points-based system for qualified people hoping to obtain visas for Germany, with criteria to include the ability to speak German, job qualifications and age.

Trainee challenge

The model city of Eisenhuettenstadt, built under socialism to serve the steelworks, is a far cry

from Reunion. “For my career development, I have to stay here,” Maillot told AFP at the plant, admitting that he misses his home. Each year around 50 new trainees join a program with ArcelorMittal in Eisenhuettenstadt, where the steel group employs 2,700 people. Most already live locally but there are “some who make the journey from further afield”, Blaschek said.

Finding new workers is particularly hard in eastern Germany, thanks to lower incomes than in the west and a reputation for being less welcoming to outsiders. Nonetheless, the challenge of finding skilled workers—or willing trainees—is one faced by businesses across the country and in all sectors of the economy, according to the economic think tank Ifo. Around 44 percent of companies surveyed by the think tank said they had been affected by labor shortages, according to the most recent figures for January. As Germany ages, more and more employees are retiring, while it has become harder to back-fill roles with new apprentices.

The acute situation has seen Scholz encourage workers not to take early retirement, and companies experiment with the use of robots in new fields, such as elderly care.

Green challenge

The right training was important to stop “young people slipping through our fingers”, labor minister Hubertus Heil noted on a visit to ArcelorMittal where he met trainees. Besides confronting the worker shortage problem, in a polluting industry like steel, the challenge in the next decade will also be the transformation to greener technologies. A lack of skilled workers could “hamper important transformation tasks like electromobility



EISENHUTTENSTADT, Germany: This file photo taken on April 25, 2019 shows trainees practicing filing steel cylinders at steel manufacturing giant Arcelor-Mittal's Eko Stahl steelworks's training center in Eisenhuettenstadt, eastern Germany. — AFP

or renewable energies”, the deputy head of the German chambers of commerce (DIHK) Achim Dercks warned earlier this year.

ArcelorMittal plans to replace a fossil fuel-burning blast furnace at the east German site with a new unit powered by hydrogen and electricity by the end of 2026. The switch to greener

production processes will see some jobs fall away, while creating new ones that will need to be filled. “We have a technological change ahead of us that is massive,” Blaschek said on a tour of the group's training centre. “If we want to convert our facilities in the next four years, then we have to start changing our training now.” —AFP

Gulf Bank to organize ‘Nuqsat Al-Khamees’ for 3rd consecutive year

KUWAIT: For the third consecutive year, and as part of its various community events and initiatives during the holy month of Ramadan, Gulf Bank is organizing “Nuqsat Al-Khamees”, in collaboration with several Kuwaiti restaurants and bakeries, starting Thursday, 30 March 2023.

The Assistant Manager of Corporate Communications at Gulf Bank, Abdullah Al-Mulaifi said, “We are keen to organize “Nuqsat Al-Khamees” annually to revive this authentic Kuwaiti tradition, and to enhance our communication with the community throughout the holy month of Ramadan. This also helps to support local SMEs by marketing their products.” He added: “We have developed “Nuqsat Al-Khamees” using its simple, original form, which is based on distributing



Abdullah Al-Mulaifi

simple home-food dishes to family, neighbors, and friends – spreading the spirit of connection, love, and cooperation within the community.”

Al-Mulaifi stated that Gulf Bank helps SMEs to further distribute their products to the public, which enables their restaurants and bakeries to reach new segments of customers and help increase their growth and expansion. He mentioned that this initiative is one of Gulf Bank's charitable events during the holy month of Ramadan, which reflects the Bank's involvement with the community over the last sixty years, and its integral part in Kuwait's economic and social history.

He also indicated that Gulf Bank continues its strong commitment to sustainability programs on

social, economic, and environmental levels – through carefully selected initiatives that benefit the Bank and society; of which also fall in line with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals and Kuwait Vision 2035. Gulf Bank's vision is to be the leading Kuwaiti Bank of the Future. The bank is constantly engaging and empowering its employees as part of an inclusive and diversified workplace in recognition of every employee's role in delivering customer excellence and serving the community at large. With its extensive network of branches and innovative digital services, Gulf Bank is able to give its customers the choice of how and where to conduct their banking transactions, all while ensuring a simple and seamless banking experience.

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

German consumer morale rises but at slower pace

BERLIN: German consumer morale rose again heading into April, a key survey showed Wednesday, but the pace of improvement slowed as concerns about high inflation weighed on Europe's top economy. Pollster GfK said its forward-looking survey of around 2,000 people climbed 1.1 points to reach minus 29.5 points, the sixth consecutive monthly increase.

Relief that energy prices are falling, after surging sharply last year following Russia's invasion of Ukraine, was helping to boost the reading, GfK said. But overall the consumer climate remained “very low”, said GfK consumer expert Rolf Buerkl. “Inflation will remain high this year,” he said. “The expected loss of purchasing power will prevent a sustained recovery of domestic demand.”

The survey found that respondents were more optimistic about their income prospects but, for the first time for several months, they were slightly more pessimistic about the broader economy. Germany has seen a wave of strikes recently by workers demanding pay rises to keep up with inflation, including a major walkout Monday that caused transport disruption across the country.

The outbreak of the Ukraine war and Russia's move to slash gas exports sent food and energy costs soaring in Germany, which had long relied on cheap Russian energy imports. But Berlin rolled out relief measures, helping to ease fears of a sharp downturn, and the government now expects the economy to eke out growth for 2023 as a whole. Some economists, however, still expect the economy may fall into a short, sharp recession at the start of this year.

After plunging last year, many economic indicators have been recovering in recent months on signs Germany has weathered the Ukraine war fallout better than feared. However, concerns about a banking sector crisis have hit markets and are adding new uncertainty. Last week, the closely-watched ZEW investor confidence survey fell for the first time in six months due to the turbulence. — AFP

Senegal's gold rush brings hope and despair

BANTAKOKOUTA, Senegal: Mohamed Bayoh climbed into the deep, pitch-black hole, hoping to emerge with a nugget that would change his life. The 26-year-old Guinean is one of thousands of West Africans who have flocked to remote eastern Senegal in search of gold.

The rush for the precious metal has dramatically transformed Bantakokouta, a town on the borders of Mali and Guinea. The locals numbered just a few dozen two decades ago, now there are several thousand on the back of a floating population of dream-seekers and risk-takers with gold in their eyes.

Over time, their ant-like labor has left the landscape looking like a Swiss cheese. As far as the eye can see, through the pervasive dusty mist, small huddled groups protected from the sun by makeshift branch shelters haul up spoil scratched from the ground. Women sit nearby, sorting the rocks into two mounds—a big one for the discards and a much smaller one for the promising samples.

The same scenes are played out every day, with no guarantee of any success. “Working here is like playing the lottery, you are never sure of winning,” sighed Bayoh, who said he was nonetheless determined to stay put until he gets rich. Other sites in the gold-rich region have been taken over by min-



BANTAKOKOUTA, Senegal: An artisanal gold miner digs at the Bantakokouta gold mine. Bantakokouta has the second largest artisanal gold mining sites in southeastern Senegal, close to the border of Mali. —AFP

ing corporations, sometimes triggering land disputes with local people.

But in Bantakokouta, informal mining has been allowed to carry on. Diggers stay typically stay for a few months—sometimes just days—to chance their arm, hoping for a lucky strike that will enable them to send money home or start a business. Bayoh was clear in his objective: to “find a lot of gold,” he said. “Not a little... a lot. To start another life in

Guinea.” After six months' grueling work, he had earned enough to buy two motorbikes. One gram (0.03 of an ounce) of gold—roughly equivalent to 60 grains of rice—brings in 30,000 CFA francs, or about \$48.

But the risks facing miners are many, from fatal falls and cuts and landslips to use of drugs to dull aches and pains, said Diba Keita, head of a community vigilance committee. — AFP

UBS-Credit Suisse merger carries ‘huge’ risk: Chairman

GENEVA: The UBS takeover of Credit Suisse comes with a huge amount of risk, UBS chairman Colm Kelleher admitted Wednesday after announcing Sergio Ermotti would return as CEO to handle the merger. Ermotti was the chief executive of Switzerland's biggest bank from 2011 to 2020 and Kelleher said the board felt he would be a “better pilot” than current CEO Ralph Hamers to oversee the transition.

“There's a huge amount of risk in integrating these businesses,” Kelleher told a press conference in Zurich. UBS and Credit Suisse, the second-biggest bank in Switzerland, were both among the select banks around the world considered to be global systemically important financial institutions (G-SIFIs).

Kelleher said it was “the biggest single financial transaction” since the 2008 global financial crisis.

“I would argue it's bigger than any deal that was

done in 2008, because it's the first time two G-SIFIs have merged. That brings with it significant execution risk,” he said. “I cannot re-emphasize how big this deal is in terms of financial history and financial engineering.” The shotgun marriage of UBS and Credit Suisse was hastily arranged by the Swiss government on March 19 to prevent a global financial meltdown following fears of contagion from the collapse of banks in the United States.

Kelleher said there were clearly parts of Credit Suisse that had a “bad culture”, primarily in its investment banking, and he did not want to import that into UBS—though he said its retail banking and wealth management were “probably really quite clean”. “Investors, our shareholders, by and large, see significant upsides in this transaction,” he explained. “But they are very concerned about execution risk and we have a lot of execution risk here, so this is not in any way an easy deal to do,” the chairman said on reasons behind the change of CEOs.

Ermotti will take up his post on April 5, with Hamers continuing on for a transition period. “It was the opinion of the board that for this massive integration exercise, Sergio would be the better pilot for this next voyage of UBS,” said Kelleher. Ermotti said



ZURICH, Switzerland: (From left) UBS Chairman Colm Kelleher, outgoing UBS CEO Ralph Hamers and newly appointed UBS CEO Sergio Ermotti leaves a press conference in Zurich on March 29, 2023. — AFP

he felt the “call of duty” to return.

“The debate is not too big to fail, rather it's too small to survive, and we want to be a winner out of this,” he said. —AFP

Gold prices drop as banking crisis concerns ease

KUWAIT: Gold prices dropped on Wednesday as easing worries over a potential fallout from the global banking crisis boosted appetite for riskier assets and dampened demand for the safe-haven metal. Spot gold was trading 0.33 per cent lower at \$1,965.42 per ounce as of 8.40 am Kuwait time on Wednesday.

“We've seen a natural retracement ... gold is pulling back after a failed ‘bid’ to break above \$1,975,” said Matt Simpson, a senior market analyst at City Index. But some investors “still seem to be holding onto gold ‘just in case’ there's another skeleton or two lurking in the closet,” he said and that gold might catch another bid heading into the European session.

Alex Kuptsikevich, a senior market analyst at the FxPro, said the yellow metal stormed \$2,000 twice last week, but both attempts failed to consolidate above this significant round level. The double correction since the previous week clears the way to the upside but does not signal that gold is in trouble. “The momentum of gold's rally from the lows of the eighth pushed it up by over \$200 at its peak, creating a short-term overbought situation. Last week, the brief touch below \$1,940 was too quick and impulsive to pave the way for upward movement,” he said. — Agencies

Business

NBK Banque Privée Suisse relocates to a new headquarters in Geneva

New HQ to facilitate expansion of investment, wealth management offerings



GENEVA: Isam Al-Sager, Faisal Al-Hamad and Malek Khalife as well as members of the Board of Directors and bank employees in Switzerland during the inauguration of the new headquarters.

KUWAIT: NBK Banque Privée Suisse announced that it has relocated to a new headquarters in Geneva, Switzerland, in a strategic move towards expanding its investment and wealth management services, while also broadening its reach in the world's leading financial and business centers.

The inauguration of the new headquarters was attended by Isam Al-Sager, Vice Chairman and Group CEO at National Bank of Kuwait, Faisal Al-Hamad, CEO - Global Wealth Management at National Bank of Kuwait, and Malek Khalife, Deputy CEO, Head of Global Private Banking at National Bank of Kuwait and General Manager of NBK Swiss, as well as members of the Board of Directors and bank employees in Switzerland.

The new headquarters is situated in the bus-

ing city of Geneva, at the core of one of Europe's most vibrant and dynamic cities, featuring state-of-the-art and sustainable infrastructure, which provides an excellent business and customer environment. The relocation to this new headquarters demonstrates NBK's commitment to invest in the future. It enables the Bank to cater to the evolving needs of its growing clientele by increasing the number of specialized employees in investment and wealth management, along with offering innovative financial products and services to help customers achieve their financial goals.

NBK Banque Privée Suisse S A provides banking and investment services to individuals and institutions from the GCC. The bank offers international investment portfolio management services tailored



The inauguration of the new headquarters in Geneva.

to the specific investment needs and preferences of individual and corporate clients. It also provides personal banking services and expert banking and investment advice. The investment portfolios managed by the bank consist of private portfolios, international stocks and bonds, as well as other types of investment products.

Since its inception in 1984 as NBK Finance, the Swiss entity has maintained a strong presence in Geneva, serving high-net-worth individuals with top-notch asset management services. Over the course of almost four decades, the bank has established itself as a leading provider in the field. In 1999, NBK Finance acquired a Swiss banking services license and rebranded as NBK Swiss, establishing itself as a fully independent entity that

adheres to Swiss laws and regulations. This enables the bank to enjoy all the privileges of a Swiss bank, including complete confidentiality and security.

In 2006, NBK Swiss rebranded as NBK Banque Privée Suisse S.A., signifying its Swiss roots and its focus on providing exclusive private banking services. NBK Group is distinguished by its local and global reach, with a network of 138 branches and subsidiaries spread across four continents, including seven countries in the MENA region. The Group boasts a global wealth management platform that integrates private banking and asset management, managing a total of over \$17 billion in assets, reflecting its strong brand name and ability to attract high-net-worth clients not only in Kuwait, but also from around the world.

Car battery recycling market gears up for future boom

FREIBERG, Germany: Researcher Anna Vanderbruggen peers into a vat of dark bubbling liquid, the result of a process she has developed to recover graphite from old lithium-ion batteries.

Although graphite represents up to a quarter of the weight of the batteries, no one has yet come up with a viable plan to recycle it, according to Vanderbruggen. The 29-year-old researcher is still fine-tuning her method but has already received an award from the European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT) for her efforts.

As Europe shifts gear from fossil fuel vehicles to electrified cars, recycling graphite as well as other elements in batteries is gradually becoming a major focus. All the more so as the continent seeks to wean itself off its reliance on countries like China for raw materials. "Battery manufacturers were not interested" in recycled graphite up to now because "they could get it at low cost in China", Vanderbruggen told AFP.

Her method, developed at the Helmholtz Research Institute in Freiberg, Germany, involves extracting graphite from "black mass", a powder that also contains cobalt, nickel, lithium and manganese.

"You put the black mass in water and add some chemicals and air bubbles, like in a jacuzzi," Vanderbruggen, who is from France, said. "The graphite attaches itself to the bubbles, whereas the metals are hydrophilic and therefore remain in the water." Vanderbruggen also works as a consultant for businesses exploring the opportunities that recycling electric car batteries could bring in the future.

Joe & The Juice debuts in Kuwait in partnership with AAW

KUWAIT: Ali Abdulwahab Al-Mutawa Commercial Co (AAW) debuted Kuwait's first "Joe & The Juice" store at the trendy and bustling Argania complex in Shuwaikh. The global Danish-founded juice bar and coffee concept serves high-quality, fresh juices, shakes, coffee, and made-to-order sandwiches, in a youthful and modern environment. The opening ceremony was attended by the management teams of both AAW and Joe & The Juice.

From fresh juices to artisanal coffee, the Joe & the Juice menu features only the finest ingredients, all of which are expertly crafted to nourish and delight taste buds. AAW has marked its foray into the restaurant and cafe sector by collaborating with Joe & the Juice - the Danish-founded, now global, juice bar and coffee concept. With this partnership, AAW has introduced one of the world's top health and nutrition food brands to Kuwait, offering healthy and nutritional foods and beverages in a trendy, creative, in-store experience. AAW invites everyone to visit the Joe & The Juice Shuwaikh store and has announced that they will be launching additional locations soon.

Joe & The Juice was founded in Copenhagen, Denmark, and has expanded to over 300 locations, including newly opened branches in the UAE, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar. The coffee shop offers a trendy and inviting atmosphere where customers can enjoy a variety of juices, coffee, and healthy food options.

Rising costs

Increasing raw material costs and shortages have led to a surge of interest in the field. The price of lithium has increased by 13 percent over the past five years, according to Philippe Barboux, a professor of chemistry at PSL University in Paris. Lithium has not been recycled on a large scale up to now "because it was not profitable", he said. But that looks set to change with 350 million electric cars expected to be on the road worldwide by 2030, up from 16.5 million in 2021, according to the International Energy Agency (IEA). "In 10 years' time, so many batteries will be manufactured that lithium will absolutely have to be recycled, otherwise there won't be enough," Barboux said.

In theory, the technology now exists to recycle almost all the materials that make up lithium-ion batteries, according to the experts interviewed by AFP.

German group Aurubis, one of Europe's largest suppliers of non-ferrous metals, claims to be able to recycle at least 95 percent of the metals that make up "black mass" at a pilot plant it has set up in Hamburg. French mining group Eramet, Belgium's Umicore and German carmaker Mercedes have also launched similar ventures. The majority of such projects are still in their pilot stages.

'Huge growing market'

"It's a huge growing market and we want to play a role in it," said Ken Nagayama, head of business development for battery materials at Aurubis, who is currently working on a graphite recycling process. He believes there will be "sufficient market supply to develop a battery recycling plant in industrial scale during the second half of the decade".

Since the batteries tend to last seven or eight years, there are not yet "enough batteries at the end of their life" to feed the market, said Serge Pelissier, director of research at the Gustave Eiffel University in Lyon. There are also many different models of car



FREIBERG: French scientist Anna Vanderbruggen (center) selects chemicals with a pipette next to the graphite recycling system in a laboratory of the Helmholtz Institute Freiberg for Resource Technology in Freiberg, eastern Germany on February 27, 2023. — AFP

batteries, making it difficult to set up a standardized recycling system like those available for mobile phones and laptops.

The market for car battery recycling will probably not reach its full potential until the "early 2030s", according to Alex Keynes of the Transport and Environment NGO. Swedish and Norwegian joint venture Northvolt-Hydro, a pioneer in the field, is aiming to recycle the equivalent of 500,000 batteries by 2030. This would represent around half of the batteries likely to be available for recycling by that time, according to estimates from consultancies.

The European Union wants new batteries to incorporate 16 percent recycled cobalt and six percent recycled lithium and nickel by 2031. It is also aiming for at least 70 percent of the weight of old batteries to be recycled by 2031. "If they recover new components like graphite, they will be able to meet these requirements," Vanderbruggen said. — AFP

Alibaba's overhaul: A 'smart' move after China crackdown

BEIJING: Alibaba, China's biggest e-commerce company, has announced plans to split its business into six groups, in one of the most significant overhauls of a leading Chinese tech firm to date.

Below is what we know about this major shake-up: What is happening to Alibaba?

Alibaba has said it will split its \$220 billion empire into six businesses: focusing on logistics, cloud computing, entertainment, e-commerce, and two others offering services to global businesses.

Its logistics arm, Cainiao, helped deliver Chinese vaccines around the world during the COVID-19 pandemic. Its cloud computing service was seen as a rival to Amazon until last year, when the Chinese government suspended a partnership with Alibaba, saying the company failed to quickly address cybersecurity vulnerabilities. The entertainment unit runs Youku, one of China's biggest online video-sharing platforms.

Each unit will be managed by its own CEO and board of directors, allowing them to raise their own funds and pursue public listing plans separately. Alibaba itself will only retain full ownership of its China e-commerce unit, Taobao Tmall Commerce Group. The company described the restructuring as the "most significant" organizational overhaul in its 24-year history. "The market is the best litmus test, and each business group and company can pursue independent fundraising and IPOs when they are ready," CEO Daniel Zhang said.

What's behind the overhaul?

Dividing the monolith into smaller units could make Alibaba more nimble and help insulate parts of the business from government crackdowns, analysts said. "Revenue in Alibaba's core e-commerce business declined last year, because pressure from competition was... high," said Li Chengdong, founder of Dolphin, a technology-focused think-tank in Beijing.

"By splitting up, Taobao actually becomes a little lighter and can cope with... new types of competition." Alibaba has been a prime target of China's regulatory crackdown, prompted in part by Beijing's fears that too much power and capital had been accrued by a small number of tech behemoths.

"Splitting things up is a smart move," said Jeffrey Towson, partner at Techmoat consulting. "Now (Alibaba) won't be seen as such a dominant, solitary player," he added. "If there is a political issue with one part, it won't hit the rest of the business."

Why is it happening now?

Signs now suggest the crackdown from regulators may be easing. Officials at China's annual rubber-stamp parliamentary session this month pledged more support for the private sector, ravaged by almost three years of harsh COVID restrictions.

Alibaba's overhaul comes as its talismanic co-founder, Jack Ma, returned to China this week after an extended absence from the public eye. Ma has kept a low profile since late 2020, when a speech he made attacking Chinese regulators was widely believed to have provoked Beijing into pulling a mammoth IPO by Alibaba's affiliate Ant Group. In January, Ant Group said Jack Ma no longer held controlling rights in the company—a move analysts speculated might have helped pull Ant and Alibaba out of the regulatory doghouse.

Will others follow suit?

Chinese tech shares rallied in Hong Kong on Wednesday on speculation that other big players could follow Alibaba's example. The tech giant's fate has been held up as a cautionary tale for others also caught in Beijing's crosshairs—and its restructuring plan could serve as a template for its peers.

"Investors could get hyped on the positive side in the short term," Willer Chen, senior research analyst at Forsyth Barr Asia Ltd, told Bloomberg News. "Alibaba's shakeup plan may also lead investors to think of the potential for other tech firms like Tencent to follow suit." — AFP



KUWAIT: The first Joe and the Juice store located in Shuwaikh.



In-store photo of Joe & the Juice.

Lifestyle



This photo shows farmer Hoang Manh Hung posing with coffee from his farm in Buon Ma Thuot city in Daklak province.



This photo shows a worker selecting coffee beans at Mori coffee farm in Plei Bau Can in Vietnam's central highlands, Gia Lai province.



This photo shows a man checking coffee beans at a coffee tasting fair in Buon Ma Thuot city in Daklak province.

Paul Newman's
Rolexes celebrating
his racing career
up for auction

Two Rolexes that carried "sentimental" value for actor Paul Newman will be auctioned as part of a broad collection of the late icon's personal effects, with the timepieces each expected to earn up to \$1 million. Sotheby's said last month that more than 300 items owned by the movie star and car racer Newman and his wife of 50 years Joanne Woodward would go under the hammer on June 9.



In this file photo taken on June 09, 1979 US actor and driver Paul Newman is pictured, during 24 Hours of Le Mans car race in Le Mans. —AFP

On Tuesday the auction house unveiled the two Rolex Daytonas, classic and coveted watches that celebrate the model's 60th anniversary this year, and which Sotheby's said Newman wore during his celebrated racing career. The 'Zenith' Daytona Rolex was presented to Newman in 1995 to mark his victory in Florida's 24 hours of Daytona Race in the GTS-2 category. He was 70 years old at the time and became the endurance contest's oldest winner.

The other, in white gold, was a gift from Woodward which bears the inscription: "DRIVE VERY SLOWLY," followed by "JOANNE."

Sotheby's said the watches are "imbued with sentimental and historical value imparting from pinnacle moments in Newman's celebrated racing career." Each watch is valued at \$500,000 to \$1,000,000, but the final price will be determined by the highest bidder in June. Another Rolex that belonged to Newman, who died in 2008, was sold by New York auction house Phillips for a staggering \$17.8 million in 2017, a world record for a wrist watch. —AFP



This handout image shows a Rolex 'Zenith' Daytona (left) and a Rolex Daytona in New York City.

Vietnam's robusta:
The go-to coffee bean in a warmer world?

Bitter and earthy. Fit for instant brews only. Robusta coffee has a dire reputation, but a small group of farmers in Vietnam is trying to turn the bean's fortunes around as a warming world threatens the industry.

As an interior designer in trendy Ho Chi Minh City, Tran Thi Bich Ngoc, 42, largely stayed clear of Vietnamese coffee, puzzling over why it didn't taste as

most double the caffeine content of arabica — is found in most instant coffees, as well as some espresso blends.

Most experts agree that the bean has potential, but is stuck in a "vicious circle of bad quality", said Mario Fernandez of the Specialty Coffee Association. "We get bad quality from robusta, therefore it gets a bad reputation, therefore no one wants to pay a pre-

Robusta, although by no means immune to a warming world, may be able to endure up to around 23C. Should global production of arabica start to fall short, "people will have to find an alternative supply", said Pham Thi Diep Giang, deputy director general of Trung Nguyen, one of Vietnam's top coffee brands. A tumble in arabica supply caused by extreme weather in Brazil already helped Vietnam earn \$4 billion in 2022, a 32 percent rise from a year earlier, the government said in a recent report. At a coffee fair in Buon Ma Thuot city, farmer Hoang Manh Hung tries his best to convince visitors to take sips of his "fruity and elegant" robusta.

"I really wish more people would love robusta, as it's truly a 'wow' drink," Hung told AFP. The 53-year-old transformed a farm that had produced low-quality coffee cherries for decades, first under the French and then his parents.

"We can now produce robusta with a completely different taste, and a scent that anyone would love," Hung said. Key to the change, Hung said, is that the cherries are now hand-picked, and only when they're fully ripe. "And they're fully organic," he added.

Gaining recognition

Robusta was first brought to Vietnam by the French in the late 19th century, and in 1991 the country exported its first beans — 104,000 tonnes.

By 2022, that figure had climbed to 1.8 million tonnes — almost all of it as raw material for instant coffee and other



This photo shows a man holding coffee beans at a coffee tasting fair in Buon Ma Thuot city in Daklak province.

mium for it, therefore there's no motivation to improve the quality," he said.

But robusta has advantages over its competitor: the yields are greater, and it can better cope with higher temperatures. Climate change presents a serious concern for the multi-billion-dollar coffee industry, with scientists predicting lower yields and fewer areas suitable for growing.

Arabica, which makes up around 60 percent of the world's coffee production, originates in the highlands of Ethiopia and South Sudan, and prefers average annual temperatures of around 19 degrees Celsius (66 degrees Fahrenheit).

good as cups from abroad. Now, nearly a decade later, she runs her own coffee farm — "Mori" — in the remote Central Highlands, cultivating robusta she believes can match the world's favourite bean, arabica, in quality and flavour.

"My beans have a fruity, flowery smell, and they taste strong — but in a gentle way," Ngoc told AFP at her farm close to the city of Pleiku, in the heart of the Vietnamese robusta region. "Vietnamese farmers need to know it is possible to make these beans taste good."

'Vicious circle of bad quality'

Long scorned by giants such as Starbucks, robusta — which has al-



This photo shows Tran Thi Bich Ngoc pouring coffee beans into a roastery at Mori coffee farm in Plei Bau Can in Vietnam's central highlands, Gia Lai province.



This photo shows Tran Thi Bich Ngoc checking on coffee cherries at Mori coffee farm in Plei Bau Can in Vietnam's central highlands, Gia Lai province.



This photo shows a man walking in a coffee farm in Plei Bau Can in Vietnam's central highlands, Gia Lai province.



This photo shows an engineer working at the Trung Nguyen coffee roastery facility in Buon Ma Thuot city in Daklak province.



This photo shows an engineer checking coffee beans at the Trung Nguyen coffee roastery facility in Buon Ma Thuot city in Daklak province.



This photo shows a farmer watering coffee plants at a farm in Vietnam's central highlands near Buon Ma Thuot in Daklak province.

Celebrated
Ethiopian pianist
and nun dies in
Jerusalem

The celebrated Ethiopian pianist and nun Emahoy Tsegue-Maryam Guebrou has died in Jerusalem aged 99, the Ethiopian patriarchate said Tuesday. Guebrou composed more than 150 works and recorded four albums during her career, according to a foundation created in her name. The musician died Monday and "many people will attend her funeral" from abroad, a secretary for the patriarchate said.



The celebrated Ethiopian pianist and nun Emahoy Tsegue-Maryam Guebrou

Born in 1923 to a wealth family in Addis Ababa, Guebrou was sent to Switzerland aged six where she learned to play the piano and violin. She returned to Ethiopia and during the 1930s was taken prisoner along with her family and sent to Italy by the country's invading forces. After the war, Guebrou lived in Egypt where she studied under Polish violinist Alexander Kontorowicz before both relocated to Ethiopia and worked for emperor Haile Selassie.

She became a nun at the age of 21 and later gained permission to leave her convent in Addis Ababa to compose music for the violin, piano and organ. The proceeds of the four albums Guebrou recorded during the 1960s and 1970s were used to educate orphans. Her music was revived in a 2006 album, as part of the "Ethiophiques" series featuring musicians from the country. —AFP

Lifestyle



This photo shows a farmer watering straw used to grow mushroom in Can Tho.



This photo shows a farmer checking water metering equipment in a rice field in Can Tho.



This photo shows a farmer holding a basket of straw mushrooms in Can Tho.

As a child, Dong Van Canh watched while the rice fields of Vietnam's Mekong Delta were set alight to make way for the next crop, blackening the sky and flooding the air with potent greenhouse gases.

Rice — Asia's principal staple — is to blame for around 10 percent of global emissions of methane, a gas that over two decades traps about 80 times as much heat as carbon dioxide. Usually associated with cows burping, high levels of methane are also generated by bacteria that grow in flooded rice paddies and thrive if leftover straw rots in the fields after harvest.



This photo shows farmers driving a truck carrying rice bags in a field in Can Tho.

The message from scientists is: rice cannot be ignored in the battle to cut emissions. In the Mekong Delta, Canh, now a 39-year-old rice farmer, does not leave straw out to decay on the paddies — nor does he burn it, as his parents did before him.

Motivated by the memory of being forced inside his home on days the smoke was thick — sometimes so acrid it made him choke or faint — he joined an initiative that removes straw from the fields and turns it into mushrooms and organic fertiliser, earning a small income on the side.

"If we can collect the straw and make money, all of us benefit," he told AFP, running his fingers through a large, soft mound of straw, cow dung and rice



How Vietnam is trying to stop rice warming the planet

husks that will soon become nutritious food for Mekong crops.

Shrinking emissions

The programme — organised by the International Rice Research Institute (IRRI) — is one of a handful across Vietnam and the region trying to steadily shrink methane emissions from rice production. Many of the initiatives are not new but have been spotlighted since around 100 countries signed the Global Methane Pledge two years ago, agreeing to reduce emissions by 30 percent from 2020 levels by 2030.

Several of the world's biggest rice producers, including Indonesia, Bangladesh and Vietnam, are on board — although the two largest, China and India, failed to sign. In Vietnam, as the harvesting season draws to a close, farmers push carts overflowing with

straw bales that will later be soaked and laid out to grow straw mushrooms.

Once the fungi are ready they will be sold before the farmers take back the straw and funnel it into a composting machine. Two months later it will be



This photo shows farmers using a roller to collect straw in a field in Can Tho.

ready — and can be sold for around 15 cents a kilogram (2.2 pounds).

"In the past a few farmers did this manually but it took too much manpower and the cost was high. Now we've cut costs by half and we will expand to meet the demands of the market," said Le Dinh Du, a rice farmer who also heads the local district's plant protection department. "The rice goes on a nice journey. We don't waste anything."

Methane-producing bacteria

Vietnam's environment ministry says irrigated rice accounted for almost half of methane emissions in 2019. Climate-friendly straw management has been introduced and spread "widely to farmers and local agricultural officials" throughout the country, according to CGIAR, an international agricultural research centre.



This photo shows bales of straw being transported down a river in Can Tho.



This aerial photograph shows a farmer driving a roller to collect straw in a field in Can Tho.



Farmer Dong Van Canh arranging bags of fertilizer at his house in Can Tho.



Farmers pushing carts carrying straw used to grow mushrooms in Can Tho.



Farmer Dong Van Canh checking fertilizer made by mechanized straw composting method at his house in Can Tho.



A man carrying straw from a truck to a mushroom field in Can Tho.



This photo shows farmers mixing straw to grow mushrooms in Can Tho.

Benin star Angelique Kidjo wins top music prize

Benin singer Angelique Kidjo won one of Europe's top music prizes Tuesday along with Britain's Chris Blackwell, founder of Island Records, and Estonian composer Arvo Part. The five-times Grammy winner, described by the organizers of Sweden's Polar Music Prize as "one of the greatest singer-songwriters in international music", sings her in native Fon and Yoruba languages as well as in French and English.

Dubbed "Africa's premier diva" by Time magazine, she is best known for her hits "Agolo" and "We We". Blackwell founded the Island Records label in Jamaica that went on to sign such legendary stars as Bob Marley, Cat Stevens, Roxy Music and U2. Estonia's

Arvo Part, who the jury described as "the world's most performed living composer", was highlighted for his "unique compositional technique, tintinnabuli" which he invented in the 1970s. The Polar Music Prize was founded in 1989 by former ABBA manager Stig Anderson and last year honored Iggy Pop and US songwriter Diane Warren. The laureates will receive their 600,000 kroner (\$58,000) prize at a ceremony in Stockholm on May 23. —AFP



In this file photo Beninese singer-songwriter Angelique Kidjo performs during the Library of Congress Gershwin Prize for Popular Song ceremony in Washington. — AFP

Sugar traps force cockroaches to adapt new intimate 'gifts'

Humans using sugar in cockroach traps has inadvertently led to female roaches being turned off by the sugary "gifts" males use to entice them into mating. But don't celebrate the demise of cockroaches just yet — some males have adapted new ways to continue wooing females, including by shortening the length of foreplay, a study said on Wednesday.

The small but stubborn German cockroach is the most common species of the insect, lurking in kitchens and bathrooms across the world. Glucose, a form of sugar, has long been used to bait these cockroaches into deadly traps.

Thirty years ago, researchers first noticed that some German cockroaches had developed an aversion to glucose and were avoiding the traps.

This distaste for glucose may save them from death, but it has also put a

dampener on their sex life, according to the study published in the journal Proceedings of the Royal Society B.

Male cockroaches have a very particular manoeuvre to attract females into mating. They lift their wings and expose a special gland that secretes a "nuptial gift," a cocktail which includes the sugar maltose.

The female jumps on the male's back to lap up the treat, which keeps

her occupied "long enough for the male to extend his abdomen under the female and engage her genitalia," the study said. However the saliva of the females quickly converts the maltose into glucose. Females who have developed an aversion to glucose jump off "before the male can grasp the female genitalia," potentially affecting the future reproduction of the species, the study said.

But never fear: male cockroaches who have also evolved an aversion to glucose can now get around the problem. These males have changed the composition of their nuptial gift, slashing the glucose content and more than doubling the amount of maltotriose. This sugar is both hugely popular with females and converts into glucose much more slowly than maltose. —AFP



Lifestyle

T-Rex skeleton on show in Zurich before auction

Yolanda Schicker-Siber gingerly fastens a pointy claw bone with a thin metal wire, putting the finishing touches on a giant Tyrannosaurus-Rex skeleton before a rare auction in Switzerland next month.

The Aathal Dinosaur Museum's curator was on Tuesday helping complete perhaps the world's biggest construction kit -- reassembling a 67-million-year-old T-Rex dubbed Trinity. Trinity was sent to Zurich from Arizona in the United States in nine giant crates.

The 3.9-metre (12.8-foot) skeleton has been mounted on a red carpet and under crystal chandeliers in a Zurich concert hall, where it will be on public display before going under the hammer on April 18. The Koller auction house has estimated it will fetch between six to eight million Swiss francs (\$6.5-8.7 million).

But Christian Link, in charge of natural history memorabilia at Koller, said he believed that was a "pretty low" estimate. Trinity is made up of bone material from three T-Rex specimens, excavated between 2008 and 2013 from the Hell Creek and Lance Creek formations in Montana and Wyoming in the United States.

The two sites are known for the discoveries of two other significant T-Rex skeletons that have gone to auction: Sue went under the hammer in 1997 for \$8.4 million, and Stan, which took the world-record hammer price of \$31.8 million at Christie's, in 2020. Last year, Christie's withdrew another T-Rex skeleton days before it went on sale in Hong Kong, after doubts were reportedly raised about parts of the skeleton.

'Very, very old'

Reassembling Trinity was no easy feat, Schicker-Siber told AFP as she secured another toe bone. "The bones are very, very old. They are 67 million years old. So they are brittle, they have cracks," she said. "They are stabilised, but you never know if there is a crack that you haven't seen so far... You have to have the glue ready."

Aart Walen, an exhibit preparator from the Netherlands with 30 years' experience assembling dinosaur skeletons, agreed. "We didn't break anything yet," he said proudly, as he and his colleagues worked on two large ischium bones, which sat near the dinosaur's pelvic area where the eggs came out. With a parakeet named Ethel perched on his shoulder, Walen filled in cracks in the bones, using what looked like dental tools and modelling compound.

It was important for the fixes to remain visible, he said, showing the dark lines where the fissures had been. "You have to see where it has been repaired. There are some stories about fakes out there. We don't want that," he said, referring to the aborted Christie's auction. Knocking on different parts of the bone, he also demonstrated the different sounds made on original bone and the plastic additions used to fill out the skeleton.

Room for a T-Rex

Just over half of the bone material in the skeleton comes from the three Tyrannosaurus specimens -- above the 50 percent level needed for experts to consider such a skeleton high quality. Link said Koller was intent on being open and transparent about the origins of the bones that make up Trinity.

"Hence the name Trinity. We are not hiding in any way that this specimen comes from three different dig sites," he said. The skeleton is being sold by a "private individual" who wants to remain anonymous. Auction sales of dinosaur skeletons and other fossils have raked in tens of millions of dollars in recent years, but experts have warned the trade could be harmful to science by putting the specimens in private hands and out of the reach of researchers.

Link stressed though that 95 percent of known T-Rexes are currently in museums, and said any private collector who might snap up the



In this photograph manager Nils Knoetschke (left) takes part in the installation of 'Trinity'.



Project manager Nils Knoetschke takes part in the installation of 'Trinity'.



In this photograph a woman takes part in the installation of 'Trinity'.



In this photograph Yolanda Schicker-Siber (left) takes part in the installation of 'Trinity' a Tyrannosaurus-Rex skeleton dating back 67-million years which will be auctioned in Switzerland on April 18, 2023, marking the first such sale in Europe.—AFP photos



This photograph shows the installation of 'Trinity' a Tyrannosaurus-Rex skeleton dating back 67-million years.



In this photograph Yolanda Schicker-Siber takes part in the installation of 'Trinity' a Tyrannosaurus-Rex skeleton dating back 67-million years.

skeleton was also likely to lend it out museums. Personally, he said he would like to see a Swiss museum buy Trinity, adding "it would be nice to

have it here permanently." Schicker-Siber said the dinosaur museum she runs with her father outside Zurich unfortunately could not afford to acquire

Trinity. "But if somebody buys it and doesn't know where to put it, we have a museum (with room) for a T-Rex," she said.—AFP

Libyan Berbers revive their language in class and on air

A pupil shyly approached the whiteboard, picked up a marker and carefully traced a letter from the Berber alphabet as the teacher watched — a scene unimaginable under Libyan dictator Muammar Gaddafi.

Tamazight has been the native language of indigenous people across North Africa since pre-Roman times. It has survived despite centuries of Arab domination and has undergone a revival in Libya since Kadhafi's four-decade rule ended in a 2011 revolution. In the city of Zuwara, a majority-Berber community near the border with Tunisia, teacher Assirem Shawashi encourages her nine-year-old pupils to approach the board, one by one, to draw out symbols.

"Children love this subject because they find their identity and their culture in books," said Shawashi, dressed in a black dress and grey hijab. "It's not just about the alphabet and vocabulary, but it's a whole culture we're passing on to them." Around 10 percent of Libya's seven million people are ethnically Berber.

Kadhafi worked to crush their culture while promoting Arab identity. But some, especially in the remote western mountains, continued to speak their language at home, out of earshot of the feared secret police. They include residents of Zuwara, 120 kilometres (75 miles) west of the capital Tripoli, who have held onto their culture throughout Greek, Roman, Arab, Ottoman and Italian rule.

'Natural Right'

Libya has seen a decade of complex and often violent power struggles since Kadhafi's fall in a NATO-backed uprising, but authorities in Tripoli have been accommodating towards Berber culture, even providing textbooks — although they have not given the language official status.

Shawashi is a member of the first-ever class to graduate with degrees in Tamazight last year from the University of Zuwara. Her younger pupils never knew life under Kadha-

fi, she notes. "It's just a natural right to learn their mother tongue, and they can't imagine that anyone would ever ban that."

She said that Tamazight textbooks arrived immediately after the revolution, from Morocco where the language is constitutionally recognised. Since then, the community has made "enormous advances", Shawashi added.

"We ourselves are surprised."

School director Sondoss Saki said the first classes in 2012 had "difficult beginnings" due to a lack of trained teachers and confusion about which curriculum to follow. Some parents feared the children would be overloaded, arguing that Arabic and English were a higher priority.

"But the children come here to learn, and their minds are wide open to knowledge," Saki said confidently, sitting behind her desk where the Libyan and Amazigh (Berber) flags stood side by side. When classes are over, Shawashi heads off to the studio of Kasas FM, founded in 2012 as Libya's first local radio station to broadcast in Tamazight. Shawashi, who works as a presenter in her spare time, meets programme director Ismail Abudib to discuss his upcoming shows on Amazigh literature.

Abudib, a 28-year-old architect in a white shirt and grey blazer, says he sees it as his duty to defend his community's rights. Kasas FM is one way of doing that, he said, sitting in front of a small mixing desk in the station's control booth. The station covers social issues, culture, religion, entertainment and sport, he said, "all the subjects that interest listeners, in the language they know best". "Respecting your language and being proud of your identity doesn't stop you living with other communities," Abudib said. "We're walking forward and not looking back to the times of repression and marginalisation. The whole world is full of diversity, and as Libyans we should be able to live together in peace."—AFP



In this picture Libyan students study Tamazight language at a school in Zuwara, a majority-Berber community near the border with Tunisia.—AFP photos



In this picture a Libyan student studies Tamazight language at a school in Zuwara, a majority-Berber community near the border with Tunisia.



In this picture teacher Assirem Shuwashia (left) watches as a Libyan pupil writes Tamazight language at a school in Zuwara, a majority-Berber community near the border with Tunisia.



In this picture a Libyan student studies Tamazight language at a school in Zuwara, a majority-Berber community near the border with Tunisia.



In this picture school director Sondoss Saki gestures at a school teaching Tamazight language in Zuwara, a majority-Berber community near the border with Tunisia.



In this picture teacher Assirem Shuwashia (left) and architect Ismail Abudib (right), present a radio program in Tamazight language at Kasas FM in Zuwara, a majority-Berber community near the border with Tunisia.



In this picture a fan holds a flag with the logo of the Tamazight language during a handball match between Al-Jazira Zuwara and Al-Ahly Tripoli, in Zuwara, a majority-Berber community near the border with Tunisia.

Sports

Warriors erase a 20-point deficit, outmuscle Pelicans

Curry scores 39; Wizards shock Celtics

LOS ANGELES: Golden State erased a 20-point deficit to beat the New Orleans Pelicans 120-109 on Tuesday, with Stephen Curry scoring 39 points as the Warriors edged ahead of Minnesota into sixth place in the Western Conference. Curry drained five of his eight three-pointers in the second half as the reigning NBA champion Warriors came alive, surging past the Pelicans to win a sometimes sloppy, often scrappy contest and boost their chances of avoiding the play-in tournament for teams placed seventh through 10th in each conference.

Golden State star Draymond Green and New Orleans' Brandon Ingram received double technical fouls with 3:45 left in the second quarter after they exchanged words in the wake of Green's foul on the Pelicans player—which was upgraded to a flagrant. Green's collision with Herbert Jones sparked some more shoving, and with 14 turnovers in the testy first half, the Warriors were down 17 at the break. They

opened the third quarter on an 8-0 scoring run and had cut the deficit to four points going into the fourth. "We started playing with some heart and intensity," Green said of the difference in the second half.

Jordan Poole's reverse layup early in the fourth gave the Warriors their first lead since the first quarter, 95-94, and they didn't trail again. Poole scored 13 of his 21 points in the fourth quarter, and Klay Thompson added 17 for the Warriors. Ingram led the Pelicans with 26 points and Trey Murphy added 21, but New Orleans coach Willie Green said his team's lackluster start to the third quarter was fatal. "We started, I believe it was eight-zip," he said. "Two turnovers. You can't give this team any life. Once they get going, once this building gets going, it's tough to stop them."

Elsewhere, the Boston Celtics' chances of overtaking the Milwaukee Bucks for the top seed in the East took a hit with an ugly 130-111 loss to the

lowly Washington Wizards. Perhaps caught looking ahead to a Thursday clash with the Bucks, the Celtics were lackadaisical on defense, unable to stop a Wizards team missing two key players in Bradley Beal and Kyle Kuzma.

Kristaps Porzingis scored 32 points for the Wizards and Deni Avdija added 25. Jayson Tatum returned from a one-game absence to lead the Celtics with 28 points. Marcus Smart had four three-pointers in the first half, but overall, Boston connected on just 11 of 44 from three-point range. They trailed by 13 at halftime and by as many as 23 in the second half. "It was just one of those nights," Celtics coach Joe Mazzulla said. "Very rarely has that happened to our team. Just one of those off nights."

The Toronto Raptors outscored the Miami Heat 62-36 in the paint in a 106-92 victory. Pascal Siakam scored 26 points and Scottie Barnes added 22 along with a career-high 12 assists for the Raptors—as

the Heat failed to gain ground in their bid to avoid the play-in round. With Jimmy Butler sidelined by a sore neck, the Heat dropped a second straight game. Tyler Herro scored 33 points and Bam Adebayo added 21 points and 12 rebounds for Miami, who cut the deficit to 10 with less than four minutes to play only for their charge to stall.

Dejounte Murray starred late as the Atlanta Hawks edged the playoff-bound Cleveland Cavaliers 120-118. Murray made three free throws to put the Hawks up 115-113 with 2:14 remaining, then came up with a steal and a basket that pushed the lead to four in the final minute. He finished with 29 points to lead the Hawks, who remained tied with Toronto for the eighth-best record in the East. Atlanta withstood a 44-point effort from Donovan Mitchell, who tied LeBron James's Cavaliers franchise record of 10 games of 40 or more points in a season. — AFP

Japan Classic hero Ohtani tops MLB with record \$65m

NEW YORK: Japanese two-way star Shohei Ohtani will make a one-season Major League Baseball record \$65 million this year in salary and endorsements, Forbes magazine reported on Tuesday. Ohtani, set to be the starting pitcher for the Los Angeles Angels in their MLB season opener Thursday against Oakland, helped spark Japan to the World Baseball Classic title a week ago with a victory over the United States in the final.

The 28-year-old who serves as an outfielder and designated hitter when not on the mound, signed a one-year contract extension worth \$30 million last year and will make \$35 million in endorsements in 2023, Forbes reported. That's a huge jump from only \$6 million in 2021 sponsorship deals and \$20 million last year. While the numbers already make Ohtani the highest-paid player in the sport, the 2021 American League Most Valuable Player is set to become a free agent after the upcoming campaign and expected to receive one of the richest contracts in MLB history for 2024 and beyond.

"Shohei's commercial impact annually for the Japanese market will be to the tune of tens of millions of dollars, because he is a cultural icon in Japan first and a baseball player second," Chris Davis, New Balance's chief marketing officer, told Forbes. "He'll probably be the first and only baseball player of this generation that has the ability to have that level of commercial impact for a brand."

In 2022, Ohtani went 15-9 with a 2.33 earned-run average and 219 strikeouts over 166 innings. He had a .273 batting average with 34 home runs, 30 doubles and 95 runs batted in over 157 games. MLB's 10 highest-paid players are set to make a record \$436 million this year, up 15% from last year's record mark of \$377 million, Forbes reported. A major reason for the leap was the \$3.8 billion MLB clubs spent on free agent contracts for the 2023 season.

Among these deals was a nine-year contract worth \$360 million for 2022 AL MVP Aaron Judge to stay with the New York Yankees and pitcher



MIAMI: Shohei Ohtani #16 of Team Japan celebrates in the clubhouse after defeating Team USA in the World Baseball Classic Championship 3-2 at loan-Depot park. — AFP

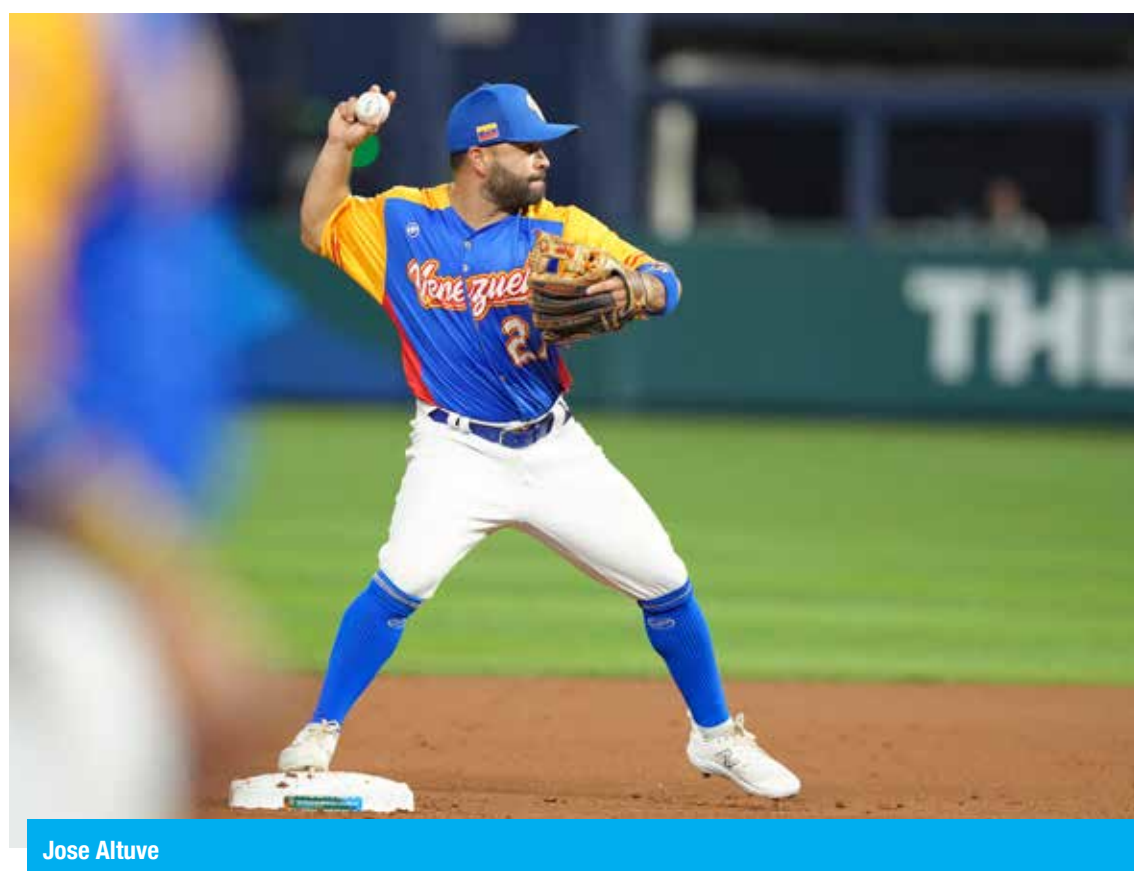
Justin Verlander's \$86.7 million two-year deal with the New York Mets. Verlander and teammate Max Scherzer have the top on-field contract totals for 2023 at \$43.3 million. Scherzer ranked second on the 2023 highest-paid players list at \$59.3 million, bolstered by \$15 million in deferred salary payments from the Washington Nationals, whom he helped win the 2019 World Series.

Judge was third at \$44.5 million, including \$4.5 million in endorsements, with Verlander fourth on \$44.3 million and Mike Trout of the Angels fifth on \$39.5 million. Trout, who just announced a deal with golf star Tiger Woods to build a course in his home state of New Jersey, was struck out by Ohtani for the last out in the Classic final to clinch Japan's third crown in five tries in the global baseball event. — AFP

ular season, it would be MLB's fastest pace of play since 1979. "It definitely speeds up the game," Yankees slugger Judge said. "I think this pitch clock is going to be a good thing for everybody." While some pitchers have complained about time limits, New York Mets ace Max Scherzer welcomes the clock. "I can completely dictate pace. I love it," Scherzer said. New York Mets ace Max Scherzer. "I can work extremely quickly or I can work extremely slow. There is another layer here to be able to mess with the hitter's timing."

'Games will be crisp'

Minnesota Twins outfielder Kyle Garlick was among the batters who would take his time and step out of the batter's box as often as he liked. Now he can do it but once. "We were always taught, slow the game down, make sure you're



Jose Altuve

McIntosh breaks Titmus freestyle world record

MONTREAL: Canadian teenager Summer McIntosh clocked 3min 56.08sec to break the women's 400m freestyle world record Tuesday at the Canadian Swimming Trials in Toronto. The 16-year-old broke the previous record of 3:56.40 set last May by Australia's Ariarne Titmus at the Australian Championships in Adelaide—where the Aussie broke American Katie Ledecky's six-year-old world mark of 3:56.46 set at the 2016 Rio de Janeiro Olympics.

Coming into the meet—Canada's selection meeting for the World Championships in Fukuoka, Japan, in July—McIntosh was the fourth-fastest performer ever in the event behind Titmus, Ledecky and Italian Federica Pellegrini. She had clocked 3:59.32 to finish second to Titmus at the Commonwealth Games last year in Birmingham in Britain. McIntosh also was the silver medalist behind Ledecky at the 2022 World Championships, where she broke the four-minute barrier for the first time in the event. She had also won gold in the 200m butterfly and 400m medley at the World Championships last year.

Her record is the first long-course world record by a Canadian since Kylie Masse in the 100m backstroke at the 2017 World Championships in Budapest. "Honestly, going into tonight, I didn't think the world record was a possibility but you never know," said McIntosh, who broke onto the international scene at Tokyo 2020 when—as a 14-year-old—she finished fourth in the 400m free in her Olympic debut.

McIntosh, who recently relocated to Florida to train, said she always feels extra motivated when competing in Canada, breaking into tears as she spoke about her family. "Over the past few years I've put my life into this," she said. "To be the best I can be. To achieve something like this, it was very unexpected. It was never in my dreams to do this tonight or even a few years ago. This just blows my mind." Ella Jansen, 17, also punched her ticket to the World Championships in the 400m free, finishing second in 4:08.81. — AFP

comfortable, control what's going to happen, don't rush into anything," Garlick said.

"I was always a guy who liked to step out, collect my thoughts, take a breath and get back in." With batter after batter doing that, games lagged to a record average of three hours and 11 minutes in 2021. "The game doesn't have to be three, three-and-a-half hours, and we're proving that," Twins manager Rocco Baldelli said. "Get out there and throw strikes, attack hitters, and the games will be crisp." Miami's Jon Berti, who led MLB with 41 stolen bases last season, sees the clock and pickoff attempt limits as an edge—not to mention bigger bases as targets. "We're still figuring out exactly how we can hopefully take advantage of it and just being able to be maybe a little bit more aggressive in some situations," Marti said. "The bigger bases it makes it a little easier just because it cuts down the distance." — AFP



Australia's Cameron Green

IPL returns as Mumbai eye sixth title

NEW DELHI: Mumbai Indians, armed with big-money signing Cameron Green, will bid for a record-extending sixth title when the Indian Premier League starts on Friday, in what could be Chennai veteran MS Dhoni's swansong. The 16th edition also returns to its pre-COVID glory days, with 74 matches scheduled at 12 venues over eight weeks. In the opener at the world's biggest cricket stadium in Ahmedabad, defending champions Gujarat Titans will play Dhoni's Chennai Super Kings.

England all-rounder Sam Curran returns to Punjab Kings after being bought for \$2.23 million, making him the most expensive IPL player ever. Green, 1.98 meters (6 feet and 6 inches) tall, joined IPL's most successful outfit Mumbai after he became the second-most expensive buy at \$2.11 million in the December auction.

India spinner Ravichandran Ashwin called Green a "once-in-a-generation" cricketer after the batting all-rounder hit his maiden Test hundred in India earlier this month. "I think he's a fantastic player. Just the raw materials for a person as tall as him, lovely levers, good batting sense, can bowl and really hit the deck well, moves pretty well on the field," Ashwin said. Mumbai, led by India captain Rohit Sharma, will be without injured pace spearhead Jasprit Bumrah but have been boosted by the return of England fast bowler Jofra Archer, who missed last season due to injury.

Dhoni and Stokes

Chennai are not far behind Mumbai with four titles—and are five-time runners-up—and Dhoni's towering presence as wicketkeeper-batsman and captain has been key. Dhoni, 41, remains a huge star more than two years after his international retirement. He said he owed a "thank you" to his Chennai fans after last year's IPL, which was held in just two cities in the group stage.

Dhoni apart, the team's success will depend on all-rounders Ravindra Jadeja, Moeen Ali and England Test skipper Ben Stokes, who was bought by the franchise for \$1.96m. According to media reports, Stokes is also being considered as a possible successor to Dhoni as Chennai captain. Australia's David Warner, South Africans Aiden Markram and Faf du Plessis are the three overseas captains in this IPL.

Warner will lead Delhi Capitals in the absence of the injured Rishabh Pant, who suffered injuries in a car crash in December, as the team again chase their first ever IPL title. Markram will lead 2016 winners Sunrisers Hyderabad while fellow South African Du Plessis continues as Bangalore skipper after Kohli stepped down. The league, which began in 2008, has grown to be the world's richest cricket tournament and a huge revenue earner for the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI).

This year for the first time there was a women's version—won in front of a packed house by Mumbai Indians. IPL has overcome corruption and match-fixing scandals to generate billions for the Indian economy each year, and last season expanded to 10 teams with Gujarat and Lucknow Super Giants. Gujarat pulled off a fairytale title win in their debut season with Hardik Pandya leading the side to victory in front of a record crowd of almost 105,000 fans at Ahmedabad's Narendra Modi Stadium. The tournament runs until May 28. — AFP

Sports

Indonesia in FIFA talks after U-20 WCup Zionist protests

Bali's governor calls for Zionists to be thrown out of the cup

JAKARTA: Indonesian President Joko Widodo said Tuesday he was sending the country's football association chief for talks with FIFA about its hosting of the Under-20 World Cup after the draw was nixed following protests over Zionist participation. The two countries do not have formal diplomatic relations, and support for the Palestinian cause in the world's most populous Muslim-majority nation runs high, fuelling local opposition to hosting the Zionist team.

Widodo said he had dispatched Indonesian Football Association (PSSI) head and minister for state-owned enterprises Erick Thohir as uncertainty

swirled over the competition's location. "I have sent PSSI chief Erick Thohir to meet with the FIFA team to look for the best solution," Widodo said in a live-streamed speech. He did not specify when Thohir - a former chairman of Inter Milan - would fly or which FIFA officials he would meet.

The meeting will take place in Qatari capital Doha, PSSI official Eko Rahmanto told AFP Wednesday. Indonesian officials initially said he would meet with FIFA in Zurich, Switzerland, where the world football governing body is headquartered. Fixtures for the 24-nation tournament beginning in May were due to

be chosen on Friday in Bali, but FIFA cancelled the event without offering a reason or setting a new date.

Indonesian officials said Bali's governor calling for Zionists to be thrown out of the cup because of its policies towards the Palestinians was likely behind the draw's cancellation. Around a hundred conservative Muslim demonstrators also marched in the capital Jakarta this month to protest Zionist involvement. FIFA is yet to comment on the tournament and where it will be held after the draw was nixed. The Indonesian president said sport and politics should not clash after the calls for Zionists to be removed from the tournament.

"I guarantee the participation of Zionists has nothing to do with the consistency of our foreign policy to Palestine. Because our support to Palestine is always strong and firm. So don't mix sports with politics," he said in the video. Widodo's intervention came as fears grew that Indonesia could face sanctions and isolation on the global football stage if it could not guarantee Zionist participation. The country would also be holding the tournament under the cloud of one of the worst stadium disasters in the sport's history after 135 people died in an East Java stadium stampede in October. —AFP

Rybakina books semis at Miami

MIAMI GARDENS: Elena Rybakina moved into the semi-finals of the Miami Open with a confident 6-3, 6-0 win over Italy's Martina Trevisan at Hard Rock Stadium on Tuesday to extend her winning streak to 12 matches. American world number three Jessica Pegula had to dig deep to come back from a set down to beat Russian Anastasia Potapova 4-6, 6-3, 7-6 (7/2), saving two match points, in a match which finished at 1:30 am.

Wimbledon champion Rybakina, who competes for Kazakhstan, remains in strong contention for the "Sunshine Double" of Indian Wells and Miami WTA titles after she beat Aryna Sabalenka in California earlier this month. Sabalenka is the biggest obstacle to Rybakina triumphing again with the Belarusian in impressive form in South Florida.

Sabalenka powered past Barbora Krejčíková in straight sets in her fourth-round match on Monday and faces Romanian Sorana Cirstea in the last eight on Wednesday. Rybakina took charge of her match with Trevisan when the Italian double-faulted to hand her opponent a break and a 3-1 advantage in the first set. Although Trevisan broke back to get back on serve at 4-3, Rybakina took full control and won the remaining eight games to wrap up the win in 69 minutes.

The world number seven said she was feeling the pace of her tough schedule. "It would be better to feel better on the courts physically, but this is something I have to play with, and for now I am getting through, which I'm happy with," she said. "I didn't serve that well, the percentage of the first serve, but in the important moments like 30-40, 30-40 and so on, I was serving aces," added the Moscow-born player. "I think it's just important to find these moments and to push, and for now I'm doing well even not being super fresh."



MIAMI GARDENS, FLORIDA: Elena Rybakina of Kazakhstan plays a forehand to Elise Mertens of Belgium in their fourth round match at Hard Rock Stadium on March 27, 2023 in Miami Gardens, Florida. —AFP

Flying starts

Pegula has got off to flying starts in her matches in Miami and she broke early again to go 2-0 up in the first set, but Potapova struck back winning the next five games with some aggressive winners and then holding to take the set. Pegula was in control in the second but Potapova was determined in the third and put herself in position to win the contest but she couldn't convert on her two match points and was forced into a tie-break.

The American looked exhausted, but she found the energy for a strong finale, winning the breaker

7-2. "I don't know how I turned it around," said Pegula after the victory. "I just kept going. It's a huge win. I haven't been that physically tired in a really long time. Just the humidity was taking so much out of me. It was just really tough, so really it was just pure will," she added. Pegula will have a day off before she has to face Rybakina and she says she is relishing the chance. "She's been playing some great tennis. I feel like her and Sabalenka are the ones to beat right now. It is going to be a great test and I think it is a deserved semi for a tournament like this," she said. —AFP

Alcaraz sets up Fritz clash

MIAMI GARDENS: World number one Carlos Alcaraz charged into the quarter-finals of the ATP Miami Open with a convincing 6-4, 6-4 victory over Tommy Paul on Tuesday but second seed Stefanos Tsitsipas was knocked out by Russian Karen Khachanov. Alcaraz, the defending Miami champion and also the winner at Indian Wells earlier this month, will face another American in the last eight when he comes up against Taylor Fritz.

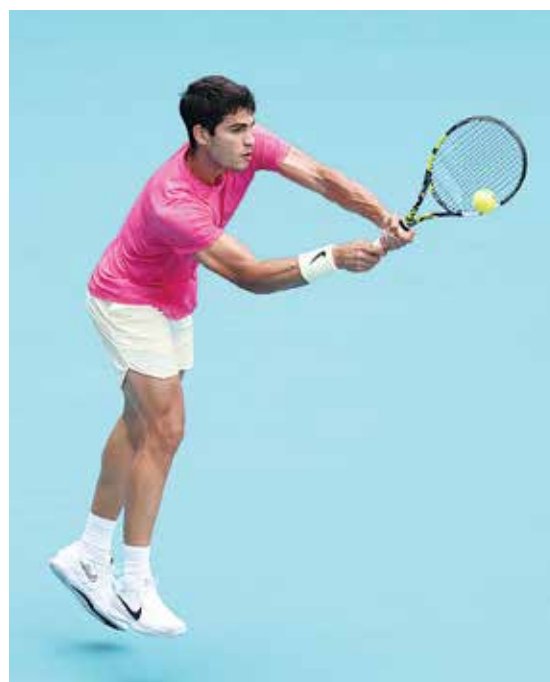
Paul came into the match having won his last 12 encounters with Spanish players, including wins over Alcaraz and Rafael Nadal last year, but he was unable to get a foothold in the contest. It was the ninth straight victory for the 19-year-old Spaniard, who delighted a supportive South Florida crowd with his powerful strokes from the baseline and readiness to move forward, once again making use of his increasingly effective drop shot. "I moved well and defended well and I counter-attacked and I think if I play at that same level I will have a lot of chances to get through," said Alcaraz.

"I feel at home here. It is easy to play here in Miami with all the energy I receive every day." Tsitsipas had

to wait a week for his first contest in Miami, beating Chilean Cristian Garin on Monday, but he came unstuck against Khachanov, losing 7-6 (7/4), 6-4. The Greek has been troubled by a shoulder injury in recent weeks but Khachanov ended his six match losing streak against Tsitsipas and 23 match barren spell against top ten opponents.

His serve was reliable throughout and broke Tsitsipas' serve to love in the fifth game of the second set and kept his cool to see out the win. "Both of us were serving pretty well in the first set... Then I took it to the tie-break, and in the second set as soon as the opportunity came, I had to take it," he said. In a clash of top-10 players, American Fritz defeated Denmark's Holger Rune 6-3, 6-4 to reach to the last eight in Miami for the first time in his career.

Fritz, who won at Delray Beach last month, beat Emilio Nava and Denis Shapovalov in straight sets before Tuesday's encounter and he was pleased with the way he was able to go on the attack. "I couldn't play aggressively in my first two matches because my opponents were hitting every ball as hard as they could. (Rune) still crushes the ball but it was nice to feel I had some more time," Fritz said. "The first two rounds, it was impossible to play my game, I just had to make balls. Today when I got the chance to be aggressive I was and I just wanted to serve well and try not to give him many free points." —AFP



MIAMI GARDENS, FLORIDA: Carlos Alcaraz of Spain plays a backhand against Tommy Paul of the United States in their fourth round match at Hard Rock Stadium on March 28, 2023 in Miami Gardens, Florida. —AFP

Cameroon shocked as Senegal, S Africa, Burkina Faso qualify

JOHANNESBURG: Defending champions Senegal, South Africa and Burkina Faso qualified for the Africa Cup of Nations in matchday four on Tuesday while Namibia are close to joining them after a shock win over Cameroon. Reigning African Footballer of the Year Sadio Mane set up Boulaye Dia to score in the first half and give Senegal a 1-0 win over Mozambique in Maputo and an eight-point Group L lead.

Mihlali Mayambela pounced on a loose ball to score the winner as South Africa defeated Liberia 2-1 in Monrovia and join shock 2022 World Cup semi-finalists Morocco as the Group K qualifiers. Burkina Faso needed one point from a visit to Togo to qualify and they drew 1-1 with Dango Ouattara giving the visiting side an early lead that Kodjo Laba cancelled out in Lome. Captain Peter Shalulle opened the scoring for Namibia, who replaced Cameroon as Group C table-toppers by winning 2-1 in Soweto near Johannesburg.

Senegal, whose penalty shootout victory over Egypt last year brought the Cup of Nations trophy to Dakar for the first time, stretched a perfect group record to four wins. But it was a much closer contest against Mozambique than last week when the Teranga Lions romped to a 5-1 victory at home. Mozambique remain second, but will be overtaken if Rwanda win at home to Benin in Kigali on Wednesday. South Africa ground out a win as Zakhele Lepasa put them ahead, although William Jebor leveled for Liberia before half-time after a blunder by captain and goalkeeper Ronwen Williams.

Goalkeeping howler

Another goalkeeping howler, this time by Liberian Thomas Songo, gifted Mayambela the crucial goal eight minutes into the second half. "It was difficult, but 90 minutes of perseverance got us through," said South Africa coach Hugo Broos. "Coping with the physicality of the Liberians was a real challenge. Fortunately, we chose the right players in the right positions and coped." Morocco, the first African or Arab nation to reach the World Cup semi-finals, did not play because scheduled opponents Zimbabwe were barred due to government interference in the sport. Cameroon football boss and former star Samuel Eto'o looked on from the stand as a team lacking injured forwards Eric Maxim Choupo-Moting and Karl Toko Ekambi came off second best. Shalulle and Absalom Iimbondi scored in the second half for the Brave Warriors before Vincent Aboubakar snatched an added-time consolation goal for the Indomitable Lions.

Namibia have five points and Cameroon four, and both must face Burundi, who have only one point but are not out of the running for a top-two finish. Algeria clinched qualification from Group F on Monday, but who accompanies them as runners-up is wide open after Uganda upset Tanzania 1-0 in Dar es Salaam through a late Rogers Mato goal. Tanzania and Uganda have four points each and Niger two with two rounds to come, in June and September. Liverpool star Mohamed Salah netted as Egypt hammered Malawi 4-0 in Lilongwe to join Guinea at the top of Group D. —AFP

Classifieds

Hospitals & Clinics

Hospitals

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

Kaizen center	25716707
Rawda	22517733

Adaliya	22517144
Khalidiya	24848075
Kaifan	24849807
Shamiya	24848913
Shuwaikh	24814507
Abdullah Salem	22549134
Nuzha	22526804
Industrial Shuwaikh	24814764
Qadsia	22515088
Dasmah	22532265
Bneid Al-Gar	22531908
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Mirqab	22456536
Sharq	22465401
Salmiya	25746401

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I, AZIZ, holder of Passport No: L5937953, do hereby change my name to AZIZ (as given name) Maimoon (as surname) for all purposes. I will henceforth be known in the name AZIZ MAIMOON and I also undertake in all my documents. (C #3191) - 28-03-2023

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Scotland down Spain 2-0

De Bruyne steers 'merciless' Belgium past Germany



GLASGOW: Scotland's midfielder Scott McTominay (center right) clears the ball from the path of Spain's striker Borja Iglesias during the UEFA Euro 2024 group A qualification football match between Scotland and Spain on March 28, 2023. — AFP

PARIS: Scott McTominay scored twice as Scotland claimed a famous 2-0 victory over Spain at Hampden Park in Euro 2024 qualifying on Tuesday, while Croatia won in Turkey. Steve Clarke's Scotland won their opening match in Group A 3-0 against Cyprus on Saturday but usurped that result with a stunning performance against three-time European champions Spain. It was their first victory over Spain since 1984 and probably their best result since beating France in 2007.

"The manager said before getting on the bus for the stadium: 'This is your chance to create a legacy as a Scotland player,'" said McTominay. "These are the sort of nights in 20-30 years you remember as a player. When you watch back the game you say I was there. It's what the game is about." Manchester United midfielder McTominay gave the hosts a dream start by slotting home Andrew Robertson's cutback in the seventh minute.

Ryan Christie went close to a second before Jose-lu, who scored twice on his debut against Norway at the weekend, hit the crossbar for Spain. Lyndon Dykes missed a golden chance to double the Scots' advantage in first-half added time, but dinked the ball over the bar after racing through on goal. McTominay made no such mistake six minutes after the restart, though, drilling home a fine left-footed volley after excellent work from Kieran Tierney.

Spain piled on late pressure but failed to create many

clear-cut chances as Scotland held on to the delight of a raucous crowd in Glasgow. The loss is a serious early setback for new Spain coach Luis de la Fuente who took over from Luis Enrique following a World Cup last-16 exit to Morocco. "It's clear that the two chances they had they put away and we tried, we hit the woodwork twice, we had a lot of chances, above all in the first half," Spain midfielder Rodri told Teledeporte. "We have to improve these lapses, and these things that cost us against these teams."

Scotland are top of a difficult Group A that also includes Erling Haaland's Norway and Khvicha Kvaratskhelia's Georgia. The Georgians played out a 1-1 draw with Norway in the other Group A game in Batumi. The Scandinavians took the lead through Alexander Sorloth, playing in place of the injured Haaland, in the 15th minute. But Metz forward Georges Mikautadze equalized on the hour mark to ensure Georgia did not start their bid to qualify for a first major tournament with a defeat. "It would have been worse if we had stood here and not created chances. We had some incredible chances today. That's life," said Norway coach Stale Solbakken.

Croatia beat Turkey

World Cup semi-finalists Croatia eased to an impressive 2-0 win in Turkey to kickstart their Group D campaign after an opening draw with Wales. Chelsea midfielder Mateo Kovacic netted a first-half double

with both goals coming from Mario Pasalic assists. Croatia are level on four points with Wales after Rob Page's side beat Latvia 1-0 for their first win since the retirement of Gareth Bale.

Striker Kieffer Moore headed home the winning goal for a dominant Wales in the 41st minute. Switzerland made it two wins from two games in Group I with a comfortable 3-0 success against Israel. Goals from Ruben Vargas, Zeki Amdouni and Silvan Widmer helped the Swiss follow up a 5-0 thrashing of Belarus in style. Romania also boast a 100 percent record in the group after edging out Belarus 2-1, while Kosovo have two points from as many matches after a 1-1 draw with Andorra.

'Merciless' Belgium

A goal and two assists from Kevin De Bruyne lifted Belgium past struggling Euro 2024 hosts Germany, winning 3-2 in a friendly in Cologne on Tuesday. De Bruyne set up two goals to give his side a 2-0 lead inside 10 minutes, before scoring one of his own late in the second to deepen Germany's woes ahead of next year's European Championship on home soil. "Independent of the result, it is important how we perform in these friendly games," said new Belgium coach Domenico Tedesco. "It's not easy to play here... the German team have some really good players."

Germany were hoping to find some form after recent uncharacteristic early exits from major tournaments, but lost to Belgium for the first time since 1954.

"We were too restrained, too passive, and we weren't able to put the opponent under pressure," Germany coach Hansi Flick told TV network RTL, saying "Belgium played mercilessly". The four-time world champions suffered a second successive World Cup group-stage exit in Qatar last year, which followed a last-16 loss to England at Euro 2020.

Belgium's German-raised coach Tedesco pushed Yannick Carrasco up front in place of Arsenal's Leandro Trossard and the move paid immediate dividends, with the Atletico Madrid winger blasting in on the counter just six minutes in. Romelu Lukaku, scorer of all three goals in Belgium's 3-0 romp against Sweden in Euro qualifying on Friday, then smashed in a left-footed effort to double the lead, the goal again assisted by De Bruyne. With three first-choice central defenders out, a rattled Germany looked all but certain to concede a third.

The introduction of Emre Can, who replaced the injured Leon Goretzka midway through the first half, brought the home side some desperately needed stability. Germany were on the board soon after when Niclas Füllkrug converted a penalty awarded for a Luka-lu handball, giving the late-blooming Werder Bremen striker his sixth goal in six international appearances. Belgium's incisiveness eluded them in the second half as Germany pushed for an equalizer but they were unable to break through, coming closest when Timo Werner had a goal chalked off for offside. — AFP



Kuwait grabs IHF bronze

KUWAIT: Deputy Director-General of Public Authority for Sport (PAS), Bashar Abdullah, said bronze medal won by the Kuwaiti team at the 2023 International Ice Hockey Federation (IIHF) World Championship, Division IV, in Mongolia, is a great achievement in the history of the game in Kuwait. The well-deserved victory, given the fierce competition, is the fruit of relentless efforts by Kuwait Winter Games Club to promote the game over the past years. Abdullah told reporters on Tuesday after

receiving the champions of the Blue team. He congratulated the players and the technical and managing mission to the championship, which ended two days ago, on their first achievement on the global level. On his part, President of Kuwait Winter Games Club Fheid Al-Ajmy voiced joy for the historic victory, noting that the Kuwaiti player Al-Al-Sarraf won the best forward award.

Al-Ajmy dedicated the victory to His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. He extolled Minister of Information and Culture, and Minister of State for Youth Affairs Abdurrahman Al-Mutairi and all sports officials for their support to the Club. — KUNA

Messi scores 100th Argentina's goal

SANTIAGO DEL ESTERO: Argentina captain Lionel Messi on Tuesday scored his 100th international goal for the reigning world champions as they romped to a 7-0 friendly win over outclassed Curacao. Seven-time Ballon d'Or winner Messi opened the scoring against the Caribbean island minnows on 20 minutes in Santiago del Estero. It came 17 years after he opened his Argentina account in a 3-2 defeat to Croatia in March 2006.

The 35-year-old soon added another just after the half-hour mark to make it 3-0, and then completed his hat-trick on 37 minutes with the fifth as Argentina toyed with their overmatched opponents. It was his seventh hat-trick for the national team. "You cannot describe Messi in words," said fellow goalscorer Nicolas Gonzalez. "He's the best in the world and he shows it match after match, day after day. Every time he touches the ball, he makes you smile."

Messi came into the game not just as his country's all-time record goalscorer, but with more goals than the next two top marksmen—Gabriel Batistuta on 56 and Sergio Aguero with 41 - put together. This was Argentina's second match since winning the World Cup in dramatic style against France in Qatar in December—triumphing 4-2 on penalties after a thrilling 3-3 draw—and it was always going to be about Messi reaching 100 goals. Now with 102, he remains third in the all-time list, behind great rival Cristiano Ronaldo (122) of Portugal and Iran's Ali Daei (109).

Messi had come up short on Thursday last week when he notched his 99th goal for the Albiceleste as Argentina toiled in their homecoming celebration match



SANTIAGO DEL ESTERO: Argentina's forward Lionel Messi (center) raises a replica of the World Cup trophy next to his teammates during a recognition ceremony for the World Cup-winning players, following the friendly football match between Argentina and Curacao on March 28, 2023. — AFP

against Panama. The Central Americans had held out until the 78th minute before 21-year-old MLS sensation Thiago Almada broke their resistance. Messi then scored direct from a free-kick a minute from time—his 800th goal in professional football—in front of 83,000 delirious fans in Buenos Aires.

Curacao, ranked 86th by world governing body FIFA, could only hold out for 20 minutes before Messi took a pass from Giovanni Lo Ceslo, cut inside his marker onto his weaker right foot and fired a low shot into the bottom corner. The referee was then seen on live television throwing the ball to someone on the side of the pitch as DirecTV commentators speculated that it was heading "straight to the museum." Three minutes later Gonzalez outjumped goalkeeper Eloy Room to head home from four yards. — AFP