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104 Palestinians massacred

Kuwait condemns Gaza genocide; Zionist troops fire at the crowd



GAZA: Zionist forces shot dead 104 people when a crowd rushed towards aid trucks on Thursday, the health ministry in Hamas-run Gaza said, in one of the worst single incidents of a nearly five-month war.

off hunger. Ministry spokesman Ashraf Al-Qudra said hundreds were killed and wounded from "bullets of the occupation forces that targeted a gathering of citizens" at Gaza City's Nabulsi roundabout. He called it a "massacre".

A witness told AFP that "thousands of people" had "just stormed the trucks", which were near army tanks. "The soldiers fired at the crowd as people came too close to the tanks," the witness said, declining to be named for safety reasons.

Zionist sources confirmed that troops opened fire at Palestinians rushing toward aid trucks in Gaza, with one saying soldiers thought they "posed a threat" to troops. A spokesman for Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's office, however, said many of the dead were crushed by the trucks themselves, after "aid trucks were overwhelmed by people trying to loot".

The Gaza City shooting adds to a Palestinian death toll from the war which the health ministry earlier Thursday said had topped 30,000.

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More than 750 people were also hurt in the incident, the ministry said. It came after aid agencies had intensified warnings over Gaza's humanitarian situation, with famine threatening particularly in Gaza's north.

Looting of aid trucks had previously occurred in northern Gaza, where residents have taken to eating animal fodder and even leaves to try to stave

GAZA: This image grab from a handout video shows what the army says are Gazans around aid trucks in Gaza City. Zionist forces shot dead 104 people when a crowd rushed towards aid trucks on February 29. (Inset) People mourn at Al-Shifa hospital in Gaza City, over the bodies of Palestinians killed in an early morning incident when residents rushed toward aid trucks in Gaza City on February 29, 2024. — AFP photos

NEWS IN BRIEF

9 million traffic tickets issued

KUWAIT: The Ministry of Interior announced Thursday that traffic violation tickets issued in Kuwait in 2023 have reached some nine million, and 296 people died in accidents during the same year. In a statement at a conference kickstarting the events of the Unified Gulf Traffic Week 2024, Brigadier Nawaf Al-Hayan, said that according to statistics, over four million tickets were issued for exceeding the speed limit, 850,000 for crossing the red light, over 300,000 for not wearing the seatbelt, and over 185,000 for using mobile phones while driving. Hayan said that the Unified Gulf Traffic Week 2024, under the slogan "Driving Without a Phone," will start from March 3 to 10, reaffirming the ministry's keenness to spread traffic awareness. — KUNA

Camping season to end

KUWAIT: Kuwait Municipality announced that the camping season will end on March 15. Campers must commit to removing their camps before the end of the camping period. They must also obtain approval from the Environment Public Authority of the location's cleanliness to receive the KD 100 insurance back. — KUNA

Media to get IDs for poll

KUWAIT: The Ministry of Information called on owners and heads of media outlets, as well as journalists who want to cover the upcoming National Assembly poll slated for April 4, to obtain the proper media identification cards. Speaking to KUNA on Thursday, ministry undersecretary Lafi Al-Subaie said media can apply for the ID cards through: <https://esice.media.gov.kw/election/electionid/electionidrequest.aspx>. Journalists and media people must show their IDs at constituencies and polling stations. — KUNA

India's richest man kicks off pre-wedding party, feeds 50,000

NEW DELHI: India's richest man has kicked off lavish pre-wedding parties for his son by feeding more than 50,000 people in his hometown, with celebrations in the coming days expected to include some of the world's most influential figures. Global tech CEOs, industry titans, Bollywood stars, pop icons and politicians are expected to jet in Friday for the main three-day celebrations hosted by billionaire tycoon Mukesh Ambani, who is building a sprawling Hindu temple complex for the event.

Ambani, 66, chairman of oil-to-telecoms giant

Reliance Industries, is Asia's richest person according to the Forbes real-time billionaires list, worth more than \$114 billion. On Wednesday evening, Ambani and wife Nita - along with their son Anant and his fiancée Radhika Merchant -- launched a three-day feast for villagers at the Reliance Township in his hometown of Jamnagar, in India's western state of Gujarat. Anant, 28, who also serves as a director on the boards of several Reliance-owned firms, is expected to marry Merchant, 29, the daughter of an industrialist, later this year.

Ambani held the most expensive wedding in India for his daughter in 2018, which reportedly cost \$100 million and saw US pop megastar Beyonce perform. This time, R&B star Rihanna, illusionist David Blaine and Bollywood's Diljit Dosanjh will perform for the guests, who are expected to include Microsoft founder Bill Gates, Meta head Mark Zuckerberg, and

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JAMNAGAR: This handout photograph shows Mukesh Ambani (4th left), chairman at Reliance Industries attending to guests during Anna Seva (community food service) to seek blessings from various community members for the pre-wedding celebration of his son Anant Ambani and Radhika Merchant. — AFP

Russia warns West of nuclear war risk

MOSCOW: President Vladimir Putin warned Thursday of a "real" risk of nuclear war if the West escalates the conflict in Ukraine, offering a defiant and emboldened stance in his annual speech to Russians. Speaking in Moscow, Putin said his soldiers were advancing in Ukraine and warned the West of "tragic consequences" for any country that dared to send troops to Kyiv. "They have announced the possibility of sending Western military contingents to Ukraine... The consequences for possible interventionists will be much more tragic," he said in his address to the nation.

"They should eventually realize that we also have weapons that can hit targets on their territory. Everything that the West comes up with creates the real threat of a conflict with the use of nuclear weapons, and thus the destruction of civilization," said Putin. His comments appeared to be a response to French President Emmanuel Macron's refusal earlier this week to rule out sending troops to Ukraine - a stance that drew swift rejection from other leaders in Europe. Nevertheless, the debate has struck a nerve in Moscow, which has long seen its conflict with Ukraine as part of a wider "hybrid war" being waged against it by NATO. Western leaders have repeatedly criticized Putin for what they see as his reckless use of nuclear rhetoric.

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SIMFEROPOL: Employees watch a TV broadcast of Russia's President Vladimir Putin's annual state of the nation address at their office in Simferopol, Crimea, on February 29, 2024. — AFP

TikTok make-up influencers spark health warnings

PARIS: Pressed by parents to pose in videos with make-up and skincare products, pre-teen girls dubbed "Sephora Kids" have taken TikTok by storm in a trend that some specialists brand a danger to children's mental and physical health. American girls

between the ages of eight and 12 are gaining thousands of followers on the video platform by modeling their make-up purchases.

The trend focuses particularly on products from the French high-street brand Sephora, championed by reality TV star Kim Kardashian's daughter, North West. Gushing over pots of moisturizer or begging their parents to buy them anti-wrinkle cream, they pose in front of the mirror with their hair tied back, aping popular grown-up make-up tutorials. Skin specialists warned that some of the products used in the kids' videos contain ingredients not suited to young skin, such as retinol.

"Many of the 'skin influencers' sometimes are more trusted than real physicians," US dermatologist Danilo Del Campo told AFP. "This has led to an increase in consultations related to skin reactions and concerns resulting from the misuse of these products," he warned. "Most parents do not realize there are any risks." Parroting famous beauty influencers, the "Sephora kids" review products from high-end lines, such as moisturizers costing nearly 70 euros (\$76). "How can these little girls spend like, my salary, really, in skincare?" said one Sephora salesperson in the United States, in a TikTok video.

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Local

Cyber fraud: Woman loses KD 17,750

Banks and experts share security tips

By Passant Hisham

KUWAIT: Zahra, a 37-year-old Indian housewife, fell victim to a cyber fraud incident resulting in the theft of KD 17,750 from her bank account. The funds were stolen through 18 transactions within minutes, wiping out her entire savings. Shocked and in disbelief, Zahra recounted the incident. A woman called her from a local Kuwaiti number, claiming to be a bank employee, and requested her personal bank account details, including her card number.

"She convinced me that she needed this information to update my bank account. I completely trusted her because she repeatedly asked me not to share my personal details with anyone except the bank, stressing their importance," Zahra lamented. After sharing her information, Zahra received a one-time password (OTP) message from her bank, which she also shared with the woman as per her request. Immediately after, Zahra noticed multiple suspicious transactions of KD 1,000 each in her account, prompting her to end the call and contact the bank to deactivate her account. But, by the time she took action, the woman had already stolen all her money.

"For a week straight, I couldn't sleep after that incident. This woman's voice kept haunting me. I don't know how she hypnotized me like that," Zahra ruefully said. After one month of reporting this incident to the bank and the Electronic and Cybercrimes Department, Zahra's case is still under investigation. Given the prevalence of such cyber fraud cases in Kuwait nowadays, Kuwait Times explored the nature of these crimes and the safety measures implemented to combat them through the perspective of a legal

expert and a banking expert.

Lawyer Mohammed Al-Jassem noted that Zahra's case is a type of social engineering attack known as "vishing," where fraudsters call victims claiming to be from the bank's technical support or from a trusted financial company and convince them to share OTP codes under the pretext of verifying their accounts or protecting them. He listed other popular means, which include:

Phishing: Fraudsters send emails or text messages that appear to be sent from trusted institutions, such as banks, asking users to click on a suspicious link, leading them to a fake page requesting their personal information and OTP codes.

Smishing: Similar to phishing, but without using links, scammers use text messages to send fake notifications that appear to be from a bank, asking users to confirm a transaction or update their account information by sending an OTP code.

Ransomware and malware: Scammers install malware on victims' electronic devices to steal personal information and OTP codes whenever they are inserted on the device.

Fake websites: Scammers create websites that look similar to the official websites of banks or financial services, asking visitors to provide their personal data and OTP codes. In the case of filing a report facing any of these cases with the Electronic and Cybercrimes Department, it acts by collaborating with banks and telecom companies to trace the criminal's IP address and personal information, Jassem explained.

However, Jassem noted that, due to the large number of complaints filed regarding these crimes, it often takes a long time for the authorities to resolve



Mohammed Hegab



Lawyer Mohammed Al-Jassem



the issue. Unfortunately, he said that this prolonged duration not only increases the rates of committing such crimes but also gives the criminals the opportunity to flee the country, thereby making it more challenging to ever reach them. Due to this, he pointed out that the success rate of finding these scammers may only amount to two or three percent.

He stated that if individuals filing complaints don't receive any official response after a prolonged period, they can take the following actions: Firstly, they could file a compensation claim against the Ministry of Justice and the Ministry of Interior for failing to comply with their duties. Alternatively, they could report a corruption complaint to Nazaha (the National Anti-Corruption Authority), alleging corruption in the handling of legal reports, as this action is deemed a violation of the constitution, which mandates the protection of citizens' rights.

From the banking expert's view, Mohammed He-

gab, Supervisor at Authorization and Fraud Monitoring and Risk Management in one of the banks in Kuwait, stressed that people should never disclose their personal details over the phone under any circumstances, highlighting that no financial institution or legitimate company will ever call or send a message to request such information.

Additionally, he advised caution with online payments, urging users to verify website safety and payment gateways. While acknowledging the ongoing efforts of banks to implement rigorous security measures for client protection, he emphasized that the primary responsibility still lies with clients to remain vigilant and informed about potential scams. He also referred to a campaign initiated by the central bank and the Kuwait Banking Association, "Diraya" (let's be aware), for more information regarding customers' rights and financial literacy in dealing with banks.

Kuwait Theatre Festival, beacon of culture, art in the Arab World

KUWAIT: Minister of Information and Culture Abdulrahman Al-Mutairi said that the Kuwait Theatre Festival, whose 23rd edition kicked off Wednesday, has been a beacon of culture and art in the Arab world since its launching in 1989. Speaking at the opening ceremony at the Abdullhussain Abduredha Theatre in Salmiya, Al-Mutairi, the festival's sponsor, said since its inception, the Kuwaiti festival has formed its identity and continued its march toward excellence and the dissemination of the culture of diversity. The minister added that the festival has also become a platform for developing the theatrical movement in the country.

This year's edition coincides with Kuwait's national days' celebrations and the 50th anniversary of founding the National Council for Culture, Arts, and Letters (NCCAL), he said. "We work at the NCCAL on implementing the directives of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Dr. Mohammad Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah on backing and encouraging culture and arts in Kuwait," the minister elaborated.

This is done through the NCCAL's strategy to boost intellectual production and the theatrical movement and create an environment that encourages theatrical creativity, he noted. The pioneers of Kuwait's theatrical movement have left a rich legacy for generations in order to cement the role of theater in society-building, he stated. He voiced delight at naming CEO of the Saudi Theater and Performing Arts Commission Sultan Al-Bazie as the festival's guest and Kuwaiti artist Saad Al-Faraj as the personality of this year's edition, honoring them as well as other dignitaries and artists. In another development, the National Council for Culture, Arts, and Letters organized on Thursday an artistic workshop (free studio) marking the 63rd anniversary of National Day and the 33rd anniversary of Liberation Day, with the participation of formative artists from Kuwait and other GCC countries. Sara Khalaf, in charge of the studio and the organizer of the workshop, said in remarks to KUNA that the three-day, annual activity was organized to "express our joy with the celebrations of the beloved homeland," noting that a number of renowned artists from Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Qatar are taking part in the workshop.

Nasser Nasrallah, of the UAE, expressed pleasure in partaking in the workshop that coincided with the Kuwaiti national days, noting that his works depict traditional ships, the Kuwaiti woman, and the national flag. His Saudi peer, Hussein Daqqas, said one of his paintings were inspired from the colors of the Kuwaiti flag. — KUNA



Abdulrahman Al-Mutairi



Alawada band performs at the Yarmouk Cultural Center on Wednesday evening.



Once upon a song: A fusion of Western and Middle Eastern music

By Zainab Al-Mashoor

KUWAIT: The Alawada band performed a fusion of Western and Middle Eastern melodies at the Yarmouk Cultural Center with a nostalgic reminiscence to the 90s era on Wednesday evening. The band transported the audience back in time with well-loved classics from their youth and Spacetoon childhood tunes. The performance highlighted the band's unique ability to fuse diverse musical traditions and instruments into familiar songs such as "AhdElasdeka," "Aisha/Zaina," and "Hotel California," which



added depth and richness to each composition.

According to Mubarak Hlshem, the manager of Alawada Band, the name "Alawada" was chosen from the Arabic word "Awada," meaning the return or reunion. It reflects the band's bringing together members from various backgrounds, nationalities, and cultures to create a musical experience that transcends boundaries.

The band includes distinguished members who bring their own unique flair to the stage from Venezuela, Kuwait, Pakistan, and America. The band's diverse lineup



includes Talal Khaled on vocals and guitar, Saba Soulayman on vocals and violin, Arshad on bamboo flute, Essa Rafael on cajon, Jarah Almansoury on Kuwaiti percussion, Faisal Aljeemaz on Kuwaiti percussion, and Rakan Alnajem on Kuwaiti percussion. As the night drew to a close, it was evident that the Alawada Band had succeeded in not only entertaining but also inspiring their audience, leaving them eagerly anticipating their next performance and the promise of more great musical adventures to come.

PIES students win top spot in GUST Research Contest

By Shiekha Alexis De Leon

KUWAIT: Philippine International English School's (PIES) students recorded another impressive winning streak in Gulf University of Science and Technology (GUST) Research Contest. Althea Dimapilis and Luke Caparros, two Grade 12 STEM students from the Philippine International English School in Fahaheel, secured the top spot in the annual GUST Research Contest, which was held on February 17, 2024.

Through an inspiring demonstration of their scientific capabilities, the dynamic duo won the champion title for their ground-breaking studies on the potential of tomatoes and mangoes as an alternative substitute for sunscreen. Their project emphasized the value of eco-friendly and sustainable skincare solutions in addition to showcasing creativity. Conversely, another PIES team led by Rob Asumen and Shiekha Alexis De Leon won third place in the GUST Research Competition. Their investigation focused on clamshells' effectiveness as a fundamental component in making sturdy hollow blocks. This project demonstrated the students' originality producing creative solutions to problems related to construction and the environment. Last year, PIES



Philippine International English School's students record another impressive winning streak in Gulf University of Science and Technology Research Contest.

students also secured first and second place in the same competition, proving the school's consistent commitment to excellence in scientific research.

Participants in the competition come from different schools, and PIES has continuously demonstrated its status as a powerhouse for exceptional STEM talent. PIES is cementing its standing as a leading institution that nurtures the upcoming generation of scientists by making waves in the GUST Research Contest. The PIES team of coaches throughout the consecutive competitions were Dr Romel Ramos, the head of the senior high school department, Kristoffer Arroyo, the coordinator of the science area, and science instructor Ivan Tolentino.



KPC keeps abreast of global market needs

LONDON: Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) regularly keeps up with the needs of the global market, a company official said on Wednesday, citing such efforts as a work in progress. Monitoring the developments in the global oil market helps cater to the needs of KPC's clientele while simultaneously pushing the company's marketing strategies, KPC's Director of International Marketing Sheikh Khaled Al-Sabah was quoted as saying in a statement released by the company's European office. Addressing a gathering in London as part of International Energy Week, the official commended Kuwait Integrated Petroleum Industries Company (KIPIIC)-owned refineries for churning out a collective 1,400 barrels of oil per day. — KUNA



KPC's Director of International Marketing Sheikh Khaled Al-Sabah in a group photo with the officials.



KUWAIT: His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Dr Mohammad Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah received on Thursday the Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Kuwait Entrepreneurship Association, Saeed Manea Al-Ajmi, and the members of the Association's Board of Directors.



KUWAIT: His Highness the Prime Minister, in the presence Minister of Commerce and Industry Abdullah Hamad Al-Jouan, received the Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Kuwaiti Saudi Pharmaceutical Industries Company, Rashid Riyad Khazal, the Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Federation of Kuwaiti Industries, Hussein Ali Al-Kharafi and the members of the Federation's Board of Directors.



KUWAIT: His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh received Chairman of the Board of Directors of Kuwait Airways, Abdul Mohsen Salem Al-Faqan, Vice Chairman of the Board of Directors Dr Amani Khaled Boursli, and the CEO Ahmad Muhammad Al-Karibani. — KUNA photos

Embassy launches 4th edition of 'Palestinian Products Festival'

Exports to Kuwait have seen a significant increase



Ambassadors checking the Palestinian products.



Some Palestinian companies.



Palestinian Ambassador Rami Tahboub opening the Palestinian Products Festival. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat



A Palestinian woman offers traditional Palestinian food products.

By Faten Omar

KUWAIT: The Embassy of Palestine to Kuwait launched the 4th edition of the "Palestinian Products Festival" under the patronage of Palestinian Ambassador Rami Tahboub at the Graduates Society. On the sidelines of the event, Ibrahim Najjar, the Executive Manager of Palcircless, highlighted the challenges faced by Palestinian companies in participating in exhibitions, saying "Despite the difficulties posed by the region's intricate road network, which includes 756 military

checkpoints, 11 Palestinian companies managed to participate in the exhibition. However, the ongoing siege and war in Gaza prevented companies from that region from contributing to the event. These barriers make it challenging to transport goods."

Najjar underscored the importance of the Kuwaiti market for Palestinian exports, noting the trust placed in Palestinian products by Kuwaiti consumers. Over the years, exports to Kuwait have seen a significant increase, reaching 20 million dollars by the present day. This

positive trend reflects the potential for further growth in trade relations between Palestine and Kuwait. Moreover, he emphasized Kuwait's unique role among Arab countries in supporting the Palestinian cause. "Kuwait stands firmly with the leadership and people of Palestine, offering not only market opportunities but also humanitarian aid, particularly to those in Gaza," he noted.

For his part, Palestinian Ambassador Rami Tahboub expressed gratitude for the opportunity to showcase Palestinian products at the fourth Palestinian

Products Festival in Kuwait, adding "The festival serves as a vital platform for Palestinian merchants to exhibit and sell their goods, especially as Ramadan approaches, a time when demand for such products typically increases."

Tahboub noted the significant demand for Palestinian products from both Kuwaiti citizens and other residents in Kuwait. He underscored the festival's importance in supporting the Palestinian economy amid challenging circumstances, including the ongoing situation in Gaza and the West Bank, indicating

that the presence of a diverse audience, including ambassadors to Kuwait which reflects the widespread appreciation for the quality of Palestinian products.

He extended gratitude to Kuwait for its ongoing support in both Palestinian affairs and commercial endeavors, particularly for its backing of exhibitions featuring Palestinian food and craft products. The Palestinian Products Festival offers an array of products such as food, handicrafts, and heritage related products. The event is being held from February 29th to March 4th, 2024.



Kuwait Health Minister Dr Ahmad Al-Awadhi inaugurates the Nuclear Medicine and Molecular Imaging Conference on Thursday.



Nuclear Medicine and Molecular Imaging conference kicks off

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: "Our presence today reflects the Ministry of Health's keenness and its continuous commitment to keep abreast of the latest technologies and scientific advancements," Kuwait Health Minister Dr. Ahmad Al-Awadhi said during the opening of the Nuclear Medicine and Molecular Imaging Conference on Thursday. This, he said, demonstrates the commitment to share experiences and exchange future visions so as to enhance scientific and professional cooperation among specialists in this field.

Dr. Al-Awadhi said, "The Ministry of Health provided the latest integrated hybrid imaging devices, PET and MRI, in nuclear medicine at the new Jahra Hospital, which is the first device of its kind in the Gulf region." He added that the upcoming launch of two



additional devices in Al-Farwaniya Hospital and the Kuwait Cancer Control Center will position Kuwait as a leader in the Middle East.

Globally, there has been increased interest in scientific publications related to the latest technologies and applications in the fields of nuclear medicine and molecular imaging. "The contribution of our national teams to this research and positive results published in the most prestigious international scientific journals is a source of pride and honor for the Ministry of Health staff," he

added. Dr. Al-Awadhi concluded his remarks by saying, "I am hopeful that this conference will provide the medical staff with the opportunity to learn about the latest developments and scientific advancements in the field of nuclear medicine and molecular imaging."

Conference Chairman Dr. Abdulredha Ismail said the ministry is keen to develop scientific expertise and attract the best experts from all over the world so as to exchange ideas and provide the most modern technology in the field of diagnosis and treatment. This has placed Kuwait at the top of nuclear medicine in the Gulf and the region.

Dr. Abdulredha Ismail acknowledged the pioneering educators and early leaders who laid the foundational stones for the field of nuclear medicine in Kuwait over 60 years ago, starting with the first application of nuclear medicine in Kuwait using therapeutic radioactive iodine in 1963. Conference co-chairperson Dr. Eman Al-Awadhi welcomed the attendees of the conference that is being held under the theme "Nuclear Medicine and Molecular Imaging: A New Era," in collaboration with a group of international and local experts. The conference is being held from February 29th until March 2, 2024.

CAN hails Kuwait leaders, celebrates national days

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: Chairman of the Board of the National Campaign for Cancer Awareness, also known as the Cancer Aware Nation (CAN), Dr. Khalid Ahmad Al-Saleh, congratulated the Kuwaiti leadership and Kuwaiti people on the occasion of National and Liberation Days. CAN supports patients through various psychological, moral, and material means and helps cancer victims fight the disease and restore their normal lives after recovery. CAN celebrated National and Liberation Days as volunteers waved Kuwaiti flags during the celebration. It also participated in distributing gifts and scarves.

It is worth mentioning that CAN has trained 1,450 dentists (from 2013 until 2023) on recognizing the initial signs of oral cancer. Also, 2,585 nurses have been trained on ways of dealing with cancer patients, 1,533 primary care doctors were trained (from 2012 until 2013) on the early detection of cancerous tumors. CAN was launched in 2006 under the Amiri patronage.



Cancer Aware Nation celebrates National day and Liberation day.



AI, Cyber security: Arab youths should be empowered

CAIRO: It is imperative to support Arab youths in all activities related to artificial intelligence (AI) and cyber security, Kuwait's Minister of State for Youth Affairs and Minister of State for Communications Dawood Maarafi said Wednesday. Speaking to KUNA at the end of the 47th meeting of Arab youth and sports ministers, Maarafi, also Minister of State for National Assembly Affairs, added that current times are rapidly accelerating, which requires paying attention to technology serving development in all Arab countries.

It is necessary to empower and better prepare youth for such technology, he said, noting that His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah has been supporting youth as they are future leaders. The government, headed by His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Dr. Mohammad Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah, has set a roadmap to support youth initiatives in all related domains, Maarafi concluded.

GCC ministerial session

Meanwhile, Secretary General of the Gulf Cooperation Council Jassem Al-Budaiwi affirmed on Thursday that the council's 159th ministerial session would be held next Sunday in Riyadh in addition to separate meetings with foreign ministers of Jordan, Egypt, and Morocco. The GCC secretary-general said in a statement that the ministerial meeting would be chaired by Qatari Foreign Minister Mohammad Al-Thani, the president of the GCC ministerial council's current session, and the conferees would discuss reports concerning follow-up on implementing resolutions of the GCC Supreme Council, issued at the 44th summit, held in Qatar in December.

He added that they would also discuss memos and reports submitted by the ministerial and technical committees as well as the GCC Secretariat General with respect to dialogue and strategic relations with states and international coalitions, in addition to regional and international affairs. He noted that Egyptian Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry would hold the talks with the GCC on the sidelines of the session, while Jordan and Morocco would be engaged in identical and separate talks by the two countries' foreign ministers, respectively, Ayman Al-Safadi and Nasser Bourita.

The meetings between the GCC and the Jordanian and Moroccan sides would be part of the distinctive relationship and partnerships. The GCC, founded in the early 1980s of the past century, groups Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Bahrain, Qatar, and Oman. The bloc was set up to coordinate strategies at various levels. — KUNA

Photo of the day



KUWAIT: Photo shows a view of the Kuwait City skyline. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

NBK urges customers to keep informed about scams and protection methods

'Let's Be Aware' campaign launched

KUWAIT: National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) continues to support the "Let's Be Aware" campaign launched by the Central Bank of Kuwait, in collaboration with local banks and Kuwait Banking Association (KBA) with the aim of promoting financial literacy and awareness among the different segments of society. In this context, NBK calls on customers to follow the latest publications and awareness messages provided by the bank through its various channels, to keep informed about the latest scams and how to avoid them, as scammers always use devious and changing schemes to steal customer information.

NBK shares educational content including video clips and text communications on all its social media and other digital channels to warn customers from fictitious investments whether in cash, commodities, virtual currencies or real estate. There are also other forms of fraud, such as tricking customers into investing in attractive stocks and bonds by promising highly lucrative returns, providing false information about a real investment, or enticing them to register their personal information on fake trading platforms to obtain profits.

Other examples include impersonating public figure and businesspersons on social media to trick customers that they provide financial aids, and requesting their banking information to deposit these aids, or calling



customers directly and impersonating official entities from police or other authorities to steal their information. NBK always warns customers of all fraud types via SMS, e-mail or phone calls by sharing content on its social media platforms to warn customers from clicking ads with unknown sources, or those pretending to be from legitimate entities like banks or telecom companies share subscriptions ads concurrently with ongoing real subscriptions.

NBK affirms that it will never ask customers for personal information via e-mail, SMS or phone calls, warning them of responding to such messages representing fraud attempts to obtain their banking information to steal their money or data. NBK firmly believes in the importance of promoting financial culture among the different segments of society and increasing awareness on how to maximize benefit from its wide range of ser-

vices via branches or digital channels, using its social media platforms, which are the most popular among Kuwaiti banks.

Regarding this as a crucial part of its strategy, NBK makes consistent efforts to educate customers. To this end, it always urges customers to strictly adhere with the general security instructions and tips to steer clear of online scams. It also advises them to change card PINs frequently and not to share them with anyone impersonating a bank employee.

The "Let's Be Aware" campaign is the largest across the GCC region focusing on raising banking and financial awareness among banks' customers. The campaign covers a variety of crucial topics including: anti-fraud tips, awareness on high-risk investments, ways to maximize benefit from banking services, promoting savings and investment culture, as well as other related topics.

It is worth mentioning that NBK is a key advocate and participant in all CBK's campaigns and initiatives to increase financial and banking awareness among different segments of society. As a leading financial institution, locally and regionally, NBK frequently organizes various activities to raise awareness on all topics related to the banking sector, as well as many training courses for its employees to enhance their knowledge and expertise in the areas of combating fraud and financial crime.



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General Consulate in China's Quanzhou marks Kuwait's 63rd National Day and 33rd Liberation Day.



Kuwait Embassy in Gabon celebrates Kuwait's 63rd National Day and 33rd Liberation Day.

Diplomatic missions mark national days

KUWAIT: The Kuwait Embassy to Gabon, the General Consulate in China's Quanzhou, and the Kuwait Permanent Mission to the UN organizations in Geneva have celebrated the 63rd National Day and the 33rd Liberation Day in the presence of some officials and diplomats accredited in the two countries. In Gabon's capital, Libreville, the Kuwaiti Embassy held a reception attended by some ministers and officials in Gabon, the embassy said in a statement to KUNA.

Speaking at the reception, Charge d'affaires at the embassy in Gabon advisor Abdurahman AlDaihani conveyed sincere greetings and congratulations to His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and Kuwait on these joyful celebrations. He said that marking these national days coincides with the 50th anniversary of establishing diplomatic ties between Kuwait and Gabon, lauding their distinguished level in all domains.

In Quanzhou, China, Kuwait's General Consul Abdullah Al-Turki held a reception on the same occasion that was attended by senior officials in Guangdong Province and its cities and Arab and Muslim diplomatic missions' representatives as well as others. Al-Turki extended congratulations to His Highness the Amir and Kuwait's government and people. In Geneva, the Permanent Mission of the State of Kuwait to the United Nations and other international organizations held a reception on Wednesday on the occasion of the 63rd anniversary of Independence Day and the 33rd anniversary of Liberation Day.

In a statement to KUNA, the Permanent Representative of the State of Kuwait to the United Nations and other international organizations, Ambassador Naser Al-Hayen, extended his warmest congratulations to His Highness Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, the political leadership, and the honorable Kuwaiti people. The national celebration witnessed a large participation of representatives of the diplomatic missions, permanent delegates to the United Nations, a number of ministers who participated in the United Nations Human Rights Council, and a group of Swiss, Arab, and international political figures. — KUNA



Kuwait Permanent Mission to the UN organizations in Geneva celebrates Kuwait's 63rd National Day and 33rd Liberation Day. — KUNA photos



Supreme Court agrees to hear Trump's immunity claim

Ailing Eiffel Tower dragged into city hall power struggle

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GAZA: Men sit on a cart as it carries the body of a Palestinian killed when Zionist forces opened fire on people lined up around aid trucks. — AFP

Desperate Gazans reel from aid 'massacre'

Palestinians plead with world to 'take pity' as Zionists deflect blame for majority of casualties

GAZA: The crowd flocked to the aid distribution point early Thursday, desperate for food amid Gaza's looming famine, only to be met with lethal chaos including live fire by Zionist troops. By mid-afternoon more than 100 people were reported dead in the grisly incident which underscored worsening shortages in the besieged Palestinian territory.

All told, Thursday's "massacre" at Gaza City's Nabulsi roundabout killed 104 people and wounded 760, said Ashraf Al-Qudra, spokesman for Gaza's health ministry. Just hours earlier the Palestinian death toll from the nearly five-month-old war in Gaza had topped 30,000.

But there were conflicting reports on what exactly was responsible for Thursday's deaths. Qudra blamed Zionist troops, and Zionist sources confirmed to AFP that the Zionist forces at the scene did open fire, having perceived the crowds near the trucks as a "threat".

A spokesman for Zionist Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's office, however, said many of the dead were crushed by the trucks themselves. "Aid trucks were overwhelmed by people trying to loot and drivers ploughed into the crowd of people, ultimately kill-

ing tens of people," said the spokesman, Avi Hyman.

A young Palestinian man who was among the wounded spoke of chaotic scenes. "There were crowds of people, but the occupation (forces) kept firing towards us," the man told AFP while lying on the dirty, crowded floor at Kamal Adwan Hospital waiting for treatment.

Outside, four women in headscarves wailed while clutching at the lifeless body of a bearded man wrapped in white cloth, while men lined up to pray nearby. At Al-Shifa Hospital in Gaza City, doctors were "unable to deal" with the flood of casualties "as a result of weak medical and human capacities," Qudra said. Hamas denounced what it described as a "hideous and heinous" massacre.

'Storming' scarce trucks

The Zionist withering military campaign has now killed at least 30,035 people, mostly women and children, according to the health ministry, which does not specify how many fighters are included in the toll.

The entity claims the campaign is in response to an attack carried out by Hamas, which resulted in the deaths of around 1,160 people, mostly civilians, ac-

ording to an AFP tally of official Zionist figures.

The offensive has caused widespread devastation in Gaza and severe shortages of food, water and medicine. For months, aid workers have warned of an increasingly desperate situation for Gazan civilians, and on Monday an official from the UN humanitarian office OCHA said widespread starvation was "almost inevitable".

UN estimates show that 2.2 million people — most of Gaza's population — are threatened with famine, particularly in the north where destruction, fighting and looting make the delivery of food almost impossible. According to the UN agency for Palestinian refugees, UNRWA, just over 2,300 aid trucks have entered the Gaza Strip in February, down by around 50 percent compared to January.

That is an average of well below 100 trucks per day, down from around 500 that were entering daily before the war. It was precisely that scarcity that drove crowds to rush the trucks at Nabulsi roundabout on Thursday, a witness told AFP.

Aerial footage distributed by the Zionist military showed large groups approaching a line of moving trucks on foot. "Trucks full of aid came too close to some army tanks that were in the area and

the crowd, thousands of people, just stormed the trucks," the witness said, declining to be named for safety reasons. "The soldiers fired at the crowd as people came too close to the tanks."

'Under siege'

Thursday's incident in Gaza City spurred a heated exchange at the Human Rights Council in Geneva, where Palestinian ambassador Ibrahim Mohammad Khraishi confronted his Zionist counterpart about the reported casualties. "Are these human shields? Are these Hamas combatants?" Khraishi asked.

The Zionist entity says it wants to eliminate Hamas, but diplomats are scrambling to broker a truce before the Muslim holy month of Ramadan, which is set to begin on March 10 or March 11, depending on the lunar calendar.

At Kamal Adwan hospital, a Palestinian woman checking on relatives caught up in the chaos at Nabulsi roundabout said the world should "take pity" on Gazans. "My nephews went there to bring flour, but they (Zionist forces) fired on them," said the woman, who did not give her name. "We are under siege. Take pity on us. Ramadan is coming soon. People should look at us. Pity us." — AFP

Pakistan lawmakers sworn in despite vote rigging claims

ISLAMABAD: Lawmakers were sworn in during the first sitting of Pakistan's new parliament Thursday, three weeks after an election marred by widespread allegations of rigging. Pakistan's February 8 poll took place with ex-prime minister Imran Khan jailed and barred from running, and his Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party targeted by a campaign of arrests and censorship.

Khan's followers defied the crackdown to win more seats than any other party but the military-backed Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) is set to shut them out of power with a coalition government. According to the coalition agreement, former premier Shehbaz Sharif — who ousted Khan in a 2022 no-confidence vote — will be elected prime minister again by new lawmakers in the coming days.

Parliamentarians began arriving at the 336-seat National Assembly in Islamabad on Thursday morning and took their oaths of office in unison around



ISLAMABAD: A supporter of jailed former prime minister Imran Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party wears a mask replicating Khan, during the inaugural session of the National Assembly. — AFP

11:30 am (0630 GMT). PTI members were forced to run as independents in the election but some arrived at parliament carrying portraits of Khan, brandishing them in defiance as Sharif and other PML-N leaders entered the chamber. "In democracy, the parliament is a sacred place," PTI's acting chief Gohar Ali Khan told reporters as he arrived to be sworn in. "Those

who don't have public trust and don't have the mandate should not be sitting here."

Gohar held aloft a poster reading "Release Imran Khan" as he signed the register of parliamentarians but the moment was omitted from state TV broadcasts as cameras cut away. The Sharif family's PML-N has agreed to govern with the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) run by the dynasty of slain ex-premier Benazir Bhutto, as well as several smaller factions. In return, the PPP has been promised the office of president for their patriarch and Bhutto's widower, Asif Ali Zardari. Cabinet positions have yet to be announced.

Analysts regard the broad alliance as a shaky enterprise, facing overlapping economic and security crises plaguing the nation of more than 240 million. Monitors have also warned the PML-N coalition may suffer from a perceived lack of legitimacy by portions of the public skeptical over whether their votes were counted.

Despite PTI-aligned candidates exceeding expectations, Imran Khan claims the election was brazenly rigged to prevent his party's landslide return to power. Islamabad cut mobile internet signal nationwide on election day, citing security reasons but declining to give specifics. Results were also delayed, further stoking rigging claims. — AFP

Global freedom drops sharply in 2023, study says

WASHINGTON: Democracy faced sharp, widespread setbacks worldwide in 2023 with violence and manipulation marring a series of elections, Freedom House said Thursday. In its annual report, the US-funded pro-democracy advocacy and research group switched classifications for two countries, downgrading Ecuador from free to partly free and upgrading Thailand from not free to partly free.

Overall, political rights and civil liberties declined in 52 countries and only 21 countries saw improvements, the 18th straight year that global freedom has declined and a much more lopsided trend than a year earlier. "Even if you look at it region by region, usually we are able to say that one is an outlier, but every single region registered a decline," said report co-author Yana Gorokhovskaia. "The deterioration is pretty widespread," she said.

The report spoke of efforts by incumbents "to control electoral competition, hinder their political opponents or prevent them from taking power" in Cambodia, Turkey and Zimbabwe and — unsuccessfully — in Guatemala and Poland.

Ecuador was downgraded due to election disruption by violent criminal gangs, including the assassination of anti-corruption presidential candidate Fernando Villavicencio following a campaign speech.

Thailand was upgraded due to competitive elections even though establishment forces prevented young progressive Pita Limjaroenrat, whose Move Forward Party won the most seats, from becoming prime minister. "This isn't, I would say, a full-scale victory for democracy or freedom and Thailand," Gorokhovskaia said.

But she saw as progress that the second-place Pheu Thai party of former prime minister and tycoon Thaksin Shinawatra was allowed to take over after years of efforts by the military-backed establishment to suppress it. The biggest improvement on Freedom House's 100-point scale was posted by Fiji, which gained seven points. — AFP

Spain opens 'street terrorism' probe into Catalan leader

MADRID: Spain's top court said on Thursday it was opening an investigation into Catalan separatist leader Carles Puigdemont on "terrorism" charges over protests linked to Catalonia's failed 2017 independence bid. The Supreme Court said it had decided "to investigate and, where appropriate, prosecute" Puigdemont "for terrorism offences in relation to the Democratic Tsunami case". Democratic Tsunami is a secretive Catalan group that spearheaded a string of protests after Spain jailed 13 pro-independence leaders, two years after their botched bid to separate the rich northeastern region from Spain.

Led by Puigdemont, who was Catalan region-

al leader at the time, the failed independence bid sparked Spain's worst political crisis in decades. Although Puigdemont fled Spain to avoid prosecution, his fellow leaders were put on trial and on the day their sentence was handed down in October 2019, thousands of activists blocked access to Barcelona airport for several hours.

The unprecedented protest prompted the cancellation of more than 100 flights and 115 people were injured during clashes between police and protesters. In its decision, the court referred to the crime of "street terrorism". The aim, it said, was to "undermine law and order, to seriously breach the peace, to cause serious harm to the functioning of an international organization or to cause a sense of terror within the population or part of it".

There was "evidence pointing to Carles Puigdemont's participation in the events under investigation", it added, citing his involvement in the group's creation "to subvert law and order and to seriously destabilize democratic institutions". — AFP



MADRID: In this file photo, protestors hold a sign depicting Catalan leader Carles Puigdemont in jail during a demonstration against the government's amnesty law for people involved in Catalonia's failed 2017 independence bid. — AFP

International

Ailing Eiffel Tower dragged into city hall power struggle

Government officials play tug-of-war over maintenance of 'deteriorating' Paris monument

PARIS: The Eiffel Tower, attacked by rust and well behind on its maintenance schedule, has taken center stage in a power struggle between the Paris mayor and her main rival, the French minister of culture. A five-day strike at the Eiffel Tower this month drew attention to the monument's bad state of repair.

Unions said the iconic monument was doomed unless its owner, the city of Paris, made massive funds available to get it back into good nick. The tower's creator, Gustave Eiffel, recommended at the time of its inauguration in 1889 that it should be painted every seven years to keep inevitable rust at bay.

But the 300-metre (985-foot) iron structure — 330 meters tall when the high-frequency antenna at the top is included — has not been given a full paint job since 2010. Unions said during the strike there were "several corrosion points ... visible", which were "signs of a worrying deteriorating of the monument".

Local associations have warned of "safety problems" if the rust is left unchecked. The protests prompted France's recently-appointed right-wing culture minister, Rachida Dati, to weigh in. She said left-wing Paris mayor Anne Hidalgo should ask for the Eiffel Tower to be given "historical monument" status. Unusually for such a high-profile site, it does not already have that protection.

'By force if necessary'

The classification, Dati said on X, formerly Twitter, would give the French government the power to override the city of Paris and "undertake construction work, by force if necessary". "The Eiffel Tower is not sufficiently protected", she said.

Dati recently confirmed she wants to run for Paris mayor in 2026, having failed to dislodge Hidalgo in the 2020 election for the powerful post. In addition to her job as culture minister, Dati is already mayor of the capital's wealthy 7th district, where the Eiffel Tower is located. On the Paris city council, the conservative politician is leader of the opposition to Hidalgo, a Socialist. "(Dati) doesn't intend to give up her war against her eternal rival," commented Gala magazine, while broadcaster TF1 said the minister was launching "a fresh tug-of-war" with Hidalgo.

The mayor responded by saying she saw no reason to change the Eiffel Tower's status. Instead, she said Dati should come up with "the 1.4 million euros (\$1.5 billion) that the government owes for work on the Eiffel Tower".

A major facelift for the monument, launched in 2019, was cut short by the Covid pandemic, and the discovery of significant levels of lead, a poisonous heavy metal, in existing layers of paint. Following the week-long strike, the Eiffel Tower reopened at the weekend when its operator, SETE, reached agreement with the unions.

The deal stipulates that "the parties will regularly monitor the company's business model, investment in works and revenue through a body that will meet every six months". Both sides also agreed on an investment of some 380 million euros up to 2031 toward works and maintenance of the tower.



PARIS: This photograph taken in Paris on February 27, 2024, shows the Eiffel Tower being illuminated at sunset. — AFP

The Eiffel Tower booked a shortfall of around 120 million euros during the Covid pandemic in 2020 and 2021, when visitor numbers dropped sharply due to closures and travel restrictions. SETE has

since benefitted from a recapitalization of 60 million euros, which unions say is insufficient. Visitor numbers recovered to 5.9 million in 2022 and 6.3 million last year. — AFP

India says about 20 citizens 'stuck' in Russian army

NEW DELHI: India said Thursday it was working to secure discharges for around 20 of its citizens "stuck" in the Russian army, after reports that several were sent to fight in Ukraine. Two years after Russia's invasion began, tens of thousands of its soldiers have been killed in Ukraine and Moscow is on a global quest for more combatants.

Several Indian recruits told AFP this month they

were lured into joining up by promises of high salaries and a Russian passport before being shipped to the frontlines. "It is our understanding that 20-odd people are stuck," foreign ministry spokesman Randhir Jaiswal told reporters in New Delhi. "We are trying our level best for early discharge. We are in regular touch with Russian authorities both here in Delhi and in Moscow."

The ministry confirmed last week that an unspecified number of Indian nationals had signed up for "support jobs" in the Russian army. It said several had already been discharged as a result of its interventions with Russian authorities.

Neither India nor Russia has explicitly confirmed whether they were deployed to fight the war in Ukraine. Jaiswal said the ministry had "told peo-

ple not to venture into the war zone". The soldiers who spoke with AFP said they had been promised non-combatant roles but were trained to use Kalashnikov assault rifles and other weapons before being sent to Ukraine.

A Russian-language defense ministry contract, signed by the men and seen by AFP, refers to "military service in the armed forces of the Russian Federation", with a requirement to "participate in hostilities" and "serve the Russian people without limit".

India is a longstanding ally of Russia and has shied away from explicit condemnation of the invasion of Ukraine. Analysts say Russian efforts to target recruits from India are just one facet of a global recruitment drive, alongside a vast campaign at home. — AFP



HYDERABAD: This photo taken on February 22, 2024 shows a picture printout of Indian national Mohammed Asfan, seen wearing Russian military fatigues. — AFP

104 Palestinians massacred...

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It came after mediators said a truce deal between Zionists and Hamas militants could be just days away. In a reflection of increased concern at the White House, President Joe Biden's administration is considering air-dropping aid into Gaza, US news site Axios reported early Thursday.

Towards 'the finish line'

Military says 242 soldiers have died in Gaza since ground operations began in late October. New Zealand on Thursday became one of the latest Western countries to designate Hamas as a "terrorist" entity, saying the October 7 attack shattered the notion that the movement's political and military wings are separate. Mediators from Egypt, Qatar and the United States have been seeking a six-week pause in the war.

Negotiators hope a truce can begin by around March 10 or 11 when the Muslim holy month of Ramadan begins, depending on the lunar calendar. The proposals reportedly include the release of some hostages held in Gaza by militants in exchange for hundreds of Palestinians held in Zionist prisons. Short of the complete withdrawal Hamas has called for, a source from the group said the deal might see Zionist forces leave "cities and populated areas", allowing the return of some displaced Palestinians and humanitarian relief. Biden is "pushing all of us to try to get this agreement over the finish line", Secretary of State Antony Blinken said.

Famine 'imminent'

The United Nations humanitarian agency OCHA described the food security situation as "extremely critical across Gaza, particularly in northern Gaza." According to the World Food Program (WFP), no humanitarian group had been able to deliver aid to the north for more than a month. The agency accused Zionists of blocking access. "If nothing changes, a famine is imminent in northern Gaza," WFP's deputy executive director Carl Skau said.

Zionist officials have denied blocking supplies. With aid flows on the ground limited, more is coming in by parachute. Neighboring Jordan said it had on Thursday again air-dropped food and other relief. Jordan's army said the drop over northern Gaza came in collaboration with Bahrain and Oman. The United Arab Emirates' official news agency WAM said the Gulf country had begun a joint operation with Egypt to drop food and medical aid. The operation would last several weeks, it said.

In the south, nearly 1.5 million people trying to flee the fighting are now packed into Rafah city, also short of food, as Zionists threaten to send in troops

against Hamas fighters there. "They are 30,000 martyrs. I don't know what (Zionists) want from us, and why they killed this number. It is a genocide," said Jihad Salha, one of the displaced in Rafah. Intense fighting has taken place in Khan Yunis city a few kilometers from Rafah.

On Thursday Zionist military said it had also killed militants in central Gaza as well as in Gaza City's Zeitun area. "Three terrorists that used drones were identified entering a compound in the area, where they were eliminated" by an air strike, the military said. While fighting continued, Muhammad Yassin, 35, battled to find flour in Zeitun. "I found thousands of people waiting for long hours just to get a kilo or two kilos of flour," he said. "We have not eaten a loaf of bread for two months. Our children are starving."

Meeting in Moscow

Talk about Gaza's post-war future has intensified even as combat continues. On Thursday, Palestinian factions — including Hamas and rival Fatah — were expected in Moscow for a meeting at Russia's invitation. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu — who leads a coalition which includes religious and ultra-nationalist parties — has come under increasing pressure to bring the remaining hostages home. A group of 150 people have started a four-day march from Reim, near the Gaza border, to Jerusalem, calling for the government to reach a deal. In another reflection of political tensions within Zionist entity, Defense Minister Yoav Gallant called for members of the ultra-Orthodox community to be enrolled in military service.

Gaza genocide

Kuwait condemned, Thursday, the genocide taking place and war crimes against Palestinian civilians in Gaza by the occupation, with more than 30,000 killed and 70,000 injured or missing. Permanent Representative to the UN in Geneva Ambassador Nasser Al-Hain: addressing the UN Human Rights Council, emphasized Kuwait's role in advocating before the International Court of Justice on behalf of Palestine regarding the occupation's criminal practices, including the bombardment of Rafah City, southern Gaza. He deemed "disgrace" what is happening in Gaza and warning against its continuation, while underscoring Kuwait's role in stopping the brutality against innocent Palestinians who have endured atrocities for 75 years.

Al-Hain also condemned the double standards of this humanitarian crisis, questioning the global conscience and human rights vis-a-vis genocide in Gaza. Ambassador Al-Hain added that cessation of funding to the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA) has worsened the humanitarian situation for nearly 5.7 million Palestinian refugees. He reiterated Kuwait's commitment in supporting the Palestinian cause, urging the international community to put an end to the genocide in Gaza. — Agencies

not actually exist." Employees at Sephora have complained about the behavior of young customers in stores with videos showing make-up counters in disarray with spill products. Sephora, which is part of the LVMH luxury group, did not respond to requests to comment from AFP.

Michael Stora, a psychoanalyst specializing in online behavior, said the girls in the videos are "not playing with dolls as you might expect at their age - they are the dolls." Some mothers in

India's richest man kicks off...

Continued from Page 1

several current and former political leaders, according to a list released by Reliance.

Also among the invitees is Disney chief Robert Iger, following a deal agreed Wednesday between Reliance Industries and Walt Disney to merge their Indian media businesses. The merger will create a \$8.5 billion entertainment giant in the world's most populous nation and fifth-largest economy. Other guests invited include Ivanka Trump, the former US

Russia warns West of nuclear...

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After pulling Russia out of arms control treaties with the United States and previously warning he was "not bluffing" when he said he was ready to use nuclear weapons, Putin had appeared in recent months to dial down his nuclear threats. But the fresh warning comes with the Kremlin buoyed by recent gains on the battlefield in Ukraine, but also an economy that has largely defied sanctions and ahead of an election certain to extend Putin's term in the Kremlin until 2030.

The current state of affairs marks a sharp reversal in fortunes for Moscow over the last 12 months. Last year at this time, Russian troops were reeling from Ukrainian counteroffensives that pushed them back in northeastern and southern Ukraine. But after a Ukrainian campaign in the summer of 2023 failed to bring similar results, Kyiv is back on the defensive. The initially strong Western support for Ukraine also appears to be fraying, with a \$60-billion US aid package stalled in Congress. Outgunning Ukrainian forces on the battlefield, Putin's troops seized the eastern stronghold of Avdiivka and are attempting to build on their advances.

Putin on Thursday pointed to recent successes. "The combat capacity of our armed forces has increased many times over," he said. "They are advancing confidently in a number of areas," he added, without providing details. Flanked by Russian tricolor flags and standing alone on stage at the Gostiny Dvor Palace near Moscow's Red Square, the Russian leader reeled off his country's arsenal of advanced weapons, including the Zircon and Kinzhal supersonic missiles. But he slammed reports Russia was preparing to deploy a nuclear weapon in space as

president's daughter, as well as ex-Swedish prime minister Carl Bildt, former Canadian prime minister Stephen Harper and the King of Bhutan.

Bollywood stars Amitabh Bachchan and Shahrukh Khan, cricket icons Sachin Tendulkar and MS Dhoni, and industry titan Gautam Adani are also invited in a who's-who of India's super-rich elite. The Ambanis are building a Hindu temple complex in Jamnagar, to keep "India's rich cultural and spiritual identity at the heart of the wedding festivities", the Reliance Foundation said on social media. The main celebrations, running from March 1-3, will have different themes, events and dress codes - including a "jungle fever" day with a visit to an animal rescue centre run by Ambani, the Hindustan Times newspaper reported. — AFP

a "ploy" by Washington to draw Moscow into arms control talks "on their terms".

Election campaign

Putin also touted Russia's strong economic performance at home and outlined a number of small-scale domestic reforms as part of his pitch to Russians ahead of next month's presidential election. His speech was broadcast not only on state television but also on large digital screens and free of charge in cinemas across the country.

On the economic front, he said Russia was faring better than many expected. Massive investment in military production, as well as high salaries and benefits for soldiers, has largely shielded the economy from the worst consequences of Western sanctions. There is little doubt on the outcome of the March 15-17 vote, with all genuine opposition candidates barred from standing and the Kremlin's most vocal critic Alexei Navalny now dead.

But Putin has still been campaigning, travelling around the country and making numerous media appearances since the start of the year, including recently flying a Russian bomber. The 71-year-old former KGB officer, in power since the final day of 1999, is the longest serving Russian leader since Joseph Stalin -- a record he is set to pass during his next six-year term. Even before Putin ordered forces into Ukraine in February 2022, he had increasingly portrayed himself as a defender of Russian values against a decadent, liberal and expansionist West.

He has used the military campaign to escalate a crackdown on domestic opponents, with hundreds prosecuted for criticizing the Kremlin and its military offensive. The speech came on the eve of a planned funeral for Putin's top opponent Navalny, who died in prison on 16 February in unclear circumstances. Putin, who famously never referred to the opposition leader by name, has remained silent on Navalny's shock death that prompted outrage at home and abroad. — AFP

TikTok make-up influencers spark...

Continued from Page 1

Del Campo warned young skin can be damaged by unsuitable ingredients. He has also seen "self-esteem issues" among his child patients who "feel the need to correct perceived flaws that may

the videos defend the trend as just a "game" - but Stora accused parents of the "fetishisation" of their offspring. Solene Delecourt, a professor at the University of California, Berkeley who specializes in social inequality, also believes the videos can "contribute to a very stereotypical representation of girls and women online". "These are not women but little girls, and they are already subject to this intense social pressure," she said.

Delecourt released a study in the Nature

journal this month which said that online images amplify gender bias, particularly against women. And in recent months, TikTok and other social media platforms have come under fire over the impact of videos on young people. In January, tech giants faced a grilling before the US Senate Judiciary Committee after being accused of not doing enough to thwart online dangers for children, including sexual predators and teen suicide. — AFP

International

Supreme Court agrees to hear Trump's immunity claim

Court won't share view on lower court's ruling that rejected Trump's immunity claim

WASHINGTON: The US Supreme Court agreed on Wednesday to hear Donald Trump's claim that as a former president he is immune from prosecution, further delaying his trial on charges of conspiring to overturn the 2020 election.

The nation's highest court scheduled arguments in the high-stakes case for the week of April 22 and said Trump's federal election interference trial would remain on hold for now. Trump had been scheduled to go on trial in Washington on March 4 for conspiring to subvert the results of the 2020 election won by Democrat Joe Biden but the proceedings have been frozen as his presidential immunity claim wound its way through the courts.

The 77-year-old Trump, the frontrunner for the 2024 Republican presidential nomination, welcomed the Supreme Court decision to hear the case. "Without Presidential Immunity, a President will not be able to properly function, or make decisions, in the best interest of the United States of America," he said in a post on his Truth Social platform. "He must not be guided by the fear of retribution!"

In agreeing to hear the case, the conservative-dominated Supreme Court, which includes three justices nominated by the former Republican president, said it was not "expressing a view on the merits" of a lower court's ruling that rejected Trump's immunity claim.

It said it would address the question of whether a former president has "immunity from criminal prosecution for conduct alleged to involve official acts during his tenure in office." A ruling is expected by the end of the court's current term in June.

The question of whether a former US president is immune from prosecution is an untested one in American jurisprudence because until Trump, an ex-president had never been charged with a crime.



National Harbor: Former US president and 2024 presidential hopeful Donald Trump speaks during the annual Conservative Political Action Conference in this file photo. — AFP

It will be among the most consequential election law cases to reach the Supreme Court since it halted the Florida vote recount in 2000 with Republican George W Bush narrowly leading Democrat Al Gore.

A three-judge appeals court panel ruled earlier this month that a former president has no immunity from prosecution for actions taken while in the White House. Trump's claim to be immune from criminal liability is "unsupported by precedent, history or the text and structure of the Constitution," the judges said in a unanimous opinion. "We cannot accept that the office of the Presidency places its former occupants above the law for all time thereafter," they said.

Colorado ballot case
Special Counsel Jack Smith filed the election con-

spiracy case against Trump in August and had been pushing hard for the March start date for his trial. Lawyers for the former president have sought repeatedly to delay the trial until after the November presidential election, when Trump could potentially have all of the federal cases against him dropped if he wins.

Liz Cheney, a former Republican lawmaker and vocal opponent of Trump, expressed frustration with the Supreme Court's decision to hear the immunity case and said delaying his trial "suppresses critical evidence that Americans deserve to hear." "Donald Trump attempted to overturn an election and seize power," Cheney said on X. "Our justice system must be able to bring him to trial before the next election."

Trump also faces 2020 election interference charges in Georgia and has been indicted in Florida for allegedly mishandling classified information after leaving the White House. He is scheduled to go on trial in New York on March 25 on state charges of falsifying business records by paying pre-election hush money to a porn star.

Trump was impeached twice by the Democrat-controlled House of Representatives while in office — once for inciting an insurrection — but acquitted both times by the Senate. The immunity case is one of two election-related cases before the Supreme Court.

The Colorado Supreme Court barred Trump in December from appearing on the Republican presidential primary ballot in the state because of his role in the January 6, 2021 attack on the US Capitol by his supporters. Trump appealed the Colorado ruling and the Supreme Court heard the case in early February. Both conservative and liberal justices expressed concern during arguments about having individual states decide which candidates can be on the presidential ballot this November. — AFP



WASHINGTON: US President Joe Biden walks across the South Lawn before boarding the Marine One presidential helicopter and departing the White House on February 29, 2024. — AFP

Biden declared 'fit for duty' as age issue looms

WASHINGTON: US President Joe Biden remains "fit for duty" with no new health worries, his doctor said Wednesday after the 81-year-old's last medical ahead of an election in which his age is a key issue. The keenly awaited annual examination at the Walter Reed military medical center outside Washington came just weeks after a special counsel report that portrayed him as elderly and forgetful.

"He continues to be fit for duty and fully executes all of his responsibilities without any exemptions or accommodations," White House doctor Kevin O'Connor said in a summary. "This year's physical identified no new concerns."

Biden, who faces a likely rematch with 77-year-old Donald Trump in November's election, himself joked that the only concern was that doctors "think I look too young." "Everything's great," he told reporters at the White House.

Biden took a short helicopter ride to the medical center that is often used by US presidents and left after two and a half hours, saluting naval staff and donning sunglasses before leaving in his motorcade. The only new issue this year was Biden's use of a machine to reduce sleep disruption, along with an emergency dental procedure, O'Connor said after the examination.

'Robust'

Biden continues to suffer a range of minor issues including a stiff walk due to wear and tear in his spine and a minor heart valve issue but there was no significant change in them from last year, the report said.

Crucially, a "reassuring" and "extremely detailed" exam found no sign of neurological problems including Parkinson's or a stroke, it added. "President Biden is a healthy, active, robust 81-year-old male, who remains fit to successfully execute the duties of the presidency," O'Connor concluded.

Biden's routine medical exam comes as voter concerns mount over the age of a leader who would be 86 at the end of a second term in office. The issue was thrust further into the spotlight by the special counsel report. It cleared him of illegally retaining classified documents in his home and garage — but said he would come across to a jury as a "well-meaning, elderly man with a poor memory."

Biden launched a fiery counterattack in a press conference at the White House, saying his memory was "fine" and slamming the special counsel for claiming he could not remember when his son Beau died of cancer. "I am well-meaning, and I'm an elderly man, and I know what the hell I'm doing... I put this country back on its feet," he said at the time.

'The other guy'

There has been a growing clamor for Biden to take a cognitive test, but the White House said his doctors had assessed that he did not need one. "The president passes a cognitive test every day," Press Secretary Karine Jean-Pierre told reporters, citing the domestic and international political issues he dealt with. "This is a very rigorous job."

This week Biden took a more lighthearted tone while trying to deflect the issue back onto his septuagenarian nemesis Trump. In an interview with late-night TV comic Seth Meyers on Monday, Biden said he was a better bet than "the other guy," who is only four years younger.

In last year's medical exam Biden got a clean bill of health, although he did have a cancerous skin lesion removed from his chest. Trump routinely depicts Biden as old, decrepit and unfit for office — despite being nearly the same age and raising eyebrows with a series of verbal gaffes and memory issues of his own.

The real estate tycoon recently confused his rival Republican Nikki Haley with Democratic former House speaker Nancy Pelosi, and said Viktor Orban was president of Turkey, rather than Hungary. Haley, 52, has depicted both men as too old for the presidency.

Late last year, Trump released a note from his doctor declaring him to be in "excellent" health, but it was short on details and did not say what tests Trump had undergone when he had a physical in September 2023. — AFP



CANBERRA: Philippines' President Ferdinand Marcos Jr addresses the House of Representatives at the Parliament House in Canberra on February 29, 2024. — AFP

Marcos: Philippines 'will not yield' in face of maritime disputes

CANBERRA: Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos told Australia's parliament his country was on the "frontline" of a battle for regional peace Thursday, pledging resolve as he sought support in maritime disputes with China.

With Beijing's warships loitering in waters off his country's coast, Marcos told Australian lawmakers that "the Philippines now finds itself on the frontline against actions that undermine regional peace, erode regional stability, and threaten regional success".

He vowed to remain firm in defending his country's sovereignty, despite "formidable" challenges. "I will not allow any attempt by any foreign power to take even one square inch of our sovereign territory," Marcos said to loud applause. "The challenges that we face may be formidable, but equally formidable is our resolve. We will not yield."

Philippines authorities this week reported detecting Chinese navy vessels around the Scarborough Shoal — an area seized by Beijing in 2012. China has claimed the shoal and large swathes of the South China Sea as its own, ignoring regional objections and an international tribunal ruling that the claims have no legal basis. The South China Sea is strategically vital for several countries — including China — providing a key route for the import and export of essential fuel, food and other goods.

Beijing has long deployed coast guard and other vessels around the Scarborough Shoal to prevent Philippine access. But Marcos painted the deployment of warships as a new and "worrisome" escalation. China has rapidly grown its naval forces in recent years, and snatched vast tracts of maritime territory, hoping to project its military and political power well beyond the country's shores. "The protection of the South China Sea as a critical global artery is crucial to the preservation of regional peace. And I dare say of global peace," Marcos said.

Marcos' Australian counterpart Anthony Albanese hailed the Philippines as a "strategic partner" on Thursday. Albanese said the two countries signed a deal on "enhanced maritime cooperation" and vowed to "collaborate even more closely to promote our shared vision for the region".

Marcos may be pushing at an open door when it comes to Australia's support, but he is likely to face a tougher task in garnering full-throated support from his Southeast Asian neighbors. Early next week, Australia and the ASEAN bloc of Southeast Asian nations will hold a summit in Melbourne.

Although Beijing's aggressive stance in the South China Sea is tipped to dominate discussions, many countries around the table — notably Laos and Cambodia — have extremely close ties with China. Many others are keen not to damage relations with Beijing, a major trading partner. — AFP

Drones, snake robot enter Japan nuclear reactor

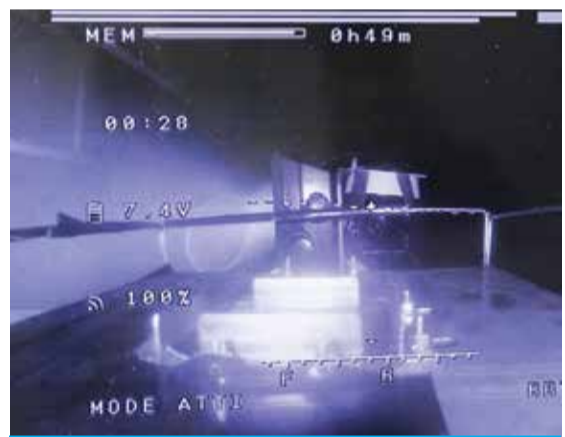
TOKYO: Japan on Thursday sent two mini-drones and a "snake-shaped robot" into one of three nuclear reactors at the Fukushima plant crippled by a tsunami in 2011, the facility's operator said. The gadgets were deployed in preparation for the removal of hundreds of tons of highly radioactive fuel and rubble, a risky operation expected to take decades.

"We sent two drones yesterday and two drones today", in addition to the "snake-shaped robot" on Thursday, a spokesman for Tokyo Electric Power (TEPCO) told AFP. Since the interior is "cramped and dark", the small drones are "highly maneuverable and have enhanced photographic capabilities", the company said.

The "snake-like robot ... houses wireless communications relay so that we can properly cover the radio transmission area within which the small drones will be operated", a statement said. But later in the day, the probe was curtailed due to technical glitches, local media including public broadcaster NHK said.

The snake-like robot "could not reach" its destination because its cables did not function properly, with immediate resumption nowhere in sight, the Mainichi daily said. The interior of the reactor buildings is too radioactive for people to enter, and the drones are meant to inspect the area before the removal of the fuel and rubble by robots.

TEPCO plans to carry out a trial removal of a



OKUMA: This handout photo by Tokyo Electric Power Co (TEPCO) on February 29, 2024 shows a drone landing at the crippled Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant. — AFP

small amount of fuel debris in October. It had already sent an underwater robot to inspect parts of the facility still submerged, the spokesman said. "It will take a long time to fully take off the 800 tons (of fuel), as the decommissioning period is thought to be 30 to 40 years," he said.

Separately, TEPCO on Wednesday began releasing a fourth batch of treated wastewater from the Fukushima plant into the ocean. The process has been given the green light by the UN nuclear watchdog, but China and Russia have banned seafood imports from Japan in response. The 2011 earthquake and tsunami killed around 18,000 people. The catastrophe at the Fukushima nuclear power facility in northeast Japan was one of the worst atomic accidents in history. — AFP



N'DJAMENA: A picture taken through a car window shows Chadian soldiers barring the entrance to the road leading to the headquarters of the Chadian opposition Socialist Party Without Borders. — AFP

Army assault kills Chad opposition leader before poll

N'DJAMENA: A leading opponent of Chad's ruling junta chief has died in an army assault on his party headquarters ahead of a May election when he was set to be the main rival to his cousin and transitional president Mahamat Idriss Deby Itno.

It came amid high tension in the center of the capital N'Djamena on Wednesday when soldiers surrounded the party's HQ and gunfire rang out and teargas was fired. The government spokesman said Thursday that four soldiers died and three party militants he described as "assailants".

The assault took place the day after Chad announced it would hold a presidential election on May 6, ending three years of junta rule when Deby Itno took power after his father was killed fighting rebels.

Yaya Dillo Djerou, 49, who led the opposition Socialist Party Without Borders (PSF), had been accused of leading an attack against the offices of the internal

security agency overnight on Tuesday to Wednesday.

Later, internet access was cut in the capital and the army carried out an assault on the party's main office, with automatic weapons fire heard. Dillo died on Wednesday "where he had retreated, at the headquarters of his party," government spokesman Abderaman Koulamallah, who is also communications minister, said on Thursday. "He didn't want to surrender and fired on law enforcement," he added. His body has been handed over to his family, with the funeral set for later Thursday, his family said.

'Brought to justice'

Security forces had gone to arrest a PSF member accused by the government accused of an "assassination attempt" against the supreme court president 10 days earlier. The junta-led government blamed the party for the attack on the offices of the internal security agency as a reprisal. It said several people had been killed in the intelligence HQ attack but did not say who they were.

"Anyone looking to disturb the democratic process under way in the country will be prosecuted and brought to justice," the government warned Wednesday. Speaking to AFP shortly before his death, Dillo denied any involvement in the incident, denouncing the claim as a "lie" and politically motivated. — AFP

Business

FRIDAY, MARCH 1, 2024

WTO ministers struggle to forge fish, farm, digital deals

Disagreements between 164 member states on key issues dominate agenda of talks



ABU DHABI: Delegates take a group picture during a session on fisheries subsidies during the 13th WTO Ministerial Conference in Abu Dhabi. The world's trade ministers gathered in the UAE on February 26 for a high-level WTO meeting with no clear prospects for breakthroughs, amid geopolitical tensions and disagreements. — AFP

ABU DHABI: World trade ministers were locked in disagreement on fisheries subsidies, agriculture and digital customs duties as a major WTO conference entered its last scheduled day on Thursday. With no signs of a breakthrough at the World Trade Organization's 13th ministerial conference (MC13) in Abu Dhabi, officials pushed back to midnight its formal closing session, initially scheduled for 8:00 pm (1600 GMT).

The meeting in the capital of the United Arab Emirates opened on Monday with disagreements between the body's 164 member states on key issues that dominated the agenda of the talks. They include fisheries subsidies, agriculture and a moratorium on customs duties for digital transactions.

"Everybody is working with a very positive outlook... to try to see what's the maximum we can get done," Indian trade minister Piyush Goyal told journalists. "I am very confident... we will come out with significant outcomes, particularly when it refers to

areas of very deep concern to large numbers" of developing countries, he added.

Fisheries deal 'difficult'

Delegates sought trade-offs as part of a potential package deal that could allow for greater agreement, as was the case during the 2022 ministerial meeting in Geneva. A new deal on fisheries was initially viewed as the most likely outcome of the MC13 talks. But Goyal on Thursday said: "It is very difficult to get a resolution."

After a 2022 deal which banned subsidies contributing to illegal, undeclared and unregulated fishing, the WTO hopes to conclude a second package focusing on subsidies which result in overcapacity and overfishing.

A draft text that was meant to be circulated on Wednesday is still facing delays, said a source close to the negotiations who spoke on the condition of anonymity. The overall negotiations "are a bit like a

rollercoaster," the source said.

Another sticking point is over the extension of an e-commerce moratorium, which EU trade commissioner Valdis Dombrovskis on Thursday called "vital" to economic growth. Since 1998, WTO members have agreed not to impose customs duties on electronic transactions.

E-commerce regulations

The moratorium has been extended at most ministerial meetings since then, but objections by India and South Africa are now throwing it into jeopardy. When asked if India would compromise on an extension, Goyal said: "Let's see what the others are budging on."

He warned, however, that an extension can't be "taken for granted." On food security, Goyal said he was "confident" progress could be made on permanent rules governing public stockholding of food reserves — a key demand of India.

A "solution can be achieved," Goyal said. Big questions remain over how the outcome will address the issue of dispute settlement reform — a main point of contention between the United States and India. Washington, under former President Donald Trump, brought the dispute settlement system to a grinding halt in 2019 by blocking the appointment of new judges to the WTO's appeals court, its highest dispute settlement authority.

During the last WTO ministerial in 2022, member states reached a commitment to having a fully and well-functioning dispute settlement system in place by 2024. "What we're going to see, I think, is a quite succinct (MC13) declaration which is... not going to sort out the substance," said a Western diplomatic source who asked not to be named.

"It will recognize the progress we have made and that there is more work to be done, and that we have committed ourselves to get... the system up and running in the course of this year." — AFP

EU consumers challenge Meta paid service as privacy 'smokescreen'

BRUSSELS: Consumer groups from eight EU countries lodged complaints against Meta on Thursday, accusing the Facebook and Instagram owner of illegally processing user data and using its "pay or consent" system as a "smokescreen" for privacy breaches.

Meta has reaped rich financial rewards by selling user data to advertisers, but its business model has pitted the US tech giant against EU regulators over data privacy. In November, Meta launched a "pay or consent" system allowing users to withhold use of their data for ad targeting in exchange for a monthly fee — a model already facing two challenges from privacy and consumer advocates.

Announcing the latest action, the European Consumer Organization (BEUC) called the system "a smokescreen to obscure the real problem of massive, illegal data processing of users which goes on regardless of what users choose." Meta dismissed the "general and unfounded accusations" regarding data use. "We strongly dispute these," a spokesperson said.

Eight consumer groups in the Czech Republic, Denmark, France, Greece, the Netherlands, Norway, Slovenia and Spain are filing complaints with their local data protection authorities, the Brussels-based BEUC umbrella body said in a statement.

The groups argue that Meta is still violating the European Union's mammoth general data protection regulation, which has been at the root of EU court cases against the online giant. "It's time for data protection authorities to stop Meta's unfair data processing and its infringing of people's fundamental rights," said Ursula Pahl, BEUC deputy director general.

BEUC in a report said that Meta is violating the EU data law's principles that demand transparency as



DAVOS: (FILES) A photograph taken during the World Economic Forum (WEF) annual meeting in Davos on January 18, 2024, shows the logo of Meta, the US company that owns and operates Facebook, Instagram, Threads, and WhatsApp. — AFP

well as limiting how much user data it processes and what it is used for. "Meta seems to be of the opinion that in order for the company to earn money with advertising, it is justified to collect any imaginable data on consumers' activities, location, personalities, behavior, attitudes and emotions," the report said.

"In reality, the massive exploitation of the private lives of hundreds of millions of European consumers for commercial gain fails to respect various fundamental principles of the GDPR."

The Silicon Valley company allows users of Instagram and Facebook in Europe to pay between 10 and 13 euros (around \$11 and \$14) a month to opt out of data sharing. Under the GDPR law, consent must be freely given but BEUC argues that its model coerces consumers into accepting Meta's processing of their personal data. "The company also fails to show that the fee it imposes on consumers who do not consent is indeed necessary, which is a requirement stipulated by" an EU top court. "Under these circumstances, the choice about how consumers want their data to be processed becomes meaningless and is therefore not free," the report said. — AFP

British Airways owner IAG, Air France-KLM post bumper profits

LONDON: Europe's aviation industry extended a bounceback from the COVID pandemic on Thursday, as British Airways owner IAG and Franco-Dutch rival Air France-KLM posted bumper 2023 profits. The sector is now flying at cruising altitude on pent-up demand after emerging from the dark days of COVID, which sparked lockdowns and grounded airlines, sparking thousands of job cuts.

IAG, which owns also Spanish carriers Iberia and Vueling among others, said its net profit surged six-fold last year, boosted by "strong" demand particularly from leisure travellers, while it also hired 13,000 new staff. Profit after tax jumped to 2.7 billion euros (\$2.9 billion) in 2023, IAG said in a results statement, adding that revenues leapt by almost a third to 29.5 billion euros.

IAG noted that "strong growth" was "underpinned by robust and sustainable demand". Air France-KLM announced that net annual profit soared almost a third to a record 934 million euros, while revenues jumped 14 percent to an all-time peak of 30 billion euros.

The carrier was also lifted by "sustained demand" in a "strong" performance, despite operational difficulties and fallout from the Zionist entity-Hamas conflict. However, its share price tanked nine percent in Paris as annual profit fell short of expectations after it logged a fourth-quarter loss. IAG shares slid 0.8 percent in London.

'Blue skies'

"People always want to travel and COVID curbs only served to create greater demand — in spite of cost pressures which have taken a toll on consumer

budgets," said Danni Hewson, head of financial analysis at stockbroker AJ Bell.

"Europe's aviation sector is enjoying blue skies and at the moment the outlook for 2024 appears relatively cloud free," she told AFP. COVID caused Air France-KLM to lose a cumulative 10.4 billion euros in 2020 and 2021, forcing the group to carry out two recapitalizations and request help from the French and Dutch governments.

Over the same period, IAG logged net losses totalling also about 10 billion euros. IAG chief executive Luis Gallego on Thursday said the group last year recovered "capacity to close to pre-COVID levels in most of its core markets".

The group said it was 92-percent booked for the first quarter of 2024 and 62-percent booked for the first half, ahead of last year's performance. Air France-KLM said booking rates for the first half were similar to those at the same time last year.

IAG also unveiled a management reshuffle Thursday, including the appointment of Vueling chief executive Marco Sansavini as head of Iberia.

Inflation pressures

"Air France-KLM and IAG provide encouragement for those hoping for a resurgence of the beleaguered aviation industry," said Scope Markets analyst Joshua Mahony, while cautioning over persistent high inflation that ramps up airlines' costs.

He added that some carriers would struggle to meet booming demand with limited capacity — and as the world's biggest planemakers struggle to produce enough jets. "Unfortunately, many airlines will likely struggle to fully address the demand evident within the industry, with both Boeing and Airbus struggling to keep up with order backlogs that continue to grow," he told AFP.

Ryanair chief executive Michael O'Leary last week blasted a "debacle" at US planemaker Boeing, adding that the no-frills Irish carrier would seek compensation for flight cancellations caused by quality issues and production delays. — AFP

Major stock markets mixed before US inflation data

‘A larger-than-expected move could cause fresh jitters and concern’

LONDON: Major stock markets traded mixed Thursday before the release of US inflation data that could present a clearer idea on when the Federal Reserve will start cutting interest rates as inflation cools. Traders reacted also to yet more earnings, with the Paris CAC 40 reaching a fresh intra-day high. Shares in Air France-KLM slumped nine percent after annual profit fell short of expectations as it fell into a final-quarter loss. The dollar was mixed against main rivals, while bitcoin rallied further to reach nearly \$63,000. The yen jumped on rising expectations of a hike to Japanese interest rates, as other central banks look to reduce borrowing costs.

The US Personal Consumption Expenditures (PCE) price index—the Fed’s most-watched inflation indicator—is expected to show a tick upwards in data Thursday, noted Susannah Streeter, head of money and markets at Hargreaves Lansdown.

“A larger-than-expected move could cause fresh

jitters and concern that monetary easing will be pushed further into the distance.” Expectations for rate cuts have shifted to later this year after earlier data showed inflation still hot in the world’s biggest economy. The US reports also consumer and jobless figures Thursday. In Europe, data showed inflation eased further in France and Spain in February. Eurozone inflation figures are due Friday. Wall Street’s main indices retreated Wednesday, although losses on both the Dow and S&P 500 were modest.

Elsewhere on the corporate front, India’s Reliance Industries and Walt Disney have agreed to merge their Indian media businesses, creating an \$8.5 billion entertainment giant in the world’s most populous nation. The two companies signed “binding definitive agreements” to form a joint venture that will combine the businesses of Reliance-backed Viacom18 and Star India, a joint statement by the firms said late Wednesday. — AFP



TOKYO: People walk past an electronic board showing the rate of the Japanese yen versus the US dollar along a street in Tokyo. — AFP

Reliance, Disney announce giant India media merger

MUMBAI: India’s Reliance Industries and Walt Disney have agreed to merge their Indian media businesses, creating a \$8.5 billion entertainment giant in the world’s most populous nation. India’s entertainment market is already one of the world’s biggest, with the merger expected to further shake up the multi-billion-dollar industry.

The two companies had signed “binding definitive agreements” to form a joint venture that will combine the businesses of Reliance-backed Viacom18 and Star India, a joint statement by the firms said late Wednesday.

Reliance, an oil-to-telecom conglomerate led by billionaire tycoon Mukesh Ambani, will invest \$1.4 billion into the new company. The statement said Disney will hold 36.8 percent, Reliance will hold a 16.3 percent stake, and Viacom18 another 46.8 percent.

“This is a landmark agreement that heralds a new era in the Indian entertainment industry,” Ambani

said. His wife, Nita Ambani, will serve as its chairperson. The merger will create an entertainment powerhouse that will have more than 100 television channels and two streaming platforms. The companies said the joint venture will have “over 750 million viewers across India”, and will also cater to the Indian diaspora.

“Reliance has a deep understanding of the Indian market and consumer, and together we will create one of the country’s leading media companies,” Disney chief Robert Iger said. The agreement will also help both Reliance and Disney stave off competition from traditional rivals such as India’s Zee Entertainment and Japan’s Sony, as well as streaming competition from Amazon and Netflix.

The announcement comes less than a month after Sony and Zee called off a \$10 billion merger that would have been a formidable force against Reliance and Disney. “This merger will have a very big impact on the entire media and entertainment ecosystem”, said Elara Capital senior vice president Karan Taurani. “It’s going to be a one of its kind.”

Taurani said the merger could help put their streaming platforms on a “path towards profitability” in the medium to long term by bringing down content costs. Taurani estimated the merged entity would command a 40 percent to 45 percent advertising revenue market share for both traditional broadcasting and digital streaming. — AFP

US to probe China tech risks in ‘connected vehicles’

WASHINGTON: The United States is launching an investigation into the national security risks of “connected vehicles,” focusing in particular on China-made technology, the US government said Thursday, as worries over data security grow. The latest probe concerns vehicles that constantly connect with personal devices, other cars, US infrastructure and their manufacturers—including electric and self-driving cars. And it comes as vehicles increasingly use advanced tech for navigational tools and driver assist features. “China is determined to dominate the future of the auto market, including by using unfair practices,” said President Joe Biden in a statement. “China’s policies could flood our market with its vehicles, posing risks to our national security,” he added.


Under Biden’s direction, the Commerce Department will look into risks stemming from connected vehicles that use technology from “countries of concern” like China, mulling regulations to address such threats, said the White House.

As part of the probe, Commerce will collect information from the industry and public, with a 60-day comment period. “China imposes restrictions on American autos and other foreign autos operating in China,” said Biden.

“Why should connected vehicles from China be allowed to operate in our country without safeguards?” he added. Connected vehicles collect vast amounts of data on drivers and passengers, log information on US infrastructure through cameras and sensors, and can be piloted or disabled remotely, the White House noted. As a result, it said, “new vulnerabilities” could arise if a foreign government gained access to their systems or data. While there are not many such vehicles containing China-made tech on US roads currently, Commerce Secretary Gina Raimondo stressed the need to “understand the extent of the technology in these cars.”

A senior US official told reporters on condition of anonymity that it is important to act before there are large numbers of these vehicles in the country, with the Chinese export market in autos growing rapidly and making strong inroads including in Europe.

In November, 14 members of Congress signed letters to 10 China-related companies involved in the auto sector—including Baidu, Didi Chuxing and AutoX—raising concerns over the handling of data collected when testing autonomous vehicles in the United States.—AFP



AL SAFAT INVESTMENT COMPANY

KUWAIT BOURSA WEEKLY REPORT

WEEK ENDED ON 29 FEBRUARY 2024

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No.	Ticker	Sector	Price Movement & Performance										Valuation Multiples *				
			Open Price	Close Price	Week High	Week Low	Range	Volume	WTD Change	WTD %	YTD %	Support Level	Resistance Level	P/E	P/B	Yield	Beta
101	National Bank of Kuwait	Banking	983	980	983	972	11	15,468,041	5	0.51%	9.62%	974	984	14.4	1.79	3.6%	1.02
102	Gulf Bank	Banking	295	295	295	290	5	22,320,130	1	0.34%	4.98%	294	303	14.1	1.30	3.2%	1.28
104	Al Ahli Bank of Kuwait	Banking	268	256	270	256	14	3,571,141	23	9.87%	9.87%	244	260	14.0	0.99	2.9%	0.98
106	Kuwait International Bank	Banking	161	165	165	163	2	21,540,120	2	1.23%	10.00%	164	167	16.7	0.59	2.2%	1.11
107	Burgan Bank	Banking	204	207	209	203	6	19,781,273	0	0.00%	20.35%	202	212	20.4	0.69	3.7%	1.37
108	Kuwait Finance House	Banking	803	810	810	802	8	32,087,921	9	1.12%	11.57%	799	814	20.9	2.01	2.5%	1.17
109	Boubyan Bank	Banking	634	643	648	638	10	4,440,661	2	0.31%	7.17%	616	644	34.2	2.53	1.2%	1.17
201	Kuwait Investment	Financial Services	199	196	199	192	7	2,590,615	-2	-1.01%	54.33%	178	200	14.6	0.88	2.6%	2.00
204	National Investments	Financial Services	290	285	290	283	7	5,899,333	-3	-1.04%	19.25%	283	296	91.6	1.31	9.9%	2.02
205	Kuwait Projects	Financial Services	127	126	134	126	8	24,322,986	-5	-3.82%	20.00%	126	132	31.8	0.73	0.0%	1.02
212	Arzan Financial Group	Financial Services	218	224	224	216	8	32,123,579	6	2.75%	6.67%	208	228	32.7	1.53	1.8%	1.16
222	Aayan Leasing and Investment	Financial Services	178	178	182	176	6	8,769,144	2	1.14%	2.30%	171	180	9.6	1.21	4.2%	1.57
252	Al Imtiaz Investment	Financial Services	56	56.4	56.8	55.7	1.1	6,061,914	0.3	0.53%	-0.18%	55.5	57.1	NM	0.38	0.0%	1.32
401	Kuwait Real Estate	Real Estate	224	230	230	223	7	15,496,419	6	2.68%	12.20%	220	237	18.3	1.52	1.3%	1.11
404	Salhia Real Estate	Real Estate	465	460	468	460	8	2,543,099	31	7.23%	7.23%	460	480	15.6	1.39	3.1%	0.51
413	Mabaneeh	Real Estate	816	818	818	805	13	3,886,316	5	0.62%	-2.97%	811	838	16.3	1.71	1.6%	0.96
418	The Commercial Real Estate	Real Estate	110	120	120	112	8	32,123,193	8	7.14%	17.65%	116	121	23.2	0.71	2.5%	0.63
501	National Industries	Financial Services	238	239	239	234	5	4,405,722	1	0.42%	17.16%	232	239	21.5	1.11	2.0%	1.65
505	Gulf Cable	Industrials	1,510	1,493	1,509	1,475	34	844,740	-17	-1.13%	13.97%	1,490	1,513	15.8	1.39	4.0%	1.03
506	HEISCO	Industrials	833	851	855	841	14	1,438,888	7	0.83%	3.78%	846	858	23.8	2.17	2.3%	0.90
514	Boubyan Petrochemical	Basic Materials	614	609	625	609	16	2,030,876	-15	-2.40%	4.10%	604	633	13.2	1.28	9.8%	0.94
603	Agility	Industrials	614	601	624	601	23	12,315,323	-21	-3.38%	18.07%	598	618	18.5	0.88	0.0%	1.55
605	Zain	Telecommunications	515	503	515	503	12	12,055,110	-9	-1.76%	-0.79%	503	512	10.2	1.77	6.9%	0.62
623	Human Soft Holding	Industrials	3,330	3,370	3,386	3,300	86	303,295	68	2.06%	-0.85%	3,350	3,400	10.3	3.39	10.4%	0.64
642	ALAFCO	Industrials	208	212	212	206	6	1,573,986	5	2.42%	17.78%	206	210	NM	0.92	0.0%	1.21
654	JAZEERA	Consumer Discretionary	1,147	1,129	1,149	1,113	36	1,180,085	-7	-0.62%	-18.72%	1,100	1,204	40.1	9.63	2.5%	1.31
813	GFH Financial Group	Financial Services	80.0	79.4	80.1	79	0.9	8,621,755	-0.5	-0.63%	4.06%	79.0	80.2	8.7	0.91	6.4%	1.37
821	Warba Bank	Banking	188	188	189	186	3	6,750,093	0	0.00%	1.08%	188	196	23.2	0.98	1.6%	1.11
822	Kuwait Telecommunications	Telecommunications	590	605	605	592	13	2,252,354	42	7.46%	7.46%	600	608	18.2	2.44	5.9%	0.70
823	Mezzan Holding	Consumer Staples	610	620	620	596	24	2,191,022	10	1.64%	7.83%	618	625	15.2	1.79	1.9%	0.50
824	Integrated Holding	Industrials	520	490	503	480	23	2,084,003	-1	-0.20%	-3.92%	485	499	34.2	1.99	3.1%	0.70
827	Boursa Kuwait	Financial Services	1,965	2,040	2,040	1,970	70	1,172,706	60	3.03%	18.33%	2,035	2,070	25.2	6.20	4.3%	1.38
830	AL GHANIM	Consumer Discretionary	1,099	1,175	1,175	1,100	75	1,900,742	80	7.31%	11.27%	1,140	1,175	11.2	3.86	5.9%	0.73

* As of end of week closing

Business

Indian economy grew 8.4% in December quarter: Official data

World's most populous country is already among the best-performing economies

NEW DELHI: India's economy grew 8.4 percent in the December quarter, official data showed Thursday, with a surging manufacturing sector helping defy more modest analyst forecasts. The world's most populous country is already among the best-performing economies thanks to robust domestic demand and investment.

Thursday's results were significantly higher than the 7.0 percent projected by India's central bank and other, lower estimates by analysts. "Double-digit growth in the manufacturing sector, followed by a good growth rate of construction sector" were responsible for the better-than-expected performance, India's statistics agency said.

The result is a fillip to the already commanding position of Prime Minister Narendra Modi ahead of a national election due in the coming months, which he is widely expected to win. Modi said in a social media post the GDP figures showed "the strength of Indian economy and its potential" to help the country's 1.4 billion people "lead a better life".

His government has made stewardship of the economy a core aspect of its campaign, along with the ruling party's muscular Hindu-nationalist ideological pitch to voters from India's majority faith. Earlier this month it announced a double-digit boost to infrastructure spending which finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman said would unlock five years of "unprecedented development". Figures from Thursday's GDP release showed 11.6 percent growth in manufacturing, reversing sluggish demand in the sector seen through last year, while the construction sector grew by 9.5 percent.

India lifted its full-year growth forecast to 7.6 percent from 7.3 percent for the 12 months to March 31. Thursday's data also revised its previ-

ous figures for the March and June 2023 quarters to above 8.0 percent. India emerged from the COVID-19 pandemic to be buffeted by a new set of global headwinds, including tightening financial conditions and the effects of the war in Ukraine on global food and oil markets.

Its economy nonetheless grew 7.2 percent in the 2022-23 financial year, the second-highest among G20 countries. The International Monetary Fund last month projected India's growth to remain strong through the next financial year due to "resilience in domestic demand" even as it predicted a slowdown elsewhere in Asia.

Demand has rebounded and inflation has receded from its 2022 peak of 7.8 percent since the Reserve Bank of India paused rate hikes last year, with its key benchmark repo rate steady at 6.5 percent since. India overtook Britain in 2022 to become the world's fifth-largest economy and last year surpassed China to become the most populous country.

Meanwhile, Mauritius inaugurated on Thursday an Indian-financed air strip and jetty on the island of Agalega, but denied the remote islet would be used for military purposes. An investigation by news broadcaster Al Jazeera in 2021 said India was building a secret naval base on Agalega, much to the chagrin of its approximately 300 inhabitants.

"There has never been a project to turn Agalega into a military base," Mauritius Prime Minister Pravind Jugnauth said. "I strongly deplore and condemn the India-bashing campaign fomented by some people in Mauritius and abroad."

The three kilometre (1.9-mile) air strip and jetty were agreed upon during Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's 2015 visit to Mauritius and cost 8.8 billion mauritian rupees (\$192 million).



VARANASI: India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi (2R) and Yogi Adityanath (3R), Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh, greet the supporters as they arrive to inaugurate the Amul Banas Dairy plant, on the outskirts of Varanasi. — AFP

Jugnauth said the infrastructures would help the Indian Ocean island modernise and strengthen its security. "They will strengthen the fight against drugs, human trafficking and illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing, and will enable emergency response," he said, calling it a dream that had turned into reality.

An archipelago of four islands, Mauritius also includes Saint-Brandon and Rodrigues, which has had an autonomous status since 2001. The report of a naval base in Agalega raised fears of a repeat of the 1965 decision by Britain to separate

the Chagos Islands from Mauritius and set up a joint military base with the United States on Diego Garcia, the largest of the isles.

The decades-old move has sparked protests by Chagossians, who accuse Britain of carrying out an "illegal occupation" and barring them from their homeland. Britain insists the islands belong to London and has renewed a lease agreement with the United States to use Diego Garcia until 2036.

Diego Garcia's air and sea bases played a strategic role during the Cold War and during the war in Afghanistan. — AFP

Japan factory output tumbles in further gloom

TOKYO: Japan's industrial output last month slumped the most since the COVID-19 pandemic, government data showed Thursday, adding to the gloom for the world's number four economy after going into recession in late 2023.

Output at factories and mines in January was down 7.5 percent from the previous month—the largest month-on-month decline since May 2020, when COVID brought global economies to a standstill. "Many will attribute the poor January print to the Noto Peninsula earthquake which struck the northwest of Japan's main island on New Year's Day," said Stefan Angrick, senior economist at Moody's Analytics.

But "business forecasts for January had already turned sour by the end of December when a major Japanese carmaker announced it would suspend production at one of its subsidiaries", he said. Mini-vehicle specialist Daihatsu, a Toyota subsidiary, suspended its domestic production for weeks from late December over an embarrassing rigged safety test scandal. — AFP



SEOUL: This handout photo taken on February 29, 2024 and released by South Korean Presidential Office via Yonhap shows South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol (R) shaking hands with Mark Zuckerberg, head of US tech giant Meta, during their meeting at Yoon's office in Seoul. — AFP

Zuckerberg, S Korea's President Yoon talk AI cooperation

SEOUL: Meta chief Mark Zuckerberg met South Korea's President Yoon Suk Yeol in Seoul Thursday and discussed cooperation on AI and ways to prevent fake news circulation ahead of key elections, Yoon's office said.

Zuckerberg is on a mini-tour of Asia that has included a stop in Japan, plus a three-day visit to Seoul where he met business leaders from electronics giants Samsung and LG. He heads to India next. Yoon and Zuckerberg discussed cooperation between South Korean companies and Meta "as well as the vision to create an AI digital ecosystem", Sung Tae-yoon, Yoon's chief of staff for policy, told reporters.

"Yoon emphasised South Korean companies' top place in the memory market for AI systems and asked Zuckerberg to forge close cooperations with them," the official said. Yoon stressed that South Korea "with its diverse portfolio of smart electronics, wearable devices and smart cars, can become an outstanding platform" to apply Facebook parent Meta's artificial intelligence, Sung said.

Yoon told the Meta founder that Seoul would assist in any way "if necessary", Sung added, pointing to close supply chain cooperation mechanisms established between South Korea and the United States. In light of major elections globally this year—including a South Korean parliamentary vote in April and the US presidential election in November—Yoon asked the Meta chief to "pay special attention" to monitoring and preventing fake news on his platform. — AFP



KUWAIT: Burgan Bank's staff celebrate Kuwait National and Liberation Days.

Burgan Bank celebrates National Day, unveils 'Beladona Helwa' song

KUWAIT: In a continued effort to celebrate momentous occasions with its employees, Burgan Bank hosted a memorable event specially organized for its staff, in celebration of Kuwait National and Liberation Days. The event held at Burgan Bank's headquarters featured the first-time exclusive unveiling of the National Day ad that features the song "Beladona Helwa" produced by Burgan Bank. The celebrated remake is the official title track from the recently reprised "Al-Sindbad Al-Bahri" children's play. This initiative is a key highlight of Burgan's robust employee engagement program.

Commenting on the event, Naqeeb Amin, General Manager - Human Resources and Development

for the Group at Burgan Bank, said: "This year's National Day celebration was particularly special as Burgan employees participated in various activities during the event. In addition, we unveiled the National Day song 'Beladona Helwa', which is the main singing act of the modern remake of 'Al-Sindbad Al-Bahri' play, a cultural treasure that has resonated with Kuwaitis for decades. To this end, we are always looking to foster a sense of community within our organization. Beyond the day-to-day work and the constant pursuit of professional development, we want to make sure our employees always feel appreciated and engaged."

"At Burgan Bank, we believe in celebrating our national heritage and culture together as one family. Events like these are a testament to our ongoing efforts to create an inclusive and supportive workplace," Mr. Naqeeb added. "We are always committed to being an employer of choice, driven by the passion and dedication of our employees. The National Day celebration is just one of the many

ways we aim to show our appreciation for our staff and their contribution to our success."

The event not only served as a celebration of national pride but also as an opportunity for staff from across different departments to bond with one another in a relaxed setting.

Burgan Bank continues to prioritize its mission to become an employer of choice, holding a wide array of events that underscore its innovative approach to employee engagement and well-being. The Bank remains committed to creating a positive and productive work environment where employees feel valued and connected, stemming from its slogan "Driven by You".



Naqeeb Amin

LuLu Hypermarket shines with traditional 'Ramadan Souq' launch

KUWAIT: Embracing the holy month of Ramadan, LuLu Hypermarket launched its eagerly anticipated 'Ramadan Special' promotion on February 28, marking the occasion with the grand opening of the traditional 'Ramadan Souq' at its Al-Qurain outlet.

The ceremony, graced by esteemed officials from five distinguished charity groups in Kuwait—Namaa Charity, Qawafil Charity, Islamic Care Society, Wasm Ahl Al Khair and Al Najad Charity—signaled the commencement of a month-long journey characterized by generosity and unity.

During the event, LuLu Hypermarket unveiled exclusive charity gift cards in collaboration with these humanitarian organizations, empowering patrons to effortlessly contribute to noble causes.

Festive gift cards, available in denominations of KD 10, KD 25, and KD 50, were made accessible at all outlets, offering shoppers the ideal opportunity to spread joy and support during Ramadan.

Furthermore, the hypermarket committed to distributing over 400 free Iftar food kits daily throughout Ramadan. Additionally with a special focus on supporting indigent individuals across Kuwait through a partnership with Namaa Charity.

Enhancing the atmosphere of the 'Ramadan Souq' are a variety of promotions and discounts on essential Ramadan items, ranging from delicious foods to household necessities and heartfelt gifts.

Shoppers can explore specially curated Ramadan kits, offered in two options: A standard kit priced at KD 10 and a premium kit at KD 15. They can also savor convenient Iftar meal counters and immerse themselves in the festive



spirit elevated by traditional decorations and impressive displays.

The 'Ramadan Special' promotion goes beyond ordinary shopping, providing captivating experiences like the 'Dates Festival,' 'Big TV Majlis,' and 'Ramadan Home Fest,' catering to a range of preferences and needs. Additionally, health-conscious consumers can delve into the 'Healthy Ramadan' segment, which offers organic, vegan, and allergen-free options to enrich their fasting journey.

LuLu Hypermarket, as a testament to its stead-

fast commitment to community engagement, invites patrons of all ages to join in the festivities of the 'Ramadan Nights' festival. It promises a blend of entertainment, gastronomic delights, and cultural enrichment for all participants.

Through initiatives such as the 'Ramadan Special' promotion, LuLu Hypermarket reaffirms its dedication to enriching the social and religious fabric of the community. Additionally, it aims to provide unparalleled shopping experiences and access to premium products at competitive prices.

Weekender

Palestinian-Kuwaiti artist traces struggle on digital canvas

By Nebal Snan

Between sharing accounts of the atrocities committed by the Zionist occupation in Gaza and staying on top of news coming from the besieged territory, Heba Haji has been glued to her screen since October 7. The Palestinian-Kuwaiti artist and designer who usually channels her emotions through art has been too frustrated to put her paint brush and pencil to use.



Palestinian-Kuwaiti artist Heba Haji created this piece about generational trauma and strength featuring the Palestinian sunbird and other Palestinian symbols.

"Whenever I start doing something I either end up being so angry to the point where I ruined what I'm making. Or I ended up crying so much because I can literally see the children's faces or hear their mother crying," she said.

Through it all, her art has always been influenced by her Palestinian ancestry – the symbols, the themes and the emotions she portrays. Palestine is still always on Haji's mind, even when she advocates for other issues close to her heart.

No stranger to pain

Women are central to Haji's art, a quick look at her Instagram accounts @fathomtheroad and @sittisloudartist clearly shows. She says it's in part because she's a woman herself, but also because women's struggle is more prominent. "Because it's their fathers, their brothers, their children, that are going through all of this as well as them. ... The pain that women feel is so much louder and easier to connect to," she said.

Haji describes her multimedia art as "defiant". "When you look at the images, it almost stares right back at you. ... You could tell that this person to become strong, had to go through grief, had to go through pain."

Like the women portrayed in her multimedia art, Haji is no stranger to pain – she carries the weight of Palestinian grief stemming from 75 years of occupation and the inter-generational trauma of having her Palestinian maternal grandparents, both from the suburbs of Akka, forcibly displaced from their homes during the nakba in 1948. Her grandmother, who passed away recently, was too shocked by the ordeal that she never spoke of it. But she managed to interview her grandfather who through the pain, was able to tell her a lot of what he remembered.

"Parents hid their children in caves beside the village because they were too young to run. And in the morning, the parents would go back to the village, leaving the children without guarantees that they would be back," said Haji.

The families eventually took their children and fled from village to village, chased by Zionist tanks, until they reached Lebanon. That's where her grandparents grew up, met and got married before coming to Kuwait in the 50s.

Haji's grandparents remain a source of strength and inspiration. Her Instagram account @sittisloudartist is a tribute to her late maternal grandmother's life, who pushed her towards her passion for art. She donates most of the money she makes through selling art pieces and offering classes in her grandmother's honor.

Don't turn a blind eye

Palestinian love for life and resilience also show through the colors and facial expressions Haji gives people in her drawings. Their solidarity with those who face injustices

is another important influence in her work. "We can't watch somebody struggle, and not speak about it, because we're people who have struggled for so long," she said.

When the Sudanese revolution broke out in 2018, Haji says she was among the first artists to create digital art in support of the Sudanese people's fight for freedom. "That's when I feel like I really understood that my artwork doesn't have to be just for me to express how I feel. But it also could help other people. It became a way for us all to connect using art. (This) made up a big part of my artistic identity."



This artwork created for the BDS movement features the Arabic text "I won't participate".

Now that Haji's artwork on Palestine is also gaining traction on social media, she says she feels conflicted. "I'm very grateful that people are listening right now. But I'm also very angry that they should have been here from day one. People could have woken up a long time ago," she said. "It's frustrating. 75 years later, we're still hearing the same excuses. We're still listening to the same blank both-sides statements when historically, it's quite obvious who the oppressor and who the oppressed is."

Haji pleaded that people would not turn a blind eye to Palestine anymore. "I want the world to understand that they're supposed to feel this anger. They're supposed to feel this pain. They're supposed to bear witness to all this that's happening whether it's Palestinian genocide, or whether it's the Sudan genocide, or whether it's the Congo genocide," she said.



Nebal Snan is a Palestinian-Canadian multiplatform journalist with bylines in CBC and the Chronicle Herald. She has a master's degree in data journalism and a background in microbiology. She enjoys baking cakes and a good cortado.

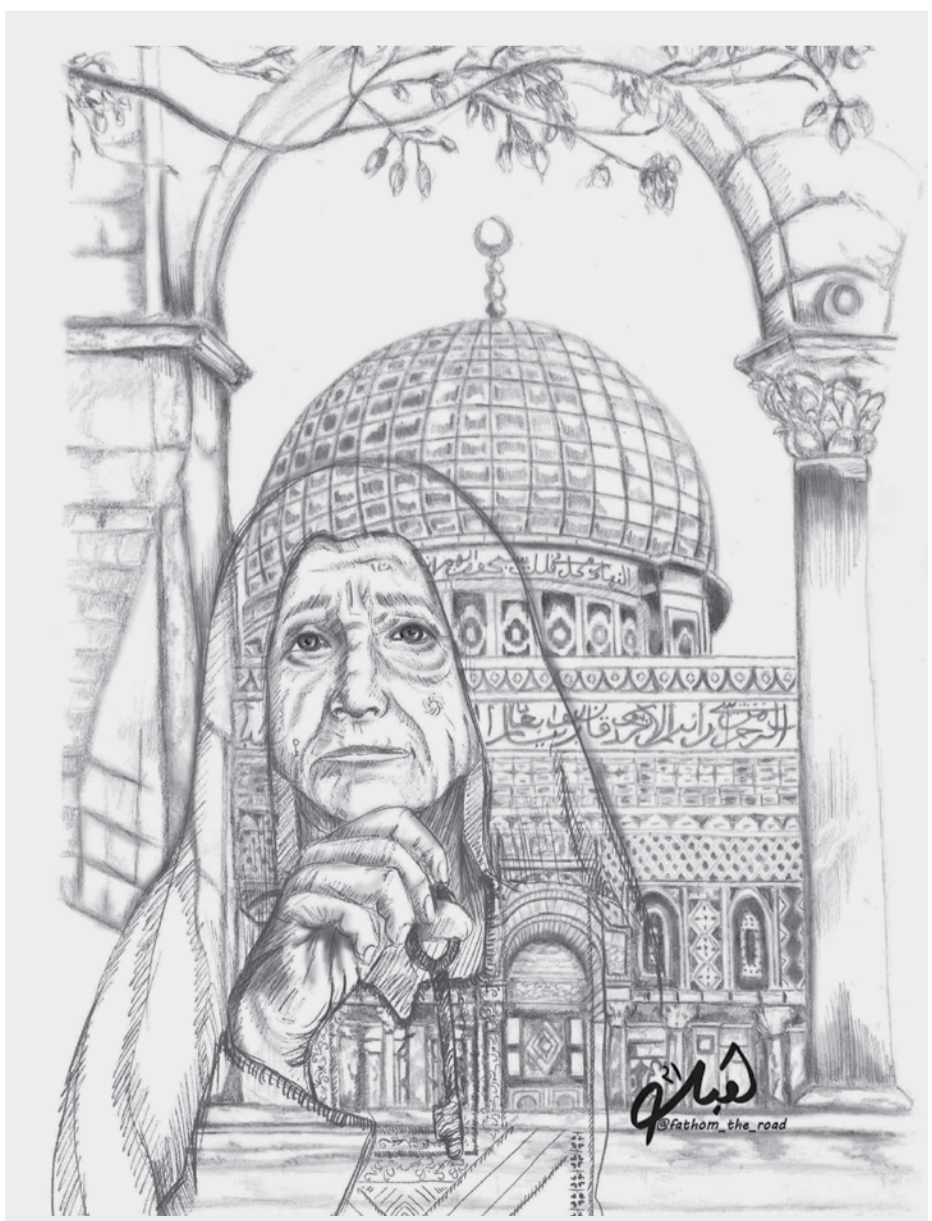


Heba Haji poses with her Palestinian grandparents.

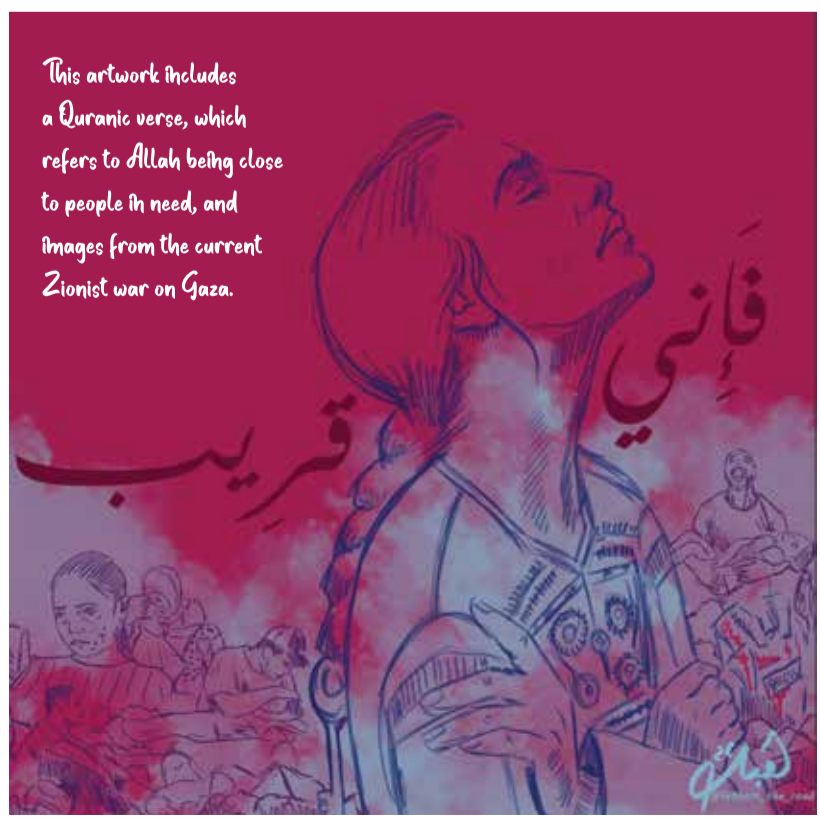
Haji first got interested in art as a way to connect with her Kuwaiti paternal grandmother, who didn't know how to write and read but bonded with her granddaughter through pencil drawings. "I vividly remember being so little sitting beside my grandma, and she patiently taught me how to draw a palm tree," she said.

Over the years, she found herself turning to her sketchbook as she explored her Palestinian-Kuwaiti identity.

"If you look at colonialism, the greatest example of this right now is Palestine. If you're talking about Western military imperialism, the biggest example of it is Palestine. If you look at racism and discrimination, the clearest example is, you know, Palestine. Whenever you're tackling social issues, Palestine always pops up and I feel like in my art, it almost always pops up," she said.



A piece about the Palestinian right of return and the guardians of the land.



This artwork includes a Quranic verse, which refers to Allah being close to people in need, and images from the current Zionist war on Gaza.



A piece depicting a Palestinian woman with the key of return on her cheek.



A piece representing the trauma from watching a genocide unfold on screen.



An art piece dedicated to Sudan, Palestine and DR Congo.

A closer look at the buzzing world of Bees



By Passant Hisham

Just like disciplined workers in a factory, bees work very hard in their beehives until the last minute, each trying to fulfill their various roles in a harmonious manner. Kuwaiti beekeeper Salem AlOumi described the unwavering commitment of bees which he learned about after becoming a key part of their incredible world.

As a young boy who frequently suffered from a weak immune system and seasonal infections, Oumi was initially drawn to the beekeeping industry with the goal of extracting fresh honey directly from its source, untouched by additives, to utilize its full nutritional benefits. On a day of his life at one of his bee yards, Oumi invited Kuwait Times on a journey to explain the production process of honey from scratch.

essential roles in keeping the hive thriving and maintaining honey production. Oumi elaborated that there are worker bees responsible for gathering nectar from trees to produce honey, others for cleaning the hive, some act as soldiers protecting the hive from any intruder, some are responsible for nursing the eggs of the honeybees, and some are tasked with caring for the queen, feeding, and grooming her.

Returning to the factory analogy, Oumi highlighted that young bees undergo a training phase before starting to fly. For approximately two weeks, they remain within the hive, attending to basic tasks such as cleaning and nursing. Subsequently, they acquire the skills of flight and orientation, learning how to gather nectar and navigate back to their hives without becoming disoriented or lost.

Bees produce a lot more than honey, Oumi said. Despite weighing no more than 0.15 grams, these tiny creatures generate six distinct products, each offering significant benefits to both humans and bees: honey, beeswax, propolis (used in hive construction), pollen (recognized as bees' primary protein source), bee milk, and bee venom. Contrary to common fears of bee stings, bee venom serves as a valuable treatment for various diseases. Oumi highlighted that among all bee products, bee venom emerges as the most valuable, with one kilogram valued at approximately \$50,000 in the global market.

However, despite all the effort that the bees undertake to increase their productivity, Kuwait's honey, primarily extracted from Sidr tree flowers, is facing a significant



Beehives are seen arranged in wooden boxes.

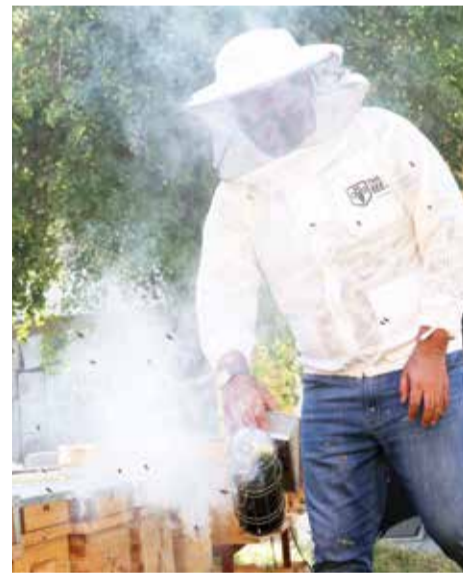


Worker bees fly towards a hive at an apiary in Kuwait City on February 5, 2024. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat

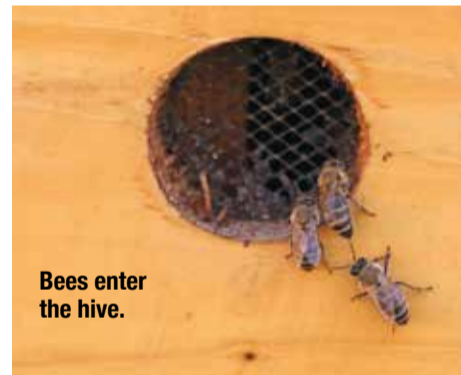
"Honeybees form a female-dominant society, with female worker bees primarily responsible for the majority of tasks," Oumi explained. Just as employees' roles are divided based on product lines or departments, bees in each hive have three distinct roles: the queen, of which there is only one per hive, the workers, all of which are female bees, and the drones, which are male bees.

The queen, as the only fertile female in the whole hive, has the sole role of reproduction. Oumi noted that the queen leaves the hive only once in her lifetime to embark on a mating flight. During this flight, the queen mates with 15 to 20 males in a single day. After mating, she returns to the hive with the stored sperm from male bees to continue laying eggs for the rest of her life.

Clearly, from that one can easily notice that the male bees' purpose and role are solely to mate with the queen. Meanwhile, the worker bees have numerous



Salem AlOumi calms bees using smoke to deter them from attacking.



Bees enter the hive.



Worker bees swarm outside a hive.

decline in production in recent years, according to Oumi. This decline is attributed to climate issues and the increasing scarcity of Sidr trees which were once an essential part of every old Kuwaiti house.

As a result of these challenges, honey production in Kuwait has dropped from six kilograms per hive in 2010 to almost three kilograms, representing a substantial decrease, as highlighted by Oumi.

As Oumi shared a glimpse into the daily life of bees, he expressed his strong connection with their world, which he has

been immersed in for the past few years. What started as a mere search for pure and natural honey grew into a yearning passion that he couldn't contain, leading him to oversee 3,500 beehives in Kuwait. Just as bees devote themselves entirely to fulfilling their tasks, he too invests all his time and effort to keep this hobby growing and let the world know of the benefits of honey.



Salem AlOumi scoops honey from a beehive frame.



Salem AlOumi explains the production process of honey.



This photo shows parts of the honey comb (the brood) where baby bees are growing in the hive.



Kuwaiti beekeeper Salem AlOumi holds a beehive frame as worker bees swarm around it at an apiary.



ARDHA: Art deeply rooted in Kuwait's history



Men perform Ardha at Kuwait's pavilion at the Expo 2020 in Dubai.

By Khaled Al-Abdulhadi

Ardha, inscribed by UNESCO in 2015 on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, is a fundamental cultural expression to the native people of the Arabian Peninsula that is still practiced widely.

According to UNESCO, no specific date of the origin of the Ardha is known, however, it is speculated that it has its origins before the 17th century at the latest. It's a traditional performance combining dance, drumming and chanting poetry that signifies the start and end of notable occasions, such as religious holidays, weddings, births, graduation ceremonies, or events of national or local significance.

Males performing Ardha carry light swords and stand shoulder to shoulder in two sets of facing rows, leaving space between them to accommodate drummers. A poet chants verses specific to the occasion in a loud voice, which are then sung antiphonally by the participants. UNESCO describes the performance thoroughly: "all performers rock back and forth, side to side and move their swords up and down in rhythmic movements in harmony with the drumbeats and verses. As the poem ends, the men gather around the flag." "All males may participate, regardless of social status, age or professional background," they added.

Earlier in history, the Ardha was called (horseshoe) as the tribal knight improvised on the back of the horse and sang several verses not more

than two verses that arouse enthusiasm in the hearts of warriors during times of war, Music Professor Hamad Al-Habad told KUNA.

Another type of Kuwaiti Ardha is called the "Marine Ardha". It has all the elements of the Najdi Ardha but has a distinct rhythm. Performers line up

"This was a tradition among ships in the Gulf region and was performed as the ship neared land so that people could hear the singing and family and friends would come out to greet the returning sailors," said Habad.

Another type of Ardha in Kuwait is also "Al-Ardhah Al-Umariya", which is

founded in the thirties of the last century in the Mirqab area. The troupe has participated and is still participating in many national and social events and holidays.

The Hasawiyah band, also known as "Awlad Amer" is another prominent Kuwaiti folk group, which has — since the era of Sheikh Mubarak Al-Sabah

era of the late Sheikh Salem Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah by performing Ardha as they walked from neighborhoods to the place where the wall was to be built.

He explained that the band was the first in Kuwait to have its members wear a uniform since the sixties to create a distinctive character for the band.



A folk troupe performs Ardha at Souq Mubarakiya during Kuwait's national celebrations in 2024.

in two sets of facing rows on board a ship in this form of Ardha. Performing the Marine Ardha on board a ship as it prepares to dock at port was considered an expression of joy for the ship's safe return and a way to identify where the ship was coming from.

native to villages, especially the people of Fintas, and blends elements from the Najdi Ardha and the Marine Ardha.

One of the most famous Ardha troupes in Kuwait is the (Al-Randi) band. The band was named after its founder Abdulaziz Suleiman Al-Randi and was

until today — offered beautiful art, especially Ardha.

The late head of the band, Mohammed Ahmed Al-Hamad, said in an interview with KUNA that the troupe played an important role in calling for the construction of the Kuwait Wall during the

The members of the band all had to wear "Al-Shallah", a men's dress with long and wide sleeves but were left to choose the color of their dress among blue, green, grey, and burgundy.



A troupe is seen dancing the Ardha during a National Day carnival held on the Arabian Gulf in the 60s.



The late Sheikh Abdullah Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, who was the honorary leader of the "Awlad Amer" band, is seen with them during an event.



Kuwaiti folklore troupes perform the traditional Ardha dance at Youm Al-Bahar Village.



Men stand holding their swords seemingly in preparation for the Ardha as others hold an early version of the Kuwait national flag.



The "Awlad Amer" troupe prepares for a performance.



The late Sheikh Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah and King Khalid bin Abdulaziz participate in an Ardha performance with the "Awlad Amer" troupe in March 1976. - KUNA photos

WHAT'S ON IN KUWAIT

Event: Look At The Times
Place: Kuwait Times
Date: March 1 -2, 2024
Time: 12 pm to 7 pm

Event: Graish
Place: JACC
Date: March 1-2, 2024
Time: 8 pm

Event: Green Market
Place: Scientific Center
Date: March 1- 2, 2024

Event: BLS Spring Market
Place: AUK
Date: March 1, 2024

Event: Artisan Expo
Place: Al-Shaheed Park

Date: March 2, 2024
Time: 10 am to 10 pm

Event: Qout Market
Place: JACC
Date: March 2, 2024
Time: 9 am to 5 pm

Event: Al-Farsi Kite
Place: Bnaider
Date: March 1, 2024

Event: "Sharing is Caring" Bazaar
Place: Designz Interiors - Shuwaikh Industrial
Date: March 1, 2024

Event: Palestinian Play and dance show
Place: Loyac - Al-Qabliya School
Date: March 3, 2024
Time: 7:30 pm to 9 pm

Sports

Gayle hopes T20 World Cup can help cricket crack US market

ICC trying to get cricket on a global scale within the USA

LONDON: Former West Indies star Chris Gayle hopes the T20 World Cup will help cricket crack the lucrative American sports market and lift the game onto a new global level. The Twenty20 showpiece, which starts on June 1, is being jointly hosted by the United States and Gayle's native West Indies, where big crowds are expected.

But it will be the first major international cricket tournament staged in the United States, with a sell-out crowd expected for the clash between arch-rivals India and Pakistan at a temporary 34,000-seat venue in Long Island, New York. Gayle believes the success of last year's inaugural Major League Cricket, a US-based T20 franchise competition, has given the game a foothold in America.

"The ICC (International Cricket Council) has been trying to get cricket on a global scale within the USA," Gayle told AFP in an interview marking 100 days to go until the start of the ICC Men's T20 World Cup 2024.

"India v Pakistan is in New York, I'm sure it's going to be phenomenal. They (the USA) had a T20 tournament last year and it was a success. It's a big market, we just have to hope it will be a success within the United States." West Indies have pedigree in limited-overs cricket, winning the first two men's one-day international World Cups in 1975 and 1979, but they failed even to qualify for last year's 50-over tournament in India.

"We missed out on the 50-over World Cup so this will be something fantastic for the guys to actually play for something," said Gayle, speaking via video call from Barbados. "We just want to be in the (June 29) final here in Barbados. Anything is possible when you make it to the final."

"I'm excited for the people, to actually see a bit

of cricket," added big-hitting opener Gayle, who in 2007 became the first batsman to score a T20 international century. The 44-year-old, a member of the West Indies teams that become T20 world champions in 2012 and 2016, said the current side had enough "options and experience" to relieve holders England of their title, even though they are a lowly seventh in the world rankings.

'Struggle'

The West Indies lost their recent ODI series in Australia 3-0 and went down 2-1 in the T20 series but they drew the Test series 1-1 as an under-strength team won a thriller in Brisbane by just eight runs against the reigning world champions in the five-day format.

It was the first time West Indies—who dominated Test cricket in the 1980s and 1990s—had won a Test in Australia since 1997 and Gayle said it was huge achievement for the side. "The adrenaline, the excitement, to beat Australia (in a Test) after so many years, you know I've been a part of that struggle as well as a captain in Australia."

"To be able to get that win, in that fantastic manner as well, is something superb. To see the likes of (batting great) Brian Lara when he was actually doing the (television) commentary, how excited he was, we saw (former batsman) Carl Hooper shed tears as well."

One pressing issue for global cricket chiefs is that top players no longer need to play internationals to make a living in an era of worldwide franchise competitions. Former West Indies captain Janson Holder missed the Test series in Australia to play T20 cricket in the United Arab Emirates instead.

Gayle, one of the original globe-trotting T20



BRIDGETOWN: (FILES) Chris Gayle of the West Indies poses at the launch of 100 days to go to start of the ICC Men's T20 World Cup 2024 at Freedom Park in Bridgetown, Barbados. — AFP

"guns for hire", who had several run-ins with Caribbean cricket chiefs over availability, said it was down to administrators to rebalance the schedule. "I'm in favour always of the players making their earnings, it's their livelihood, it's their job," he said.

"Cricket is actually a big business, so we can't beat down on a player to choose a franchise over his

particular country, because there's no loyalty from both sides. "There's just too much cricket and it takes away a bit from international cricket, unless there's two big teams playing. They just need to structure it a bit better to make sure both teams are competitive when they are going against each other at international level." — AFP

Bumrah back for fifth England Test

NEW DELHI: India's pace spearhead Jasprit Bumrah will return for the final Test against England after missing the team's series-clinching win in the fourth match, the country's cricket board said Thursday. Bumrah was rested in the previous Test, which India won by five wickets in Ranchi to take an unassailable 3-1 lead in the five-match series.

The Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) said Bumrah "will link-up with the squad in Dharamsala" for the final Test starting March 7. Batsman KL Rahul will miss out again after he was forced out of the previous three due to a quad injury he picked up in the opener.

Spinner Washington Sundar has been released from the squad to join his state team Tamil Nadu for the Ranji Trophy semi-finals and will rejoin the national team for the Test "if need be". The BCCI also said Mohammed Shami had successfully undergone surgery for a right heel injury after the fast bowler posted social media photographs of himself from hospital after the operation on Tuesday. — AFP



SINGAPORE: Lilia Vu of the US hits a shot during round one of the HSBC Women's World Championship golf tournament at Sentosa Golf Club in Singapore on February 29, 2024. — AFP

World number one Vu lies a stroke behind LPGA leader

SINGAPORE: World number one Lilia Vu shot a three-under par 69 to be a stroke off the lead after the first round of the HSBC Women's World Championship in Singapore on Thursday.

The surprise leader, in a field featuring 15 of the world's top 20 in the LPGA Tour's flagship Asian event, was Sarah Schmelzel from the United States.

The world number 107 found herself a stroke clear at the head of the field after a four-under-par 68 at Sentosa Golf Club. Vu was in a three-way tie for second with Sweden's Linn Grant and Germany's Esther Henseleit. South Korea's Ko Jin-young, who is seeking an unprecedented treble of titles after winning the 2022 and 2023 editions, is three shots back from Schmelzel in a 13-way tie for 10th place on a stacked leaderboard.

Starting from the 10th and turning at one-over par, Schmelzel, who joined the LPGA Tour in 2019, carded five birdies on a fabulous closing nine to take an opening-round lead for the first time.

"I have not been in this position before," Schmelzel told reporters. "But I guess there's a first time for everything. I'm excited. Let's see what happens next."

"This is my fifth (LPGA) year, so I'm just trying to get into contention more and get a little bit better every day," said the 29-year-old. Vu expressed disbelief that no one posted lower than four-under par around the 6,775-yard Tanjong course that hosts the tournament dubbed "Asia's major". — AFP

Green century steers Australia to 279-9 in first New Zealand Test

WELLINGTON: Cameron Green slammed only his second Test century Thursday to steer Australia to 279-9 at stumps on the opening day of the first Test in Wellington. The visitors were tottering on 89-4 after being put into bat at the Basin Reserve before Green dug in for a rescue mission with the help of Mitchell Marsh, who made 40.

The 24-year-old brought up three figures with his 16th four in the final over to end day one on 103 with Josh Hazlewood yet to score. "Obviously it feels really good, mainly with where we were as a team," Green said. "It was a pretty tough wicket out there... someone just needed to bat through so glad it was me. Was nice to stick it out there, and hopefully put a semi-competitive total on the board." Green, batting at number four, fought back after New Zealand seamer Matt Henry took the key wickets of Steve Smith, Usman Khawaja and Marsh to end with 4-43 on a green pitch.

Henry dismissed Smith for 31 before lunch, bowled Khawaja for 33 after the break then snaggled Marsh and Nathan Lyon, for five. Scott Kuggeleijn, restored to the side, also grabbed two wickets, removing out-of-form Marnus Labuschagne for one and Alex Carey for 10.

Black Caps rising star Will O'Rourke, who took nine wickets on his debut this month, bagged two more in the shape of Travis Head (1) and Mitchell Starc (9). Green said the wicket would still offer plenty for the Australian quick bowlers on Friday.

"It's pretty close, I reckon they are just on top," he said. "They have a quality batting line-up and we have to bowl well tomorrow." Marsh and Green offered the resistance with a 67-run partnership off 77 balls.

But Marsh succumbed to Henry, caught behind by

Paris Olympic village ready on time as confidence grows

PARIS: The organisers of the Paris Olympics took possession of the newly built athletes' village on Thursday on schedule, reinforcing growing confidence that they will be ready for the Games. At an inauguration ceremony in northern Paris, chief organiser Tony Estanguet received a symbolic key for the complex in front of VIPs including President Emmanuel Macron.

The roughly 40 low-rise tower blocks will house around 14,000 people over the course of the Olympics, which kick off on July 26, and another 9,000 during the Paralympics afterwards. The handover target of March 1 for the crucial piece of Olympics infrastructure was exceeded by a day, with all sides keen to stress that the construction work was finished on time and only marginally over budget.

"It's a demonstration that we have honoured our commitments," Macron told reporters after meeting workers who he said should be "proud" of taking part in what he called "the adventure of a century". The village was a major test of whether the Paris Games could avoid the pitfalls of past editions.

Wasteful over-spending, rushed construction work and extravagant "white elephant" infrastructure projects have consistently tarnished the reputation of the Olympics. Concerns about climate change have also led activists to target the enormous carbon footprint of an event that brings together athletes and spectators from across the world every four years.

Regeneration

Paris organisers see themselves as promoting a new "sober" model, with a focus on using existing



WELLINGTON: Australia's Pat Cummins (L) plays a shot watched by New Zealand's wicketkeeper Tom Blundell (R) and Daryl Mitchell (back) during day one of the 1st International cricket Test match between New Zealand and Australia at the Basin Reserve in Wellington on February 29, 2024. — AFP

Tom Blundell, before Carey meekly slapped a Kuggeleijn delivery to Kane Williamson at cover. With stumps beckoning, New Zealand attacked Australia's tail with Starc, Pat Cummins and Lyon dismissed in the space of 57 runs.

After winning the toss, Tim Southee and New Zealand's pace bowlers were frustrated by Smith and Khawaja as they put on 61 before Henry got the breakthrough.

Diving catch

Smith, promoted to open for the second Test in a row after the retirement of David Warner, lasted 71 deliveries, crunching four boundaries. Henry induced him to play back to a delivery that nipped and took the edge, with Blundell collecting a sharp diving catch in front of first slip.

or temporary sporting infrastructure, as well as promoting recycling, re-use and innovative low-carbon technologies. "We've made a village that's a showcase, but also a manifesto of what we know how to do best in France today in response to the major questions posed for urbanisation in the 21st century," Olympics infrastructure chief Nicolas Ferrand told Macron.

By using low-carbon concrete, wood structures, and renewable geothermal heating, organisers claim the village will create around half the amount of carbon emissions over its lifetime compared with an equivalent built with standard construction techniques.

The village is the single biggest new-build Olympics project, located on a site by the river Seine that is a focus for regeneration efforts in the economically deprived Paris suburb of Seine-Saint-Denis. The suburb, which also hosts the national stadium, is the poorest and most crime-ridden of mainland France.

"We made a promise: that we would create above all a new neighbourhood for Seine-Saint-Denis rather than an Olympic and Paralympic village," Laurent Michaud, director of village operations for the organising committee, told reporters earlier this week.

Roughly two thirds of the 2.0-billion-euro (\$2.2 billion) budget has been provided by private real estate companies, with the state contributing 646 million euros. During the Games, it will include a 24-hour restaurant, an alcohol-free bar, as well as training facilities.

Afterwards, around a third of the 2,800 apartments will be sold off to private homeowners, while a third is destined for public housing, and the rest for rentals, including for students.

Model village?

Opinion polls suggest a majority of French people support the Paris Games, though expensive tickets, political bickering and disruption to life in the capital have soured the mood recently. "Wherever the Games have been held, you have inconveniences that



SAINT-DENIS: Ile-de-France's Regional Council President Valerie Pécresse (2nd L) shakes hands with France's President Emmanuel Macron (R) during the inauguration of the Paris 2024 Olympic village in Saint-Denis, northern Paris, on February 29, 2024. — AFP

come at the end," Macron said when asked about the mood of the country.

Other environmental innovations in the village include a mini water-processing plant to recycle water that will be used on the more than 9,000 trees and shrubs that are set to be planted on the site. "The village is already ready for the climate of 2050," Ferrand added.

Some pavements have been made from oyster and other seashells to absorb heat, while the beds to be used by athletes are made out of reinforced cardboard and recycled fishing nets. Organisers are set to spend the next four months fitting out the village with more than 300,000 items of furniture and decoration. The tower blocks each have a different design, which is intended to underline the "architectural variety" that is seen as a marker of European cities. — AFP

Sports

Rampant Inter charge 12 points clear, Napoli hit Sassuolo for six

Napoli are still ninth but four points behind Roma

MILAN: Inter Milan continued their march towards the Serie A title with Wednesday's 4-0 thumping of Atalanta which extended their league lead to 12 points, while Victor Osimhen and Khvicha Kvaratskhelia netted five of Napoli's six goals at Sassuolo. A convincing victory in their game in hand at the San Siro took Inter's all-competitions winning streak to 11 matches and left closest rivals Juventus trailing in the distance.

Simone Inzaghi's side were missing key players Francesco Acerbi, Hakan Calhanoglu and Marcus Thuram but it made little difference against one of the division's form teams. "We feel good. It's all part of a process which begun a few years ago now," said defender Alessandro Bastoni to DAZN.

"We have a group of players who have been together a good few years, and we're maturing," Matteo Darmian got the ball rolling in the 26th minute with his first club goal of the season before Lautaro Martinez scored his 26th on the stroke of half-time with a sensational spin and left-footed hit.

Martinez was denied a brace when Marco Carnesecchi saved his penalty nine minutes after the break, but Federico Dimarco was on hand to ram home the rebound. However things might not have gone all their way had Charles De Ketelaere's early opener for Atalanta not been chalked off for a Aleksai Miranchuk handball following a long VAR check.

Atalanta boss Gian Piero Gasperini was visibly irritated by that decision and the awarding — for another handball by Hans Hateboer — of the spot-kick which led to Dimarco ending the match as a contest. Heavy defeat ensured that Gasperini's team stay fifth, two points behind Bologna who have the advantage in the race for the Champions League.

But Inter dominated from the moment De Ketelaere's goal was disallowed and substitute Davide Frattesi completed the rout in the 71st minute with a header from Alexis Sanchez's free-kick, as Inter put four past their opponents for the fourth straight league match.

"We've won little as it stands, let's hope that they come," said Inzaghi. "We got one with the Super Cup in January but for now we have to keep going and think about Monday when we have Genoa."

Napoli's dynamic duo

Clinical Osimhen scored a hat-trick before Kvaratskhelia bagged a brace of his own as Napoli come from behind to win their game in hand 6-1 and reignite hopes of European football. After Amir Rrahmani levelled just before the half-hour mark, Osimhen rattled in his treble across 16 minutes either side of half-time to take his goal tally since returning from the Africa Cup of Nations to five in three matches in all competitions.

And Kvaratskhelia, who rolled Osimhen in for his simple third, belted in two fabulous strikes in the 51st and 75th minutes against a dreadful Sassuolo. "We already knew that Osimhen was a great player, we missed him a lot. When you've got Osi in this kind of form everything is easier," said Matteo Politano, who set up two of Osimhen's goals, to DAZN.

Napoli are still ninth but four points behind Roma, who sit sixth and in the Europa Conference League spot, after just their third league win of 2024. Francesco Calzona's team are 29 points behind Inter, a sign of just how bad their league title defence has been.

And while Roma are in sight, eight points separate



MILAN: Inter Milan's Italian midfielder #16 Davide Frattesi (C) jumps for the ball to score his team's fourth goal during the Italian Serie A football match between Inter Milan and Atalanta at the San Siro Stadium in Milan. — AFP

them from Bologna with a huge home fixture with fierce rivals Juventus coming at the weekend. "We really needed the win and we showed today that we're a good team," added Politano. "We've given away a lot of points but if this is how we're going to

approach games then there's still time for us to catch up," Sassuolo, playing for the first time under Emiliano Bigica following Alessio Dionisi's sacking on Sunday, drop down into the relegation zone following a sixth defeat in seven matches. —AFP

Girona seek to reignite shock La Liga title charge

BARCELONA: Surprise contenders Girona seemed to have stumbled in their La Liga title bid when they went three games without a win earlier in the month but victory on Monday moved them back into second. Michel's side required two late goals from Savio to ensure the much-needed points against Rayo Vallecano with a 3-0 victory, ending a run of one draw and back-to-back defeats.

A crushing 4-0 defeat on February 10 to Real Madrid followed up by a 3-2 loss at Athletic Bilbao opened up a six-point gap between Madrid and Girona, who had been neck and neck for months at the top of the table.

The welcome return to winning form on matchday 26 leapfrogged Girona back above Barcelona and into second place, restoring a two-point cushion between them and their Catalan neighbors. "There is still a lot to

do, but the team needed to win after three games without a victory," Girona coach Michel said after the Rayo success. The Rojiblancos travel to Mallorca on Sunday seeking to put their poor recent form firmly behind them and also to enact revenge upon the side that knocked them out of the Copa del Rey quarter-finals in January.

But by the time Girona kick off they could find themselves nine points adrift of Madrid after Carlo Ancelotti's charges visit ninth-placed Valencia on Saturday. The league leaders will still be without top scorer Jude Bellingham and have struggled for goals since his injury in the handsome win against Girona.

Los Blancos have scored just three goals in their three games since his absence, including two 1-0 wins, and in Valencia face a side that average just over one goal conceded per league game. The most eye-catching encounter of the weekend is third-placed Barcelona's trip to the Basque country to take on fifth-placed Athletic Bilbao on Sunday.

The Catalan side have four wins in their last five La Liga matches as they aim to defend last season's league title. This strong run has been boosted



GIRONA: (From L) Rayo Vallecano's French midfielder #15 Miguel Silva fights for the ball with Girona's Spanish forward #24 Cristian Ronaldo and Girona's Brazilian defender #20 Yan Couto during the Spanish league football match between Girona FC and Rayo Vallecano de Madrid at the Montilivi stadium in Girona. — AFP

by Robert Lewandowski's return to goalscoring form since the turn of the year. On the other hand, victory for the hosts could move them into

the Champions League spots should fourth-placed Atletico Madrid fail to win at home to Real Betis earlier on Sunday. — AFP

Pogba's career in jeopardy with 4-year doping ban

ROME: France star Paul Pogba has been given a four-year ban from football by Italy's anti-doping tribunal after testing positive for testosterone last August, his club Juventus said on Thursday. A spokesman for the club told AFP it had been notified of the decision against the 30-year-old World Cup winner, who had been provisionally suspended in September.

"We received notification from the tribunal this morning," the spokesman said. Italy's anti-doping body did not immediately respond when contacted by AFP. Pogba announced he would appeal the ruling, which risks bringing a premature end to his career.

"I am sad, shocked and heartbroken that everything I have built in my professional playing career has been taken away from me," he posted on Instagram. Declaring the verdict was "incorrect", he denied ever using performance-enhancing substances.

"When I am free of legal restrictions the full story will become clear, but I have never knowingly or deliberately taken any supplements that violate anti-doping regulations", he insisted. "As a consequence of the decision announced today I will appeal this before the Court of Arbitration for Sport."

The ban means Pogba will not be able to play again until the 2027/28 season, by which time he will be 34. Anti-doping prosecutors had called for the four-year ban to be imposed on the former Manchester United midfielder, who tested positive following Juventus' opening match of the Italian Serie A season against Udinese on August 20, during which he was an unused substitute.

A month later a B sample confirmed the presence of testosterone, and he had been provisionally suspended since. Pogba's representatives said the testosterone came from a food supplement prescribed by a doctor he consulted in the United States. The ban could have been limited to two years if Pogba had been able to prove he was not at fault, or even just a few months if the use of the substance took place "out of competition and (was) not related to his level of performance".

Pogba, who returned to Juventus for a second spell in 2022 after six years at United, was a key member of the France team that won the World Cup in Russia in 2018, scoring in the final against Croatia.

His positive doping test came as he was trying to put behind him a difficult first season back at Juve, in which he struggled with fitness problems and made just 10 appearances, while also missing France's defence of the World Cup in Qatar due to injury. He made two substitute appearances for Juventus at the start of this campaign before being suspended.

Meanwhile Pogba, who was a youth player at Le Havre before a first move to Old Trafford aged 16 in 2009, has been troubled by off-field issues. An investigation is ongoing in France into an extortion attempt against him in March 2022, which involved a break-in at his home in the Paris suburbs. — AFP

Baseball superstar Ohtani reveals he is 'now married'

TOKYO: Japanese baseball superstar Shohei Ohtani revealed on Thursday that he is now married but kept the identity of his wife a mystery. The Los Angeles Dodgers player said he was beginning not only "a new chapter in my career with the Dodgers but I also... began a new life with someone from my native country of Japan who is very special to me and I wanted everyone to know I am now married".

"I am excited for what is (to) come and thank you for your support," the 29-year-old said in an Instagram post that racked up almost 1.5 million likes in just one hour. Ohtani, who won his second American

League Most Valuable Player award in six seasons with the Los Angeles Angels last year, included a picture of his dog at the bottom of the post.

"The two of us (and our dog) will support each other and we hope to move forward together with all of our fans," he also wrote in Japanese. He added that he and his wife were "still immature in many ways, but we would appreciate your kind support".

Ohtani, nicknamed "Sho-Time", has achieved stratospheric fame in Japan and abroad. Known for his skills as a pitcher as well as a batter, he helped Japan win last year's World Baseball Classic. Ohtani left the Los Angeles Angels last year for free agency after failing to reach the MLB playoffs.

Following weeks of frenzied speculation, he joined the Dodgers in December. His 10-year deal worth \$700 million was the richest contract in the history of North American sport. He made his Dodgers pre-season debut on Tuesday, smashing a home run

covering he is no longer assured of a place in the line-up since telling the Qatar-owned club he would leave at the end of this season.

Mbappe informed PSG in mid-February that he intended to depart when his contract expires in June, after seven years at the Parc des Princes, with Real Madrid his likely next destination. Luis Enrique responded to that by leaving the 25-year-old on the bench for their next game at Nantes, although Mbappe came on to score a penalty in a 2-0 win.

More surprisingly, Mbappe started last week's home meeting with Rennes and wore the captain's armband in the absence of Marquinhos, but was sub-



Shohei Ohtani

stituted on 65 minutes. Trailing 1-0 at the time, PSG came back to draw thanks to a penalty won and converted by his replacement, Goncalo Ramos.

PSG's all-time top scorer with 244 goals, Mbappe has rarely started on the bench in 292 appearances since signing from Monaco in 2017. He has occasionally been substituted earlier than was the case last weekend, but always either due to injury or with PSG already winning. "It's very simple. Sooner or later, when it happens, we are going to have to get used to playing without Kylian," Luis Enrique said when asked to explain why he had taken Mbappe off. "When I want to play him I will do so, and if I don't want to, the same thing." — AFP

Classifieds

Clinics

Clinics

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

Change of Name

I, MOHAMED SHAFIQUE, Holder of Indian Passport No. Z5425958 Having Permanent Address Khajamiya Chl Bandra Plot Nr Mahfile Mohamadi Jogeshwari, Mumbai, Pin: 400060, Maharashtra, India, India Residing In Kuwait At Present, Hereby Declare That Henceforth My Name Will Be Read As Under: Given Name MOHAMMED SHAFIQUE And Surname SHAIKH. (#5169 28/02/2024)

I, ANTONIO JOSE D CUNHA, holder of passport No. M6716579 do hereby change my name to ANTONIO JOSE (as given name) DA CUNHA (as surname) for all purposes. I will henceforth be known in the name ANTONIO JOSE DA CUNHA and I also undertake to carry out this name change in all my documents. (#5167 28/02/2024)

I, RAHUL, holder of Passport No. R5199093 do hereby change my name to Rahul Krishan (as given name) Krishan (as surname) for all purposes I will henceforth be known in the name Rahul Krishan and I also undertake to carry out this name change in all my documents. My address H. No. 106 Amar Garden bypass Jalandhar, Pin-144004, Punjab, India (#5168 28/02/2024)

I, CHRISTOPHER ALBERT D CUNHA, holder of Passport No. M4635571 do hereby change my name to CHRISTOPHER ALBERT (as given name) DA CUNHA (as surname) for all purposes. I will henceforth be known in the name CHRISTOPHER ALBERT DA CUNHA. And I also undertake to carry out this name change in all my documents. (#5166 28/02/2024)



LONDON: Leeds United's Spanish-born English striker #49 Mateo Joseph (2L) heads home their second goal during the English FA Cup fifth round football match between Chelsea and Leeds United at Stamford Bridge, in London. — AFP

Man Utd, Liverpool to meet in FA Cup quarters as Chelsea survive

United reach FA Cup quarter-finals for a record 48th time

LONDON: Manchester United will host Liverpool in an FA Cup quarter-final blockbuster after the bitter rivals took contrasting routes to their fifth round victories on Wednesday. United eased the pressure on beleaguered boss Erik ten Hag as they scraped through with a 1-0 win at Nottingham Forest thanks to Casemiro's late goal.

Fresh from their League Cup final triumph against Chelsea on Sunday, Liverpool relied on their youngsters again in a 3-0 win against second tier Southampton at Anfield. Chelsea bounced back from their painful 1-0 defeat to Liverpool at Wembley, snatching a 3-2 win against Championship promotion chasers Leeds to book a last eight date with Leicester.

After Liverpool's ball boys paraded the League Cup around Anfield prior to kick-off, Jurgen Klopp's kids gave another

glimpse into a bright future as two of their young guns inspired the win. With Liverpool ravaged by injuries to Mohamed Salah, Darwin Nunez, Diogo Jota and Alisson Becker among others, Lewis Koumas, the son of former Wales and West Brom midfielder Jason Koumas, marked his debut with the opening goal in the 44th minute.

The 18-year-old forward drilled a fierce low drive that deflected in off Southampton's Jack Stephens. Jayden Danms, another 18-year-old offspring of a former player — his father Neil starred for Crystal Palace — netted Liverpool's second in the 73rd minute with a composed finish that belied his tender age.

James McConnell, 19, and Bobby Clark, 19, also impressed for Liverpool, who introduced 16-year-old Trey Nyoni to become their youngest ever FA Cup player in the second half. Danms capped the victory

in the 88th minute when he lashed home in front of The Kop.

"We don't take these things for granted," Klopp said of facing United. "The situation is horribly difficult. We have too many games and not enough players. They (the youngsters) have got to learn and improve, but it was a top performance." At the City Ground, United reached the FA Cup quarter-finals for a record 48th time. Ten Hag insisted this week that he doesn't need a public vote of confidence from Jim Ratcliffe after the British billionaire took charge of United's football operations.

Pressure mounting

But United are languishing in sixth place in the Premier League, eight points adrift of the top four, after Saturday's shock 2-1 home defeat against Fulham. A loss to Forest would have been a major

blow for Ten Hag after Ratcliffe was linked with a move for former Real Madrid boss Zinedine Zidane. The FA Cup represents United's last silverware chance this term and, after missing a host of chances, they finally hit the target in the 89th minute when Bruno Fernandes' free-kick was headed in by Casemiro.

Ten Hag will hope a 1-0 FA Cup win at Forest proves a launchpad for sustained success at United in the same way it did for former boss Alex Ferguson in 1990. "It's the best time to score at the end. On Saturday we felt the defeat in stoppage-time. What they showed today is great," Ten Hag said.

At Stamford Bridge, Mauricio Pochettino will have felt similar relief to Ten Hag. With the pressure mounting in his troubled first season in charge, the Argentine was indebted to Conor Gallagher for a late winner.

It was the first FA Cup tie between Chelsea and Leeds since the Blues won the 1970 FA Cup final replay, a bookie-filled clash regarded as one of the most vicious matches in English football history. Mateo Joseph put Leeds ahead before Nicolas Jackson and Mykhailo Mudryk netted to give Chelsea the lead.

Joseph scored again but Gallagher won it in the 90th minute. "In the context of the week, I'm happy. The performance wasn't great but of course it's about building our confidence again," Pochettino said. Elsewhere, Wolves beat Brighton 1-0 at Molineux, with Mario Lemina's goal after just 77 seconds securing a home tie against second tier Coventry. Holders Manchester City, who beat Luton 6-2 on Tuesday, will host Newcastle in the other quarter-final. — AFP

Saudi football body suspends, fines Ronaldo over gesture

RIYADH: Saudi Arabia's football governing body on Thursday suspended Cristiano Ronaldo for one game over a gesture he made on the pitch last weekend that was judged a "provocation". The Saudi Arabian Football Federation said the Al-Nassr captain was also fined a total of 30,000 riyals (\$8,000) for the move, which broke rules against provoking the public during a match.

The decision cannot be appealed. Video emerged after his side's 3-2 win against Al-Shabab showing Ronaldo making a repeated thrusting gesture towards his groin in response to crowds taunting him by chanting the name of his longtime rival, Lionel Messi. The content quickly went viral and surged to the top of Saudi social media trending topics.

Sports newspaper Al-Riyadiya reported Ronaldo as saying he respected all football clubs and that the gesture expressed "strength and victory" — not offence — and was considered acceptable in Europe. The 39-year-old, a five-time winner of the UEFA Champions League, was the first major star to move to the kingdom when he penned a deal with Al-Nassr in January 2023.

Saudi Pro League teams have gone on a spending spree to lure big-name players, and the country is set to host the 2034 World Cup as part of a broader move into global sport. France's Karim Benzema, Brazilian star Neymar and Senegalese



RIYADH: Nassr's Portuguese forward #07 Cristiano Ronaldo takes a penalty kick to score his team's first goal during the Saudi Pro League football match between Al-Shabab and Al-Nassr. — AFP

forward Sadio Mane have also left Europe behind for bumper pay packets in Saudi.

But Riyadh has been accused by its critics of "sportswashing" by using athletics to improve its international reputation after widespread criticism of its human rights and environmental record. — AFP

US sprinter Lyles ready to write next chapter

GLASGOW: Noah Lyles' road to his ambitious aim of "all the Olympic medals" at the Paris Games winds through Glasgow this weekend, with the top US sprinter seeking 60m glory at the world indoor championships.

Lyles is a six-time world outdoor champion, last year becoming the first sprinter to win the world 100-200m double since Usain Bolt in 2015.

Bolt's retirement in 2017 left a gaping hole at the heart of athletics, but Lyles does not shy away from trying to take on the mantle of the fastest man on earth, something that comes with untold riches and notoriety. Lyles heads to Scotland on the back of a first-ever US indoor title and a multi-million dollar contract renewal with German sportswear brand Adidas said to be second only to Bolt's with Puma.

But the American's stock cannot currently be said to be quite the same as Bolt's. Crucially, Lyles does not have an Olympic title to his name, and Bolt still holds the world records in both the 100m and 200m.

Ever the showman, Lyles earlier this month captured the US title over domestic rival Christian Coleman in a personal best 6.43 seconds. "I'm not going to say I'm shocked, but I'm very proud of myself, it's eight years in the making," said Lyles.

Outdoor fireworks

The 26-year-old sees competing indoors as the perfect chance to hone his start — which he considers the weak link in his skillset — in time for the Olympics.



Noah Lyles

"This is indoor, I'm just excited that I'm running this fast consistently," Lyles said after his victory over Coleman. "This is my weakest event, so come outdoors, wow fireworks!" Lyles boasts personal bests of 9.83sec and 19.31sec for the 100m and 200m compared to Bolt's world records of 9.58 and 19.19.

Bolt's efforts were both set at the 2009 world championships in Berlin, a year after the Jamaican had set previous bests of 9.63 and 19.30 at the 2008 Beijing Olympics to really make the world sit up and take notice. "Last year I went out there and won three gold medals," a defiant Lyles said.

"This year I want to get four. And if I don't get four, I am going after three world records. "If I don't succeed, I will try, try, try again."

As an athlete whose passions also include fashion, Lyles sports a fine piece of bling: a diamond-encrusted ring with the letters "WC" inside a red track, with his name engraved alongside 2023, in a similar vein to the ostentatious rings worn by NFL Super Bowl winners. Lyles' new deal with Adidas was termed "the richest contract in the sport of track and field since the retirement of Usain Bolt". — AFP