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2 Zain unveils annual Ramadan campaign's extensive program



8 Gulf Bank launches 'A Step Towards Change' initiative with Kaifan Co-op



10 NBK-Bahrain reports net profits of KD 108.22 million for FY2023



16 Arsenal hit Sheff Utd for six to set record scoring streak



UAE honors Amir, ties hailed

Visit marks 'new beginning', affirmation of unity • Amir to inaugurate AASU



ABU DHABI: HH the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah is welcomed by UAE President Sheikh Mohammad bin Zayed Al-Nahyan after he arrived on a state visit on March 5, 2024, where the two leaders held official talks and exchanged orders at Qasr Al-Watan. — KUNA photos (See Page 3)

ABU DHABI: HH the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, accompanied by a delegation of officials, arrived on Tuesday in Abu Dhabi on a state visit. A squadron of UAE military aircraft accompanied HH the Amir's plane across Emirati airspace. Upon his arrival in the UAE capital's airport, HH the Amir Sheikh Mishal was received by the UAE President Sheikh Mohammad bin Zayed Al-Nahyan and senior officials.

HH the Amir was accorded an elaborate welcome at Qasr Al-Watan (the UAE Presidential Palace). Upon

arrival of HH the Amir's motorcade at the palace, horse and camel riders lined up on the sides of the road, while popular troupes performed folkloric shows, amid overflights by "Fursan Al-Emarat" (the UAE Knights) aircraft in a dazzling formation depicting Kuwait's flag. A military band blew trumpets and gunners greeted the Amir's motorcade with a 21-gun salute, with children waving Kuwaiti and UAE flags lining up along the sides of the road leading to the palace.

Upon arrival at the stand of honor, the two countries'

national anthems were played. HH the Amir then shook hands with the UAE sheikhs and senior state officials, while UAE President Sheikh Mohammad welcomed HH the Amir and his entourage.

HH the Amir said his state visit to the UAE would mark "a new beginning" for further strengthening bilateral relations and an affirmation of unity of common positions. HH the Amir, in a speech during summit talks with Sheikh Mohammad at Qasr Al-Watan, said he was looking forward to promoting a bilateral

relationship within the march of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) "to achieve the interest of the two countries and their people".

HH the Amir, who said special relations with the UAE dated back decades, expressed gratitude to the UAE leadership and people for the warm welcome and hospitality, which reflected "the strong historic relations and the genuine fraternity between our countries and people".

Continued on Page 6

Khaled Al-Falah new NIC Chairman

KUWAIT: In a meeting held on Monday, March 4, 2024, the National Investments Company's Board of Directors unanimously approved the reformation of the Chairman and Vice Chairman positions, with Khaled Walceed Al-Falah as Chairman of the Board of Directors and Bader Nasser Al-Kharafi as Vice Chairman of the Board of Directors. (See Page 8)



Khaled Al-Falah

Kuwait opens investment conf in London

LONDON: A Kuwait investment conference was launched in London on Tuesday as part of celebrations of 125 years of Kuwait-UK bilateral relations and the 70th anniversary of the opening of the Kuwait Investment Office in London. Attending the conference are Kuwaiti Minister of Finance and State Minister for Economic and Investment Affairs Dr Anwar Al-Mudhaf, Assistant Foreign Minister Ambassador Sadeq Maarafi and Kuwaiti Ambassador to Britain Bader Al-Awadhi.

From the British side, State Minister for Middle East and North Africa, Lord Tariq Ahmad, State Minister for Business and Trade Dominic Johnson and British

Ambassador to Kuwait Belinda Lewis are attending. The conference will address three main topics: Finance and investments bolstering bilateral relations, the 125th year of Kuwaiti-British relations, as well as technological advancements and digital innovation. The conference, overseen by the Kuwait Direct Investment Promotion Authority, comes at a time when relations are undergoing continuous improvements, with facilitations of travel permits. On an economic level, total trade between March 2022 to March 2023 reached more than £5.7 billion (\$7.23 billion), a 118.3 percent surge.

UK exports to Kuwait witnessed a 33 percent increase within the past 12 months compared to same period of last year. British Deputy Prime Minister Oliver Dowden visited Kuwait in January and accompanied HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Mohammad Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah in inaugurating the anniversary event on the occasion of 125 years of diplomatic relations. —KUNA



LONDON: Kuwaiti and British officials attend an investment conference on March 5, 2024. — KUNA

28 candidates register on Day 2

KUWAIT: Twenty-eight new candidates filed their nomination papers on Tuesday to run in next month's snap polls, raising the number of hopefuls after two days of registration to 70, including two female candidates. Many of the candidates stressed on the need to continue political and legal reforms and the necessity to raise wages to help Kuwaiti citizens face a rise in the cost of living. Three of those who registered were members of the dissolved Assembly while eight others are ex- MPs from previous assemblies.

Blinken calls on Hamas to accept 'immediate' truce

GAZA: The US top diplomat called on Hamas on Tuesday to accept a plan for an "immediate ceasefire" with the Zionist entity as mediators met for a third day in Cairo in efforts to end almost five months of fighting. As famine threatens Gazans, US and Jordanian planes again airdropped food aid into the besieged territory of 2.4 million people in a joint operation with Egypt and France. Bombing and fighting in the war killed another 97 people, said the health ministry in Gaza.

In Cairo, US and Hamas envoys were meeting Egyptian and Qatari mediators for a third day in protracted negotiations to end the fighting and free captives before the holy fasting month of Ramadan starts on March 10 or 11. Egypt's AlQahera News, which is close to the country's intelligence services, said the "negotiations are difficult but they are continuing", citing an unnamed senior official.

The parties in Egypt — so far excluding the Zionist entity — have discussed a plan for a six-week truce, the exchange of dozens of captives for hundreds of Palestinian prisoners, and increased aid into Gaza. US Secretary of State Antony Blinken on called on Hamas to accept the plan to pause the fighting and allow in more desperately needed humanitarian aid.

Continued on Page 6



GAZA: Ten-year-old Palestinian boy Yazan Al-Kafarneh, displaced from Beit Hanun, lies on a hospital bed at Al-Awda clinic in Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip in this Feb 29, 2024 photo. Yazan has died from severe malnourishment and insufficient healthcare in Gaza. — AFP



Zain unveils annual Ramadan campaign's extensive program



A group pic of Zain's team and success partners.

- **Waleed Al Khashti:** "The success of any community program of this scale relies on close collaboration and a shared vision. We're proud of what we've achieved with our partners"

- Campaign comes in collaboration with 6 of Zain's strategic partners
- 'Social Affairs', Grand Mosque, 'Disability Affairs', KRCS, 'Food Bank', and Suffix

- Campaign promises a wide range of humanitarian, charitable, social, and sports programs
- Company held press conference joined by public and private sector partners

KUWAIT: Zain held a press conference at its main headquarters in Shuwaikh to unveil the extensive program of its annual Ramadan social campaign, dubbed Zain Al Shuhoor. The conference was joined by six of Zain's strategic community partners from both the public and private sectors. This year's campaign promises a wide range of humanitarian, charitable, social, religious, health, and sports programs that will continue throughout the Holy Month of Ramadan.

The press conference was attended by Zain Kuwait Chief Corporate Affairs and Relations Officer Waleed Al Khashti, Public Relations Manager and Spokesman for the Ministry of Social Affairs Ahmad Al Enzi, Director of the Grand Mosque Administration Ali Shadad, Kuwait Food Bank Vice-Chairman Meshal Al Ansari, Kuwait Red Crescent Society (KRCS) Managing Director Abdulrahman Al Oun, Public Authority for Disability Affairs Supervisor Zainab Al Enzi and Suffix General Manager Ahmad Al Majed.

During the conference, Waleed Al Khashti said: "At Zain, we're always proud to claim that Zain Al Shuhoor is one of the biggest and most successful community campaigns during the Holy Month. Every year, we make sure to introduce a bigger, renewed version of the campaign that expands upon the previous year in its initiatives and programs."

Al Khashti added: "Without a doubt, such success has many key factors, most important of which is the presence of strategic partners whom we collaborate with to reflect the Holy Month's spirit of giving and kindness. After all, the success of any community program of this scale relies on close collaboration and a shared vision, and we're extremely proud of what we've achieved with our partners so far."

"It is also important to highlight the tremendous efforts of our media partners, who continue to shed light on the many programs and initiatives of our annual campaign. For this, I take this opportunity to thank them for being with us today and for their constant presence and great efforts in helping us create a bigger impact in the community," he added.

Al Khashti concluded by saying: "The main goal of this campaign will always be to share the blessings of this much-cherished month with the entire Kuwaiti people. We will always work hard to reflect this community's beautiful values in helping others and spreading love, peace, and togetherness."

Public Relations Manager and Spokesman for the Ministry of Social Affairs Ahmad Al Enzi said: "Zain has been a humanitarian and social partner of the Ministry of Social Affairs for 21 years. Throughout this period, we've worked together to support many of the communities that the ministry serves, including foster care children, elderly individuals, and people with disabilities. We urge other private sector institutions to follow Zain's example and present such community campaigns that bring socially impactful programs."

Director of the Grand Mosque Administration Ali Shadad said: "Our partnership with Zain started 28 years ago and has encompassed a plethora of charitable, humanitarian, and social contributions. This has effectively reflected the beautiful values of the Kuwaiti community in always being eager to help others. This year, Zain continues to be our main partner in many of the Grand Mosque's programs, including the main tent for Iftar meals, hospitality services for worshippers, the first Holy Quran Recital Competition from Zain, and more. All this and more reaffirms that the Grand Mosque is a leading cultural and religious center within the State of Kuwait."

Kuwait Food Bank Vice-Chairman Meshal Al Ansari commented: "The Kuwait Food Bank continues to carry out many charitable activities throughout the year, especially during the Holy Month season. We have an extended strategic partnership



Waleed Al Khashti with Ahmad Al Enzi, Ali Shadad, Meshal Al Ansari, Abdulrahman Al Oun, Zainab Al Enzi and Ahmad Al Majed.



Waleed Al Khashti speaking at the press conference.

with Zain to implement several charitable projects, through which we work together to serve underprivileged communities by providing food supplies and other contributions."

Kuwait Red Crescent Society (KRCS) Managing Director Abdulrahman Al Oun said: "Our partnership with Zain started over 30 years ago, and it is one of the very first private sector companies that encourage community service both in and outside of Kuwait. The company has always taken initiative to partner with KRCS to serve our charitable, humanitarian, and social contributions, including providing food supplies, organizing donation campaigns, and much more."

Authority for Disability Affairs Supervisor Zainab Al Enzi commented: "The Authority serves nearly 65,000 people with disabilities, offering education, career, and rehabilitation services. Our partnership with Zain centers around humanitarian and social principles, and we thank them for their many contributions every year to serve our communities in the Social Care Centers with engaging programs, initiatives, social visits, and more."

Suffix General Manager Ahmad Al Majed said: "Suffix was founded in 2007, and Zain has been one of the first companies to support us throughout the past 15 years. This proves their well-established vi-

sion to support the youth and sports sectors. Ultimately, our main goal is to create impactful programs that promote health and sports awareness in Kuwait, and to put our nation on the regional and global map in these areas. Throughout our partnership with Zain, we presented tens of effective programs and initiatives that helped achieve this goal, and this year we bring back the Zain Ramadan Challenge for the third year running along with other programs to promote an active, healthy lifestyle."

Zain kicked-off its Ramadan campaign by delivering 'Ramadan Machla' (food supplies) in collaboration with three of its non-profit strategic partners: the Kuwait Red Crescent Society (KRCS), the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor's Social Care Centers, and the Kuwait Food Bank. Zain's Iftar Hall initiative, which is a main pillar of the company's Ramadan campaign every year, comes back for its 17th year. Zain provides daily meals at the main tent in the Grand Mosque and through the Kuwait Food Bank via trucks in areas around Kuwait.

This year, Zain partners with the Grand Mosque to present daily Iftar meals, the first Holy Quran Recital Competition from Zain, the Holy Quran Recital Competition for Zain employees, hospitality services to worshippers during the last ten days of the Holy Month, facilitate transportation of worshippers with mobile carts, and more. In continuation of its long-term partnership with the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor's Social Care Centers, Zain this year offers food supplies and sponsors the annual Girgeaan celebration to bring joy into the hearts of foster care children, elderly individuals, and people with disabilities.

Every year, Zain supports health and sports programs to encourage adopting an active and healthy lifestyle during the Holy Month. This year, Zain continues to partner with Suffix to present the third Zain Ramadan Challenge at Al Shaheed Park, which will feature walkathons and marathons throughout the Holy Month, with advanced tech tools being used to monitor the participants throughout the challenge.

This year, Zain invited all its employees to join its



very own volunteer team to contribute to the campaign's many initiatives and programs with its strategic partners. Zain's campaign will also include many other contributions, such as hosting an Iftar banquet for employees of various ministries and agencies, Girgeaan celebrations and social activities with community members, in addition to many activities dedicated to Zain employees.

Every Ramadan, Zain diversifies the content of its campaign to include cultural and recreational programs. This year, Zain partners with Kuwait TV for the highly popular 'Iftar Canon' program that receives wide interaction on a daily basis. The company also partners with Al Rai TV to sponsor the popular talk show with Kuwaiti star Nabeel Shuaib for the third consecutive season. Zain also partners with 360 FM to sponsor 'Mukhalat', the popular radio show offering daily prizes to listeners and winners all through the Holy Month.

Kuwait and UAE: Fraternal nations tethered by deeply rooted history

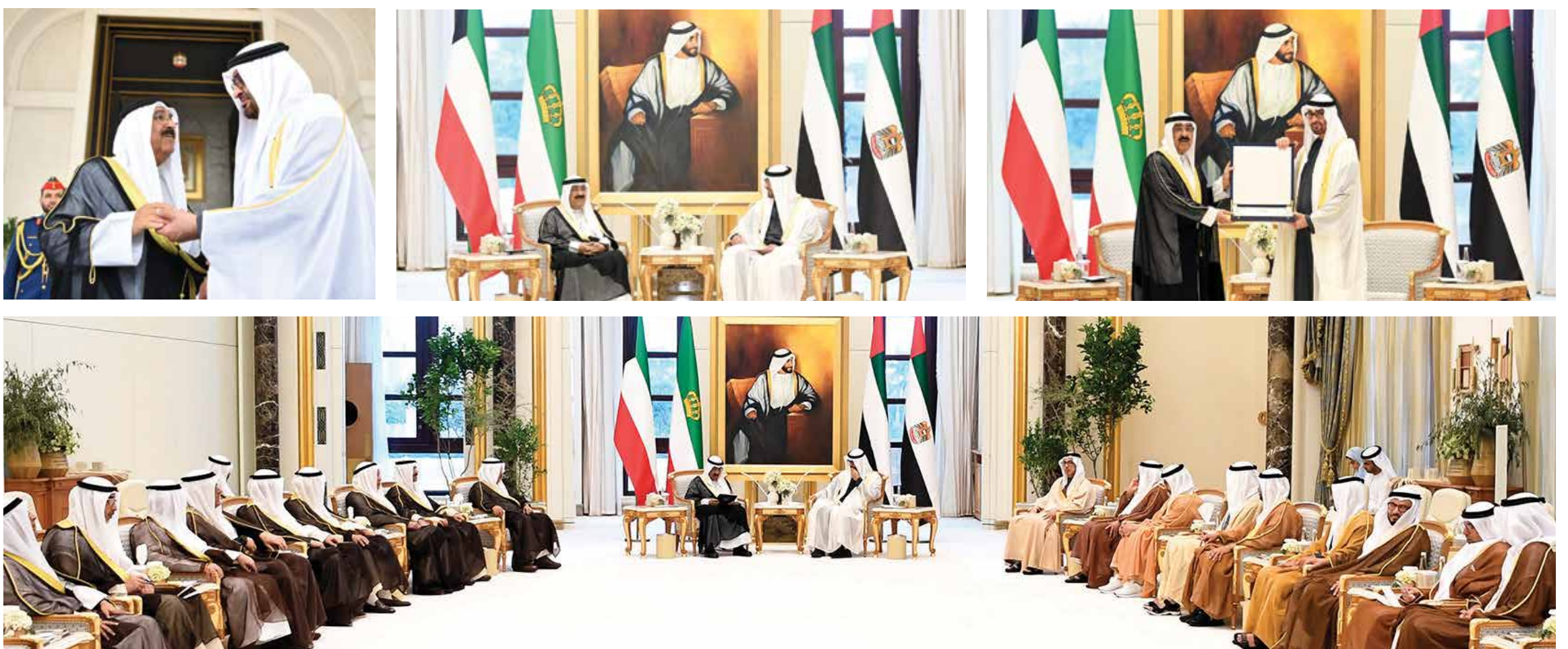
Steady exponential growth attributed to wise leadership



ABU DHABI: An official reception ceremony for His Highness the Amir in Abu Dhabi. — KUNA photos



ABU DHABI: UAE President Sheikh Mohammad bin Zayed Al-Nahyan receives His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah in Abu Dhabi. His Highness the Amir is accompanied by an official delegation.



ABU DHABI: The state visit of Kuwait Amir His Highness Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah to the United Arab Emirates is marked by themes of deeply rooted ties, fraternal relations, strategic partnership, and a mutual destiny. The steady exponential growth of bilateral ties on political, economic, social, and cultural fronts could be attributed to the wise leadership of both nations. The two have been closely linked for more than six decades, and both are striving for closer and more integrated relations, as this reflects positively on their respective nations.

Over the years, Kuwaiti-Emirati relations have stepped over various cornerstones; most notable was Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al-Nahyan's role during the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, taking in tens of thousands of Kuwaiti families on Emirati soil and sending troops to take part in the liberation. On a diplomatic front, the two are quite keen on coordinating positions and presenting a united front ahead of regional and international issues.

Emirati leadership and people alike have hailed the focal role of Kuwait in reinforcing ties between the Gulf States. In recognition of the depth of relations, the two established the joint committee in 2006,

which culminated in multiple meetings and numerous agreements. A plethora of deals ranging across various fields have been signed, relating to diplomatic training, trade chambers, the industrial sector, oil and petrochemicals, as well as new and renewable energy sources.

The non-oil trade exchange between the two has also witnessed a significant increase in the years following the pandemic. On an educational level, the two have facilitated international study programs, allowing for the flow of students and redirecting them from their usual destinations to choosing to study in Gulf nations instead. — KUNA

Amir's visit reflects 'deep-rooted' ties

ABU DHABI: His Highness the Amir of Kuwait, Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah's state visit to the UAE reflects the strong ties between the two nations, said Emirati media. In remarks to KUNA, UAE media figures stressed that the Amir of Kuwait's visit reflects the keenness of the two states' 'leaderships on further propensity and cooperation.'

UAE News Agency (WAM) Director-General Mohammad Al-Raisi affirmed that the Kuwaiti-Emirati ties are deeply and historically rooted, adding that the bilateral relationship reflects the common history between the two nations. In turn, the Head of the Media Department at UAE University, Dr. Ahmad Al-Mansouri, said that Kuwait's visit to the UAE is a great opportunity to boost the historical ties that bind the two countries.

He also noted that the talks between the two leaders would push for more cooperation and coordination between both countries. Al-Mansouri said that the visit is a great opportunity to shed light on the ongoing political devel-

opments, especially the genocidal war launched by the Zionist occupation forces against the Palestinians.

The CEO of Marketing and Communication at Abu Dhabi Media Network, Abdulraheem Al-Nuaimi, affirmed that the visit of His Highness the Amir to the UAE is an authentic, inherited part of a series of mutual visits between the two ruling families since ancient times. He also noted that statistics and trade between the two countries shed light on the distinguished economic cooperation between Kuwait and the UAE, adding that the non-petroleum trade between the two states in the last ten years reached 300 billion dirhams.

For his part, the CEO of Al-Eitihad News Center, Hamad Al-Kaabi, said the visit is conclusive evidence of the strength and stability of Kuwaiti-Emirati relations, which is in turn reflected in the diplomatic positions in terms of the political approach in various circles. Both countries are keen on supporting peace and stability in the region and worldwide, he added. — KUNA



The 'Fursan Al-Emarat' (the UAE Knights) aircraft depict Kuwait's flag in a dazzling formation.

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News in Brief



Kuwait, Panama sign MoU

KUWAIT: Kuwait and the Republic of Panama signed on Tuesday at the headquarters of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs a memorandum of understanding (MoU) between the ministries of foreign affairs of the two countries on holding bilateral consultations. The memorandum was signed by Deputy Foreign Minister Sheikh Jarrah Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah on behalf of Kuwait, and by the Ambassador of Panama to the state of Qatar and nonresident Ambassador to Kuwait Musa Abdulhai Asfat Kaso on behalf of Panama. — KUNA

Kuwait opens clinics in Yemen

ADEN: The Kuwait Direct Aid Society has opened two health clinics in the Yemeni temporary capital (Aden), providing their services for the benefit of 50,000 beneficiaries funded by Kuwaiti donors as part of the ongoing "Kuwait by Your Side" campaign for the ninth year in a row. The direct aid office in Yemen explained in a press release that the two clinics were established and equipped with funding from donors Iman Al-Saeed and Munira Al-Zinki. Director General of the Ministry of Health Office Ahmed Al-Bishi expressed his thanks and appreciation to the Kuwaiti supporters for these two vital projects, which will make a qualitative leap in the health service provided to citizens. The two clinics have started receiving beneficiaries and have started providing health services. — KUNA

Conference on Mamluk state

KUWAIT: The 10th conference of Mamluk studies kicked off on Tuesday at Dar Al-Athar Al-Islamiya with the participation of Kuwaiti and international archaeological scholars and researchers who specialized in the history of the Mamluk state. The conference is conducted by the Middle East Documentation Center at the University of Chicago under the patronage of the National Council for Culture, Arts and Literature (NCCAL). In his speech in the conference, NCCAL Secretary General Dr. Mohammad Al-Jassar said that translating and interpreting archeology could reveal more facts about that historical era than any individual effort. Dr Al-Jassar added that the importance of archeology reflects the culture and civilization of a certain society, such as the buildings that society builds, we can study them, investigate and predict their way of living, patterns, and how they deal with their surroundings in the world. He noted that this conference is an opportunity to exchange expertise, experience and researches. — KUNA

Kuwait celebrates World Hearing Day

KUWAIT: The Ministry of Health, represented by Sheikh Salem Al-Ali for Hearing and Speech Center, held a celebration on Tuesday marking World Hearing Day under the logo "hearing to all," with the participation of a number of public and private institutions and authorities. Sheikha Awrad Jaber Al-Ahmad (a leading charity activist), in a statement in the aftermath of inaugurating the activity, lauded the MoH's top services and continuous efforts for overhauling the national health sector, in tandem with neo Kuwait vision 2035 and the UN sustainability goals 2030.

Sheikha Awrad said the center offers services that

Al Wazzan Education launches 'One International School'

KUWAIT: Lujain Al Wazzan, Chief Operating Officer of Al Wazzan Education, announced the launch of a significant project that puts Kuwait on the map of global education and changes the traditional concept of the school, "One International School," a substantial shift within the education sector in Kuwait and the region.

The concept revolves around four fundamental pillars that have not been met in any school before: (1) Internationally accredited American curriculum, STEAM program, and Montessori methodology. (2) Directing the school's curriculum towards entrepreneurship and wealth management for the first time at the level of Middle Eastern schools,



KUWAIT: His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Dr Mohammad Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah presides over the Cabinet meeting. — KUNA photos



Cabinet applauds operetta concert

KUWAIT: The Kuwait Cabinet praised the distinguished national operetta concert (Qissat Wattan), which was held at the Bayan Palace under the patronage and presence of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. This came during the Cabinet's weekly meeting headed by His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Dr Mohammad Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah. After the meeting, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs, Sharida Al-Maousherji, said the Cabinet was

briefed on His Highness the Amir and his accompanying delegation visit to the UAE.

The Cabinet was briefed on an explanation presented by the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Defense, and Acting Minister of Interior, Chairman of the Supreme Committee for the Investigation of Kuwaiti Citizenship, Sheikh Fahad Yousef Al-Sabah, regarding the Supreme Committee's recommendation to withdraw the Kuwaiti citizenship certificate from some people who obtained it illegally based on fraud or false statements. The Kuwait Cabinet hailed the effort made by the Deputy Prime Minister and the members of the committee in exposing these people as a translation of the contents of the sublime speech of His Highness the Amir by preserving the national identity and unity of Kuwaiti society.

On the other hand, the Cabinet discussed the

presentation submitted by the Minister of Public Works and the Minister of State for Municipal Affairs, Dr. Noura Al-Meshaan, regarding the railway connection project between Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, which will contribute to organizing and activating sustainable railway connectivity and enhance trade exchange and economic growth between the two countries.

The Cabinet was also briefed on the latest developments in the Northern Economic Zone project, which is one of the basic pillars and promising projects that strengthen the non-oil economy of Kuwait and create promising job opportunities for citizens. Moreover, the Cabinet touched on the mechanism for implementing bilateral agreements and memoranda of understanding between Kuwait and the People's Republic of China. — KUNA

Ministry reviews tourism experiences

Info Ministry organizes 'Tourism Communication' conference



Dr. Nasser Muhaisen

Basmah Al-Mayman

By Faten Omar

KUWAIT: Under the patronage of the Minister of Information and Culture Abdulrahman Badah Al-Mutairi, the ministry of information organized on Tuesday a "Tourism Communication" conference to review successful tourism experiences in the Arabian Gulf region and communicate with specialized local authorities.

Undersecretary of the Ministry of Information Dr Nasser Muhaisen emphasized the significance of tourism communication between GCC countries, highlighting its pivotal role in fostering partnerships and exchanging regional and international expertise and experiences, thereby promoting mutual understanding and collaboration in this vital sector. He underscored the focus of the conference on exploring Gulf tourism experiences and enhancing the sector's vitality through collaboration with specialists and private industry.

Muhaisen highlighted the crucial role played by civil society in bolstering the tourism industry, emphasizing tourism's pivotal role in fostering prosperity. He elaborated on its significance as a major sector providing investment opportunities and generating income for the country. He emphasized the need to fortify the tourism concept and enhance facilities within this vital sector to fully harness its potential. "In Kuwait, where ample opportunities for

tourism projects exist, efforts are underway to attract foreign investments through entertainment programs, thereby stimulating economic growth and diversification."

Basmah Al-Mayman, the Middle East regional director at the UN World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), said: "What we are witnessing in the region is the best evidence of the development of tourism regionally. Our optimism for the future of the tourism sector is buoyed by the multitude of developments, initiatives and proposals aimed at bolstering its sustainability and expanding infrastructure."

She added the Middle East is still the only region in the world that has recovered and went back to the tourism levels of 2019 before the COVID-19 pandemic, noting the election of Kuwait to hold the positions of Vice-Presidents of the General Assembly and the Credentials Committee of WTO is the best evidence of the position it enjoys in the organization and among Arab countries.

"These efforts are poised to create an environment conducive to investment opportunities, thereby fostering growth and innovation within the tourism industry. With a focus on enhancing infrastructure and encouraging investments, we remain committed to driving forward the tourism sector and realizing its full potential for economic prosperity and cultural exchange," Mayman said.

Regarding Kuwait, Mayman stated Kuwait pays great attention to the tourism sector, which is one of the bases



Experts from Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, and Oman discussing the Gulf tourism during the conference.

— Photos by Yesser Al-Zayyat

of the government's action plan for 2022-2026 and in commitment to the New Kuwait 2035 vision.

"Developing the tourism sector will contribute to attracting investments and providing job opportunities for citizens, where tourism is one of the most important sectors after oil. I am very confident that the Kuwaiti tourism sector will witness significant growth in the coming years. Uniting efforts and cooperation is the way to a safe return, to enjoy authentic Kuwaiti and Gulf touristic experiences by applying local marketing strategies and advertising campaigns that will undoubtedly have an impact in highlighting Kuwait, which is distinguished by its attractions, including sea, entertainment and shopping," Mayman pointed out.

During the panel discussions, the conference delved into various aspects of Gulf tourism, including strategies to empower the sector, its economic impact and sustainability concerns. Moreover, experts examined the challenges and opportunities facing Gulf tourism, emphasizing the importance of effective public relations in Kuwait's tourism resurgence. Additionally, the significance of festivals and exhibitions in attracting tourists was underscored as a key component of the region's tourism promotion efforts. Also, they highlighted the role of the hotel industry in driving tourism growth and discussed the influence of regulations and legislation on the sector's development.

ment, said that World Hearing Day is being observed with the motto, "hearing to all," advising that guidance should be given, particularly, at a young age on hearing issues. Dr. Al-Kandari indicated that all newly born in Kuwait are examined to detect any hearing impairment, within a month after birth, and that such cases are regularly shifted to the center.

At the global level, the proportion of hearing impairment cases stands at 1-3 percent and ten percent of limited and medium deflection case, she said. The proportion of hearing deficiency cases in Kuwait is largely similar to advanced nations due to the available care and treatment services, she said, noting that up to 1,500 patients had undergone cochlear transplants, 70-80 percent of whom were able to restore normal hearing. Moreover, she has cautioned that up to 50 percent of the cases are hereditary or result from marriages to close relatives. — KUNA

comfortable designs for students and the school community in a space that is one of the largest in Kuwait's schools.

Mahmoud Najm, Director of Education and Development, and Dr. Tracy Randall, Director of Curriculum at Al Wazzan Education, also stated that the educational curriculum focuses on the concept of entrepreneurship to instill the skills of forward-thinking, far-sightedness, seizing opportunities, flexibility, and creativity under the umbrella of Kuwaiti values derived from our history and reality.

The project also witnessed the first cooperation of its kind between a school and a renowned fitness center, Lose/Gain, led by Abdullah Abu Al-Qasim and Mariam Dashti, pioneers in the field of physical health and sports; they will oversee the programs of physical health, nutrition, and sports, to promote a healthy culture among students.

With this project, Al Wazzan Education seeks to provide an integrated educational experience that elevates the level of education in Kuwait and prepares students for practical life. Here are Al



Exhibitors display their products at the World Hearing Day event organized by Sheikh Salem Al-Ali for Hearing and Speech Center. — KUNA



Wazzan Education top executives: Lujain Al Wazzan (Chief Operating Officer); Mahmoud Najm (Director of Education and Development); Dr. Tracy Randall (Director of Curriculum); Jassem Al Saddah (Founding Partner/Creative Director - Babnimnim); Abdullah Abu Al Qasim (Managing Director - Lose/Gain) and Mariam Dashti (Head Coach - Lose/Gain).



EU proposes vast defense boost

France world's first country to enshrine abortion in constitution

Page 6

Page 7



BEIT LAHIA: Palestinians receive medical care at Kamal Adwan Hospital in Beit Lahia, in the northern Gaza Strip, on February 29, 2024. — AFP

Power means 'life or death' in Gaza destroyed hospitals

Electricity shortages due to Zionist siege pose 'serious threat' to patients in critical condition

GAZA: Gaza's hospitals have been wracked by strikes, sieges and raids, but on a day-to-day basis, it is the Palestinian territory's acute power shortages that pose an enduring risk to life-saving care. "Power means life or death in hospitals," said Hiba Tibi, country director for the occupied West Bank and Gaza at the international aid group Care.

At Kamal Adwan hospital's maternity ward in northern Gaza, solar panels are the only thing keeping incubators running, five months into the grueling war. "This section works on solar energy, so it may stop working at any time as a result of clouds or any change in the weather," said doctor Ahmad Al-Kahlut.

Kamal Adwan hospital is one of only 12 partly functioning hospitals, out of 36 in the entire war-battered Gaza Strip. "We hear of newborns dying because there is no electricity for the incubators," said Tibi, as well as children dying when ventilators switch off.

Patients are "dying on the operation table simply because lifesaving machinery is switched off," she added.

According to Kahlut, there are no more functional neonatal care wards in the rest of the coastal territory, piling pressure onto his hospital.

Power generation is a critical issue plaguing Gaza, United Nations agencies have stated since the beginning of the war on October 7. "Electricity shortages in the north of the Gaza Strip" were still among the top challenges listed Friday by the UN humanitarian agency, OCHA.

'Complete siege'

The Zionist entity announced a "complete siege" of Gaza at the start of the war, cutting off fuel and power supplies, as well as food, water and other vital goods, to the territory's 2.4 million people. The enclave has mainly relied on power generators as a result, which require fuel to function, a scarce commodity these days. At the beginning of the war, WHO established that Gaza's 12 main hospitals require 94,000 liters of fuel to keep functioning.

The first fuel deliveries entered the Palestinian territory on November 18

after they were authorized by the Zionist entity. But the desperately-needed fuel struggles to reach those in need, due to both the difficulties on the ground as well as in receiving permits at the Kerem Shalom crossing controlled by Zionist authorities.

The Zionist Coordination and Liaison Administration (CLA) for Gaza says it permits the entry of goods depending on the "security situation" and "humanitarian" considerations. An analysis by Care of satellite images found that 70 percent of Gaza's hospitals have "little or no" power overnight.

'Serious threat'

The Zionist entity's bombardment and ground offensive have now killed more than 30,600 people, most of them women and children, according to Gaza's health ministry. The entity claims the five-month assault is in response to an attack staged by Hamas in the south of the Zionist entity which resulted in the deaths of 1,160 people.

On January 24, the World Health

Organization and its partners said they completed a high-risk mission to resupply fuel to the Al-Shifa Hospital in northern Gaza. The mission delivered 19,000 liters of fuel according to WHO, but "faced delays at the checkpoint" due to "severely damaged" roads, and "thousands of civilians (that) surrounded the UN vehicles and fuel truck in the hopes of finding food and water".

Over the weekend, a WHO team visited Kamal Adwan hospital which was overwhelmed by patients, said WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus. "The lack of electricity poses a serious threat to patient care, especially in critical areas like the intensive care unit and the neonatal unit," he said on X.

The quantity of aid entering Gaza was halved in February compared to January, according to the UN agency for Palestinian refugees, UNRWA. In a February report, Amnesty International said: "While (the Zionist entity) has now allowed some fuel to enter Gaza, the quantities remain jarringly insufficient." — AFP

Single-use plastic packaging to be banned in EU cafes

BRUSSELS: EU negotiators struck an agreement Monday to ban single-use plastics in cafes and restaurants from 2030, officials said, under new rules to reduce waste from packaging across the bloc. The EU's 27 nations and lawmakers agreed on the draft text that sets a target of cutting packaging waste in the bloc by five percent by 2030, compared with the amount in 2018.

The aim is to reduce that further by 10 percent in 2035 and 15 percent by 2040. The text is a key element of the EU's environmental goals under the Green Deal, a set of laws for helping the bloc meet its climate goals. "This regulation aims to reduce waste caused by packaging, making it more sustainable, while ensuring the highest waste management standards," the government of Belgium, which holds the rotating EU presidency, said on X.

Plastics in catering had been at the heart of bitter negotiations after intense lobbying by fast-food giants and the paper industry, which said cardboard packaging, recyclable or from sustainable forests, was more environmentally friendly than plastics.

The single-use plastic packaging ban from 2030 will also apply for unprocessed fresh fruit and vegetables, individual portions of products such as condiments and sugar, as well as miniature toiletries and shrink-wrap for suitcases in airports.

Ultra-lightweight plastic bags will also be banned, with some exceptions. "For the first time in an environmental law, the EU is setting targets to reduce packaging consumption, regardless of the material used," said Frederique Ries, the Belgian EU lawmaker who pushed the text through parliament. "We call on all industrial sectors, EU countries and consumers to play their part in the fight against excess packaging," she said.

Establishments offering drinks and take-away food must also "endeavor" to offer 10 percent of their products in reusable packaging by 2030 and should also give consumers the choice of using their own containers, the EU parliament said.

Lawmakers also added a ban of so-called "forever chemicals" in packaging that has contact with food in a bid to prevent adverse health effects, including different types of cancer. "The ban on forever chemicals in food packaging is a great victory for the health of European consumers," Ries said. The agreement will become law after formal approval by member states and the parliament. — AFP

China to spend more on defense as regional disputes heat up

BEIJING: China announced Tuesday it would boost its defense spending in 2024, as hostility over Taiwan and in the South China Sea grows. The 7.2 percent increase, identical to last year's figure, was announced at the start of the annual meeting of the country's rubber-stamp parliament, the National People's Congress (NPC).

China will spend 1.665 trillion yuan (\$231.4 billion) on defense in 2024, according to the budget report that lays out the government's financial plans for the year ahead. China has the world's second-largest defense budget behind the United States, even though the People's Liberation Army (PLA) surpasses the US military by number of personnel.

Still, China's military spend is around three times smaller than Washington's in recent years. The world's second-largest economy will maintain "reasonable growth" in its defense budget to "safeguard its sovereignty, security and development interests", NPC spokesman Lou Qinjian said Monday.

Viewed with suspicion

The country's expenditure on its armed forces has been on the rise for decades, broadly in line with eco-

nomical growth. China's military spending makes up 1.6 percent of its GDP, far less than the United States or Russia, according to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (Sipri).

But its defense expansion is viewed with suspicion by Washington, as well as other powers in the region including Japan, with which Beijing has a territorial dispute over islands in the East China Sea.

China has also increasingly flexed its muscles in the South China Sea, which it claims almost entirely despite an international arbitration ruling that declared its stance baseless.

China's boost in spending is also a cause for concern for self-ruled Taiwan, which Beijing says is part of its territory to be claimed by force if necessary. As the NPC kicked off on Tuesday, the government work report said China would again "resolutely oppose separatist activities aimed at 'Taiwan independence'" in 2024.

'Biggest challenge to NATO'

China also says it is worried about cooperation between its regional rivals and the United States, as well as NATO. NATO chief Jens Stoltenberg said in January that China was the "biggest long-term challenge NATO Allies face". "We see them in Africa, we see them in the Arctic, we see them trying to control our critical infrastructure," he added.

China made "a number of significant acquisitions, including a substantial increase in number of nuclear



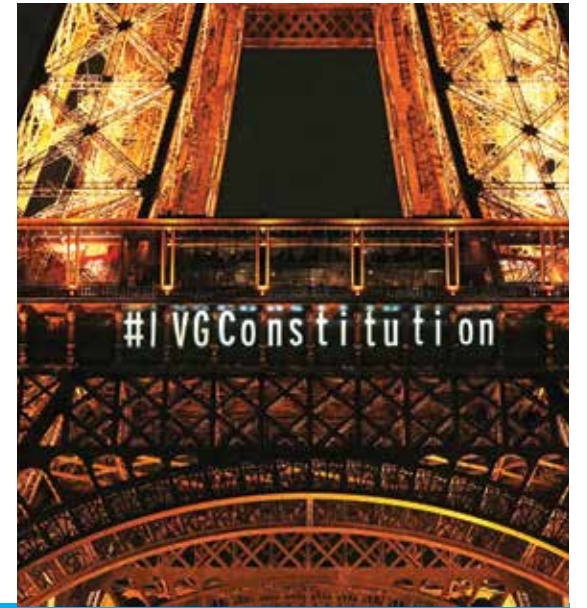
BEIJING: Workers replenish Chinese President Xi Jinping's teacups during the opening session of the National People's Congress (NPC) on March 5, 2024. — AFP

warheads" last year, James Char, an expert on the Chinese army at Nanyang Technological University (NTU) in Singapore, told AFP.

According to Sipri, Beijing had 410 nuclear warheads in 2023, an increase of 60 from the year before. However, that still significantly lags behind Washington's 3,708 and Moscow's 4,489.

Moreover, "recent military corruption scandals raise doubts about the effectiveness of (Beijing's) missile force and overall military professionalism," said Adam Ni, editor of China Neican, a newsletter on Chinese current affairs. — AFP

International



VERSAILLES: (Left) A general view shows MPs and Senators listening as France's Prime Minister Gabriel Attal (rear bottom center) delivers a speech. (Right) A message pertaining to abortion and the constitution is projected onto the Eiffel Tower after the French parliament voted to anchor the right to abortion in the country's constitution. - AFP photos

France world's first country to enshrine abortion in constitution

Lawmakers approve bill in 780-72 majority vote at rare joint parliamentary session

VERSAILLES: The French parliament on Monday voted to anchor the right to abortion in the constitution, making France the first country in the world to offer explicit protection for terminating a pregnancy in its basic law. A congress of both houses of parliament, gathered in a special chamber at the Palace of Versailles, easily found the three-fifths supermajority needed for the change, with 780 lawmakers in favor and 72 voting against. Deputies applauded the change with cheers and a standing ovation. President Emmanuel Macron described the move as "French pride" that had sent a "universal message", and a special public ceremony is planned to celebrate the move in Paris on International Women's Day on March 8.

The Eiffel Tower was lit up in celebration after the change was passed with slogans including "My Body My Choice" flashing on the edifice. "This is a fundamental step ... A step that will go down in history," Prime Minister Gabriel Attal told the lawmakers as he urged them to pass the legislation.

He said they owed "a moral debt" toward all women who had suffered before the legalization of abortion. But Attal said the right to abort remained "in danger" worldwide, with our "freedoms in essence threatened ... at the mercy of decision makers". "In one generation, one year, one week, you can go from one thing to the opposite," he said, referring to rights reversals in the United States, Hungary and Poland. Such joint parliamentary sessions are rare in France and called only for momentous occasions such as constitutional changes, the last of which was made in 2008.

'Hope and solidarity'

Macron pledged last year to enshrine abortion — legal in France since 1975 — in the constitution after the US Supreme Court in 2022 overturned the half-century-old right to the procedure, allowing individual American states to ban or curtail it.

The vote "is of huge significance given the rollback of this essential right around the world," said Amnesty International's secretary general Agnes Callamard, adding that it had sent a message of "hope and solidarity". World Health Organization chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, in a post on X, welcomed "France's decision to secure women's rights and save their lives".

In January, France's lower house of parliament, the National Assembly, overwhelmingly approved the move with the upper house, the Senate, following suit on Wednesday. A majority of the French public support the move to give the right to abortion extra protection, according to polls.

A November 2022 survey by French polling group IFOP found that 86 percent of French people supported inscribing it in the constitution. Left-wing and cen-

trist politicians have welcomed the change, while some right-wing senators have said in private they felt under pressure to give it a green light.

Several hundred abortion opponents, largely marginalized in the move for the constitutional change, protested in Versailles. Catholic bishops meanwhile called for a day of "fasting and prayer" so the French could "rediscover the taste for life". Weighing in from Rome, the Vatican said there could be "no 'right' to take a human life". But hundreds of jubilant backers of the move leapt for joy at the Place du Trocadero in western Paris as they witnessed the passing of the law on a large screen set up for the occasion.



PARIS: A woman sheds tears during the broadcasting of the convocation of both houses of parliament to anchor the right of abortion in the country's constitution.

'Rights under threat'

"I'm happy because our rights are constantly under threat everywhere ... and it's only getting worse," said Cecile Carimalo, 46, who watched with her 12-year-old daughter at the Trocadero esplanade. "This they won't be able to take from us." "If men got pregnant, it would have been inscribed in the text in 1792" during the French Revolution, she added.

Abortion was legalized in France in 1975 in a law championed by then-health minister Simone Veil, a women's rights icon granted the rare honor of burial at the Pantheon after her death in 2018.

When political campaigning began in earnest in 1971, "we could never have imagined that the right to abortion would one day be written into the constitution", Claudine Monteil, head of the Femmes Monde (Women in the World) association, told AFP. At the time, an estimated 700,000 to 800,000 women aborted each year. Leah Hoctor, of the Center for Reproductive Rights, said France could offer "the first explicit broad constitutional provision of its kind, not just in Europe, but also globally". — AFP

Conspiracy theorists monetize 'Disease X' misinformation in US

WASHINGTON: Coined by the World Health Organization to denote a hypothetical future pandemic, "Disease X" is at the center of a blizzard of misinformation that American conspiracy theorists are amplifying — and profiting from.

The falsehoods, including that the unknown pathogen indicates an elitist plot to depopulate the earth, appeared to originate in the United States but spilled to Asia in multiple regional languages, AFP fact-checkers found.

The fast-spreading misinformation, which experts say illustrates the perils of reduced content moderation on social media sites, threatens to fuel vaccine hesitancy and jeopardize preparation for public health emergencies four years after the outbreak of COVID-19.

Stoking fears about Disease X, right-wing influencers in the United States are also cashing in on the falsehoods by hawking medical kits which contain what health experts call an unproven COVID-19 treatment. "Misinformation mongers are trying to exploit this conspiracy theory to sell products," Timothy Caulfield, from the University of Alberta in Canada, told AFP.

"This is often their primary mode of income. The conflict is profound. Without the evidence-free fearmongering about vaccines and government conspiracies, they'd have little or no income." The conspiracy theories particularly took off after the World Economic Forum — a magnet for misinformation — convened a "Preparing for Disease X" panel in January focused on a possible future pandemic.

Selling products

Alex Jones, the founder of the website InfoWars who has made millions spreading conspiracy theories about mass shootings and COVID-19, falsely claimed on social media that there was a globalist plan to deploy Disease X as a "genocidal kill weapon".

As the conspiracy spread to China, posts shared on TikTok and X (formerly Twitter) claimed the Chinese government was rolling out mobile cremation ovens to cope with "mass deaths." But using reverse image searches, AFP fact-checkers found the videos in the posts actually showed pet cremation services.

Last October, AFP fact-checkers debunked online posts in Malaysia that claimed nurses were being forced to take a nonexistent vaccine for Disease X. US cardiologist Peter McCullough, known for spreading COVID-19 misinformation, claimed without evidence that Disease X was "expected to be engineered in a biolab."

He made the claim on the website of The Wellness Company, a US-based supplements supplier where he serves as the chief scientific officer. Urging people to "be ready" for Disease X, the website offers a "medical emergency kit" for around \$300, which contains drugs including ivermectin, an unproven COVID-19 treatment.

The Gateway Pundit, a right-wing website notorious for conspiracy theories, also promoted the kits in a sponsored message titled "DISEASE X — Are The Globalists Planning Another Pandemic?" "Don't be caught unprepared," the message said, leading readers to a link to order the kits.

Misinformation unchallenged

"Spreading conspiracy theories in order to make money is a grift long established on the right," Julie Millican, vice president of the left-leaning watchdog Media Matters, told AFP. "The ones most likely to be spreading conspiracy theories" about topics such as Disease X, she added, "are also looking for a way to take advantage of their audience to profit from it." The Wellness Company and Gateway Pundit did not respond to AFP requests for comment.

Much of the misinformation appears to go unchallenged as platforms such as X scale back content moderation in a climate of cost-cutting that has gutted trust and safety teams. The conspiracy theories built on growing vaccine hesitancy since COVID-19, which is likely to have "far-reaching" public health effects, said Jennifer Reich, a sociologist at the University of Colorado Denver. "Since COVID, we have seen declining support for childhood vaccines and more support on surveys for parents' rights to reject vaccines for their children," Reich told AFP.

Some believers of Disease X conspiracies vowed to reject future vaccines, according to social media posts tracked by AFP, a stance that could limit the response to real health emergencies. "Disinformation can also lead to some segments of the population taking up either ineffective or even harmful measures during an epidemic," Chunhui Chi, a professor of global health at Oregon State University, told AFP. "It can become a major barrier for a society to be proactive in preparing and preventing an emerging contagious disease." — AFP

UAE honors Amir, ties ...

Continued from Page 1

Sheikh Mohammad bin Zayed welcomed HH the Amir and wished success for his leadership towards further progress and prosperity at all levels.

The official talks dealt with economic, trade, investment and development relations, which witnessed giant leaps in the past years, which would contribute to honoring development goals and boosting sustainable prosperity. The two leaders also underlined the importance of supporting common Gulf action amidst regional and international challenges, in a way that would achieve common interests of the GCC countries and their people, as well as contribute to boosting regional security and stability.

They affirmed that Kuwait and the UAE were firm supporters of the GCC and its interests. Sheikh Mohammad said the tour of HH the Amir to GCC countries mirrored his keenness to support the Gulf bloc, bolstering solidarity, supporting aspirations of Gulf citizens, cooperation and integration amidst developments and challenges in the region. The UAE believes and supports the objectives of this tour "and considers it an integral part of its policy", he said.

Sheikh Mohammad said he is confident the wisdom and vision of HH the Amir aimed at continuing the path of development triggered by late Kuwait

leaders, and their contributions, specially health and education, would remain in the hearts and minds of the people of the UAE and the Gulf. The two leaders reaffirmed that bilateral historic relations were based on the strong foundation of respect and understanding amidst common regional challenges. HH the Amir Sheikh Mishal and Emirati President Sheikh Mohammad exchanged orders at Qasr Al-Watan, marking HH the Amir's state visit to the UAE. Sheikh Mohammad presented the Zayed Order to HH the Amir, the highest order in recognition of "deep fraternal relations" and his efforts to further strengthening ties. HH the Amir presented Sheikh Mohammad with the Mubarak Al-Kabeer Order in recognition of his efforts for the progress, stability and prosperity of the UAE and its people, as well as promoting relations among the GCC countries.

Sheikh Mohammad then held a lunch banquet in honor of HH the Amir and his accompanying delegation, before HH Sheikh Mishal departed the UAE. HH the Amir was seen off by Sheikh Mohammad and senior officials. HH the Amir sent a cable of appreciation upon his departure to Sheikh Mohammad, thanking him for his hospitality which reflected the deep bonds between the two states. He also expressed great gratitude to the UAE President for awarding him with the Zayed Order, wishing the UAE President and his people health and prosperity.

HH the Amir Sheikh Mishal will patronize and attend the official opening of Abdullah Al-Salem University (AASU) on Wednesday at Abdullah Al-Jaber Auditorium in Shuwaikh. — KUNA

Blinken calls on Hamas ...

Continued from Page 1

"We have an opportunity for an immediate ceasefire that can bring hostages home, that can dramatically increase the amount of humanitarian assistance getting to Palestinians who so desperately need it, and then also set the conditions for an enduring resolution," Blinken said. "It is on Hamas to make decisions about whether it is prepared to engage in that ceasefire," the US top diplomat added as he met the Qatari prime minister in Washington.

As conditions in Gaza deteriorate and the specter of famine looms, the Zionist entity has also faced increasingly sharp rebukes from Washington. Vice President Kamala Harris expressed "deep concern about the humanitarian conditions in Gaza" during talks on Monday with war cabinet member Benny Gantz, a centrist political rival of rightwing Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

American cargo planes airdropped more than 36,000 meals into Gaza Tuesday in a joint operation with Jordan, which said French and Egyptian planes also took part. The United Nations has warned famine is "almost inevitable" in the Palestinian territory. Zionist media reported, meanwhile, that the country's negotiating team had so far boycotted the Cairo talks after Hamas had failed to provide it with a list of the living captives. The Zionist entity has said it believes 130 of the original 250 captives remain in Gaza, but that 31 have been killed.



GAZA: Relatives of Palestinians killed when the Al-Faqawi family home was hit during overnight Zionist bombardment mourn over their bodies at the European hospital morgue in Khan Yunis in the southern Gaza Strip on March 5, 2024. — AFP

Senior Hamas leader Bassem Naim told AFP on Monday that the group did not know "who among them are alive or dead, killed because of strikes or hunger", and that the captives were being held by "numerous groups in multiple places". He said that, in order for all of them to be located, "a ceasefire is necessary". Speaking on Tuesday, Naim said a truce and hostage release deal "could happen within days". But he added that, "if the Americans are serious about it, they have to put enough pressure" on Netanyahu and his government.

The Zionist entity's offensive has killed 30,631 people, mostly women and children, according to the health ministry. Fighting raged on in Gaza, with Hamas officials reporting dozens of Zionist air strikes near the European Hospital in Hamad, near the main southern city of Khan Yunis. Khan

Yunis residents said decomposing bodies were lying in streets lined with destroyed homes and shops. "We want to eat and live," said Nader Abu Shanab, pointing to the rubble with blackened hands. "Take a look at our homes. How am I to blame, a single, unarmed person without any income in this impoverished country?"

The UN World Health Organization said an aid mission to two hospitals in northern Gaza had found children dying of starvation. "The lack of food resulted in the deaths of 10 children," said WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus. On Tuesday, the WHO estimated at least 8,000 Gaza patients needed evacuation for treatment, which would relieve pressure on the few functioning hospitals. Tensions between the Zionist entity and the United Nations flared on Monday, with the Zionist entity recalling its ambassador. — AFP

International

EU proposes vast defense boost

Bloc plans to scale up arms production, procurement in face of Russian aggression

BRUSSELS: EU officials on Tuesday unveiled an ambitious proposal to massively boost weapons production and procurement in the bloc to shift from a reliance on US arms and in reaction to Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

The European Commission says the 27-nation bloc is facing a new "security paradigm" with an expansionist Russia operating a wartime economy as it presses into year three of the conflict with Kyiv. "To counter the return of high-intensity war on our border, we have decided to kick up a gear," EU internal market commissioner Thierry Breton told reporters in announcing the new initiative.

The European Defense Industrial Strategy aims, over the long term, to give incentives to European arms manufacturers to invest more, make their production more agile and — for the first time — to collectively catalogue what they have available.

"We must take more responsibility for our own security, while, of course, remaining fully committed to our NATO alliance," said European Commission Vice President Margrethe Vestager.

"We need to get that transatlantic balance right, irrespective of electoral dynamics in the US," she told reporters, in a nod to Republican White House hopeful Donald Trump casting doubt on the US commitment to its NATO allies should he win reelection. "An improved ability to act will make us a stronger ally," Vestager said. The question of financing the ambitious initiative is problematic for a continent that has trimmed defense investment for decades following the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Funding questions

Breton has spoken of an ultimate need for some 100 billion euros (\$110 billion) for the European Union to rival the Pentagon and US defense industry. To kickstart the project, the commission plans

to set aside 1.5 billion euros from the EU's current budget that runs to 2027 — an amount Vestager acknowledged "is not a lot of money" given the scale of the initiative.

"But it can still work as an incentive, as a bonus... because the real funding for a stronger defense comes from member states and that funding will increase over the years to come," she said.

Some countries, such as France, back an idea of EU bonds to finance a buy-European weapons production base, similar to what was done to finance economic recovery from the Covid pandemic.

But "frugal" countries such as Germany are against that, concerned it will centralize budget power in Brussels and override national sovereignty over defense issues. There is also a debate over using money generated from frozen Russian assets in the EU to help fund the initiative, though the bloc's foreign policy chief Josep Borrell said that "is still not decided and there are different views" among member states.

'Kick up a gear'

While the EU and member countries have supported Ukraine financially and with military weapons and equipment, arms production has come up short with the bloc missing a target to give Kyiv a promised one million artillery shells. Breton said the bloc was now providing Ukraine around 80,000 shells per month.

The EU's 27 member countries spent more than 100 billion euros on defense purchases between Russia's February 2022 invasion of Ukraine and June last year, Vestager said. "Almost 80 percent of that was spent outside of the European Union, and the US alone accounted for more than 60 percent of this spending. This is no longer sustainable," she said.

The EU's proposed strategy aims to have trade of



ODESA: Rescuers clear debris from a multi-storey building heavily damaged following a drone strike, in Odesa on March 3, 2024. — AFP

weapons within the bloc reaching 35 percent of total value of the EU defense market by 2030. Member states will also be encouraged to procure European weapons to a level of at least 50 percent of their defense budgets by 2030 and 60 percent by 2035.

A defense industrial readiness board would be created to bring together member countries, the commission and the EU's top diplomat, currently Borrell, to coordinate.

One mechanism would be set up for common arms procurement across the bloc, and another to support defense cooperation including through potential tax breaks.

Importantly, Ukraine would be treated as a "quasi member" of the initiative, which would open the way for it to more easily purview and tap arms production and supplies in the EU — should its war against Russian troops be ongoing then. — AFP

Sunken ship threatens massive Red Sea spill, 'environmental disaster'

ADEN: The sinking of a Belize-flagged bulker off Yemen after a Houthi missile attack poses grave environmental risks, as thousands of tons of fertilizer threaten to spill into the Red Sea, according to officials and experts. The Belize-flagged, Lebanese-operated Rubymar sank on Saturday with 21,000 metric tons of ammonium phosphate sulfate fertilizer on board, according to US Central Command (CENTCOM).

It had been taking in water since a Houthi missile strike on February 18 damaged its hull, marking the most significant impact on a commercial ship since the rebels started targeting vessels in November.

After already leaving a slick from leaking fuel while it was still afloat, the Rubymar now poses a new set of environmental threats underwater. Abdulsalam Al-Jaabi of the Yemeni government's environmental protection agency warned of "double pollution" that could impact 78,000 fishermen and their families — roughly half a million people. "The first pollution is oil pollution resulting from the large amount of fuel oil on board" which could continue to leak, he said, estimating the quantity to be over 200 tons.

The second risk is posed by the fertilizer cargo, which is highly soluble and could harm "fish and living organisms such as coral reefs and seaweed" if released into the water, Jaabi added. The overall contamination could incur "significant economic costs", especially on war-torn coastal communities that depend on fishing for survival, the official warned. Yemen's Iran-backed Houthi rebels seized the capital Sanaa in 2014, pushing the internationally recognized government south to Aden and prompting Saudi Arabia to lead a military coalition to help prop it up the following year. A ceasefire since April 2022 has largely held.



A handout picture released by the US Central Command shows the capsized bulk carrier Rubymar in the Red Sea, after taking damage due to a strike claimed by Yemen's Houthis. — AFP

'Cascading effects'

The Rubymar is the first ship to sink since the Houthis started their Red Sea campaign which they say is in solidarity with Palestinians in Gaza being attacked by the Zionist entity since October 2023.

Plans to tow the vessel failed after port authorities in Aden, Djibouti and Saudi Arabia refused to receive the ship, according to Roy Khoury, the chief executive of Blue Fleet Group, the ship's Lebanese operator.

The Yemeni government's transport minister Abdulsalam Humaid said Aden's "refusal comes out of fear of an environmental disaster". Djibouti also refused the ship over "environmental risks", said an official close to the country's presidency.

Saudi authorities were not immediately available for comment. "Without immediate action, this situation could escalate into a major environmental crisis," warned Julien Jreissati, Middle East and North Africa program director

at Greenpeace. "The sinking of the vessel could further breach the hull, allowing water to contact with the thousands of tons of fertilizer," he added. This would "disrupt the balance of the marine ecosystems, triggering cascading effects throughout the food web," Jreissati said. UN Special Envoy Hans Grundberg said five experts from the United Nations Environment Program are due in Yemen this week to conduct an assessment in coordination with the Yemeni environment ministry.

George Wikoff, the head of the US Navy's Bahrain-based Fifth Fleet, warned that the "tons of chemicals carried on the sinking vessel Rubymar presents environmental risk to the Red Sea in the form of algae blooms and damaged coral". Speaking during a conference in Doha on Tuesday, Wikoff said the ship also poses a threat to Red Sea navigation as it "presents a subsurface impact risk" to other ships transiting the critical waterway which normally carries around 12 percent of global trade. — AFP

8 arrested in India after tourist raped

NEW DELHI: Indian police have arrested five more men in connection with the gang rape of a Spanish tourist, taking the total detained to eight, local media reported Tuesday.

The attack on the woman, who was on a motorbike trip with her husband, took place last week in Dumka district in the eastern Indian state of Jharkhand where the couple was camping.

The Press Trust of India (PTI) news agency broadcasted footage of five suspects, handcuffed and tied to each other in a line by a rope, in front of seated police officers.

On Monday, three other men appeared in court — also with sacks on their heads — and were later remanded in custody. "The three arrested gave a new statement, in which they mentioned five more names so, until now, we have arrested eight culprits in total," senior local police officer Pitamber Singh Kherwar said, according to PTI.

Kherwar said any of the men, if found guilty, would face "strict punishment". "We are forming a strong case against them", he added.

The authorities have handed a cheque of \$12,000 to the couple as compensation under a "victim compensation scheme", broadcaster NDTV reported.

The woman, who identified herself on social media, posted a statement after the latest arrests. "They have caught all the criminals, and there were eight in total," she wrote, thanking the "efficient" police. "I ask for justice ... (for) all of the women who also have to go through this."

An average of nearly 90 rapes a day were reported in India in 2022, according to data from the National Crime Records Bureau. However, large numbers go unreported due

to prevailing stigmas around victims and a lack of faith in police investigations. Convictions remain rare, with cases getting stuck for years in India's clogged-up criminal justice system. The notorious gang rape and murder of an Indian student made global headlines in 2012.

Jyoti Singh, a 23-year-old physiotherapy student, was raped, assaulted and left for dead by five men and a teenager on a bus in New Delhi in December that year. The horrific crime shone an international spotlight on India's high levels of sexual violence and sparked weeks of protests, and eventually a change in the law to introduce the death penalty for rape. — AFP

'Surveillance'

India last week said it was bolstering its naval forces on its "strategically important" Lakshadweep islands, about 130 kilometers (80 miles) north of the Maldives. The Indian naval unit based on the island of Minicoy will boost "operational surveillance" of the area, the navy said. Addressing a public rally north of the capital on Monday, Muizzu vowed there would be no Indian troops on Maldivian soil after May 10, when they are expected to complete a withdrawal. The Indians had been deployed to operate three reconnaissance aircraft New Delhi had gifted Male to patrol its vast maritime boundary. India is expected to replace the military personnel with civilian staff to operate the aircraft, and the Maldives defense ministry announced last month that Indian civilian crew had begun arriving in the atoll nation.

Last month, Male allowed a controversial Chinese research ship to enter its waters in a sign of the nation's diplomatic reorientation towards Beijing and away from its traditional benefactor India. China's Xiang Yang Hong 3 arrived in Male after being refused permission to dock by Sri Lanka following objections from India, which has labelled it a spy ship. China also gave 12 electric ambulances to the Maldives on Sunday, the health ministry said. — AFP

Maldives, China ink defense deal as India prepares exit

MALE: The Maldives has signed a "military assistance" deal with China after ordering Indian troops deployed in the small but strategically-placed archipelago to leave, officials said Tuesday.

Some 89 Indian military personnel in the country will be gone by May 10 after having been previously ordered out by pro-China President Mohamed Muizzu, who came to power last year on an anti-Indian platform.

The Maldivian defense ministry said they signed an "agreement on China's provision of military assistance" with Beijing late Monday, saying the agreement was "gratis", or without payment or charge, but giving no further details. The defense ministry said the deal was to foster "stronger bilateral ties", in a post on social media platform X.

India is suspicious of China's growing presence in

the Indian Ocean and its influence in the Maldives, a chain of 1,192 tiny coral islands stretching around 800 kilometers (500 miles) across the equator, as well as in neighboring Sri Lanka.

Both South Asian island nations are strategically placed halfway along key east-west international shipping routes. Relations between Male and New Delhi have chilled since Muizzu won elections in September.

New Delhi considers the Indian Ocean archipelago to be within its sphere of influence, but the Maldives has shifted into the orbit of China — its largest external creditor.

Muizzu, who visited Beijing in January where he signed a raft of infrastructure, energy, marine and agricultural deals, has previously denied seeking to redraw the regional balance by bringing in Chinese forces to replace Indian troops.

Chinese foreign ministry spokesperson Mao Ning told reporters Tuesday that Beijing was doing "its utmost to jointly build a comprehensive strategic cooperative partnership" with the archipelago. "Normal cooperation between China and the Maldives does not target any third party and does not undergo any interference by third parties," she added.

Ukraine destroys another Russian warship

KYIV: Ukraine said on Tuesday its forces had destroyed a Russian military patrol ship in the Black Sea near annexed Crimea, the latest naval attack on Moscow's fleet in the key waterway. Kyiv also said it was behind a drone strike on an oil depot in a Russian border region.

Ukraine is flexing its ability to strike Russia from the air and at sea while its troops struggle on the front lines. The Black Sea has been a vital battleground in the two-year war. Ukraine claims to have destroyed more than two dozen Russian ships since Moscow invaded in February 2022.

Ukraine's GUR military intelligence unit on Tuesday released a black and white video of what it said was the overnight attack on the Sergei Kotov, a 94-metre (308-foot) Russian military patrol ship. The footage showed a naval drone approaching the side of the vessel, before a large explosion can be seen sending fire, smoke and debris into the sky. "Another very successful operation. Great news," said GUR spokesman Andriy Yusov. The attack happened near the Kerch Strait, off the Crimean peninsula, which Moscow unilaterally annexed in 2014. Officials in Kyiv revealed in the hit, a much-needed boost for Ukrainian forces at a time when Russia is in the ascendancy on the battlefield. "One Russian ship has been upgraded to a submarine," Ukraine's defense ministry said in an ironic post on X.

Delays to Western aid — a \$60-billion US aid package and European artillery shells — have left Ukraine's troops outnumbered and outgunned across the sprawling front lines. French President Emmanuel Macron on Tuesday urged Kyiv's allies not to be "cowards" in helping them fight the Russian invasion. He said he "fully stood behind" controversial remarks he made last week, in which he did not rule out the possibility of Western troops being sent to Ukraine.

'Symbol of occupation'

There was no official response from Moscow about the overnight strike but it was confirmed by Russian military bloggers with close ties to the armed forces. Some were scornful of the Russian navy's inability to defend itself.

Pro-war Russian military blogger Yuri Podolyak on Tuesday accused Moscow's military leaders of being in "ostrich mode" — having their heads buried in the sand — over yet another successful Ukrainian attack in the Black Sea.

Kyiv says it has disabled at least 25 Russian vessels since Moscow invaded — more than a third of its pre-war Black Sea fleet. "Russia's Black Sea Fleet is a symbol of occupation. It cannot be in Ukrainian Crimea," the Ukrainian president's chief of staff, Andriy Yermak, said on Tuesday. Moscow has moved many military ships from its historic Sevastopol naval base in Crimea to the port of Novorossiysk further to the east, amid the spate of Ukrainian attacks.

A Ukrainian intelligence source told AFP its forces were also behind a drone strike on an oil depot in the Russian border region of Belgorod on Tuesday that set storage tanks ablaze. In the neighboring Kursk region of Russia, authorities said an artillery strike triggered a fire at the Glushkovo railway station and cut off power to a nearby village.

On land, Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu said on Tuesday that Moscow's forces were "continuing to press the enemy westwards", seeking to build on the capture of Avdiivka last month. Meanwhile, Berlin said "individual error" was behind the leak of confidential military talks in which air force officials discussed the potential impact of sending long-range missiles to Ukraine. Moscow has said the leaked recording showed Ukraine's Western allies were directly involved in the conflict. — AFP

Business

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 6, 2024

Gulf Bank launches 'A Step Towards Change' initiative in partnership with Kaifan Co-op

Initiative aimed at distributing 20,000 reusable bags

Fahad Al-Sharrah: The initiative has been widely embraced and positively received by the members of the cooperative societies that have implemented it.**Musaab Ahmed Al-Mulla:** We are pleased to partner with Gulf Bank and are eager to contribute to changing societal behavior toward reducing plastic usage.

KUWAIT: Following the specified timeline, Gulf Bank has launched the "A Step Towards Change" environmental sustainability initiative, aimed at shifting societal habits by promoting the use of reusable bags, in partnership with Kaifan Cooperative Society. Over the course of a week, the initiative involves distributing around 20,000 reusable bags at Mishref co-op, accompanied by various informative events.

Gulf Bank had earlier revealed the timetable for executing the initiative within the participating co-ops, which include Al-Dahiya and Al-Mansouriah, Al-Shamiya and Al-Shuwaikh, Al-Rawda and Hawally, Kaifan, and Mishref. This disclosure took place in the presence of bank officials, representatives from the Environment Public Authority, and the Committee for Environmental, Food, and Water Security in the National Assembly.

On this occasion, Fahad Al-Sharrah, Assistant Manager of Corporate Communications at Gulf Bank, stated: "We are pleased at Gulf Bank to have partnered with Kaifan co-op for the fourth phase of our environmental sustainability initiative, 'A Step Towards Change,' which has been widely embraced and positively received by the members of the Co-operative Societies that have implemented it.

He continued, saying: "Our primary objective is to instigate a change in behavior within society, and we are working closely with Mishref co-op to achieve this. Through the distribution of reusable bags and encouraging customers to reduce their plastic consumption, we hope to make significant progress."

Al-Sharrah conveyed optimism that this initiative would actively contribute to shaping government



KUWAIT: Gulf Bank launches the "A Step Towards Change" environmental sustainability initiative in partnership with Kaifan Cooperative Society.

decisions and laws, compelling both institutions and individuals to minimize plastic usage. Ultimately, this effort is expected to contribute significantly to the protection of Kuwait's environment from the significant harm caused by plastic bags. He further emphasized that this initiative is part of Gulf Bank's annual commitment to implement various initiatives aimed at reinforcing the principles of environmental sustainability within the community. Gulf Bank believes that the journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step, and they found it fitting to initiate

this program with selected major Co-ops in Kuwait. Around 100,000 reusable bags will be distributed to the selected co-ops, marking the first step towards changing behavior, and becoming an integral part of their daily lives.

He added, "This initiative is rooted in Gulf Bank's 2025 strategy, with the goal of establishing principles of environmental, social, and governance sustainability. It aligns with the country's environmental strategy under the vision of 'New Kuwait 2035,' as well as legislation related to the environment, laws

safeguarding the environment, resource conservation, pollution reduction, environmental safety, ecosystem rehabilitation, biodiversity protection, waste management efficiency improvement, utilization of renewable energy, and building and developing national capabilities in environmental work."

Musaab Ahmed Al-Mulla, a member of the Board of Directors at Kaifan Cooperative Society and President of the Union of Consumer Cooperative Societies, expressed satisfaction with the partnership with Gulf Bank in the "A Step Towards Change" initiative, highlighting their commitment to driving societal progress towards decreased plastic consumption. Furthermore, he stressed the introduction of a "Fast Track" service by the co-op for shareholders who utilize reusable bags, with the aim of promoting their ongoing use. Gulf Bank's vision is to be the leading Kuwaiti Bank of the Future. The Bank is constantly engaging and empowering its employees as part of an inclusive and diversified workplace in recognition of every employee's role in delivering customer excellence and serving the community at large. With its extensive network of branches and innovative digital services, Gulf Bank is able to give its customers the choice of how and where to conduct their banking transactions, all while ensuring a simple and seamless banking experience.

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



Gold hits record peak on US rate cut hopes

LONDON: The price of gold on Tuesday struck an all-time pinnacle, boosted by its haven status ahead of expected cuts to US interest rates amid growing economic gloom. Shortly after 1330 GMT, gold advanced to \$2,141.79 per ounce, surpassing its prior peak of \$2,135.39 that was struck in early December, before pulling back slightly. Gold, whose twin drivers are jewelry and investment buying, has now gained about 15 percent in value since the same stage last year.

"Concerns surrounding global economic prospects, geopolitical tensions, and shifting expectations towards earlier interest rate cuts have fuelled increased demand for the precious metal, leading to its upward price trajectory," said ActivTrades analyst Ricardo Evangelista. "Of these factors, US interest rates stand out as the primary risk factor influencing gold prices, with the potential upside constrained by uncertainty surrounding the Federal Reserve's plans to unwind its restrictive monetary policy."

This week's strong advance was partly triggered by weak data published before the weekend. US manufacturing activity contracted in February more quickly than markets expected, an industry survey showed Friday, as demand slowed and output eased. The Institute for Supply Management said its manufacturing index stood at 47.8 percent last month, down from 49.1 percent in January.

This was significantly below market expectations, according to Briefing.com, and kept the index below the 50-point marking separating expansion from contraction for the 16th month in a row.

That stoked market expectations that the Fed could move more quicker than expected to lower borrowing costs in order to stimulate economic activity. "Gold continues its upward trajectory," added Commerzbank analyst Thu Lan Nguyen, who also sounded a note of caution. "As there is still a lot of uncertainty about the start and extent of the next interest rate cut cycle in the US, we think the rally is fragile. "We would not be surprised to see a small downward correction in the coming days on the back of profit taking." — AFP

Jordan top choice for Kuwaiti investors: Official

AMMAN: Undersecretary of Kuwait's Ministry of Commerce and Industry, Ziad Al-Najem, said Tuesday that Jordan is a top choice for Kuwaiti investors due to its diverse investment opportunities. Speaking during the 8th session of the joint Kuwaiti-Jordanian technical trade committee, Al-Najem highlighted its goal of enhancing bilateral relations and addressing obstacles, thus fulfilling the aspirations of both nations.



AMMAN: Undersecretary of Kuwait's Ministry of Commerce and Industry Ziad Al-Najem speaks during the 8th session of the joint Kuwaiti-Jordanian technical trade committee. — KUNA.

China sets 5% GDP growth target for 2024

BEIJING: China's economic troubles are far from over and leaders admit the country will face an uphill struggle in hitting its goals for 2024, piling on the pressure for stimulus and reforms that experts say are needed to reverse the malaise. Beijing's leadership on Tuesday laid out an objective of "around five percent" gross domestic product (GDP) growth this year—a dream of many developed Western nations but for China a far cry from the breakneck expansion that powered its rise.

It is also identical to last year's GDP target—one of China's lowest in decades even as the economy was buoyed by the country's emergence from strict COVID rules that had stifled progress. Beijing has been upfront that it believes hitting five percent growth will "not be easy" given the "lingering risks and hidden dangers" still present in the economy.

Economists agree. "Although the growth target this year is the same as last year, it's actually more ambitious given the higher base in 2023," said Jing

Increasing trade through information exchange, expertise sharing, and participation in exhibitions and conferences, especially in the private sectors, is a key focus of the committee's meetings. On her side, Secretary General of the Jordanian Ministry of Industry, Trade and Supply, Dana Al-Zoubi, affirmed the strong ties between the two countries adding that Kuwait is a vital strategic partner.

She also added that the committee's meetings show the eagerness of the two countries to increase investments and commercial trade in various fields. Representatives from ministries and government agencies attended the meeting, while on the Jordanian side, participants included representatives from both government agencies and the private sector. — KUNA



Liu, HSBC Global Research Greater China chief economist. Chief among the risks is China's real estate sector—now under unprecedented strain with some major developers on the verge of bankruptcy and falling prices dissuading consumers.

Property in China experienced two decades of meteoric growth alongside rising living standards across the country and long accounted for more than a quarter of China's GDP. But the sector has become emblematic of the challenges facing the wider Chinese economy—overpowered by cheap debt and roaring demand, millions of unfinished homes now lie empty.

Despite official efforts to offer fresh support, "the property sector has shown no signs of recovery", said Ting Lu, chief China economist at Nomura. Tuesday's government work report promised greater steps—more investment in government-funded housing, efforts to assist in the "justified financing demands" of real estate firms, and a vaguely defined "new development model" for real estate.

"The property sector will likely remain a prolonged drag on growth," according to Lynn Song, chief Greater China economist at ING. But economists were hoping that Beijing would signal a move beyond its traditionally cautious approach to bailouts—what Chinese Premier Li Qiang this year likened to seeking "short-term growth while accumulating long-term risks". — AFP

Khaled Waleed Al-Falah, Chairman of Board for NIC

KUWAIT: In a meeting held on Monday, March 4, 2024, the National Investments Company's Board of Directors unanimously approved the reformation of the Chairman and Vice Chairman positions, with Khaled Waleed Al-Falah as Chairman of the Board of Directors and Bader Nasser Al-Kharafi as Vice Chairman of the Board of Directors.

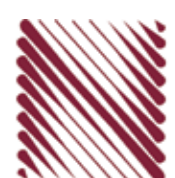
Al-Falah expressed his gratitude upon gaining the trust and confidence of members of the Board, stressing his desire and efforts to continue implementing the company's prudent strategy and maintaining the solidity of its financial position. "The company continues to create new paths to enhance its leading position by making a sustainable impact and expanding its diverse services in various sectors locally and regionally," he added.

Khaled Al-Falah has extensive experience in the financial services, industrial and investment banking sectors. He is the Business Development Manager at Mohammed Abdulmohsin Al-Kharafi & Sons, Vice Chairman and CEO of MENA Capital, Board of Director at Boursa Kuwait Securities Company and Bahrain Steel Company, and Executive Committee Member of Foulath Holding Company.

The National Investments Company has been one of the leading investment companies in Kuwait since 1987. It has a proven track record of success and plays an active and vital role in various local, Gulf, and international sectors. The NIC Board of Directors consists of Khaled Waleed Al-Falah, Bader Nasser Al-Kharafi, Anas Khaled Al-Saleh, Taibah Mohammed Al-Qatami, and Fahad Abdulrahman Al-Mukhaizim.



Khaled Waleed Al-Falah



شركة الاستثمار الوطنية
NATIONAL INVESTMENTS COMPANY



(From Left), Abdulrahman Al-Bahar, Mohamed El-Shareef, Othman Tafweqe and Musab Al-Shalan.

KIB launches Kuwait's first bank-led digital marketplace KIBPayTally App

App represents a significant breakthrough in digital Islamic banking solutions

KUWAIT: Kuwait International Bank (KIB) held a special press conference to announce the launch of Kuwait's first bank-led digital marketplace, the KIB-PayTally App. A leader in Islamic banking solutions, KIB's pioneering initiative marks the first time a bank in Kuwait has created a platform to serve as a specialized digital marketplace, catering to the diverse needs of its customers' modern lifestyles by allowing them to access everything they need in one place across various categories, in addition to the exclusive KIB store.

Commenting on the launch, Othman Tafweqe, General Manager of the Retail Banking Department at KIB, said: "This initiative represents a significant breakthrough in the field of digital Islamic banking solutions and serves as a testament to our dedication to offering exceptional products and services. These offerings are designed to meet our customers' needs comprehensively and align with their lifestyles. Furthermore, the KIBPayTally application will enhance the customer experience, especially during the holy month of Ramadan, by providing seamless and beneficial features."

Speaking at the press conference, Tafweqe added: "The launch of the new application, which adheres to Islamic banking principles, in conjunction with our Ramadan campaign embodies the holy month's spirit of generosity, and KIB stands proud as a community partner, offering financial solutions that are both accessible and advantageous. Our focus this Ramadan is not just on facilitating easy and convenient transactions, but also on fostering generosity and making wishes come true, be it through purchasing a new car



Abdulrahman Al-Bahar



Musab Al-Shalan



Othman Tafweqe



Mohamed El-Shareef

or building a dream home."

On his part, Mohamed Atef El-Shareef, General Manager of the Digital Innovation and Data Intelligence Department at KIB, stated: "The new app stands out as the first digital marketplace introduced by a bank in Kuwait, allowing users to shop, finance and track their applications in real-time with complete ease. It is crafted to bring about a significant improvement in how customers access financing services and enjoy a comprehensive browsing experience, without the hassle of visiting multiple websites or locations. The KIBPayTally application is user-friendly and equipped with distinctive features specifically designed to enhance the digital marketplace concept through exclusive deals not found at any other marketplace destination. Moreover, it enables customers to

compare products across various categories, ensuring accuracy and trustworthiness in their choices before making a purchase."

Meanwhile, Abdulrahman Al-Bahar, Assistant Manager of Central Sales in the Retail Banking Department at KIB, remarked: "We are confident that KIB's innovative app will ensure convenience and security by facilitating transactions through simple steps, anytime and anywhere. This eliminates the necessity of visiting branches, making the experience more efficient and effective. Notably, applying for financing via the KIBPayTally app does not require customers to transfer their salaries to the bank." He pointed out that KIB provides a range of flexible financing options through the application with payment plans from 3 months and up to 60 months, ranging between KD 300 and KD 25,000, to

meet the needs of the widest possible customer base, including both customers and non-customers, as well as citizens and residents alike.

Further discussing what KIBPayTally offers, Musab Al-Shalan, Deputy General Manager of the Retail Banking Department at KIB, said "Through this new app, KIB will manage to bring together a wide array of its partners in the KIBPayTally program under a single umbrella, creating a comprehensive market place destination. This will enable the bank to offer its customers innovative and flexible financing solutions across various sectors, such as automobile financing, medical financing, financing for overseas treatment, educational financing, as well as financing for furniture, electronics and gaming, among other financing services. These offerings further solidify the bank's leadership in pioneering digital banking innovation strategies."

Al-Shalan invited everyone to download the KIB-PayTally application and explore the opportunities offered this Ramadan. With its user-friendly interface, comprehensive range of services, and exclusive deals, the new application is set to change the landscape of digital banking and financing in Kuwait. He also encouraged following the bank on its social media platforms and visiting its website to find out more information about KIBPayTally.

It is worth noting that KIB is committed to providing the best banking and financing solutions to the largest number of people in the community, affirming its position as a leader in the Islamic banking sector, and stemming from its main slogan 'Bank for Life'.

Chemicals giant Bayer rules out break-up now after huge loss

FRANKFURT: German chemicals giant Bayer vowed Tuesday to "urgently" address key challenges after plunging deep into the red in 2023, weighed down by woes related to its glyphosate-based weedkillers. But CEO Bill Anderson, hired last year to help steer the troubled group in a new direction, ruled out any imminent break-up of the company—despite mounting pressure from activist investors.

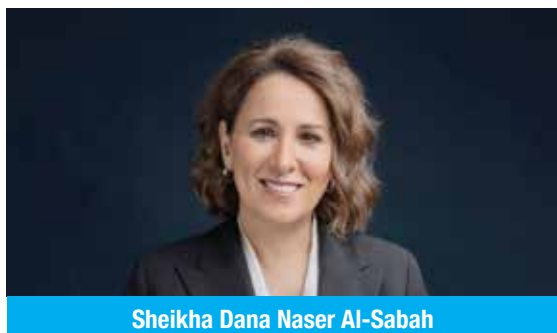
Bayer swung to a 2.9-billion-euro loss (\$3.1 billion) in 2023 after booking a net profit of 4.15 billion euros a year earlier, it said in a statement. Sales fell by six percent to 47.6 billion euros, partly because of "significantly" lower prices for glyphosate-based herbicides in the group's crop science division. Earnings were also dragged down by heavy impairment losses in the same division. Sales of prescription medicines in the pharmaceuticals division were flat, while the consumer health unit saw an uptick in part thanks to higher demand for dermatology products.



Anderson said Bayer faced "four challenges that urgently must be addressed." Bayer, maker of Aspirin, has to strengthen its pharmaceuticals pipeline, he said, referring to the need to launch new products to compensate for the expiration of patents on several blockbuster drugs in the coming years.

The group also needs to address massive litigation issues linked to the Roundup weedkiller, Anderson said, a problem Bayer inherited in the 2018 takeover of US firm Monsanto. Bayer has faced a wave of lawsuits in the United States over claims Roundup, which contains the active ingredient glyphosate, causes cancer. Bayer denies the claim but has spent billions of euros on legal costs in recent years. The group's high debt levels and a hierarchical bureaucracy that "blocks progress" were also key issues that need tackling, Anderson added. But he pushed back against pressure from activist investors who want to split up the company and spin off at least one branch to generate cash.

On the question of a possible break-up of the group, "our answer is 'not now'—and this shouldn't be misunderstood as 'never'," said Anderson. "Our priority is on tackling our challenges," he added. Bayer, which has already warned there would be "significant" job cuts to help turn around the group's fortunes, said it aimed to make savings of two billion euros a year from 2026. —AFP



Sheikha Dana Naser Al-Sabah

Sheikha Dana Al-Sabah elected Chairperson of Jordan Kuwait Bank

AMMAN: Jordan Kuwait Bank (JKB) — a subsidiary of Kuwait Projects Company (Holding) — announced the election of Sheikha Dana Naser Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah as Chairperson of the Board of Directors, succeeding Nasser Lozi who chaired the board since 2021. Sheikha Dana Al-Sabah, the Group Chief Executive Officer of KIPCO, became Vice Chairperson of JKB in 2023.

JKB announced exceptional results for 2023, reporting total profit after taxes of JOD 90 million (KD 38.9 million), marking an outstanding growth of 380 percent compared to 2022.

The Board of Directors has recommended the distribution of 8 percent of its capital as cash dividends. The recommendation is subject to the approval of the Central Bank of Jordan and the bank's General Assembly. On this occasion, Sheikha Dana Naser Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, JKB's Chairperson, said: "The bank's profit growth is a strong indicator of JKB's financial position, the success of its regional expansion strategy, and its dedication to delivering exceptional banking services."

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Business

NBK-Bahrain reports net profits of KD 108.22 million for FY2023

Group's strategy encompasses expansion of footprint within existing geographical regions

Isam Al-Sager

- NBK-Bahrain's profits reflect the success of our strategy in Bahrain
- We are committed to further expanding our presence in our operational markets while giving utmost priority to upholding our digital advantage and the seamless integration of our services

KUWAIT: National Bank of Kuwait-Bahrain (NBK-Bahrain) reported net profits of BHD 132.79 million (KD 108.22 million) in 2023, compared to BHD 122.14 million (KD 99.39 million) in 2022. As of the end of 2023, NBK-Bahrain's total assets stood at BHD 7.08 billion (KD 5.77 billion) compared with BHD 7.24 billion (KD 5.89 billion) in 2022. Total shareholders' equity increased by 12 percent y-o-y to BHD 1.213 billion (KD 988.33 million), whereas customers' deposits stood at BHD 3.34 billion (KD 2.722 billion) by end of December 2023.

Commenting on NBK-Bahrain's year-end financial results, Isam Al-Sager, NBK Group Vice Chairman and CEO said, "NBK-Bahrain realized good profits in FY2023, navigating through challenges posed by the operating environment, global geopolitical tensions, and heightened inflation levels. This underscores our resilient business model and robust financial standing".

"Our profits last year were driven by the expansion of the bank's operational activity. Moving forward, we aim to bolster this momentum by broadening our presence and operations in the Bahraini market, capitalizing on the promising growth opportunities and favorable outlook that this market offers," Al-Sager stated. "Our international operations are key contributors to the Group's profits, which proves our resilient business model, and at the same time, the success of our regional expansion strategy in hedging against the risks and fluctuations, and its contribution to diversifying income sources," he added.

Al-Sager also emphasized that the Group's diversification strategy extends beyond products and services, encompassing the expansion of our business footprint within existing geographical regions, seizing new opportunities, and maintaining our leadership in digital transformation. These



Isam Al-Sager

Ali Fardan

efforts position the bank for sustained growth and prosperity in the future.

Meanwhile, Ali Fardan, General Manager of NBK-Bahrain, said: "NBK-Bahrain's results for 2023 prove our focus on strategic goals, sustained business growth and leading position in the Bahraini market, despite the challenges faced during this year."

Fardan pointed out that the bank is moving steadily in strengthening its position in Bahrain by providing high-quality banking and financial services to its retail and corporate customers, noting that the bank has great potentials to achieve further growth in the Bahraini market in the future.

"Over the course of this year, NBK-Bahrain has been successful in providing various high-quality banking products and services that effectively helped meet customers' needs and enrich their banking experience," he highlighted. Fardan praised the Central Bank of Bahrain's efforts, in particular, and all government agencies, in general, for their continued support extended to NBK-Bahrain and the Bahraini banking sectors.

Ali Fardan

- Our profits prove our focus on strategic goals, sustained business growth and leading position
- We persist in achieving success by providing top-notch services and products that adeptly meet customers' needs and enrich their banking experience



He also highlighted that the great support extended by NBK Group has contributed to strengthening the Bank's performance, through capitalizing on NBK's high credit ratings, broad relationship network, and leading reputation as one of the top banks in the Middle East, and one of the safest banks in the world.

NBK is the largest financial institution in Kuwait with effective market dominance in the commercial banking market and has been consistently

awarded one of the highest credit ratings among all regional banks from Moody's, Standard & Poor's, and Fitch Ratings. NBK also stands out in terms of its local and international network, which includes branches, subsidiaries and representative offices in many regional and global financial hubs including China, Geneva, London, Paris, New York, and Singapore alongside its regional presence in Lebanon, Egypt, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE.

Uber Eats starts robot deliveries in Tokyo

TOKYO: "Caution: robot!" chirps the green self-driving delivery vehicle as it trundles down the street to a restaurant in Tokyo to pick up a meal ordered on Uber Eats. Starting Wednesday, robot deliveries will be offered in a small area of the city by the US-based food app, which hopes to eventually roll out the service more widely in Japan.

The country, facing growing labor shortages, changed traffic laws last year to allow delivery robots on public streets, and other companies including Panasonic are also trialing cute new machines to transport goods. Uber Eats' boxy robots have square headlights for eyes and three wheels on each side to navigate kerbs as they calculate routes on their own, using sensors to avoid pedestrians and other obstacles.

Moving at up to 5.4 kilometers an hour (3.4 mph) and with flashing lights around the lid, there's a human operator on standby in case of trouble. Like self-driving delivery services launched by the company in North America, the Tokyo robots will be limited in scope at first, said Uber Eats executive Alvin Oo.

App users must wait outside for the robot to arrive, but one day it could come to their door, he told AFP on Tuesday. "Going all the way to the office floor, to the exact apartment... could be useful in somewhere like high-rise Tokyo," said Oo, market operations director at Uber Eats Japan.

The service could also one day come to rural areas, where many residents are elderly and drivers are scarce, he added. Current drivers "do not



Pedestrians walk alongside an unmanned robot (C) as it navigates down a street during a demonstration of a robot delivery service by Uber Eats Japan, Mitsubishi Electric and robot developer Cartken in downtown Tokyo on March 5, 2024. — AFP

need to worry", Oo said, because "even in five, 10 years' time, there will always be work for the human delivery partners on the platform".

Uber Eats and similar apps faced strikes last month, and reshare giant Uber has long been criticized for dodging minimum wage and holiday pay rules by arguing its workers are not employees but independent contractors. The Uber Eats robots, developed with Mitsubishi Electric and US start-up Cartken, will deliver food from just a few restaurants in the busy Nihonbashi district at first.

Users cannot choose robot delivery, and if it is selected for them they can accept or decline the offer.

At a demonstration on Tuesday, the robot nearly collided with a pedestrian, but also attracted lots of attention. It's "so cute, so eye-catching", said passer-by Akemi Hayakawa. "I thought it might bump into people's feet, but people give way to it," the 60-year-old said.

"Japan has an ageing, dwindling population, with a serious labour shortage. So this is a very good idea for Japan too." — AFP

Cuba asks WFP for powdered milk as economy struggles

HAVANA: Cuba, its economy in tatters, has asked for help from the World Food Programme to provide powdered milk to children, state media said Monday.

In the early days of communism in Cuba, Fidel Castro had pledged that every child under seven would have a liter of subsidized milk every day. For decades, they did — but today, many go without as the country battles its worst economic crisis in decades due to the coronavirus pandemic, tightening of US sanctions in recent years, and structural weaknesses.

"Cuba has requested the assistance of the WFP for the purchase of milk powder to guarantee supply to Cuban children" aged up to six years of age, the Cubadebate website said, citing a "complicated economic context." As a result, it added, 375 tons of

milk powder will arrive in Cuba in the coming days.

In February, authorities in Havana acknowledged they were not able to provide all the milk usually made available to the country's children through the "libreta" — a ration book with which one can buy staples at a subsidized price. They also admitted "financial and logistical constraints" for wheat and flour obtained through the "libreta."

According to official estimates, the Cuban economy shrank by two percent in 2023, while inflation reached 30 percent. Independent experts say this is likely an underestimation.

The country, which has seen a historic wave of emigration in recent years, is also finding it increasingly difficult to produce and import basic foodstuffs. Official data shows that agricultural production fell by 35 percent between 2019 and 2023. And in September, the government said it was now importing "almost 100 percent" or ration book staples even as Cubans deal with chronic shortages of fuel and other basics. — AFP

JetBlue, Spirit Airlines cancel merger

NEW YORK: JetBlue and Spirit Airlines formally pulled the plug Monday on their merger, about six weeks after a federal judge ruled it violated US antitrust law.

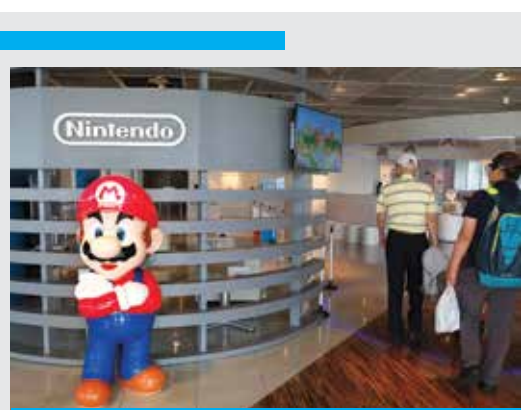
The companies had positioned JetBlue's \$3.8 billion purchase of Spirit as beneficial to consumers, but a federal judge in January sided with the US Justice Department, which had argued that the removal of the no-frills Spirit would lead to higher fares.

The companies decided after concluding that, given the legal situation, they were unlikely to meet the merger's deadline of July 24, 2024. JetBlue will pay Spirit \$69 million as a termination fee. "We believed this merger was worth pursuing because it would have unleashed a national low-fare, high-value competitor to the Big Four airlines," said JetBlue Chief Executive Joanna Geraghty.

"Given the hurdles to closing that remain, we decided together that both airlines' interests are better served by moving forward independently." US President Joe Biden hailed the decision in a post on X, formerly Twitter. "This merger would have forced higher fares and fewer choices on tens of millions of Americans. My Administration's historic success in blocking it is a win for American consumers and competition," he said. Shares of Spirit slumped 14.5 percent in early trading Monday, while JetBlue rose 3.9 percent.

Spirit remains confident "in our future as a successful independent airline," said Chief Executive Ted Christie in a company statement. "After discussing our options with our advisors and JetBlue, we concluded that current regulatory obstacles will not permit us to close this transaction in a timely fashion under the merger agreement," he added.

"We are disappointed we cannot move forward with a deal that would save hundreds of millions for consumers," he said. Spirit said it has enlisted advisors on efforts to refinance and reduce debt payments. — AFP



TOKYO: This file picture taken on September 8, 2016 shows the logo of Japanese gaming giant Nintendo and its game character Super Mario at a show room in Tokyo. — AFP

Nintendo wins battle against piracy software firm

WASHINGTON: A company that was sued by Nintendo for creating software that allowed the mass pirating of video games agreed Monday to pay the "Super Mario" maker \$2.4 million in damages and shutter the tool.

The company behind "Legend of Zelda" and "Donkey Kong" last week sued Tropic Haze, registered in the US state of Rhode Island, which owns and runs Yuzu, a popular video game emulator.

A video game emulator is a piece of software that can be downloaded onto a PC or smartphone to play video games intended for a specific console, such as the Switch, PlayStation or Xbox. Initially, emulators were developed to play games that were no longer published on the latest consoles, before vintage gaming became a market in its own right for Nintendo, Sony and Microsoft.

According to a settlement filed on Monday with the US federal court in Rhode Island, the defendant agreed to no longer make Yuzu available to the public and hand over all its programming code to Nintendo. Nintendo would also take possession of the website where the Yuzu tool was made available to download. The defendant is "fully aware" that Yuzu is "facilitating piracy at a colossal scale" the company said in the suit, which was filed a week ago in a federal court in Rhode Island.

The Japanese gaming juggernaut had accused the company of going out of its way to circumvent elaborate safeguards and encryption to make Nintendo games available to Yuzu's users.

Nintendo said that Yuzu was an important platform for existing games but also for playing games that were illegally leaked before their release. Last year's "Legend of Zelda: Tears of the Kingdom" was downloaded one million times before its release with pirate websites directing users to Yuzu to play the game, the suit alleged. The company had argued that Tropic Haze was liable for thousands of dollars in damages for each copyright violation. — AFP

Lifestyle

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 6, 2024



Iraqi campers gather around the fire in the Samawah desert.



Iraqi campers play a game of dominoes in the Samawah desert.



An Iraqi camper prepares tea inside a tent in the Samawah desert.



This aerial view shows tents set up by Iraqi campers, surrounded by circles left in the sand by car tyres in the Samawah desert.

Years removed from war, Iraqis seek new **desert escapades**

Far from the hustle and bustle of major cities, young Iraqis are increasingly taking advantage of a renewed sense of safety to explore the country's serene desert getaways. Sheltering amidst the golden dunes, Ghadanfar Abdallah and his friends gather around a flickering campfire in the Samawah desert south of the capital, humming tunes, laughing and eating. "When we post pictures, people do not believe that there are such places like the dunes in Iraq," the 35-year-old oil sector worker said.



Kuwaiti tourists manoeuvre their jeep in the Samawah desert.

"My friends ask me if the pictures were taken in Dubai. They are shocked when they learn that they were, in fact, in Iraq." For years, only the most intrepid of hikers and campers would brave the trips into Iraq's desert. But with the rise of social media and a period of relative stability, it has become a popular destination for those seeking not only adventure and off-roading but also tranquility in the vast, barren landscape.

"It is something I loved since

I was a little boy. But I only started doing it with friends in the winter of 2018 or 2019," Abdallah said. He crossed 200 kilometers (125 miles) from his southern city of Basra to reach an area untouched by the trappings of urban life—including phone networks.

On a crisp winter weekend, around 20 campers set up their tents amid the serene dunes. The air filled with the aroma of carp grilling over a smoky wood fire, as the hikers prepared to feast on Iraq's national dish, masgouf. Later, some played dominoes while others bickered over heated games of backgammon, sipping hot cups of tea and smoking hookahs (water pipe). Their voices resonated with traditional Iraqi songs, their laughter piercing the still desert night.

'It is safe'

Abdallah said such desert expeditions have "become more widespread, and today many stores sell camping gear. "Some are starting to realize that it is safe, it is an adventure." But for many, the lingering sense of danger remains. Iraq has been ravaged by successive years of conflict since the 2003 US-led invasion, including most recently the fight against the Islamic State group.

Though the jihadists were driven out of their major strongholds in late 2017, many retreated into desert hideouts, largely in the country's west, from where they still sporadically—though with increasing rarity—stage deadly attacks. "How can someone go to a desert where there is no water or mobile network? If something happens, how would you report it?" Abdallah said.

Iraq's soaring summer temperatures—often surpassing 50 degrees Celsius (120 Fahrenheit) -- mean these arid adventures are limited to wintertime. A weekend getaway costs between \$75 and \$100 per person, covering food, transportation and accommodation. A single



An Iraqi camper reads a book inside his tent in the Samawah desert.

trip can bring together a group of up to 30 people—typically men in the conservative country where women would not normally take part in such activities.

For Hussein Al-Jazairi, the journey is worth every penny. "The city is full of dust, noise and daily annoyances," the 34-year-old influencer said during his first desert camping trip. "One can come here, where it is quiet, serene, and there is fresh air." Jazairi is often glued to his phone, scrolling through his social media accounts. But his recent trip to the Sa-

mawah desert proved to be a completely different experience.

"Social media is my work. I receive non-stop notifications. By the end of the day, I have spent a very long time on my phone," Jazairi said. "Here, there is no network. It has been two days, and my



In this aerial view Iraqi campers set up a tent in the Samawah

phone's battery is still 70 percent. I haven't used it."

'Not a sound'

While Jazairi encourages people to explore the country's vast sandhills, he warns that "one should not go alone, especially for the first time." "We came with experts who know the places around." Iraq's deserts have long attracted hunters, both locals and visitors from neighboring Gulf countries, before the years of conflict drove them away. Today, campers still need to remain vigilant,

as some areas are still riddled with mines, while the borders with Saudi Arabia, Iran and Syria are intersected by routes used by drug traffickers or jihadists.

"We don't start any trip without first identifying where we will sleep," said Murad Al-Bahadli, a camper with

over eight years of experience. "We plan carefully to avoid any security risk," the 38-year-old added. Yet the placid desert nights are a far cry from the years of turmoil, and for many their lure is irresistible. Among those is Ravshan Mokhtarov, an Uzbek who has been living in Basra for six years. "This area is unique. There is no one, not even a sound," the young man said, expressing gratitude for "Iraqi hospitality". "It is pretty much safe. I don't feel any danger."—AFP



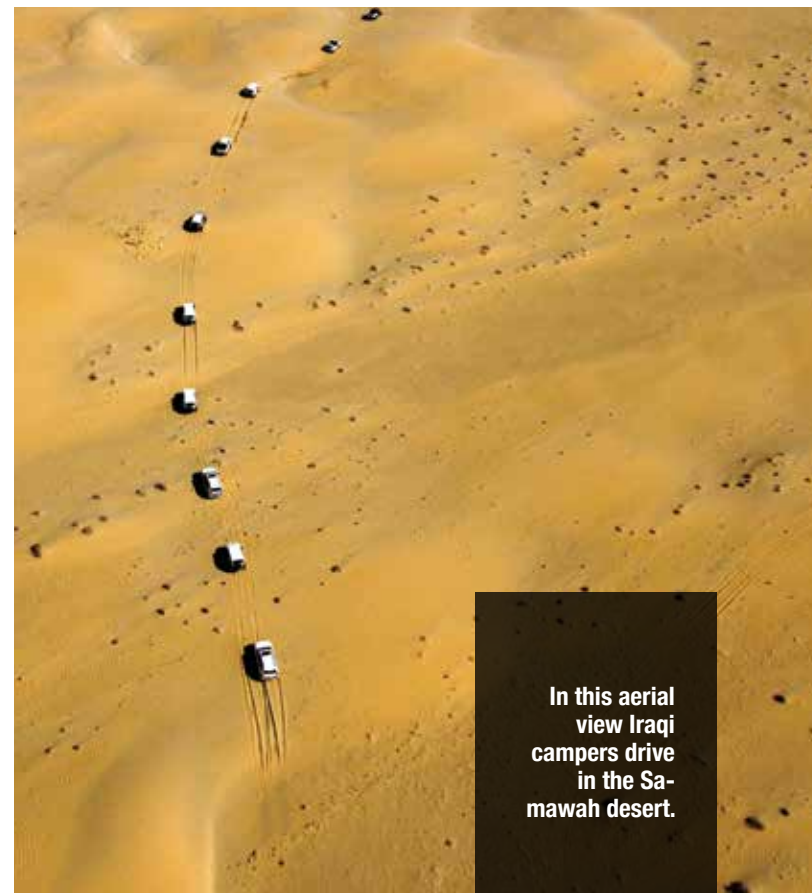
Iraqi campers gather around a fire in the early morning in the Samawah desert.



An Iraqi man rides a camel during a trip to the Samawah desert.



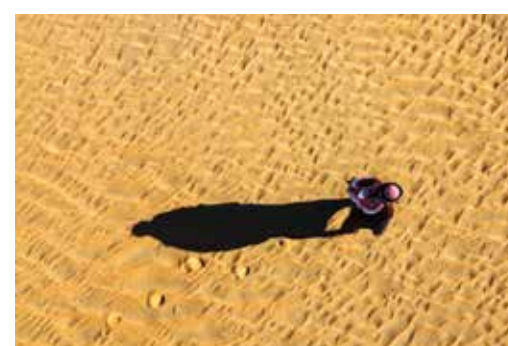
An Iraqi man sets a tent during a camping trip in the Samawah desert.



In this aerial view Iraqi campers drive in the Samawah desert.



Iraqi campers play backgammon as others smoke a water pipe inside a tent.



In this aerial view an Iraqi camper walks in the Samawah desert.



German designer Chemena Kamali acknowledges the audience after presenting creations by Chloe for the Women Ready-to-wear Fall-Winter 2024/2025 collection as part of the Paris Fashion Week, in Paris.--AFP photos



Models present creations by Vetements

PARIS FASHION WEEK HIGHLIGHTS: TEDDIES, KIDS AND A PHONE BAN



A model presents a creation by Vetements for the Women Ready-to-wear Fall-Winter 2024/2025 collection.

Paris Fashion Week, which runs until Tuesday, has seen no shortage of eye-catching moments this week. Here are a few highlights.

No phones?!?

OMG! Fashionistas at The Row's show were told they were not allowed to use their beloved phones, meaning entire minutes of their lives would go unrecorded on Instagram. The label of TV star sisters Ashley and Mary-Kate Olsen instead offered guests a notebook and pencil to record their impressions the old-fashioned way.

Chloe's new mama

There was a rare moment of spontaneity and family love at Chloe, where German designer Chemena Kamali made her debut with a collection that returned to the 1970s heyday of the house. When Kamali came to take the customary bow at the end of the show, her five-year-old son couldn't resist running onto the catwalk for a hug in front of the ranks of fashion elite. Surprised and delighted, Kamali took him in her arms before quickly passing him back to dad and rushing backstage.

PETA's Beckham protest

PETA (People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals) disrupted Victoria Beckham's show on Friday, with slogans including "Viva Vegan Leather" and "Animals Aren't Fabric" before being bundled quickly off the catwalk.

Teddy Boy

Vetements, the subversive brand launched in 2014, vowed its latest show was the one "you've been waiting for 10 years", and drew attention with hugely oversized suits and a Ronaldo jersey turned into a dress. One crazy look was a coat made of teddy bears. Was creative director Guram Gvasalia having a dig at his estranged brother Demna, who quit the brand to work for Balenciaga and had a huge controversy around an ad campaign featuring BDSM teddy bears? Perhaps, though Vogue pointed out it was a direct copy from Jean-Charles de Castelbajac, who made a similar coat for Madonna.



This combination of pictures shows models presenting creations by Victoria Beckham.

DVN's 'audacious everyday'

Known for meticulous craftsmanship, Belgium's Dries Van Noten presented another eclectic collection that spawned a possible new trend tag from WWD: "audacious everyday" has apparently replaced last year's "quiet luxury". Deconstructed sweaters turned into wraparound shawls, kimono-like coats, big furry shorts and bags—in a pastel range of pink, aniseed green and butter yellow—the collection sought a balance between stylish restraint and exciting statement.

Raining on Hermes

It was a rainy week in Paris, and Hermes brought the wet indoors, too, with a curtain of rain pouring down through the middle of the catwalk. The collection, "midway between equestrianism and motorbikes" according to creative director Nadege Vanhee, offered luxurious ways to keep dry. Biker-style jackets and tight-fitting coats with wool sleeves. Others featured rocker-style rivets or ostrich feathers, all in a narrow palette of burgundy, green, black and grey.—AFP



A model presents a creation by Dries Van Noten



A model presents a creation by Chloe



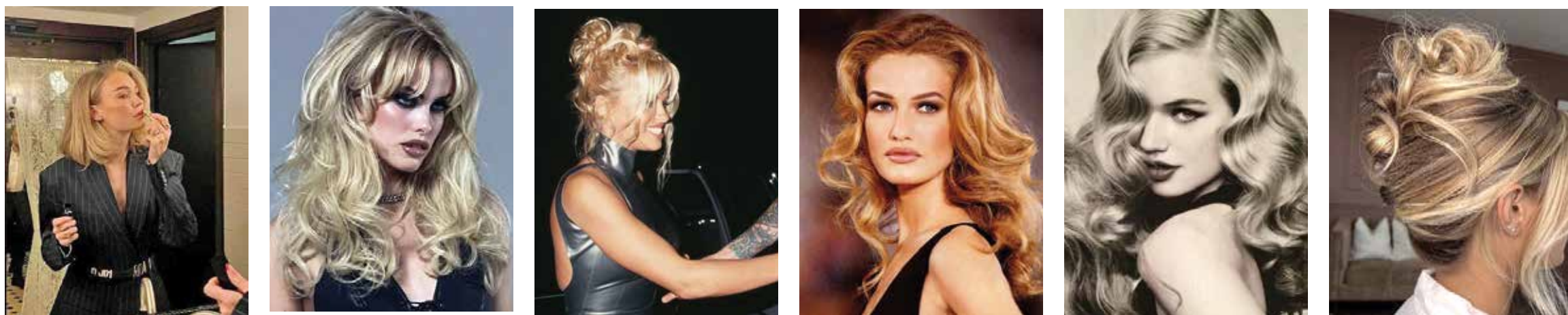
A model presents a creation by Hermes



This combination of pictures shows models presenting creations by Dries Van Noten for the Women Ready-to-wear Fall-Winter 2024/2025 collection.



This combination of pictures shows models presenting creations by Hermes



Mob Wife Aesthetic

HAIR THAT SPEAKS VOLUMES: EMBRACING THE BOLD AND GLAMOROUS 'MOB WIFE' STYLE

In the world of fashion and beauty, the 'mob wife' aesthetic has re-emerged as a symbol of unabashed glamour and boldness, echoing the sophistication of Hollywood's golden era with a modern twist. This resurgence is a testament to the timeless allure of cinematic icons, reimagined through contemporary eyes, offering a blend of nostalgia and innovation in hairstyling.

The renaissance of classic glamour

The 'mob wife' aesthetic, with its roots in the dramatic narratives of shows like "The Sopranos" and films such as "The Godfather," transcends mere fashion to become a profound expression of identity. It's a style characterized by voluminous curls, elegant updos, and sleek, glossy blowouts, each style making a

statement of the wearer's confidence and elegance. This approach draws heavily from the mystique of past cinematic legends, bringing their timeless elegance to the modern era, offering a sophisticated option for those looking to make a statement with their hair.

Crafting the signature 'mob wife' hairstyle

Achieving the Mob Wife look is all about volume, sophistication, and health. Incorporating quality volumizing products into your hair care routine is essential for creating the foundation of these glamorous styles. Deep conditioning treatments and nourishing oils are crucial for maintaining hair that is not only visually stunning but also full of life and vitality. These steps ensure that your hair remains manageable

and healthy, ready to be styled into any glamorous look you desire.

Elevating the look with accessories

No mob wife hairstyle is complete without the right accessories. Elegant headbands, sparkling barrettes, and bold clips transform simple hairstyles into statements of luxury and sophistication. These accessories serve as the perfect finishing touches, enhancing the overall elegance of the hairstyle and adding a layer of glamour that complements the boldness of the 'mob wife' aesthetic.

Personalizing the 'mob wife' hairstyle

What makes the 'mob wife' aesthetic particularly captivating is its versatility

and the ability to personalize it to one's taste. Experimenting with different textures, lengths, colors, and highlights allows for a unique twist on the style, making it adaptable to individual preferences. Whether it involves a dramatic color change, the addition of extensions, or subtle highlights, the essence of the 'mob wife' style lies in its adaptability and the personal statement it allows one to make.

Conclusion: A statement of confidence and style

The revival of the 'mob wife' hair aesthetic is more than just a trend; it's a celebration of individuality, confidence, and the enduring appeal of classic glamour. It invites women to explore the transformative power of their hair, to express their unique identity in bold and

glamorous ways. Whether it's through a voluminous blowout, a chic updo, or a sleek, polished look, the 'mob wife' aesthetic is about embracing your strength, elegance, and the indomitable spirit that lies within.

As we witness the resurgence of this iconic style, it's clear that the 'mob wife' aesthetic offers more than just a beauty trend; it provides a means of expression, a way to stand out, and a nod to the enduring legacy of glamour that continues to inspire and captivate. So, as you step into the world, let your hair do more than just frame your face—let it speak volumes about who you are and the statement you want to make.— Dashe Beauty Kuwait

Depardieu co-star says producers knew he was an 'aggressor'

One of the actors who has called out French star Gerard Depardieu for his behavior on set says producers knew he was an aggressor, and urged more women film stars to speak out about sexual violence. Anouk Grinberg, 60, appeared alongside Depardieu in the 2022 feature "The Green Shutters". Two members of the film's crew, including a costume designer, have made complaints of sexual assault against the 75-year-old, arguably France's best-known actor.

Depardieu already faces a rape charge and accusations of sexual harassment and assault from more than a dozen women—all of which he has strongly denied. "When film producers hire Depardieu on a film, they know they are hiring an aggressor. Not a potential aggressor—an aggressor," said Grinberg.

"We all saw. We all heard... We were treated to his salacious nonsense from morning to night," she told AFP. Grinberg said the producers of "The Green Shutters" had supposedly appointed someone to deal with harassment issues but that she did nothing. "She was never introduced to me. She never gave her support to the women who were attacked," she said.

AFP has requested comment from Depardieu through his lawyers. The film's director, Jean Becker, has denied Grinberg's account, saying he would have confronted Depardieu if any such complaints had been made. "Come on! (Becker) knew very well that two women had been seriously attacked," said Grinberg. "It was to cover up their cowardice, their inability to protect women, that they accuse me (of lying)."

'Many women know'

Grinberg has known Depardieu for decades, having worked with him on 1991 film "Merci la Vie". She said his behavior had considerably worsened over the years. "I always heard him make sexual remarks but it got much, much worse—all with the permission of the profession that pays him and covers up his crimes," she said.

Asked why other iconic co-stars of Depardieu's, such as Catherine Deneuve and Isabelle Huppert, have not accused him, Grinberg said it was "a matter of self-awareness and empathy for others". "It's their business. But of course I would like many more women to speak out, because many women know," she added. Grinberg began speaking up after befriending Charlotte Arno, who accused Depardieu of raping her in 2018 when she was 22 and anorexic. That did not stop Grinberg appearing alongside Depardieu in "The Green Shutters".—AFP



A crocodile in a lagoon at Crocodylus Park.



Crocodile swimming in a lagoon at Crocodylus Park. — AFP Photos



From edge of extinction to Australia's croc 'paradise'

If you want a snappy death, one expert's advice is to leap into a river near the Australian city of Darwin -- within minutes, you'll be in the jaws of one of the hundreds of crocodiles that stalk its murky waters. That's the promise of Grahame Webb, whose conservation efforts are credited with helping wrestle Australia's saltwater predators back from the verge of extinction. "You can't sugarcoat crocs; these are seriously dangerous," Webb told AFP in his leafy garden in the country's tropical Top End. Blunt messaging about the dangers around the waterways of Australia's north has been vital to rebuilding a population of the scaly reptiles once decimated by uncontrolled hunting, he said.

Before government protection in the 1970s, an estimated 98 percent of the wild saltwater crocodile population had disappeared in the Northern Territory, driven by leather demand and culling. Now, according to government figures, over 100,000 "salties", which can grow over six meters long and weigh more than 1,000 kilograms (2,200 pounds), hunt along the coasts, rivers and wetlands of the continent's far north.

'Eating people'

"It's been a raging success story," Webb said. But protecting the animals was only a first step. "To conserve predators, you've got to rebuild their population; if you're successful at doing that, they then start eating people again, and everyone wants to get rid of them." Char-

lie Manolis, a crocodile expert from the International Union for Conservation of Nature, said that by the 1980s, it was clear the community needed to see real value in the creatures to tolerate them as neighbors.

A public safety campaign, known locally as Crocwise, and regular relocations of the toothy predators from densely populated areas have helped them to coexist more peacefully with their sometimes-prey. Wild egg harvesting is part of a "ranching" program in the Northern Territory that links the leather industry and livelihoods directly to the animals, according to colleagues Webb and Manolis. Under the scheme, landholders -- many of them Indigenous Australians -- can receive payments for wild eggs collected from their properties, which are then supplied to ranches.

The lucrative leather trade relies on farms primarily stocked with eggs and animals plucked from the wild, with 70,000 eggs and 1,400 crocodiles allowed to be taken each year. "There are quite a lot of people who are employed through crocodiles," Webb said, highlighting both tourism and farming industries.

'Cattle eater'

The crocodile farming industry has been estimated to be worth over Aus\$100 million (US\$66 million) a year to the Territory, which is the largest producer of skins in Australia. The resulting leather is highly prized by luxury brands such as Hermes and Louis Vuitton. Manolis said



A crocodile leaping out of the water towards a piece of meat on a stick in a lagoon at Crocodylus Park.

ing a soft spot for chomping on livestock. "You can't train a crocodile, but you can put them in a place where they are not going to be a problem," she said as she routinely hoisted a hock of meat tethered to a long pole over the side of the boat. She slapped the water with the bait and dangled it above.

The dark green muzzle of a once notorious "cattle-eater" called Prince slowly surfaced, followed by the glaring reptilian eyes. The creature launched its hulking body upwards, its jaws at full stretch, before clamping its teeth deep into the flesh and splashing back into the water. The message is clear for onlookers: be wary around where these giants hunt and live.

'A million years' of fear

"You've always got to speculate that there is a crocodile in the water, no matter what," Grills said. As populations boom and larger crocs become common, attacks, though rare, are likely to increase, Manolis said. Dealing with a fear that goes back "a million years" while keeping support for conservation will be "the biggest challenge", Manolis said.

"Let's face it, WWF (World Wildlife Fund) doesn't have a picture of a crocodile on it. It has a panda." For Grills, the chance to admire the predators up close helps get support to save the animal. "If you respect them and their territory, I don't think they would be as terrifying."—AFP



A crocodile swimming in a lagoon at Crocodylus Park.



A crocodile leaping out of the water towards a piece of meat on a stick in a lagoon at Crocodylus Park.



A crocodile swimming in a lagoon at Crocodylus Park located on the outskirts of the Northern Territory town of Darwin.

Sports

Broncos cut veteran NFL quarterback Russell Wilson

Eagles center Jason Kelce retires after 13 seasons

LOS ANGELES, United States: The Denver Broncos said Monday the team has released veteran quarterback Russell Wilson, drawing a line under one of the most calamitous deals in NFL history. In a statement, the Broncos confirmed Wilson's departure just two years after the former Seattle Seahawks star joined the club in a blockbuster trade.

"We spoke with Russell Wilson today to inform him of his release after the start of the league year," Broncos general manager George Paton and head coach Sean Payton said in a joint statement. "On behalf of the Broncos, we thank Russell for his contributions and dedication to our team and community while wishing him the best as he continues his career."

"As we move forward, we are focused on building the strongest team possible for the 2024 season and beyond. We are excited to improve this offseason and will have the flexibility to get better through the draft and free agency," Wilson's departure from the Broncos will come with a hefty price tag.

The team is reported to owe the 35-year-old quarterback \$85 million over the next two seasons. By releasing him, the Broncos have avoided paying a further \$37 million in guaranteed money under the five-year \$242 million contract signed in March 2022. "Over these last two years, you have welcomed my family and me with open arms and have

embraced us as members of the Denver community," Wilson said in a statement following his release.

"The will will always hold a special place in my heart," Wilson, a nine-time Pro Bowler who led the Seahawks to victory in the Super Bowl in the 2013-2014 season, was initially seen by Denver as the answer to the team's quarterback problems when he joined two years ago.

As well as his lucrative long-term deal, the Broncos handed Seattle a slew of 2022 and 2023 Draft picks as well as three players — tight end Noah Fant, defensive lineman Shelby Harris and quarterback Drew Lock. But the Broncos never came close to recouping that massive outlay with Wilson at quarterback.

He fared badly in his debut season in Denver, with the team going 5-12, while head coach Nathaniel Hackett was fired after a 51-14 Christmas Day mauling by the Los Angeles Rams. Wilson was sacked 55 times during that first season, managing just 16 touchdowns throughout the campaign.

He fared slightly better in 2023 under Payton, but stories indicating his future was in jeopardy continued throughout the season. He was benched for the final two games of the regular season.

Meanwhile, Philadelphia Eagles center Jason Kelce, a 13-year NFL veteran who won a Super Bowl, made a tearful farewell on Monday, announcing his retirement.

The six-time NFL All-Pro offensive lineman, whose two-time Super Bowl champion brother Travis is best known as the boyfriend of singer Taylor Swift, played for the Eagles from 2011 through 2023 after being taken in the sixth round of the 2011 NFL Draft.

"Stepping on the field was the most alive and free I had ever felt," Kelce said. "It was a visceral feeling with football unlike any other sport. 'The hairs on my arms would stand up. I could hit somebody, run around like a crazed lunatic, and then get told, 'Good job.' I love football." Kelce helped the Eagles capture the 2018 Super Bowl, defeating New England 41-33. "You just keep working at your craft and you have people around you who believe in you and if you have the drive to be the best, you love it," Kelce said.

"I've always loved it," Kelce, 36, is the older brother of Kansas City Chiefs star tight end Travis Kelce, who gained worldwide acclaim for dating Swift. Wiping away tears and choked up by emotion several times in announcing he would not return, Jason Kelce said he is uncertain what the future holds, although he is expected to receive offers for television commentary deals.

"It took a lot of hard work and determination getting here," Kelce said. "I don't know what's next but I look forward to the new challenges and opportunities that await and I know I carry



DENVER: (FILES) Russell Wilson #3 of the Denver Broncos warms up prior to a game against the Los Angeles Chargers at Empower Field At Mile High in Denver, Colorado. — AFP

with me the lessons from my time here and that forever we will all share the bond of being Philadelphians."

Kelce became a local celebrity and eventually a national figure for his outgoing personality and over-the-top celebrating when watching his brother on the path to two Super Bowl crowns of his own with the Chiefs.

"Jason gave of himself for others, played through injuries and never wa-

vered through all the ups and downs of our seasons and his own personal career," Eagles owner Jeffrey Lurie said.

"He could chug beers with fans at a tailgate. He could sing in a Christmas album and raise money for charity or he could talk Xs and Os all day with coaches and teammates. "Then after all that he could do things out on the football field that no other offensive linemen are capable of doing." — AFP



DHARAMSALA: England's player Jonny Bairstow speaks during a press conference at the Himachal Pradesh Cricket Association Stadium in Dharamsala on March 5, 2024, ahead of their fifth and final Test cricket match against India. — AFP

Bairstow under pressure in Test after lean series

DHARAMSALA: Struggling England batsman Jonny Bairstow looks to be fighting to save his Test career when the fifth and final match against India begins in Dharamsala on Thursday. Bairstow will win his 100th cap as England, who have already lost the series 3-1, try to salvage some pride in the high-altitude and chilly Himalayan hill town.

India spinner Ravichandran Ashwin is also in line to play his 100th Test, having already passed the milestone of 500 Test wickets during the series. Former wicketkeeper Bairstow is in the side as a specialist batsman after Ben Foakes took over behind the stumps, but he has scored just 170 runs at an average of 21.25 during the series.

The 34-year-old has struggled since returning to the side last year after breaking his leg in a freak golfing accident. He has played 10 Tests since recovering, but has not scored a century and has a highest of only 38 in eight innings in India.

"It's a great triumph of resilience and even in terms of sentiment I believe that if you get to 99 caps you deserve the moment of your 100th," former England captain Michael Vaughan wrote in his column for the UK's Telegraph newspaper.

"However, you can't escape that he could miss out on his 101st. "He hasn't played well enough across the 10 Tests he's been back in the side, especially in India." Bairstow is renowned as an attacking batsman and at number five in the order is crucial to England's aggressive "Bazball" style of cricket.

Bairstow showed glimpses of a return to form in the fourth Test but could not convert good starts, where he reached 38 and 30 in each innings respectively, into substantial scores. Former captain Joe Root also struggled in the first three Tests, but struck form as he knuckled down to score a sublime century in the fourth on a testing wicket.

Veteran seamer James Anderson, 41, is just two wickets away from 700 and becoming the third bowler, after Sri Lanka's Muttiah Muralitharan (800) and late Australian spin legend Shane Warne (708), to achieve the milestone.

England could make changes to their side, with fast bowler Ollie Robinson's place in jeopardy after going wicketless in Ranchi. The weather in Dharamsala could play a huge part in the match. The picturesque ground is surrounded by snow-capped peaks at an altitude of 1,317 metres (4,320 feet).

There is a risk of sleet and forecasts say temperatures could plunge as low as 1C (33.8 Fahrenheit) on Thursday. India pace spearhead Jasprit Bumrah will return after being rested but the focus will be on Ashwin, 37, who made his debut in 2011.

Ashwin has 507 Test victims, second only to Anil Kumble's 619 wickets on India's all-time list.

"Reading batters has always been a key part of what Ash does," India batsman Cheteshwar Pujara told the Cricinfo website. "He is always one step ahead, alert to the smallest cues." — AFP

100-Test milestone 'just a number', says India's Ashwin

DHARAMSALA: India spinner Ravichandran Ashwin said Tuesday he did not share his family's excitement for his 100th Test appearance, adding a series-ending win over England was more important to him than "just a number".

Ashwin, 37, is set to reach the landmark in the fifth and final match of England's tour starting Thursday in the brisk Himalayan hill town of Dharamsala. "It does not mean anything to me," he told reporters. It means a lot to my wife and my mom. My daughters are more excited than I am. It's just a number."

The off-spinner already passed the rare milestone of 500 wickets in the third match of the series, which India has already won 3-1. He left that match midway to be with his ailing mother before returning to be part of India's victory in Rajkot, acknowledging the strain his career had put on his loved ones.

'Powerful and free': Black figure skaters take to the ice in NY

NEW YORK: One by one, a line of young African American and biracial women dressed in ball gowns took to the ice in New York's Central Park to the soundtracks of "Barbie" and "Wonder Woman." "Figure Skating in Harlem" (FSH) was staging its annual winter show before a delighted audience under a bright moon, its light reflecting off the glistening rink.

Most of the 300 students who participate in FSH's programs every year live in Harlem or the Bronx. They are among the poorest corners of New York, a city of 8.5 million riven by inequality despite being an economic engine of the United States. Adorned in mustard yellow, six of the amateur ice skating enthusiasts effortlessly twirled on the ice, moving together in a synchronized choreography reminiscent of ballet.

When the nonprofit FSH, located on the densely populated, multicultural north side of Manhattan island, was founded in the 1990s, figure skating was "not a sport that many Black and brown girls participated in," said FSH's founder Sharon Cohen.

FSH skater Nadia Neil, 17, told AFP the program was her "whole life." "I don't remember a time in my life before Figure Skating in Harlem," she said, having joined at the age of six. "I started to slowly learn and evolve and grow. And it was a really beautiful thing. I felt like a butterfly emerging from a cocoon," said fellow figure skating student Ashley Prentice.

"I just feel like whenever I skate, I feel so powerful and free," said Prentice, a Black teenager who described finding family and community through FSH.

The idea of bringing figure skating to Harlem

Shanaka guides Lanka to dramatic T20 win over Bangladesh

SYLHET: Dasun Shanaka held his nerve under pressure to take two wickets in the final over, snatching a dramatic three-run win for Sri Lanka in the opening Twenty20 international of a three-match series against Bangladesh in Sylhet on Monday.

Set a target of 207 runs, lower middle-order batsman Jaker Ali took Bangladesh close with his maiden fifty before Shanaka ended his 34-ball innings of 68 with the third ball of the last over. Shoriful Islam hit a four from the next ball, leaving Bangladesh requir-

ing six from their last two balls. But the hosts could manage only two runs to be restricted to 203-8, with Shanaka, who also dismissed Rishad Hossain in the first ball of the final over, finishing with 2-36. Former skipper Angelo Mathews claimed 2-17 to inflict some early damage on the Bangladesh innings before veteran Mahmudullah Riyad struck 54 off 31 balls to revive the hopes of the home side.

Sadeera Samarawickrama and Kusal Mendis earlier slammed a fifty each to guide Sri Lanka to 206-3 after Bangladesh sent them in. Samarawickrama struck an unbeaten 61 off 48 balls after Mendis hit 59 off 36 balls as the visitors overcame a slow start to put up an imposing total.

Stand-in skipper Charith Asalanka played his part with an unbeaten 44 from 21 balls. Mendis and Samarawickrama shared 96 runs for the third wicket

support that they need," said Neil, adding that some get "led down a wrong path." At FSH, she is able to take advantage of vocational evening classes to supplement her studies.

Cohen said that ice skating mirrors life's challenges: "You begin by failing. You get on the ice and you fall." "It's uniquely about learning what you do once you fall, and how you get back up, and do it again. And that there's nothing wrong with failing."

The group says that success — and failure — on the rink, as well as the academic support, have lasting effects. Almost 90 percent of FSH's enrollees go on to get top marks at school, with many going on to higher education, according to the organization. — AFP



Ravichandran Ashwin

When asked about the batsmen who challenged him the most over his career, Ashwin said he "loved bowling to Steve Smith, (Kane) Williamson and Joe Root". — AFP



NEW YORK: Members of FSH - "Figure Skating in Harlem" - are pictured during a training session in New York on January 30, 2024. One by one, a line of young African American and biracial women dressed in ball gowns took to the ice rink in New York's central park to the soundtrack of "Barbie" and "Wonder Woman." — AFP

"Support they need" "Sometimes, young girls in Harlem don't get that

after Sri Lanka lost their first two wickets for 37 runs. Shoriful removed Avishka Fernando for four with the second ball of the innings before Taskin Ahmed had Kamindu Mendis caught by Soumya Sarkar at midwicket for 19. Mendis hit leg-spinner Rishad for a four and two sixes off consecutive balls to race to his fifty off 27 balls.

Rishad returned for his next spell to exact revenge as Mahmudullah took a well-judged catch at long off boundary to end the innings of Mendis. Asalanka joined Samarawickrama to continue the assault, adding 73 for the unbroken fourth wicket, including 24 runs from the last over of the innings bowled by Mustafizur Rahman. The series marks the start of Sri Lanka's month-long tour of Bangladesh, which also includes three one-day internationals and two Tests. — AFP

Sports

Lakers rout Thunder, Lillard's 41 helps Bucks sink Clippers

Defeat knocks Oklahoma City (42-19) out of top spot in the West

LOS ANGELES: D'Angelo Russell scored 26 points as the Los Angeles Lakers produced a dominant defensive display to upset the Oklahoma City Thunder 116-104 on Monday. Russell and Anthony Davis (24) combined for 50 points while LeBron James added 19 points, 11 rebounds and eight assists in an ultimately comfortable win for the 17-time NBA champions.

Oklahoma City went into the game as leaders of the Western Conference and they started smoothly, opening up a 12-point lead early in the first quarter. But some stubborn defending and Russell's hot hand hauled the Lakers back into contention, and a big second-quarter—outscored the Thunder 27-18 -- gave them a lead they held for the remainder of the contest.

"Early on they made some shots and we turned the ball over, but we didn't totally collapse," Lakers coach Darvin Ham said. "We continued to defend. I told the team at half-time: 'That's the best defensive half I've seen all season.'"

"Kudos to our guys—they stepped up and defended really, really well." The Lakers defense restricted Thunder star Shai Gilgeous-Alexander to 20 points, while Chet Holmgren finished with 15 and Josh Giddey 13.

The defeat knocked Oklahoma City (42-19) out of top spot in the West, with the Minnesota Timberwolves taking over first place. The Lakers improved to 34-29 to sit in ninth. Elsewhere, Damian Lillard produced a dazzling 41-point display as the Milwaukee Bucks shrugged off the injury absence of Giannis Antetokounmpo to defeat the Los Angeles Clippers 113-106.

With Antetokounmpo ruled out just before tip-off with a sore Achilles, and Chris Middleton also out injured, Lillard led from the front to help in-form Milwaukee claim a sixth straight victory. The Clippers looked to have the measure of their opponents, opening up a 15-point lead at one stage in the third quarter.

'Embraced it'

But Lillard and Bobby Portis caught fire in the fourth as the Bucks outscored the Clippers 40-25 to pull clear and seal the win before a fired-up Milwaukee crowd. Lillard finished with four rebounds and four assists along with his 41 points, while Portis stepped up with 28 points and 16 rebounds.

Milwaukee improved to 41-21, leaving them second place in the Eastern Conference behind Boston (48-12). "We're just playing together on both sides of the

ball," Lillard said. Bucks coach Doc Rivers accused some members of his team as being in holiday-mode prior to last month's All-Star game mid-season break.

But Lillard revealed the Bucks were now reaping the benefits from a clear-the-air meeting that has sparked the team's unbeaten streak. "Coming out of the break we had a big talk as a team, Doc addressed a lot of things, challenged us to do some things differently—and I think we embraced it as a team," Lillard said.

"Leading into the break there were a lot of things that we just weren't fully committed to doing together. But now I think everybody is seeing the success of us being all-in on both sides." The only down note for the Bucks came with Antetokounmpo's injury.

The Greek star appeared for a pre-game warm-up but hobbled away in visible discomfort with a left Achilles problem as he went through shooting drills. The Clippers saw Paul George and James Harden finish with 29 points apiece, with Kawhi Leonard adding 16.

Minnesota leapfrogged Oklahoma City at the top of the West after their 119-114 win over the Portland Trail Blazers in Minneapolis.

French international Rudy Gobert



LOS ANGELES: Olivier Sarr #30 of the Oklahoma City Thunder takes a shot against Maxwell Lewis #21 of the Los Angeles Lakers in the second half at Crypto.com Arena on March 04, 2024 in Los Angeles, California.—AFP

led Minnesota's scoring with 25 points, hauling in 16 rebounds with three blocks. Anthony Edwards finished with 13 off the bench on a night when six Minnesota players posted double-digit points tallies.

Anfernee Simons was the pick of the Portland shooters with 34 points, including 5-of-13 from three-point range. Duop Reath made 5-of-6 from outside the arc en route to 26 points. — AFP

Inter beat Genoa to take step towards Serie A title

MILAN: Serie A leaders Inter Milan beat Genoa 2-1 on Monday to move 15 points clear of second-placed Juventus as they search for a 20th league title. Youngster Kristjan Asllani and veteran Alexis Sanchez scored within six minutes of each other in the San Siro as Inter move closer to going one better than local rivals AC Milan and their Scudetto tally, which would get them a second star above their club badge.

Juve trail Inter with 11 games of the season remaining after losing 2-1 at Napoli on Sunday. "15 points is a significant advantage," Asllani said. "But we can't get carried away, there are still a lot of games to play and we have to stay focused," the 21-year-old added.

Simone Inzaghi's Inter were looking to stretch their winning run in all competitions to 12 games, and last lost at home in the league in September. In an open first half an hour, Inter midfielder Nicolo Barella and Genoa attacker Mateo Retegui threatened to break the deadlock.

After 31 minutes, Asllani did one better than them following a smooth Alexis assist. Albania's Asllani, who turns 22 on Saturday, fired home into the top corner, claiming his first senior goal since June 2022, which came against Inter when he was still at Empoli, to put the hosts 1-0 up.

"To be honest, I had waited a long time for this goal and hoped it would come at San Siro," Asllani said. "It's a special emotion scoring here," he said. Inzaghi's outfit doubled their advantage six minutes later from a penalty checked by VAR, as Alexis converted Inter's 11th spot kick of the season, following



MILAN: Inter Milan's Albanian midfielder #21 Kristjan Asllani (L) shoots to score his team's first goal past Genoa's Italian defender #13 Mattia Bani during the Italian Serie A football match between Inter Milan and Genoa at San Siro Stadium, in Milan. — AFP

Asllani in opening his account for the campaign. Inter kept up the pressure on Genoa after the break with attacker Henrikh Mkhitarjan troubling visiting goalkeeper Josep Martinez after 52 minutes before the away side surprisingly cut the deficit. Mexico centre-back Johan Vasquez volleyed low past Yanniss Sommer two minutes later, as Inter conceded just their 13th goal in 27 league games this season.

Alberto Gilardino's side thought they had equal-

land, but was not publicly disclosed until now and appeared to take Australian football bosses by surprise.

Matildas coach Tony Gustavsson said he had only found out about the allegation on Tuesday and was yet to speak to his skipper. "I was informed this morning and obviously I was surprised," he said. "I can't comment on the offence because it's a legal matter at this point. The only thing I can comment on is my experience and interaction with Sam as a person, and as a footballer."

"And I have only had positive experiences," he said. Gustavsson said it was too early to say whether the allegation would rule Kerr out of selection for this summer's Paris Olympics. Kerr has been sidelined since January with a ruptured anterior cruciate ligament. "I think it's a bit too early to look at selection at this time and as we all know with Sam's serious injury in January, there's obviously a very big question mark whether she will even be up for selection," said Gustavsson.

'Very serious'

Football Australia CEO James Johnson called the allegation "unsettling" and "very serious". "We've got our own questions that we'd like to know. We've got to find out what actually happened," he said. "It's regarding racism, and there's no place for racism in our sport."

ised after 66 minutes but Portuguese striker Vitinha was denied his first goal for the club after drifting offside. Inter held on for three points, as France attacker Marcus Thuram came off the bench for Sanchez after two weeks out with injury, despite English defender Djed Spence's late chance for the visitors.

Next up for Inter is Saturday's trip to fourth-placed Bologna before heading to Atletico Madrid for March 13's Champions League last 16 second leg with a 1-0 lead. — AFP



SYDNEY: This file photo taken on August 16, 2023 shows Australia's forward Sam Kerr celebrating scoring her team's first goal during the Australia and New Zealand 2023 Women's World Cup semi-final football match between Australia and England at Stadium Australia in Sydney. — AFP

At the same time, Sam has rights, natural justice rights, procedural rights, that she's going to work her way through and we're respectful of that." Former Australia men's team captain Craig Foster said the news was unexpected and distressing. —AFP

Eckroat holds off Aussie Lee to win Cognizant Classic

MIAMI: Austin Eckroat held off Australia's Min Woo Lee over the final holes after a Monday resumption to win the storm-interrupted Cognizant Classic for his first PGA Tour title. The 25-year-old American made three birdies, a bogey and seven pars Monday to complete a four-under par final round of 67 at PGA National in Palm Beach Gardens, Florida. That left overnight leader Eckroat on 17-under 267 for 72 holes, good enough to defeat Australia's Lee and South African Erik van Rooyen by three strokes in the PGA's first Monday finish since last year at Pebble Beach.

"It's crazy," Eckroat said. "This has always been my dream, to win on the PGA Tour, and I haven't won since 2019 -- it was a college event—it has been so long. I'm just so happy to do it. "This is just a dream come true." South Korea's Lee Kyoung-hoon shared fourth on 271 with Americans Jake Knapp and Cameron Young, England's David Skins and Ireland's Shane Lowry. Eckroat's best PGA Tour result over 49 prior starts was a runner-up effort last May at the Byron Nelson.

"It's not a fun finish whenever you have to hold onto a lead," Eckroat said. "Then the adversity of sleeping mid-round. Just really happy with how I handled it." Eckroat was 15-under after seven holes and clung to a one-stroke lead over clubhouse leader van Rooyen when darkness fell Sunday, leaving 26 players to complete their final round on Monday after Sunday storms stopped play for 3 1/2 hours.

"I knew I had a lot of work to go," Eckroat said. "It wasn't a comfortable position." Lee made a morning charge with an eagle at the par-5 10th, reaching the green in two and sinking an eight-foot putt, and made a seven-foot birdie putt at 12 to reach 14-under, one off the lead.

'Nervous all day'

But Eckroat, after four morning pars, sank birdie putts at 12 and 13 to reach 17-under, stretching his advantage to three strokes. "From the first hole I was shaking," Eckroat said. "I was nervous all day long. It was because we had the break. It really made me think on it a while. But I was able to keep swinging well, just my processes and it all worked out well."

At 14, Eckroat blasted out of a bunker to six feet but missed his par putt, the bogey lifting Lee within two shots. Eckroat answered by holing a birdie putt at 16 to restore his three-stroke lead and parred in for the victory. "I just kept telling myself that I put myself in this position for a reason, it's what I want to do and I was just happy I was able to perform under the situation," Eckroat said. Lee, a three-time European Tour winner who also captured last year's Asian Tour Macao Open, settled for his best PGA Tour finish. The 25-year-old from Perth improved on his share of fifth at last year's US Open. — AFP

Kerr pleads not guilty to racially aggravated offence

LONDON: International women's football star Sam Kerr is facing trial in England after pleading not guilty to a racially aggravated offence against a London police officer, prosecutors said. The Chelsea striker and Australia captain was charged following an incident in January last year, when the Metropolitan Police said they were called to a dispute over a taxi fare.

The 30-year-old Kerr, born to an Anglo-Indian father and Australian mother, is a treasured sporting figure in Australia and one of the most famous players in women's football. Australia's all-time leading scorer last year graced the cover of the FIFA video game alongside Kylian Mbappe.

She is expected to face trial in February 2025. The charge, relating to "threatening, abusive or insulting" behaviour, can carry a fine or custodial sentence if proven. The alleged incident occurred before last year's World Cup, which was held in Australia and New Zea-

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Clinics

Clinics

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Shamiya	24848913
Shuwaikh	24814507
Abdullah Salem	22549134
Nuzha	22526804

Change of Name

I, Husain, Passport no. U0461410 do hereby change my name to Husain (as given name) Kothari (as surname) for all purpose I will henceforth be known as in the name of Husain Kothari and I also undertake to carryout this name change in all documents V/P Nazamipura Mohalla Sagwara. (#5172 6/3/2024)

I, Husaini Najmuddin Bohra, holder of Indian Passport No. L8353356 having permanent address 1216 Akab Maqbra Pin Code 457226 residing in Jaora Dist Ratlam, MP, at present, hereby declare that henceforth my name will be read as under: Husain Susnerwala (Given name) and Najmuddin (Surname). (#5173 6/3/2024)

I, Nubla Fasil holder of Indian Passport No. N0419170 having permanent address Thaikandy House, Vellimadukunnu, Post Marikunnu, Kozhikode, Kerala, India, Pin Code: 673012, residing in Kuwait at present, hereby declare that henceforth my name will be read as: Given name: Nubla and Surname: Kummancheery. (#5170 5/3/2024)

I, Siddesh Fatarpekar Holder of Indian Passport No. V9396775 Having my permanent Address H. No. 417. Voilem Bhat Mercedes Murda Tiswadi Goa Pin 403005. State Goa, Country India. Residing in Kuwait a present hereby declare that henceforth my name will be read as given name Siddesh and Surname Pereira. (#5171 5/3/2024)

Arsenal hit Sheff Utd for six to set record scoring streak

Arsenal's stunning streak of 31 goals in seven consecutive Premier League wins



SHEFFIELD: Sheffield United's English-born Northern Irish midfielder #16 Oliver Norwood fouls Arsenal's Brazilian midfielder #11 Gabriel Martinelli during the English Premier League football match between Sheffield United and Arsenal at Bramall Lane in Sheffield. — AFP

SHEFFIELD: Arsenal entered the record books as a 6-0 demolition of Sheffield United on Monday kept the Gunners on Liverpool and Manchester City's tails in the Premier League title race. Martin Odegaard, Jayden Bogle's own goal, Gabriel Martinelli, Kai Havertz and Declan Rice put the visitors 5-0 at half-time before Ben White rounded off the scoring.

Mikel Arteta's men become the first side to ever win three consecutive away games in the English top-flight by five or more goals. "When we had the ball, we were in a good mood today," said Arsenal captain Odegaard. "Created a lot, scored the goals early on - a nice performance." By contrast, Sheffield United also set a new record by becoming the first English top-flight side to concede five or more goals in three straight home matches. "It's a painful season and the boys are a damaged group of players," said Blades boss Chris Wilder.

"They were in a different league, a different planet to us. We couldn't lay a glove on them." Arsenal's stunning streak of 31 goals in seven consecutive Premier League wins since a winter break has at least built up a big advantage over their rivals should the title be decided on goal difference.

They remain in third, just two points behind leaders Liverpool and one adrift of defending champions City. However, Arteta's men can go top with victory at home to Brentford on Saturday ahead of Sunday's showdown between Liverpool and City at Anfield. "I love the way the team played. The quality and the aggression we showed from the beginning," said Arteta. "We have to continue to do what we are doing."

Havertz hits form

There appeared little doubt over the outcome from the first whistle at Bramall Lane. Bukayo Saka

rattled the crossbar after just two minutes and what little resistance there was from the Blades ended just five minutes in. Rice's cross picked out the unmarked Odegaard to turn into the bottom corner. Saka's five-game scoring streak in the league came to an end but he did bag two assists before going off at half-time due to illness.

The England international turned former Arsenal defender Austin Trusty with ease as he got to the by-line and his driven cross flicked off Bogle into his own net. Martinelli's deflected effort quickly made it 3-0 and forced Wilder to make a change after just 17 minutes.

Ben Osborn replaced Oliver Norwood but a change of shape did little to stem the bleeding for the hosts. Havertz is beginning to silence his critics after a slow start to life at the Emirates following a £65 million (\$82 million) move from Chelsea.

The German international slammed home Arsenal's fourth before Rice then got in on the party by sweeping home Saka's cross six minutes before half-time. Only the sight of Martinelli hobbling off just after the hour mark blighted a perfect night for the visitors.

White rounded off the scoring with a cool finish from Havertz's cut-back on 58 minutes as Arsenal matched their record Premier League away win, set just last month at West Ham. By that stage many of the home support had headed for the exits, resigned to their side's fate on the night and the season.

Wilder's men remain rooted to the foot of the table, 11 points adrift of safety with 11 games remaining. Arsenal on the other hand are 11 matches away from a first league title for 20 years and could not wish to be in finer form heading down the home straight. — AFP



RIO DE JANEIRO: Manbol players train at Copacabana beach in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil on February 23, 2024. A childhood pastime of kids tossing mangoes to each other in the Amazon has transformed into a proper sport in Brazil. — AFP

Brazil sinks its teeth into mango inspired ballgame

RIO DE JANEIRO: A childhood pastime of kids tossing mangoes to each other in the Amazon has transformed into a proper sport in Brazil, even finding a place among the vaunted beach games played in Rio de Janeiro. On the hot, golden sands of Copacabana, players simultaneously toss two mango-shaped balls across a net in a fast, fun and tiring test of their reflexes. Dubbed "manbol" — a mashup of the words for mango and ball — the new game is slowly spreading across Rio's beaches, where sports-loving Brazilians indulge in activities like footvolley, beach tennis, and volleyball.

It is the brainchild of Rui Hildebrando, based on a game he and his younger brother, Rogerio, used to play as children in the Amazonian city Belem do Para. "At first, it was a simple game between us: my brother Rogerio would throw a mango at me and I would

throw it back. But after a while I thought it would be more fun to each throw a mango at the same time," Rui Hildebrando, 44, told AFP.

After it caught on among youngsters in town, Hildebrando came up with official rules for the game and in 2004 decided to form the Brazilian Manbol Confederation. The game is now played with mango-shaped polyurethane balls, about 3 times smaller than a rugby ball, on a rectangular court on any surface. The rules are simple: You win a point if the ball passes over the net and lands on the ground on your rival's side — as long as you also catch the other ball thrown to your side. If both balls fall, the point is replayed.

To win, a team must win two sets of 12 points. Each game can be played with up to three players, with a match lasting between 15 to 25 minutes. "It's a very dynamic sport, and the fact that there are two balls makes it very fun. It's tiring but it's a matter of practice," said Adriana Mathias, 46, a physical education teacher who has been playing since 2007.

After two decades, manbol is making inroads in Brazil, with some 2,000 players in a nation of more than 200 million people. There are regional federations in Rio de Janeiro, the capital Brasilia, northeastern Ceara and northern Para. — AFP

Advantage Al Ain as Ronaldo's Al Nassr put on back foot

ABU DHABI: Cristiano Ronaldo's Al Nassr lost the first leg of their AFC Champions League quarterfinal match 1-0 to UAE's Al Ain in an ill-tempered battle on Monday. At Hazza bin Zayed Stadium in Al Ain, Soufiane Rahimi scored the only goal in the 44th minute, thus ending Al Nassr's run of eight matches without a loss in the continental championship and putting a slight question mark over a third straight semi-final appearance for the Saudi club.

Al Ain were without their star striker Kodjo Laba, out because of an injury, and Moroccan Rahimi stepped up and excelled. The goal was his sixth in the competition, matching Laba's tally as the club's highest scorer this season.

Al Ain goalkeeper Khalid Essa twice denied Ronaldo with acrobatic saves, and Nassr lost Aymeric Laporte through a red card in the fourth minute of a 15-minute-long added time. After Sadio Mané and Ayman Yahya had a couple of chances for Nassr early

in the first half, Rahimi nearly put Al Ain ahead in the 23rd minute, but David Ospina pulled off a diving save.

In the 28th minute, Rahimi was in the thick of things with an assist to Kaku, but the goal was denied as Rahimi was found to be offside. Moments after Ronaldo missed a chance by the narrowest of margins, it was the hard-working Rahimi, quite appropriately, who scored by latching on to an Alejandro Romero through pass. Rahimi dribbled past Ospina and scored what proved to be the decider with minutes remaining for half-time.

Nassr had a chance to bounce right back, but Eisa saved a Ronaldo volley in the 45th minute. Ronaldo got another chance eight minutes into the second half to draw parity for his team, but he smashed a beautiful cross by Aiman Yahya straight over.

Rahimi went past Ospina once again in the 72nd minute, but a second Al Ain goal was declined as Rahimi was declared offside by a fraction of a foot past Laporte. Al Nassr created several opportunities as they went on the offensive in the second half, but they could not get through. With the number of fouls which led to eight yellow cards, 11 minutes were added in the second half, and that time got extended further when Laporte elbowed Al Ahabbi in 90+4 minute. The second leg of the quarter-final will be played on Monday in Saudi Arabia. — AFP

WADA suspends SA doping laboratory

MONTREAL: The World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) said on Monday it has suspended Africa's only accredited drug-testing laboratory due to "multiple non-conformities" with international standards. In a statement, WADA said it had suspended the accreditation of the South African Doping Control Laboratory in Bloemfontein for up to six months.

The Bloemfontein lab had already seen some restrictions imposed in September last year, while other anti-doping activities were allowed to continue. However WADA said experts had advised the agency to suspend the facility's accreditation due to "multiple

non-conformities with the International Standard for Laboratories." WADA said the Bloemfontein laboratory had accepted the suspension, which took effect on March 1. "The suspension ... prohibits the Laboratory from carrying out any anti-doping activities, including analyses of urine and blood samples, with the exception of analysis related to the Athlete Biological Passport hematological module," WADA said in a statement.

WADA said during the suspension, samples awaiting analysis, samples currently undergoing a confirmation procedure and any samples where an adverse analytical finding has been reported must be transported to another WADA-accredited laboratory for analysis. "This is in order to ensure continued high-quality sample analysis, which also helps preserve athletes' confidence in this process and the wider anti-doping system," WADA said. WADA said the laboratory would be allowed to apply for reinstatement once it had demonstrated all the identified "non-conformities" had been addressed. — AFP